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Department of psychology

**“It’s not just a fun little thing, it can be its own thing”**

A Reflexive Thematic Analysis of How Bisexual People  
Experience Their Sexuality and Identity

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## **“It’s not just a fun little thing, it can be its own thing”**

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#### **Abstract**

Bisexual people are underrepresented in current scientific research on sexuality, with existing research showing contradicting findings. The aim of this study was to explore how bisexual individuals experience their sexuality and identity to build a better base of understanding for future research. The study was conducted within the research project “Factors affecting sexual satisfaction: An exploratory and cross-cultural examination of sexual and aesthetic ideals and norms, self-compassion and body awareness” at Lund University. Ten semi-structured interviews were conducted with bisexual people, seven women and three men. Analysis was done using reflexive thematic analysis which resulted in three themes: *I know who I am, it’s everyone else that’s the problem* which portrays the participants’ internal experience of their bisexual identity as something obvious, lasting and integral; *I want to be myself but...* which portrays how external norms inhibited the participants’ freedom; and *To be sexually unbound* which explores how participants experienced freedom as well as restraints in their sexual practice. These themes are presented as three different facets of sexuality which are all necessary to fully understand participants’ experience of their sexuality and identity. The themes aligned with previous research regarding experienced bi-negativity coming both from heterosexual and LGBTQ+ groups which perpetuates bisexual erasure. Participants expressed being able to move between worlds but also needing to negotiate both heteronormative and queer sexual scripts. Future research is urged to explore how the unique position of bisexual people in society affects wellbeing and to have a more open approach when researching sexuality.

Keywords: Sexuality, bisexuality, bi-negativity, sexual satisfaction, sexual identity

## **”Det är inte bara en liten rolig grej utan det kan vara sin egen grej”**

En reflexiv tematisk analys om hur bisexuella personer upplever sin sexualitet och identitet

### **Sammanfattning**

Bisexuella personer är underrepresenterade i nuvarande forskning om sexualitet. Den forskning som finns om bisexuellas sexualitet visar motstridiga resultat. Syftet med studien var därför att utforska hur bisexuella upplever sin sexualitet och identitet, och på så vis skapa en bättre grund för framtida forskning. Studien genomfördes inom forskningsprojektet “Faktorer som påverkar den sexuella tillfredsställelsen: En explorativ och tvärkulturell undersökning av sexuella och estetiska ideal, självmedkänsla och kroppsmedvetenhet” på Lunds universitet. Tio semistrukturerade intervjuer genomfördes med bisexuella personer, sju kvinnor och tre män. Reflexiv tematisk analys användes för att analysera intervjuerna vilket resulterade i tre teman: *Det är självklart för mig, det är alla andra som är problemet* vilket beskriver deltagarnas interna upplevelse av sin bisexualitet som en självklar, varaktig och viktig identitet; *Jag vill vara mig själv men...* vilket beskriver hur externa normer hämmade deltagarnas frihet; och *Att vara sexuellt frigjord* vilket utforskar hur deltagarna upplevde frihet och begränsningar i sitt sexliv. Dessa teman presenteras som tre olika facetter av sexualitet som alla behövs för att fullt förstå deltagarnas upplevelse av sin sexualitet och identitet. Resultatet var i linje med tidigare forskning om att binegativitet upplevs komma från både heterosexuella och hbtq+ grupper, vilket vidmakthåller osynliggörandet av bisexualitet. Deltagarna beskrev hur de kunde röra sig mellan olika delar av samhället men att de samtidigt behövde förhålla sig till både heteronormativa och queera sexuella skript. Framtida forskning bör undersöka hur bisexuella individers unika position i samhället påverkar deras välmående och uppmanas att ha en öppen ansats vid sexualitetsforskning.

Nyckelord: Sexualitet, bisexualitet, binegativitet, sexuell tillfredsställelse, sexuell identitet

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## Introduction

According to a survey by the Swedish public health authority, bisexuality was the most common identity among non-straight people in Sweden where 56% of women and 41% of men who identified as non-straight identified as bisexual (Folkhälsomyndigheten, 2020). Despite this, according to a meta-analysis of all research that has been done within the field of sexual satisfaction over the last 38 years, only 10.74% of all participants in all studies identified as bisexual (Vigil et al., 2023). The meta-analysis by Vigil et al. (2023) also found that about 23% of the articles did not differentiate bisexual individuals from other groups. This grouping with other queer identities, most commonly with homosexual individuals, has been criticised since bisexual people face particular anti-bisexual stigma from both heterosexist contexts and from within the LGBTQ+ community (Matsuno et al., 2020). Moreover, other sources report that bisexual people are often completely excluded from studies (Flanders et al., 2016; Gauvin & Pukall, 2018) and disregarded in psychological literature (Barker, 2007). This cultural invisibility of bisexual people can have negative consequences on their psychological, physical, and sexual wellbeing, which this study will attempt to rectify by examining them specifically. Furthermore, bisexual research has primarily examined bisexual women (McCormack, 2023) which means that there is a pressing need to study the bisexual population in its entirety, inclusive of all genders. One of the aims of this study is to study bisexual individuals as a heterogeneous and broad population. In this study, bisexuality will be studied as a sexual identity, therefore, experiences of identification and sexual experiences will be examined.

Diamond et al. (2008) argues that one of the reasons that bisexual individuals are under-researched is because of the disagreement about conceptualisation of the term. Bisexuality is often included in the umbrella term pluri-sexual, which is used for all sexual orientations who are attracted to more than one gender (Vigil et al., 2023). Pluri-sexuality, *inter alia*, consists of people who identify as pansexual, fluid and queer, with bisexual being the most commonly used identity label (Vigil et al., 2023). Bisexuality as a term can be defined in many different ways within research and by laypeople, for example as focusing on behavioural, identity or attraction aspects, which can lead to difficulties in conceptualising bisexual people as a group in research (Diamond, 2008). Even within the pluri-sexual community there are different views on how inclusive the term bisexual is viewed to be, for example if bisexuality includes attraction to non-binary or transgender people (Cipriano et al., 2022). In a study by Cipriano et al. (2022), bisexual women themselves defined “bisexual” as

being attracted to more than one gender, including those outside of the gender binary. In the current study, we use this broad definition of bisexuality consisting of “attraction to more than one gender”, as it is based in lived experiences of bisexuality.

There is evidence in the literature of both similarities and differences between bisexual individuals and other pluri-sexual such as queer and pansexual. One way in which bisexual individuals can differ from pansexual individuals is how open they are with their identity; only 38% of bisexual individuals in Sweden reported being out as compared to 71% of pansexual and 80% of homosexual individuals (Folkhälsomyndigheten, 2020). There is also some evidence that bisexual individuals experience more discrimination from the LGBTQ+ community than pansexual, queer, and fluid individuals do, in addition to the already apparent discrimination from heterosexual people (Mitchell et al., 2014). Thus, bisexual people represent a sexual minority group with unique experiences and conditions that won't be visible if they are not studied on their own. Without this knowledge we will not be able to address issues faced by this group nor be able to alleviate negative consequences on mental health. Additionally, the positive aspects of such a unique position can only be explored by researching bisexual people further as a separate population, such as positive aspects of being able to move between the heterosexual and queer world.

### **Bisexual Erasure and its Mechanisms**

Bi-negativity or biphobia denotes bisexual people's experience with discrimination, prejudice and anti-bisexual stigma (Roberts et al., 2015). Research has shown that bisexual people who experience bi-negativity are more likely to experience severe psychological distress and suicidality (Mereish et al., 2017). These mechanisms have been shown longitudinally, that is, experiences of anti-bisexual stigma predicts increased internalised bi-negativity, which in turn increases the risk of symptoms of anxiety and depression (Dyar & London, 2018). The link between bi-negativity and mental health may provide an explanation to bisexual people generally reporting worse sexual function and lower sexual satisfaction (Björkenstam et al., 2020; Lorenz, 2019), more severe sexual victimisation experiences in adulthood (Hequembourg et al., 2013) and worse health outcomes (Cross et al., 2023), although this connection needs further research.

The impact of bi-negativity can be understood through the minority stress model which posits that environmental and social factors can be sources of stress that strain mental and physical wellbeing. Minority groups face unique stressors that are exacerbated by their membership of a stigmatised or minority position in society (Meyer, 2003). These stressors are categorised either as distal (external) stressors such as discrimination or rejection, or



proximal (internal) stressors such as internalisation of negative societal values (also referred to as internalised homonegativity) or concealment of one's sexual identity (Meyer, 2003). Because minority members are constantly preoccupied with these stressors, there is less mental capacity available to focus on other aspects of life around them, causing extra stress which can affect physical and psychological wellbeing.

However, while Meyer (2003) developed the minority stress framework for lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) people, it has primarily been studied and applied to populations of lesbian women and gay men (Frost & Meyer, 2023). Effectively, this means that unique stressors for bisexual people are overlooked, such as bisexual erasure. Bisexual erasure denotes how bisexuality is made invisible by different groups in society (Roberts et al., 2015). According to Yoshino (2009), bisexual erasure occurs because bisexuality threatens heterosexual and homosexual people's agendas: for heterosexual people, it threatens their privilege; for homosexual people, it threatens their arguments of being regarded as legitimate. He therefore groups heterosexual and homosexual people into one group: monosexual people, that is people who are solely attracted to one gender (Yoshino, 2009). One way in which bisexuality threatens monosexuality is by destabilising sexual orientation. By making it a possibility to be attracted to more than one sex, bisexual people render it impossible for monosexual people to prove their attraction to only one sex, since it is impossible to prove the absence of attraction. For example, a person who identifies as lesbian will easily be able to prove this in a world where only monosexuality exists, since she then only must demonstrate her attraction to other women. However, in a world where bisexuality exists, she would arguably have to prove her lack of attraction to men, a conceivably impossible feat.

Besides destabilising the concept of monosexuality, bisexuality also destabilises the primacy of sex as a ground of distinction in attraction (Yoshino, 2009). In other words, by being attracted to more than one sex, bisexual people consequently show that sex matters less in choosing a partner than for monosexual people. Butler's theory of the heterosexual matrix can be used to understand why this disconnection of sex from attraction is destabilising for a binary gender system. The heterosexual matrix describes the dominant discursive and epistemic model of gender that says there are two genders, man and woman, which are supposedly based on a stable biological sex and are said to be opposing, complimentary and hierarchical in nature. Furthermore, the term implies that these genders are defined and recognized through the practice of compulsive heterosexuality (Butler, 2006). In other words, Butler (2006) postulates that heterosexuality is inextricably linked to gender; part of being seen as a "real man" for example, is to be attracted to women and only women, as well as to

act in a typically masculine fashion. The term also implies that any behaviour or outwards display against gender normativity implies non-heterosexuality (Butler, 2006). Homosexual men and women are often interpreted and outwardly recognized through stereotypes of having “inverted” gender expression (Klysing, 2023). Consequently, bisexuality poses threats to this heterosexual matrix due to the fact that neither their gender nor sexual orientation fit this mould, even in simple opposition. Bisexuality can, in this framework, only be described as something that is both and neither homosexuality and heterosexuality (Klysing, 2023). This makes bisexuality incomprehensible within our current framework of gender.

Since destabilisation of sexual orientation and primacy of sex threaten both heterosexuality’s privileged status and homosexuality’s legitimacy, these groups strategically, although not always consciously, endeavour to erase bisexuality as a concept. This essentially results in a form of double discrimination towards bisexual people; in other words, discrimination and stigma from both the majority, heterosexual population as well as the LGBTQ+ community. This is done, for example, by referring to bisexuality as a phase, describing it as chic or trendy, or labelling bisexual behaviour as gay, straight or queer (Yoshino, 2009). Both Yoshino (2009) and Butler (2006) argue that since erasure is a process facilitated by the heterosexual and homosexual people, the two most powerful groups of sexual orientation, it is not perceived at all, effectively erasing erasure as a process. This further perpetuates the invisibility of bisexual individuals, even though these individuals make up approximately half of the LGBT+ population. Therefore, it is important to portray monosexism, or the essentialist perception of monosexuality as the only viable sexual orientation, as a mechanism in bisexual erasure, because then the process can be highlighted and examined (Bollas, 2023).

However, the theories regarding bisexual erasure have been criticised for grouping homosexual people, a sexual minority, with the normative sexual orientation, since it could undermine the liberation efforts of the homosexual community by painting them as the same as their oppressors (Bollas, 2023). Furthermore, some studies have shown evidence that bisexual people more often experienced discrimination as coming from heterosexual people rather than LGBTQ+ community (Brewster & Moradi, 2010; Roberts et al., 2015). If this is true, then the term monosexuality and the grouping of homosexual and heterosexual people would be especially problematic and could lead to undue scrutiny of the LGBTQ+ community. However, both aforementioned studies noted their effect size for the difference between heterosexual and LGBTQ+ biphobia to be small and therefore cautions against overemphasising the difference (Brewster & Moradi, 2010; Roberts et al., 2015).

Furthermore, discrimination from the two groups has been shown to affect bisexual people in experientially different ways. For example, levels of outness was related to the amount of prejudice that the bisexual individuals experienced from lesbian and gay people, whereas levels of internalised bi-negativity were related to levels of discrimination from straight people (Brewster & Moradi, 2010). Therefore, although there is some critique of the concept of monosexuality, there is evidence supporting existence of double discrimination of bisexual people.

The theories regarding bisexual erasure and minority stress lay the groundwork for a possible explanation as to why bisexual people experience more psychological distress compared to other populations. However, there is a need for additional research into the ways that bisexual people experience monosexism and compulsory heterosexuality in order to better understand how bisexual people are affected by these norms, which this study will endeavour to explore. With this study, we therefore hope to lay a better groundwork for future researchers to examine the relationship between norms and bisexual people's mental health.

### **Bisexual People's Sexuality**

According to American Psychological Association (APA), the definition of sexuality includes all aspects of sexual behaviour, including gender identity, orientation, attitudes, and activity ("Sexuality," 2018). Many studies narrow sexuality down to sexual satisfaction, which is described as an experiential and subjective aspect of sexual health involving positive affect and met expectations (McClelland, 2010). Since sexual satisfaction is identified as subjective, studies that evaluate it heavily rely on the participants own judgement (McClelland, 2010). While sexual satisfaction focuses more on the experiential aspect of sexual health and pleasure, sexual function is a term more often used to describe the practical aspects of sex, namely if there are dysfunctions such as premature orgasms, experienced pain or difficulty to achieve orgasm (Herbenick et al., 2010). Sexual dysfunction is often associated with poorer sexual satisfaction (Björkenstam et al., 2020), although issues have been raised regarding this association. For example, orgasm consistency is a common aspect of sexual function, even though research shows that it doesn't necessarily correlate with satisfaction (McClelland, 2010). Sexual satisfaction research commonly does not include aspects of identity and discrimination. This study will use the broadest definition of sexuality, so that not only sexual satisfaction and behaviour can be explored but also sexual identity, identity and attitudes.

