

# **How do young people developing minority sexual identities construct 'sexual identity'?**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Sexual identity development is understood as an important task of identity formation during adolescence (Erikson, 1959, 1962). Models of minority sexual identity development (e.g. Cass, 1979; Troiden, 1989) have traditionally presented a series of linear stages from early awareness and confusion to later acceptance, pride and integration into an overall sense of self. However, such models have been criticised for relying on the retrospective recall of adults, lack of validity beyond their samples of primarily gay men, and privileging of identities that do not challenge heteronormative power structures (Eliaison & Schope, 2007).

To address these shortcomings, it was decided to explore sexual identity formation with a diverse group of young people. 15 young people attending LGBT youth groups, and aged between 13 and 17, participated in one of two focus groups, an individual interview, and / or an online discussion forum. Using a critical realist epistemology, a discourse analytic approach inspired by the work of Michel Foucault was employed to analyse the young people's talk. Four discursive 'sites' in the constructions of 'sexual identity' were identified: 'Identity development or identity positioning?', 'Being normal' (with love constructed as the same for all, but gay/lesbian sex constructed as different), 'Rainbow sheep' (e.g. social isolation), and 'Coherence and stability' of identities.

Theoretical stages of identity development were recast as subject positions made available through discourse and material conditions; rather than simply psychological, they are inherently social. A deployment of 'equality' was found in the construction of love as being the same for all regardless of sexual identity, tying minority sexual identities into a heteronormative framework of romantic relationships. Heteronormative constructions of sex cast gay and lesbian sex as 'different' but also limited the availability of alternative views of sex outside this frame. Implications for research, service provision and clinical psychology practice are discussed.

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## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to the memory of my dear friend Christian Thiele, whose time was cut short just as he was finding his place in the world. Despite his own fair share of struggles, he always had an infectious smile, especially whenever he managed to bring conversation around to his favourite topic of *Winnie the Pooh*. He would have made a wonderful, compassionate and inspiring psychologist – as well as being a truly fabulous friend.

*Christian – auch wenn Du nicht mehr bei uns bist, lebst Du weiter in unseren Herzen.*

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

First and foremost, I would like to express my sincerest appreciation to the young people who took part in this study for their time, thoughtfulness and passion in sharing their experiences with me. As well as having been a pleasure to meet with each of them, they have also widened my horizons and challenged me to rethink some of my previously taken-for-granted ideas. I would also like to thank the managers and youth workers at the LGBT youth groups I visited, who not only were incredibly gracious with their time in supporting me to meet with the young people they work with but also helped me both to develop the project from its early beginnings and to address later challenges as they arose.

My heartfelt thanks also go to Neil Rees for his support, guidance and supervision throughout the research process. This study has grown and developed from his initial idea and I hope that I have done this justice.

Finally, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my friends, family and colleagues for their support and encouragement throughout this process. In particular I thank my mum, Anne, for seeing me through many a fraught telephone call when she has patiently listened to my stresses and frustrations and calmly brought me back to reason.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

“Strip away the fear  
Underneath it’s all the same love  
About time that we raised up”

- *Same Love* by Macklemore and Ryan Lewis, featuring Mary Lambert  
(Haggerty & Lewis, 2012, track 5)

In a previous draft, this chapter began by quoting from Lady Gaga’s *Born This Way* (Germanotta & Laursen, 2011, track 2). I argued the song reflected how current discursive positions available to British adolescents frequently site sexuality within a framework of biological determinism as a basis for emancipation and equality. Furthermore, I noted how the *Born This Way* music video (Germanotta & Herbert, 2011) presented a more complex discursive picture with anti-essentialist visual performances challenging the concepts of discrete categories of gender and sexuality, in stark contrast to the lyrical supposition of innate identities. I linked this to Savin-Williams’ (2005) suggestion that young people may be starting to eschew binary constructions of gender and sexual identity. Indeed, this was a discursive feature present in the talk of some of the young people in this study.

However, listening to these young people I realised that questions of causality were rarely directly addressed in their discussions. Talk of being ‘born this way’ highlights difference; rather than participants arguing for equality from this position, an alternative discourse of ‘our love is the same’ was frequently drawn upon. Thus, the achievement of equality becomes not a moral question but a logical imperative within a framework of civil and human rights. Quoting from *Same Love* (Haggerty & Lewis, 2012, track 5), a song calling for marriage equality from this civil rights position and which was discussed in one of the focus groups for this study, therefore appeared a fitting introduction.

This study analyses the various ways young people developing minority sexual identities construct identities such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, pansexual or queer in their contributions to two focus groups, an individual interview and an online discussion forum. In doing so, I explore how certain discursive constructions are made more or less possible by the wider social and institutional contexts, and the various subject positions and practices that are made available.

### **1.1. Literature Search**

The literature search had a number of related aims:

- to review the academic literature in relation to sexual identity development, and particularly minority sexual identities;
- to review recent research related to the experiences of minority sexual adolescents, including psychological and social outcomes;
- to provide an historical context for the analysis of the data in this study for how certain constructions of sexual identity have become possible over time.

Thus, an overview could be sought of the concepts and theories relevant to this research, as well as the clinical relevance of understanding minority sexual identity development in adolescence. Given the relative paucity of previous studies where researchers have directly had conversations with adolescents about sexuality, a major focus in the review of the literature is to situate the present study within the context of the development of academic theories of sexuality and sexual identity.

Searches were performed using two online databases (PsycINFO and CINAHL Plus), which focus on journals relevant to psychology and allied health professions. Results were limited to peer-reviewed academic journal articles published since 2000. For CINAHL, only results for which an abstract was available were included. The following search terms were used:



- LGBT<sup>1</sup> AND adolescence;
- LGBT AND identity;
- LGBT AND discourse analysis.

Additionally, the British Psychological Society's recent *Guidelines and literature review for psychologists working therapeutically with sexual and gender minority clients* (BPS, 2012) was used to identify further relevant references. Publications found using the above methods were also used to identify other relevant references (e.g. the wider theoretical literature on 'identity'; articles published before 2000). Key articles or publications – mentioned by several different authors – or those addressing topics closely relevant to this research were examined.

## **1.2. Researcher's Position**

Qualitative research calls for researchers to adopt a position of reflexivity (Burr, 2003) with researchers often conceptualised as productive agents. However, as a researcher exploring an issue close to my own experiences, I am particularly aware of how the *doing* of this research also influences my own identity and sense of self in a complex, interactive process. Neatly summarising this complexity in a few paragraphs is an impossible task; nonetheless, I shall attempt to introduce some of the influences upon this research and my own roles and identities.

One of my earliest desires with this project was to avoid the well-worn terrain of academic investigation into experiences of 'disclosure'. Repeated retellings of the 'Tale of Coming-Out' at times feel to be more definitional of my experiences as a gay man than the original angst-filled experiences of my youth. It is with weary, acquiescent frustration that I repeat and recreate this performance each time to inquisitive acquaintances, friends and colleagues. Indeed, I have previously bemoaned the "eternal preoccupation" with coming out as the defining experience of LGBT people (Bristow, 2012). It was therefore with a strong sense

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<sup>1</sup> Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender: this construction currently enjoys wide currency in the UK, although the alignment of sexual and gender identities has been contested (Serano, 2007; Wilchins, 1997).

of irony when first setting fingers to keyboard I should feel compelled to produce a version of the coming-out confessional on these pages. However, an autobiographical “who I told what when and why” would not necessarily provide a clear sense of what “being gay” means to me currently. By recounting this anecdote I wish not only to draw attention to the dominance of coming-out discourses, but also to acknowledge my own ambivalence towards this aspect of minority sexual experience. Therefore ‘coming-out’ could be both something I privilege, and also a potential blind spot.

I have also been interested in how the young people’s discussions in this research might differ from how I remember my own understandings and experiences in adolescence. As a teenager in the late 1990s and early 2000s (from a White British, liberal and urban middle-class background), part of the tension in my own identity development was that the relatively discrete categories available to me did not seem to fit satisfactorily but alternatives were lacking. For example, the culturally available script of how to do ‘gay’ was camp and flamboyant, yet this did not sit well with other aspects of my identity such as my musical tastes. When I saw Tillmans’ (2002) photograph of two ‘Indie’ - looking men kissing it was almost a revelation that it was indeed possible for these different identities to coincide. Furthermore, ‘lesbian’, ‘gay’, ‘bisexual’ and ‘transgender’ appeared to me to exist in relatively discrete, albeit neighbouring silos. However, whilst consulting with young people ahead of recruiting to this study, it was clear that they readily talked in terms of complex identities such as the differences between bisexual and pansexual and my question to a young person about whether there was such a thing as a ‘gay taste in music’ was met with some confusion.

Whilst writing this research in my final year of training, I have been working in a service for gender-variant children and young people. Perhaps of note is that in this context, it is the adult professionals – myself included – who are usually more interested in postmodern conceptions of gender, whereas the young people accessing the service more typically view gender in binary terms (Wren, 2014). Working in this service has challenged my own identities and positions in ways I had not foreseen. For example, I have previously seen myself as belonging to a

broad LGBT alliance, which although not homogenous is united by similar political aims, and experiences of challenging gender norms. However, in this professional role, I have at times felt positioned as standing in opposition to rather than alongside these young clients: as a cisgender<sup>2</sup> professional occupying the position of gatekeeper to biological interventions.

### **1.3. A Changing Socio-political Context**

Foucault (1976) views sexuality as culturally and historically determined, subject to changing social and moral judgements. The British Psychological Society (BPS) encourages psychologists to “recognise that attitudes towards sexuality and gender are located in a changing socio-political context, and to reflect on their own understanding of these concepts” (2012, p. 6). Indeed, the British Social Attitudes survey has charted a fundamental shift in UK attitudes towards same-sex sexual activity between adults since the 1980s (Park & Rhead, 2013). In 2012, 22% of people believed homosexuality is always wrong (compared with 64% in 1987 at the height of public concern about HIV/AIDS), with younger respondents expressing progressively more tolerant views (p. 16). However, attitudes differ widely across socio-economic backgrounds with 47% of people with no formal educational qualifications still viewing homosexuality as ‘always wrong’ in 2012 (p. 18).

The past 50 years in the UK have also seen a fundamental shift in legal rights with respect to sexual minorities. It was only in 1967 (1980 in Scotland, 1982 in Northern Ireland) that sex between two men (aged 21 and over and ‘in private’ only) was decriminalised. The equalisation of the age of consent at the same age as heterosexual sex came into effect in 2001 (previously the age of consent for male homosexual sex was 18 and there was no statutory age of consent for sex between two women). The 2000s also saw legislative changes outlawing discrimination in the provision of goods and services and in employment, as well as introducing Civil Partnerships and the right for same-sex couples to adopt.

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<sup>2</sup> Cisgender is a term that is used to describe the opposite of transgender, i.e. referring to people whose social gender identity and biological natal sex (or ‘assigned gender’) are congruent.

