

“Obviously People Haven’t Heard of Being Pansexual”
Pansexual Peoples’ Experiences of Pansexuality: An Interpretative Phenomenological
Analysis

Charlotte Haylock

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Declaration

I hereby declare that the work submitted in this thesis is entirely the result of my own investigation, except where otherwise stated.

Name: Charlotte Haylock

Date: 22/04/2021

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Abstract

Background: People who are attracted to more than one gender are often grouped together in research under the bisexual umbrella (Flanders, 2017). This has been valuable when investigating issues potentially faced by these groups, such as erasure and poor health outcomes, as well as in the context of bisexual activism. However, grouping people under the bisexual umbrella may carry the risk of overlooking individual differences and findings suggest differences between bisexual and pansexual participants, suggesting a need for further knowledge about pansexuality. **Aims:** This study aimed to gain a rich understanding of the ways in which pansexual people experience pansexuality. It also sought to contribute to the health professions by offering some insights into what may possibly be experienced by pansexual people. **Methodology:** Semi structured interviews were completed with six pansexual people. The data was analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) **Findings:** Three superordinate themes (*The pansexual label as an anchor; feeling 'boxed in'; and a label that defies labels*) and ten subthemes emerged. **Conclusion:** The findings indicated the concept of feeling 'boxed in' as central to all of the superordinate themes in the study. A societal lack of awareness of both pansexual as an emerging, less 'mainstream' sexuality, and of gender identity outside the binary led to the strategic use of the bisexual label in order to manage stigma and invalidation. However, participants felt that the bisexual label was incongruent with their felt sense of identity because they favoured a label that explicitly acknowledged gender diversity. This led to a feeling of being erased. The current study provides a foundational knowledge of the under researched area of pansexuality. Future research could aim to further explore the impact of intersectionality, and experiences of healthcare settings for pansexual people.

Chapter 1. Introduction

This study aimed to explore the ways in which pansexual people experience pansexuality. This introductory chapter will provide a brief conceptualisation of sexuality and sexual identity, as well as bisexuality and pansexuality, considering gender diversity. Furthermore, as previous research on sexuality within the field of psychology has been complex and arguably problematic, this chapter will provide a brief overview of historical psychological approaches to diverse sexualities and explain the researcher positioning on this topic. Thenceforth, chapter two will provide a detailed critical review of the relevant existing research in order to locate the current study within the research field.

1.1 Sexuality and Sexual Identity

The term sexuality is a complex one that describes a multitude of phenomena related to desires, practices and identities, (Milton, 2014). Due to its complexity, there is not one set definition for sexual orientation. It can be considered “a component of identity that includes a person’s sexual and emotional attraction to another person and the behaviour and/or social affiliation that may result from this attraction” (American Psychological Association, 2015, p. 862). Identity is understood as a sense of one’s meaning making of their roles, their beliefs and values, and their goals in both personal and social contexts (Marcia, 1987). It is a complex mix of intrapersonal and interpersonal interactions and involves multiplicity in relation to context (Vignoles et al., 2011). Sexual identity can be seen as the way a person understands themselves in relation to their sexuality. This can involve the use of labels, such as bisexual and pansexual (Galupo et al., 2017).

1.2 Bisexual and Pansexual Identities

Bisexuality as a distinct identity, was not the focus of research until the mid 1970s, when it became more prominent within communities (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1977). Bisexuality has since become increasingly more prominent in academia, particularly in the 1990s when a body of research emerged and grew from the meeting of bisexual communities, activists, and scholars, leading to the publication of the Journal of Bisexuality in 2000. During this period, several themes emerged with regard to bisexual identities, including biphobia, bisexual marginalisation, mental and physical health disparities, invisibility and bisexual erasure (Callis, 2014; Feinstein & Dyar, 2017; Flanders et al., 2015; Hayfield, 2020; Katz-

Wise et al., 2017; Yoshino, 2000). These themes are relevant in terms of social and community issues, and are also mirrored in academia, whereby bisexuality is largely less visible and less well researched in the wider field of sexuality diversity. These themes are further explored in chapter two.

Historically, there has been disagreement amongst bisexual communities and researchers alike with regard to how bisexuality is defined (Flanders, LeBreton, et al., 2017; Halperin, 2009; Swan, 2018). Some earlier definitions focused on bisexuality as a third sexuality category which described sexual attraction towards, and sexual behaviours with, men and women (Angelides, 2001; Weiss, 2004). Broader definitions have conceptualised bisexuality as a sexual identity that goes beyond the limitations of sexuality being fixed and gender centred, instead viewing it as a sexual identity that can acknowledge fluid and changing attraction not dictated by gender (Galupo, et al., 2017). With the emergence of queer theory came new perspectives around bisexuality as revolutionary, carrying the potential to transcend the categorical and binary understandings of gender and sexuality altogether (Berenson, 2001; Gonzalez, Ramirez, & Galupo, 2017). Bisexuality in the context of this research broadly includes people romantically and/or sexually attracted to more than one gender, people attracted mostly to one gender but not exclusively, and people for whom their attraction is fluid and changing (Belous & Bauman, 2017).

As outlined above, sexual identity is a complex construct that relates not only to attraction and/or behaviour, but also to how someone understands and makes sense of themselves. Therefore, an individual's attraction or experiences do not necessarily automatically confer a specific sexual identity label (Richards & Barker, 2013). Indeed, much of the previous research into bisexuality has noted that there are people who engage in sexual behaviours with more than one gender but do not identify as bisexual, and people for whom the opposite is true (Baldwin et al., 2015; Rust, 1992). Furthermore, as sexual identity labels are socially constructed, people who self-identify as bisexual and/or pansexual, are likely to self-define these labels in a variety of ways. Individuals hold power to assign meaning to, and conceptualisations of, their own sexual identities regardless of the existing socially constructed labels (Horowitz & Newcomb, 2002).

Following on from the emergence of bisexuality, other labels that challenged cisnormative, binary ideas of gender, such as pansexual, also emerged (Elizabeth, 2013). The pansexual label was initially adopted by BDSM (bondage and discipline, domination and submission, and sadism and masochism) communities to indicate a merging of previously divided sexual identity communities such as gay men and lesbians in BDSM and fetish groups to indicate a freedom for all to “play” with each other (Lenius, 2011). Presently, pansexuality is rarely linked to BDSM and is more commonly defined as attraction to all genders across the gender spectrum (Fontanella et al., 2014; Palermo, 2013). For some it has also been defined as ‘gender blindness’, meaning the potential to be attracted to any person, with a disregard for their gender (Morgan, 2013). This label has been suggested to indicate an ‘anti-identity position’ which represents opposition to traditional and fixed understandings of sexual identity (Gonel, 2013).

With regard to definitions for, and discourses surrounding, bisexuality and pansexuality, there has been some debate and tension within communities. For example, the description of pansexuality as “gender blindness” and similarly the phrase “hearts not parts” are sometimes used by some pansexual people as a concise way to communicate their experience of pansexuality (Galupo et al., 2016; Lapointe, 2017; Morgan, 2013). It has been argued in some online social media and blogpost forums such as Reddit and Tumblr that these descriptions, although intended to express a focus on people rather than their bodies, dismiss the gender of others, which may be of significance to them (Hayfield, 2020). Furthermore, it has been considered to imply that bisexual people only base their attraction to others on genitalia.

Similarly, the concept of pansexuality as attraction to all genders has brought forth arguments for bisexuality as non-binary with regard to sexuality but binary with regard to gender, whilst pansexuality is non-binary with regard to both sexuality and gender (Elizabeth, 2013). Therefore, some have argued that the two sexualities are very different, and that bisexuality is therefore not inclusive of trans and non-binary people. However, as explored previously, this is not the case for bisexuality; many predominant understandings of bisexuality include attraction to more than one gender and it is therefore not inherently exclusionary towards gender diverse people. This debate can be considered detrimental to the LGBTQ+ community, and activist Robyn Ochs argues that there is no universal definition for

any sexual identity label and that this debate pits two identities within the same community against each other (Doyle, 2019).

Arguably, the increased visibility of trans and non-binary people may have influenced the increasing adoption of the pansexual label. Some have suggested that they chose this label because it explicitly acknowledges gender outside of the gender binary (Sprott & Benoit Hadcock, 2018). Furthermore, many gender diverse people have highlighted that they identify with the pansexual label as they feel it more explicitly includes them in its definition (Galupo, Ramirez, et al., 2017).

1.2.1 The Bisexual Umbrella

The term bisexual is often used as an umbrella term to describe sexualities that involve romantic or sexual attractions and/or behaviours related to more than one gender (Flanders, 2017; Robinson, 2017). As over time numerous sexual identity labels have emerged to describe attraction to more than one gender, the bisexual umbrella has been used to encompass these. As well as pansexual, the bisexual umbrella may include those who use labels such as fluid or queer (Flanders, 2017; Robinson, 2017). Queer can be simultaneously defined in various ways, whilst also being the absence of a clear definition (Callis, 2014). It was originally used as a pejorative term for gay people before being reclaimed by queer activists, queer theorists and LGBTQ+ people (Levy & Johnson, 2012). It is now used by some as a term for sexual attraction that transcends or rejects the gender binary; for others, to refer to the collective LGBTQ+ community (Eisner, 2013). For many the term 'queer' is somewhat vague and often adopted for this reason, by individuals who prefer a lack of definition for their sexual identity, or to defy labels that may feel restricting (Horner, 2007). Fluid is a sexual identity label used to refer to sexual attraction that is not fixed but changes and shifts over time with regard to genders attracted to and the extent of attraction (Mereish et al., 2017).

The bisexual umbrella can also include those who identify as asexual, a term used to describe an absence of sexual attraction (Carrigan, 2015), but who experience romantic attraction to more than one gender such as biromantic and panromantic (Eisner, 2013). Other terms that often fall under the bisexual umbrella include omnisexual, a term used to describe attraction to all genders, sometimes used interchangeably with pansexual (Eisner, 2013), plurisexual, a collective term used to describe people who are attracted to multiple genders

(Brown, Montgomery, & Hammer, 2017; Galupo, Ramirez, & Pulice-Farrow, 2017), and polysexual which can refer to attraction to multiple but not explicitly all genders (Eisner, 2013).

There are various perspectives on the potential merits and pitfalls of using the bisexual umbrella, some of which are explored in chapter two. Given that those attracted to multiple genders may identify with, and adopt, more than one of these labels (Burleson, 2013; Katz-Wise, 2015; Mitchell et al., 2015), may have similar experiences (Brown, Montgomery, & Hammer, 2017) and may describe their sexual identities in similar ways (Flanders et al., 2017), this convergence has the potential advantage of uniting those with shared experiences and shared objectives (Flanders, 2017). In particular, it has been considered helpful in the context of bisexual activism (Brown, Montgomery, & Hammer, 2017). However, grouping plurisexual people with varied sexual identity labels together under the bisexual umbrella may carry the risk of ignoring differences between them (Callis, 2013, 2014; Diamond, 2008; Galupo, et al., 2017; Gray & Desmarais, 2014; Mereish et al., 2017; Morgan, 2013). Therefore, in some cases the use of the bisexual umbrella may assume homogeneity for what is a fairly heterogenous group of individuals.

Pansexuality has thus far been considered to be under the bisexual umbrella. Some research has argued for pansexuality to be the umbrella, with bisexuality being a ‘component’ of bisexuality (Belous & Bauman, 2017), stating that “‘Pansexuality’ as a term and identity is much larger and more encompassing, though many definitions proposed for bisexuality are much narrower” (p. 68). However, other researchers’ findings point to bisexuality being just as broad and open as pansexuality, with the binary nature of bisexuality being nothing more than a stereotype (Flanders et al., 2017).

1.3 Gender Identity

When discussing bisexuality and pansexuality, it is necessary to consider gender diversity. Gender identity can be defined as an individual’s internal sense of gender which is commonly, but not always, congruent with their sex assigned at birth (American Psychological Association, 2015). Those whose gender identity is congruent with the sex they were assigned at birth are cisgender (Schilt & Westbrook, 2009). Transgender and trans can be used as umbrella terms to define those who do not identify as the gender they were assigned at birth,

either some or all of the time, and who may or may not choose to present as such (Richards & Barker, 2013). This can include binary trans people, as well as those who identify their gender as outside of the dichotomy of male and female, sometimes called non-binary.

Non-binary people may identify as both a mixture of male and female, as somewhere on a spectrum between male and female, or as a 'third gender', or feel themselves to have no gender (Richards et al., 2017). Thus, they may use nuanced labels to describe their gender identity such as genderqueer, gender fluid, agender, neutrois, demigirl or demiboy, among others (Richards et al., 2016). Therefore, when considering bisexuality and pansexuality, some people within these communities may describe their attraction to 'all' genders or 'more than one' gender rather than attraction to 'both', in recognition of gender identities beyond the gender binary.

1.4 A Brief History of Sexuality Within Counselling Psychology

Research studies on sexuality have arguably been characterised by polarised debates, narrow and simplistic views of sexuality, and the minoritizing of diverse sexualities (Eliaison, 1996). The early psychoanalytic theories of sexuality predominantly focused on gay men, and 'homosexuality' was theorised by Freud to be the result of an unresolved oedipal complex (Freud, 1905). Freud supposed that all humans were born bisexual before they developed a 'healthy' heterosexual orientation and that 'homosexuality' was the result of stunted sexual development. Other psychoanalysts in the following years proposed alternative theories of 'homosexuality' as unhealthy and curable, and caused by 'irrational heterophobia' (Bieber et al., 1962; Rado, 1940), or repressed trauma of maternal separation (Socarides, 1968). The view of 'homosexuality' as 'stunted growth' gave room for the view of heterosexuality as healthy, and 'homosexuality' as caused by one's environment and therefore reparable, leading to highly damaging attempts to 'cure' it, with no evidence for effectiveness (Keogh et al., 2016; Smith et al., 2004). Although the British Psychoanalytic Council now asserts an explicitly non-discriminatory position (British Psychoanalytic Council, 2011), and the British Psychological Society explicitly states its position against conversion therapy (British Psychological Society, 2019) this is arguably still present in the field of psychology currently, with a study as recently as 2009 developing findings to suggest that a minority of mental

health professionals are attempting to ‘help’ their clients ‘become’ heterosexual (Bartlett et al., 2009).

Although more contemporary therapeutic approaches, such as Person Centred (Rogers, 1961) and Cognitive Behavioural (CBT; Beck, 1976) approaches arguably do not have a history of pathologising diverse sexualities in this way, they seem to consider client sexuality as irrelevant and therefore do not consider it a pertinent aspect of assessment, or include it, when relevant, in formulating and treatment planning (Milton & Coyle, 1999). In response to this, a variety of affirmative based approaches have been developed. An affirmative stance to psychological and therapeutic work with clients can potentially involve taking the aforementioned well-established psychotherapeutic approaches, and updating them to attend to sexuality diversity with a non-discriminatory stance and contextual awareness (Milton & Coyle, 1999).

1.4.1 Researcher Positioning

As someone who identifies with the ‘pluralistic’ approach that Orlans and Van Scoyoc (2008) and Woolfe et al. (2003) indicate is embedded in the Counselling Psychologist (CoP) identity, I believe that sexuality is diverse and multifaceted. Someone’s sexual orientation forms a part of their nature and social constructs arguably influence way that this is expressed. I believe it is important to recognise that diversity of sexuality and gender identity is part of healthy human diversity and not to be pathologised. As a Counselling Psychologist, I take this position as an ethical stance. With this in mind, although this study is focusing on pansexuality in particular, it is not intended to consider pansexuality as an ‘other’ or a ‘non-normative’ sexuality per se, but fundamentally as a valid, healthy expression of sexuality diversity.

Furthermore, I consider sexual identity labels to be socially constructed and therefore subject to the meaning making of the individuals that use them as suggested by Horowitz and Newcomb (2002). To this end the definitions of sexual identity labels discussed in this piece are not considered concrete and finite.

As a final note, the reader may on occasion see the term ‘homosexual’ used in this study. This term, used to describe people who are gay or lesbian, carries pejorative and pathologising connotations (American Psychological Association, 2020). It is only used in this

study when referring to findings of research studies where this label was explicitly used and is indicated in single quotation marks to highlight this. It is otherwise avoided.

1.4.2 Researcher Theoretical Stance: Epistemology and Ontology

It is considered necessary and responsible for a researcher to state their epistemological stance when conducting research (Madill et al., 2000), in order to make the reader aware and to demonstrate self-awareness (McLeod, 2011). Epistemology is concerned with knowledge, and how we consider it to be acquired (Carter & Little, 2007). I have the understanding that there is one reality, external from any social interpretation (Maxwell, 2012), and that every person has a unique experience of this reality, that is socially constructed and influenced by many factors unique to that individual. I therefore take the position of critical realism as proposed by Bhaskar (1976), which is underpinned by a realist ontology with a relativist epistemology.

Furthermore, this stance is consistent with CoP positioning, which is underpinned by humanistic values and prioritising the unique subjective experience (Woolfe et al., 2003). As I am researching from a CoP perspective, I aim to acknowledge the pluralistic nature of individual 'truth', and acknowledge that there can be multiple 'truths' (Woolfe et al., 2003). Furthermore, part of the humanistic underpinning of CoP is the acknowledgment that every individual is more than the sum of their parts (Rogers, 1995). Put simply, whilst labels such as pansexual can be helpful for those who adopt them, this does not form all of who they are, nor do two pansexual people necessarily equate to the same thing or have the same experiences.

Chapter 2. Critical Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This section will provide a critical review of the relevant literature. It will begin with a reflexive statement, before considering historical understandings of sexuality and sexual identity grounded in psychological theory and research. Research findings regarding bisexuality will be outlined. Subsequently, a critical evaluation of the use of the ‘bisexual umbrella’ in research will be presented. This section will also discuss research involving bisexual and pansexual participants, and existing studies that have focused solely on pansexuality. With acknowledgement of the current social relevance of this emerging identity, the section concludes with a rationale for the clinical relevance of the current study.

2.2 Reflexive Statement

Researcher reflexivity is relevant to each stage of this research project. Therefore, a reflexive statement will be included in each chapter. The current reflexive statement aims to explore the researcher’s personal positioning on the topic of pansexuality broadly, and also within the context of reviewing the relevant literature. As subjectivity is arguably always present in research (Gough, 2003), the researcher’s continuous efforts to be reflexive throughout this project aimed to bring personal biases and assumptions into awareness in order to ‘bracket’ them off (Kasket, 2012). The notion of being reflective and reflexive (Finlay & Gough, 2003; Shaw, 2010), refers to continually considering our own interpretations of the content we interact with during the research process and what impact this may have (Finlay & Gough, 2003; Shaw, 2010). Furthermore, reflexivity is consistent with CoP values whereby reflexivity is an ethical practice that aims to minimize the imposition of personal beliefs and bias (Woolfe et al., 2003). In this case, reflexivity is employed to produce research that holds validity (Finlay & Gough, 2003).

My own personal connection to this topic, and the reason that I chose it as an area of research, is related to my relationship with sexual identity labels. I have spent much time in my past considering my sexual identity and have not fully felt as though there is any sexual identity label that fits. This has at times left me feeling uncertain and confused, although in recent years these feelings come with acceptance; it is no longer important for me to attempt to

put my sexual identity into an easily explained box, it is just what it is, and I have come to embrace that.

When considering my experiences and feelings I have found it pertinent to explore the assumptions this might lead me to make when reading relevant existing literature. When I first began, I found myself becoming irritated. I felt that in some studies, participants were being put into categories that they may not necessarily identify with, to fulfil the needs of the researcher. This encouraged me to take a step back. I learned that when strong emotions arose, this had the potential to skew my interpretation of what I was reading, therefore risking a biased literature review. I explored my feelings of confusion around the formation of a sexual identity in a reflective diary and with my supervisor: a difficulty with labels and the ‘unjustness’ of being labelled by others with an identity that doesn’t fit, and what these labels meant. I gradually saw that grouping diverse identities together in some of the existing literature, had some value. I felt that my view became more balanced and it is my hope that this is reflected in the literature review. Beyond this, I consider it essential to continuously reflect when writing about a particular group or community, on the implications of my writing for that said group. Therefore, my own frustration at reading some other research has helped to solidify my own stance as a writer, one of taking care to act in the clinical interest of this group, to write about people in a human way and to not impose assumptions or language that might ‘work’ for me as a researcher but take away from their voices.

What also became apparent as I worked on this research was my own helplessness, when meeting people who have narrow and binary views on gender and sexuality. I found in these moments that I took solace in my research. I chose this topic to overcome these feelings of helplessness. There is a part of me that hopes I can contribute to informing people of the diversity of gender and sexuality, and challenge binary views.

This has also led me to consider my role within the literature review. When recognising my own experiences of the social pressure of ‘picking a label and sticking to it’ and frustrations around being labelled by others, I might be driven to approach the literature in a way that would reflect this. Upon further reflection, I feel that this is a need to fulfil a sense of belonging; a validation of my own experiences. When initially completing a literature search, I noticed that some of the keywords I selected were biased towards finding literature

that would reflect my own stance, rather than a balanced overview. In turn, the titles of the journals I was paying most attention to were reflective of what I was *hoping* to find. Once I became aware of how I might ‘confirm’ my view, I was able to become more open minded when reading studies. This meant that the ones I had already paid attention to were valid and useful, and increasingly so when considered alongside other existing relevant research. Throughout the literature review process I worked to continually be aware of this, making use of supervision, personal therapy and a reflective diary to ensure the validity of my work by separating my own experiences as much as possible, from that of the studies I was reading, remaining in the position of researcher (Willig, 2012).

2.3 Sexual Identity Formation

Early models of sexual identity formation focused on adopting a lesbian or gay identity and used stage theories (Brown, 2002; Coleman, 1982; Reynolds & Hanjorgiris, 2000; Troiden, 1979), for example, the Cass six stage model of identity formation (Cass, 1979). The model highlights a theory of how an individual goes through stages of confusion, comparison to others and identity tolerance before an individual accepts, gains pride in, and synthesises their sexual identity into their self-concept. In critique of these models, some researchers have argued that few of the stages can actually be observed for participants (Halpin & Allen, 2004; Van de Meerendonk & Probst, 2004) suggesting that sexual identity formation is complex and unique to the individual. However, later research did propose main themes for the process, putting an emphasis on ‘coming out’ in order to integrate sexual identity into the self-concept (Cass, 1983; Chapman & Brannock, 1987; Fassinger & Miller, 1997; Levine, 1997). Research on bisexual identity formation is more limited. The existing research highlights bisexual identity formation as possibly more complex, as it occurs in a society that arguably privileges attraction to one gender and imposes a binary view on sexuality (Bradford, 2013; Brown, 2002; Weinberg, Williams, & Pryor, 1994). However, due to the complex nature of sexuality it could be suggested that identity development is an individual, fluid and distinctive process that cannot be reduced to a ‘one size fits all’ model (Diamond, 2006; Eliason & Schope, 2007; Hoburg, Konik, Williams, & Crawford, 2004; Vrangalova & Savin-Williams, 2010).

More recently, new social constructionist models for sexual identity formation have been proposed that are dynamic and flexible, recognising many different sexual identities

(Horowitz & Newcomb, 2002), the importance of community group membership (Dillon et al., 2011) and uniqueness based not only on varied sexual orientation but a variety of characteristics (Savin-Williams, 2001). Although more recent theoretical models for sexual identity development have attempted to diversify and account for the complexity of sexual identity, it could be argued that they still do not account for important intersections in identity such as age, gender, race and ethnicity (Chun & Singh, 2010; Striepe & Tolman, 2003). Also, these models were formed in a time when it was potentially less known and accepted to be sexuality diverse, whereas people forming a sexual identity in 2020 may experience this differently, potentially rendering these models less applicable (Entrup & Firestein, 2007; Savin-Williams, 2005) and suggesting more recent information into the experience of diverse sexual identities may be relevant.

2.4 Sexual Identity: Conceptualisations in Research

Models of sexual identity most often conceptualise it based on the gender identities of both the individual in focus and the individual(s) they are attracted to (Bailey et al., 2016; Galupo, Lomash, et al., 2017; Van Anders, 2015; Weinrich, 2014). Historically, sexuality was considered dichotomous and categorical, the categories being ‘homosexual’ and ‘heterosexual’ before the development of the Kinsey scale and the proposal of sexual identity on a continuum (Kinsey et al., 1948). The Kinsey Scale, which is now widely used in sexuality research, measures sexual orientation on a seven point scale from ‘homosexual’ to ‘heterosexual’ (Kinsey et al., 1948). This was designed to acknowledge the continuous rather than categorical nature of sexuality, by allowing participants to rate based on degree of attraction (Klein, 2014). However, it has been employed in some research to categorise participants, with any participants falling in the middle of the scale labelled as bisexual, although these participants themselves may or may not self-identify as such (Callis, 2014; Galupo, Mitchell, Gryniewicz, & Davis, 2014; Gray & Desmarais, 2014; Savin-Williams, 2014).

Sexual orientation has since been acknowledged as comprising of complex systems involving identity, behaviour and attraction (Belous & Bauman, 2017; Laumann et al., 1994; Wolff et al., 2017), by the development of the Klein Sexual Orientation Grid (KSOG), a continuum which includes sexual fantasies, attraction and behaviours (Klein et al., 1985). Further, recent literature has attempted to separate those who fall in the middle of the

continuum, by including labels such as ‘mostly heterosexual’ (Savin-Williams & Vrangalova, 2013), ‘bi-lesbian’, and ‘bi-heterosexual’ (Weinrich & Klein, 2002). This has been valuable in attempting to acknowledge the non-dichotomous nature of sexual orientation using the KSOG, but also relies on measuring against dichotomous labels such as lesbian and heterosexual to attempt to conceptualise diverse sexualities. This highlights the binary lens through which sexuality is viewed within research, which may not fit the identity of people who do not endorse binary views and labels for sexuality or gender (Galupo et al., 2016).