According to sexual script theory, perceptions and evaluations of sexual practices happens through the use of sexual scripts, that is, cognitive structures that dictate what is

sexually appropriate (Gauvin & Pukall, 2018; Simon & Gagnon, 1984). Sexual scripts are divided into three dimensions: individual preferences and fantasies; interpersonal scripts that affect sexual practice in relationships; and cultural scripts that influence both the individual and relationships by providing a guide in accordance with the societal culture at large (Simon & Gagnon, 1984). These scripts can both vary between societies and across time (Simon & Gagnon, 1984). Some suggest that sexual scripts within the LGBTQ+ community, known as queer sexual scripts, are more flexible since they may be formed in opposition to heteronormativity (Ekholm et al., 2021). Heteronormative sexual scripts, in comparison, have been argued to have a more binary and rigid understanding of sexual practice, for example portraying men as initiators and dominant, and women as submissive and with a lower sexual desire (Sakaluk et al., 2014). However, studies that examine sexual scripts in sexual minorities, particularly in the bisexual population, are scarce (Gauvin & Pukall, 2018). Therefore, it is unknown how bisexual people relate to queer sexual scripts as opposed to heteronormative scripts, and additional research is needed to examine sexual scripts within the bisexual population.

In research that has studied and compared lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) people, bisexual individuals reported feeling more sexual satisfaction (Lefevor et al., 2019) and have a higher sexual function (Herbenick et al., 2010). One study that measured satisfaction with partnered bisexual women showed them to be content and secure in their relationships, as well as sexually satisfied (Reinhardt, 2011), although it should be noted that the sample size was quite small for that type of quantitative study. Bisexual people report masturbating more often than other groups (Lorenz, 2019) and bisexual women report using vibrators more often than other groups (Herbenick et al., 2010). This seemingly higher sex drive was interpreted as being tied to higher levels of open mindedness and flexibility regarding sexuality, which bisexual individuals have also reported (Diamond, 2008; Herbenick et al., 2010).

However, other studies show that bisexual people report lower sexual functioning and sexual satisfaction as well as more experiences of pain during sex compared to both heterosexual and homosexual people (Björkenstam et al., 2020; Lorenz, 2019). In Sweden, the public health authority presented similar trends, showing that both bisexual men and women were less satisfied with their sex lives than heterosexual and homosexual individuals of their same gender (Folkhälsomyndigheten, 2020). For example, bisexual women more often reported that they had sex even though they did not want to, and more often reported never or rarely experiencing an orgasm compared to both lesbian and straight women. Bisexual women were also more likely to report experiencing pain or worry in relation to sex

compared to others (Folkhälsomyndigheten, 2020). Moreover, being out is not necessarily linked to positive outcomes for bisexual people. A study showed that partners to bisexual people were less sexually satisfied the more out their partner was (Mark et al., 2020). In the same study, higher internalised bi-negativity in the bisexual individual predicted higher sexual satisfaction in the partner. This implies that bisexual people are likely to face repercussions for being out. Another study showed that identity pride, which is acceptance of one's sexual orientation, correlate with higher sexual satisfaction (Shepler et al., 2018). This finding could partly explain why some studies show bisexual people to be less sexually satisfied, since the antithesis of identity pride for bisexual individuals is arguably bi-negativity.

Findings regarding sexual satisfaction among bisexual people are thus contradictory, both showing them as more and less sexually satisfied than heterosexual and homosexual people, as well as showing them to be both more open sexually and more vulnerable regarding mental health and effects on outness. When trying to understand a poorly researched population, qualitative studies could be more appropriate for deeper insight (Willig, 2022). To the best of our knowledge, only one qualitative study regarding sexual satisfaction has been conducted with sexual minorities. In that study, participants were asked to define sexual satisfaction for the purpose of examining if current theories regarding sexuality are sufficient to capture sexual minority's experiences (Pascoal et al., 2019). According to the participants, sexual satisfaction consisted of an individual aspect (e.g. experiencing loss of control or transcending bodily sensations), a dyadic aspect (e.g. connection or sexual creativity with another) and primary discourses (i.e. acceptance of sexual identity in relationships with self and others). These aspects were consistent with research on heterosexual samples (Pascoal et al., 2019). However, there are two issues with this study: it examines LGB people, thereby grouping bisexual people with lesbian women and gay men, and the thematic conceptualisation is inadequate and superficial. Qualitative research's strength lies in its rich descriptions of the participants' reality (Willig, 2022) which Pascoal et al. (2019) failed to achieve in their study.

Altogether, results of quantitative studies are inconsistent and the qualitative research that has been done is methodologically lacking. This can partly be due to the various studies' different ways of conceptualising sexual satisfaction. Björkenstam et al. (2020) for example conceptualised premature orgasm for women as contributing to less satisfaction, which is not necessarily to be considered a dysfunction. Indeed, current conceptualisations of sexual satisfaction have been criticised for adhering to normative descriptions of sex and pleasure, as

well as not considering the role of sexual and social stigmas (McClelland, 2010). For example, how sexual rights for people with non-normative gender identities or sexual orientation can affect their sexual satisfaction is rarely discussed, and if it is, it is rarely contextualised in relation to monosexism. Therefore, there is a clear gap in scientific literature, both in terms of bisexual representation overall and in terms of exploring how bisexual people experience their sexuality and identity in the context of social norms.

### **Aim and Research Questions**

Bisexual people have been shown to face a unique type of discrimination which affects their wellbeing and, in extension, their sexuality. It is apparent that they should not be grouped with LGBTQ+ people as a whole and it is uncertain to what extent they can be grouped with other pluri-sexual individuals. Even so, research specifically regarding sexual satisfaction among bisexual people is scarce, especially in relation to identity research. The research that does exist has shown contradictory findings, poorly conceptualised terminology, and inadequately contextualised findings. Consequently, there is a pressing need for specific research regarding bisexual people's sexuality in a broad sense. Therefore, this present study will focus solely on bisexual people's experience of their identity, sexual identity, and satisfaction and use an exploratory, qualitative approach. The main research question is therefore as follows: How do bisexual people experience their sexuality? This research question encompasses three dimensions as per our broad conceptualisation of sexuality:

1. How do bisexual people experience their identity and sexual identity?
2. How do bisexual people experience internal and external norms in relation to their sexuality?
3. How do bisexual people experience sexual satisfaction and sexual practise?

### **Method**

The aim of this study was to deepen understanding about how bisexual people experience their sexuality. To achieve this goal, an exploratory interview study was designed and conducted as a part of the research project "Factors affecting sexual satisfaction: An exploratory and cross-cultural examination of sexual and aesthetic ideals and norms, self-compassion and body awareness" at Lund University, department of psychology. The responsible researcher for this project is Ingela Steij Stålbrand. Amanda Klysing and Ingela Steij Stålbrand acted as main supervisor and co-supervisor for this thesis.

### **Recruitment and Participants**

Recruitment occurred during January and February 2024 and all interviews were conducted in February 2024. The poster for the study (Appendix A) was published in various

Facebook groups. The poster was also pinned to bulletin boards around the Lund university campus in southern Sweden. Inclusion criteria were that the person was at least 18 years of age, Swedish-speaking and defined themselves as bisexual. If asked, prospective participants were told that we were using the broadest definition of the term bisexual and that it was up to them to decide if they fit this criterion or not. We excluded individuals who did not feel comfortable being labelled as bisexual. Before the interview, they were asked to sign a consent form (Appendix B).

Communication between the authors and the participants took place via e-mail, using a specific e-mail address created and used solely for the purposes of this study. After an individual showed interest in the study, further information was sent in the form of an informational letter (Appendix C). If they still wished to be involved, they could choose if they preferred to be interviewed in person on the Lund University campus or via Zoom. Fifteen people showed interest in the study and ten people were interviewed. Two were excluded because they had a too close personal relationship with the authors and one person excluded themselves because they were not comfortable with being interviewed and referred to as bisexual. The final two individuals were excluded due to showing interest when the time scheduled for data generation was already over. In total, four interviews were conducted via Zoom and six interviews were conducted in person.

The average age of the participants was 29 years old with the youngest being 20 years old and the oldest being 50 years old. Three of the participants identified as men, one of which was a transgender man. The other seven identified as women and were all cisgendered. At the time of the interview, five of the participants had one stable long-term partner and the other five participants described themselves as either single or casually dating. Lastly, from what we gathered from the interview, all participants except one had experiences of physical intimacy (kissing, touching, sex) with both men and women.

### **Data Generation**

We created an interview guide (Appendix D) based on the interview guide template approved by the Ethical Review Board. To explore how bisexuality came into play in the participants' sexuality, questions were added that explored the participants' experience of their bisexual identity, if it was believed to affect their sexual satisfaction and how their bisexuality was experienced in relation to others specifically and society at large. All questions were asked within the framework of sexuality and societal norms and were therefore in line with the ethical approval.

We conducted ten interviews with participants who identified, or were comfortable with being referred to, as bisexual. All interviews lasted for approximately 60 minutes and were split evenly between the authors. The interviews were recorded with a dictation machine. Initial transcription was done by using the transcription program Whisper, and the same researcher who had conducted the interview finalised the transcription and redacted personal information.

### **Ethics**

This study was carried out as part of the research project “Factors affecting sexual satisfaction: An exploratory and cross-cultural examination of sexual and aesthetic ideals and norms, self-compassion and body awareness” which is approved by the Swedish Ethical Review Authority (reference number 2022-03724-01). As such, the current study was covered by the approval.

To ensure that the risk of direct identification of our participants remained minimal, an e-mail address was created to solely communicate with the participants, with the plan of erasing the account after the study’s completion. The audio files from the interviews were stored in a secure, locked place. Any potentially identifying personal information, such as names, mentions of geographical location and places of employment, were redacted from the transcripts before any type of data management. The edited transcripts were only accessible to people within the research project and any quotes presented in the study were carefully chosen to represent the participants as a group rather than specific individuals.

As qualitative methods may impede on the participants’ integrity due to the asymmetry in interviews (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2005), measures were taken to ensure the comfort, autonomy, and welfare of the participants. An information letter about the project and how the data would be processed was sent to each participant before the interviews. Participants were informed that they could opt-out of the study at any moment without negative consequences, and that they could request their transcripts if they pleased. Right before the interviews, the participants were asked to read the information letter again and sign the consent form if they were willing to go through with the study. During the interviews, the participants were assured that they could choose how much they were comfortable with sharing and that they could refrain from answering questions if they wished. They were also reminded they could discontinue their participation at any time. The authors’ and main supervisor’s contact information were given in case participants had any questions regarding the project. Contact information to an external psychologist with expertise within the field of



sexuality was also provided as a resource for if participants experienced discomfort or distress in relation to the subjects discussed.

When conducting a study on an underrepresented population, thought must be given to how the current study will affect the readers specifically and future research generally, in other words, macro-ethics (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2005). We defined bisexuality in accordance with scientific literature: as attraction to more than one gender. We therefore decided that only participants who felt comfortable being referred to as bisexual would be included in the study. By choosing to separate bisexual people from other pluri-sexual people, we could unwittingly contribute to painting bisexual individuals as an anomaly and something “other”, since our definition of bisexual people could arguably encompass for example pansexual and queer people. By not explicitly researching pluri-sexual people as a whole, they may therefore continue to be overlooked in research regarding sexual satisfaction. However, non-bisexual pluri-sexual individuals may disagree and instead see these as separate identities. Furthermore, since there also seems to be research suggesting these to be different populations, one could also argue that by differentiating between pluri-sexual people, we honour the way sexual minorities are unique in relation to one another. Therefore, with scientific literature in mind, we decided to single bisexual people out by leaving it up to the participants’ own judgement.

### **Methodological Position**

Reflexive thematic analysis is a flexible framework where ontology and epistemology can be adapted to what best answers the study’s research question (Braun & Clarke, 2022). This study’s ontological position was critical realism and the participants’ experiences were analysed contextually. In other words, we aimed to analyse the interview transcripts in light of each participants’ unique positions and experiences, out in a world that exists. The study did not aim to uncover the reality of what it objectively means to be a bisexual person or sexually satisfied but instead wished to examine how a broad range of individuals who see themselves as bisexual experience the world, its norms, and how they relate to them. This position was chosen to be best suited to explore how the population experienced their sexuality in an inductive manner.

As per Braun & Clarke’s (2022) guidelines, we used the researchers’ subjectivity as a tool for interpreting the participants’ experiences through active reflexivity. This is in line with critical realism, which believes that the researcher and participant co-produce meaning, and that the researcher must be transparent with this process to appropriately present the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Since this study had two researchers and authors, joint

discussion and reflection were used to enrich the analysis of the data, and the point of discussions was never to reach an agreement of truth but rather to share and position ourselves regarding similar and different interpretations.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis was guided by the six phases set forth by Braun & Clarke (2022). As per Braun & Clarke's recommendation, we had a dynamic approach to the phases and a non-linear progression of the analysis, the main goal being to capture the participants' experiences and actively reflect on our interpretations of the data.

The transcripts were split equally between the two researchers and read by the researcher who did not conduct the interview. This was done to facilitate the process of familiarising ourselves with all the data, phase one of reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022). In phase two, the transcriptions were coded by using NVivo 14. NVivo 14 is a qualitative data analysis computer software. In this study, it was used solely for coding the participants' transcripts and was not used to aid the analysis of the data. An inductive approach was taken when coding, which means that the codes and themes were created based on interpretation of the data rather than creating codes from theoretical frameworks (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

After coding all the data, we entered phase three, where we compared our codes and discussed the similarities and differences in order to give depth to our interpretation and later analysis. During this phase, we broadened our research question to reflect the data more accurately. Phase three ended with clustering the codes into more comprehensive units, which was guided by our previous discussions.

Phase four began with another round of coding in NVivo using our finalised codes. After that, we assembled the codes and combined them into nine subthemes. The subthemes were then finalised into three overall themes that reflect the participants experience of their sexuality.