However, given the centrality of schooling to young people's lives one of the most important legislative changes affecting young people was the repeal in 2003 (2000 in Scotland) of Section 28 of the Local Government Act 1988. This had required local authorities to not "intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material with the intention of promoting homosexuality" or "promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship." Although some argued that this did not prevent teachers from addressing bullying, Epstein (2000) found that teachers were unsure of how to comply with the legislation, leading to a permissive environment for homophobic bullying. However, whilst Section 28 was repealed, this does not mean that 'anything goes' in terms of how schools teach sexuality. For example, under the Learning and Skills Act 2000, (S.148(4)):

The Secretary of State must issue guidance designed to secure that when sex education is given to registered pupils at maintained schools—

- (a) they learn the nature of marriage and its importance for family life and the bringing up of children, and
- (b) they are protected from teaching and materials which are inappropriate having regard to the age and the religious and cultural background of the pupils concerned.

Most recently, the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013 has allowed same-sex couples to marry in England and Wales from 29<sup>th</sup> March 2014. Indeed, Ben Summerskill, Chief Executive of Stonewall ('the lesbian, gay and bisexual charity') stated that, "the historic passage of the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Bill means that one strand of Stonewall's domestic focus – legislative equality – is effectively complete" (Stonewall, 2013). The Prime Minister, David Cameron, has also drawn upon the discourse of equality to describe the reasons for this change, for example in this message ahead of the 2013 'Pride in London' event (Cameron, 2013):

"There will be girls and boys in school today who are worried about being bullied and concerned about what society thinks of them because they are gay or lesbian. By making this change they will be able to see that

Parliament believes their love is worth the same as anyone else's love and that we believe in equality.”

Here, like in the lyrics quoted at the start of this chapter, the idea of the ‘equal value of love’ is used to stress the moral imperative of legislative equality in the area of marriage. This draws upon a discourse of romantic love, which arose from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards in Europe. For Giddens (1993), in romantic love attachments “the element of sublime love tends to predominate over that of sexual ardour [...] love breaks with sexuality while embracing it” (p. 40).

#### **1.4. Constructing Sexuality**

This study examines how young people construct sexual identity. The premise behind the research question is a social constructionist (Gergen, 1985) understanding that the ways in which sexuality is conceptualised varies over time and place, as well as within a particular society at a given time. I shall explore Foucault’s (1976) ideas about how ‘homosexuality’ as a concept was made possible and examine how same-sex attraction has been conceptualised from within psychoanalytic traditions. I then turn to more recent contributions, which call into question the binary constructions upon which traditional accounts of minority sexualities rely.

##### **1.4.1. The ‘Origins’ of Homosexuality**

Foucault (1976) argues that, from the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, as European governments became increasingly interested in the management of ‘populations’ (as opposed to ruling over ‘subjects’ or ‘peoples’), there was an increasing focus on issues such as marriage and birth rates. Thus, the reproductive function of sex was thrown into sharp relief and there was an imperative to understand those sexual acts that might be viewed as a threat to healthy population growth, to classify and categorise these ‘perversions’. Thus, for Foucault (1976) prior to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, homosexuality as a concept that refers to a category of individual did not exist. Instead it was only sexual acts, identified as sodomy, that were understood. Foucault (1978/1996) writes:

As defined by the ancient civil or canonical codes, sodomy was a category of forbidden acts; their perpetrator was nothing more than the juridical subject of them. The nineteenth century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology [...] Homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphrodism of the soul. The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species. (p. 43).

Indeed, McIntosh (1968) argues the idea of an essential nature of homosexuality is not universal across all cultures, nor a historically stable category.

Distinguishing between homosexual behaviour and homosexual role, McIntosh suggests that a socio-cultural 'homosexual role' only appears in England towards the late 17<sup>th</sup> century. In societies that recognise such a role there are a number of expectations around personality, partner choice, sexual desire, etc. for those adopting this role. These assumptions, McIntosh argues, can become self-fulfilling as people conform to these social expectations. Similarly, Foucault (1976) argues there is no inner sexual drive but rather that cultural forces create our potential for sexuality.

Essentialist arguments, on the other hand, contend that differences in underlying sexual desire (rather than sexual behaviour) create categories of homosexual and heterosexual individuals, which at their core remain stable across time and culture (Troiden, 1988; Stein, 1996). Epstein describes the essentialist position as sexuality being a "biological force seeking expression in ways that are preordained" (1987, p. 13). He argues such understandings are consistent with a gay and lesbian identity politics that demand recognition on the basis of belonging to a quasi-ethnic group. Similarly, McIntosh (1968) notes that "homosexuals themselves welcome and support the notion that homosexuality is a condition" (p. 184), which can be verified and classified, as rigid categorization not only "deters people from drifting into deviancy, so it appears to foreclose on

the possibility of drifting back into normality and thus removes the element of anxious choice” (ibid.).

For Stein (1996), neither essentialist nor social constructionist accounts alone are sufficient, and therapists must be able to work with both. Epstein (1987) notes that whilst gay liberation politics of the early 1970s were broadly in line with developing social constructionist accounts of sexuality, by the late 1970s “a disjuncture developed between theory and practice” with a “growing tension between an evolving essentialist politics and a constructionist theory that is firmly in place” (p. 20). Furthermore, he suggests the constructionist-essentialist debate “unravels into two underlying dualisms: ‘sameness’ vs. ‘difference,’ and ‘choice’ vs. ‘constraint’” (p. 25), and if these dimensions are separated out there are four logical possibilities rather than two. He lists what he terms “legitimation strategies” and “delegitimizing threats” associated with each:

	<b>Choice</b>	<b>Constraint</b>
<b>Sameness</b>	<i>Strategies</i>	
	Free expression Social liberation	Liberal tolerance
	<i>Threats</i>	
	Sin Criminality	Curable illness
<b>Difference</b>	<i>Strategies</i>	
	Oppositional culture	Civil rights Cultural pluralism
	<i>Threats</i>	
	Deviant group	Degenerate group Incurable illness

Table 1.1: Legitimation strategies and delegitimizing threats (Epstein, 1987, p. 26)

However, Vance (1989) contends that some critics have conflated social construction of sexuality with voluntary choice of sexual orientation, thus seeing social constructionist accounts as supporting socially conservative arguments that one can be held accountable for what amounts to a lifestyle choice. She argues that although social constructionist theorists contend that identities are not as fixed as is often held, this is a cultural rather than individual level analysis.

#### 1.4.2. Medical And Psychoanalytic Contributions

Theories of sexuality, particularly of male homosexuality, developed in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries often placed same-sex attraction within a framework of abnormality or pathology. Drescher (2010) suggests the existence of three broad theories that are advanced to explain the origins of adult homosexuality:

- Normal variation: homosexuality is different, but a natural difference (i.e. one is 'born gay').
- Pathology: homosexuality is a disease or otherwise abnormal condition (with various explanations for both pre- and postnatal causes).
- Immaturity: homosexuality represents arrested development, which would have otherwise resulted in heterosexuality (exemplified by Freud's theories, as outlined below).

Thus, homosexuality is frequently constructed as biological. This argument has been used to privilege heterosexuality (where homosexuality is viewed as aberrant biology) but also to promote the cause of legislative equality (in the case of normal variation theories). Freud's position, founded on a theory of immaturity, was that homosexuality was at least benign. However, later in the 20<sup>th</sup> century psychoanalytic traditions would conceptualise this as a form of pathology that could be cured (Drescher, 2010).

Freud, in his *Drei Abhandlungen zur Sexualtheorie* (1905)<sup>3</sup>, lists same-sex sexuality as 'inversions' (as opposed to 'normal' heterosexuality) under the heading of 'sexual aberrations' and also posits that normal psychosexual development ends with the genital stage at the onset of puberty. He notes the wide variations in sexuality and how these may change over time, and also that societal or legal prohibitions influence the extent to which homosexuality is expressed. Furthermore, he claims that 'innate inversion' is unlikely (except in what he terms the most extreme cases) and refutes the conception of 'inversion' as degenerative disease. Freud therefore suggests causation is to be found in

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<sup>3</sup> Known in English as: *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (or sometimes: *Three Contributions to the Theory of Sex*)



developmental disturbances of sexual impulse; for example, he asserts that frequent male homosexuality amongst the nobility might be caused by an abundance of male servants combined with lack of care from mothers. This is in contrast with the view of Freud's contemporary, Hirschfeld, who countered that homosexuality was an innate phenomenon (1914).

Freud (1905) argues that given the wide variety of sexual practices reported we should not conflate these with sexual object choice (i.e. gender of sexual partners), for example male homosexuality does not necessarily involve anal sex. Indeed, he reiterates that mutual masturbation is a more common sexual practice amongst male 'inverts' (which would be presumably consistent with Freud's genital stage of psychosexual development). Nonetheless, psychoanalytic theory developed to describe gay men as unable to resolve the Oedipal conflict (Beard & Glickauf-Hughes, 1994) and traditionally has suggested that unimpeded normal development leads to heterosexuality, with homosexuality the result of early developmental disturbances (Isay, 1989). Practitioners would therefore commonly focus on addressing these supposed developmental failures in therapy (Drescher, 2008).

Erikson (1959, 1962) views identity formation as the central task of adolescence and sexuality is seen as an important part of this. In his stage model of life-span identity development, Erikson (1968) regarded same-sex attraction as a normal phase of adolescent development, but if this persisted it represented developmental arrest. As Goggin (1993) notes, "until recently homosexuality was considered an adult phenomenon and adolescents were thought to be uniformly heterosexual. Youthful homosexual behaviour was regarded as part of the transient experimentation typical of early adolescence" (p. 103). In contrast, Malyon (1982) views delays in the developmental trajectories of gay men to be the result of negative social attitudes rather than individual pathology, suggesting that through identification and introjection these attitudes towards homosexuality are internalised leading to premature identity foreclosure (i.e. adoption of an outwardly heterosexual identity despite homosexual attraction). Furthermore, he suggests 'adolescent' developmental tasks may be revisited when coming out in later years. In other words, homosexuality is not the result of developmental

arrest, but may result in normal developmental tasks being delayed. Peacock (2000) also suggests that different life experiences and expectations may mean that the timeline for Eriksonian stages is different for fixed gay men than heterosexuals. However, it is perhaps worth questioning the continued relevance of such theories about minority sexual identity development in societies such as the UK where attitudes towards homosexuality have radically changed in recent years.