Gradually, more complex attempts to conceptualise sexual identity have emerged. Sexual configurations theory has attempted to explain sexual attraction to biological sex as different from sexual attraction to gender, to acknowledge those sexualities for which sexual attraction is unrelated to the biological sex of the target(s) of attraction (Van Anders, 2015). Furthermore, the acknowledgement of a potential incongruence between sexual identity, sexual attraction and sexual behaviour (Bauer & Jairam, 2008), alongside the assertion that the domain of attraction is made up of romantic and sexual attraction (Savin-Williams, Cash, McCormack, & Rieger, 2017), and that these two may not match (Diamond, 2003), has led to new scales and labels emerging, such as ‘bisexual leaning gay’ and ‘mostly gay’ (Savin-Williams et al., 2017).

2.4.1 Acknowledging Individual Experience

Arguably, sexuality conceptualisations in research often reduce it to an oversimplified narrative in an attempt to find ‘the answer’. However, as highlighted by Hicks and Milton (2010, p.258) “sexuality is a rich, complex, relational phenomenon and requires elaboration, not premature knowing: understanding process and meaning rather than simple assumption and classification”. Although many previous research studies conceptualising sexuality are useful, perhaps they do not often hold the individual experiences of the people to whom they refer at the centre (Sell, 2007). For example, two people could fall under the same Kinsey number based on responses, but qualitatively their sexual orientations could be quite different, suggesting that putting people into a box cannot fully capture their individual identity.

This notion is supported by research investigating the experiences of the use of the Kinsey scale and KSOG among sexuality diverse people (Galupo, Mitchell, et al., 2014). The participants, who were sexuality and gender diverse, were asked to use the scales and critique

their effectiveness. Responses reflected that participants felt their sexual identity was unrelated to sexual behaviour, and that it was not fully captured by these scales because it was self-defined. Therefore, these models used to conceptualise sexuality may not fit the subjective experience of sexually diverse individuals who potentially experience them as unrepresentative. Further, omnisexual and trans participants were found most likely to feel the scales did not represent them, possibly addressing a need to understand sexualities beyond a gender binary. This is supported by a study in which sexuality and gender diverse participants completed two measures of sexuality (created for the study) and then critiqued them (Galupo, Lomash, et al., 2017). One of the scales had participants rate on a seven-point scale, their levels of sexual and romantic attraction to the 'same' and 'opposite' sex. Results showed that cisgender and monosexual participants found this scale helpful because it separated romantic and sexual attraction, whereas omnisexual and trans participants found the binary nature of the scale problematic. For the second scale, rather than the use of the two dimensions 'same sex' and 'other sex', other non-binary dimensions were added such as masculine, androgynous, feminine and gender 'non-conforming'. This scale was found to be more inclusive by participants of all sexualities and gender identities.

Further, labels generated from models to understand sexuality are separate from socially constructed identity labels like bisexual and pansexual, which are difficult to place on a scientific continuum and are suggested to be chosen with the intent to challenge and diverge from this binary, cisnormative and heteronormative understanding of sexuality (Callis, 2014; Galupo, Lomash, et al., 2017; Mereish, Katz-Wise, & Woulfe, 2017; Rust, 2001; Tabatabai & Linders, 2011). Additionally, creating labels based on the needs of the researcher that are not constructed or accepted by the individuals themselves, whilst perhaps well meaning, is arguably unrepresentative of, and potentially othering or pathologising these individuals, communities or groups.

2.5 Experiences and Potential Difficulties for Bisexual People

2.5.1 Stereotypes and Prejudice

Sexual prejudice, negative feelings towards others based on their sexuality, is potentially decreasing in western society (Cunningham & Melton, 2013; Herek, 2000; Herek, 2009), however, a recent study on attitudes towards bisexual people in America produced

findings suggesting an absence of positive attitudes towards bisexuality among many respondents (Dodge et al., 2016). Furthermore, it seems that bisexual people experience rejection by heterosexual and LGBTQ+ communities (Boccone, 2016; Hertlein et al., 2016; Mulick & Wright Jr, 2002), and are potentially less connected to the LGBTQ+ community than other sexualities (Balsam & Mohr, 2007; Frost & Meyer, 2012), possibly resulting in invalidation and poor support networks (Oswalt, 2009). This notion of exclusion of bisexual people among people with binary heterosexual and gay or lesbian sexualities is supported by research investigating bias towards bisexual individuals in marriage pairings (Breno & Galupo, 2008). Findings suggested that participants viewed bisexual people as better paired together, as they thought bisexual people were not viable marriage partners for gay, lesbian or heterosexual people.

Additionally, it seems that bisexual people are stereotyped as sexually confused, promiscuous, greedy, and non-monogamous (Barker et al., 2012; Dyar & Feinstein, 2018; Eliason, 1997; Flanders, Robinson, Legge, & Tarasoff, 2016; Galupo, 2006; Spalding & Peplau, 1997), with bisexuality viewed as a ‘cover up’ for being gay (Brewster & Moradi, 2010; Eliason, 2000; Ochs, 1996) or a transient stage before figuring out one’s ‘true’ sexuality (Alarie & Gaudet, 2013; Dyar, Lytle, London, & Levy, 2015; Gonzalez et al., 2017; Rust, 2003). This is a form of bisexual erasure, as looking at bisexuality like a ‘half way point’ to an individual’s genuine sexuality, renders bisexuality non-existent.

2.5.2 Bisexual Erasure

Bisexual erasure, a refusal to acknowledge the existence of bisexuality (Dworkin, 2001), is arguably an ongoing issue (Hayfield, 2020; Herek, 2002). A study analysing the discourse of views on sexuality among emerging adults produced findings suggesting participants simultaneously recognised and discounted bisexuality through devaluing (Alarie & Gaudet, 2013). Furthermore, research using textual analysis on media reports of Olympic diver Tom Daley coming out as having attractions to both men and women, found that whilst most media reports appeared supportive of Tom’s sexuality, they commonly labelled him as gay (Magrath et al., 2017). As Tom did not label himself but indicated an attraction to two genders, this could suggest a media reluctance to label him as bisexual. Subsequently, he did announce his sexuality as a gay man, however, this was not apparent before this time.

2.5.3 Monosexism

Arguably, gay, lesbian and heterosexual people may contribute to bi-erasure as the concept of attraction to multiple genders threatens societal understandings of gay and straight (Erickson-Schroth & Mitchell, 2009; Yoshino, 2000), by suggesting that sexuality is not dichotomous and fixed (San Filippo, 2013). This leads to monosexism, the belief that being gay or heterosexual is more legitimate and superior to being bisexual, which in turn leads to erasure (Roberts et al., 2015). Bi-erasure plausibly serves a purpose for monosexual people by reinforcing ‘norms’ like monogamy, and a stable orientation based on sexual behaviour (Yoshino, 2000). This arguably leads to exclusion of bisexual people within communities (Brewster & Moradi, 2010; McLean, 2015; Nutter-Pridgen, 2015; Rust, 1995; Weiss, 2004; Yost & Thomas, 2012).

Potentially, many issues faced by bisexual people are faced by other plurisexual groups, which highlights a need to explore this further to contribute to existing knowledge.

2.5.4 Potential Impact: Poorer Health Outcomes

Sexuality diverse groups are suggested to have poorer mental health than heterosexual individuals (Cochran et al., 2003). Furthermore, bisexual people potentially have poorer mental health and increased substance misuse behaviours, in comparison to gay, lesbian or straight people (Bauer et al., 2016; Jorm et al., 2002; Pakula et al., 2016; Ross et al., 2014; Trocki et al., 2005). They are suggested to have a higher likelihood of depression (Bostwick, 2012; la Roi et al., 2019), higher risk of sleep difficulties (Patterson & Potter, 2020) and anxiety (Bostwick, Boyd, Hughes, & McCabe, 2010; Jorm et al., 2002). Bisexual people also experience more suicidality (Brennan et al., 2010; Kerr et al., 2013; Salway et al., 2019; Steele et al., 2009).

Research suggests that poor mental health for bisexual people is caused by discrimination and biphobia (Flanders et al., 2015; Scandurra et al., 2020). Furthermore, bisexual erasure could lead to inadequate social support, invalidation, difficulty with self-acceptance, low mood and trauma (Eisner, 2013; Roberts et al., 2015). Additionally, bisexual women experience higher rates of sexual violence, and bisexual stigma is suggested to be a predictor of this (Flanders et al., 2019; McConnell & Messman-Moore, 2019). Moreover, exposure to micro aggressions, subtle forms of discrimination, seems to increase anxiety

among bisexual individuals. Negative experiences of bisexuality could be associated with increased stress, whilst positive and affirming experiences could potentially reduce stress and anxiety (Flanders, 2015).

Furthermore, research highlights that stigma and prejudice could lead to self-doubt and poor wellbeing (Brewster & Moradi, 2010). This is because these stressors could lead to or exacerbate internalised biphobia and discomfort with one's own identity (Meyer, 2013). As wellbeing is influenced by being autonomous and self-accepting (Ryff, 2014), negative consequences for wellbeing can occur when the 'public self' is incongruent with the 'private self' (Bejakovich & Flett, 2018; Cass, 1979). This can potentially occur for bisexual people, who tend to be less likely to disclose their sexuality than lesbians and gay men in social situations to avoid stigmatising reactions (Balsam & Mohr, 2007; Bartelt et al., 2017; Hertlein et al., 2016; Schrimshaw et al., 2018) and a lower likelihood for disclosure may partially account for poorer mental health outcomes among bisexual people (Persson et al., 2015).

2.5.5 Positive Experiences

Whilst this review highlights potential difficulties for bisexual people, this is intended to acknowledge these issues and to consider them potentially faced by pansexual people. Crucially, this is not intended to pathologise bisexuality, but instead to highlight the understandable problems that may arise as a result of bisexual discrimination. Many positive experiences of being bisexual have also been explored in research such as the ability to live authentically and act as a role model (Riggle & Rostosky, 2011), to enjoy a sense of community connection (Kwon, 2013), liberation from social labels, and the opportunity for advocacy (Rostosky et al., 2010). International research investigating the experiences of bisexual people of colour suggests experiences of high levels of resilience and positive identity development (Castro & Carnassale, 2019), and finding advantage in invisibility to advocate for others (Ghabrial, 2019). These positive experiences of bisexuality could potentially be more consistently linked to mental health than negative ones (Flanders, 2015). Moreover, Galupo et al. (2019), who conducted qualitative research investigating experiences of people who were bisexual and biracial suggest that 73.8% of their participants reported positive experiences related to their dual bi identities including the celebration of uniqueness of experience, varied experiences, and strength and resilience.

Arguably, bisexuality research is most commonly focused on what is ‘wrong’ for bisexual people, which is important as difficulties need to be addressed, however, it may give the impression that all bisexual people are struggling due to their sexuality. The Bisexuality Report (Barker et al., 2012) highlights the need to avoid reducing every member of a group to the same experience, and to consider intersectionality. Bisexual people are just people like anyone else and live ‘normal’ lives where they may enjoy and flourish in their sexuality and frequently experience this positively in a variety of ways (Flanders, Tarasoff, et al., 2017).

2.6 The Bisexual Umbrella

Using the bisexual umbrella in research has been valuable when investigating issues possibly faced by people who are attracted to more than one gender, to obtain large sample sizes (Flanders et al., 2017; Sanders & McCartney Chalk, 2016). Additionally, it has been helpful in social domains and in the context of bisexual activism, particularly considering the potentially high level of monosexism in society as this can equally impact all plurisexual people regardless of sexual identity label (Brown, Montgomery, & Hammer, 2017). However, grouping people under the bisexual umbrella may carry the risk of ignoring individual differences (Callis, 2013, 2014; Diamond, 2008; Gray & Desmarais, 2014; Morgan, 2013) and findings suggest differences between bisexual, pansexual and queer participants (Galupo, et al., 2017; Mereish et al., 2017), suggesting a need for more knowledge about these individual subgroups. It seems that the use of the bisexual umbrella is suitable for some research studies but not others, depending on what is under investigation (Brown et al., 2017).

Furthermore, research suggests that many people who are attracted to more than one gender use more than one sexual identity label (Burlison, 2013; Katz-Wise, 2015; Mitchell et al., 2015) supporting the validity of the bisexual umbrella. However, not all people who are attracted to more than one gender identify themselves under the bisexual umbrella, but are still grouped as such in some studies (Brown, Montgomery, & Hammer, 2017). Arguably, pansexual and queer people are sometimes grouped under the bisexual umbrella because of a lack of understanding of what these labels mean (Belous & Bauman, 2017). This may happen based on the assumption that an individual’s behaviour is congruent with their sexuality (Bauer & Jairam, 2008). It could be argued that in these cases homogeneity is being imposed on a more diverse group of individuals.

Research suggests that plurisexual people have similar experiences in that they commonly feel as though a sexual identity label does not fully capture their sexuality (Dyar et al., 2014) and therefore that they are more likely to elaborate on this (Galupo, Mitchell, & Davis, 2015). Although this seemingly shared experience of sexual identity labels could support the homogeneity of the bisexual umbrella in research, it also highlights the complexity of the way in which people understand their sexuality. Therefore, the potential importance of giving sexuality diverse individuals a voice, to explain their individual experiences of sexual identity is highlighted.

2.7 Bisexuality and Pansexuality: Potential Similarities and Emerging Differences

2.7.1 Researcher Positioning

Pansexuality, which has been commonly been thought of as part of the bisexual umbrella, has many similarities with bisexuality in the way that it is defined. (Belous & Bauman, 2017). Therefore, similarities in experiences between these two groups could be expected. However, there is an argument for variation in the experiences of bisexual and pansexual communities (Borgogna et al., 2019; Galupo, Mitchell, et al., 2014; Galupo, Lomash, et al., 2017; Morandini et al., 2017; Smalley et al., 2016). My intention in presenting this research is not to create a divide between bisexual and pansexual communities, but to hold in mind plurality and the idea that pansexuality can be both a part of bisexual communities and also a separate independent identity that is equally in need of recognition and a deeper understanding through research.

2.7.2 Monosexism as a Shared Experience

As outlined above, many issues faced by those who are bisexual are related to monosexism, such as prejudice, exclusion and invisibility (Roberts et al., 2015). This could suggest that pansexual individuals have similar experiences to bisexual individuals in this respect. This is supported by a study on the perceptions of bisexuality and pansexuality of teachers and students of a 'gay straight alliance' in a Canadian school (Lapointe, 2017). Participants distinguished bisexuality and pansexuality as separate identities, but both were subject to misunderstandings, invisibility and prejudice. This supports the idea that pansexual people may have similar experiences to bisexual people, with a similar impact their wellbeing.

However, other research suggests that pansexual and bisexual people experience variations regarding prejudice. For example, a study investigating negative attitudes towards bisexual folk found that attitudes are less negative when the gender dichotomy is de-emphasised (Rubinstein et al., 2013). Depending on the ways in which pansexual people may approach discussions about gender, this could highlight the need for more detailed information regarding their experiences of negativity.

2.7.3 The Potential Significance of Self-Identification

Self-identification, or the assigning of a specific label to oneself, could impact how individuals experience their sexuality. For example Galupo et al. (2014) conducted a study investigating how sexuality and gender diverse people experienced the use of the KSOG. Outcomes suggested that “participants used their self-identification as a primary lens through which they contemplated their sexual orientation” suggesting differences in the way they experience their sexuality and potential differences in the way they experience challenges such as discrimination (p. 14). Furthermore, the significance of self-identification was emphasised by the participants, with one stating: “Sexual identity is an identity you give yourself. It can be as complex or as simple as you desire. But no one can give you this identity” (p. 13). Moreover, Kolker et al. (2019) described how sexual identity labels were used to ‘mark’ one’s sexuality, in order to convey it to others. This seems to highlight how the choice of a label can create meaning and potentially how those using different sexual identity labels, such as bisexual and pansexual, may experience their sexuality differently.

2.7.4 Pansexuality as an Emerging Identity

Pansexuality has been considered in existing research as an ‘emerging’ or ‘contemporary’ identity due to its relatively recent social emergence (Borgogna et al., 2019; Hayfield, 2020). Arguably, pansexual people have higher levels of depression and anxiety, and this can possibly be attributed to experiencing more minority stress than those who have more ‘mainstream’ sexualities such as bisexual or gay (Borgogna et al., 2019).

Furthermore, a study in New Zealand investigating differences in demographics, wellbeing and political ideology in a nationally representative sample of bisexual and pansexual people, suggested that pansexual people are different to bisexual people (Greaves et al., 2019). Their findings suggested that pansexual participants were younger, more likely to

be gender diverse, and higher scoring for psychological distress. Furthermore, pansexual participants reported a more liberal political stance than bisexual participants. Potentially, pansexual people opt for this label to reflect certain political views, for example, trans equality. Another study also supports the idea that pansexual individuals are more likely to be younger and gender diverse, as compared to bisexual people (Morandini et al., 2017), further highlighting the potential differences in these two sexualities.

Additionally, research suggests that there are differences in the ways bisexual and pansexual people describe their sexuality. In a qualitative study using an online survey to investigate the difference in the way plurisexual individuals conceptualised their sexual identities, thematic analysis of online responses of bisexual, pansexual and queer participants, who were asked to describe their sexual identity was used (Galupo, et al., 2017). Results suggested that although there appeared to be many similarities between bisexual and pansexual participants, there were also significant differences. There were 16 subthemes, 6 of which differed in frequency between the groups of participants. For example, pansexual people were less likely to indicate a preference for a specific gender than bisexual and queer participants, less likely to show a preference for the sexuality or gender identity of their partner, and less likely to describe their identity with reference to the degree that they were attracted to a certain person/gender than bisexual participants. They were also more likely to refer to their attraction in terms of transcending gender. This study plays an important part in highlighting how the grouping together of bisexual and pansexual people might ignore key differences in experience. However, this online study was over representative of middle class, white participants, meaning potentially less diversity of the sample and less generalisability.

There are a few other existing studies which seek to directly compare bisexual, pansexual, and sometimes also queer participants. For example, a study by Mitchell, Davis and Galupo (2015) investigated the experiences of anti-bisexual prejudice among 235 plurisexual participants. Bisexual participants reported more hostility from gay and lesbian people than pansexual, queer and fluid participants, and less connection to the LGBT+ community (Mitchell et al., 2015). Although this study grouped together pansexual, fluid and queer participants, meaning that individual differences between these groups may have been missed, findings could suggest that bisexual and pansexual participants expressed different experiences.

Another study compared the way 60 bisexual and pansexual participants defined bisexuality (Flanders et al., 2017). All participants identified as being under the bisexual umbrella and responded to survey questions regarding bisexual definitions. Findings from a content analysis suggested that bisexual and pansexual people define bisexuality similarly, as involving behavior and attraction, non-binary gender, and fluidity. This research was useful in highlighting the individualistic way that sexuality is defined, as well as giving bisexual and pansexual people a voice in defining bisexuality, which is perhaps often misunderstood due to stereotypes. However, this study did not account for how pansexuality was defined by the participants.

Arguably, not only do the experiences of pansexual individuals differ from that of bisexual individuals, but their responses to stressors may be different. This notion is supported by Bauer et al. (2016), who suggested that bisexual people were more likely to report mental health difficulties and substance abuse than those who were both bisexual and pansexual. Further, it has been argued that bisexual and pansexual participants differ in the nature and level of health risk behaviours, with pansexual people less likely to abuse substances but more likely to self-harm. (Smalley et al., 2016). These findings suggest that bisexual and pansexual people could potentially have different coping mechanisms that could impact on their individual experiences.

2.8 Research Investigating Pansexuality

Although pansexuality is now present within social communities, and somewhat more visible than it has been previously (Hayfield, 2020), there is limited research acknowledging pansexuality as separate from bisexuality (Galupo, 2018). There have been three studies in which pansexuality has been researched exclusively. One of them by Gonel (2013), which investigated different aspects of pansexuality using an online survey, containing open and closed questions, with responses being analysed using a ‘collaborative queer method’. The survey was posted onto five online groups for pansexual people and 57 respondents anonymously completed it. Findings suggested that pansexual participants used labels strategically, for example using another label when in certain settings and not desiring to explain pansexuality. Descriptions of pansexuality as transcending gender were also found, as well as the rejection of the gender binary. This study was able to highlight the possible ‘anti-

identity position' of the pansexual identity which goes against binary and fixed views of sexuality. The online and anonymous nature of the research seemed to allow for candid, honest responses without the threat of exposure that some participants may feel. However, information that could have been observed from a face to face interview, such as nonverbal cues, may have been missed. Furthermore, 68.4 per cent of respondents were from the United States, suggesting that more UK based research is needed.

Another existing online study looking solely at pansexuality was conducted by Belous and Bauman (2017). Document and content analyses were employed on 55 online blog posts pertaining to the topic of pansexuality. The themes that emerged included 'comparison to bisexuality', 'media and celebrities', 'identity development', 'normalisation' and 'pan-erasure'. This study made a useful contribution to sexuality research by highlighting some of the issues that pansexual people are potentially facing, such as the emerging concept of pan-erasure, as separate to bisexual erasure, however, the material analysed may have a subjective bias as it was posted for an audience and may have been influenced by popular public opinion when written. Furthermore, although many of the blog posts were written by pansexual people, the content, and the type of analysis used, does not account for personal interpretations of experiences.

Finally, a study conducted in California by Green (2019), sought to understand the methods that participants used to make sense of their pansexual identity and the reasons why they chose this label. This sociological research study consisted of 10 qualitative interviews with pansexual people and used an ethnomethodological approach to data analysis. The researcher claimed to focus on the methods employed by individuals to describe their experiences of discovering and adopting the pansexual label. Findings suggested the use of a 'discovery narrative' meaning that participants constructed their identities based on learning about their natural and innate orientation, rather than solely choosing to identify as pansexual. Furthermore, findings pointed towards participants making sense of their pansexual identity by positioning it in contrast with bisexuality, with the researcher describing this as a method used to establish pansexuality to listeners as its own distinct identity. The research also seemed to suggest that pansexual participants felt that the bisexual label was non-binary exclusionary. Furthermore, findings seemed to highlight the importance for some participants of using the pansexual label in order to be able to communicate to others that their sexual identity is

inclusive of diverse gender identities, and is sometimes influenced by having previous relationships with gender diverse partners. This study is the first of its kind in that it provides pansexual people with the opportunity to give detailed descriptions of their pansexual identity and their meaning making around this label. However, in the chapter presented, there is no evidence of the use of researcher reflexivity or the positioning of the researcher with regard to this study. This could arguably bring into question the validity of the findings as potential researcher bias has seemingly not been accounted for.

It can therefore be observed that the existing literature on pansexuality is predominantly representative of American participants, and predominantly completed online. There are three existing research papers that solely investigate pansexuality. There is currently limited existing research using qualitative interviews that attempts to understand the unique experiences of pansexual individuals, and none broadly with regard to the way that they experience pansexuality. As both bisexual and pansexual individuals may face many similar issues and difficulties, but there are also potential differences that can be observed, it would appear that more knowledge is needed in the United Kingdom regarding the ways in which pansexual people experience pansexuality, in order to inform our understanding within the healthcare professions and within Counselling Psychology in particular.

2.9 Relevance to Healthcare

Poorer mental and physical health among sexuality diverse people could be linked to the quality of experience with health care providers (HCPs; Mayer et al., 2008). Bisexual people in particular arguably experience poorer mental health and the most negative responses from HCPs (King & McKeown, 2003). In a study using a mixed methods design to assess factors influencing identity disclosure and the nature of interactions with HCPs for lesbian, queer, bisexual and pansexual women, positive experiences with HCPs were linked to a neutral or positive response to sexual identity disclosure, and HCP knowledge and understanding of sexuality diversity (Baldwin et al., 2017). Further, bisexual and pansexual women were less likely to disclose their sexuality. Seemingly, disclosure is linked to positive use of healthcare services, and service satisfaction, so it could be argued that continued non-disclosure among pansexual women could point to ongoing negative outcomes (Bergeron & Senn, 2003; Durso & Meyer, 2013; Hagen & Galupo, 2014).

Additionally, perceived stigma can reduce the likelihood of sexual identity disclosure to HCPs (Whitehead et al., 2016). A lack of knowledge of pansexuality could potentially lead HCP's to use heteronormative and binary language, possibly causing reduced access to sexual healthcare and feelings of invalidation when accessing healthcare (Carrotte et al., 2016). Potentially, a better understanding of pansexuality could promote more positive healthcare experiences and increase the likelihood of client willingness to disclose their sexuality to their HCP, leading to better health outcomes.

2.9.1 Relevance to Counselling Psychology

The BPS Guidelines for psychologists working with gender, sexuality and relationship diversity (British Psychological Society, 2019) state that “psychologists should be knowledgeable of the diversity of gender, sexuality and relationship identities and practices” (p. 9) and that “psychologists should strive to understand the ways in which social stigmatisation (e.g. prejudice, discrimination, and violence) pose risks to gender, sexuality and relationship diverse clients” (p. 7). This can be considered particularly relevant for less ‘mainstream’ sexualities such as pansexual, that many therapists may have an absence of, or limited knowledge around (Cormier-Otaño & Davies, 2012). Furthermore, the HCPC guidelines for practitioner psychologists state that professionals are required to recognise the importance of maintaining up to date knowledge (Health & Care Professions Council, 2015). Therefore, research into the subjective experience of pansexual folk could give insight into the potential issues faced, which is not intended to be generalised to all pansexual people but used for psychologists to keep in mind when working with a pansexual client.

Moreover, knowledge of sexuality diversity among health care professionals is potentially linked to more positive interactions (Baldwin et al., 2017), meaning that a better understanding of the subjective experience of pansexual individuals could likely contribute to building a ‘therapeutic relationship’ with pansexual clients (Clarkson, 1996). This highlights the need for further research focusing solely on pansexuality, to inform psychological practice.