Up to this point, all the codes, themes and quotes were in Swedish to stay as close to the participants' experiences as possible. When we shifted between refining and naming our themes and writing our analysis, effectively combining phase five and six, we started the process of translating the data necessary for the written analysis into English. Here, we aimed to come as close as we could to the participants' sentiment by translating idioms and expressions into their English equivalent when possible.

## Results

Based on the research question, how bisexual individuals experience their sexuality, analysis of the data resulted in three themes and nine sub-themes (see Table 1). *I know who I am, it's everyone else that's the problem* explores the participants' internal experience of being a bisexual person and their own relationship to their sexuality in terms of identity. *I want to be myself but...* explores the participants' experiences of their sexuality in relation to others and the outside world, including how norms and expectations from others come into play. *To be sexually unbound* explores the participants' experience of sexuality in terms of their sex lives with themselves, their partners and as affected by the external world.

**Table 1**

*Overview of the study's three themes and nine sub-themes*

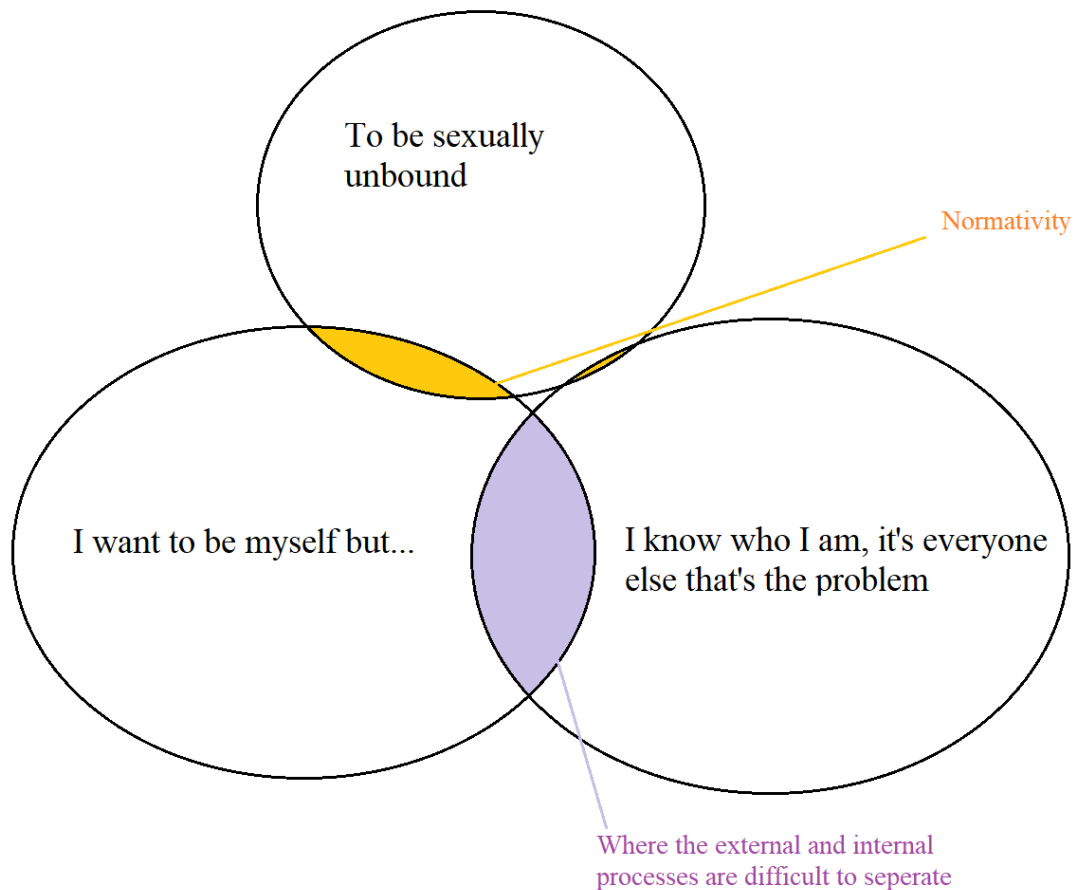
<b>Themes</b>	<b>Sub-themes</b>
<b>I know who I am, it's everyone else that's the problem</b>	<i>Everything all the time is bisexual</i> <i>To be bisexual is to be free</i> <i>Or do I know who I am?</i>
<b>I want to be myself but...</b>	<i>People seem to think sexuality is static</i> <i>They want me to choose a side</i> <i>I have to prove my bisexuality</i>
<b>To be sexually unbound</b>	<i>It's important to feel a connection to my partner</i> <i>I'm in tune with my desire</i> <i>I'm caught up in these very stereotypical ideas of what is appropriate to do in bed</i>

Although these themes all explore different facets of the participants' sexuality, there is some overlap between them, conceptualised in the form of a visual aid by the researchers as shown in Figure 1. The participants' sex-lives and direct discussion of sexual satisfaction was surprisingly separate from the other themes, although not entirely disconnected. The largest overlap is between the first two sub-themes *I know who I am, it's everyone else that's the problem* and *I want to be myself but...* which explore the internal and external dimensions of very similar phenomena. Although they were conceptualised separately, it is difficult to entirely separate the internal from the external, especially the ways in which the external

becomes internalised within the individual. Some experience of repetition or overlap between the presentations of these themes could therefore be expected. As previously stated, there was less overlap than initially expected between the first two themes and *To be sexually unbound*. The final theme tends to overlap with the other two themes primarily in the ways in which normative ideas come into play during sex, affecting satisfaction and pleasure. The overlap of the themes as illustrated in Figure 1 helps to illustrate that these three facets of sexuality are indeed not entirely separate for our participants and goes to show that one cannot focus on only one dimension of sexuality and truly understand bisexual individual's experience.

**Figure 1**

*Conceptualisation of relationship between the three themes*



**I Know Who I am, it's Everyone Else That's the Problem**

This theme illustrates the various internal processes experienced by our participants regarding their bisexuality. The participants experienced their sexuality as being self-evident for them and that it was instead in relation to the outside world that their sexual orientation

became a so-called problem. This was illustrated clearly in the following quote by participant 8 (woman):

It [my bisexuality] has been a given my entire life. It has formed me so much. As long as I can remember, it's just been an integral thing that I have known, that I am attracted to all genders and it was when I was a teenager that I first heard there was a word for it, and then I just immediately felt like "oh, I thought everyone was like this" \*laughs\* So it has been something that sits deep within me and it was only after I learned the word for it that I understood that it was something that wasn't, in quotation marks, normal, and something I needed to hide.

The theme is composed of three sub-themes. The first of which is *Everything all the time is bisexual* which explores the participants' experiences of their bisexual identity as being an integral part of who they are and much more than who they are attracted to sexually; something that is woven into every part of their being. The second sub-theme *To be bisexual is to be free* portrays the participants' experiences of having community, fewer norms to have to relate to, and distance from societal scrutiny. The final sub-theme within this theme is *Or do I know who I am?* which describes the internal experience of shame or confusion that kept our participants from an experience of total freedom in their sexuality.

### ***Everything All the Time is Bisexual***

The participants experienced their bisexuality as an integral part of who they are and how they experienced themselves. Some participants felt strongly about wanting to use the label bisexual and that it accurately described them. Others described it as not being particularly important for them whether they were referred to as "non-straight", queer, pansexual, or bisexual. What the participants had in common though was that they described their bisexuality as being a given or integral part of who they were, as exemplified by participant 8 (woman), "I think it's hard to separate my bisexuality from the rest of my identity, so it's hard for me to see how that alone has affected me". Not only was bisexuality an important part of who they are, it was often explicitly said to be more than just sexuality in terms of who they were attracted to or had sex with. This was described by participant 7 (man), "I sometimes describe myself as a yes-and person or hybrid or something. It isn't just my sexuality that it permeates, it's something that's a part of my entire personality". Here, participant 7 described bisexuality as something beyond who he had sex with, almost as a part of his personality, which other participants also explicitly stated. These aspects of personality were often described as feeling especially open to new experiences and ideas,

more so than other people around them, not unlike a personality trait. This was further exemplified by participant 4 (woman):

I don't know, it's everything, maybe you could say that all the sexual is bisexual, it's not like homo and hetero it's like everything all the time is bisexual. [...] but also that it's not just sexual it's also how you express yourself, what you like, all of that stuff, at least for me, has formed many aspects of my personality and interests and stuff.

In a way, this aspect of their sexuality was hard to describe, and yet it seemed to bleed into all the parts of their lives, from their interests to their friends to their sex lives. Many participants even described an experience of being subconsciously drawn to other people who were similar to them and then after getting to know them, finding out that they also were bisexual, like participant 5 (woman), "It wasn't at all like 'oh I know you are bisexual' but you're just in some way drawn to each other and then, especially if you feel like you're a little different from everyone else, then it's pretty relieving to find people who are similar". This quote captures both the idea that there is something about other bisexual people that the participants are subconsciously drawn to in friendships but also highlights another concept that was mentioned, a vague feeling of being slightly different from other people around them.

While nearly all the participants described in some way being different or feeling queer in some sense, not all participants felt that their bisexuality specifically was such a big part of who they were as a person in a broader sense. For example, participant 1 (man) said, "There are so many other things about me that are more important than my sexuality. So, it's pretty de-prioritized but at the same time I'm not ashamed of it". As this participant described, he himself would not necessarily describe his bisexuality as being something all-encompassing. Another participant 9 (man) similarly described:

I haven't let my bisexuality shape my identity, it's just a part of my life \*laughs\* basically. It's just a part of me that I don't feel like I need to bring up that often, if I'm not like asked about it.

This participant also described his identity as being something he wouldn't spontaneously bring up without being asked first. This could be seen as contradictory, yet the meaning of the theme does not have to do with the participants saying that they have made bisexuality their whole personality. It has to do with this part of them, often called sexuality, in a broad sense, being an integrated part of them. For some of our participants, they saw their bisexuality almost as one would see a limb. Just like a limb

can be an integral and important part of your life and even how you describe yourself without it being all that you are, bisexuality was a part they did not have to make representative of their whole personality and yet it was self-evident.

### ***To be Bisexual is to be Free***

The participants described, in relation to their sexuality, many ways in which they felt freed and fulfilled by seeing themselves as bisexual. This bisexual identity was described as giving them access to a special type of freedom and liberation from norms. This experience of freedom was often highlighted in relation to the constrained ways of normative straight people: a queer freedom. Stereotypical heterosexual relationships and sexual interactions were described as undesirable, boring and in contrast to the freedom of expression that they felt. Participant 4 (woman) described her bisexuality:

Now I think that it's actually a super positive thing, that it opens up for so many different kinds of experiences and relationships and also, that you get an insight into different subcultures in an exciting way, that a straight or homosexual person can't get, and to be able to kind of move between those different worlds a little bit, I think it's super enriching and fun.

Here we see the ways in which being bisexual is an experience that can give a unique feeling of freedom and flexibility. Bisexuality also gave the ability to move between worlds and explore more in depth one's own unique desires, instead of being stuck on one side or the other. Additionally, there was a certain safety and freedom that comes from knowing one is already outside of societal norms which makes it easier to go against other norms. This is exemplified by participant 5 (woman), "It just kind of feels safe, like no one is going to judge you because you are already, you know, different in some way than the typical person which kind of removes that fear of being judged". She described that to be bisexual is to be outside of the heterosexual norm which therefore gives freedom to try new things and express oneself in a flexible way without as much fear of being judged. Below, participant 7 (man) described his experience of being with the same gender:

I think with guys it's something totally different, it's a lot more experimental and a lot more, there's not as many taboos and it's not strange when someone says this or that, and I think with women, I have experienced a lot more like "What, you like that? That's weird".

Here we see the freedom of sexual experiences with people of the same gender being illustrated as feeling freer than interactions with the opposite gender. This insight can be interpreted as an integral part of a queer experience, but particularly as a bisexual experience

because these individuals can move between worlds and compare and contrast norms explicitly based on their own experiences. In line with the idea that our participants' freedom stands in contrast to the constrained world of heterosexuality, participant 7 (man) clearly described that being bisexual felt like such an integral part of who he was as a person that it could at times be hard to imagine himself being any other way:

I actually have a hard time understanding being heterosexual for example, I almost don't understand it at all, [...] I just think "no, but you can't actually be satisfied with just this" \*laughs\* I just think you are all weirdos, I'm not the problem, everyone else is the problem.

This quote highlights the idea of not wanting to be constrained in a heterosexual role and the freedom found in same gender sexual interactions. This participant also clearly illustrated, with humour, the idea that his identity is a given to him and that he would not want to be constrained in heterosexual gender norms.

The flexibility to move between worlds permeates the bisexual experience and is what facilitated the experience of freedom that many of our participants described. Not only was the heterosexual experience described as being less free, but it was also often portrayed in a light of being constraining and full of rigid norms and ideas about sex. This was a common theme from our participants who illustrated, in various ways, that the stereotypical way of having sex and relationships was boring or undesirable for them. Participant 6 (woman) described her bisexuality in relation to earlier sexual relationships with women:

For me it's been a really positive thing that has also transferred over to my relationships later, with men. I think that the heterosexual role is very narrow in every kind of way but when you have already been outside it for so many years then there isn't, I don't feel like there are any expectations on me, which I might have experienced if I had lived as heterosexual my entire life.

Here, participant 6 (woman) described the experience of freedom from living in queer relationships and spaces as being transferable to experiences with someone of another gender. She was able to integrate this experience into herself and experience that same freedom even when she was in a relationship with a man, effectively queering her seemingly heterosexual relationship.

### ***Or Do I Know Who I am?***

The majority of the participants described themselves as being secure in their sexual identity. However, many of them also told stories about times when they had not felt as secure. Some participants even expressed that they were at a point in their journey where they



currently weren't secure in themselves. Rather than solely describing external norms that inhibited their ability to express themselves freely, the participants sometimes referred to internal processes such as shame or confusion that held them back from living as freely as they wished. Participant 8 (woman) expressed this with:

So it's both that [my bisexuality] has felt like it's a given but also that it's been very shameful, like both at the same time and that has formed me very much I feel, in my sexuality and how I see myself.

The participant both described a deep knowing that she is in fact bisexual and a sense of wrongness with having that identity. This internal conflict was holding her back from living the life she longed for as a bisexual person. Participant 3 (woman) described it similarly with:

I think I would say that I have felt, very like, "but like am I bisexual?" [...] and it's very strange actually, how one can feel, like a pressure [...] for no reason really because it is only you who knows what you feel.