#### 1.4.3. Gender Binaries and Queer Theory

The choice of framing this study in terms of 'minority sexual identities' reflects current dominant Western discourses of sexuality, and indeed of gender. In this context, 'minority' can be viewed as a heteronormative<sup>4</sup> term, which assumes an unproblematic division between heterosexual (the majority) and non-heterosexual (the minority). However, there are a number of challenges to this. For example, the Kinsey Reports (Kinsey, Pomeroy & Martin, 1948/1998; Kinsey, Pomeroy, Martin & Gebhard, 1953/1998) into human sexuality suggest a continuum model where the majority of the population are not exclusively heterosexual or homosexual across their adult lives (though Kinsey and his colleagues have been criticised for ignoring sampling and volunteer bias in their studies). Furthermore, the distinction between same- versus other-sex attraction and sexual behaviour is itself socially constructed. For example, if using an alternative binary of andro- and gynecophilia<sup>5</sup> (attraction to men or women respectively, regardless of the subject's gender) the task of identifying a societal minority group would presumably become more difficult.

Alternatives to current distinctions between sexuality and gender are also possible. Examples such as *hijras* in South Asia or *kathoeys* in Thailand – who cannot be easily categorised within a Eurocentric understanding of gender and sexuality – challenge suggestions of universality or an essential nature to a supposed homosexual-transgender dichotomy. Drescher (2010) highlights that

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<sup>4</sup> Warner, credited with coining the term heteronormativity, states that "heterosexual privilege lies in heterosexual culture's exclusive ability to interpret itself as society" (1991, p. 6).

<sup>5</sup> Diamond (1997), for example, suggests the terms andro-, gyneco-, and ambiphilic describing sexual attraction to men, women, or both. Although this removes the description of gender of the 'subject', it still utilises a binary gender construct for the 'objects' of their attraction.

the distinction between sexual orientation and gender identity are relatively recent definitions. Drescher notes that historians of homosexuality have routinely regarded Ulrich's 'third sex' or 'urnings' of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century as homosexual men, though he suggests that the concept of men born with a woman's spirit trapped in their bodies "bears a narrative kinship with 20<sup>th</sup> century theories of transsexualism" (p. 430). Furthermore, he argues, "many cultures *conflate* homosexuality with transgender identities because they rely upon several beliefs that use conventional heterosexuality and cisgender identities as a frame of reference" (p. 430, [emphasis added]). Indeed, Levine (1992) suggests the gay liberation movement of the 1960s promoted a construction of homosexuality as same-sex love as "a moral, natural and healthy form of erotic expression among men", and that the redefinition of homosexuality as normal eliminated the reason for perceiving it as gender deviance and the basis for 'camp' behaviour. However, Drescher's use of the word 'conflate' belies an implicit assumption that a currently privileged division between gender and sexual identities is more accurate than other constructions, despite his acknowledgement that this understanding is both recent and not universally shared. For Bilodeau and Renn (2005) the segmentation of gender identity and sexual orientation into separate categories is part of a Western medical and psychiatric tradition, not necessarily shared in other cultural contexts where more integrated gender-sexual identities are available.

Drescher (2010) also notes that theories of sexual identity development have traditionally relied on binary 'gender beliefs' (e.g. female/male, homosexual/heterosexual, transgender/cisgender). Indeed, the terms heterosexual and homosexual depend upon the presumed existence of binary 'opposite' and 'same' biological sexes. The concept of 'queer' emerged in response to dissatisfaction with such binary gender constructions (Jagose, 1996). To maintain these gender binaries, societies insist upon individuals being assigned to the category of male or female at birth and that individuals thenceforth conform to behavioural models associated with this category (Butler, 1993; Drescher, 2007). Butler (1993) argues, "gender norms operate by requiring the embodiment of certain ideals of femininity and masculinity, [...] almost always related to the idealization of the heterosexual bond" (pp. 231-2). Whereas some

authors have proposed gender as a sociocultural phenomenon independent of biological sex (e.g. Beauvoir, 1949), Butler (1990) contests this notion arguing that gender is “the discursive/cultural means by which ‘sexed nature’ or ‘a natural sex’ is produced and established as ‘prediscursive,’ prior to culture, a politically neutral surface on which culture acts” (p. 10) or in other words “sex [is] shown to have been gender all along” (p. 8).

Since the early 1990s, ‘queer theory’ has represented an influential contribution to studies of gender and sexuality. Wilchins (2004) suggests that at heart queer theory is “about politics – things like power and identity, language, and difference” (p. 5). In this respect, it can be seen to be related to wider postmodern and poststructuralist traditions. For Richards and Barker (2013), queer theory is “a diverse theoretical movement which questions identity labels, particularly in relation to sexuality and gender, and the implicit power hierarchies attendant in these” (p. 229). However, this definition perhaps obscures a more fundamental critique in queer theory of the very notions of identity and of gender or sexual norms as stable and unconditional. Jagose (1996) suggests that queer theory recognises that “the conservative effects of identity classifications lie in their ability to naturalise themselves as self-evident descriptive categories” (p. 133). Furthermore, Jagose states that ‘queer’ is:

In part, a response to perceived limitations in the liberationist and identity-conscious politics of the gay and lesbian feminist movements. The rhetoric of both has been structured predominantly around self-recognition, community and shared identity; inevitably, if inadvertently, both movements have also resulted in exclusions, delegitimation, and a false sense of universality. The discursive proliferation of queer has been enabled in part by the knowledge that identities are fictitious--that is, produced by and productive of material effects but nevertheless arbitrary, contingent and ideologically motivated. (p. 134).

Thus, queer theory raises a more fundamental critique of notions of identity and questions our ability to speak of distinct classes of person. It therefore also poses a challenge to this study, which is premised upon the concept of “minority sexual

identity". Whilst queer theory might question such categories, this choice is itself influenced by queer theory in that it extends the scope of the study beyond stable, unitary "LGB" identities. However, using a wider theoretical framework (social constructionism) in this study permits queer theory to be drawn upon, whilst also incorporating other influences less consistent with this approach. I return to the influence of queer theory on this study in the final chapter.

## **1.5. Identity**

In this section I shall first explore how the concept of identity itself is contested. I then outline how academics have sought to draw distinctions between concepts of same-sex attraction (or desire), same-sex behaviour, and sexual identities such as lesbian and gay and some of the problems with these concepts.

### **1.5.1. Using the Concept of 'Identity'**

Identity, in its original sense, refers to 'the quality of being identical' (Oxford Dictionaries, n.d.) and is therefore inherently relational. Rather than describing fixed qualities of individuals, identities are therefore discursively constructed and changeable. As a concept, 'identity' has been problematised by contemporary theorists. For example, Hobsbawm (1996) suggests that collective identities (upon which 'identity politics' depend) are negatively defined "based not on what their members have in common—they may have very little in common except not being the 'Others'" (p. 40). Hobsbawm argues that 'identity politics' assumes that one identity dominates or determines our politics over all others and that campaigning for particular rights or privileges for certain groups over others is opposite to the universalistic ambitions of the Left.

In a similar vein, Markard (2006) argues that although it is an undeniable and relevant psychological phenomenon that people search for, and are offered, various identities by which to be defined, this does not make 'identity' in itself a suitable analytic category. Rather, he suggests, the concept of identity serves to psychologise inhumane conditions in neoliberal societies. Markard argues that 'identity' is a concept by which social problems are transformed into psychological ones through the elimination or ontologisation of societal conflicts or

contradictions, or their displacement into the 'individual'. Thus, resolving such conflict and contradictions becomes a subjective psychological task rather than a socio-material one.

Hall (1996), however, argues that although 'identity' is an idea that is no longer serviceable in its original, unreconstructed form, without it certain questions cannot be thought at all. He argues the process of 'identification' "entails discursive work, the binding and marking of symbolic boundaries, the production of 'frontier-effects'" (p. 3). Hall suggests that rather than representing natural and inevitable 'unities', identity does not fix "the play of difference in a point of origin and stability but [...] is constantly destabilized by what it leaves out" (p. 5). For Hall, identities are "points of temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us" (p. 6). He also suggests that identities are formed as a response from subjects to disciplinary power, not simply determined by this, in what Foucault (1985/1992) calls:

The practices by which individuals were led to focus attention on themselves to decipher, recognize and acknowledge themselves as subjects of desire, bringing into play between themselves and themselves a certain relationship that allows them to discover, in desire, the truth of their being. (p. 5)

As Anderson and Goolishian (1988) note, "social science theories are ideologies invented at a moment in time for practical reasons" (p. 372); 'identity' might also be helpfully understood as a theory. Therefore whilst accepting the many problematic aspects of 'identity' as an idea, it retains some utility, including for the present study. However, rather than according 'sexual identities' a reified status, this study seeks to understand how they are talked into being and the conditions of possibility for these identities to emerge.

### 1.5.2. Identity, Attraction and Behaviour

Researchers and professionals have sought various ways to conceptualise minority sexual experiences. Although theorists from the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century suggested a separate category of "homosexual" inherently linked to

sexual desire, later authors have concluded that the formation of a 'gay identity' is not necessarily a foregone conclusion for those who experience same-sex attraction. Indeed, survey research in the UK, US, Canada and Australia suggests a greater number of people experience same-sex attraction or participate in sexual activities with someone of the same-sex than would identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual (Gates, 2011). The labels people use may also differ according to social context (Davis, Kleumer & Dowsett, 1991). Therefore, a current distinction in the literature is often made between behaviour (i.e. sexual practices), orientation (e.g. same-sex attraction<sup>6</sup>) and identity (Goggin, 1993).

Giddens (1993) argues that the shift in focus from orientation to identity reflects a wider cultural phenomenon in Western societies in how individuals relate to society at large. McLelland (2000) argues that Western conceptions of 'gay identity' are not only relatively recent, but can also be entirely alien to other cultural contexts. Furthermore, he argues that researchers and activists in the West often attempt to use 'gay' or 'homosexual' as umbrella terms without recognition of how these can restrict and constrain possible ways of being, as well as opening up new possibilities.

Even if one accepts the usefulness or desirability of identity constructs, the choice of which identities become privileged can be controversial. Some authors have questioned whether it is helpful to view the experiences of same-sex attracted women and men as comparable. Goggin (1993, p.105) notes that given "the visibility of male homosexual communities and the relative invisibility of lesbian culture, the word 'gay' has become synonymous with male homosexuality". Indeed, Rich (1980) argues that equating "lesbian existence with male homosexuality because each is stigmatized is to deny and erase female reality." Therefore the terms 'gay woman' and 'lesbian' signal different discursive positions. As such, 'lesbian' may be deployed as a linguistic device to both signify separateness and also demand inclusion alongside gay men (e.g. the term 'lesbian and gay' which assumes the presence of women in a way 'gay' does not).

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<sup>6</sup> Sexual orientation is described by Spitzer (1981) as "a consistent pattern of sexual arousal" towards the same and/or opposite gender.

## 1.6. Sexual Identity Development

### 1.6.1. Stage Models of Minority Sexual Identity Development

Models of minority sexual identity development (e.g. Cass, 1979, 1996; Lewis, 1984; Troiden, 1989) have suggested various stages of crisis and peer comparisons prior to reaching 'acceptance' of such an identity (Fontaine & Hammond, 1996).