Although writing focused on working therapeutically with sexuality diversity is becoming increasingly prevalent in research journals (Hartwell et al., 2012), there is little research on pansexuality broadly, and none in a therapeutic context. Research into the subjective experiences of pansexual individuals could begin to highlight potential areas that

we as psychologists do not have an awareness of. This could provide the basis for more specific research into pansexuality, in particular, how pansexual people experience working with psychologists and other HCPs, helping to inform CoP practice.

Therapists in western society are arguably trained in a heteronormative environment, with minimal training regarding sexuality and gender diversity (Anhalt et al., 2003; Shaw et al., 2008). This can lead to qualified therapists who lack knowledge and confidence when discussing sexuality and gender diversity (Murphy et al., 2002; Snowdon-Carr, 2005). A lack of awareness within the therapist could lead to avoidance of discussing material around gender, sexuality and relationships, or focusing too much on these with the presumption that this is the ‘problem’, both of which could be harmful (Hayes & Gelso, 1993). Furthermore, a lack of understanding and awareness could conceivably lead to harmful insensitivity and stereotyping on the part of the therapist (Long, 1996).

2.10 Summary of Rationale

In conclusion, the limited existing knowledge of pansexuality, in conjunction with the potential issues pansexual people may be facing such as discrimination and poor mental health outcomes, combined with potential differences from bisexual communities, indicates the importance of gaining knowledge of the experiences of pansexuality. This is in order to work with pansexual people effectively therapeutically, and in health care settings, where professionals may have a lack of knowledge of this group. Gaining an insight into the individual experiences of pansexuality, could contribute to more effective and informed care, and consequently better mental and physical health outcomes. Therefore, the gap identified in the literature is a study that investigates what pansexual people may be experiencing within themselves and within society in relation to pansexuality and the question that needs to be answered is: how do pansexual individuals experience pansexuality?

Chapter 3. Methodology

This chapter outlines the chosen methodology, the rationale for this choice, and the epistemological stance in relation to the philosophical positioning of CoP. Further, the chapter will outline details regarding participant recruitment, data collection and analysis. Lastly, a reflexive statement will be presented.

3.1 Qualitative Methodology

This research aimed to describe and interpret the ways in which pansexual individuals experience pansexuality. Therefore, a qualitative research methodology was deemed most appropriate. Qualitative research facilitates an exploratory stance, provides rich data regarding lived experiences (Willig, 2012), and an opportunity to discover unanticipated knowledge (Barker et al., 1994; Crowe, 1998). The qualitative approach deemed most appropriate for this study was Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

3.1.1 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

IPA is a qualitative approach designed for the purposes of psychological research and exploring individual lived experience (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). When undertaking research, it is important to consider the epistemological positioning of the chosen methodology to ensure compatibility with the research aims and researcher stance. IPA is based on three areas of epistemology: phenomenology, idiography and hermeneutics.

3.1.2 Phenomenology

Phenomenology is a philosophical approach that is primarily concerned with our conscious embodied experience as we engage with external stimuli (Willig, 2012). “Knowledge of the quality and texture of the experience itself” (Willig, 2013, p. 71). There are several phenomenological approaches in existence, some of which mainly focus on descriptive methods (Giorgi, 1997), and the setting aside of personal assumptions (Willig, 2013). This is considered almost impossible to do in its entirety, so a reflexive approach is adopted within IPA (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2008). Therefore, IPA is a phenomenological methodology that values features distinctive to the individual, but also values what is shared, both between the researcher and the participant and between participants themselves (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

3.1.3 Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is described as the theory of interpretation (Smith et al., 2009). Putting one's experience into a narrative is considered an attempt to make sense of, or interpret, that experience (Willig, 2012). Within hermeneutics, it is argued that interpretation is a necessary requirement in order to gain access to the human experience, both that of ourselves and of others (Smith, 1995). In other words, there is a shared phenomenon, and we are able to access it through our own lens, our own interpretation of this phenomenon.

This is recognised within IPA, which posits that it is impossible for one person to be able to access the exact experience of another. Therefore, when another provides us with a verbal account of their experience we must use our own interpretation in an attempt to understand it (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006). This is known as the double hermeneutic, in which the participant is making sense of their experience and the researcher is making sense of the participant (Smith & Osborn, 2004). This can become problematic if the researcher holds strong beliefs about the phenomenon under investigation, and they have not reflected on this. Subsequently, bracketing is another necessary part of IPA. Although IPA actively involves the researcher in the interpretive process, it is important that the researcher's preconceptions do not contaminate the findings. A process known as bracketing is therefore employed, whereby the researcher develops awareness of their biases, and brackets these as far as possible in order to return to the main focus of the research: the participant. This is done through reflective and reflexive practice repeatedly throughout the research process.

To summarise, IPA involves the merging together of phenomenology and hermeneutics to produce meaningful findings regarding individual experience.

3.1.4 Idiography

Within an idiographic stance, the aim is not to generalise across populations but give a detailed analysis of individual cases that develops a cautious understanding of a phenomenon (E. E. Lyons & Coyle, 2007). This is suitable for this study which aims to get an in depth understanding of individual experiences of pansexuality. The study is not looking to make generalisations about all pansexual people's experiences of pansexuality but gain a tentative understanding. This is relevant to Counselling Psychology as the findings produced could inform how we approach pansexuality therapeutically and in further research. When focusing

on idiography it is hoped that whilst attempting to gain knowledge of such an under researched area, the findings will be more meaningful and accurate, without the imposition of pre-existing research regarding sexuality.

3.2 The Epistemological and Phenomenological Positioning of IPA

Epistemology is the way in which knowledge is considered to be acquired (Carter & Little, 2007). IPA does not have one defined epistemological position, but is considered to be compatible with both critical realism (predominantly) and social constructionism (Larkin et al., 2006). Critical realism argues that an objective truth exists and exists independently of the human comprehension of its existence, however, the way we comprehend it is individualised. IPA adopts the notion that we can say a specific phenomenon exists, but that it is experienced different by each individual who experiences it (Bhaskar, 1976).

Social constructionism, which is a stance compatible with both the researcher's epistemological positioning and that of CoP, posits that knowledge is socially constructed, acquired through our histories, our culture, our social environment and through language (Davy, 2010), making this approach compatible with the current research aims. This is from the position that 'pansexuality' is a phenomenon, however the ways in which this phenomenon is experienced are unique. This study aims to develop insights into the way pansexual participants experience this phenomenon.

3.3 Alternatives Considered

Arguably, research aiming to describe and explore the way something is experienced, such as the current study, is most suited to IPA as a methodology (Willig, 2013). When designing a research topic, it is important for the researcher to consider several methodologies before committing to one, in order to understand which best fits the epistemological positioning of the research question and aims (Smith et al., 2009).

As the current research is exploratory, Grounded theory (GT) was considered as an alternative methodology as it is characterised by an exploratory nature (Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007). However, alongside exploration, GT looks to build a new theoretical framework for a phenomenon (Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007). In the case of the current phenomenon, this may have been useful for developing a theoretical understanding of how a

pansexual identity emerges and develops among individuals. GT would do this by looking for similarities between participants to build an overarching theory of identity development, which may discount subtle nuances in the responses and experiences of participants. IPA on the other hand, looks to gain in depth narrative accounts of experiences and to allow whatever unfolds from participants, potentially unearthing new and unestablished data. This is considered important for this research as pansexuality is currently an under researched area, so arguably it is important to gain a rich foundational knowledge of how it is experienced. If not, one risks building a theoretical model for the emergence of a phenomenon that one has little understanding of. This could lay some foundations for more explanatory research further down the line. (Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007) As the present study was only interested in experience, GT, was not deemed appropriate for the objective (Smith, 2015). Furthermore, IPA is considered suitable for uncovering new phenomena and new understandings by connecting with participants and is therefore suitable for under researched areas where there is a lack of understanding (Camic et al., 2003).

Discourse analysis (DA) was also considered for two reasons. Firstly, DA embodies social constructionism as a main epistemological stand point which is consistent with that of the research and of CoP, and this is considered to be advantageous (Willig, 2013). Secondly, it has an emphasis on the construction of a phenomenon through language, which is similar to IPA (Willig, 2013). However, its emphasis on language is as that of a social behaviour that is dictated by culture, background and history, among other markers, without concerning itself with language as linked to cognition (Willig, 2013). IPA comes from the position that language can be used to access participant cognitions, when it is analysed. This means that IPA has a sensitivity not only to discourse, but also emotion and cognition, providing a rich account of an experience (Eatough & Smith, 2008). The current research is concerned with individual experiences and not with how experiences are constructed using language. Therefore, it was decided that DA was not a suitable methodological approach.

3.4 Participants and Procedures

3.4.1 Sample

Participants were 6 pansexual people aged between 22 and 34 (See Table 1). Crucially, participants' sexuality was self-determined and self-defined and the pansexual label was not

assigned to any participants by the researcher based on desires or behaviours. All of them identified as pansexual only, except Alex who identified as both pansexual (primarily) and bisexual. This is in accordance with IPA as participants were in a position to give insight into the phenomenon under investigation (pansexuality) and were a homogenous sample. Six participants is deemed a suitable amount for IPA (Giorgi, 1997). The gender identity of each of the participants was recorded as research suggests that gender identity has potential relevance to pansexuality (Galupo et al., 2016; Galupo et al., 2017; Green, 2019; Kuper et al., 2012).

Table 1 Participant Demographics

Participant (pseudonym)	Gender identity	Pronouns	Age	Time identifying as pansexual	Ethnicity
Jay	Gender fluid	They/them	Early 20s	2 years	White British
Ashley	Cis man	He/him	Early 30s	1 year	Mixed
Sammy	Cis woman	She/her	Early 30s	6 months	White British
Charlie	Cis woman	She/her	Early 30s	10 years	Black Caribbean
Danny	Cis man	He/him	Late 20s	1-2 years	White other
Alex	Non-binary	They/them	Early 20s	5 years	Not disclosed

3.4.2 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Some pansexual people may simultaneously identify with other sexual identity labels (Galupo et al., 2015). The researcher took a pluralistic and flexible stance on sexual identity and did not exclude participants on this basis. However, individuals who identify with multiple labels might name a ‘primary’ sexual identity label, and this has been useful in previous studies (Galupo et al., 2017). Participants who identified as pansexual alone, or as pansexual primarily were included in this study.

Participants were required to be based in the United Kingdom in order to participate. One individual who approached the researcher was therefore excluded based on country of residence.

After obtaining consent, participants were asked to complete the PHQ9 (see Appendix A) and GAD7 (See Appendix B), to measure levels of anxiety, depression and suicidal ideation. Any participants who scored 20 or above on either, or above zero on the PHQ9 question 9, were to be excluded. This was in order to reduce the risk of the personal nature of the interview triggering any mental health difficulties to worsen. None of the participants initially recruited for the study scored above 20, or above 0 for the PHQ9 question 9, and so no participants were excluded on this basis.

3.4.3 Recruitment

Participants were recruited using recruitment posters (see Appendix C and D). The posters were advertised on social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Reddit (subreddit: Pansexual). Additionally, they were distributed to both university Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Queer (LGBTQ+) societies and wider non-LGBTQ+ university spaces, in order to potentially access less community connected pansexual people.

3.4.4 Informed Consent

Prospective participants were provided with an information sheet and consent form via an email marked confidential (See Appendix E and F) informing them of inclusion criteria, terms of agreement, confidentiality and right to withdraw. This was to ensure informed consent.

3.4.5 Interview Schedule

Consistent with IPA (Smith & Osborn, 2004), a semi structured interview was used (see Appendix G). The interview contained open ended questions and started with broad questions to avoid influencing the participants, so allowing their more personally meaningful experiences of pansexuality to emerge. The researcher used the interview schedule flexibly and sensitively to provide a comfortable interaction, allowing for probing of unanticipated relevant topics that emerged. This was primarily participant led. The aim was to minimize the imposition of the researcher's understanding of the topic onto the participants narrative account, allowing for the gathering of good quality data. This style of interview questioning was led by the guidelines developed by Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009).

The content of the interview schedule was influenced by existing research on plurisexual identities. For example, previous research suggests that plurisexual people find sexual identity labels do not fully capture their identity (Dyar, Feinstein, & London, 2014; Galupo, Mitchell, & Davis, 2015). Therefore, participants were asked about their experience of sexual identity labels. Previous findings indicating that pansexual individuals may use different labels in different contexts (Gonel, 2013), influenced the inclusion of a question regarding participants' experiences of their sexual identity in various settings. Additionally, findings indicating potential community exclusion (Breno & Galupo, 2008) led to the inclusion of questioning regarding conceptualisation of pansexuality within communities. These general topics were introduced broadly to avoid imposition of expectation to answer in a particular way.

3.4.6 Interview Process

Interviews took place only once the participant had given consent and the PHQ9 and GAD7 had been completed. One of the interviews was conducted in a private study room in a university library. The remaining 5 were conducted via Skype. The decision to conduct the interviews over Skype was mutually agreed between the researcher and the participants, considering time, availability, distance, and participant preference. Some researchers suggest that completing interviews via video call, although more time consuming and producing a smaller quantity of words, does not impact level of self-disclosure or type and depth of themes that emerge (Shapka et al., 2016). However, others argue that using this method comes at a cost to the richness of information produced by the interviews but can be advantageous nonetheless (Johnson et al., 2019). The majority of findings suggest that Skype interviews are a viable alternative to in person interviewing (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014; Janghorban et al., 2014; Lo Iacono et al., 2016), and can even have benefits such as facilitating a greater sense of ease, rapport and more detailed personal disclosure (Hanna, 2012; Weller, 2017). Overall it could be argued that the benefits of Skype interviewing strongly outweigh the drawbacks (Sullivan, 2012).

The same interview schedule was used for every participant, but the level of depth reached with each question and the order of the questions asked was varied depending on how this fit for the participants individually.

Interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes and were audio recorded. At the end of each interview the researcher noted personal feelings and other relevant information that arose, for data analysis. Finally, all participants were debriefed, giving the opportunity to discuss any difficulties that arose (See Appendix H). Participants were provided with contact details for the research supervisor with whom they could raise any issues that they wished not to discuss with the researcher directly.

3.4.7 Analytic Process

The analytic strategy for the research data was based on established IPA guidelines (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). This began with transcribing the first interview verbatim, and then re-reading the text several times whilst adding exploratory comments on the right-hand margin. Initially, the aim was for these notes to be descriptive and therefore linked closely with the text (Smith, Jarman, & Osborn, 1999). Following this, the aim was for the comments to become more conceptual, adding a level of interpretation by considering the exploration of the participants overarching way of making sense of their experiences of pansexuality. Based on these initial observations, emergent themes were identified and noted in the left-hand margin. These emergent themes were rich and concise statements that captured relevant information emerging from a focus on the exploratory notes. These reflected the researcher's interpretation as well as the participants' language. Initial themes were then compiled in a list, sorted into clusters, and distilled into superordinate and subordinate themes. The researcher aimed as much as possible to stay close to the experience and language of the participants and attempted to achieve this by moving back and forth between the themes and the transcribed interviews.

3.4.8 Superordinate and Subordinate Themes

Superordinate and subordinate themes were established by clustering and ordering the emergent themes. The groups of themes were named into subordinate themes, before being further grouped together to produce superordinate themes. These were compiled into a table, using quotes from the interview as evidence for the relevance and accuracy of the theme. The entirety of this process was completed with all other interview transcripts, with care being taken not to pay excessive attention to existing themes from previous transcripts. This was to prevent skewing the analysis and to remain open to the identification of new themes.

3.4.9 Across Case Analysis and Integration

Using the tables produced for each interview, the analyst searched for patterns and similarities across participants as well as any contrasting differences. From this initial search, the researcher established possible, overall representative superordinate themes, and then sorted the condensed subthemes for all participants into these superordinate themes to check that these represented the whole sample accurately (see Appendix O). From this table, the researcher was able to revise the superordinate themes to represent the subthemes of all participants (see Appendix P). Themes that were insufficiently represented were dropped at this time and the remaining themes are considered representative of the whole sample. As the group is homogenous it is justifiable to obtain an overview of the phenomenon extracted from all data (Smith et al., 2009). The integration process was cyclical, checking the raw data to ensure that the themes made sense, and stayed close to the participants experiences.

3.5 Quality and Validity of the Study

To ensure validity, the extent to which the research is measuring what it intends to measure (Willig, 2012), researcher transparency is crucial throughout the process so that the findings can be independently audited (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). Therefore, the researcher kept a paper trail to allow for an independent body to be able to check that her interpretations are grounded in the original data (Marks & Yardley, 2004).

Furthermore, the researcher consulted with the research supervisor and other psychologists who helped to confirm the appropriateness of the themes that were produced. This process has been previously shown to increase validity of research (Madill et al., 2000).

As the researcher herself is involved in the data collection, and her interpretations form part of the research findings, it is important to acknowledge that the researcher's own perspectives were implicated in the results that emerged. It was therefore important that this did not happen to the extent that it would taint the original data collected by participants, in order to ensure good quality results. In order to bracket some of her own beliefs and assumptions, the researcher continued to practice reflexivity throughout the process of data collection and analysis.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

3.6.1 Ethical Approval

This research received ethical approval from the London Metropolitan University Research Ethics Review Panel (see Appendix I).

3.6.2 Distress Protocol

A distress protocol was established in the event that a participant became distressed during the interview (see Appendix J).

3.6.3 Confidentiality

Interview data was stored under a pseudonym in a locked cabinet only accessible to the researcher. Consent forms were stored in the same way, but separately from the interview data. All data will be destroyed after 5 years in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR, 2018) or earlier if no longer required for publication purposes.

3.6.4 Researcher Declaration

The researcher did not accept any participants into the study with whom they had any prior relationship.

3.7 Reflexivity

A reflexive statement in this chapter gives an opportunity to reflect on the process during the recruitment and interview stages. In particular, what was going on for both myself and the participants, our impact on each other and the potential impact on the data. The recruitment stage was the stage in which I initially placed the most trepidation. As someone who is rigidly intent on staying to a deadline, I was concerned about the lack of control I had over who would approach me to participate and if/when this may happen. However, the recruitment of my participants was much quicker and easier than anticipated. My first participant contacted me within 12 hours of posting my advertisement on Instagram and the remaining participants followed relatively quickly. For my first interview I was nervous and hopeful that it would go well. I noticed that at times I found myself slipping more into the position of a therapist, paraphrasing and making empathic statements often, perhaps in an attempt to manage my anxiety at taking on an unfamiliar task. As I listened back to the tape, I was relieved to find that this had not led us to diverge greatly from the task at hand, and that I had stayed closely with my participant's experience, so it did not seem that I had

‘contaminated’ his responses other than there being slightly more emotional content than perhaps I would have otherwise found. I learned a great deal from this initial interview and took care to self-monitor and to adjust my approach by reading other example IPA interviews in order to get a greater sense of my role as interviewer. I feel that this positively impacted the subsequent interviews and kept them more pursuant to the IPA interview approach presented by Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009).

The nature of the interviews also evoked curiosity regarding what prompted my participants to take part. One of them, who was not ‘out’ as pansexual, completed the interview in his car on a quiet street. I sensed it was difficult for him to find a ‘safe space’ to openly discuss his sexuality. Perhaps volunteering to participate was his way of seeking a safe space to process, reflect on, and seek validation of his experiences. Indeed, he contacted me afterwards to tell me how validating the experience was, perhaps supporting this interpretation and speaking to the lack of societal validation there may be for pansexuality. All participants seemed to wish to share their experience not just so that it could be heard by me but to ‘spread the word’. They perhaps hoped this would provide a platform for information to be disseminated more widely. To this end, they seemed keen to share both their struggles and the things that they enjoy and take pride in with regard to their identity. With this potential agenda in mind, the participants may have been conscious of the messages they conveyed, emphasising what they would like to be ‘known’ by society about pansexuality and disregarding other aspects of their experiences that were not consistent with this cause.

Chapter 4. Analysis

This section will present the findings of the study. The analysis includes three superordinate themes and ten subthemes. The themes will be presented (see table 2) then expanded upon. Some examples of the analysis are included in the appendix in order to provide the reader with a sense of the analytic process (See Appendices K to O).

The themes included here offer one potential account of how pansexual people experience pansexuality. Although reflexivity and bracketing were employed, the themes that have been formulated are subjective to the researcher. This section aims to reflect the considerable similarities and potential differences in the participants' experiences.

Short utterances (e.g. 'um') were omitted from the quotes used, unless they were considered relevant to the overall experience of the participant using them. Ellipses indicate that some words or sentences of the original quotation have been removed.

Table 2 Superordinate Themes and Subthemes with Quotes

Superordinate Theme	Subtheme	Quote
Pansexual label as an anchor	A period of confusion - lost at sea	“I was very confused I didn’t really know who I was” (Jay, 385)
	Pansexual label “a comfortable jumper”	“I just realised that pansexual is something that feels very comfortable? Kind of like a more comfortable jumper” (Alex, 105-106)
	Identity development “this big framework to explore in”	“I have this big framework to explore in, ... I’m just learning to navigate who I am” (Jay, 573-575)
Feeling ‘boxed in’	The burden of explaining	“even though I really like to educate people ... I don’t want to have to put all that energy in” (Alex, 309-312)
	Feeling unseen - a push and pull dynamic	“they choose their own understanding and just go with that” (Charlie, 291-292)
	Stigma from gay communities; invalidation from heterosexual people	“if you’re not kind of gay or straight you’re confused you’re promiscuous, kind of there was a big negative connotation with it” (Sammy, 230-231)
	Emotional impact - anger, sadness and shame	“and that really is depressing I I don’t need anything to raise my blood pressure and that comment does it for me” (Danny, 443-446)
	A label that defies labels	Authenticity as a crucial component
Beyond labels “I just see people”		“I just see people” (Jay, 80-81)
A wish for wider societal change		“I suppose a more wider recognition of pansexuality on like a wider societal level rather than a small community level would be a lot more helpful” (Alex, 779-781)

4.1 Superordinate Theme 1: Pansexual Label as an Anchor

This superordinate theme refers to the role of the pansexual label in the participants' sense of identity. There were notable similarities in the accounts, characterised by feeling lost as if at sea, followed by relief and comfort at discovering the pansexual label, culminating in a curiosity and learning that occurred once anchored by this label as a reference point from which to explore.

4.1.1 Subtheme 1.1: A Period of Confusion – Lost at Sea

This subtheme refers to a time period prior to the discovery or adoption of the pansexual label, when the participants seemed to experience considerable confusion regarding their identities. Their sense of feeling unsure of who they were, as though drifting without the reassurance of a firm structure or foundation gave a sense of feeling lost, as if at sea.

Sammy, who was previously a lesbian, spoke of the confusion that accompanied a shift in her understanding of her identity.

Going from someone who was in a relationship, a very serious relationship with a woman, having a child together from- going from that to kind of saying well I don't know if that is who I am, it is quite- I suppose it was quite awkward for me and quite confusing (Sammy, 600-605)

She seemed to describe an awkwardness associated with sitting in uncertainty about her sexual identity, when she had previously established a secure lesbian identity and a family unit that she may have felt represented this. As she spoke of this shift when she said, "I don't know if that is who I am", it seemed there was a possible sense of loss of who she was alongside her feelings of confusion about who she is now.

Ashley also spoke of confusion.

I was like, I always thought I was gay, but I knew I wasn't... it was a contradiction in my head. I'd think 'am I lying to myself?' (Ashley, 117-119)

Ashley seemingly described questioning whether he was gay whilst simultaneously knowing he was not. Possibly this was because during that period the label 'gay' was the only possible language that he had available to him, to describe his experience. As this label did not fit how he felt, he seemingly questioned his own sense of reality, describing a lack of trust in

himself and internal conflict when he questioned “am I lying to myself?”. This sounds deeply distressing to him.

Jay similarly described distress.

I was very confused I didn't really know who I was, and I was questioning a lot of things about myself like and I had after sixth form I had a mental breakdown like a full mental breakdown where I couldn't even – I didn't leave my room for four months and stuff and I was really unhealthy and I just completely broke (Jay, 385-390)

It seems Jay's sense of not knowing who they were led to significant internal questioning, which culminated in a sense of overwhelm. They also seemed to describe a feeling of brokenness that led to their life being on hold, and them withdrawing from society. Potentially during the time of not knowing how they identified, their level of despair was so intolerable that they felt unable to be around others.

Charlie did not explicitly describe this period of time in much detail, but when speaking about discovering her pansexual identity she said:

I didn't feel like I knew what I was and then I did so it was like... it was like a victory to find out... but only a short one because it was like okay now I can get on with my life sort of thing (Charlie 193-199).

Possibly, during the time period when she did not know who she was, her life was on hold. It appears there was a sense of “victory” and achievement that accompanied the end of a period of possibly feeling stuck and uncertain about who she was, as she described being able to “get on with [her] life”.

Alex spoke of their initial use of the bisexual label.

well I was quite young, so I was about 16 when I realised that I am attracted to women as well, and I mean I was pretty okay with the concept. I had no main trouble with the identity. It was just that after a while, about a year or so, I realised that maybe it wasn't quite as inclusive as I would like necessarily, and I had a couple of friends who identified as pansexual, so I was familiar with the

concept. It was just that it wasn't necessarily explained to me in a very clear way, so I didn't really relate so much (Alex, 92-100)

Presumably, 'bisexual' felt comfortable to them for about a year before they began to question whether it was a label that felt representative of their sexuality. It is possible that they were searching for a "more inclusive" identity label. They appeared to be highlighting that they had heard of pansexuality previously, but that their understanding of it at the time also did not feel congruent with their internal sense of sexuality. It would appear that an unclear understanding of both of these labels led to feeling a lack of belonging to either, as later in the interview they spoke of adopting both and having a clearer understanding of bisexual as a label that is possible to be as inclusive as pansexual.