Rather than implying that it is due to external influences, participant 3 expressed that the pressure is internal, rising from an unspecific and vague sense of questioning and confusion. This friction is described as nonsensical, seeing as she had never heard these notions explicitly and, as participant 3 expressed, no one other than the individual can know how they define themselves. Still, this internal pressure prevented the participants from living freely, or even delayed their coming out, as exemplified by participant 5 (woman):

I think I realized I was bisexual when I was maybe thirteen or fourteen and I didn't come out until I was sixteen so there were a few years there that I was very, I really didn't want to come out.

Although this participant described feeling at peace with her sexuality at the time of the interview, she illustrated here that that was not always the case. Indeed, many such narratives were shared by other participants, that there was a time when they were less secure in themselves, partly due to an internal sense of confusion and shame.

Some participants described the experience of an internal conundrum, being drawn in multiple directions and being attracted to different kinds of people and having to somehow choose what life to live, such as participant 2 (woman):

I have no inclination whatsoever towards having more than one partner, for various reasons. I'm just not interested and that's also a thing, because there can be a clash in my brain because I still have some kind of need to express myself, and I have done that via literature. I write very much and I have written and

published works that have bisexuals in various roles and for me, that can be enough. The need is there to somehow express myself but at the same time, I don't feel like I need another partner [...] so that's also a thing that I have had to compromise a little bit with myself and ponder what is important to me.

This participant described the fact that in her current life, she wanted to build a life with her monogamous male partner but still felt a strong attraction to women and a desire to somehow express those emotions. She explained that she had to figure out what was most important to her, which was maintaining her lifestyle with her current partner. To not see these desires as a problem she had to "compromise" with herself and channel that conflict into a creative endeavour. She illustrated the fact that her bisexual attraction was still present even though her lifestyle did not necessarily allow for her to follow those desires. Participant 7 (man) also described how he had grown into his identity over time:

So, now if someone were to ask me "how do you see your sexuality?" then I would say 'Yeah, I see myself as bisexual' or 'I can be with both men and women'. That's not a problem for me anymore, I can identify with that and in the beginning I couldn't, when I went out onto those [dating] sites with other men I couldn't show my face or anything, it was more like anonymous but now, I can show myself and if someone were to say "oh, are you out on those sites with guys?" then I would say "yes, I am". I think I have now integrated that it is like that.

This quote illustrates the freedom that this participant now has, that he can show himself freely on dating sites and stand for who he is. Now, this dimension of his sexuality is a more integrated part of him and something he can explore openly.

### **I Want to be Myself But...**

In contrast to the more internal focus of the first theme, or as a continuation of it, this theme explores the participants experience of ideas from the external world bleeding into their lives and affecting their sexuality in various ways. The participants described an experience of wanting to be themselves but often feeling held back from being able to be the person they are on the inside due to various limitations stemming from the outside world. This is clearly illustrated by the following quote from participant 1 (man):

Things that maybe other people generally relate to, "this is a gay thing or something that straight people do", that doesn't exist in my world. Instead, I just think "this is fun", and that's also something I have had to get used to, or build my self-confidence around, to be able to say, "no but I think this is fun" instead of being scared of being seen as gay or something else.

The theme “I want to be myself but...” consists of three sub-themes. The first sub-theme *People seem to think sexuality is static* explores the participants descriptions of their sexuality as being an ongoing process that is not static and does not have a clear goal, which differs from what is expected of them by the outside world. The second sub-theme *They want me to choose a side* explores the ways in which the participants felt forced to choose a side as well as the times they felt themselves being seen as either gay or straight which in turn made their bisexuality invisible. The third sub-theme *I have to prove my bisexuality* explores the ideas that their sexuality was up for debate and only truly existed if other people acknowledged it to be so, which means they felt like they had to “prove it”.

### ***People Seem to Think Sexuality is Static***

Nearly all the participants described that they experienced sexual identity and attraction as an ongoing and fluctuating process, which is a view not shared by the world around them. Participants described a feeling of needing to know quickly who they were and how they identified, and once they knew, there was no room for it to change. Participant 2 (woman) described her experience of this:

Yeah it’s like you need to decide which direction you lean towards and that’s expected of you as soon as you happen to be infatuated with someone for the first time, and I do believe that I’m not alone in maybe not understanding instantly that I am bi.

This quote highlights the idea that one doesn’t always have all the information from the beginning, which is often what is expected, sometimes even from a very young age. Whereas this participant saw her journey as her not yet having had access to all relevant information about herself until she was an adult. She described the experience in more detail below.

It probably started when I discovered that I was attracted to women when I was thirteen years old [...] and then when I was twenty, I was attracted to a man for the first time and then so many things just clicked in my life, I realized I was bi.

She described that after having more information about herself and more life experiences, she felt she finally saw the whole picture and was able to see herself as wholly bisexual. Other participants however had a different journey where there wasn’t a lightbulb moment of knowing they were bisexual, as expressed by participant 1 (man):

I’ve lived as openly straight, lived as openly gay. Now I have ended up somewhere in between where I feel like neither of those concepts really define me and I guess bisexual is about as close as I can come.

This participant sees the term bisexual in a more pragmatic way, that it's as close as he can come to describing his experience of being "somewhere in between". He also later reflected on feeling like he was seen in a different light by others depending how he openly identified which made him uncomfortable and feel like he could not just be himself. This feeling of expectations from others is the opposite of seeing sexuality as a process that is allowed to happen naturally. These expectations come not only from heterosexual people around them but also from people in the LGBTQ+ community.

And I feel like the queer community loves categorization and I understand that it can be a very invigorating thing for sure, to find that sense of belonging with other queer people [...] but there is also a dark side where I think sexuality is seen in a way that it's not, and I know many people that have switched identities, queer people you know, during their adult lives, from cis to trans or from lesbian to bisexual or from bisexual to lesbian \*laughs\* yeah but that's how it is and I think that's just natural.

Here, participant 6 (woman) expressed the idea that even within the LGBTQ+ community there seems to be strong ideas about sexuality being static, even though it often doesn't reflect the real world. She continued reflecting on a similar phenomenon in society in general:

In our society we have some kind of idea about sexual identity that you should just know and then you should come out and you should just say it and then everyone should just think it's wonderful and then there's no more growth on that level, personality-wise but most people fluctuate anyway throughout their whole life in various ways.

Here, she explained the fluidity of identity and the fluctuation of desire throughout life. She also highlights some common conceptions about what coming out "should" look like, in the eyes of society. Some participants also highlighted the idea that one comes out constantly in life so the cultural idea of "coming out" once and for all is not realistic. This was seen as providing wiggle room for all individuals to be able to question their sexuality and follow their own process before they pick a label, if they ever do at all.

It was not only labels or ways of identifying that were discussed as being an ever-changing process, but also who one is attracted to. Participant 9 (man) described the concept of bi-waves: the idea that the ratio of attraction to different genders comes in waves which ebb and flow over time. He illustrated this in terms of his own life experience:

One month you're maybe more interested in guys than women, that it like, goes up and down. And it's probably, that has happened now [...] I was head over heels for this guy that was a close friend of mine [...] but now when I dream of getting married and stuff, I almost never imagine it being with a man [...] now I'm maybe riding the woman wave a bit more.

This participant and others described a common misconception that bisexual means being attracted 50% to women and 50% to men, but in their experience each individual has their own ratio and even that ratio fluctuates over time. In the quote below, participant 7 (man) described integrating this process-focused way of seeing his desire for the next phase of his life:

I'm just opening up and we'll see what sticks, if it's a man and I feel like I want to move forward with that then maybe I'll explore that. If it's a woman and I feel like I want to dive into that again then maybe I will. Now I've been thinking a bit more like let the body decide not the head, a bit more like I'm opening up for a person that I can have a deeper connection with and also a sexuality with but then we'll see what it becomes [...] a little bit more pragmatic you know, like try with a man and see where it goes and don't make it into a problem, just see it as a possibility and an exploration.

Here, he described the idea of trying to embrace this way of seeing his sexuality, as an ongoing process or journey to be followed and explored. He reflected on the fact that this way of thinking pragmatically has in part helped him come to terms with the internal battle of how to live "bisexually", as well as helped him see his sexuality as a possibility for exploration and not as something stressful.

Almost all participants highlighted the importance of having your own process in your own time because it can look different for every individual. Many shared negative experiences of not being believed or being seen in a negative light for "switching sides" when they came out as bisexual or when they changed their label. The participants also expressed a wish for more people to understand this idea, that sexuality fluctuates and that everyone should be allowed to have their process without being stressed into choosing sides or defining themselves quickly, or even at all.

### ***They Want Me to Choose a Side***

The participants shared many descriptions of the feeling of being pressured into "choosing a side". That is, deciding if they were homosexual or heterosexual. This can be seen as an expression of the norm of monosexuality, where there are only two camps

and nothing in between or outside of those. The participants experienced this as being invalidating and making them feel invisible. Many described this in terms of others automatically assuming they were one or the other, and then projecting that identity and associated stereotypes onto them. This idea was illustrated by Participant 1 (man) below:

I want bisexuals to be more visible in different contexts, that it's not just, either you're straight or you're gay, which I think is kind of the norm in society now. It's great that we have become more accepting and critical of norms and so on, but in my opinion, bisexuality doesn't exist at all in society, and I would like it to become more visible.

This quote illustrates succinctly this notion of monosexuality and how he experienced the consequences of this firsthand. There were many small ways in which the participants felt invalidated in their bisexuality which made them feel pressured to choose a side. Another way this notion arose was through encountering the prejudice that bisexuality is a transitional identity. For example, participant 3 (woman) said, “[bisexuality] is not just a segue to another [sexual orientation], it's not just a fun little thing, it can be its own thing and still have value”. Describing how she implicitly experienced other people's mentality of bisexuality being only a phase. Participant 7 (man) described a more explicit example: “Especially when I talk to homosexual men, I'll say ‘I'm bisexual’ and they often counter with ‘no, you're not bisexual, you're homosexual, it's just a defence mechanism when you say that’”. This quote furthermore shows how the participants experienced prejudice from the LGBTQ+ community. As participant 9 (man) put it, “There's all sorts of love and simultaneously all sorts of hate within the LGBTQ+ community. And I think a lot of the hate is mainly towards bisexuals”. The participants shared varying experiences of feeling excluded from the LGBTQ+ community or invalidated for their bisexuality.

One common pattern was that participants were told by other people that they were less LGBTQ than others within the community, such as participant 8 (woman), “And a friend told me that I'm less LGBTQ than a person who's lesbian \*laughs\* and I'm like, what do you mean? It says LGBTQ, there's a B in there, how can you be less LGBTQ if you're bi?” Participant 2 (woman) described another event:

One of my exes told me that I'm a traitor to the whole LGBTQ+ movement [...] I know that some people think it's awful that I started identifying as bi, do with that what you will. Because I had come out as lesbian before, because at the time, it was what I thought and I believe that it's not the biggest crime because, well,

you're 20 and unsure of who you are, but some people were like "what, what's this, you can't do that, you can't just change camp", those were some comments that I received.

This quote can be interpreted as intolerance towards the process of discovering your sexual identity as well, but through the usage of strong language such as calling the participant a traitor and accusing them of changing camps, it implies that the participant had somehow deceived them and was now less queer than her LGBTQ+ peers originally thought. Participant 2 (woman) later added, "That experience, in particular, has caused me to feel less inclined to seek support within the [...] rainbow community [...] I've felt very unsure if I'm even welcome there", describing how these experiences have made her feel ostracised as a bisexual person from the LGBTQ+ community. Participant 5 (woman) expressed a similar yet internal process:

I especially didn't like calling myself bisexual initially, I think I had a small internal conflict cause I was like, I'd rather call myself a lesbian or something and I think you kind of get the feeling of "I should choose one or the other".

This mentality of having to pick a side and choose one gender to have relations with extended to how the participants experienced being viewed depending on the gender of their partner. Participant 2 (woman) described, "Bisexuality is portrayed as non-existent, that I should accept that 'oh I'm straight now' just because I got together with this man who I've wanted to be with for a long time". Many participants expressed that they were viewed and treated as straight if they were in a relationship with someone of the "opposite" gender. Sometimes, this was because of others' assumptions, as they did not explicitly come out as bisexual. Other times however, the relationship itself was treated as proof of their lessened queerness.

If you're queer or bisexual like me and you hear, because I'm with a guy now and if you're only thinking of LGBTQ then you end up less, you're not as valid in a way, it becomes like "yeah but you're not part of the gang".

The implication in this quote from participant 3 (woman) is that being in a relationship with someone of the opposite gender automatically makes you less queer and thus more straight. This monosexual norm also permeated how the participants described their own lifestyle and sexuality. For example, participant 5 (woman) expressed:

I've always had a hunch that I'm like, not that I'm betraying myself in any way but more like I don't count anymore because no one can see from my relationship that I'm a part of the LGBTQ community because I'm in a straight relationship.

The fact that the participants referred to their relationships as straight and that they worried about not being as LGBTQ+ as before now that they were in a relationship with someone of the opposite gender, reflects how ingrained the monosexual norm can be even for bisexual people themselves. The phenomenon of being in a relationship with one person and simultaneously maintaining attraction to more than one gender is not something that can be easily understood nor described in our current society. One way in which they could make sense of this was to use terms such as “straight relationship”. However, being in a straight relationship doesn’t quite capture the bisexual experience of being attracted to more genders than one, regardless of current relationship status. Using this terminology was also a way in which participants’ queerness was reduced to being a part of one out of two teams. This terminology was not experienced as accurate to the participants’ internal experience of being bisexual. However, there is no terminology that accurately describes such relationships, which perpetuates the invisibility of bisexual experiences of relationships.

It was not only the choice of partner that sorted the participants into the categories of straight and gay. The participants experienced that other aspects such as clothing, body language and make-up could give their surroundings a gay or straight impression, causing them to be perceived as one or the other. Participant 1 (man) described it as:

Experimenting with my appearance and stuff has always been fun to me, so during the period for example when I was more openly gay and could put make-up on every day or do other stuff, it wasn’t seen as strange. But now, I still think it’s fun but if I were to date a woman it would give a strange vibe despite me being like, “I’m sexually attracted to you but I can’t do things I enjoy because it gives you the impression that I’m gay”, so I have to hold myself back.

The participant later added, “If you’re bisexual in a straight relationship, then you have to act straight rather than just be who you are. And that’s sad.”. This quote captures the essence of participants’ experiences of not being able to freely express their sexuality due to the monosexual norm that assumes there is only two sides: the heterosexual and the homosexual one. These sides are not limited to attraction but also include gender expression and gendered behaviour, also coded into the two categories. Ultimately, this results in bisexuality fading out of existence and becoming a non-existent concept.