Cass (1979) proposed a six-stage model of the process to acquire an identity of "homosexual" fully integrated within the individual's overall concept of self" (p. 220):

<b>Stage 1:</b> <b>Identity Confusion</b>	Feelings of turmoil, questioning of previously held assumptions about sexuality, denial or rejection of feelings.
<b>Stage 2:</b> <b>Identity Comparison</b>	Feelings of alienation, acceptance of possibility of being gay, isolation from heterosexual others, grieving for loss of heterosexuality. May maintain some heterosexual identity or believe it is temporary.
<b>Stage 3:</b> <b>Identity Tolerance</b>	Feelings of ambivalence, maintenance of separate public and private images, beginning to seek out lesbian and gay culture.
<b>Stage 4:</b> <b>Identity Acceptance</b>	Selective disclosure to others, possible compartmentalisation of 'gay life', less contact with heterosexual community, beginning of acceptance of lesbian or gay identity.
<b>Stage 5:</b> <b>Identity Pride</b>	Immersion in gay subculture and rejection of heterosexual people, institutions and values, unwillingness to blend in, view of gay culture as only source of support. Anger at heterosexism.
<b>Stage 6:</b> <b>Identity Synthesis</b>	Clarity and acceptance moving beyond dichotomous view of gay as good and straight as bad. Sexual orientation incorporated as one aspect of more



integrated self-identity and not defined simply according to sexual orientation. Continued anger with heterosexism but with decreased intensity.

Table 1.2: Stages of homosexual identity formation, adapted from Cass (1979)

Cass (1979) views individuals as possessing agency within this developmental process and therefore able to “choose not to develop any further” (‘identity foreclosure’, p. 220). She also distinguishes between private (personal) and public (social) identities, which may differ. Indeed, Cass situates this model within the framework of interpersonal congruency theory (e.g. Secord & Backman, 1961), positing that ‘growth’ occurs when an individual attempts to “resolve the inconsistency between perception of self and others” (Cass, 1979; p. 220). Bilodeau and Renn (2005) note that although stage theories suggest linear development, the authors of these models recognise the process is more fluid in practice. D’Augelli (1994) suggests an alternative development model of six independent identity processes, which are contingent on different social contexts:

- Exiting heterosexuality
- Developing a personal LGB identity
- Developing an LGB social identity
- Becoming an LGB offspring
- Developing an LGB intimacy status
- Entering an LGB community

Thus, for example, a person could be in a same-sex relationship and ‘out’ at school, whilst maintaining a heterosexual identity with family and not being involved in a ‘gay scene’ in their social life.

Little research has examined the experiences of young people whilst they are developing minority sexual identities (Moore & Rosenthal, 1993). Cultural norms may have led researchers to avoid speaking to young people directly about sexuality (Savin-Williams, 2005). Thus, stage models of minority sexual identity development have relied on adults’ retrospective accounts. However, such

studies are problematic as recollection may be affected by subsequent experience (BPS, 2012). Or as Freud (1905) suggests, autobiographical accounts of first same-sex attraction are unreliable, as heterosexual feelings may have been repressed. Furthermore, stage theories have often relied on gay men's accounts and assumed these can be applied equally to women (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005) and may also be less applicable to the developmental processes for bisexual people (Fox, 1995). Eliason and Schope (2007) suggest stage models are popular with professionals "because they provide guidelines for what interventions the individual in therapy may need" (p.20). However, these are "simplifications of complex developmental processes" and "rigid linear stage models are unlikely to apply to all or even most LGBT people" (ibid.).

#### 1.6.2. 'Coming Out'

Closely related to the stage models of minority sexual identity development is the concept of disclosure, or 'coming out': a topic frequently discussed in academic literature. De Montefiores and Schultz (1978) describe coming out as the "developmental process through which gay people recognise their sexual preferences and choose to integrate this knowledge into their personal and social lives" (p. 60). Thus, in contemporary Western societies coming-out is viewed as a prerequisite to adopting a gay identity (though not same-sex attraction or sexual behaviour) and is a phenomenon reliant upon societal assumptions of heterosexuality. Though coming-out is often regarded as a highly valued aspect of LGBT experience in Western societies, it may be neither possible nor desirable for minority ethnic groups (Chan, 1987; Nair, 2006) or in other cultural contexts (e.g. McLelland, 2000). Indeed, coming-out can be seen as belonging to a broader European tradition of the confessional, which Foucault (1976) argues spread beyond its origins in the Church to become a pervasive feature of how knowledge is produced in Western societies. As, Foucault (1978/1996) writes:

The obligation to confess is now relayed through so many different points, is so deeply ingrained in us, that we no longer perceive it as the effect of a power that constrains us; on the contrary, it seems to us that truth, lodged in our most secret nature, "demands" only to surface; that if it fails to do so, this is because a constraint holds it in place, the violence of a power

weighs it down, and it can finally be articulated only at the price of a kind of liberation (p. 60).

For Foucault (1976/1996), the confessional is “a ritual of discourse in which the speaking subject is also the subject of the statement” (p. 61), it is not simply a revelation of some hidden reality but is rather how truth is produced. As Plummer (1995) notes, coming-out is not only an act of individual self-description, it also speaks into being a community or culture to which one is said to belong. However, D’Emilio (1997) cautions that the gay community has had an “overreliance on a strategy of coming-out”, ignoring “the institutional ways in which homophobia and heterosexism are reproduced” (p. 170).

Coming-out has variously been viewed as a single event when an individual first publicly identifies as gay (e.g. Hooker, 1967; Dank, 1971) or as a process that occurs over time and across several dimensions (de Monteflores & Schultz, 1978). A linear, uni-dimensional process model, moving from private self-identification to public identification (Lee, 1977), has been challenged as not adequately taking into account fluctuations in identifying as gay across different contexts (Weinberg & Williams, 1975; Riddle & Morin, 1977). Furthermore, experiences for men and women may differ particularly due to patriarchal social pressures (Groves, 1985).

Previous research has found major developmental milestones for minority sexual identities occurring between ages 11 and 17 (Maguen, Floyd, Bakeman & Armistead, 2002). Though previously many LGB people did not ‘come out’ until their late teens or early 20s, evidence suggests this now frequently occurs at younger ages (Savin-Williams, 1998). Bennett and Douglass (2013) note that in their clinical practice in New York, the emphasis on work with LGBT adults has moved from issues around disclosure to a broader range of concerns. They suggest this is related to social changes particularly in urban areas, although recognise that for some individuals disclosure remains an important issue wherever they reside.

## **1.7. Clinical Implications**

Though Savin-Williams (2005) cautions against solely negative portrayals of minority sexual youth experience, a large quantity of research finds young people with minority sexual identities continue to experience bullying, prejudice, discrimination and resulting poorer mental health (e.g. Stonewall, 2012). Warwick, Aggleton and Douglas (2001) found that suicide attempts were two to three times higher for young LGB people compared to their peers, and that around 30 percent of people who complete suicide in this age group are LGB. In the UK, 29% of LGB girls and 16% of boys have tried to take their life at some point (Stonewall, 2012). Russell, Ryan, Toomey, Diaz and Sanchez (2011) found that retrospective reports of homophobic bullying at school were associated with poorer mental health and increased risk of sexually transmitted infection in young adulthood (21 – 25 years old). Obversely, positive earlier experiences can have long-lasting benefits: greater family acceptance of minority sexual identities was associated with later positive health and psychological outcomes (Ryan, Russell, Huebner, Diaz & Sanchez, 2010).

### **1.7.1. Research Bias?**

Savin-Williams (2001) cautions against relying on solely negative portrayals of sexual-minority youth experience and highlights the ways in which research may become biased towards problematic descriptions of same-sex attracted adolescents' lives. He argues previous research on lesbian, gay and bisexual youths has often focused on problematic concerns rather than basic developmental processes because advocacy and policy concerns dictate the issues investigated and how samples are obtained. Furthermore, research often implicitly assumes that individuals fall into discrete categories of heterosexual, bisexual or homosexual, with homo- and bisexuality constructed as a homogenous unified group standing in opposition to heterosexuality. Research questions are framed to examine between-group rather than within-group differences. He posits that this obscures that minority sexual youth are similar to all youths, and also vary amongst themselves. Savin-Williams' argument can be understood as a view of research contributing to a discourse of difficulties and distress rather than strength and resilience; though perhaps intended to support

minority sexual youth, research may thus also frequently contribute to the production of knowledge that reinforces an academic discourse of pathology and abnormality. Savin-Williams calls for researchers to “move beyond traditional paradigms [...] in this process their resiliency and their ordinariness will become readily apparent” (2001, p. 11).

Nevertheless, studies have frequently provided evidence for poorer psychosocial and health outcomes for sexual minority youth and adults. For Savin-Williams, negative portrayals in research are obtained through samples selected upon the basis of self-identified lesbians, gays and bisexuals, which he deems likely to be a “non-representative minority of the total population of same-sex attracted individuals” (2001, p. 10). He cites McConaghy’s conclusion that studies are therefore “investigating not homosexuality but self-identification as homosexual” (1999, p. 302). Taking Savin-Williams’ (2001) line of argument, one might conclude these studies are reflective of only certain subsamples of these groups of people. However, this is perhaps too simplistic a conclusion, and one which might lead us to assume that there exist separate subgroups of well-adjusted sexual minority teenagers leading broadly similar lives to their well-adjusted heterosexual counterparts. An alternative argument might be that all sexual-minority adolescents are both similar to all of their age peers and yet also different from them.

The terms gay and lesbian were themselves created to emphasise intimacy and romantic feelings over sexual behaviour (Goggin, 1993). What Savin-Williams (2001) appears to advance is that young people who self-identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual are likely to have poorer psychosocial outcomes than adolescents who experience same-sex attraction but who do not identify as LGB. He notes that factors such as strong identification as gay, early age of disclosure to others, and higher gender non-conformity may be risk factors for suicide (citing Remafedi, Farrow & Deisher, 1991). Savin-Williams’ (2001) suggestion is that it is not same-sex attraction in itself that leads to greater depression, self-harm, or suicide, but rather identification with cultural identities of lesbian, gay or bisexual. Omitted from this analysis are the effects of social attitudes, rejection by family or peers and discrimination. Reading between the lines, one might conclude that for

Savin-Williams it is the politically and culturally subversive LGB identities that themselves may be to blame for individuals' misfortune. To take this argument to one logical conclusion, to eliminate health and psychosocial inequalities, same-sex attracted people simply need to behave as heterosexuals – or indeed, that those whose behaviour singles them out as 'Other' bring misery upon themselves. Goffman (1968) suggests that when there is evidence of an individual possessing an attribute that marks them as different, they become "reduced in our minds from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one" (p. 12). Thus, we might conclude that the best-adjusted homosexuals would be those who were the most 'heterosexual'. Indeed, Kuban and Grinnell (2008) accuse Savin-Williams of "calling for the erasure of the multiplicity of queer identities" (p. 78). Thus, one reading of Savin-Williams' position is one characterised by what Duggan (2003) describes as homonormativity: "a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption" (p. 50).