Danny also mentioned questioning a bi identity

I kind of parked that for probably 6 years, which is incredibly embarrassing [laughs]. Sort of compartmentalised that and yeah, then my wife had that pixie cut like probably a year or so ago. That sort of led to me realising oh hey I'm not straight maybe I'm bi – cool I'm probably bi, and the more I read into labels the more I was like 'oh yeah bi doesn't really quite fit that' (Danny, 189-195)

Danny seemed to refer to significant events in his history that led him to briefly consider his "not straight" sexuality. Presumably, this was difficult for Danny to stay with as he seemed to describe separating these experiences from the rest of his life when he said he "compartmentalised" it. This appeared to shift for him when his wife adopted a more masculine hairstyle, seemingly leading to a realisation and subsequent exploration of a potential bi identity. Danny's further research into sexual identity labels could suggest that he was experiencing uncertainty about the bi label which seemed to lead to his realisation that bi "doesn't really quite fit" his experience.

4.1.2 Subtheme 1.2: Pansexual Label - "A Comfortable Jumper"

This subtheme refers to the participants' experience of adopting the pansexual label and their explorations of their relationship to the label.

Alex explored the way the pansexual label felt for them.

for a while I was kind of trying to not have a label, but then I just realised that pansexual is something that feels very comfortable? Kind of like a more comfortable jumper (Alex, 104-106)

Alex arguably described resistance to adopting a sexual identity label, however, presumably this did not feel most comfortable to them as they came to realise that the pansexual label was potentially more comfortable than no label. When describing the “comfortable jumper” it sounds as though they experienced a sensation of physical comfort and reassurance when eventually adopting the pansexual label.

Sammy explored how it felt to find the pansexual label.

you don't have to clear things up in your own head anymore, there is just this label that basically does fit what you feel (Sammy, 592-594)

Sammy was possibly describing a relief from internal tension, resulting from finding the pansexual label as an external representation of her internal sense of identity. Her words arguably indicated a sense of comfort at having her feelings encapsulated in the label when she said it “fits what [she] feels”.

Ashley also spoke of the shift felt before adopting the label and afterwards.

it's quite- I'm in quite a calm place kind of, 'cause it- it's just not a thing anymore if that makes sense. I know what it is, I've told everyone in my life that this is how I identify. Done. Yeah (Ashley, 364-367)

It seemed that Ashley had developed from questioning his own reality to “knowing what it is” and that this left him feeling calmer and more at peace with himself. He appeared to describe the pansexual label as something that had helped him to understand his sexuality, and that this level of understanding was what had helped him to share this with others, as well as come to terms with it himself.

Jay also seemed to explore a sense of connection to the label.

and then I just found pan and was like 'I connect with this this just feels like me' (Jay, 398-399)

When Jay elaborated on their sense of connection to the label with “this just feels like me” they were seemingly reiterating the strength of this feeling of connection and the way they felt the label was an accurate representation of them.

Charlie had a potentially different experience.

*but to me it feels the most comfortable label I guess if I have to choose one
(Charlie, 213-214)*

Charlie seemingly felt forced to choose a sexual identity label. She seemed to reluctantly associate the pansexual label with a sense of comfort. One could tentatively hypothesise that for Charlie the pansexual label did not always feel comfortable, but perhaps the ‘least uncomfortable’ of the sexual identity labels available to her at the time.

Danny explored themes of self-acceptance as opposed to comfort.

*well actually the most unusual thing is the fact that I found it relatively easy to
accept myself, because my parents are fairly homophobic (Danny, 255-257)*

Possibly Danny felt surprised at how well he had come to terms with his sexuality, considering that he was aware that most of his family members would not be accepting of it. He seemed to suggest that the possibility that he was considered ‘unacceptable’ in the eyes of his family was at the forefront of his mind, and something that he had had to overcome in order to “accept” himself, although he had anticipated that this would be more of a challenge.

4.1.3 Subtheme 1.3: Identity Development - “This Big Framework to Explore In”

The participants explored experiences of the pansexual label as a “guideline” from which to explore and make sense of themselves. They seemed to acknowledge the broadness and inclusiveness of the label as something that facilitated this. In a sense, it seemed that the pansexual label provided a “framework” but one that was open and freeing, acknowledging plurality, flexibility and diversity. Here the emphasis seemed to move away from feeling lost and confused, and towards curiosity, possibly suggesting a sense of security provided by the pansexual label as an anchor.

Ashley, Alex and Danny spoke in relation to the bisexual label

But, it's very limiting for someone like myself. I just never subscribed to it, I just feel like I could genuinely either go for a drink or have sex with any person on the planet in- in theory. I don't think bisexuality encompasses that (Ashley 838-841)

bi doesn't really quite encompass it. I know bi does mean to like two or more gender expressions but it's like you know pan really describes the spectrum a little better ... I think the sort of description of gender as a spectrum and attraction as a spectrum sort of fits a little better (Danny, 304-310)

I know that bisexuality can be a very broad word but... while I could be bisexual and be attracted to people regardless of gender, I feel like pansexual is just something that really clearly implies this (Alex, 113-115)

Each of them seemed to both acknowledge that bisexual is a broad label that can encompass attraction to all genders, but also their strong need to have a label that explicitly stated this. It seemed that there was an emphasis on avoiding a restrictive label and a connection to the idea of all-encompassing inclusivity that facilitates freedom. Possibly, they were averse to feeling restricted by societal labels when they spoke of the importance of a label that clearly “encompassed” their experience. It would appear that the pansexual label represented freedom from restriction and facilitated playful exploration. They also seemed to find it important that they had a sexual identity label that acknowledged non-dichotomous ideas of gender. For example, Danny spoke of pansexuality describing a “gender spectrum”.

Jay spoke similarly about freedom and exploration within a “framework” provided by the pansexual label, acknowledging gender diversity.

the opening guideline is so huge, that I'm so free to explore who I am within it and be an individual within that landscape, rather than be restricted to maybe three or four genders and that's the limit... I have this big framework to explore in (Jay, 555-573)

Jay's words suggested they felt contained by the pansexual label but not “restricted”. It appeared that they experienced a sense of having individual autonomy and therefore freedom of a ‘no right or wrong’ identity, but within this also a sense of belonging. Like the other

participants, Jay seemed to feel averse to being restricted or limited by a label, and they seemed to position the pansexual label as the opposite of this when they described being “free to explore”. They also seemed to position their attraction to multiple genders as central to this freedom to explore without restriction and considered that they can be attracted to more than “three or four genders” outside of the binary. Their words seemed to highlight the way that they felt the pansexual label facilitated exploration of self and identity, and learning about the self through reflection, due to the large scope of possibility provided by the label.

For Sammy, the removal of the expectation that gender is important for attraction seemed to facilitate exploration.

that kind of showed me how unimportant gender was which wasn't something that I'd thought about before, and it wasn't something I'd had the opportunity to explore before either (Sammy, 156-159)

Sammy seemingly emphasised how her attraction was experienced as regardless of gender, and that the pansexual label acknowledged her feeling that gender was “unimportant” for her potential attraction to another person. Possibly, having a label that she felt represented the unimportance of gender for her, provided her with space to explore her sexual identity. It appeared there was a sense of gratitude and hope for Sammy when she described her “opportunity” to learn more about herself, and the opening up of new possibilities to “explore”.

Charlie explored the importance of flexibility.

yeah for me everything has to be flexible and malleable, I change my mind maybe every ten seconds (Charlie, 661-662)

Charlie seemed to be describing a strong sense that she did not want to be restricted by the expectation that identity is fixed and finite. Possibly, she held her freedom to move fluidly within her sexuality highly and felt determined to maintain this freedom when she explained that it “has to be flexible”.

4.2 Superordinate Theme 2: Feeling ‘Boxed In’

This superordinate theme refers to the participants experiences of pansexuality in relation to being ‘boxed in’ by the people around them. This included the expectation that they

would be required to explain their identity to others, and their attempts to feel seen which may be unsuccessful, leaving them feeling hopeless, stuck and restricted by limited options. This sense of feeling ‘boxed in’ also seemed to be linked to stigma from gay communities and invalidation from heterosexual people as they did not fit into the ‘boxes’ that were assumed for them by others, leaving them feeling the emotional impact of this.

4.2.1 Subtheme 2.1: The Burden of Explaining

This subtheme includes the participants’ experiences of a likely expectation to explain their sexuality to others, often without acceptance and understanding as an outcome of this explanation leaving them feeling hopeless, stuck and restricted by limited options and therefore ‘boxed in’.

Danny described explaining pansexuality to others, which led to having to explain gender outside of the binary.

*when I first discussed [pansexuality] with my wife *****, trying to explain to her what it meant was really quite difficult because I think she’s also still very on board with the concept of the gender binary, so trying to explain attraction outside of the gender binary is really quite difficult – really quite difficult – and. I suppose there’s the occasion where we’re driving along, and my mum is talking about something. I can’t remember she’s probably going on some rant about her transgender work colleague which is utterly irrelevant. I think I tried to explain the concept of pansexuality but, I think that went completely over her head (Danny, 632-642)*

Danny arguably highlighted how his wife’s binary assumptions about gender made it difficult for him to explain his sexuality to her. His repetition: “really quite difficult” seemed to emphasise how hard it was, and possibly his frustration surrounding this. When he spoke about his mother, his description of her “rant” as “utterly irrelevant” potentially indicated his distress around hearing transphobia and therefore his urge to dismiss it. Seemingly in response to this, he attempted to connect with her by broaching the subject of pansexuality in a broader sense, rather than directly relating it to himself. Potentially then, his mother’s reaction made him feel unable to be honest with her about his own identity. Finally, he seemed to highlight

his sense that his attempt to educate his mother was unsuccessful when he said it “went completely over her head”.

Sammy explored others’ reactions to her explaining gender beyond the binary.

Yeah, I mean that’s another aspect to it. Obviously, people haven’t heard of being pansexual, but then when you- you kind of- kind of start talking about- about more than two genders that is a- a separate issue that people, as well, that people might not be aware of or they might not agree with. Or, just not really have any kind of experience of I suppose (Sammy, 553-558)

She similarly highlighted the possible burden of having to explain both pansexuality and then gender diversity to others. It appeared that she was not only concerned that this may be a new concept for people, but their reaction may be unpredictable. For example, she mentioned the potential risk of people disputing or invalidating non-binary gender identities and alongside this, possibly invalidating her sexuality when she shared her concern that people “might not agree”. Therefore, it seemed she not only carried the burden of explaining these two separate but interrelated concepts, but also the risk of invalidation as an outcome of fulfilling this task of explaining, possibly adding to this sense of burden.

Jay and Alex seemingly highlighted the task of educating people

If I’ve got the time, which I don’t always have, I try and like, explain it, take time to talk to that person about pansexuality and gender identity and all that, and tell them as much as I know on it because I think educating people is important (Jay, 673-676)

It can be a bit annoying, and even though I really like to educate people on a lot of topics at one point it starts feeling like it’s not really my responsibility? and I don’t want to have to put all that energy in when I don’t even know how they will react or whether they will be accepting, so it’s just- it’s kind of just exhausting (Alex, 309-314)

They both seemingly explored a sense of responsibility and drive that they felt to “educate” others about pansexuality and gender. They also mentioned the time and energy that it took to do so, highlighting that this endeavour was perhaps at personal cost to themselves,

and understandably not something that they could always maintain. Alex seemed to feel this to a larger extent than Jay, when they described it as “exhausting”. Possibly, their sense of exhaustion came from their uncertainty about people’s level of acceptance even when they do invest the energy to educate them, as they did not know “whether they will be accepting” possibly evoking some understandable anxiety for them.

Ashley described his experience of coming out as pansexual to his best friend who proceeded to ask questions.

I said ‘I can’t- all the words I’ve given you. You’ve got all the information, there’s no more- information is not a problem here you’ve got it all It’s you my friend you- you can’t get your small little head around It’ (Ashley, 736-739)

Ashley seemed to describe being at a loss regarding how to handle his friend’s lack of ability to understand pansexuality, after exhausting all avenues of attempting to explain. His words suggested frustration and hopelessness at being probed for more information when he felt he had explained all he could, and his reference to his friends “small little head” possibly indicated anger and hurt at his friend’s reaction.

4.2.2 Subtheme 2.2: Feeling Unseen - A Push and Pull Dynamic

The participants seemed to explore themes of not being seen by others as who they actually were, and their responses to this.

Jay seemed to describe feeling unseen by others.

yeah and they just assume that I’m just gay and a lesbian, and I’m like ... I don’t know where to begin with this, to begin to explain this to you because it’s something that’s so much more than that (Jay, 227-230)

They seemed to highlight the ways in which others made assumptions about them without a full understanding. They were possibly speaking about the ways in which people labelled them, or made assumptions about certain labels, that possibly left them feeling frustrated and misunderstood. Jay’s sense of not knowing “where to begin” seemed to speak to their sense of hopelessness and powerlessness around this.

Most of the participants described using the label bisexual as a means to avoid having to provide a further explanation. Danny and Sammy seemed to experience this use of the bisexual label in similar ways

Bisexual isn't what I identify with, so you do kind of feel like you're lying a little bit, yeah (Sammy, 286-288).

I do tend to use the word bi over pan because oh my god if you start discussing gender with people it's an utter pain in your arse...it makes me feel like a bit of a traitor (Danny, 268-276)

It would appear that this left them both feeling that they were not seen as how they really identified, and that they had a role to play in this, making them feel as though they were “lying”, and perhaps bringing a sense of guilt.

Alex and Charlie both mentioned context as a factor that influenced their use of labels

I just go with bisexual if I feel that I'm not in any environment that's aware enough, so I don't have to bother explaining absolutely everything. It's a term that at least has a mostly clear meaning to most people. (Alex, 287-291)

Within my work, I have concerns about how people perceive me, about how I should identify or if honesty is always the best policy, maybe. I work in like, a high fuelled media industry with a lot of people who would say they are important which I struggle with. Will I lose work? Will people not understand? that type of thing (Charlie, 76-81)

They seemingly described assessing their environment to predict the potential impact of using the pansexual label. For Alex, this was seemingly related to removing the expectation of having to explain, when they said they use the bisexual label in an environment that's not “aware enough”. For Charlie, she seemingly experienced fear of being disadvantaged within her workplace for being pansexual, when she questioned “will I lose work?”. She also spoke of honesty, and like Sammy and Danny, possibly felt dishonest when she did not disclose her pansexual identity.

Conversely, although they used the bisexual label seemingly in order to escape having to explain pansexuality, almost all participants seemed to express discomfort at being labelled bisexual by others. Jay and Sammy described this.

people don't understand who meet me they just say oh you're bi and I'm like no I'm not bi I'm pan that that's what I like (Jay 206-208)

it's quite annoying because I mean to me bisexual doesn't describe it doesn't describe me like it's not it's not who I am it's not what I identify with its not what I feel explains my sexuality (Sammy 783-786)

They appeared to express incongruence between how they felt and how they were seen when others labelled them as bisexual and a sense of “that’s not who I am” alongside an urge to correct the person.

Throughout the quotes included so far in this superordinate theme, participants seemed to describe a ‘push and pull’ dynamic with others, whereby they made attempts to be seen and to educate others, which became tiresome and led them to begin to bend to make things easier for others, in order to not have to explain themselves. However, this seemed to have left them feeling further unseen, uncomfortable with being labelled as bisexual, and at times dishonest.

4.2.3 Subtheme 2.3: Stigma from Gay Communities; Invalidation from Heterosexual People

The participants seemed to experience stigma from gay and lesbian communities and groups, and invalidation from heterosexual people. This invalidation seemed to take the form of dismissing the pansexual identity by boxing it into ‘just bisexual’ and invalidating the need for a different label.

Sammy, who previously had a connection with gay communities during the time that she was a lesbian, seemed to experience stigma from the gay community and invalidation from heterosexual people.

All of the negativity I've experienced has been from the gay community rather than heterosexual people. I suppose there's a level of confusion from heterosexual people. When you do explain to them what pansexuality is, it is

kind of 'well isn't that- isn't that being bisexual?' it is kind of that aspect of it, but the negativity is more from the gay community (Sammy 252-258)

Sammy appeared to describe both “negativity” from the gay community and poor understanding leading to invalidation of her pansexual identity from heterosexual people when she described their question: “isn't that being bisexual?”. Her repetition: “the negativity is from the gay community” could suggest she placed more emphasis on the reactions from gay people, potentially indicating that this had more of an impact on her. This could be because of the explicit negativity that she perceived and may also be linked to her previous affiliation with the gay community.

Charlie explored her experiences of lesbian spaces.

I don't know if I feel like I fit there necessarily. I do go- I do go to lesbian nights... some people don't necessarily take it very seriously you know they might stigmatise you, because, you know, you “can't make up your mind” or you're, you know, you're “just playing games, you can't possibly want everybody, you're greedy”. So, I just stay away, out of those circles definitely (Charlie, 490-497)

Charlie's continued attendance at lesbian nights may possibly have indicated her wish for increased community connection. She seemed to feel conflicted, as a part of her wanted this but she questioned whether or not she “fit” in. It seemed that she feared negative judgement and her specific examples of stereotyping suggested that she might have heard those comments before. Possibly, when she attended lesbian nights she kept herself out of social “circles”, perhaps keeping herself at the side-lines. It sounded as though her overarching sense that she did not belong in these spaces based on the stigma attached to pansexuality, made it difficult for her to enjoy herself and feel a sense of belonging.

Alex seemed to speak more about this in relation to non-LGBTQ+ people.

It's kind of the ignorance and people not paying attention and I have heard people saying things like 'oh there are just so many labels its completely unnecessary' and that just makes me feel kind of irritated, because what do they know? Like what do they know? Like, they don't have that kind of

experience that they need a label, so I don't see why they would be judgemental (Alex, 807-813)

Alex appeared to feel intensely angry at having heard heterosexual people question the importance of diverse sexual identity labels. Their words might represent outrage at their experience of having felt ignored and dismissed by heterosexual people in a position of privilege, who they felt passed judgement without adequate understanding. Their repetition of “what do they know?” seemed to emphasise both their ‘us and them’ experiences of heterosexual people and their sense of injustice.

Danny seemed to highlight invalidation and a lack of sense of belonging

You know, gay people still give you the attitude of ‘bisexual isn't real, and pansexuality super isn't real’ (Danny 548-550)

you know anything outside of... that expectation it's kind of ‘yeah, are you guys really part of us?’ you know, bisexuals were too gay to be straight too straight to be gay, so pansexual you know it's all- yeah it's- I would say you kind of feel like you haven't got a home anywhere (Danny, 711-716)

He seemed to emphasise the extent of the attempts to erase his identity when he said, “super isn't real”. It seemed as though Danny was describing being shut out, as if there was no place for him due to pansexuality not fitting with the dichotomous ‘gay or straight’ groups. His account seemed to emphasise a sense of loneliness and lack of comfort, as well as a possible wish for more acceptance and community connection.

Ashley seemed to speak about people's reactions to pansexuality within the context of it being a relatively new label that people had not heard.

Yeah, straight away they don't even know what it is they don't like, but they know they don't like it (Ashley, 436-437)

Ashley's reference to the abstract “they” seemed to convey his general sense that he, as a pansexual person, was disliked and stigmatised by general society when he said, “they don't like it”. He appeared to highlight that this dislike of an aspect of his identity was present even before an understanding of what pansexuality means. He seemed to feel that he was hated and

misunderstood, and that no effort was made to attempt to understand what his pansexual identity meant to him, nor to accept it when he described how “straight away” it was disliked.

4.2.4 Subtheme 2.4: Emotional Impact - Anger, Sadness and Shame

This subtheme refers to the potential emotional impact of feeling boxed in, stigmatised and invalidated. Anger, sadness and shame seemed to appear as prominent themes.

Danny spoke of his reaction to overhearing work colleagues talking about sexuality.

That really is depressing. I, I don't need anything to raise my blood pressure and that comment does it for me. You know, it's all I can do, you know, not to really voice in and be like 'will you guys shut the fuck up talking this bullshit for 5 minutes' because that doesn't make you very popular in the workplace (Danny, 444-449)

The way that Danny spoke of raising his blood pressure, along with his use of the words “fuck” and “bullshit” that seemed to be outside of his usual way of speaking throughout the rest of the interview, suggested that this exposure to negative comments made him feel somewhat enraged. His mention of feeling depressed and unable to “voice in” possibly indicated his feelings of sadness and resentment.

Alex, who is non-binary, also seemed to describe feelings of irritation, although to a lesser degree

It can be a bit annoying, like it rubs me the wrong way when they clearly view me as a lesbian but I'm not a lesbian. I'm also not a woman but they don't know... [laughs] (Alex, 385-388)

They seemed to experience a strong awareness that others did not view them in the way that they actually identified. Their words possibly highlighted their annoyance and irritation at the imposition of the binary views of others. Their non-binary gender identity seemed to add an extra element of feeling unseen, and their laughter at the end could possibly highlighted a wish to distance themselves from their feelings of invisibility.

Charlie and Ashley's experiences seemed to be more shame centred.

Every day I'm still learning, and every day is a massive learning curve of what this is and how other people act or move with this, and is it an affliction? Or, you know, is it a problem? (Charlie, 649-652)

I kind of revelled in the shame of it all. I dunno maybe that's just something to do with as a people, I dunno, we're- we're meant to feel a sense of shame aren't we? where we have a Christian culture hanging over us... it still feels very odd at times actually I s- I still feel this sense of like, I feel as if I should feel disgusted and I don't, and I laugh, and I find it weird (Ashley, 308-316)

Charlie seemed at times to question whether there was something wrong with her as a person when she asked herself “is this an affliction?”, which could possibly indicate that she felt shame around her sexuality. She appeared to relate this to how others responded to her, perhaps indicating that the way others acted towards her regarding her sexuality had an impact on the level of pain and shame she felt about herself.

Ashley's somewhat disjointed account could indicate that he felt conflicted, with elements of shame and disgust as well as enjoyment when he spoke of “reveling in the shame of it all”. His laughter could be a defence against getting too close to his shame. He, like Charlie, related others' responses to the way he felt about his sexuality and specifically seemed to highlight his Christian upbringing as a potential source of his shame.

Sammy spoke of the negative reaction she received from the gay and lesbian community that she once felt a part of.

Yeah, I suppose it's quite sad in a way, because you don't really expect that from other people- people who are gay and lesbian, who have kind of been through difficulties themselves and kind of having to defend their sexuality quite a lot, you do kind of expect them to be the open-minded ones really. But, that definitely doesn't appear to be the case at all. (Sammy 304-310)

Again, for Sammy, sadness, loss and disappointment at the closed-mindedness that she appeared to have received from the gay and lesbian community seemed to be present in her account when she spoke of “expecting them to be the open-minded ones”. She seemed to have a sense of certainty that she was not accepted by them when she said, “that definitely doesn't

appear to be the case at all”. Potentially, she also felt a sense of rejection at them not having met her expectations of continuing to accept her following her identity shift.

Jay appeared to speak about how they responded to their feelings

It makes me really stop and think ‘is it wrong?’ ...But I have to really reiterate to myself and reassure myself that what I am isn’t wrong and what I am isn’t like, broken or anything it’s just different (Jay, 144-150)

It’s hard, but I try not to dwell on it too much, and then I think about it I’ll get angry and like ranting online about it, and then I’m like no just chill because the trick is to just educate people rather than getting angry about it (Jay, 157-160)

Jay was possibly describing a sense of shame when they spoke of questioning if it was wrong to be pansexual and whether “what” they were was “broken”. It seemed they were using a compassionate internal dialogue to help counteract shame. They also seemed to describe educating others as a process that helped them cope with anger when they said, “the trick is to educate people rather than getting angry”. Presumably they were trying to channel their anger into something that they felt may be helpful.

4.3 Superordinate Theme 3: A Label That Defies Labels

Seemingly depending on where they were in their journey in terms of their identity development at the time of the interviews, the participants spoke in varying degrees about the crucial component of authenticity, both facilitated by labels and by moving away from labels to an emphasis on people as people.

4.3.1 Subtheme 3.1: Authenticity as a Crucial Component

Each participant spoke about ways in which they felt able to develop authenticity within themselves and with others, and some spoke of their attraction to authenticity in others. They seemed to speak of this in relation to the ways in which learning about themselves through the ‘framework’ of the pansexual label facilitated authenticity as a crucial component, and how conversely this led to a distancing from or defiance towards labels in order to facilitate true authenticity through seeing the whole person.

Alex seemed to explore authenticity most frequently, and also spoke many times during the interview about their supportive experiences of LGBTQ+ communities.

It feels a lot more authentic and a lot more free... most of my friends that are close at this point are queer and it just gives me- gives me the freedom to be myself, and be honest not just with myself but with others around me, and that they actually see me as the person I am. So, it's not just that they see me as the person that is pansexual and non-binary but they actually view me as the person and that's really comforting and comfortable (Alex, 437-446)

In contrast to the other participants, Alex spoke of having a “queer” friendship circle and highlighted this as the space in which they were able to express themselves authentically. They seemed to explore the experience of authentically showing the queer people around them their pansexuality and non-binary gender identity, and in the process of this feeling seen as who they were beyond these aspects. It appeared that they felt as though the more of their gender and sexuality they were able to show, the less this became the focus and they were accepted as a whole person when they said, “they actually see me as the person I am”.

For Sammy, it seemed that her previous difficult experiences with going through a divorce influenced her openness with others

Yeah, definitely. I mean, I don't know, if I hadn't have gone through such an awful time I would have been so brave about things really, but it was just 'I am with someone who makes me happy now, I obviously want people to know that'. Yeah, so I- I didn't care what people's reactions were really (Sammy, 427-431)

Possibly, Sammy's attunement to the shift in her emotional state, and potential sense of pride in being in a fulfilling relationship indicated the level of authenticity that she was experiencing internally, and her authentic way of interacting with others. It sounded as though her prioritising of her own wellbeing over the opinions of others had enabled her to express herself openly.