### ***I Have to Prove my Bisexuality***

The participants were in various stages of acceptance and comfort with their own sexuality, but regardless of their process, other people’s view of the validity of their identity were in some cases quite important. In line with the previous sub-theme where the



participants felt invisible, they often also felt that they had to prove their bisexuality for others to recognize it. It was not necessarily that the participants explicitly wanted others to know that they were bisexual but when it came up, they often felt themselves placed in a defensive position. Participant 2 (woman) put it like this: “People often assume that in reality, I’m straight, but I’ve been in relationships with women before, I find that I have to list these experiences”. One way in which she felt pressured to prove her sexuality was to list her previous experiences with women, because others often assumed she was straight due to her relationship with a man.

Another way in which participants felt they could prove their sexuality was through their appearance. Participant 3 (woman) illustrated the ways in which other people sometimes had more power than herself in determining the veracity of her identity.

People have asked me and said “I can tell that you’re bisexual” \*laughs\* and then I’ve felt reassured that if it’s that apparent, I could accept that well, in that case, I am [bisexual], what a relief! So like, for a long time I’ve thought that if I still feel like this in five years then maybe I am bisexual, like I have never quite been confident in my own judgement.

This participant illustrated how much of a relief it can be to be seen in the same way that one sees themselves. This quote also illustrates the idea that she trusted the judgement of others more than her own in relation to determining the veracity of her bisexual identity. She later added, “In this relationship [with my boyfriend], I kind of become occupied with having to prove my [bisexuality] somehow”, describing how she experienced the relationship as implicitly endangering her queer status outwardly. This providing of proof was not limited to proving the participants were not heterosexual, but also that they were not homosexual, which participant 6 (woman) described with:

Back then I only dated women really, for many years and was viewed as a lesbian and I was like “do I have to speak up?”, “does it matter if people view me differently from who I am or does it even matter, *I* know who I am” and back then it was more of a struggle in a way because I felt like I owed the world the truth maybe? Or did I? I thought about it a lot.

As highlighted above this participant was previously unsure about what she owed to the rest of the world regarding her identity. She struggled with the fact that other people tended to care a lot. Not all participants expressed that they presently cared about other people’s opinions, but it had for many been a concern at some time in their life.

This external proof of their sexuality was not only desired for the sake of others approval but also for their own comfort in seeing themselves. This was in line with and often presented as the belief that one can observe another person's sexual orientation based on appearance, as participant 10 (woman) said, "before, I was very out, you could see it by looking at my clothes, you could tell immediately". This shows that some used clothing as a way of being out and as proof both for themselves and others of who they felt they were on the inside.

I'm attracted to both women and men, and sometimes I want to see it in the mirror, so I cut my hair off or find some lumber jack, or like a flannel shirt you know, and wear it and feel a certain inner peace, like "wow, now I'm expressing myself again".

This quote by participant 2 (woman) exemplifies how appearance can aid the participants' outness and be a way of using gender norms to their advantage. By cutting her hair short and wearing a flannel shirt she knew she was more likely to be seen externally as an LGBTQ+ person, and consequently avoiding having to explain herself. This gave her more power over others' perceptions of her by implying her sexual orientation in the way she looked.

Overall, participants shared similar experiences of outside approval or rejection affecting their own certainty, showcasing the notion that it's other people who decide if the participants are bisexual or not. Some participants dealt with the experienced scrutiny by refraining from being explicitly out as bisexual, such as participant 1 (man) who described, "A better term that I've begun identifying with is saying 'I'm non-straight' and leaving the rest a mystery", expressing how being vaguer helped him dodge others' prejudices.

Participant 4 (woman) similarly described:

I've never had a moment of like "I'll come out to everyone now", instead I either haven't said anything or just done the classic like "oh *she's* good-looking" or "*he* looks nice" or like "I went on a date with *her*" so that it's just a normal part of the conversation and then people can figure out the rest themselves.

By making other people the detectives, the participants experienced it as easier to avoid being questioned about the veracity of their bisexuality. Regardless, the participants described the scrutiny and need to prove themselves as frustrating, stressful, and causing them to question their own judgement. In regard to this Participant 2 (woman) expressed:

Yeah and it's not possible to generalise us, we can be very different and have different experiences and we're still just as valid, regardless if you're with a man

or a woman or someone else, some other gender or if you're with multiple people or whatever, or if you've never been with anyone, you should be able to say that you're bisexual and be believed.

Like participant 2, other participants also expressed that they would like their own word to bear more weight than that of others and to not have to feel the need to constantly prove oneself.

### **To be Sexually Unbound**

This theme illustrates all the ways in which the participants experienced their sex lives: how they were affected by both societal norms as well as guided by their internal lust and desire. The theme "To be sexually unbound" includes three sub-themes. The first sub-theme, *It's important to feel a connection to my partner* is a relational subtheme and describes the participants' experience of relationships being the platform for sex. In other words, having a spark and experiencing a bond to the other were considered important for their sexual satisfaction. The second subtheme, *I'm in tune with my desire*, portrays an individual aspect of sexuality like knowing and accepting one's own needs, being free from societal expectations and finding confidence in setting boundaries. The third and final sub-theme *I'm caught up in these very stereotypical ideas of what is appropriate to do in bed* depicts how heteronormative roles and norms regarding sexual function disrupted the participants' sense of sexual unboundedness. All three of these dimensions are described in the following quote by participant 7 (man):

I suppose I feel the most satisfied when I can fully express my sexuality, like when I can be myself. When you can let go in some way and just, I have the body that I have and I can stand by it, there is another body that can also be exactly as it is and our bodies can meet and we can just be in the pleasure, you can just enjoy each other and there is no shame.

Participant 7 summarised here how it can feel to follow one's own desire and be in the moment, to freely be able to connect with another person, as well as to be free from shame.

#### ***It's Important to Feel a Connection to My Partner***

The participants described that when they have sex with others, they value the intimacy, trust, and connection that a relationship can give. Not all described that it was important to be in a committed relationship, but even sexually focused relationships needed some level of connection. This could be a vague feeling of similarity, or to feel more concrete similarity in politics, world views, or interests. This sense of connection facilitated an attraction to their partner as a person, which could ignite a sexual spark. The value of connectedness was

described by participant 7 (man) as follows: “Even though I can sometimes have quick sex with someone, it’s not what I really long for, instead I want the intimacy and to be able to [...] let go in a way.” This participant showed that the feeling of a connection to his partners made him relax and let go. When in bed, sexual satisfaction could thus be facilitated by connectedness through open-minded exploration, sensitivity to each other’s needs, and communication.

An established relationship wasn’t necessarily a requirement to be intimate but rather as participant 3 (woman) described, “it’s important to have a bond to someone else”, and later added, “mostly, sexuality for me is a shared nice experience”. The participants experienced that an interpersonal connection or a perception of like-mindedness was important for their own curiosity and attraction to the other, like participant 7 (man) expressed with “the chemistry has to be there, that you feel attracted to the other”. A certain level of synchronisation was also important to some participants, for example similar sex drives. As participant 9 (man) put it: “One example of an unsatisfying sex life is the one I had with my ex-girlfriend. She almost never wanted to have sex, except for when I didn’t want to have sex \*laughs\* oh it was awful”. This illustrated the feeling of being somewhat in sync as facilitating connectedness.

When a connection existed, the participants experienced that it facilitated playfulness and open-minded exploration of both their own desire and their sexual partner’s wants, which participant 3 (woman) conveyed when describing her own relationship, “I actually think we have a nice sexual relationship, it’s very playful, very exploratory”. Participant 4 (woman) said, “I think it’s more interesting the new things you discover together with someone else” which conveys the general experience that together, people can create something wonderful that is beyond the sum of the individuals alone.

Generally, participants seemed to long for stable relationships rather than the excitement that one-night stands can bring. As participant 6 (woman) said, “You don’t have to know each other super well but it’s more important for me now to not throw myself into things, like, without any thought”. Some yearned for a loving and steady relationship, like participant 8 (woman) who expressed, “to sleep with someone you love is very different, or I have experienced it as very different from sleeping with a complete stranger and I would like to have that again”. Thus, it varied how established the relationship should ideally be for the participants to feel comfortable or even inclined to be intimate with someone else, but some form of build-up was ideal to facilitate sexual satisfaction, as participant 10 (woman) described:

That both of us liked each other, that it was nice and that we set a mood before, that I entered her room and we kissed a lot then laid down on the bed, like foreplay happened, and she was curious of me and I was curious of her and it went well.

As expressed, satisfying sex was described as not limited to sexual contact itself but also the events before and after, like cuddling and flirting. Attraction to each other and the desire to be close physically were aspects that strengthened the participants' experience of connectedness. Some participants even valued physical intimacy such as cuddling over more explicitly sexual contact, like participant 1 (man) who expressed "So it's more like human closeness that is important for me rather than sex" or participant 2 (woman) who said "It depends a bit on what I'm after, sometimes I just want some type of closeness that, where sex is included".

Having a sexual partner who is both perceptive and willing to listen was important for the sense of connection and safety that contributed to satisfaction. In other words, communication about needs and boundaries. Participant 8 (woman) described it as:

And then that he was very perceptive of my needs and that I said "Touch me like this, no a bit faster, a bit looser, touch me there instead" that I could dare to say what I wanted kind of and that he listened to me.

Participants also experienced communication to be a strategy for coping with things that obstruct the path to satisfaction, such as differences in sex drive or difficulty with reaching orgasms, like participant 2 (woman):

Well, my strategy, I try to talk to him about it or rather we try to talk to each other. And it's not always easy, there's a lot of emotions that can come up like "oh you always use the vibrator [to reach orgasm] instead of using me" yeah like that.

When communication faltered, so did open-minded exploration and the feeling of connectedness, which in turn lessened the participants sense of satisfaction.

### ***I'm In Tune With My Desire***

Across the participants, being in tune with their desire was described as an internal state that facilitated sexual satisfaction, as it made them feel sure of themselves and free to express their needs. This state of being wasn't necessarily linked to sexual practices, but rather that sexuality was expressed in accordance with the participants' own desires at the time.

Participant 6 (woman) described it as follows:

Okay well for me I would say that it's a lot about being comfortable with my own sexuality in some way [...] I've had different periods of my life where I've maybe been more or less sexually active, like in certain periods I've had lots of energy

and had many different partners, and in other periods I've not had that but it hasn't really bothered me either, you know, like I think that my \*laughs\* level of energy [...] goes a bit up and down depending on what else is happening in life, so in certain periods I've been more interested in having sexual partners and it has been fun and it gave me a lot, and in other periods it hasn't been a thing because there was other stuff that happened and in some way I've still felt, I haven't felt unsatisfied because of that.

Freely exploring their own wants was a vital part of being attuned to desire, which varied from desiring slow and loving sex, to what they described as kinky sex, to more playful and light-hearted sex. There was no single type of sex that all the participants preferred in their sex life, nevertheless they generally experienced more satisfaction if they could open-mindedly explore it with themselves and others rather than conform to an idea of what is appropriate. As participant 6 (woman) said, "I think that I follow my own interest and let that lead rather than an idea of how things should be", which can be interpreted as freedom from expectations of how sex should be. This openness was seen as leading to new discoveries, which participant 4 (woman) described, "Maybe that you experience something new \*laughs\* or yeah, got a new perspective or that you discover something new about yourself [...] that you didn't know until you tried it".

Internalised shame was experienced as an obstacle to open exploration of the participants' own desire. This extended to expressing their sexual wants to their partners, which participant 1 (man) exemplified:

I think that this broad way of thinking about sex has to do with, for me, the fact that I have already shamed myself enough to not be open with it and it's rooted in the idea that I will never really get my needs sexually satisfied, so it's better for me to just be there for all of my partners' needs.

This quote illustrates how internalised shame could lead to the participants not asking for what they actually want in sexual situations because they assume that those needs could never be met. In some cases, this led to them resigning themselves to focusing more on other people than themselves. In contrast, by knowing what made the participants tick, they experienced themselves being liberated from normative sex and internalised shame, which participant 1 (man) expressed with "It was the first thing we did, me and my first girlfriend, we tried like bondage [...] just to make it fun and then it becomes something beyond just sex, just sex is not interesting enough". Here, the participant introduced the idea that normative sex wasn't the sole aspect that facilitated satisfaction. Indeed, one commonality across

participants was that things that are not traditionally considered sex could still contribute to or even be sexually satisfying. Participant 1 (man) continued, “and [sexuality] is not always sexual at all either, it’s also a part of physical intimacy or like body contact”.

To be able to follow their desires, participants described that they had to be aware of their own boundaries. Participant 8 (woman) said, “I think safety is key for me” when talking about setting boundaries with sexual partners. She continued:

For a long time, I’ve had trouble with knowing like where my boundaries are, what I want to do and don’t want to do [...] and that can become quite problematic when you sleep with people you don’t know, that you don’t know where the boundaries are, and you have trouble saying no.

As expressed by participant 8 above, the participants experienced that it was particularly important to know and be confident in their own feelings and boundaries to facilitate to be attuned to their own desire. The ability to be in tune with your own desire and boundaries was experienced as a journey by the participants. Participant 6 (woman) said “And I don’t just have sex with people like without thinking or like, I’m much more aware of what I myself want” to describe how she has become increasingly more attentive to her own needs. Participant 3 (woman) similarly expressed:

I actually think that I have shaped my own sexuality and what I like and what, yeah, it has kind of been shaped over time and I actually feel like I have put [societal expectations] behind me and that I don’t have that perception anymore and that means that I decide on my own what I like, my own satisfaction.

Thus, it seemed as if knowing themselves and being able to express their needs as well as saying no was a learned mindset that had to be honed and nurtured. Some participants expressed that they still had ways to go before they could safely say that they were in tune with their desire, which brings us to the last subtheme.

### ***I’m Caught Up in These Very Stereotypical Ideas of What is Appropriate to Do in Bed***

The participants often experienced difficulties with being sexually unbound due to societal norms around what is appropriate to yearn for and what roles are expected to be played. A plethora of norms were present in the participants’ experiences of sex. For instance, they experienced that orgasming, penetration and oral sex were normative parts of sex, and that gender roles limited what was allowed in the bedroom and in the relationship. Often, these norms seemed to inhibit their ability to live out their sexuality in accordance with their desire.