#### 1.7.2. Psychosocial Effects of Heteronormative Discourses

The following quote illustrates the profound effects of heterosexist discourses on young people's sense of identity and mental health: "I once carved the words 'dirty lesbian' into my thigh because people kept calling me that. I hated myself." ('Claudia' in Stonewall, 2012). Models of sexual identity development, though often acknowledging the role of social environment, focus on processes within individuals. Little attention has been paid to the discursive constructions of identity, however, some research has explored this area. For example, Hillier and Harrison (2004) use narrative accounts of young Australians' experiences to explore the strategies adopted to resist negative societal attitudes.

In two papers from one research team (Scourfield, Roen & McDermott, 2008; McDermott, Roen & Scourfield, 2008), the authors examine how non-normative sexual and gender identities are linked with distress and self-destructive behaviour (e.g. self-harm, suicide). In their first paper, a Thematic Analysis, Scourfield and colleagues (2008) found that young people could have complex

relationships towards sexual identity; for example, disgust and disdain for aspects of LGBT identities (e.g. 'the scene') co-existed with a discourse of 'gay pride'. Self-harm (cutting) was described by some participants as a coping mechanism for their own negative feelings towards their sexual identity, whereas others understood it as a reaction to homophobia in society. Isolation, homophobia and conflict with family were factors that the participants felt might contribute to suicides in young LGBT people. Some of the participants also described having multiple sexual partners as a form of self-destructive behaviour.

The authors note that experiences of discrimination and homophobia were sometimes seen as leading to personal growth and strength. However, they argue that finding spaces for 'genuinely unashamed sexual identities' is a difficult task, and for some people constructing a positive LGBT identity is difficult as this requires them to be positioned in opposition to a privileged, heterosexual norm. Taking this further, in a Foucauldian Discourse Analysis of the same data, McDermott et al. (2008) argue that homophobia operates to punish those who transgress heterosexual norms, and requires young LGBT people to manage being positioned as abnormal, dirty or disgusting. The authors draw upon the idea from cultural studies and queer theory of a pride/shame binary, as the central organising feature of how LGBT people negotiate everyday life and structure their identities (e.g. Munt, 2000; Probyn, 2000, Sedgwick, 2003). McDermott and colleagues argue young people use numerous 'modalities of shame-avoidance' to negotiate homophobia such as the 'routinization and minimizing of homophobia', 'maintaining individual 'adult' responsibility', and 'constructing 'proud' identities'. These are constructed as tasks for neo-liberal individual selves, leading the authors to conclude people may be less likely to seek support from others and instead turn to self-destructive behaviours.

## **1.8. Research With Young People**

Whilst some qualitative research exists, such as the examples cited above or Jamil, Harper and Fernandez's (2009) phenomenological study into the identity development of sexual and ethnic minority male adolescents, studies with young

people as participants have generally been conducted using quantitative or survey methods (e.g. Watzlawik, 2004; Rosario, Schrimshaw & Hunter, 2011).

Research has also focussed on experiences in educational settings. Stonewall has commissioned two studies using online surveys examining the experiences for young LGB people in UK schools (Stonewall, 2007; 2012). The results are presented as a mixture of quantitative data and quotes. Buston and Hart (2001) found barriers existed to inclusive sex education in Scottish schools, despite some positive practices being evident. Sex education was often heterosexist and accompanied by frequent homophobic comments from pupils, particularly boys. Jones (2011) explored the processes of identity development in young LGB people in the context of English schools. His grounded theory model suggests an interaction between 'coming in' (acceptance of own LGB identity), disclosing the self, managing pressures, and integrating private and public selves.

### **1.9. Research Aims and Questions**

Young people may experience various negative experiences when forming minority sexual identities. This study aims to assist young people and the systems around them in understanding how positive identities are constructed by examining the discourses surrounding young people's experiences. Authors of stage models of sexual identity development have used adult samples to reconstruct adolescent developmental processes (Ryan & Futterman, 1998). This exploratory research analyses how a group of young people (aged under 18) discuss sexual identity and the understandings that this talk (re)produces. Its focus is on the discourses that render young people with minority sexual identities as problematic, the technologies of power or self-regulatory practices which govern their conduct, and how various subject positions allow them to speak the 'truth' about their experiences.

Prior to obtaining any data, I identified two areas of particular interest to help guide the research (without constraining other themes or interests to develop). Firstly, I have previously argued that current discursive trends may conflate equality with sameness, and thereby act to neutralise challenges to existing



heterosexist power structures (Bristow, 2012). This contrasts with 'queering' discourses, which destabilise traditional understandings of sexual and gender identities (see e.g. Butler, 1990). I was therefore particularly interested to explore if a 'deployment of equality' is a discursive feature of young people's talk, and to what extent this constructs minority sexual identities as belonging within heteronormative social frameworks.

Secondly, I was interested in the interplay between gender and sexuality in constructions of sexual identity. Wilchins (2004) notes that minority sexual identities are often discussed in relation to gender norms. For example, gay men are often positioned as feminine and passive (Gough, 2002). Indeed for Butler, "homophobia often operates through the attribution of a damaged, failed or otherwise abject gender to homosexuals" (1993, p. 238).

#### **1.10. Summary**

In this chapter, I first outlined my approach to examining the literature on 'minority sexual identities', reflected on my own connections to this topic, and explored some of the socio-political and legislative changes in the UK with respect to sexuality in the past 50 years. I then examined various ways in which sexuality has been understood since the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the West, including exploring the debate between social constructionist and essentialist accounts, the relationship between sexuality and gender, and critiques of the concept of 'identity' itself. Subsequently I discussed developmental models of sexual identity and the role of 'coming-out', as well as exploring the clinical relevance of this topic. Finally, I note how qualitative research in this area has previously been limited in this area, especially studies which speak directly to young people (issues this project hopes to begin to redress) and outlined my initial research question and areas of analytic interest. In the following chapter I outline the methods used to collect and analyse data for this study, and describe how my research questions and analytic foci were further refined.

## **METHOD**

In this chapter, I first outline and discuss the epistemological position I have taken and the methodology and method used in this study, which examines constructions of sexual identity in young people's talk. Subsequently I describe the practical aspects of how I conducted this research, including: ethical considerations, details of recruitment and participants, as well as the process of data collection and analysis.

### **1.11. Epistemology**

Epistemology, or the philosophy of knowledge, seeks to answer the question "How, and what, can we know?" (Willig, 2013, p. 4) and also whether or not this knowledge is reliable (Thompson & Harper, 2012). Thus, questions such as 'what are the research objectives?' and 'what type of knowledge does the research produce?' are closely intertwined with epistemological positions. Outlining an epistemological position, and therefore the assumptions regarding what can be known about reality, is an important way to allow the claims made in qualitative research to be judged by others (Harper, 2012).

#### **1.11.1. Critical Realist Social Constructionist**

The epistemological stance for this study is one that can be described as 'critical realist social constructionist'. Social constructionism challenges the "traditional Western conception of objective, individualistic, ahistoric knowledge" (Gergen, 1985, pp. 271-272). Therefore social constructionist research questions taken-for-granted assumptions, and emphasises the social, cultural and historical situatedness of knowledge (Harper, 2012). Furthermore, social constructionism posits that knowledge is shaped through language and social processes, and that knowledge and action go together (Burr, 2003).

Within social constructionist approaches, researchers' epistemological positions are often identified as more or less 'realist' versus 'relativist'. A critical realist social constructionist position can be said to be ontologically realist (i.e. assuming that a material reality exists, which has real effects on real bodies) but

epistemologically relativist (i.e. the ways in which this is constructed do not directly mirror reality but rather inform us about the meaning ascribed to social realities). Sims-Schouten, Riley and Willig (2007) argue that the social constructions available to us are “constrained by the possibilities and limitations inherent in the material world” (p. 101).

From a relativist perspective, it is important to analyse the text itself (e.g. transcript) and it is not possible to make comments on reality, as we do not have direct contact with it. However, a critical realist perspective suggests a further layer of interpretation of the text is needed, setting it within broader social, cultural and historical contexts. This position views social constructions as “grounded within, yet not directly reflective of social structures” (Willig, 1999, p. 44). Therefore, researchers adopting this stance argue it is necessary to go beyond the text being analysed, drawing upon other evidence to support any ontological claims. In this study I therefore go beyond the language used in the transcripts in order to address ‘extra-discursive’ factors and practices that may influence young people’s experiences. Examples of this include: materiality (e.g. the existence of LGBT youth groups in particular locations), embodied experiences (e.g. sex), the power of institutional practices (e.g. single-sex education), and speakers’ orientations to dominant social accounts (e.g. towards romantic love).

#### 1.11.2. Epistemological Issues

This study is based upon an understanding of sexual identities (including the idea of ‘sexual identity’ itself) as being constructed through ‘discourse’: a “set of statements or practices that systematically constructs the object of which it speaks” (Foucault, 1972, p. 32). Willig (2012), cited in Harper (2012, p. 92), suggests critical realist constructionists are “concerned with the ways in which available discourses can constrain and limit what can be said or done within particular contexts.” Therefore the epistemological stance adopted in this study enables an exploration of discursive constructions of sexual identity, self-disciplining practices (e.g. ‘coming out’), and subjective positions (e.g. as romantic partners), whilst acknowledging the influence of social structures and material practices in how these discursive constructions are deployed.

Speer (2007) argues that in critical realist constructionist research a “simultaneous pull towards two essentially incompatible epistemologies means that the analyses have a tendency to veer inconsistently between the two” and therefore risk simply adopting a realist position, or selectively questioning some aspects as constructed whilst accepting others as real. However, Willig (1999, p. 38) suggests that although relativist social constructionist positions are valuable on the level of epistemological critique by deconstructing taken-for-granted positivist ideas, this does not extend to “social critique of the (socio-economic/material) structures that support positivist categories” resulting in “a conceptual, and consequently also a political, vacuum.” Cromby and Nightingale (1999) argue that relativist positions fail to address issues such as embodied realities and that a critical realist analysis can explore issues of subjectivity more fully.

My position has been informed by Burr (1998), and Pujol and Montenegro (1999), who argue against a dichotomy of the ‘real’ and the ‘constructed’. This suggests a complex and intricate relationship between ‘knowledge’ and ‘practice’ (Foucault, 1972). For Hook (2001), “discourse facilitates and endorses the emergence of certain relations of material power, just as it justifies these effects after the fact.” (p. 33). Thus, this position subscribes to the idea of real, material realities, which both create and are created by discourse and together produce both embodied and subjective effects. However, what can be known about such reality, knowledge, and practices is also socially constructed through language and power.