Danny seemed to describe authenticity in his relationship

It's been much easier to say, discuss these things with my wife, and when you really understand. Well, I say when you really understand but, when you begin

to really understand, it's kind of easier to have those discussions of, you know, 'right this guy's attractive or that persons attractive'. It's kind of easier to be more open about it, to have more honest relationships so I guess ... that's really important to me (Danny 342-350)

Danny seemed to be highlighting the role of learning about himself through the process of self-reflection and gaining self-understanding in supporting him to become more authentic. He appeared to describe the ways in which this had helped him to have an honest and open relationship with his partner, which sounded consistent with his relationship values when he said, “that’s really important to me”.

Ashley and Jay both spoke about attraction to authenticity in others

But, to act with authenticity is important, that is where it's attractive... all external stimuli is just telling us to conform... and so to be able to not do that is very powerful (Ashley, 890-894)

Accepting that gender exists but not really conforming to it, I find very attractive because it's a- I like people who are free in who they are, who don't feel constrained by the ideas of society who just live their life the way they want to live it and they live it freely. (Jay, 523-527)

They seemed to be describing the attraction that they felt to people who were able to live authentically as themselves, when their identity did not necessarily fit or “conform” to societal dichotomised expectations of gender. This seemed particularly so for Jay when they said, “people...who don’t feel constrained by the ideas of society”.

4.3.2 Subtheme 3.2: Beyond Labels - “I Just See People”

This subtheme refers to the participants experiences of seemingly distancing themselves from labels, both for themselves and for others.

Sammy, Charlie and Jay spoke about the way they saw others in relation to labels

I'm just in a relationship with another person, because his gender isn't important to me. It's not that 'oh I used to be with a woman and now I'm with a man' but... to other people that is quite a big thing, but to me it's just that I'm with a new partner, so I suppose I did find that quite odd (Sammy, 729-735)

And I'm like oh well there's a person there too and that's all I'm seeing (Jay, 411-412)

I take people for people, and so it doesn't matter to me what your label is anyway (Charlie, 304-305)

They all seemed to be reflecting on how the rest of society tended to assign labels to themselves and each other and how this did not seem to be consistent with the way that they experienced themselves and others.

Charlie and Ashley seemed to actively wish to distance themselves from labels, including the pansexual label.

I really dislike labels, I'm not a person – before I would've said I don't wanna be labelled. To look for a label was to help people understand why I don't wanna be labelled [laughs] (Charlie, 376-379)

I didn't have the language for which to express it, so the phrases are quite good when you're new to something... like 'way finding' and it's, as you actually get into it more you can move away from the term. (Ashley, 136-140)

Both appeared to describe the functions of the label, and insinuated that the label was unwanted, or something to “move away” from. Charlie expressed hope that the pansexual label conveyed a lack of label when she said, “to help people understand why I don't wanna be labelled”. Similarly, Ashley appeared to explore moving back towards a position of ‘no label’ once he had established his sense of sexual identity. This seemed to create a plurality around their experiences of the pansexual label. It was possibly something that provided an anchor for them from which to make sense of themselves, but simultaneously went against their feelings about labels as restrictive.

4.3.3 Subtheme 3.3: A Wish for Wider Societal Change

This subtheme refers to the participants' exploration of how the lack of understanding of pansexuality on a societal level was a problem that they wished to be addressed. They seemed to express that they would like pansexuality to be recognised, and for the meaning of the label to be understood more widely. For some of the participants, being seen as their authentic selves was about others understanding their identity labels and accepting them to the

extent that they were able to see past labels to see the whole person. Potentially then, if society were to better understand pansexuality this could help facilitate moving beyond hyper focusing on this label over time so that there would be less emphasis on labels and more emphasis on people beyond labels. This possibly spoke to the participants' decision to take part in this study.

I suppose a more wider recognition of pansexuality on like, a wider societal level rather than a small community level would be a lot more helpful. I'm not entirely sure how that can be achieved, because I feel like a lot of the community tries to educate people on what pansexuality is, but there is only so much we can do and people might or might not pay attention to what we are saying, so a wider recognition would be quite helpful (Alex, 779-786)

For Alex, it seemed they understandably felt that they would like their sexuality to be recognised and validated by society. Possibly they felt that the amount of difference that they and those around them could make was limited due to being small scale and within the LGBTQ+ community when they said, "there is only so much we can do". It seemed that they worried they were being dismissed and that larger scale recognition would help with this when they said, "people might or might not pay attention to what we are saying".

Ashley and Jay, on the other hand, seemed to highlight their own role, and the role of the pansexual community, in making a difference.

I want to make a difference and I want to show people that the world is full of these amazing wonderful people, and if we just understood others better then we wouldn't have so many differences and disagreements about things (Jay, 235-239)

I think it's important that people who identify as pansexual are more visible because we're not really understood. It's something I'm still understanding and... from what I'm reading a lot of people are still understanding it, and things aren't gonna change if we don't speak up, yeah (Ashley 1295-1299)

They both seemed to describe the importance of pansexual visibility, and outspokenness in educating others and increasing understanding. Ashley was possibly slightly

earlier on his journey of understanding his sexuality, as he spoke of “still understanding” it. He highlighted the potential for increased visibility to aid him in his self-understanding.

This was something that seemed to be echoed by Danny.

I think visibility is really important from the point of view of ‘how can people understand who they are if there’s no sort of reference?’ (Danny, 780-782)

Ashley and Danny both seemed, from their overall interviews, to be the two participants that experienced the longest period of confusion about their pansexual identities. They possibly felt that a higher level of pansexual visibility in general society could have made this period less difficult for them. Danny seemed to be speaking about how difficult it had been to make sense of himself when there was “no sort of reference” as an example for the possibility of being pansexual.

Sammy and Ashley seemed to speak about being stigmatised by society, and the role of visibility and education in reducing this.

Things are starting to be a lot better in that aspect, but there is definitely still that undertone of, you know, ‘you’re confused, you’re promiscuous’, probably how people used to be with bisexual people and how a lot of the time... they still are ... But yeah, I think things are getting better with regards to inclusivity within the community, but it’s definitely not completely there. (Sammy, 696-707)

It’s important to talk to people to demystify stuff. Just a simple talking- even hearing the language is calming for people, I feel pacifies them, it’s less scary and new (Ashley, 1305-1307)

Their narratives suggested that they experienced a level of optimism with regard to the future of pansexual visibility and a wider societal understanding and acceptance. Sammy seemed to indicate this when she said, “things are getting better”.

Charlie’s experience seemed to be different.

It comes down to understanding, and a want to understand, or a need to understand. So yeah, not everyone has a need or even a want to- to find out more (Charlie, 532-534)

Perhaps Charlie felt that attempts to educate people would be left unheard and that those who were not open minded to further sexualities would not be impacted by increased pansexual visibility, possibly speaking to a feeling of hopelessness or helplessness on Charlie's part.

4.4 Reflexivity

The analytic process presented a new challenge as it brought fourth my need to 'do justice' to my participants accounts and to not overlook anything important. At times this posed a barrier for me as I became rigidly perfectionistic in this stance which stunted the process. Of course, one cannot include every aspect of the participants experiences, else the meaningful essence intended to be extracted from the accounts would be lost.

As a human, I related to each of my participants in different ways, and I was conscious to remain aware of this in order to bracket it whilst analysing their interviews. This was more challenging for some participants than others, based partly on the way the interviews felt and partly on the nature of the responses given. I was particularly aware that much of the interview discussion involved trans and non-binary people, and I was sensitive, perhaps hypersensitive, to any participant responses that I perceived to be transphobic, objectifying, or otherwise othering of trans people. In response to this, I would retract from the data. During these stages I enlisted input from my supervisor and other psychologists to assist in reading and analysing anonymised excerpts of the transcripts alongside me in order to bring a distanced perspective, from people who were not immersed and emotionally invested in the data. This helped me to gain a more balanced perspective on the data and regain contact with my participants experiences, considering their current stage of understanding and their attempts to gain clarity regarding their identities.

I also became aware that I had assigned pseudonyms to my participants, a common practice for IPA researchers (Eatough & Smith, 2008). For my non-binary participants, I chose pseudonyms which I perceived to be gender neutral. At the time I did not fully grasp the potential importance of self-identified names which reflect the gendered experience of the individual who chooses them. In hindsight, I believe it would have been pertinent to allow my participants to select their own pseudonym. I am aware now that what I perceived to be appropriate pseudonyms may not be experienced as such by my participants and may be

experienced as an imposition. Should I do this research again, this is something I would do differently.

Chapter 5. Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This study sought to explore the ways in which pansexual people experience pansexuality. Increasing evidence suggests this emerging identity may need to be explored in more detail, outside of the bisexual umbrella, which is currently lacking in existing research. This chapter presents the findings in relation to extant literature. Professional, practical and clinical implications will then be considered, before a final reflexive statement.

5.2 Summary of Findings

Three superordinate themes (*the pansexual label as an anchor; feeling 'boxed in'; and a label that defies labels*) and ten subthemes emerged in this study. Overall, the themes seemed to be underpinned by the concept of feeling 'boxed in'. This is because the impact of being 'boxed in', as well as attempts to avoid it for both the self and for others, as centred on the meaning of the pansexual label, was central to all participants.

This sense of being 'boxed in' and attempts to avoid this, seemed to result in a 'push and pull dynamic'. To elaborate, once this identity label was discovered and the associated freedom from fixed and binary views of sexuality and gender were established, the participants attempted to embody this within their social worlds. Seemingly, the societal majority expectation that they were attempting to position themselves away from became imposed on them. Namely, others would express confusion, an inability to see beyond dichotomous ideas of gender, and then impose a label that they better understood, usually bisexual. The imposition of such a label seemed understandably distressing to the participants because there was a discrepancy between the way they saw themselves and the way they were perceived. It seems that the participants were then left with two difficult options. The first: use the label that felt congruent with their identity, meet the confused response from others and feel the burden of explaining themselves with the risk of being stigmatised or invalidated as a result. The second: use the bisexual label and feel inauthentic. The pansexual identity seemed to embody an open minded and exploratory stance to whom one finds attractive. This involved continuous internal reflection rather than remaining within fixed 'norms'. Hence, a continuous developmental process seemed to occur whereby one is 'always learning' about one's sexual identity rather than reaching an 'end point'. This development seemed to occur within the

experience of being ‘boxed in’, within society. It seemed to manifest a continued search for authenticity and moving beyond labels which was where the ‘push and pull dynamic’ seemed to occur.

Although the small sample size makes the findings of this study non-generalisable, this has not been the scope of it. The intention was to provide a rich experiential account that HCPs could tentatively consider when working with pansexual people. However, it is also of note that some of the current findings have similarities with other, more large-scale sexuality research. Additionally, some of the findings are original.

5.3 Superordinate Theme 1: Pansexual Label as an Anchor

5.3.1 Subtheme 1.1: A Period of Confusion – Lost at Sea

All participants explored their experiences of a period of confusion regarding their identity. Labels seemed to play a significant role in this period in various ways. For some, it seemed that there was a ‘trying on’ of different labels such as gay or bisexual in order to learn which might ‘fit’. For others it was a transition from a previous identity, or a period of time without a label. These findings seem to be consistent with previous research exploring how pansexual people make sense of their identity, whereby participants described using the labels gay, lesbian, straight or bisexual before adopting the pansexual label (Green, 2019).

For the current participants, this period seemed to precede either a discovery of the pansexual label, or a more accurate understanding of it, suggesting that beforehand they had not been aware that identifying as pansexual was an available option. Something similar was argued by Klein regarding bisexuality in his early research on sexuality which began in the 1970s, whereby interview findings suggested that some participants were attracted to more than one gender but were not aware that it was possible to identify as bisexual (Klein, 1978).

In relation, the Cass six stage model (1979) proclaimed ‘identity confusion’ to be the first stage in the development of a gay identity. This stage describes the ‘turmoil’ as one notices that their feelings or behaviours could be defined as ‘homosexual’, leading one to question whether or not they might be gay. Indeed, for the current participants there seemed to be a sense of inner turmoil. However, this seemed to be more related to the lack of accurate language or label to explain to self and others who one is with regard to sexuality. For almost

all of the participants, it seemed that there was a knowledge of one's sense of 'queerness' and that this in itself was not necessarily distressing, but that the lack of available language that felt congruent with one's identity was.

5.3.2 Subtheme 1.2: Pansexual Label - "A Comfortable Jumper"

The participants seemingly experienced the pansexual label as something comforting and comfortable once they had adopted it. 'Discovering' the label was a moment of realisation that provided an accurate description for what they were experiencing internally. This seemed to signify the lessening of the distressing confusion, and 'knowing' what their sexual identity was. For all participants there was huge importance placed into finding a label that accurately represented their internal sense of sexual identity. This seemed to be consistent with previous research suggesting that many people find power and comfort in a sexual identity label (Hammack et al., 2019).

Crucially, Belous & Bauman (2017, p. 68) highlight the role of pansexual visibility, acceptance and normalisation in media in the growing awareness of pansexuality as an emerging identity, stating that "They [people who post online about their sexuality] are realizing that because they did not fit with the standard, well-known, three sexual identity models (heterosexual, gay/lesbian, or bisexual) there are emerging identities that they can relate to—and that is OK". They argue that this emerging identity is increasing in prevalence due to positive and normalizing discussions of pansexuality online. Interestingly, all of the participants in the current study contacted the researcher via either Instagram or Reddit. This could suggest that social media potentially plays a role in connecting pansexual people via the posting of pansexual content.

5.3.3 Subtheme 1.3: Identity Development - "This Big Framework to Explore In"

The participants described their relationship to the pansexual label as being given a 'guideline' as a point of reference from which to explore their identity further. This is consistent with previous bisexuality research which has explored 'label-first' sexual identity development (Comeau, 2012). The participants also seemed to acknowledge the pansexual label as broad and inclusive, in order that exploration could be unrestricted. They explored in particular the value of seeing beyond dichotomous ideas of sexuality and gender. They also explored the value of having a label that clearly represented gender identities beyond the

binary of male and female, acknowledging plurality, flexibility and diversity. Previous research by Green (2019), which explored how pansexual people use social processes to make sense of their pansexual identities, produced findings which seemed to suggest something similar. Some participants used the pansexual label as a tool to let others know that their identity is inclusive of diverse gender identities and communicate their view that people should not be required to conform to a gender binary. Other previous research also suggests that the pansexual label is used to represent transcendence of gender and to highlight gender diversity (Galupo et al., 2016; Katz-Wise, 2015; Morandini et al., 2017).

The way the current participants described their relationship to the pansexual label seemed to represent having an ‘anchor’ or ‘reference’ in a way that felt less restrictive. Seemingly, there was an emphasis on avoiding a label that felt too restrictive and a connection to the idea of all-encompassing inclusivity that facilitated freedom. It would appear that the pansexual label represented freedom from restriction and facilitated playful exploration. Previous research exploring bisexuality seemed to echo these experiences (Jen, 2019). Findings suggested that participants felt both ambivalence towards their bisexual identity label, and also felt that it facilitated freedom and possibility.

5.4 Superordinate Theme 2: Feeling ‘Boxed In’

5.4.1 Subtheme 2.1: The Burden of Explaining

The participants described how disclosing their sexuality inevitably involved having to provide a longer explanation, as pansexuality was something that most people had not heard of before. They named that this would then evolve into providing an explanation for gender outside of the dichotomy of male and female. This is consistent with previous research involving pansexual identities. The findings of the study by Belous & Bauman (2017) suggested that one of the prominent narratives that arose from pansexual people who blogged and posted online was the difficulties related to talking to others about what pansexuality means. Furthermore, pansexual participants who completed an online survey most commonly selected the response “people can’t see beyond the male/female binary” when asked about the problems faced when explaining pansexuality to others (Gonel, 2013, p. 52). The burden of explaining therefore seemed to be a common theme throughout the research solely investigating pansexuality.

5.4.2 Subtheme 2.2: Feeling Unseen - A Push and Pull Dynamic

Participants seemed to establish an identity based on a wide unrestrictive framework, representative of gender identities outside the binary, and potentially transcending societal expectations around gender and sexuality. Participants then understandably wanted this to be recognised socially but found others unable to understand. They seemed to find that the societal majority expectations that they were attempting to position themselves away from became imposed on them. It appeared that the establishment of one's own identity as relinquishing or going against fixed and binary views of sexuality and gender created a tension between the self and the 'mainstream' societal identity structures. This finding seemed to elaborate on findings by Gonel (2013 p. 36), who stated: "The existence and recognition of an attraction that accepts and includes all, however, embodies a tension with the way in which mainstream gender structures perceive identities, sexual orientations and acceptance".

Current findings suggest that the participants used the bisexual label strategically to avoid this tension by preventing them from having to explain themselves in certain settings. Previous findings also suggested the strategic use of sexual identity labels amongst pansexual people (Gonel, 2013, p. 45). According to the researchers, "this strategic use primarily depended on the other party's ability to understand, or familiarity with non-heteronormative ideas, such as the rejection of gender and sex binaries, and an open mind about different sexual orientations". Moreover, Kolker et al. (2019) had similar findings, suggesting that pansexual participants would use the label 'queer' depending on who was present and to avoid providing further explanation which seemed to mirror the current findings.

It seemed that the current participants almost exclusively used the label bisexual when strategically using labels. Contrastingly, previous research argues that pansexual people tend to use the queer label strategically (Gonel, 2013; Kolker et al., 2019). We could hypothesise that people who are unfamiliar with non-binary gender assume that bisexual means 'attracted to both'. This assumption compounded with the suggestion that they are more familiar with the term 'bisexual', means that they do not usually question further. This seemed to be the sentiment of the participants in this study and previous research suggests that people often assume that bisexual means 'attracted to both' without considering non-dichotomous ideas of gender (Weiss, 2004).

Existing research argues that pansexual people have been stereotyped as avoiding identifying as bisexual to avoid biphobia (Belous & Bauman, 2017). The current participant accounts did not seem to reflect this. To the contrary, they seemed more comfortable using bisexual in many contexts. However, the participants did express distress associated with being labelled as bisexual by others. They both used the bisexual label and also found it uncomfortable when others conflated pansexuality and bisexuality. This was not due to risk of biphobia but because they felt an incongruence between the way that they saw themselves and the way others were referring to them. This seemed to leave them feeling that they were not seen as themselves.

Arguably, the participants would have liked pansexuality to be recognised as its own distinct identity separate from bisexuality. This is consistent with previous research suggesting that pansexual people sought to distinguish bisexuality from pansexuality in order to ‘authenticate’ pansexuality (Green, 2019). However, Green suggested that some participants did this by engaging in ‘biphobic rhetoric’ whilst others expressed respect for all identities. In the current study it did not seem that any of the participants expressed any explicitly biphobic views. Predominantly, bisexuality and pansexuality were recognised as having the potential to be defined as attraction to all genders, but the participants felt the pansexual label more explicitly recognised this. However, some participants sometimes used binary language when discussing bisexuality. This suggests they may have had some binary assumptions about bisexuality, which may have influenced the decision to adopt the pansexual label or, which may have served to validate or distinguish pansexuality from bisexuality.

Seemingly, it was the ‘newness’ of this identity label that possibly contributed to increased minority stress. Pansexuality has been considered in the research as an ‘emerging’ or ‘contemporary’ identity due to its recent emergence in society (Borgogna et al., 2019; Hayfield, 2020). Possibly, pansexual people have higher levels of depression and anxiety, due to experiencing more minority stress than those who identify as more ‘mainstream’ sexual identities such as bisexual or gay (Borgogna et al., 2019).

5.4.3 Subtheme 2.3: Stigma from Gay Communities; Invalidation from Heterosexual People

The participants described stigma and invalidation from both LGBTQ+ communities and straight people. They described being seen as ‘confused’, ‘game-playing’, ‘greedy’,

‘unreliable’ and ‘non-existent’. These findings are consistent with previous research investigating pansexuality. Pansexual participants described being discriminated against, labelled indecisive, and accused of avoiding the bisexual label to avoid stigma (Belous & Bauman, 2017), as well as receiving negative reactions from gay men and lesbians and judged as “promiscuous and desperate” (Gonell, 2013).

Arguably, the stigma and invalidation that they described was similar to that which has been experienced by bisexual communities. Previous research suggests that bisexual people are stereotyped as sexually confused, promiscuous, and non-monogamous (Barker et al., 2012; Dyar & Feinstein, 2018; Eliason, 1997; Flanders, Robinson, Legge, & Tarasoff, 2016; Galupo, 2006; Spalding & Peplau, 1997). Further, that bisexuality is viewed as a ‘cover up’ for being gay or a transient stage before figuring out one’s ‘true’ sexuality (Brewster & Moradi, 2010; Eliason, 2000; Ochs, 1996). This erases bisexuality as its own distinct, valid identity (Alarie & Gaudet, 2013; Dyar, Lytle, London, & Levy, 2015; Gonzalez et al., 2017; Rust, 2003).

A study analysing the discourse of views on sexuality among emerging adults produced findings suggesting that participants simultaneously recognised and discounted bisexuality through devaluing (Alarie & Gaudet, 2013). Participants in the current study seemed to describe something similar and acknowledged that due to the lesser known label of pansexual, they felt there was an extra layer of invisibility, erasure and invalidation. Interestingly, the current participants seemed to experience the erasure of their pansexual identity through others labelling them bisexual, when this was not how they identified, suggesting that ‘pansexual erasure’ is its own distinct type of erasure. Relatedly, the preconceived notion that pansexual people only identify as such to avoid bisexual stigma and discrimination, is arguably another form of pansexual erasure (Belous & Bauman, 2017).

Bisexual erasure potentially serves monosexual people by upholding norms like monogamy and a stable orientation based on sexual behaviour (Yoshino, 2000). Arguably, the labelling of bisexual and pansexual people as ‘promiscuous’ represents a sense of threat to typically monosexual and monogamous societal structures. Furthermore, most societal attitudes towards bisexuality potentially represent the questioning of the authenticity or existence of bisexual identities (Israel & Mohr, 2004). Something similar could be observed for the pansexual participants in the current study. As pansexuality, like bisexuality falls under

plurisexuality, it seems that pansexual people are also subject to similar prejudice and discrimination, and also to pansexual erasure. The participants experiences of rejection from both LGBTQ+ communities and heterosexual people also seemed consistent with existing bisexuality research (Balsam & Mohr, 2007; Boccone, 2016; Frost & Meyer, 2012; Hertlein et al., 2016; Mulick & Wright Jr, 2002). This could potentially be linked to monosexism.

Furthermore, the current participants' experiences of being labelled as bisexual or having non-binary gender concepts questioned could be considered forms of 'identity denial'. This has been explored in previous research with regard to bisexual people (Garr-Schultz & Gardner, 2019). Identity denial can be defined as "the situation in which an individual is not recognized as a member of an important in-group" (Cheryan & Monin, 2005, p. 717). This questioning of a person's group identity can lead to a sense of incongruence between how a person see's themselves and how others see them (Barreto & Ellemers, 2003). This arguably leads to stressful experiences that threaten the self-concept, the stability of which is important for wellbeing (Lodi-Smith & DeMarree, 2018; Slotter & Gardner, 2014; Swann Jr, 2011). Additionally, being miscategorised by others can lower self-esteem and wellbeing (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Leary, 2010). These experiences have been explored in bisexuality research, where it was suggested that "identity denial was significantly and uniquely associated with consequential outcomes including depressive symptoms, self-esteem, felt authenticity, and the maintenance of a clear and coherent sense of self." (Garr-Schultz & Gardner, 2019, p. 12). With regard to the current study, identity denial seemed to take the form of people labelling the participants as bisexual or questioning the validity of gender outside of the dichotomous male and female. The impact of this on the participants, namely feelings of anger, sadness and shame, also seemed consistent with previous findings regarding bisexual experiences of identity denial (Garr-Schultz & Gardner, 2019).

5.4.4 Subtheme 2.4: Emotional Impact - Anger, Sadness and Shame

In response to stigma and invalidation, the participants seemed to experience shame in the form of questioning whether there was something 'wrong' with them. They also explored anger, sadness and low mood. This seems consistent with previous findings suggesting that sexuality diverse people expressed discomfort, anger and frustration, sadness, embarrassment and shame in response to microaggressions (Nadal et al., 2011).

Previous research has suggested that “discriminatory relational disconnections” are linked to shame due to their disempowering and isolating impact (Miller, 2015). Shame can be defined as “a sense of unworthiness to be in connection, an absence of hope that empathic response will be forthcoming from another person” (Hartling et al., 2004 p. 122). It seems conceivable to tentatively link shame with the ways in which the participants in the current study described their interactions with others regarding their sexuality. Furthermore, the minority stress model posits ‘internalised homophobia’, or the integrating of societal homophobic beliefs into the own self-concept, and ‘identity concealment’ as proximal stressors (Meyer, 2013). These are also suggested to be linked to feelings of shame (Allen & Oleson, 1999; Chow & Cheng, 2010; Sherry, 2007). The current participants’ sense of their own ‘wrongness’ that seemed to be the result of a lack of a mirroring response, denial of the existence of pansexuality and overt discrimination could be considered as a sort of internalised biphobia or ‘panphobia’.

Mereish & Poteat (2015, p. 4) argue that “When sexual minorities feel shameful, they might keep parts of themselves out of relationships with peers or LGBT community members out of fear of rejection or ridicule. This could lead to lack of mutuality in relationships and exacerbate disconnections.” Arguably, for the current participants, feeling unable to correct people who labelled them bisexual, or using the label bisexual strategically, could stem from feelings of shame and fear of discrimination. This in turn could lead to feeling disconnected and inauthentic. This is supported by previous research which explored LGB women’s “self-perceived accuracy” of sexual identity labels. Findings suggested that one may disclose sexuality using a label that does not accurately describe one’s own sexual identity, and that this leads to feeling inauthentic (Dyar et al., 2014).