I'm a bit caught up in these very stereotypical ideas of what is appropriate to do in bed, and that may have led to me being stuck in, like I described, this performance of like, what the guy should do.

As participant 8 (woman) described, heteronormative roles often made an appearance in the bedroom. Participants experienced that a man is stereotypically more sexually active, dominant in the sexual act and often takes initiative to engage in sex or intimacy. Conversely, women stereotypically were described to exist to follow the man's lead. It differed how the participants described their own perspective of these roles, but generally they were described as distinct categories that were more apparent when the partner was of the opposite gender from the participant, as participant 6 (woman) expressed:

Yeah and on the topic of sexual satisfaction, [the gender roles] extend to who takes initiative to what, how many sexual partners you should have, who takes initiative in bed, who hits on who, all these things, these norms are everywhere and they trickle down into every last minute of it, at least if you don't think about it.

Men were also often described as easier to start sexual relationships with, whereas women were more difficult sexually but easier to have an emotional and deeper bond with. Participant 7 (man) expressed it with "My experience has been that it's much simpler to be emotionally intimate with women, I have never met a man who I've been able to form a deep emotional relationship with". He continues, "However, my sexual attraction, that is stronger towards men". This illustrates how traditional gender roles were experienced to affect the participants' attraction to different people.

These roles were sometimes described as uncomfortable and disruptive for the participants. Participant 1 (man) said, "I often feel more forced to be dominant when I'm with women [as opposed to men] for example, and that's a norm that I perceive, even though it's not a role that I'm happy with having". In other cases, the participants described it neutrally, like participant 5 (woman) who reflected "I don't want to say gender roles, but with guys I'm kind of more, how I behave during sex with guys is different from how I behave with girls, I feel like with girls I tend to be more dominant" and later added "[in society] the guy is stronger and bigger so, and I've often been bigger in my relations with girls so I've often played the typical guy role". Some participants even described that their own desire was in tune with normative narratives of sex. However, these individuals described this in a way where they had to almost defend the fact that this was indeed what they liked and not just simple following of a so-called script, as expressed by participant 5 (woman):



Sometimes I want to go against it just because I have realised that it's so gender normative, so I feel a little bit like I want to actively be like "no, I don't want to follow them" but at the same time, it's what feels good and it's what I like.

As expressed, participant 5 described that she enjoyed sex that was seen as stereotypical but felt also like she should not. She sometimes got the feeling she wanted to make a statement against traditional gender roles but realised that those acts are in line with her own desire.

Nevertheless, gender roles were generally described as stifling and what was experienced as stereotypical straight sex was often viewed as less satisfying than sex with people of the same gender or the open-minded and exploratory sex described in *I'm in tune with my desire*. This was exemplified by participant 3 (woman):

I think that it has kind of affected me, that I've observed how it should be because I think things you hear, when people say "this is how it is to have sex with my boyfriend, this is how we do it" and then it's very normative and stereotypical, like it's not this playfulness that I've described or, [the sex] is kind of over quickly.

This participant both described how she herself viewed stereotypical straight sex as the antithesis of free and playful sex, and that she experienced the norms to inhibit her own exploration by setting expectations of the conventional sexual scenario. Some participants described their ideas about sexuality to partly be formed by gender roles but to partly also be formed by their first sexual experience.

I see myself as pretty flexible and I think if I had started by having sex with men, now I'm just guessing I have no idea, but then maybe I would be more into the norm where you have penetrative sex.

Above, participant 10 (woman) illustrated this concept, that the first sexual experience you have sets the course for how it will go later in life. This was also expressed by other participants in various ways, sometimes directly related to the gender of their first partner and sometimes related to other aspects of who the first person was. However, not all participants felt as strongly affected by their gender as others. Some instead expressed that because of their experiences of living in same-gender relationships, they felt distanced from the strict norms of their gender. Living explicitly outside of one norm was described as facilitating breaking further norms.

Overall, sexual functioning was described as an important aspect of sexual satisfaction, which participant 7 (man) expressed by, "Well sexual function, first of all, I believe it to be an important thing, that you have some kind of sexual function". However, it was not always

explicitly stated as something essential, rather it was implicitly present in almost all of the participants' experiences. In part, it was present in the participants' experiences of orgasms as a key part of satisfying sex. Sometimes, they described reaching climax as the goal of stereotypical sex, which could be a problem for the participants who had difficulty achieving orgasm.

It feels like, because I have a problem with getting there with myself and with my partner and generally, I just feel like well, sexual satisfaction is just [orgasms] and so if you can't get there then your whole sex life falls apart.

As participant 3 (woman) described, having trouble with climaxing could make the participants feel like there was something wrong with their sexual functioning and that it was a large hindrance in their sex life, regardless of how they themselves viewed it. Participant 3 later added, "I actually think that you can reach a type of climax, even if I don't get there completely it's still satisfying and to feel that it's nice, it's a lovely moment", which described how she herself was accepting of and content with her functioning. However, the societal expectation of reaching orgasm could be disruptive to her satisfaction. Generally, the participants experienced orgasm as a vital indicator of satisfaction, like participant 1 (man) who said, "If I don't manage to get my partner there, then I wouldn't say that my partner is satisfied". Some participants expressed difficulty climaxing as an issue, for example participant 8 (woman):

It's very frustrating to not be able to get there with others or, I want to be able to, it has happened but then it's with someone patient and empathetic [about] what I say, and then it can happen but otherwise, I sort of don't count on it happening \*laughs\* because it's difficult, and it's a shame, it's such a shame I think.

Simultaneously, many participants thought it was alright if orgasm did not occur in sex, like participant 4 (woman) who said, "I've had sex where maybe I didn't get there and yeah, but it was still satisfying". Even so, the participants experienced climaxing as something they had to position themselves in relation to, especially if they had encountered problems themselves or with their partner not reaching orgasm.

To sum it up, how the participants experienced these societal expectations differed. Not all participants expressed feeling limited by them, especially if they themselves enjoyed aspects of normative sex, for example enjoying having a dominant partner as a woman or preferring penetrative sex above other sexual acts. However, if the participants felt drawn to non-normative aspects of sex or experienced problems with sexual functioning, these societal

expectations could lead to shame, friction in sexual relationships and a need to position themselves in relation to these sexual norms.

### **Discussion**

In brief, the results show that the participants experienced their sexuality as permeating their entire being, granting them a unique type of freedom and, at the same time, inhibiting and hindering them through monosexual and heteronormative norms. The three dimensions of the research question were closely related to the three themes, with the first theme being related to the internal experience of identity, sexual identity and norms, the second theme being related to external norms in relation to their sexual identity, and the third theme being related to sexual practice and sexual satisfaction. The theme “I know who I am, it’s everyone else that’s the problem” portrays how bisexuality was experienced as self-evident and freeing, and how internal pressure could affect the participants leading to insecurity or confusion regarding their identity. In the theme “I want to be myself but...”, three constricting ways in which society conceptualises sexuality are presented, where the participants described themselves as opposed to the norms regarding sexuality being static, binary, and requiring evidence. Lastly, the theme “To be sexually unbound” highlights the importance of connectedness and self-attunement for sexual satisfaction and how normative sexual scripts could disrupt this process. The participants experienced their sexual satisfaction and bisexuality as different facets of their sexuality, sharing similarities regarding influential norms but otherwise experienced as somewhat separate. This was further conceptualised in our results as the themes were illustrated as separate facets but were difficult to conceptualise without the context of each other.

Participants’ conceptualisations of sexual satisfaction were notably similar to qualitative studies regarding both LGB people’s and heterosexual people’s definition of sexual satisfaction (Pascoal et al., 2014; Pascoal et al., 2019). Specifically, individual and relational aspects contributing to sexual satisfaction consisted of largely the same components such as connection, open-minded exploration, and letting one’s inner desire lead. This could suggest that what people value in sexual satisfaction is universal. In this study, the experiential aspects that were specific to the participants — which possibly differentiates them from other groups — were norms regarding monosexuality, heteronormativity, and how these two aspects were expressed to cause conflict and ostracism for the participants. This confirms previous studies that have identified bisexual people as a group vulnerable to double discrimination and illustrates the importance of considering identity pride when researching this group specifically. Altogether, sexuality was described as a web of separate facets that

nevertheless affect each other, such as bisexual identity being tied to, although not encompassed by, sexual practice.

### **Wrestling with Monosexual Norms and Bi-Negativity**

Participants described that they felt like they had to pick a side regarding their sexual orientation, showcasing an experienced monosexism (Roberts et al., 2015). They expressed that their relationship status, clothing, body language, and having make-up gave others the impression that they were either heterosexual or homosexual, reaffirming the idea of a binary perspective on sexual orientation. In other words, how the participants chose to express themselves outwardly was seen as linked directly to their sexual orientation, which is in line with Butler's theory of the heterosexual matrix (Butler, 2006) as well as previous research on how gender expression and behaviour can be used to communicate sexuality (Davis-Delano & Morgan, 2016; Thoma et al., 2021). The participants furthermore seemed to lack the vocabulary to describe their lifestyle as bisexual and instead described it in monosexual terms, such as describing their relationship as "straight". This shows that language use as well as outward perceptions contributed to a sense of bisexual erasure that was experienced as both coming from the heterosexual majority as well as the LGBTQ+ community. In other words, the participants experienced double discrimination.

When not picking a side, participants expressed a constant need to prove their bisexuality to others. Previous qualitative studies have also reported this experience and argued that since there is no accepted frameworks for what being a "real bisexual" is, bisexual people can never provide sufficient evidence for their identity (Cipriano et al., 2023; Flanders et al., 2016). The fact that participants described both feeling as though their bisexuality did not exist as well as having to constantly prove it, may seem paradoxical in combination. However, previous research has suggested that processes of identity denial as well as having to prove oneself through practice could be linked (Flanders et al., 2016). Bisexual erasure and proving oneself could therefore be regarded as two sides of the same coin, where bisexual people themselves are expected to constantly define the boundaries of their identity but their sexual behaviour is never regarded as enough to prove that bisexuality actually exists (Flanders et al., 2016).

The participants opposed the notion of bisexuality being a phase or transitional, and research has shown bisexuality to, generally, be a quite stable identity (Diamond, 2008). However, the participants described how their own attraction had fluctuated over time, for example more attraction to a certain gender during one point in time, without it affecting their bisexual identity. They described how others interpreted it as a transition or even fluidity. In

Diamond (2008), sexual fluidity and fluctuation in bisexuality were described as separate processes, and although they have a degree of overlap, they should be regarded as such. As the participants mentioned, fluctuations and even changing identity label were normal, regardless of orientation. Intolerance toward sexuality as a process can therefore be interpreted as another manifestation of monosexism, where any insecurity or fluctuation is portrayed as evidence against the participants' bisexuality. In addition, fluctuations may be experienced as destabilising orientation as per Yoshino's theory and thus any fluctuation, regardless of if the person identifies as bisexual or something else, is painted as a threat (Yoshino, 2009).

In the present study, participants described how they felt compelled to list their sexual experiences, as well as dress themselves in a certain way to validate their bisexual identity. Previous studies have researched how clothing and specific behaviours are often used to signal sexual orientation to others, both in heterosexual populations (Davis-Delano & Morgan, 2016) as well as in LGB populations as a group (Thoma et al., 2021). Although, as far as we know, there has been no research done on how specifically bisexual people use identity markers and behaviours to communicate their sexuality. Participants were somewhat vague in descriptions of what exactly they used for communicating their sexuality but did express that certain mannerisms and clothing could be used to do so. Some participants described using their clothing and gender expression not only to prove their bisexuality but also to manipulate how they were perceived by others and themselves. In this way, the participants could take advantage of norms regarding gender expression communicating sexual orientation for their own gain, to be seen as more or less gender conforming depending on the circumstance.

Another way some participants described using norms to avoid bi-negativity was by referring to their sexual orientation ambiguously. For example, the sub-theme "I have to prove my bisexuality" showed how it could be easier to avoid being questioned by others by either dodging the question of sexuality explicitly or describing themselves as "non-straight". This is interesting in part because it shows just how much the label bisexual specifically can cause preoccupation with having to prove oneself. Furthermore, the term non-straight puts the individual's sexuality in relation to straight-ness, being the opposite of straight-ness or something other-than and in relation to heterosexual norms. Bisexuality for these participants seemed to come with many assumptions and requirements, whereas a non-category seemed to allow for more freedom and less need to prove oneself.

Bi-negativity and double discrimination were explicitly and implicitly experienced by the participants. However, the participants also described both being out to their partners and that their outness did not negatively affect their relationship or sexual satisfaction, which stands in contrast with some previous research (Folkhälsomyndigheten, 2020; Mark et al., 2020). In fact, the participants regarded bisexuality as a positive and enriching identity. Since previous research has suggested that identity pride contributes positively to sexual satisfaction (Shepler et al., 2018), this could tentatively explain how outness and sexual satisfaction co-occurred for the participants in this study. Further research is needed to more closely examine how these factors relate to each other. This suggests however that identity pride, outness and sexual satisfaction are important aspects to consider when researching sexual health in bisexual people.

It should also be noted that even though the participants were out to their support systems and experienced both acceptance and community from other LGBTQ+ people, the acceptance from the LGBTQ+ community at large was described as somewhat conditional, only accessible as long as the participants acted queer and did not exhibit any heterosexual behaviour. Therefore, even though they expressed being out more often than previous studies have shown (Folkhälsomyndigheten, 2020), the fact that they experienced bi-negativity and used strategies to counter it goes to show just how much it permeates society.

An openminded attitude to sexuality and identity was experienced by the participants as a positive trait related to their bisexuality. Openness has furthermore been shown as a more prominent personality trait in bisexual individuals compared to homosexual and heterosexual people (Allen & Robson, 2020). On the other hand, previous research regarding sexuality framed bisexual people's openminded attitude as relating to higher sex drive (Herbenick et al., 2010; Lorenz, 2019). Since higher sex drive has been presented as a possible stereotype meant to paint bisexuals as more likely to be unfaithful or duplicitous (Yoshino, 2009), future research should examine how sex drive is measured and related to general openness in order to examine these aspects further, since harmful stereotypes may affect how data is interpreted. For example, bisexual people may be more open to both themselves and their partners using sex toys in a study by Herbenick et al. (2020) due to their generally higher openness personality wise, rather than relating to a higher sex drive. However, such relations require further research.