In the previous chapter, I explored how constructions of sexual identity vary across time and culture, as well as how these are influenced by wider discourses such as gender (e.g. a supposition of dichotomous sex, grounded in certain embodied experiences but not independent of discourse). As well as constructing subject practices (e.g. ‘gay’ as sexually promiscuous), these constructions also produce and are produced by institutional practices. To take an example from a discussion in this study (**Tom**: 1959-1968), the provision of single-sex toilets to protect people (from sexual predation) and restrain them (from sexual activity) is made possible by an assumption of heterosexuality. In turn, this may reinforce

the constructions of LGB people as outsiders, and as a sexual threat. Thus, there is a complex interplay between the meaning-making of individuals, institutional and social practices, and the material world.

### **1.12. Methodology**

Silverman (1993) distinguishes between methodology (as a general research approach) and method (as specific research techniques). Willig (2013) notes a further distinction between methods of analysis and methods of data collection. This study takes a qualitative methodological approach to data collection (an online discussion forum, focus groups and individual interview) and analysis (a Foucauldian-inspired discourse analysis). This is informed by the social constructionist epistemological stance that social phenomena and the meanings ascribed to them are constructed through language.

Discourse analysis can be understood as a general framework to study linguistic constructions and discursive practices. There are a number of different approaches or forms of discourse analysis, which are underpinned by different theoretical principles (Wetherell, Yates & Taylor, 2001). Common across these various analytic methods is the view that language constructs our experience of the world, rather being directly reflective of reality. Harper (2006) identifies two main approaches to discourse analysis: Discursive Psychology (DP) and Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA). DP is informed by a more relativist position and therefore takes a finer grain analysis of discursive practice (e.g. how rhetorical devices are used in negotiating social interactions). FDA, on the other hand, focuses on how certain constructions are made more or less possible by the wider social and institutional contexts. It examines how such constructions make possible various subject positions and practices (Willig, 2008). As such, FDA is particularly interested in issues of power and how privileged discursive positions are either legitimated or resisted.

## **1.13. Method Of Analysis**

### **1.13.1. Influences**

The transcripts were analysed using a Foucauldian-inspired Discourse Analysis (FDA) approach. As Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine note, “it is customary to offer the disclaimer that there are no set rules or procedures for conducting Foucauldian-inspired analyses of discourse” (2008, p.91). Indeed, Chamberlain (2012) counsels against ‘methodolatry’ (Janesick, 1994) in all qualitative research, suggesting researchers should use methods in a way which best suits their research questions rather than unthinkingly reproducing ‘off-the-shelf brands’ of method. Thus, although I use the term FDA to describe the analysis, this is best understood as shorthand for a Foucauldian-inspired method, rather than a rigid application of a specific set of techniques.

Nonetheless, as others have previously suggested (e.g. Harper, O’Connor, Self & Stevens, 2008) a novice discourse analyst faced with a method that defies formalisation could be left questioning how to perform an analysis. One possible starting point is the following procedure suggested by Willig (2013, pp. 131-133):

*Step 1:* Identify the different ways the discursive object (here: sexual identity) is constructed, including both implicit and explicit references.

*Step 2:* Locate the discursive constructions within multiple wider discourses.

*Step 3:* Examine the action orientation of talk, i.e. what is the function of a certain construction at a given point in the text?

*Step 4:* Identify subject positions offered within a discourse, i.e. what positions are available from which to speak or act.

*Step 5:* Examine the relationship between discourse and practice, i.e. what possibilities for action are opened up or closed down?

*Step 6:* Explore the relationship between discourse and subjectivity, i.e. what can be felt, thought or experienced from various subject positions.

However, as Morgan notes, this process “relates to the direct analysis of a piece of text, and ignores the more fundamental precepts of Foucauldian method, those of power/knowledge, historicity and governmentality” (2010, p. 5). Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine (2008) suggest that there are three broad dimensions to an analysis of discourse: historical inquiry, attending to mechanisms of power, and subjectification. Expanding on the later stages of Willig’s (2013) steps, I have been informed by Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine’s (2008, p. 99) guidelines suggesting the following elements are addressed within a discourse analysis:

- **Problematizations:** examples where discursive objects are made ‘problematic’, frequently where different discourses intersect and expose power/knowledge relations.
- **Technologies:** practical forms of rationality for the government of the self and others. *Technologies of power* seek to govern conduct from a distance, whereas *technologies of the self* are techniques by which individuals attempt to regulate their own conduct.
- **Subject positions:** positions from which to ground claims of truth and responsibility, and to manage one’s moral location within social interaction.
- **Subjectification:** how do subjects seek to fashion and transform themselves within a moral order and in terms of an ethical goal? What are the practices by which subjects seek to regulate themselves, and what is the authority enabling these?

The present study is limited in scope insofar as it seeks only to analyse how a small number of young people in one city construct sexual identity at a particular point in time. It was beyond the scope of this study to conduct a genealogical inquiry into how the conditions of possibility arose that allowed current

constructions of minority identity to emerge. Nevertheless, the examination of the literature in the previous chapter provides some historical context for the analysis. Indeed, Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine (2008) suggest that an FDA approach can be used for studies such as this, as long as the historical background to discourses is taken into account.

### 1.13.2. Analytic Process

#### *Stage 1: Making notes*

During the course of the website use, and after each focus group and interview, brief notes with initial ideas were made in a reflective journal (extracts provided in Appendix A). Further ideas were noted when reading through each transcript for the first time.

Speer (2007) counsels that researchers must take a reflexive stance towards the impact of the context of the interview on participants' accounts. Therefore, as well as noting initial impressions of what had been said and how, I noted how I had positioned myself in the discussions as well as how I understood what I had seen of the relationships between the young people who had taken part in the focus groups or online forum.

#### *Stage 2: Identifying what is being talked about and how*

Following Willig (2013), I first focussed on identifying the objects, events and experiences being constructed in the young people's talk. Keeping the research questions in mind, I considered what the participants were talking about at different points (e.g. losing friends, coming out, love, media representations of gay people), how these were being talked about, and how these constructions were located within wider discourses as well as historical contexts. Examples of worked transcripts for this stage can be found in Appendix B.

#### *Stage 3: Identifying analytic foci*

In the course of the initial stages of analysis I was particularly drawn to how the constructions of 'sexual identity' were rendered problematic in the context of the young people's relationships to others (e.g. friends, family, religious groups). The discursive and material practices highlighted by the young people's talk allowed



for an exploration of experiences of regulation and systems of power and the ways in which constructions of sexual identity positioned the young people as problematic. The process of analysis was informed by the following analytic foci:

- 1) What discourses render young people with minority sexual identities as problematic? In what ways are these supported or resisted?
- 2) What technologies of power (e.g. national legislation, religious doctrine) are evidenced in the young people's talk? What institutional forces act upon young people to govern their conduct? What technologies of self (e.g. coming out) are in evidence? What are the material and discursive self-regulatory practices, which constrain or enable their conduct?
- 3) How do various subject positions (e.g. 'minority sexual identity', 'romantic partner') allow the participants to speak the 'truth' about their experiences? In what ways are linguistic practices and discursive resources deployed (or not) in the discussions to construct experiences of minority sexual identity? What wider discursive and extra-discursive contexts are made possible through these positions?
- 4) How do young people engage in practices of self-regulation in order to attain the status of moral subjects?

*Stage 4: Identifying key constructions and connections between them*

Key constructions were identified and further notes were made on how these were presented by participants within the transcripts. Attention was also paid to instances where these constructions were challenged and examples of contradictory accounts. Connections between various constructions were identified.

In deciding which constructions should be presented in the analysis I looked at whether they were supported by extracts within and between the different transcripts and whether these were representative of constructions of 'sexual

identity'. However, I sought to include subjugated as well as dominant constructions that represented the diversity of different discursive positions.

#### *Stage 5: Selecting extracts*

In line with the analytic foci, extracts were selected from the transcripts that addressed these questions:

- How is the development of minority sexual identity (e.g. insecurity, coming-out, pride) talked into being?
- In what ways are minority sexual identities constructed as the same or different from heterosexuality? How are certain forms of intimate relationships privileged over others?
- How do certain constructions of minority sexual identity function to isolate young people from their peers? How do young people regulate their conduct in different contexts?
- How do identity labels function to establish 'truth'? How do discourses of identity politics, individuality and gender render young people developing minority sexual identities as problematic?

#### *Stage 6: Presenting the analysis*

The next stage was to write up the analysis drawing upon sets of related extracts to elaborate key constructions, choosing examples demonstrating the effects of these most clearly. Extracts were discussed with reference to relevant literature.

With a view to providing a coherent account, the overall analysis was refined by integrating some constructions together and separating others into distinct parts. Having satisfied myself that the final analysis provided useful answers to the research questions, the primary factor in determining when to stop analysing further was the time available to complete the study.

### **1.14. Planning And Development Of The Study**

#### **1.14.1. Consultation**

Prior to starting the study, I consulted with a youth worker from one of the LGBT youth groups to consider the feasibility and use of doing this research. I later also

consulted with some young people from the same group to consider which topics might be important to cover. Aware of my position as a male researcher looking at a topic where historically male voices have been privileged, I also asked what steps I might need to take to ensure the study was appropriate for young women. One suggestion was to create a section of the website specifically for young women, which I implemented (although ultimately this was not used). Prior to meeting with the group for trans young people for recruitment to the study, I met with the group's co-founder to discuss my plans and whether any specific changes were required to meet the needs of this group of young people.

#### 1.14.2. Ethical Approval

An application for research ethics approval (Appendix C) was made to the UEL School of Psychology Ethics Sub-Committee and approval was subsequently granted (Appendix D). The study was registered with the University of East London (UEL) Graduate School (Appendix E).

#### 1.14.3. Online Discussion Forum

The original intention was to use an online message board as the site of data collection. However, ethical approval was also obtained for face-to-face focus groups should it not be possible to conduct the study online. In developing the study, I was hopeful that an online discussion forum would represent a form of communication that would be relevant to the young people in the study. Given the potential sensitivity of the discussions, I was also guided by Rodham and Gavin (2006), who note that the anonymity afforded by Internet communication may allow people to “express themselves in ways that may be constrained in their real world interactions” (p.95). Indeed, Bond, Hefner and Drogos (2009) suggest use of media, such as the Internet, may be beneficial for adolescents' sexual identity development.

The ethics of online data collection are no different than from other means but special consideration may be needed to ensure ethical principles are upheld (Rodham & Gavin, 2006; BPS, 2007). Using a discussion forum to collect data, Sharkey et al. (2011) discuss using a number of features to protect potentially vulnerable participants in their study, including:

- participant usernames specific to the study;
- a closed website;
- contact email address for researchers;
- information about forum rules displayed on the website;
- links to online support.

I adopted these features for this study in order to protect participants' anonymity and confidentiality, as well as providing mechanisms to report distressing, inappropriate or offensive content and sign-posting external sources of support. Participants were asked not to share personally identifying information or contact details on the forum. Accounts granting access to the website were activated after meeting participants in person and once parental permission, where applicable, had been verified.

#### 1.14.4. Focus Groups and Interview

Due to a low level of activity on the forum, I decided to arrange three focus groups to supplement the data obtained online. The Chair of the ethics sub-committee was informed of changes to the participant information sheets and consent forms taking into account the use of focus groups (Appendix F).