The current participants reported both concealing parts of their pansexuality and also attempts to make their identity known and understood. Although previous studies have argued that disclosing one’s sexuality to others is a key part of accepting and developing pride in one’s identity (Meyer, 2013), it is also suggested that ‘increased outness’ can worsen low mood (Riggle et al., 2017). This is because disclosing one’s sexual identity can potentially lead to experiencing more discrimination and associated stress (Huebner & Davis, 2005). This has been explored for bisexual people whereby having a visible identity is related to increased anti bisexual discrimination and associated psychological distress (Scandurra et al., 2020).

For some of the participants this distress was linked to disappointment with other marginalised communities, whom they expected to be more understanding. This seemed to impact their sense of belonging, possibly contributing to low mood. Previous research has suggested that an increased sense of belonging leads to lower rates of depression amongst bisexual women, potentially highlighting the importance of community connection for wellbeing (McLaren & Castillo, 2020).

Arguably, the emotional responses linked to ‘coming out’ and living authentically are linked to the context in which this occurs and social responses. Contexts which support autonomy are potentially related to less anger, less depression, and higher self-esteem, whereas contexts that are controlling are not associated with these positive outcomes (Legate et al., 2012). In relation to the current study, it therefore seems to make sense that a controlling environment whereby one does not quite ‘fit’ unless they adapt to the ‘norms’ set by others would lead to feelings of anger and shame, and to low mood (Legate et al., 2012).

5.5 Superordinate Theme 3: A Label That Defies Labels

5.5.1 Subtheme 3.1: Authenticity as a Crucial Component

The themes that emerged from the participants’ accounts, centred around feeling ‘boxed in’ and the associated ‘push and pull’ dynamic in an attempt to move towards authenticity also appears to be congruent with previous research exploring ‘outness’, concealment and authenticity for sexuality diverse people (Riggle et al., 2017). For example, previous models of identity development have focused on the importance of discovering one’s sexuality and then communicating it to others (Cass, 1979). For the participants in the current study, telling people that they were pansexual, although important to them, seemed often to result in stress, sometimes leading to either complete or partial concealment of their identity. For example, using the bisexual label strategically. This identity concealment has also been suggested in previous research, and has been argued to impact wellbeing, as it impedes authenticity (Jackson & Mohr, 2016; Meidlinger & Hope, 2014). Authenticity, or a feeling of comfort when claiming a sexual identity label and freedom to be transparent about this with others is arguably a positive experience for sexuality diverse people and helps with positive social functioning (Riggle et al., 2014). It potentially involves an intrapersonal process

whereby assessment of whether one is being true to one's values within the external context (Riggle et al., 2017).

Within the Meyer minority stress model (2003), it was suggested that deciding whether or not to disclose sexuality involved weighing up a fear of discrimination versus a need for self-integrity. This does not sound dissimilar to the 'push and pull' dynamic that seemed to emerge in the current study. The need for self-integrity that Meyer described has also been interpreted in previous research as being related to feeling authentic (Riggle et al., 2017). Although identity disclosure and concealment have been widely researched, authenticity has less so (Cass, 1979; Meyer, 2013). However, a study exploring 373 lesbian gay and bisexual peoples experiences of outness, concealment and authenticity suggested that "Higher levels of LGB-specific authenticity were significantly associated with higher psychological well-being, fewer depressive symptoms, and lower levels of perceived stress" (Riggle et al., 2017, p. 54). This is further support by Petrocchi et al. (2020) who argue that authenticity is important for wellbeing.

The freedom to live authentically and be around authentic others was something that seemed highly important for the current participants. There seemed to be a sense of resilience around choosing to be oneself regardless of other's opinions and choosing to surround oneself with those supportive of authenticity. Previous research regarding bisexual participants has also noted this emphasis on claiming authenticity and the freedom of self-expression that comes with claiming a bisexual identity (Scales Rostosky et al. 2010).

Additionally, the current participants seemed to express attraction to authentic gender expression in others in a way that seemed to celebrate diversity. They also expressed attraction to those able to live authentically in a gender role that is outside of typical societal norms. Previous bisexuality literature has highlighted the ways in which bisexual people may name particular traits as being important to them for attraction, for example mutual interests or values, or someone who is kind or intelligent (Scales Rostosky et al., 2010). As pansexuality is seemingly explicitly linked to acknowledging gender diversity, it would seem to make sense that the current participants would explicitly name attraction to those who express their gender in a way that feels authentic, regardless of typical societal gender expectations.

5.5.2 Subtheme 3.2: Beyond Labels - "I Just See People"

The current participants explored experiences of distancing themselves and others from labels. They seemed to wish to relinquish sexual identity labels. This has also been observed in other studies. For example, in the study by Green (2019, p. 28) one participant described how they “didn’t really want any label but... would rather have something that’s inclusive”. Furthermore, previous findings suggest that some pansexual participants described their attraction to people beyond labels and expressed uncertainty, avoidance or rejection of having a sexual identity label (Galupo et al., 2017). In both the current study and these previous ones, there seems to be an element of choosing the ‘least worst’ label. This is in order to be able to communicate one’s identity to people easily but for it to be as inclusive and unrestricted as possible.

Arguably, it is when people feel like their attraction is more related to the characteristics of the target of attraction, and to the nature of the relationship with them, than to their gender, that the resistance to labels tends to arise (Diamond, 2003; Peplau, 2001; Savin-Williams, 2005). Such a resistance to labels in general has previously been explored. Notably, a study by Scales Rostosky et al. (2010), in which 157 participants explored the positive aspects of identifying as bisexual. Many of the participants expressed discomfort with the bisexual label and with sexual identity labels generally, a freedom from prescribed gender roles, and fluidity and flexibility with regard to attraction and identity. Furthermore, participants expressed the prioritising of personality traits, moral character, interests, emotional intimacy and sexual compatibility over gender or sex.

5.5.3 Subtheme 3.3: A Wish for Wider Societal Change

All of the participants explored how the lack of understanding of pansexuality on a societal level is a problem they wish to be addressed. They seemed to describe their role of attempting to improve visibility and awareness by explaining their pansexuality and gender diversity to others directly. They also explored the general importance of pansexual visibility and outspokenness in educating others and increasing understanding. It would seem from the current findings that a lack of awareness and visibility of pansexuality made it more difficult for the participants to be their authentic selves in society. It has also been observed in previous research that bisexual people feel that visibility is important to their sense of authenticity and that they therefore work towards making their identities visible (Hartman-Linck, 2014).

The participants seemed to speak of progress being made to reduce pansexual stigma, but that more work was necessary. Moreover, that increased visibility and awareness would help to improve their experiences and alleviate pressure. Previous research has investigated the ways in which bisexual people attempt to attain increased visibility and found that 58% of 397 participants made attempts to increase bisexual visibility (Davila et al., 2019). This was done through strategies including direct and indirect communication, public displays and community engagement. This seemed to be similar to the findings from the current study, whereby pansexual participants explored the ways in which they navigate visibility in their daily lives.

Individuals, activists and academics have made efforts to increase visibility of bisexuality, and although this visibility is potentially somewhat limited, there has been significant improvement for this reason (Hayfield, 2020). More recently, this has extended to other plurisexual identities such as pansexual, although this remains largely invisible. Visibility is important for education and advocacy, however also increases risk of further invalidation and discrimination (Hayfield, 2020). Nonetheless, it seemed that becoming visible and validated was challenging for the pansexual participants in this study, but there was a drive to do so. While visibility will not necessarily lead to validation, as pansexuality becomes more visible there is scope for raising awareness, with the aim for pansexual people to become more understood, acknowledged and represented by wider society. For mental health professionals and Counselling Psychologists in particular, this may involve validating people's identities and experiences of discrimination, whilst encouraging our clients to advocate for themselves, or advocating for them when necessary. Arguably, as Counselling Psychologists we have an ethical duty to actively support social justice and question inequality, positioning ourselves as actively supportive of those who rightfully wish to be seen and recognised as equal within society.

5.6 General Observations Regarding the Findings

It would seem that there are several key findings emerging from this study. Firstly, that societal lack of knowledge regarding gender diversity outside of the dichotomy of male and female makes having a sexual identity which actively recognises this distressing, as others are unable to easily understand your experience. Secondly, that identifying under a label that has

emerged recently and is not yet within the ‘mainstream’ set of labels available to people can be distressing because when one discloses that they are pansexual people will often be hearing it for the first time and so will likely question it.

Furthermore, although previous research has explored the strategic use of labels in social situations, and the desire for pansexuality to be recognised as its own distinct identity, this research is unique in that it seemed to explicitly highlight the interaction between these two elements for pansexual people in particular. Participants seemed to feel incongruence between how they see themselves and how others see them when others label them as bisexual, therefore wishing for their pansexuality to be recognised as such. However, as the pansexual label is less well known they sometimes rely on the strategic use of the bisexual label to alleviate social pressures. Furthermore, the participants seemed to experience the erasure of pansexuality through others labelling them as bisexual, when this was not how they identified, suggesting that ‘pansexual erasure’ is its own distinct type of erasure.

In relation to this, the participants seemed to discuss discrimination in a hierarchical way, positioning pansexuality as potentially more discriminated against than bisexuality. For some participants, this seemed to involve a magnified version of bisexual erasure, whereby pansexuality was seen as ‘even less real’ than bisexuality. For others it seemed to be the impact of panphobia compounded by transphobia. Additionally, the sense from the participants that perhaps bisexuality is no longer as discriminated against as it once was, but that pansexuality has not yet been through that process gave a sense of ‘it is now for pansexual people as it once was for bisexual people’. This again potentially points to the hierarchical way that discrimination is viewed for pansexuality as a form of comparison to bisexuality, leaving the participants feeling that being pansexual seemed to be more difficult than being bisexual.

Previous research looking at experiences of pansexuality has suggested that a highly prevalent theme was that pansexual participants were either trans or non-binary, or they had had a relationship with someone who was gender diverse (Green, 2019). This did not seem to be the case for the current study, in which the majority of the participants were cisgender. Seemingly, the participants in the current study placed the emphasis on who they were attracted to rather than who they had been in a relationship with. Nonetheless, considering that

the non-binary population is arguably relatively small, it is of note that one third of the participants were non-binary or gender fluid. This could indicate that pansexual people are more likely to be gender diverse as supported by previous research (Scales Rostosky et al., 2010), however, with a small sample size it is not possible to generalise. Furthermore, it has been suggested by the same study that trans and non-binary people may choose the pansexual label, because it is a label that recognises and is inclusive of their gender identity (Green 2019). Although this may have been the case for the non-binary participants in the current study, this was not something that they expressed during the interviews.

It is of note that in the current study all of the participants except Alex were exclusively pansexual. This is in contrast with other previous studies that suggest that people who identify as pansexual are more likely to identify under multiple labels (Burlison, 2013; Galupo et al., 2015; Greaves et al., 2019). However, the use of labels described by the participants was a complex process in which they regularly used the bisexual label, suggesting that they considered it a good enough label to use as a social aspect of identity signalling. Further research could aim to explore in more detail the complex relationship with sexual identity labels that are used in social situations but that pansexual individuals do not explicitly say that they identify under.

The current findings highlighting the use of the pansexual label as a 'framework' or 'guideline' rather than as prescriptive seems to speak to the 'post gay era' in which younger people are turning away from fixed and categorical definitions of sexuality, whilst using an ever growing set of nuanced sexual identity labels (Callis, 2014; Elizabeth, 2013; Gonel, 2013; Morandini et al., 2017). It has been argued that pansexuality is growing prominent amongst younger people as it is broad and flexible, allowing freedom of choice and expression (Callis, 2014; Gonel, 2013). Further, that the broadness of the label contradicts labels themselves, similar to the positioning of queer theory (Palermo, 2013). According to Gonel (2013), the pansexual label is chosen to mitigate the requirement to fit into one single category, and Belous and Bauman (2017; pg.60) posit that "Pansexuality is quickly becoming the face of the antilabeling movement within a new generation". This apparent ongoing shift in the way sexual identity labels are used, as loose guidelines rather than rigid categories, carries potential implications for sexual identity research, in particular the emphasis that is placed on 'coming out' as a crucial aspect of identity (Cass, 1979; Meyer, 2013; Riggle et al., 2017), as this is an

aspect of sexual identity theories that may become less applicable to pansexual individuals and others as this shift into freedom of expression beyond labels continues.

5.6.1 Intersectionality

Intersectionality theory highlights the way multiple social identities intersect, constructing people's individual experiences and accounting for systems of privilege and oppression (Bowleg, 2012). Previous research has argued that plurisexual people's experiences of discrimination can be additive when compounded with further marginalised facets of identity, such as race and gender identity (Van et al., 2019). Additionally, previous research has suggested that trans people are at higher risk for bisexual minority stress, compared to cisgender people (Katz-Wise et al., 2017). This suggests that gender diverse people may experience additional, gender related prejudice alongside bisexual prejudice. The non-binary participants in the current study notably spoke of safety in more detail than cisgender participants, possibly suggesting a level of danger and threat that was significant to them in particular.

Furthermore, Charlie and Ashley, who are both Black and from Christian backgrounds seemed to express feelings of shame, and a fear of being disadvantaged at work should they 'come out' as pansexual. Although both were out in most areas of their lives, neither were out in the workplace, and both explicitly seemed to describe the cumulative stress of being both Black and pansexual in relation to anticipated compounded discrimination from others should they come out. For example, Ashley said "being a black man in the work force is a challenge enough ... so I mean I don't think I would [come out], no and that would ... make my time at work more challenging". Charlie expressed something similar but also highlighted being a woman as an additional intersection of oppression: "I find that my work also impacts that. How do I present at work? ... how do people perceive me in the work space? erm not just being... pansexual but also being black and female". This suggests that Ashley and Charlie in particular had increased stressors surrounding employment that were specifically related to their race in conjunction with their sexuality. It is well known in the existing research that sexuality and gender diverse People of Colour experience stigma and discrimination associated with multiple, intersecting marginalised identities (Balsam et al., 2011; Ghabrial, 2017; Sutter & Perrin, 2016), and particularly experience marginalisation stress in relation to

these intersections in the workplace (Bowleg et al., 2008). It has been suggested that LGBTQ+ employees who were also People of Colour disclosed their sexual identity at work less so than white LGBTQ+ employees (Ragins et al., 2003). Additionally, higher levels of depression and anxiety have previously been reported among Black bisexual men and women compared to their gay counterparts (English et al., 2018; Friedman et al., 2019; Fukuyama & Ferguson, 2000). The findings from the current study provide a first-hand account of the stress associated with being both black and pansexual in the workplace, along with other intersections such as gender, which could add to the body of literature that could inform how LGBTQ+ people of colour are supported psychologically, and at work.

It is important that bisexual and pansexual People of Colour feel able to come out in the workplace, in order to avoid them feeling alienated, inauthentic and isolated at work, and to promote a sense of authenticity and belonging (Köllen, 2013; Popova, 2018). Being able to be out at work is arguably not only beneficial to employees but also to organisations as a whole. Strategies to facilitate this could include challenging racism and biphobia in the workplace and ensuring an anti-racist organisational stance (Badgett, 1996; Ghabrial & Ross, 2018). Furthermore, organisations should use inclusive language, openly discuss diversity and support inclusion in order to validate diverse identities, acknowledge intersections of privilege and oppression, and promote a safe environment (Köllen, 2013; Lloren & Parini, 2017).

Ashley and Charlie also seemed to explore the challenges associated with coming out to their families and in their home lives, due to experiences of homophobia that they attributed to the racial, cultural and religious backgrounds of themselves and their families. They described this in terms of a significant delay to coming out to key family members such as parents, and a strong fear that they would not be accepted. Previous research suggests that LGBTQ+ People of Colour feared negative responses, and threats from their families, as well as the risk of being disowned (Ghabrial, 2017). Thankfully, both reported accepting responses from the family members that they had told, which previously seems to have been shown to be more common in younger bisexual people, whilst people over thirty have reportedly experienced more biphobic responses (McCormack et al., 2014). It is therefore important to hold in mind that pansexual People of Colour may experience difficulty coming out to family members, and may experience negative responses, but that this is not always the case and we must take care not to assume this as counselling psychologists. Ashley in particular, seemed to

attribute his feelings of shame about his pansexual identity to his Christian upbringing. Previous research investigating experiences of pansexuality and Christianity also seemed to reference secrecy and shame that Christian pansexual people experience (Levy & Harr, 2018), but also that high levels of resilience, community and church connections, and humour can be some of the factors that help influence wellbeing (Levy, 2012). This seemed to be observed for the participants in the current study, who explored support from their families and friends as an important factor for their wellbeing.

As an additional point of reflection, Ashley and Charlie explored positive aspects of their intersecting identities. Charlie in particular reflected on how her experiences of racism, and challenges of discrimination as a black, pansexual woman contributed to her sense of “openness” and authenticity that she felt it important to embody with others, due to her unique perspective. She seemed to describe her role in “making a difference” to other people experiencing oppression by being open with others where possible, suggesting a level of resilience surrounding her experiences. Previous research by Galupo et al. (2019), investigating experiences of people who were bisexual and biracial suggest that 73.8% of their participants reported positive experiences related to their dual bi identities including the celebration of uniqueness of experience, varied experiences, and strength and resilience.

5.7 Clinical Implications

The current findings suggest that societal binary assumptions of gender and sexuality and an inability to understand beyond this seem to be factors that make it difficult for pansexual people to disclose their identity. Research has suggested that sexual identity disclosure in healthcare settings is important, as lack of disclosure among pansexual individuals is linked to poorer health outcomes and low patient satisfaction (Baldwin et al., 2017; Bergeron & Senn, 2003; Durso & Meyer, 2013). Furthermore, positive experiences with HCPs have been linked to a neutral or positive response to sexual identity disclosure, and HCP knowledge and understanding of sexuality diversity (Baldwin et al., 2017). Seemingly, in order to encourage pansexual people to feel safe enough to disclose their sexuality, more training is needed in all areas of healthcare, facilitating the understanding of gender and sexuality beyond the binary. Arguably, a better understanding of pansexuality could promote

more positive healthcare experiences and increase the likelihood of client willingness to disclose their sexuality to their HCP, leading to better health outcomes. This could involve awareness of the use of non-binary language and the avoidance of heteronormative and cisnormative assumptions about patients or clients. Furthermore, using intake paperwork that has a diverse selection of gender and sexual identities to choose from, as well as space to self-report to avoid erasing or excluding diverse clients is imperative. Such affirming services may help alleviate the stress associated with having a lesser known gender or sexual identity (Borgogna et al., 2019).

5.7.1 Implications for Counselling Psychology Training and Practice

It could be argued that the current study highlights the ways in which pansexual people experience their attempts to navigate the expression of their authentic selves amongst societal erasure and invalidation. As Counselling Psychologists, it is therefore important that we work in ways that respect, acknowledge and affirm the identities of our clients.

Psychologists and therapists are potentially trained in a heteronormative environment, with minimal training focusing on building awareness of sexuality and gender diversity (Anhalt et al., 2003; Shaw et al., 2008). In order to practice affirmatively it is important for psychologists to reflect on their own sexuality and gender identity, as well as their assumptions and biases. Conceivably then, Counselling Psychology training programmes, and HCP training programmes generally, need to incorporate education around contextual awareness and the impact of societal stigma and discrimination on gender and sexuality diverse groups. This should incorporate affirmative practice that acknowledges gender and sexuality diversity without pathologising (Herek & Garnets, 2007).

On the whole, this study highlights that HCPs in general and counselling psychologists specifically, are required to have an awareness and a basic understanding of pansexuality as a sexual identity, and to therefore include it on relevant forms, documents and other paperwork in order to provide care that moves acknowledging and affirming this identity.

5.8 Evaluation of the Current Study and Implications for Future Research

The use of IPA in the current study produced in-depth accounts of pansexual people's experiences of pansexuality. It was employed to provide an understanding of individual

experiences in a specific time and context. Therefore, it offers a valuable contribution to our currently limited understanding of pansexuality as it is the first study of its kind within the field of counselling psychology research to gain a phenomenological understanding of pansexuality. Although the study used a small sample, this provides knowledge that a counselling psychologist, or other healthcare professional, could hold in mind when working with a pansexual person. As with any identity-based research, the experiences highlighted in this research could not apply to every person all the time. The complex nature of sexual identity arguably means that each individual will experience it differently. However, this research has highlighted important and impactful evidence regarding what some pansexual people sometimes experience which can inform our practice.

The current findings are based on researcher interpretations and inevitably there will be variability in what emerged. Had another researcher analysed this data presumably they would not have produced the exact same themes. I have attempted to ensure validity through a rigorous process of reflexivity, maintaining an audit trail, and verification of the accuracy of the themes produced from other professionals. However, my extensive theoretical knowledge base in this area, and my personal experiences have inevitably shaped my interpretative lens. Furthermore, my participants will likely have had an impact on the findings produced in this study. It could be suggested that people identifying as pansexual with strong views about this, or particularly pressing experiences may have been more likely to participate. Therefore, the interview data may have been biased towards the participants areas of focus and may not reflect the experiences of other pansexual people.

As a strength, the use of both public forms of social media such as Instagram, and more anonymous forums such as Reddit, allowed for people who were either public with their identity or who were completely anonymous online, to access the advertisement and approach.

The current study provides a foundational knowledge of the under researched area of pansexuality, from which several questions have emerged that could be useful to explore in future research. The current participants had various intersecting identities, and this has been explored to a degree in this research. Future research could aim to further explore the intersections between pansexuality and gender identity, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic background, etc. It may be of particular interest to consider the possible relationship between a

non-binary gender identity and a pansexual identity and how these intersections are experienced. Furthermore, future research should aim to better understand how pansexual people experience psychotherapy and health care settings in general and work towards understanding the ways in which pansexual people can become more integrated with the wider LGBTQ+ community and be more widely recognised in society in order to understand and improve health and wellbeing for pansexual communities.

To further build on the findings from the current study, continuing research could benefit the field by exploring in more detail the use of the pansexual label as a ‘framework’ as opposed to something prescriptive and restrictive, and the implications for the role of coming out as a crucial component of sexual identity. This could be considered in the context of a ‘post gay era’ whereby rigid labels and ‘outness’ potentially play less of a role than they are suggested to have done historically.

5.8.1 Reflections on the Use of Skype Interviews

Within this study 5 of the 6 interviews were conducted via Skype which could be considered to have both strengths and limitations. This medium enabled easily accessible interviews for pansexual people across the UK. This meant that the data represented a rich variety of UK locations and was more representative of UK based experiences.

The use of Skype interviews in the current study seemed to offer various opportunities for increased richness of the interview data, and increased rapport between the participants and myself as the researcher. One of the participants completed the interview in his car on a quiet street, and at the early stages of the interview, there was a felt sense of his trepidation at discussing his identity. I would hypothesise that offering him the option of doing the interview via Skype would perhaps have felt more accessible than having to travel to a location and do it in person, when he was perhaps already feeling ambivalent about whether to participate. Most other participants completed the interview from their own home, and from the researchers perspective, there was a felt sense of the comfort and security that this allowed. This may allude to the increased sense of freedom and agency that [Bertrand and Bourdeau \(2010\)](#) have previously suggested is present for participants using this medium. However, when it was not the case that the participant was at home this did seem to have an impact on the rapport and possibly the richness of the data. For one of the participants, who was at work at the time of

the interview and had stepped into a private room, it may have been difficult to fully immerse themselves in the interview as they may have felt that they could be called upon at any moment. However, as they were fitting the interview in around a busy work schedule, again, the interview may not have been accessible to them had they been required to meet me in person. As the interviewer, I was aware that I had less control of the location of my participants when interviewing remotely which required me to be flexible and also to negotiate boundaries around privacy. Arguably, using Skype in this way can create limitations around rapport building, but can also create new and varied opportunities as previously noted by Lo Iacono et al. (2016).

Being able to see my participants on a screen and therefore only able to observe their faces, there may have been less of an opportunity for non-verbal observations that may have been more available had the interviews taken place in person. For the most part I felt able to get a sense of ‘being with’ the participants and what may have been going on for them emotionally and cognitively as they were speaking. However, this was to varying degrees depending on the participant and at times when this was more difficult to do, it may have been useful for us to have been in the same room. Although rapport was good for the most part, at times when I felt my participant and I were less attuned, a small interruption like a momentary loss of sound felt as though it had a larger impact on the flow of the interview, which potentially impacted the depth of the discussion and the richness of the data in those instances, as observed previously by (Johnson et al., 2019). Overall, it would seem that conducting the interviews via Skype created opportunities and allowed for a good enough rapport that outweighed the drawbacks of a potential increased level of interruption.

5.8.2 Reflections on the Use of PHQ9 and GAD7

As explained in the methodology chapter, the PHQ9 and GAD7 psychometric measures were employed in order to reduce the risk of the personal nature of the interview triggering any mental health difficulties to worsen. On reflection, as this research is involving sexual identity and not mental health, the use of these measures may have been experienced as intrusive and othering. In hindsight, these measures do not seem necessary for research of this nature and represent an over-cautiousness from myself as the researcher. If I were to do this research again I would not consider it necessary to use them.

5.8.2 Implications for Bisexuality Research

The current study has highlighted many similarities in the experiences of people who identify as bisexual and pansexual and also some differences with regard to the stressors potentially experienced as a result of a lesser known ‘emerging’ sexual identity. Furthermore, although most of the participants in the current study reported identifying exclusively as pansexual, they also reported regular use of the bisexual label to signal their sexuality socially. Therefore, it would be reasonable to group participants such as these under an umbrella with bisexuality in some research. When investigating bisexuality, researchers should place careful consideration into how they group participants together, depending on the purpose of the research. The current study has further highlighted how nuanced and personal the label that one chooses to use to communicate their sexuality to others is. Therefore, although the use of the bisexual umbrella in research can be useful, it is important to consider whether the participants themselves identify under the bisexual umbrella. Categorising participants based on the needs to the researcher rather than reflecting the identities of the participants themselves risks erasing the participants’ identities and voices.