In accordance with the minority stress framework (Meyer, 2003), the experiences of external bi-negativity can be described as distal stressors, which were internalised by the participants and became proximal stressors. Overall, participants described their bisexuality

as tied to identity, often associated with an internal sense of freeness and identity pride. However, they also expressed an internal pressure to speak and dress in a certain way, report experiences with both genders, as well as drop breadcrumb clues about their sexual identity. These proximal stressors were tied to distal stressors of bisexual erasure that arose when the participants' view of their bisexual identity came into conflict with those around them. In other words, the people around the participants' preoccupation with monosexuality conflicted with the participants' own view on their bisexual identity. Perhaps this conflict could explain the participants' ambivalent attitude to their own internalised pressure, since the internalised stressors conflict with their personal values regarding identity. This would explain how the participants both rarely wavered in their identity, explicitly positioned themselves against monosexual norms, and experienced confusion and shame in relation to their bisexuality. In conclusion, their identity pride might have conflicted with their internalised bi-negativity.

### **Gender Roles**

Nearly all participants had experience of sex with both men and women, which gave them a unique perspective on gender roles. Bisexual people are positioned in a way that gives them an opportunity to view the heterosexual matrix from multiple perspectives due to them being able to move between spaces. Not all participants described gendered differences in their sexual experiences but instead described differences to be more related to their partner's personality. However, when descriptions of gendered differences were brought up, they were often in line with heteronormative ideas of gender. For example, that relationships with women tended to be of an emotionally intimate character, whereas relationships with men were of a sexual character. This difference is very much in line with binary views of gender: men are active and sexual, and women are demure and non-sexual. Gender norms also affected same-gender sexual relationships, with physical size seen as a reason to take on a masculine role in sex among women.

Even though the participants spoke at large of freedom in their bisexuality, they were surprisingly binary in their ways of understanding their gender, sexuality, and sexual interactions with others. This can support the ideas that heterosexual norms and gender socialization have a stronger effect on sexual satisfaction than sexual orientation alone (Henderson et al., 2009). Some theories have also posited that bisexual people are gender-blind, which has received critique due to lack of support from the bisexual community, who rather described themselves to the contrary (Yoshino, 2009). Our results seem to suggest that bisexual people are not all gender-blind, and instead our participants seemed to be drawn to multiple genders and described some type of differences in relation to different genders.

Tentatively, this could be speculated to be a difference between bisexual people and other pluri-sexual groups such as pansexual people, but this needs further research.

Some participants described differences between genders to be that sex with the same gender was freer because it was not as obvious to apply heterosexual frameworks to those interactions. Some of the women participants who first had sexual interactions with other women described that experience as priming them to be less affected by norms in their sex lives later. Some even described an experience of this freedom being transferable to later experiences with men. This is in line with research showing queer sexual scripts as more flexible (Ekholm et al., 2021). On one hand, the participants oftentimes related their freedom to being more than that of heterosexual people, which is in line with research that theorises that the flexibility arises due to the oppositional stance in regards to heteronormativity (Ekholm et al., 2021). On the other hand, bisexuality seemed to grant a unique type of freedom that only individuals who move in-between relationships of the same and opposite genders can access. In other words, the participants could transfer the queer sexual scripts to their relationships with partners of the same gender, making them more exploratory and playful.

Although heteronormative scripts were often described as the opposite of free queer sexual scripts, it was also clear that heterosexual scripts provided a clear framework that could be followed when the participants were unsure in new sexual situations. Thus, the queer and heteronormative scripts seemed to occasionally come in conflict with each other. For example, even the participants that were critical of the norm of orgasm being a vital part of sex, still described it as disruptive if climax did not come easy for them or their partners. One could interpret this as their queer sexual scripts, which facilitated open-mindedness, conflicting with heteronormative scripts of orgasms and gendered sexual roles being vital to sexual satisfaction. Of course, all people are affected by normative sexual scripts, but the participants seemed to live in accordance with opposing scripts. Future studies should therefore further examine how queer sexual scripts and heteronormative scripts are experienced by bisexual people, and moreover how they negotiate and live by them.

### **Bisexual Men**

A majority of the literature on bisexual sexuality, especially done within the field of sexual satisfaction research, is done on bisexual women. One of the aims of this study was to explore bisexual people as a whole and heterogeneous group. In the current study there were three participants who were men, one of which was transgender. These three men had diverse lived experiences in terms of age, earlier romantic and sexual relationships, levels of



internalised homonegativity, and gender identity. The data from these men was rich and there were some similarities and some differences in how they related to their sexuality. There were also many similarities between the bisexual men and women in the current study and we tentatively suggest that bisexual people could be investigated more as a single group. As can be seen in the majority of our themes, there are quotes from both the female and male participants, which backs our claim that there is significant overlap in experiences.

However, there were qualitative differences between the men and women in how much their gender directly affected their sexuality. At least two of the men spontaneously discussed ways in which their sexuality affected their idea of themselves as men. This can be understood through the works of Bosson et al. (2014) on precarious manhood. The theory states that manhood is something that must be earned and constantly proved. Womanhood is more often seen as an ascribed trait that is stable regardless of behaviour, whereas for men, their manliness is based on what they do and how they act, primarily in terms of avoiding acting in a way that is feminine (Bosson et al., 2014). The motivation for not acting feminine is argued to be the material and social gains in status that come from being seen as a “real man” (Bosson et al., 2014). This is reflected in how participant 1 described that there were ways he was allowed to act when he identified as homosexual that he could not do otherwise. He described that when he consequently dated women those behaviours were no longer allowed anymore, because his gender came into play in a heterosexual dynamic. In a way, one could say that manhood is like bisexuality by both needing to be constantly defended and proved through everyday behaviours. This also further demonstrated the heterosexual matrix; because he was dating a woman, he automatically had to show that “straight-ness” in his behaviour and gender expression for the woman to be attracted to him.

In other words, gender was a very important dimension for at least two of the men in our study, and they described how their manhood needed to be constantly upheld and that the social consequences for not doing so could be harsh. The women in our study did not relate their sexuality as much to the validity of their own gender; however, this could be due to us not explicitly asking questions about it. Due to our methodology, it is impossible to draw conclusions that explicitly compare the men with the women. Thus, we can draw no conclusions about the amount of overlap. However, in the reflexive process of theme building there was no need for exclusion of one gender over the other in the building of the current results and instead many similarities. We suggest that future research should ask more explicitly about individuals’ experiences of the relationship between their gender and

sexuality, to further develop knowledge about how different gender roles affect bisexual individuals.

### **Strengths and Limitations**

To assess the strengths and weaknesses of the current study we will use the seven quality criteria put forth by Elliott et al. (1999). One strength of this study was how critical realism and reflexivity were used cohesively as an important dimension of reflexive thematic analysis throughout the study, from the research question to the discussion (Elliott et al., 1999). This methodology allowed us to stay close to the data and respond to what came up, for example, updating and broadening the research question to include all facets of the participants' descriptions of their sexuality. Previous research on bisexual people has either focused on bisexual identity or sexual satisfaction. To our knowledge, no previous study has connected these as facets of the broader concept sexuality in a bisexual population. By keeping the research question broad, the data could be presented in a nuanced yet cohesive manner and represent our participants' experiences more accurately. Therefore, we urge future researchers to consider that sexuality encompasses multiple facets, and that limiting oneself to only one can negatively affect representation of the data.

Another criterion is describing and situating the study's sample (Elliott et al., 1999). This study attempted to balance the anonymity of the participants with presenting demographics. In the interviews, we collected the information we found relevant for the research question, that is, gender identity, relationship status and age. Furthermore, we interpreted based on all interview material that all participants except one had experiences of physical intimacy (kissing, touching, sex) with both men and women. There is no literature to the knowledge of this study that has mapped out how common this experience is in for bisexual people at large. The participants were heterogenous regarding life experiences and represented different ages and genders. However, the sample was homogenous regarding ethnic background and cis-genderedness. Furthermore, a vast majority of the participants were out to their support system. This begs the question of how transferable their experience with sexuality is compared to a larger bisexual population who are generally not out (Folkhälsomyndigheten, 2020). It should lastly be noted that the study was carried out in Sweden, and it is uncertain how transferable the results of this study are to a non-Swedish context, partly due to how sexual scripts may vary culturally between societies (Simon & Gagnon, 1984). Even so, since the participants had diverse life experiences, the sample could be generally regarded as transferable to a larger population.

Both quantitative and qualitative research has been used to map the research field in this study, which is in line with Elliott et al. (1999) recommendations. Elliott et al. (1999) also stipulates that the analysis should be grounded in examples from the data, in other words descriptive and rich quotes, which this study has achieved by representing the participants' experiences with vivid quotes throughout the results. A qualitative analysis of high quality should also present the data in a nuanced yet comprehensive manner (Elliott et al., 1999), which was achieved by including contrasting subthemes to add depth to the analysis. Contradicting or opposing statements by participants were furthermore used to present a rich portrayal of their experiences by finding the common ground between these at higher levels of abstraction.

Finally, Elliott et al. (1999) stated that authors should situate themselves in relation to the study. Researchers can either identify in accordance with the sample and be inside researchers, or not identify with the sample and be outside researchers (Braun & Clarke, 2022). In the recruitment and writing process, we have refrained from going into depth on whether we are researchers who identify in accordance with our sample or not, and the lack of transparency could be regarded as a limitation. However, in the process of conducting this study, we discussed in depth how our different experiences and identities may affect our interests and interpretations, in accordance with our reflexive approach.

In conclusion, this study's greatest strength lies in the methodological conceptualisation of the themes, using reflexive thematic analysis to its fullest, and our broad exploration of the sexuality of our participants. The experiences of our participants were in line with a lot of previous research and there was breadth in their descriptions of their lived experiences, showing support for transferability. However, our participants were in many ways similar to each other, in their expressions of outness, internalised bi-negativity and previous sexual experiences. Due to Swedish praxis, information about for example ethnicity and income were not gathered, which makes it difficult to situate our sample fully. The greatest limitation also has to do with the breadth of the current study, which created difficulty in comprehensively exploring and discussing all aspects of the results and leading to a concise conclusion. We have attempted to contextualise bisexual people's experience, which is missing in the current literature. However, the problem with exploratory research and contextualisation is that reality is complicated and doing research with both breadth and specificity is a constant challenge.

## **Implications and Future Research**

This study shows the importance of acknowledging and validating people who have a bisexual identity in clinical practice. It is important that clinicians do not perpetrate harmful stereotypes about bisexuality and instead acknowledge its existence. As our participants have said in their own words, they want to be believed, heard, and not seen as a phase or as non-existent. Furthermore, it is of utmost importance that clinicians understand the specific kind of double discrimination that bisexual people can be subject to. It is, for example, not necessarily always helpful for bisexual people to suggest coming out or joining an LGBTQ+ community group. One must be sensitive to the feelings of rejection that bisexual people can experience from even within the LGBTQ+ community.

As previously stated, the participants in the current study were largely out to their support system. They furthermore did not express their relationships with their partners being negatively affected by their outness, as opposed to findings from previous research (Mark et al., 2020). Further research is therefore advised to explore the mechanisms behind coming out in bisexual individuals to nuance and deepen the understanding of the positive as well as the negative aspects of the outness experience. It could be interesting for future research to explore a possible connection between outness and sexual experience. This should not be done to prove validity of bisexuality but rather to explore how outness correlates with sexual experience. For example, the current participants were mostly out to their closest social networks and nearly all had experience of physical intimacy with both men and women. It could be theorised that some people could feel more comfortable being out if they know they could prove it if they had to. To our knowledge, there is no data regarding the relationship between behavioural history in accordance with stereotypes and level of outness. Additionally, future research should examine how bisexual people negotiate between identity pride and the fear of being rejected by members of the LGBTQ+ community, and whether community is more often found with other bisexual individuals rather than other members of the community.

Our participants' experiences show nuanced findings regarding sexual scripts, bisexual erasure, and how they related to gender roles. A commonality was how bisexual people seem to live according to contradictory scripts, following both heteronormative and queer sexual scripts. Similarly, gender roles could be inferred to affect bisexual people in a unique way, since sexual orientation is inextricably tied to gender. For example, bisexual men may relate to gender roles in unique ways due to precarious manhood, although this requires further research. Furthermore, as previous studies as well as the current study imply, proving one's

bisexuality seems to be an aspect of erasure and should therefore be incorporated into theories regarding bisexual erasure. Altogether, bisexual people may not only face unique stressors in accordance with the minority stress model, but they also seem to be granted unique opportunities to move between worlds and therefore relate to societal norms and scripts differently compared to other populations. Tentatively, this could be why research regarding sexual satisfaction is contradictory within the research field, as it may both contribute to increased distress as well as increased satisfaction. Bisexual people could therefore not only be regarded as an especially vulnerable population but also a valuable resource, since they have the opportunity to experience norms that other sexual minority groups cannot. Their experiences could thus be conceptualised as a strength that other people can learn from. Further research is needed to examine all the aforementioned dynamic more closely.

Normative questionnaires are often used in quantitative sexual satisfaction research on all populations, which for example define satisfaction in terms of orgasm and sexual function. Based on our findings this does not seem to be a useful conceptualisation for bisexual people. This is in line with McClelland (2010) claims that this may be true for many other populations as well, for example since orgasms do not seem to correlate with experienced sexual satisfaction. Applying normative concepts to a bisexual population can further perpetuate harmful stereotypes as well as bisexual erasure through not highlighting problems that are specific to bisexual people. Indeed, bisexual people share many experiences with other groups within the LGBTQ+ community as they also are sexual minorities. In some cases, there are reason to group these groups together. However, it is important that future researchers think thoroughly about whether one should group bisexual people with other populations. Bisexual individuals seem to face a specific double discrimination, leading to unique proximal and distal stressors that can affect psychological and sexual wellbeing. Seeing as bisexual people have specific lived experiences and a special position in relation to both heterosexuality as well as the LGBTQ+ community, future research should aim to focus more on bisexual people as their own group. Not only is it important to understand the specific stressors faced by bisexual people, it is also important to research the ways in which bisexual peoples' resiliency shines through, in order to find ways to help them as well as other minority groups. One cannot understand bisexual people's sexual satisfaction without situating them in context and gathering data on their internal and external experience of their sexual orientation, both the positive and the negative.