An interview was held with one participant who had arranged to come to the second focus group but had not arrived at the youth group until later in the evening. The third focus group was not attended – one person had confirmed their intention to participate but informed me on the day that they were unwell. Participants were encouraged to continue to use the website both before and after the focus groups, although actual further use was limited.

#### 1.14.5. Data Security

The online forum was hosted on a private server and participants required a password to access the website. A confidentiality agreement with the owner of the server was in place. The login page did not include details of the study to protect the confidentiality of participants given that other people might see or use

the computers or devices used to access the website. The researcher's contact details were provided on the login page, as well as within the discussion board itself (where full details of the study were also posted).

Audio recordings were saved in a password-protected folder on a private computer. Due to time limitations following delays in data collection, a transcription service was used to transcribe the recordings verbatim. Recordings were transferred via a secure server and a confidentiality agreement with the company was in place. I checked the transcripts for accuracy by reading these through whilst listening to the audio files.

## **1.15. Participants**

### **1.15.1. Recruitment**

Recruitment to the study was via four LGBT youth groups (including one LGBT group in a further education college and one group specifically for young trans people). Eight other LGBT youth groups across London were contacted, two of these did not have any members under 18 and six others did not reply.

### **1.15.2. Participant and Parental Consent**

Young LGBT people (or those questioning sexuality) continue "to fear rejection, intolerance and even abuse when coming out. This can have a serious and lasting impact on their mental health, leaving them vulnerable to substance misuse, unsafe sex and other risky behaviours" (BPS, 2012, p.12). Wallace and Monsen (2004) in a study conducted in London, found that 32% of young people were rejected by family members when they came out. The authors also found that half of those reporting violence from family members following disclosure of their sexuality still lived with those family member(s). Savin-Williams (1989) notes that rejection by parents can have serious consequences for young people as this can disrupt the achievement of developmental tasks.

The University usually requires parental consent for all research participants under 18 years old. However, in my ethics application I argued that requiring parental consent for 16 or 17 year olds would represent a disproportionate burden for these young people, as obtaining parental consent could involve the

participant being put at risk of serious negative repercussions. I further argued that it might be viewed as ethically dubious to exclude from the research a significant proportion of young people whose experiences are extremely important and may be of most relevance to clinicians. Approval was granted not to require parental consent for participants aged 16 or 17 on this basis. Young people were, however, encouraged to discuss the study with parents if possible.

The University requires parental consent for those under 16 in all circumstances and therefore consent was sought from a parent / guardian for participants aged between 13 and 15. This was an inevitable limitation of the study. Indeed, one person interested in taking part was unable to do so as they were not 'out' to their parents. Following discussions with potential participants, a minor amendment to the ethical approval was granted by the chair of the ethics sub-committee (Appendix G) to allow ethical approval to be obtained from parents via e-mail or telephone call rather in person.

Both parents (where applicable) and young people were given copies of information sheets (Appendix H) and asked to sign consent forms (Appendix I). The original participant information sheets and consent forms (prior to amendments) can be found in the application for research ethics approval (Appendix B).

#### 1.15.3. Age

Previous research has found major developmental milestones for minority sexual identities occurring between ages 11 and 17 (Maguen, Floyd, Bakeman & Armistead, 2002). Though previously many LGB people did not 'come out' until their late teens or early 20s, evidence suggests this now frequently occurs at younger ages (Savin-Williams, 1998). Participants invited to the study were all aged between 13 and 17 years old at the time of recruitment. The lower limit for this study was based on the age at which LGBT youth groups generally accept members, with the upper limit determined by a focus in the literature on participants aged 18 or over.

#### 1.15.4. Sexual Identity

The other inclusion criterion was that the young person was developing a “minority sexual identity”. The information sheet listed the examples of “lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer” as possible minority sexual identities for illustrative purposes, but potential participants were free to decide whether and how the label “minority sexual identity” applied to them. Trans young people who self-defined as having a minority sexual identity were encouraged to participate.

#### 1.15.5. Problematic Aspects

The inclusion criteria for this study overlapped with the membership of the organisations of which participants were members, but these were not identical. One issue was age, which was problematic on two counts. Firstly, the upper age limit for LGBT youth groups in some cases extended to the age of 25. Therefore large numbers of group members were not invited to participate on this basis. Secondly, many of the participants were 17 at the time of recruitment but given that data was collected over a period of months at least one person turned 18 during this time. However, others who had recently turned 18 at the point of recruitment were ineligible for the study. In the context of an LGBT youth group this cut-off seemed increasingly arbitrary over the course of the study.

Potential participants were asked to self-define within a discourse of ‘minority sexual identity’, placing them outside of a supposed heterosexual majority grouping. However, I wished to avoid the limitations of ‘LGB(T)’ so that young people could define themselves outside of these categories. The study also excluded trans young people who did not self-define as having a minority sexual identity. I was particularly aware of this for trans young people attending youth groups where the majority of members self-defined as lesbian, gay, bisexual or pansexual, and therefore a feeling of exclusion for individuals may have been greater than at the trans-specific group where there was a more even mix with people who did not identify with the label ‘minority sexual identity’.

The choice of a minority identity construction is appropriate in my view, as this research seeks to inform professionals working with young people who may be experiencing numerous difficulties due to their experiences being located in marginalised positions. However, In hindsight, a research question of “how do

members of LGBT groups for young people construct sexual identity?” would perhaps have been more congruent with the attendance at the organisations from which I planned to recruit.

#### 1.15.6. Demographic Information

24 participants were recruited to the study, of whom 15 participated in either the online forum or a face-to-face focus group / interview. Table 2.1 lists: age at recruitment, self-defined gender and sexual identity (these were asked as optional open questions), and whether the person participated in the online forum, a focus group / interview, or both. Information about trans-/cisgender identity is included where stated by the participant on the sign-up sheet.

<b>Age</b> (at point of recruitment)	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Sexual identity</b>	<b>Online forum</b>	<b>Focus group / interview</b>
15	Female (cis)	Biromantic lesbian	✓	✗
16	Male	Gay	✓	✗
16	Female	Lesbian	✓	✓
16	Female	Lesbian	✗	✓
16	Female	Bisexual	✗	✓
16	Female	Lesbian	✗	✓
16	Don't know yet	Sapiosexual	✗	✓
16	Male	Gay	✗	✓
16	Female	Bisexual	✗	✓
16	<i>No response</i>	<i>No response</i>	✗	✓
17	Male	Kinsey 2	✓	✓
17	Female	Lesbian	✓	✗
17	Male	I don't put a label on it	✗	✓
17	Male	Bisexual	✓	✗
17	Female	Lesbian	✓	✓

*Table 2.1: Participant demographic details*

I have chosen not to match these demographic details to usernames or aliases used in the transcripts / extracts. Posts in the forum were made under the understanding of anonymity, which might be breached (to other participants in the



study) by linking usernames to an alias used for focus group / interview extracts. This means that some individuals' contributions appear in the extracts used both under a pseudonym and a forum username.

Nine young people consented to participate but neither posted on the forum nor attended the focus groups; their demographic data are included in Table 2.2 below. This includes participants who attended a focus group but did not speak during the recording.

<b>Age</b> (at point of recruitment)	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Sexual identity</b>
16	Female	Lesbian
17	Female	Lesbian
17	Male	Gay
17	Male	Gay
17	Female	Pansexual
17	Transman	Pansexual
17	<i>No response</i>	Genderqueer
17	<i>No response</i>	<i>No response</i>
17	Female	Lesbian

*Table 2.2: Drop-out demographic details*

Three further young people under the age of 16 who agreed to participate did not subsequently obtain parental consent and were thus ineligible to take part in the study. Their details are therefore not included above.

## **1.16. Discussions**

### **1.16.1. Discussion Topics**

The following list shows examples of questions I used to begin discussions on the website:

- Do you use words like lesbian, gay, bi, pansexual or queer to describe yourself? If so, what words do you prefer and why?

- Do you think same-sex / equal marriage is a good thing or a bad thing (or is it maybe a mix of both)? Do you think you will want to get married in the future?
- Is it important for you to see LGBT characters on TV?
- What are your experiences with friends and family? And have these changed over time?

Participants themselves were also welcome to suggest other topics for discussion (examples of this were “LGBT and Religion” and “Too many labels”).

The questions asked at the focus groups built upon the experience on the forum and I sought to use questions that had found some resonance online. However, I was also aware of certain subjects (e.g. sex) that had not been spoken about and particularly in the second focus group I sought to create a space where these could be discussed. In the individual interview with one participant, as well as using some of the general questions outlined above, I sought to ask about some of their contributions to the website that had seemed to come from a different perspective to the majority of participants.

#### 1.16.2. Researcher Participation

I sought initially to keep my participation in discussions minimal and restricted to asking questions. Although some topics (e.g. what words do you use to describe yourself?) generated lengthy discussions, the general experience of the website was that few posts were made. I tried to encourage participants to login to the website and contribute discussions, to minimal and short-lived effect. Some participants commented in personal communication to me that not knowing who the other participants were made them feel less comfortable about posting. I found myself in a dilemma as to how to respond to this situation: I had wished to restrict my own participation to asking a few starting questions but felt that I needed to become more involved to get discussion going. I asked participants for feedback by e-mail as to what might help increase discussion on the website. One person gave this reply:

“When you reply to one of the threads that someone else has commented on, other people might then not want to reply, as we know you are mod, and are clearly commenting to stimulate the conversation, and it feels a little false, I think these conversations need to start naturally.”

However, when I attempted to return to this position of not commenting on discussions or asking further questions, it was apparent that even less material was posted by participants on the site. I believe one major factor in the failure of the website to generate a larger amount of discussion was the numbers recruited to the study. A greater number of participants may have created a ‘snowball’ effect with each person contributing more to the discussions.

My approach to the two focus groups differed according to the contexts in which they were held. At the first group, we were in the large room where the group usually meets and all participants had known each other previously. Here, although I began the group sat in the circle with the young people I noticed that the conversation was stilted. I therefore asked the group if it would help if I removed myself from the circle, which I subsequently did and the conversation flourished. At the second focus group, two of the participants were existing youth group members and two were school friends attending the group for the first time. In this situation greater facilitation was required than at the first focus group.

### **1.17. Summary**

In this chapter I have discussed the epistemological and methodological issues in relation to data collection and analysis, as well as how the study was planned and conducted in practice. In the following chapter I present my analysis of the data and discuss this with reference to the literature outlined in the Introduction.

## ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

In the first chapter, I explored how Western constructions of minority sexual identity have developed and changed since the 19<sup>th</sup> century and how the concept of identity itself has been challenged. Alongside this, wider socio-economic and cultural changes have reshaped the lives of people developing minority sexual identities. In this chapter I explore how young people are positioned by constructions of sexual identity, the ways in which these positions are taken up or resisted, and the social practices which are enabled by them. In addition, I discuss these in relation to the material and discursive forces which render certain ways of being more or less possible, or desirable.