5.9 Post Study Reflexivity

Through exploring the literature, discussing with colleagues and talking to my participants, it has become clear to me that within bisexual and pansexual communities there is some tension. This is in the form of a bisexual-pansexual debate, whereby it seems that pansexual people are of a younger cohort that consider bisexuality problematic as it is too binary, and exclusionary of trans and gender diverse people. Bisexual people, on the other hand, argue that their bisexuality has always been trans inclusive. This debate is harmful to communities as it creates an ‘us and them’ divide. This is exacerbated by media, which tends to compare and contrast bisexuality and pansexuality, describing bisexuality as binary and pansexuality as more ‘progressive’ and inclusive.

Within my literature review, I made the decision to present the research on bisexuality and consider the similarities and differences that this may have with pansexuality. I did this because of the lack of pansexual research that currently exists, to help to form the basis of my research, and to locate pansexuality research in the wider context of existing research on bisexuality. However, on reflection I can see that it also replicates the bisexual pansexual

debate going on more widely, that is as of yet unresolved. My intention with this was also to locate pansexuality as a separate sexual identity which deserves due focus in its own right, but not to create a divide or enhance the existing debate around pansexuality 'versus' bisexuality. Reflecting on alternative ways that I could have done this, I could have focused my literature review solely on the existing information surrounding pansexuality. This would have allowed my research to step outside of that debate whilst still meeting one of the main aims of the research, which was to focus on pansexuality exclusively. However, this would also have its pitfalls, as this would require me to reference research which also involved bisexual participants, whilst removing them from the discussion.

Reflecting on my research as I complete it has led me to further consider my own role and impact as a researcher. It is unavoidable that I have previous knowledge and experience, both personal and professional, of the ways in which society can tend to view sexuality and gender in binary and dichotomous ways. Furthermore, I tend to view this in a negative way, as I am aware of the impact that this can have on gender, sexuality and relationship diverse people, and have a drive to change it. However, my research was not conducted with the intention to impose these views, or to politicise the experiences of my participants, but instead to allow their voices to be heard. I therefore continuously reflected on this in order to bracket it as much as possible. Furthermore, I crosschecked my themes and notes, sought verification from other, more distanced psychologists, and kept a paper trail of my analytic process.

Despite the methods employed to ensure bracketing and therefore validity of my research, I will inevitably have affected the study in various ways. As a white, cisgender, woman who identifies under multiple plurisexual identity labels, I will have approached this research through this lens. Having had experiences that were at times similar to that of my research participants, and the participants in other research I have referenced, will have influenced my study at all stages. From the choice of research question, to the literature review, recruitment, interviews and analysis etc. I will have had an impact. On reflection, I believe that some of this influence will have been useful. This lens has played a large role in my emphasis on placing my participants at the centre of my research, elevated their voices and working ethically. My shared experiences with my participants, whilst I did not disclose my sexuality to them explicitly, gave us a shared language which I believe helped to build rapport and increase the depth of the interview responses. Throughout the analysis section however, I

often found myself wondering what pieces of data I might not be paying enough attention to, as things I might take for granted as a queer person, that perhaps some of my heterosexual research colleagues might pick up on, and conversely, what I might be overemphasising because it resonated with me. In a sense, this regular internal ‘checking in’ may have helped mitigate these effects, but it would be unrealistic to expect that my interaction with the research as a human could be removed entirely. Importantly, my emphasis on meticulously reporting and validating the perspectives of my participants could also have had its disadvantages as highlighted by Kitzinger and Wilkinson (1997) who argue that it is required to challenge participants accounts at times. I feel that this has been somewhat of a weakness for me, and something I would be mindful of should I repeat this research.

Alongside reflecting on the sense of similarity between myself and my participants, it is also important to consider areas of difference, in order to acknowledge the complexity of my relationships with my participants as highlighted by Hayfield and Huxley (2015). There were many facets of my identity that were different to my participants, as some were non-binary, of a different race or from a different religious, cultural or socioeconomic background. I wonder about the ways in which they perceived me, my role, and their role in relation to me during the interview process and what barriers this may have produced.

As I conclude this study in August 2020, there is much occurring in the political, legal and social arenas with regard to race and gender diversity. People around the world have been taking to the streets to protest in support of the Black Lives Matter movement following the murder of George Floyd by a police officer in the United States. This has sparked an increased media presence highlighting the reality of systemic racism and subsequently, has put increased attention on violence and oppression of queer and trans people of colour around the world, and in America in particular. Furthermore, the Gender Recognition Act reform has been a highly contentious media documented discussion following a government leak of a document suggesting that trans people would no longer be legally allowed to access gendered spaces that were in line with their gender identity. Additionally, prominent influential figures have used Twitter as a platform from which to express transphobia, and to support others who do so. I can only speculate on the effect that such events could have had on the participants experiences of their sexuality, intersecting with their gender identity, race and ethnicity.

However, I would predict that this would have been something that may have come up and may have had an impact on my participants.

5.10 Conclusion

It is the hope that this study has made a useful contribution to sexuality research and to Counselling Psychology practice, and healthcare settings more generally. The use of IPA has afforded a rich account of the experiences of pansexuality for pansexual people, an identity that little information has been collected on as an identity in its own right, rather than under the bisexual umbrella. This has allowed both the positioning of the findings of this research in with the existing literature on bisexuality, and the similarities with this, and has also allowed for new and novel findings to emerge. Three superordinate themes emerged: *pansexual label as an anchor*, *feeling 'boxed in'* and *a label that defies labels*.

Overall, the themes seemed to be underpinned by the concept of feeling 'boxed in'. This is because the impact of being 'boxed in', as well as attempts to avoid it for both the self and for others, as centred on the meaning of the pansexual label, was central to all participants.

This sense of being 'boxed in' and attempts to avoid this, seemed to result in a 'push and pull dynamic'. To elaborate, once this identity label was discovered and the associated freedom from fixed and binary views of sexuality and gender were established, the participants attempted to embody this within their social worlds. What they seemed to find was that the societal majority expectation that they were attempting to position themselves away from became imposed on them. Namely, others would express confusion, an inability to see beyond dichotomous ideas of gender, and then impose a label that they better understood, usually bisexual. The imposition of such a label seemed to be distressing to the participants mainly because there was a discrepancy between the way they saw themselves and the way they were perceived by others. It seems that the participants were then left with two difficult options. The first: use the label that felt congruent with their identity, meet the confused response from others and feel the burden of explaining themselves with the risk of being stigmatised or invalidated as a result. The second: use the bisexual label and feel inauthentic. The pansexual identity seemed to embody an open minded and exploratory stance to whom one finds attractive. This involved continuous internal reflection rather than remaining within fixed norms. Hence, a continuous developmental process seemed to occur whereby one is

‘always learning’ about one’s sexual identity rather than reaching an ‘end point’. This development seemed to occur within the experience of being ‘boxed in’ within society and within one’s social world and seemed to manifest as a continued search for authenticity and moving beyond labels which is where the ‘push and pull dynamic’ seemed to occur.

The findings suggest that a societal lack of awareness of both pansexuality as an emerging sexual identity that is less ‘mainstream’ or well known, and of gender identity outside of the dichotomous male and female leads to the use of the bisexual label in order to manage the stress associated with having an emerging sexual identity label. However, the pansexual participants in this study felt incongruence with the bisexual label, not due to internalised biphobia or to escape bisexual stigma but because they needed a label that explicitly represented their attraction beyond the gender binary.

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Appendix A: PHQ9

**PATIENT HEALTH QUESTIONNAIRE-9
(PHQ-9)**

Over the last 2 weeks, how often have you been bothered by any of the following problems?
(Use "✓" to indicate your answer)

	Not at all	Several days	More than half the days	Nearly every day
1. Little interest or pleasure in doing things	0	1	2	3
2. Feeling down, depressed, or hopeless	0	1	2	3
3. Trouble falling or staying asleep, or sleeping too much	0	1	2	3
4. Feeling tired or having little energy	0	1	2	3
5. Poor appetite or overeating	0	1	2	3
6. Feeling bad about yourself — or that you are a failure or have let yourself or your family down	0	1	2	3
7. Trouble concentrating on things, such as reading the newspaper or watching television	0	1	2	3
8. Moving or speaking so slowly that other people could have noticed? Or the opposite — being so fidgety or restless that you have been moving around a lot more than usual	0	1	2	3
9. Thoughts that you would be better off dead or of hurting yourself in some way	0	1	2	3

FOR OFFICE CODING 0 + + +
=Total Score:

Appendix B: GAD 7

GAD-7 Anxiety

Over the last 2 weeks , how often have you been bothered by the following problems? <i>(Use "✓" to indicate your answer"</i>	Not at all	Several days	More than half the days	Nearly every day
1. Feeling nervous, anxious or on edge	0	1	2	3
2. Not being able to stop or control worrying	0	1	2	3
3. Worrying too much about different things	0	1	2	3
4. Trouble relaxing	0	1	2	3
5. Being so restless that it is hard to sit still	0	1	2	3
6. Becoming easily annoyed or irritable	0	1	2	3
7. Feeling afraid as if something awful might happen	0	1	2	3

Column totals: ___ + ___ + ___ + ___

= **Total Score** _____

Appendix C: Recruitment Poster

**Do you identify as
pansexual? Would you
like to take part in
research?**



**We are looking for individuals who self-identify as
pansexual**

**A doctoral research study looking at how pansexual identified
people experience pansexuality is in progress at London
Metropolitan University and your participation would be most
welcomed!**

**This research could help to increase understanding of pansexual identities within the
psychological and health care professions**

**For more information please contact Charlotte Haylock: ceh0137@my.londonmet.ac.uk
(07944680149) – Any contact that you make with me will be kept confidential.**

(supervisor's email address: a.loulopoulou@my.londonmet.ac.uk)

**CALLING ALL UK PANSEXUAL
IDENTIFYING INDIVIDUALS!**

**WE WANT TO HEAR ABOUT YOUR
EXPERIENCES OF PANSEXUALITY
FOR A DOCTORAL RESEARCH STUDY
AT LONDON METROPOLITAN UNI**

**WE HOPE TO PROVIDE HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONS
WITH A GREATER UNDERSTANDING OF PANSEXUALITY**

DM FOR MORE INFO OR COMMENT BELOW

EMAIL: ceh0137@my.londonmet.ac.uk

(MUST BE 18+)

Appendix E: Participant Information Sheet

To whom it may concern,

I am a trainee counselling psychologist at London Metropolitan University and I am currently researching the experiences of people who self-identify as Pansexual. The healthcare professions have relatively little knowledge about how pansexual people may experience pansexuality, and this lack of knowledge could be contributing to poorer health outcomes among this group. Also, the limited amount of research in this area has in the past meant a lack of visibility of this sexual identity within the healthcare professions, which is not helpful for recognizing diversity within our society and providing people with recognition and validation. I hope that by carrying out this research, we can first of all provide visibility for pansexual people within healthcare, and secondly, we can gain a better understanding of the experiences of people who self-identify as pansexual, to better enable helping professions to provide adequate support that acknowledges difference and diversity.

I am currently looking for UK based individuals who identify primarily under the label Pansexual. This could mean that you also use other labels to describe your sexuality with Pansexual as your primary label, or you use only the label Pansexual to describe your sexual identity.

I am writing with the hope that you will have some interest in helping me in this endeavor, and share your experiences, as someone who identifies as pansexual. You could do this by taking part in a one-hour long interview. The interview would be voice recorded and the interview data would be used for my doctoral level research project for Counselling Psychology.

Your participation is entirely your own choice, and you are not obligated to take part. If you do choose to take part, you are more than welcome to withdraw at any point up to 2 weeks after you complete the interview without question. Any identifying information you share at the interview will be strictly confidential. Recordings will be stored securely and destroyed when the project has been completed.

It is important to acknowledge that the interview might discuss some topics that are personal to you, and that may bring up some emotion in you. It is unlikely that the interview will be very distressing for you, but as you would be discussing a topic that is personal to you, there can be a chance of this happening. It is important that you take the time you need to decide if this interview is something that you are comfortable and willing to do. Should you decide you would like to, you will have some time at the end of the interview to discuss with the researcher, any feelings that may have been evoked, should you wish to. You will also be given some information on sources of support should you need it.

Thank you for your time, if you have any further questions please do not hesitate to contact me via phone on 07944680149 or via email ceh0137@my.londonmet.ac.uk.

I hope to hear from you soon

Sincerely,

Charlotte Haylock

Appendix F: Participant Consent Form

Title of research: An Exploration into the way Pansexual Identified Individuals Experience Pansexuality: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Description of procedure: In this research you will be asked some questions about yourself regarding your pansexual identity within a voice recorded interview

- I understand the procedures that will be used in this research
- I understand that I have the right to withdraw at any time during the interview without question. I understand that if I want to withdraw after the interview, I need to do it within two weeks as after this time, all data will be aggregated.
- I understand that my participation in this research is completely anonymous. My identifying information will not be connected to the results, a pseudonym will be used for the voice recording and any other identifying information recorded during the interview will be changed in the transcription.
- I understand that this confidentiality may need to be breached if any information disclosed indicates a safety risk.
- I understand that the write up of this study may be read by others, and that this may include anonymized excerpts from my interview.
- I understand that this interview is discussing something that is personal to me, so this may evoke some emotions within me. I know that there will be time allocated at the end of the interview just in case I want to talk about any feelings that it has brought up with the researcher. I understand that I will be signposted to other forms of support if I want/need to.
- I understand that I have the right to seek out details regarding the findings of this study and that the researcher will provide me with detail regarding how I can request this in the debriefing form.
- I understand that once the write up of this study has been assessed, my data will be destroyed.
- I confirm that I am aged 18 or above

Signature of Participant.....

Signature of Researcher.....

Name (print).....

Name (print).....

Date.....

Date.....

Appendix G: Interview Schedule

1. Is it okay for us to start with you telling me a bit about yourself?
Age, gender identity, ethnicity, background, any other sexual identity labels that you identify with other than pansexuality, etc.
2. What does pansexuality mean to you?
Prompt 1 – how do you experience being pansexual?
Prompt 2 – when did you first realise that you identified as pansexual?
Prompt 3 – What was your reaction?
Prompt 4 – how do you differentiate pansexuality from other sexualities?
3. Would you say that your experience of pansexuality is different in different settings?
Prompt 1 – are there any specific settings that come to mind?
Prompt 2 – how do you experience pansexuality at work? / with your friends? /family?
4. What are your experiences of disclosing your pansexual identity, if any?
Prompt 1 – are there any specific examples that come to mind?
Prompt 2 – can you think of a recent example and describe what it was like?
Prompt 3 – can you tell me some of the reactions that you have noticed in others?
5. What is your experience or understanding of sexual identity labels in general?
Prompt 1 – do you prefer / prefer not to use labels?
Prompt 2 – what other sexual identity labels do you identify with, if any?
Prompt 3 – (if participant does identify with multiple labels) can you say more about this?
Prompt 3 – what do labels mean to you?
6. How do you conceptualize pansexuality within communities?
Prompt 1 – do you feel that there is a pansexual community?
Prompt 2 – do you see pansexuality as part of the LGBTQ+ community? In what way?
7. Is there anything you would like to tell me that I haven't asked you about?

Appendix H: Participant Debrief Sheet

Thank you very much for taking part in this Doctoral research project.

If you would like to know the outcomes of this study, or if you wish to withdraw your data, you are welcome to contact the researcher via email on ceh0137@my.londonmet.ac.uk.

It is important that you know that if you want to withdraw from this study you can do so up to 2 weeks after you complete the interview. You will not be able to withdraw after this as the researcher will be incorporating your data into the study after this time.

If you have anything to ask or any concerns to share you are welcome to do so now.

If you are concerned, or wish to complain about the way you have been treated by the researcher during the course of the interview, please contact the research supervisor Dr Angela Loulopoulou via email on a.loulopoulou@londonmet.ac.uk.

If some emotions have been evoked for you during the course of this interview, below are some further sources of support that you may wish to pursue:

- **LGBT Foundation**
<http://www.lgf.org.uk>
The LGBT Foundation offer information and support.
Helpline: 0345 3 30 3030 (lines open Monday – Friday 9am - 9pm, Saturday 10am - 6pm)
Email: helpline@lgf.org.uk
- **Switchboard LGBT+ helpline**
<http://switchboard.lgbt/>
A telephone service giving support advice and referrals to young people who may be confused about their sexuality, as well as providing advice on gay issues.
Helpline: 0300 330 0630 (lines open 10am to 10pm)
Email: chris@switchboard.lgbt
- **Stonewall**
<http://www.stonewall.org.uk>
For the gay and bisexual community, support advice and information.
Info Line: 0800 050 20 20 (lines open Monday - Friday, 9.30am - 5.30pm)
Email: info@stonewall.org.uk
- **Pink therapy. Online directory of qualified therapists who have adopted a positive stance on minority sexual and gender identities.**
Contact: 07971205323. admin@pinktherapyv.com
- **You can also book an appointment with your GP**
- **In an emergency always call 999**

Appendix I: Ethical Approval

6/27/2020

Email - Charlotte Haylock - Outlook

Approved Ethics form

Angela Loulopoulou <A.Loulopoulou@londonmet.ac.uk>

Wed 13/02/2019 13:14

To: Charlotte Haylock <charlotte_ryan24@hotmail.co.uk>

1 attachments (392 KB)

Ethics Application.doc LGBTQ.doc;

Dear Charlotte,

your ethics form has been approved by the reviewer and the Chair of the Ethics committee for the school of social sciences.

You can proceed with recruitment and data collection

--

Kind Regards,

Angela

Dr Angela Ioanna Loulopoulou, PhD; AFBPsS; FHEA

Principal Lecturer in Counselling Psychology
Programme Director of the Professional Doctorate in Counselling Psychology
School of Social Sciences
Chair of Subject Standards Board for PG Psychology
Chair of Ethics Review Committee for PG Psychology

Office hours 9.30-17.00 Tuesday to Thursday

Please email me if you would like an appointment, as I am not often at my desk.

Read my article at: <http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/banners/readmyarticle/ccpg.gif>

Contact address:

London Metropolitan University
Room T6-20
Tower Building
166-220 Holloway Road
London N7 8DB
Tel: 0207 133 2667

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Appendix J: Participant Distress Protocol

Process intended to be followed in the instance that a participant becomes distressed during participation in the study:

This protocol has been designed in order to manage the situation responsibly in the event that a participant becomes upset or distressed when taking part in this research on self-identified pansexual individuals' experiences of pansexuality. This group of participants are not necessarily vulnerable to psychological distress, however, minority groups such as this may have had negative experiences in relation to their sexuality, and reminders of this could be distressing. However, it is not anticipated that participants are likely to experience very severe distress levels in the case of this particular group and this research topic. The researcher, Charlotte Haylock, is a trainee counselling psychologist at London Metropolitan University and has experience in managing circumstances in which another person may be experiencing distress.

Outlined below is a protocol intended to be followed should participants exhibit signs of distress.

- 1) Signs that the research will look out for:
 - Tearfulness
 - Changing of the subject/ avoiding the question
 - Distracted/distant
 - Difficulty speaking
 - Other visible emotional reaction such as anger or fear

- 2) Plan of action:
 - Ask participant if they are okay to continue
 - Ask participant if they would like a break/drink of water
 - Remind them that it is okay to stop at any time
 - Remind them that they are not obliged to answer questions

Sample transcripts for all participants and annotated transcripts were included here prior to Viva examination and subsequently removed to preserve anonymity for the participants.

Appendix K: Sample of List of Emergent Themes for Alex

Theme	Line Number(s)	Quote(s)
1. Attraction regardless of gender	76-79	erm to me personally it means that I experience attraction that has nothing or very little to do with gender at all erm so when I feel attraction towards someone its completely regardless of gender
2. Realizing bisexual label did not fit	83-88	erm since I was 18 I think yeah umm first I identified as bisexual for about 2 years, that was when I was about 16 and I kind of realised it didn't fit, and that pansexuality was like more of an accurate term for me erm I see bisexual as a term that describes me depending on the environment I'm in but erm pansexual is my main identity label
3. Learning and growth	83-88	erm since I was 18 I think yeah umm first I identified as bisexual for about 2 years, that was when I was about 16 and I kind of realised it didn't fit, and that pansexuality was like more of an accurate term for me erm I see bisexual as a term that describes me depending on the environment I'm in but erm pansexual is my main identity label
4. Importance of accurate label	83-88	erm since I was 18 I think yeah umm first I identified as bisexual for about 2 years, that was when I was about 16 and I kind of realised it didn't fit and that pansexuality was like more of an accurate term for me erm I see bisexual as a term that describes me depending on the environment I'm in but erm pansexual is my main identity label
5. Label dependent on environment	86-87	erm I see bisexual as a term that describes me depending on the environment
6. Point in time	92-93	yeah yeah erm well I was quite young so I was about 16 when I realised that I am attracted to women as well
7. Learning about attraction	92-93	yeah yeah erm well I was quite young so I was about 16 when I realised that I am attracted to women as well
8. An inclusive label	95-97	after a while about a year or so I realised that erm maybe it wasn't quite as inclusive as I would like necessarily
9. Importance of accurate label	103-106	as accurate to me as pansexual erm so for a while I was kind of trying to not have a label but then I just realised that pansexual is something that feels very comfortable?

10. Pansexual label as comfortable	105-106	I just realised that pansexual is something that feels very comfortable? Kind of like a more comfortable jumper
11. Point in time: binary assumptions of bisexual label	109-110	um well that was then, I feel like erm it can be inclusive and I know that bisexuality can be a very broad word
12. Development	109-110	um well that was then, I feel like erm it can be inclusive and I know that bisexuality can be a very broad word
13. The importance of explicit inclusivity	110-115	I feel like pansexual is just a word that implies that I necessarily feel attraction towards all genders while bisexual it doesn't necessarily have to mean that so while I could be bisexual and be attracted to people regardless of gender I feel like pansexual is just something that really clearly implies this
14. Developing understanding of pansexual label	124-133	yeah erm around the time that I first heard about pansexuality it was erm most of the time explained as erm being attracted to a person's personality not their gender and erm that didn't resonate with me so well because that would imply that I already know the person and er I'm necessarily attracted to their personality traits while that's not the case for me like I can be very much attracted to someone I just see for like the first ever time it's just that it has nothing to do with their gender, so because of the way this was explained to me I felt like that didn't describe me.
15. Personality not essential to attraction	136-137	it doesn't have to be, it, I mean it can be of course but erm it's not a necessary component
16. Sexual versus romantic attraction	142-151	erm yes erm I do experience attraction to people just based on physical traits erm but it's usually not something very deep that I tend to pursue very much its erm very plain example if I'm at a club I might make out with someone who I will never see again and it's something I find fun and it's something that erm I find engaging in the way that I am attracted to the person but erm this has- doesn't have to go anywhere, if I am attracted to someone's personality then I tend to know them a bit better and I might find that I would want it to be a dating kind of thing rather than just making out
17. Anxiety around changing label	158-159	erm I was actually a bit hesitant because I felt like changing my label would be taken badly by a lot of people

18. Fear of judgement for changing label	161-169	but while I didn't feel that it was a problem for me necessarily I was very afraid that erm other people would think that I was lying about being bisexual or that erm they would think that I'm just erm like I'm not being genuine about my sexuality and I was quite afraid that people would react badly to me changing something that was supposed to be viewed as constant in different places – I don't use sexuality in that way but I know that a lot of people do so I was very afraid about that
19. Fear of negative reactions	163-165	they would think that I'm just erm like I'm not being genuine about my sexuality
20. Feeling boxed in	165-169	and I was quite afraid that people would react badly to me changing something that was supposed to be viewed as constant in different places – I don't use sexuality in that way but I know that a lot of people do so I was very afraid about that
21. Stress	171	erm I found it quite stressful
22. Importance of authenticity	173-175	it was something that bothered me on a personal level like as it was my identity it was quite close to me
23. Valuing authenticity	178-184	yeah erm I tend to take my identity quite seriously in the way that erm it's important to me that I express my identity and erm the way I interact with society according to my identity and erm I tend to be quite open about erm who I am and my sexuality and all of that so I thought that erm how I interact with other people around me could depend a lot on my identity and my relationship with it
24. A fear of dismissal or challenge	187-189	yeah because erm I didn't want people to think that I am just picking labels that I like I wanted people to take me seriously and to not question who I am

Appendix L: Table of Superordinate Themes and Subthemes for Alex

Superordinate theme	Subtheme	Page no.	Quote(s)
The role of the pansexual label	A period of uncertainty	238-240	erm I feel like I have settled down a lot with erm anxieties about like erm what label fits me and what I'm supposed to use
	Importance of an accurate label	103-106 225-226	as accurate to me as pansexual erm so for a while I was kind of trying to not have a label but then I just realised that pansexual is something that feels very comfortable? And erm that felt very very descriptive to me and very much like myself
	All encompassing	220-225	um that it didn't have erm hm, well that it implied something that was clear enough for me that it felt like it was a very good description of me and that it just implied this all-encompassing attraction to different people that doesn't have anything to do with gender and that my attraction seemed to be just erm all inclusive
	Learning and growth	83-88	erm since I was 18 I think yeah umm first I identified as bisexual for about 2 years, that was when I was about 16 and I kind of realised it didn't fit and that pansexuality was like more of an accurate term for me erm I see bisexual as a term that describes me depending on the environment I'm in but erm pansexual is my main identity label
	Discovery	83-88 92-93	erm since I was 18 I think yeah umm first I identified as bisexual for about 2 years, that was when I was about 16 and I kind of realised it didn't fit and that pansexuality was like more of an accurate term for me erm I see bisexual as a term that describes me depending on the environment I'm in but erm pansexual is my main identity label yeah yeah erm well I was quite young so I was about 16 when I realised that I am attracted to women as well