## **Conclusions**

In summary, how bisexual individuals experience their sexuality cannot be fully understood without a broad understanding and contextualisation of their lives. With this study we have attempted to add to the existing literature both within the fields of bisexual identity as well as sexual satisfaction. We have attempted to show, through the breadth of our research question, that in order to understand how bisexual individuals experience sexual satisfaction, identity and sexual identity, one must also understand the various factors that contribute to them feeling free as well as inhibited in their lives in general. The overlap between this study's themes illustrates that identity, sexual identity, attitudes, norms and sexual satisfaction are indeed not entirely separate and goes to show that one cannot focus on only one dimension of sexuality to truly understand bisexual individuals' experience in these matters.

Therefore, future research should aim to expand theories regarding sexual scripts, bisexual erasure, the heterosexual matrix, and the minority stress model to the bisexual population's unique ways in which they negotiate between specific stressors and contradicting norms. Furthermore, findings regarding bisexual people's identity, sexual satisfaction and wellbeing should be contextualised to the specific type of discrimination that they face, so that directions for health care can be more carefully crafted in accordance with bisexual people's needs. Finally, clinical practitioners should take double discrimination into consideration when treating bisexual people and be attentive to how rejection may come from both heterosexual people and the LGBTQ+ community.

### **Authors' contributions and responsibilities**

Veronika Kathi and Victoria Udy have written the current study within the research project "Factors affecting sexual satisfaction: An exploratory and cross-cultural examination of sexual and aesthetic ideals and norms, self-compassion and body awareness" at Lund University, department of psychology. Both authors have formulated the research question and designed the study's methodology under the supervision of Amanda Klysing, who acted as main supervisor for the study, and Ingela Steij Stålbrand, who acted as co-supervisor. The data in the thesis was collected, interpreted, and analysed by the authors, and the workload was split equally during these steps. When writing the thesis, both authors contributed in equal amounts to all parts of the essay and therefore share equal responsibility for the analysis and conclusions presented.

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## Appendix A



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# ÄR DU BISEXUELL?

**Vi söker individer som identifierar sig som bisexuella och är intresserade av att dela med sig av sina tankar och erfarenheter av sexuell tillfredsställelse.**

Vi är nyfikna på alla typer av upplevelser, positiva såsom negativa, självsex såsom sex med andra.

Studien utförs av psykologstudenter Victoria Udy och Veronika Kathi och ingår i ett större forskningsprojekt som undersöker sexuell tillfredsställelse i olika målgrupper i Sverige.

Deltagande innebär en intervju på ca en timme i februari, antingen via videolänk eller på Lunds universitet. Studien är godkänd av Etikprövningsmyndigheten. Alla deltagare kommer vara anonyma i uppsatsen. Vid frågor, hör gärna av dig till oss via [bisexuellstudie@gmail.com](mailto:bisexuellstudie@gmail.com). Vid ytterligare frågor kan du även kontakta ansvarig forskare Amanda Klysing [amanda.klysing@psy.lu.se](mailto:amanda.klysing@psy.lu.se)

### Låter det som något för dig?

Intresseanmäl dig genom att kontakta oss via mejl eller skanna QR-kod, så får du vidare info.

**[bisexuellstudie@gmail.com](mailto:bisexuellstudie@gmail.com)**



## Appendix B

### BLANKETT FÖR SAMTYCKE

**Titel på projektet: *Faktorer som påverkar den sexuella tillfredställelsen: En explorativ och tvärkulturell undersökning av sexuella och estetiska ideal, självmedkänsla och kroppsmedvetenhet***

**Forskningsledare:** Amanda Klysing

Jag bekräftar att jag har tagit del av och förstått informationen om intervjustudien och att jag har fått möjlighet att ställa frågor.

Jag bekräftar härmed att jag har haft tillräckligt med tid för att bestämma mig för huruvida jag vill vara med i studien eller inte.

Jag förstår att mitt deltagande är frivilligt och att jag när som helst kan avbryta min medverkan utan att ange något som helst skäl.

Jag samtycker härmed till deltagande i studien

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Deltagares namn (textas) och datum

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Underskrift

#### ***Kommentarer eller frågor kopplat till forskningen***

Om du har några som helst frågor eller kommentarer kan du ta upp dem med forskaren eller maila: Amanda Klysing, Fil. Dr. i psykologi; [amanda.klysing@psy.lu.se](mailto:amanda.klysing@psy.lu.se)

Ansvariga psykologkandidater för studien är Veronika Kathi och Victoria Udy. Det går bra att kontakta oss på [bisexuellstudie@gmail.com](mailto:bisexuellstudie@gmail.com).



## Appendix C



### **Vill du delta i en studie som undersöker sexuell tillfredsställelse hos bisexuella personer i Sverige?**

Du har fått denna information eftersom du har visat intresse för projektet. Projektet genomförs under våren 2024.

Du som identifierar dig som bisexuell och är över 18 år kan delta i den här studien.

#### **Hur går studien till?**

Först utförs semistrukturerade intervjuer som sedan kommer att transkriberas, avidentifieras och sedan analyseras med kvalitativa analysmetoder. Intervjuerna kan äga rum antingen digitalt via videolänk eller på plats på Lunds universitet. Det är upp till dig som deltagare hur du vill genomföra intervjun utifrån dina behov. Under intervjuerna kommer vi ställa frågor om dina tankar och erfarenheter av sexuell tillfredsställelse, identitet samt sexuella ideal.

#### **Frivillighet**

Deltagande i vår studie är helt frivilligt och man får avbryta sitt deltagande när som helst under studiens gång utan att behöva ange anledning till sitt avbrytande. Du kan även avbryta ditt deltagande efter att intervjun genomförts genom att kontakta oss på [bisexuellstudie@gmail.com](mailto:bisexuellstudie@gmail.com). Då tar vi bort all din data från studien. Innan intervjun kommer du att lämna ett skriftligt samtycke om du vill delta i studien.

#### **Finns det risker med att delta?**

Ämnena som behandlas i denna studie är känsliga och personliga. Därför kommer data att avidentifieras redan under transkriberingen för att skydda samtliga deltagares identitet. Uppgifter som kan knyta deltagare till sin intervju samt inspelningarna från intervjuerna kommer att förvaras på en säker plats. Endast vi två som utför intervjuerna kommer att ha tillgång till identifierbar information. Därför bedömer vi att risken för sekretessbrott är låg.

Vi har format intervjuguiden för att på ett så respektfullt sätt som möjligt kunna fråga om sexuella och relationella erfarenheter. Dock kan dessa ämnen väcka viss obehag eller negativa känslor hos

vissa deltagare. Det kommer därför vara helt fritt vad och hur mycket du vill dela av dina erfarenheter och tankar, och du kommer att kunna hoppa över frågor utan negativa konsekvenser.

Om du har funderingar efter intervjun är du välkommen att prata om detta med intervjuaren eller forskningsansvarig (se kontaktuppgifter nedan). Om du upplever att du mår dåligt eller behöver någon utomstående att prata med efter intervjun kan du kontakta Anna Pardo ([anna.pardo@lundspanykologihus.se](mailto:anna.pardo@lundspanykologihus.se), 0738-397108), som har stor kompetens och vana att arbeta med sexualitetsfrågor och är helt fristående från projektet. Läs mer om Anna Pardos kompetens och kontaktuppgifter här: <https://www.lundspanykologihus.se/personal.html>.

### **Finns det fördelar med att delta?**

Många upplever att det känns givande att få tid att reflektera kring dessa frågor i en trygg miljö tillsammans med någon annan. Det kan därför bidra till ökad förståelse för sig själv. Det kan även kännas meningsfullt att bidra till ökad kunskap som kan förbättra hälsa och förutsättningar för bisexuella som grupp.

### **Esättning**

Ingen ersättning erbjuds för att delta i studien.

### **Data hantering**

Din intervjudata kommer att avidentifieras vid transkriberingen och inför analysen. Den kommer endast vara tillgänglig för oss som utför studien samt de ansvariga forskarna inom det större forskningsprojektet som studien ingår i. Den avidentifierade datan kan begäras ut av andra forskare med behörighet och av valida skäl. Dina personuppgifter som vi samlar in ska endast användas av oss som skriver uppsatsen. Informationen kommer att hanteras enligt GDPR och vi kommer endast att kontakta dig då det är direkt relevant för ditt deltagande i studien.

Efter transkriberingen av intervjun kan du få möjlighet att ta del av din egen transkribering innan den analyseras vidare ifall du vill lämna ytterligare synpunkter eller tydliggöra innehållet.

### **Bakgrund och syfte**

Vi är två studenter som går tionde terminen på psykologprogrammet. Vi skriver vår masteruppsats inom ett större forskningsprojekt som undersöker sexuell tillfredsställelse i olika målgrupper i Sverige. Sexuell hälsa ses av bland annat Folkhälsomyndigheten som en förutsättning för människors allmänna hälsa, och ett tillfredsställande sexliv är en viktig del av sexuell hälsa. Vår studie ämnar att undersöka sexuell tillfredsställelse hos personer som identifierar sig som bisexuella

då gruppen är underrepresenterad i nuvarande forskning. Genom att delta i studien kan man därför bidra till information som kan förbättra hälsa hos bisexuella.

Syftet med studien är att kvalitativt utforska bisexuellas upplevelse av sexuell tillfredsställelse med intervjuer, så att vi med hjälp av den informationen kan forma en tematisk förståelse utifrån deltagarnas egna ord. Studien kommer även undersöka vilka samhällsnormer som blir relevanta i deltagarnas upplevelse av sexuell tillfredsställelse.

#### **Vill du läsa studien när den är klar?**

Skicka ett mail till [bisexuellstudie@gmail.com](mailto:bisexuellstudie@gmail.com) om du vill få studien skickad till dig när den är färdig och godkänd av universitetet. Studien kommer även att laddas upp på LUP student papers efter att den är godkänd.

#### **Ansvariga forskare och kontaktuppgifter**

Forskningshuvudman för studien är Lunds universitet. Studien utförs på Institutionen för psykologi. Om du har frågor, synpunkter eller vill ha mer information är du välkommen att kontakta följande.

Amanda Klysing är den ansvariga forskare för masteruppsatsen. Amanda går att kontakta på [amanda.klysing@psy.lu.se](mailto:amanda.klysing@psy.lu.se).

Dataskyddsombudet hanterar ärenden kring dataskyddsförordningen och går att kontakta på [dataskyddsombud@lu.se](mailto:dataskyddsombud@lu.se).

Ansvariga psykologkandidater för studien är Veronika Kathi och Victoria Udy. Det går att kontakta oss på [bisexuellstudie@gmail.com](mailto:bisexuellstudie@gmail.com).



## Appendix D

### Del 1: Introduktion

Innan vi sätter igång, skulle du vilja berätta lite om dig själv? Vilka pronomen föredrar du?

Varför sökte du till denna studie?

Vad tänker du på när jag säger sexualitet?

Vad tänker du själv är viktigt kopplat till din sexualitet?

Du har svarat på vår annons för att du identifierar dig som bisexuell, vilken roll spelar din sexuella läggning i ditt liv? Vad betyder det för dig att vara en bisexuell person?

- *Kan du komma ihåg när du började tänka på dig själv som bisexuell? Hur såg den processen ut för dig?*
  - *Vad kände du? Skam, stolthet, rädsla, glädje?*
- Hur känner du om din sexuella läggning just nu, känns den bekväm för dig eller upplever du några svårigheter med att identifiera dig som bisexuell?

Vet alla personer i din omgivning om att du är bisexuell eller är det något du bara sagt till vissa personer?

- Behöver man komma ut? Vem i ditt liv vet om din sexualitet? Fördelar/nackdelar?

Hur ser ditt sexliv ut just nu? Är du nöjd med det? Varför/varför inte?

- Relationsstatus? Vilka typer av relationer? Sexuella erfarenheter?
- Har det alltid varit såsom du har beskrivit det nu? Fluktuerat?

### Del 2: Sexuell tillfredsställelse som begrepp

En del av sexualiteten handlar om den sexuella funktionen. När jag säger "sexuell funktion", vad tänker du på då?

Hur skulle du beskriva din sexuella funktion? Beskriv aspekter som inte fungerar. Beskriv aspekter som fungerar.

- Kan du berätta om en situation/senast när det inte fungerade? Vad hände, vad kände och tänkte du, vad gjorde du?
- Kan du berätta om en situation/senast när det fungerade? Vad hände, vad kände och tänkte du, vad gjorde du?

Vad tänker du på när jag säger sexuell tillfredsställelse?

När du har sex, vad i den upplevelsen bidrar till att det blir tillfredställande? Om du var helt tillfredsställd med ditt sexliv, hur hade det sett ut då?

Kan du beskriva en situation där du kände dig tillfredsställd? Hur visste du det? Vad tror du bidrog till att du var tillfredsställd? (fysisk, mentalt, känslomässig, socialt, kontexten, relationen)

- Vad tror du är anledningen till att situationen poppade upp och inte någon annan? Vad är det som är speciellt/annorlunda med just den situationen?

Vad hindrar/försvårar tillfredsställelse för dig? Vad har gjort upplevelser mindre tillfredsställande?

- Hur har du hanterat svårigheter som du har upplevt? Vilka strategier har du använt för att hantera dessa?

### **Del 3: Normer**

Upplever du att det finns förväntningar på dig avseende att följa de sexuella normer/script som finns i samhället? Har du några exempel på hur det kan se ut för dig?

- Vilka förväntningar blir relevanta i ditt sexliv? Utifrån? Inifrån? På andra? På dig? Upplever du att det finns något som begränsar något din sexuella frihet? (be om exempel)
  - Hur ofta man bör ha sex? Hur bör man ha sex? När bör man ha sex? Med vem/vilka? Varför bör man ha sex?

När du tänker på de sexuella erfarenheter du haft, har du känt att din bisexualitet har påverkat dina möjligheter till tillfredsställelse med andra eller med dig själv?

- Normer? Vad är speciellt med att vara bisexuell kring sexualitet? Något unikt? Någon specifik svårighet? Något som underlättar?
- Har t ex dina sexpartners uttryckt några tankar om din sexualitet? Har du upplevt dig sexuellt fri eller som att det finns begränsningar som stör din möjlighet till njutning?

### **Del 4: Avrundande frågor**

Är det något som är specifikt för den bisexuella erfarenheten som du önskar att fler förstod? (vänner, sjukvården, familj, främlingar, forskare, etc.)

- Är det någonting som du tycker är viktig för folk att veta är viktigt att tänka på när man undersöker en bisexuell population? Eller träffar bisexuella personer? (Vad önskar du att forskarna tog hänsyn till gällande bisexuella personer?)

Är det någonting annat som du tänker är viktigt som du vill dela med dig av?

Finns det något du vill fråga om den här studien?