	Facilitating self-expression	549-551	it helps with expressing our who we are interested in and er you know general things like that
	A comforting label	105-106	I just realised that pansexual is something that feels very comfortable? Kind of like a more comfortable jumper
	Development of a secure sexual identity	272-275 267-260	mm but I also interchangeably use those two terms for myself at the moment so I feel like it doesn't matter so much and those arguments have also settled a lot but er I tend to be quite clear about what it means to me to be pansexual so erm I don't think it's something that's quite major as an anxiety to me in my life at the moment
Feeling boxed in	People don't understand	281-284	um because pansexual is not necessarily a label that everyone knows um it is well known enough in many circles at this point but if people don't know anything about LGBT topics might have absolutely no clue
	Binary assumptions	297-300 301-304 285-287	and so a lot of the time whenever I came out to people I had to explain what that meant what it means to me to be pansexual and er they would be taken aback by the fact that there are more than two genders whenever I come out to have a five minute explanation of what genders mean and what my attraction means so it would be just a lot to deal with every single time and what it means that there are more than two genders because a lot of people don't even realise that
	The burden of explaining	846-853 525-526	because I need to I need to understand their perception as well and what they know and I need to explain it to them in a way that it makes sense for them and that they will understand and so it makes it erm quite difficult to always try to view these topics through someone else's eyes instead of my own and to always say erm the most basic

		309-314	<p>information to people all over instead of trying to progress further</p> <p>I just don't really see the point in trying very hard to explain myself</p>
		299-303	<p>even though I really like to educate people on a lot of topics at one point it starts feeling like it's not really my responsibility and erm I don't want to have to put all that energy in</p>
		287-291	<p>when I don't even know how they will react or whether they will be accepting so it's just it's kind of just exhausting</p> <p>they would be taken aback by the fact that there are more than two genders and erm and its just a lot to always explain you know whenever I come out to have a five minute explanation of what genders mean and what my attraction means</p> <p>and erm I just go with bisexual and if I feel that I'm not in any environment that's aware enough [okay] so I don't have to bother explaining absolutely everything it's a term that at least has a mostly clear meaning to most people</p>
	Anxiety and fear	510-514	<p>not personally like it has never been aimed at me erm I have seen negativity around pansexuality that was not aimed at any specific person but it did make me feel like there are clearly people out there who are not necessarily understanding and that maybe I want to be a bit careful</p>
	They don't view me the way I am actually	393-398	<p>erm its just when I'm around them I feel like they're a but ignorant so I'm not necessarily addressed the way I want them to address me and they don't view me the way that I am actually as a person they have their own perception of me and erm it's kind of</p>

		385-388	<p>irritating but it's not something that impacts my life too majorly</p> <p>erm it can be a bit annoying like it rubs me the wrong way when they clearly view me as a lesbian but I'm not a lesbian erm I'm also not a woman but they don't know so its [laughs]</p>
	Limited openness	406-408	erm so they just erm all they know about me is that I have dated women and erm and that I say I am bisexual so that's about how far it goes in that respect
	Safety seeking	473-474	yeah erm I mean that's with the implication that I am in a circle that I know is generally cool with it so it's a lot safer
	Sense of responsibility	846-853 309-314	<p>because I need to I need to understand their perception as well and what they know and I need to explain it to them in a way that it makes sense for them and that they will understand and so it makes it erm quite difficult to always try to view these topics through someone else's eyes instead of my own and to always say erm the most basic information to people all over instead of trying to progress further</p> <p>even though I really like to educate people on a lot of topics at one point it starts feeling like it's not really my responsibility and erm I don't want to have to put all that energy in when I don't even know how they will react or whether they will be accepting so it's just it's kind of just exhausting</p>
	A wish for visibility leading to change	779-786	I suppose a more wider recognition of pansexuality on like a wider societal level rather than a small community level would be a lot more helpful erm I'm not entirely sure how that can be achieved erm because I feel like a lot of the community tries to educate people on what pansexuality is but there is so much we can do and people might or might not pay attention to what we are saying erm so a wider recognition would be quite helpful

Authenticity	Easing into it	649-650	erm I had to kind of ease into it but as time went on I felt more and more comfortable with it
	Authenticity is valued	178-184 439-442 437-438	<p>yeah erm I tend to take my identity quite seriously in the way that erm it's important to me that I express my identity and erm the way I interact with society according to my identity and erm I tend to be quite open about erm who I am and my sexuality and all of that so I thought that erm how I interact with other people around me could depend a lot on my identity and my relationship with it</p> <p>most of my friends that are close at this point are queer and it just gives me gives me the freedom to be myself and be honest not just with myself but with others around me</p> <p>it's very very comfortable and very nice and erm its feels a lot more authentic and a lot more free</p>
	Towards self-acceptance	204-211	a lot of my friends they're very helpful and very accepting so I felt that that helped me a lot with accepting myself as well as erm having responses that were really encouraging and really accepting and this made me able to say things to people that I didn't know as well because erm this gave me a sort of safety net in my life that I needed knowing that I can fall back and it will be fine because there are people that support me
	Role of support system	204-211	a lot of my friends they're very helpful and very accepting so I felt that that helped me a lot with accepting myself as well as erm having responses that were really encouraging and really accepting and this made me able to say things to people that I didn't know as well because erm this gave me a sort of safety net in my life that I needed knowing that I can fall back and it will be fine because there are people that support me

	LGBT spaces for safety	473-474	yeah erm I mean that's with the implication that I am in a circle that I know is generally cool with it so it's a lot safer
	Comfortable and calming	426-429	erm it's kind of relaxed I'm quite comfortable around most of my friends erm out to all close friends I would say both as non-binary and pansexual so it's a very relaxed environment where I can feel quite comfortable
	Freedom of expression	449-453	: it makes me quite happy and feel quite a lot of freedom in expressing myself and erm I think it helped me feel a lot a lot more brave as well to express myself openly not just to them but to my environment in general and it just makes me feel just nice
	Being seen	442-446	and that they actually see me as the person I am so erm it's not just that they see me as the person that is pansexual and non-binary but they actually view me as the person and that's really comforting and comfortable
	Removal of binary assumptions	554-557 606-608 619-620	it's very helpful to have people around us who have some sort of similar experience in life because erm it helps with each erm level of understanding that er people can be very comfortable with each other because these are all free to discuss relationships of any gender it doesn't matter so its and accepting environment and erm how it feels to exist in society in that sort of relationship
	Developing confidence	197-199	so that gave me a bit more bravery and erm and er I found it a lot easier to actually easier to to actually start calling myself pansexual in front of other people as well
	Embracing fluidity and plurality	644-646 650-656	it shouldn't matter whether I change my label or not it should be what is most accurate to me in that moment and that should be okay I think having this experience also helped me to say this to other people that it's okay to

			<p>have some changes in our lives and maybe we were unsure about our labels at one point but it's okay to change them because we get more and more experiences and life just happens like we learn more and more about ourselves and it's fine to change</p>
	Respecting diversity	676-679	<p>erm well I have erm I think I even have friends who describe their pansexuality a bit differently to me and erm I don't think it's an issue I think it's something that has its own personal meaning to all of us</p>
		680-685	<p>erm I have heard people say that they think of it as attraction to all genders whereas I just say its regardless of gender so I suppose some people feel a bit more fluctuating attraction erm instead of like an all-encompassing attraction that I feel erm but it's not something that's a problem it's just our different experiences</p>

Appendix M: Table of Superordinate Themes and Subthemes for Charlie

Superordinate theme	Subtheme	Page no.	Quote(s)
Pansexual label as an anchor	Period of confusion and distress	43	for many years didn't understand it myself
	Unexpected attraction	42-43 46-49	I connected with my partner unintentionally I also realised noticed as I got older attraction to people that I never maybe didn't expect er I wasn't er no not expect is maybe not a good word I wasn't sure about
	Realisation of pansexual label	44-46	and then realised that it came down to who she was not what she was and so that's how I came to the realisation that my sexuality was pan
	Pansexual label comforting and validating	186-187 212-213	but it was kind of I guess validating whether I am or I'm not but to me it feels the most comfortable label I guess
	Sense of victory	197-198	it was like a victory to find out because as but only a short one
	The end of uncertainty: from confusion to understanding	193-194	I guess erm it I didn't feel like I knew what I was and then I did so it was like
	Pansexual label for meaning making with self and others	250-253 302-305	I think for me people can finally understand who I am – they already were asking questions about you know who is this person I think when you tell them that it helps them understand you so much more like my my experience was I need to found out about myself and worry- I don't worry too much about other people I take people for people and so it doesn't matter to me what your label is anyway
	Deeper self-reflection	210-212	I didn't think it did so I looked deeper I guess and then it turned out the conclusion that I've come to I feel like that's the right decision

	Development of pansexual identity	58-61 460-464	and it was something that we both kind of dealt with together being attracted sometimes to men sometimes to women erm sometimes to other people who identified neither way so it it has been an interesting journey I guess it's hard to find out who you are until you realise oh I've changed everything's changed now so yeah I before felt very heterosexual always dated men but then it flips now it's mostly female or femme centred
Feeling boxed in	People need an explanation	159-161	erm recently more recently I have got more confident to tell and to explain to people what it means so yes maybe in the last 2-3 months
	Social pressure to have a label	404-409	because if you say to people that you don't have a label you have to spend maybe two hours to explain to them why you don't have a label but if you just said pansexual then that conversation becomes a lot shorter because erm hopefully they're able to make their own kind of assumptions or decisions based on that
	"they choose their own understanding and just go with that"	287-292	yeah um they're just old [laughs] I don't know how best – they're just older old I mean my mum she uses the internet so she googled it and my aunts googled it and stuff my cousins are a bit more they're just old so they choose not to look deeper like they choose their own understanding and just go with that
	Unspoken within family	140-144	yeah that's it really we don't talk about it er we maybe haven't had a hundred conversations about it but they don't I know they haven't got a problem with it and that's enough for me they are welcoming to my partner and she's available and she comes over all the time so it's been good
	Anxiety	64-67	I have anxiety problems socially anxiety problems and general anxiety I have been to CBT like I mentioned erm issues with er imposter imposter syndrome
	Fear of other people's reactions and perceptions	67-69 69-71	I find that my work also impacts that how do I present at work erm to how do people perceive me in the work space

			how do people perceive me in the work space erm not just being the you know queer or pansexual but also being black and female so
	Fear of discrimination and disadvantage	67-81	within my work I have concerns about how people perceive me about how I should erm identify or if honesty is always the best policy maybe erm I work in like a high fuelled media industry with a lot of people who would say they are important which I struggle with, will I lose work? Will people not understand that type of thing?
	The role of culture	69-71 329-332	how do people perceive me in the work space erm not just being the you know queer or pansexual but also being black and female so erm my family are Jamaican so obvious preconceptions about er sexuality, er hers are south Indian so again similar preconceptions about what family would think which part mostly turned out to be untrue
	Questioning: am I normal?	700-702 704	yeah I mean I think everybody who is not heterosexual at some stage goes through that kind of journey of am I normal? And I think that just comes as part and parcel of the journey I'm born in a Christian household am I wrong is this wrong
	"I don't feel like I fit there" stigma within the LGBTQ+ community	490 490-496	I don't know if I feel like I fit there necessarily I go- do I go to lesbian nights do I go to you know femme centred nights like I just I'm not really into it and also I think that they centre – some people don't necessarily take it very seriously you know they might stigmatise you because you know you can't make up your mind or your you know you just playing games you can't possibly want everybody you're greedy
	Sense of responsibility: "a difficult job to undertake"	241	er I guess it's a difficult job to undertake you know?

	Using the bisexual label when people don't understand	342-344 34-35	It's more of a speed thing obviously that's for speed erm sometimes you don't have a ten minute fifteen minute conversation to go into detail erm but saying that can give them the gist of it sort sort of thing if it was somebody who didn't understand a term I would say bisexual
	Using a 'go to' phrase	41-42 295-296	I go with a slogan of like hearts not parts is my way of explaining it to people no never I think the the phrase makes perfect sense and people are like happy to have learned something new
	Hiding	54-58	the first time I realised was I came became very close with my my partner now erm and it appeared to be erm kind of I guess a game or erm we felt we were just messing about erm it lasted for ten years in secret in quiet
	Distancing self from LGBTQ+ spaces	170-174	erm I to me I don't I don't er spend a lot of time involved in the politics of of this like world so to me not much but I when I do socialise in those I mean from the outside perspective its brilliant and it it can make things a lot easier for a younger generation but for me I guess it it doesn't matter so much now
Towards authenticity	From experimenting to acceptance	97-100	we had to talk through you know what were we doing were we in a faze were we just experimenting that type of thing and I think when we got to the end of the conversation we realised that it lay in attraction
	Role of support system	502-506	Er of course you like them you like everybody that type of banter so yeah it's not a comfortable group for me like I said I stick very tightly with my friends and family so I don't feel the need necessarily to go out and search for community
	Developing confidence	716-719	I think I accepted myself at some stage I accepted myself and I grew more confident in myself as a person and what I can do and who

		159-161	I am and then when that changed everything kind of domino effect. erm recently more recently I have got more confident to tell and to explain to people what it means so yes maybe in the last 2-3 months
	Developing openness with others	159-161	erm recently more recently I have got more confident to tell and to explain to people what it means so yes maybe in the last 2-3 months
	Using openness to 'make a difference'	232-237	for me at the base of it all we are all the same and er I think like I said I've been I'm black I'm female I'm queer I struggle with a lot of I see racism you know prejudice everywhere and so I feel like it's important for me to present in a way that I'm open to everybody and everything and erm one person can make a difference in that way really
	Embracing 'oddness'	382-384	I am an in I am an odd person and I'm happy being odd so I don't like to be what everybody else is or to try and fit in to everybody else's circles
	Embracing change	471	I really love it I really enjoy being able to like change
	The whole self beyond sexuality	428-431	I always yeah I think it's important my personality like I think myself my identity is goes first before my sexual identity so yeah I always present straight away as me find out about what I do in the bedroom afterwards
	Developing sense of pride	652-658	but most of the time I'm really happy to to to be able to identify as pansexual and I find it a brilliant thing and most people give me a really positive reaction erm all types of people have given me a positive reaction based on the fact that they are happy to know that there's people out there that could like them just for them and not see anything else so I I take a lot of pride in being pansexual definitely
	Reducing shame	705-708	so yeah but I'm older now I'm kind of more mature to understand that I'm not obviously bad mental health days happen and sometimes you do feel that way but it doesn't last very long so yeah I'm definitely growing in that way

		713-714	but no so much about my sexuality definitely not no no not so much anymore
A label that defies labels	Reluctant to be labelled	213-214	it feels the most comfortable label I guess if I have to choose one
	The label that defies labels	376-379	I don't know if you can tell but I really dislike labels I'm not a person – before I would've said I don't wanna be labelled erm to look for a label was to help people understand why I don't wanna be labelled [laughs]
	Distancing self from labels	300-302	I'm not in the generation of now where everybody's like you know keen to to pick a label and to to talk about it
	Questioning the pan label: is it enough?	648-649	as a definition I struggle with it sometimes because I'm not sure it's enough
	Organic personal connection	672-677	my attraction lies in somebody's personality or erm personality or I guess because I grew up in a Christian place I would say like spirit or soul um and a connection that I find there I can't really describe what type of connection but a connection that I find there that seems to grow organically
	People not labels/boxes	217-221	I relate with everybody I meet based on er I guess erm me connecting with their hearts or their souls and so it it that's how I manage every relationship that I have so it fits in that way I guess
	Limitless attraction	468-469	but I just anybody really it could be literally absolutely anybody that is an adult
	Attraction fluid and changing "like the weather"	437-440	mainly I mainly see other women but sometimes it changes I guess like the weather, seasonal [laughs] er who I'm attracted to or what erm is a seasonal thing so yeah it can change so I'm used to that as well
	Difficulty relating to fixed views	537-539	no, I don't think so er I'm always inquisitive about everything so everything has just forever been for me about finding out more about the world and embracing as much as possible

	Importance of knowledge and visibility for 'outness'	163-166	easier than I thought It would be much easier than I thought but I think the internet helps massively and the amount of kinda media coverage that LGBTQ plus world has really helped so I don't think people are so scared anymore
	Understanding aids acceptance	522-523	definitely 100% yeah er but that just comes from understanding right?

Appendix N: Hypothesised Superordinate Themes
 Subthemes were sorted into hypothesised superordinate themes for all participants

The role of the pansexual label	feeling 'boxed in'	Towards authenticity	Other / unsure
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CONTINUOUS DEVELOPMENT OF AWARENESS + UNDERSTANDING IMPORTANCE OF PAN LABEL FOR MEANING MAKING THE IMPORTANCE OF A LABEL THAT IS INCLUSIVE OF ALL CONTINUOUS DEVELOPMENT OF AWARENESS + UNDERSTANDING IMPORTANCE OF PAN LABEL FOR MEANING MAKING DISCOVERY OF PAN LABEL LEADING TO COMFORT + CLARITY A PERIOD OF CONFUSION AND UNCERTAINTY DISCOVERY OF PAN LABEL FOR MEANING MAKING THE PAN LABEL AN ANCHOR BUT ALSO FREEDOM OF LIMITATIONS TRYING OUT BISEXUAL LABEL BUT THIS DIDN'T FIT A PERIOD OF CONFUSION PANSEXUAL LABEL FOR MEANING MAKING ALL ENCOMPASSING A PERIOD OF UNCERTAINTY IMPORTANCE OF AN ACCURATE LABEL ALL ENCOMPASSING FACILITATING SELF EXPRESSION A COMFORTING LABEL DEVELOPMENT OF A SECURE SEXUAL IDENTITY PERIOD OF CONFUSION + DISTRESS UNEXPECTED ATTRACTION REALISATION OF PANSEXUAL LABEL PANSEXUAL LABEL COMFORTING AND VALIDATING SENSE OF VICTORY THE END OF UNCERTAINTY: FROM CONFUSION TO UNDERSTANDING PANSEXUAL LABEL FOR MEANING MAKING WITH SELF + OTHERS DEEPER SELF REFLECTION DEVELOPMENT OF PANSEXUAL IDENTITY 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DIFFICULTY EXPLAINING ATTRACTION OUTSIDE OF GENDER BINARY OTHER PEOPLE DON'T UNDERSTAND IMPOSE BISEXUAL LABEL EMOTIONAL IMPACT OF ISOLATION PAN GRIEVANCE + INVISIBILITY AM I REAL? OR AN IMPOSTER? ASSUMED GENDER BINARY WHICH INVALIDATES PANSEXUALITY RESENTMENT CERTAIN PEOPLE ARE VERY VOICE ABOUT THEIR OPINIONS FEELINGS OF GRIEVANCE COMPARMENTALISATION OF EXPERIENCE INTERNAL SELF QUESTIONING SAFETY IN THE CLOSET NO VOICE SPLIT OF PARTS OF SELF DIFFICULTY EXPLAINING ATTRACTION OUTSIDE OF GENDER BINARY OTHER PEOPLE DON'T UNDERSTAND IMPOSE BI LABEL DIFF EXPLAINING GENDER OUTSIDE OF GENDER BINARY LOSS + REJECTION PAN GRIEVANCE + INVISIBILITY INCONGRUENCE BETWEEN SELF AND OTHERS WHEN ASSIGNED GENDER BINARY INVALIDATES PANSEXUALITY WISDOM TO STRAIGHT + PROVOICE STEREOTYPES COMPARMENTALISING EXPERIENCE FEELING PARTS OF THE SELF FEELING UNSEEN + ANNOYED FEELING SORE + DISAPPOINTED SOCIAL PRESSURE + ANXIETY USING A LABEL THAT DOESN'T FIT LEADING TO FEELING A LIAR OTHER PEOPLE DON'T UNDERSTAND GETTING LABELLED AS BISEXUAL INTENSIVE QUESTIONING INVISIBILITY HAVING NO VOICE / DIFFICULTY EXPLAINING SENSE OF UNFINISHED BUSINESS FEELING LIKE HIDING FRUSTRATION + ANGER RESPONSIBILITY + BURDEN WAVING TO SUSTAIN SELF USING DIFFERENT LABELS DIFFICULTY RELATING TO GENDER THEMES FEARING MISUSE OF LABELS FRUSTRATION PEOPLE DON'T UNDERSTAND SOCIAL NORMS SHAME + SELF DISGUST DISAPPOINTING REACTIONS HIDING THE BURDEN OF EXPLAINING PELLEABILITY PEOPLE DON'T UNDERSTAND BINARY ASSUMPTIONS THE BURDEN OF EXPLAINING ANXIETY + FEAR THEY DON'T VIEW ME THE WAY I AM ACTUALLY LIMITED OPENNESS SAFETY SEEKING SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY PEOPLE NEED AN EXPLANATION SOCIAL PRESSURE TO HAVE A LABEL "THEY CHOOSE THEIR OWN UNDERSTANDING JUST GO WITH THAT" UNEXPECTED WITHIN FAMILY + ANXIETY FEAR OF OTHERS' REACTIONS + PERCEPTIONS FEAR OF DISCRIMINATION + OJJARD THE ROLE OF CULTURE QUESTIONING: AM I INFORMAL? "I DON'T FEEL LIKE I FIT THERE" OTHERS WITHIN LGBT+ COMMUNITY SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY DIFFICULT FOR TO UNDERSTAND USING THE BISEXUAL LABEL WHEN PEOPLE DON'T UNDERSTAND USING A "GO TO" PHRASE HIDING DISTANCING SELF FROM LGBT+ SPACES 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DEVELOPING SELF ACCEPTANCE IMPORTANCE OF VISIBILITY TO PROMOTE GENDER SELF DISCOVERY INCREASED OPEN MINDEDNESS OPENNESS OF PANSEXUAL LABEL TRANSCENDS TO RESPECTING DIVERSITY DEVELOPING SELF ACCEPTANCE PANSEXUALITY TRANSCENDS TO INCLUSIVITY + RESPECTING DIVERSITY OPEN COMMUNICATION WITH PARTNER UNITY WITH PARTNER PRIDE OPENNESS ACCEPTANCE FROM OTHERS THE ROLE OF THE INTERNET RESILIENCE BE AGENCY CONTINUOUS SELF REFLECTION / GROWTH + GROWTH TOWARDS AUTHENTICITY A HUMAN CONNECTION BEYOND LABELS RESPECTING UNIQUE EXPERIENCES A PAN ATTITUDE ATTRACTION BASED IN AUTHENTICITY + FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION ONE GENDER NARRATIVE THE ROLE OF THE INTERNET FOR COMING OUT THE ROLE OF THE INTERNET FOR LEARNING COMMUNITY + PRIDE EMBRACING 'WEIRDNESS' WELCOMING CURIOSITY SENSE OF BELONGING + FREEDOM CONTINUOUS LEARNING LEARNING + GROWTH EMBRACING IT AUTHENTICITY IS VALUED TOWARDS SELF ACCEPTANCE ROLE OF SUPPORT SYSTEM LGBT SPACES FOR SAFETY COMFORTABLE + CALMING FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION BEING SEEN REMOVAL OF BINARY ASSUMPTIONS DEVELOPING CONFIDENCE EMBRACING FLUIDITY + PLURALITY RESPECTING DIVERSITY FROM EXPERIMENTING TO ACCEPTANCE ROLE OF SUPPORT SYSTEM DEVELOPING CONFIDENCE DEVELOPING OPENNESS WITH OTHERS USING OPENNESS TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE EMBRACING 'ODDNESS' EMBRACING CHANGE THE WHOLE SELF BEYOND SEXUALITY DEVELOPING SENSE OF PRIDE BEINGING SHAME 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A WISH FOR COMMUNITY CONNECTION DISCOVERY + SURPRISE CERTAINTY ABOUT ATTRACTION ATTRACTION ACROSS SPECTRUM SHADES OF GREY ARE INTRIGUING BREAKING OUT OF STEREOTYPES IS ATTRACTIVE A DESIRE TO EXPLORE MISSED OPPORTUNITIES AND DISAPPOINTMENT FEELING LIKE A TRAITOR DISCOVERY + SURPRISE REACHING CERTAINTY ABOUT ATTRACTION TO THE PERSON FROM GENDER BINARY ASSUMPTIONS TO TRANSCENDING THEM LACK OF SENSE OF BELONGING / COMMUNITY A WISH FOR MORE / BETTER INCREMENTAL CHANGE IN AWARENESS / VISIBILITY LACK OF SENSE OF BELONGING WISH FOR MORE / BETTER UNEXPECTED ATTRACTION ELIMINATION + OVERWHELM THE PERSON NOT THE LABEL: ATTRACTION + BELONGING ATTRACTION IN A CONNECTION ATTRACTION AS FLUID ATTRACTION BASED ON HUMAN VALUES + VIEWPOINTS SELF COMPASSION FINDING A VOICE: EDUCATING OTHERS SHARED EXPERIENCES + VALIDATION AWARENESS OF INCLUDING IDENTITY UNEXPECTED ATTRACTION / ACCEPTANCE AN EPIDEMIOLOGY UNEXPECTED ATTRACTION RELUCTANT TO BE LABELLED A LABEL THAT DEFIES LABELS QUESTIONING THE PAN LABEL: "IS IT ENOUGH?" ORGANIC PERSONAL CONNECTION PEOPLE NOT LABELS / BONES LIMITLESS ATTRACTION ATTRACTION FLUID + CHANGING "LIKE THE WEATHER" DIFFICULTY RELATING TO FIXED VIEWS IMPORTANCE OF KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING FOR 'OUTNESS' UNDERSTANDING AND ACCEPTANCE

SAMMY DANNY
 ALEX ASHLEY
 CHARLIE JAY