Whilst acknowledging the interconnected relationships of the various themes and statements presented in this analysis, I have chosen to present this in terms of four discursive sites, summarised in the table below:

<b>Identity development or identity positioning?</b>	Theoretical models (e.g. Cass, 1979, Troiden, 1989) often conceptualise sexual identity development as a series of sequential stages. This section recasts 'confusion and turmoil', 'out and proud' and 'identity synthesis' as subject positions made available through discourse and material practices.
<b>Being normal</b>	This section examines how the construction of minority sexual identity as normal (and deserving of 'equality') draws upon a discourse of 'love' rooted in heteronormative relationship structures; lesbian and gay sex, on the other hand, is constructed as a mark of difference and its importance is minimised.
<b>Rainbow sheep</b>	Participants described social isolation, particularly at school, due to their sexuality. One young woman described this as being the 'rainbow

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sheep'. This section explores how constructions of minority sexual identities as contagious, or equated with sexual predation, function to separate 'straight' and LGB teens. Subsequently, I explore how differences in behaviour according to context were constructed, e.g. 'hiding' in homophobic environments and 'being oneself' in LGBT youth groups.

Identity labels are one way of establishing 'truth', though labels differ in the status that they hold and may not 'fit'. Competing discourses of identity, individuality, and flexibility may render young people problematic. This section also explores the relationship between constructions of sexual identity and gender.

*Table 3.1: Summary of discursive 'sites'*

### **1.18. Identity Development Or Identity Positioning?**

Stage models of sexual identity development (e.g. Cass, 1979; Troiden, 1989) have provided an influential theoretical account of minority sexual identity development. Whilst the possibility for fluidity in the stages is acknowledged, the premise of such models is a progression from initial stages such as awareness or confusion towards later acceptance, pride, and integration into overall identity. However, it is also possible to conceptualise these 'stages' as subject positions made available through discourse, which are taken up or resisted in different contexts. In this section I explore discursive constructions of sexual identity development, as well as their relation to material practices.

#### **1.18.1. Confusion And Turmoil**

Earlier stages of developmental models (e.g. Cass, 1979, Troiden, 1989) suggest that prior to reaching 'pride', individuals experience confusion and turmoil over their feelings of same-sex attraction.

**EXTRACT 1** (461-468; lines omitted<sup>7</sup>)

Yunus: Throughout my whole teenage years or up to recently it's just been like full of like me believing that I was err completely really disgusting [...] 'cause I that was my religion and I believed everything that they said [...] it was a completely really big factor in deciding like whether who I was, was the right thing to be like if I should umm like guys or not, if I should just get married to somebody or something like that.

In this first extract, Yunus, who was raised Muslim before converting to Christianity as a teenager, describes struggling with conflicting ideas about how to live his life. On the one hand, he suggests religious teaching made him believe that being attracted to men was wrong and the morally correct choice would be to marry a woman. As Epstein (1987) suggests, the construction of sexuality as sin in the Christian tradition frames sexual orientation as choice. On the other hand, Yunus' account also draws upon essentialist constructions, suggesting that religion made him feel he was 'disgusting' and made him question whether 'who I was, was the right thing to be'. Thus, we can understand Yunus' distress as a meeting of competing discourses of 'choice' versus 'constraint'.

Yunus' dilemma was therefore not whether or not to be attracted to other men but whether or not to make this a lived identity visible in his actions. D'Emilio (1997) argues that due to the economic "'imperative' to procreate" (p. 171) all extra-marital sex was cast as sinful in the pre-Industrial age. However, he suggests the move from a self-sufficient agrarian economy to a capitalist wage labour system with socialised production allowed sexuality to be decoupled from procreation. Thus, in a society of individual workers rather than interdependent family members, it was possible for same-sex desire to "coalesce into a personal identity [...] based on the ability to remain outside the heterosexual family" (p. 172). Thus, it is possible to see Yunus' 'identity confusion' as being contingent upon the socio-material circumstances of free labour capitalism which allow the possibility of an exclusively 'gay' identity where previously opposite-sex marriage

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<sup>7</sup> Omitted text denoted by [...]

was the only viable option for most people. However, it should be noted that D'Emilio's analysis focuses on American society and the changing role of family in a Protestant society. Jaspal (2014) argues that for British Asian gay men cultural and familial expectations of (opposite-sex) marriage can threaten psychological well-being, and openly gay identities may appear to threaten their membership of religious, cultural and social groups. Thus, in understanding the identity dilemmas of same-sex attracted young people, it is also important to consider the discursive constructions of sexuality, family and marriage in the cultural contexts within which they live and the material practices that accompany these.

In this first extract Yunus describes a period where he did not speak about his sexual attraction to men with anyone else. Cass (1979) suggests that people may also disclose their sexuality to some but not others as they learn to integrate a homosexual identity into their own sense of self. The following accounts from Tom would appear to typify this position:

**EXTRACT 2 (1451-1464)**

Tom: I went to an all boys' school, like secondary school and I didn't come out at all there. Erm, I actually struggled a lot in secondary school with friends and stuff, so I just didn't turn up and eventually got kicked out, but er yeah, when I was there, I decided not to come out because you know, being you know, gay was the, the latest, ooh they just but, the long running insult that was best used, so yeah... er you know, and it was all the rough borough of London, so yeah... Erm, after that I went to a college sort of that, that, well run, you know all the thugs and stuff went to, so I didn't come out there, come out there either, because I'd probably get stabbed like straightaway. Erm, and then I went to college and I'm now in, in a group of adults, which are really mature and I came out the first day and everyone's really supportive and, yeah they don't really care, they, you know, they, they ask me if I am with a guy, and yeah, yeah, it's quite good.

In this extract, Tom describes coming out (or not) as a rational decision he made based on the social environments he found himself in. The phrases 'rough borough of London' and 'all the thugs and stuff went to' highlights a hostile environment where he might even be at risk of physical harm. However, it also emphasises his difference from the other young people: as someone making a reasoned decision in a social sphere where others use insults and violence.

Tom's description of 'gay' being 'the long running insult' amongst young people suggests that negative constructions of minority sexual identities and abuse is seen as a taken-for-granted state of affairs. Stonewall (2012) found that homophobic remarks are ubiquitous in British schools and three in five pupils report that teachers never intervene in cases of homophobic bullying. In their survey, 64% of pupils who had reported homophobic bullying said that doing so had not stopped the abuse. Furthermore, 44% of LGB pupils surveyed had skipped school because of such bullying, and 32% of those who had experienced bullying changed their plans for future education due to this. Despite professional guidance for tackling homophobic bullying in schools (e.g. NASUWT, 2012) it appears that it remains an endemic problem. However, recent government guidance for teachers (Department for Education, 2014) makes only brief mention of bullying due to sexual orientation, concentrating instead on the forms bullying in general can take, in particular new powers for schools to tackle 'cyber-bullying'. While in the extract above, Tom describes how he 'struggled' at school, it also appears that many schools struggle to protect and nurture pupils developing minority sexual identities.

Thus, whilst the repeal of Section 28 in 2003 removed the legal requirement for local authorities to not "promote homosexuality", it appears the permissive environment for homophobic bullying, which Epstein (2000) found it had created still remains. Young people in this study noted that schools do not teach about minority sexual identities in a positive way, and may even promote negative views (e.g. **Kate**: 'Like in R.E., they say it's Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve, I think we get like preached' [1175-1176]). Sex and Relationship Education (SRE) is not a statutory requirement under the Education Act 1996. Yvette Cooper, currently the Shadow Home Secretary and previously also Shadow Minister for Equalities,



has described the Government's rejection of compulsory SRE as a mistake and that it would mean problems for young LGBT people's mental and sexual health would fail to be addressed (Roberts, 2013). Even where SRE is provided the Learning and Skills Act 2000 means that marriage is privileged in teaching and that the religious and 'cultural' views are prioritised. The failure of the education system to address homophobic bullying, whilst at the same time actively promoting heterosexual/heteronormative relationships as superior, might be seen as complicity with the social exclusion of young people developing minority sexual identities. For some young people, such as Tom, this may even contribute to them being excluded from school and not realising their academic potential.

Tom's account of relationships with peers at school contrasts sharply with his account of college, amongst a group of adult learners who are 'mature' and 'supportive', where he came out on the first day. A discourse of maturity suggests both homophobic bullying in schools, and tolerance and acceptance in 'adult' spheres are inevitable. In practice, this may mean that challenging the status quo is seen as futile. Similar criticisms have been levelled at the 'It Gets Better Project' (<http://www.itgetsbetter.org/>), an American website set up in response to suicides of LGBT teenagers, which contains video messages intended to provide hope to young people that life will improve for them as adults. As Doyle (2010) suggests, simply asserting that 'it gets better' does not eliminate systemic homophobic abuse nor directly improve young people's present realities. Puar (2010) notes that the vision of successful adult gay life portrayed by the website is male, white, urban and neoliberal; she suggests that this narrow view of gay life and its failure to address how discrimination operates on difference mean that "It Gets Better might actually contribute to Making Things Worse" (paragraph 9). On similar lines, we might also question whether the happy future promised by construction of homophobia as immaturity (which will thus naturally disappear) is something that is necessarily available to all, or is rather contingent upon a politics of 'homonormativity' (Duggan, 2003) and the privilege of white, cisgender, gay men.

Whereas in the previous extract Tom describes the influences on his coming out as due to his social situation, later he appears to explain his difficulties at school and decision not to come out there in terms of psychological factors.

**EXTRACT 3 (1540-1546)**

Tom: Yeah, I sort of had trouble going to school from about the end of primary school to all the way through secondary school, so I didn't finish my GCSEs, but that, yeah it's mainly because of bullying, yeah that'll be because I wasn't secure about my sexuality I think... Erm, although I did have like four friends at secondary school and two, well one of them was gay, one was bisexual, so that was kind of weird, er yeah. Yeah, neither of them came out, except in our small group.

In the above extract Tom's 'trouble going to school' is first explained in terms of bullying, which however in turn is explained by him not being 'secure' about his sexuality. Here, the problem of Tom's school attendance and that he didn't finish his GCSEs is located in his insecurity about his sexuality rather than the behaviour of other pupils or his sexuality per se. Here an 'out and proud' discourse functions to cast Tom's difficulties at school as an individual deficit; being 'secure' in one's sexuality is framed as a personal virtue.

'Coming out' appears to be partially predicated upon this security, but is described as additionally being contingent on a supportive social environment. The fact Tom had found a small friendship group where two of the other boys were gay or bisexual is described as 'kind of weird'. This commonality is not talked about as a source of strength; rather the description of neither of his friends having come out except in their small group highlights that they had not come out to others, which perhaps instead would have signified some strength of character. Thus, there is an expectation of being secure and open about one's sexuality and that this should come from within, independent of the social environment, even though there may be good reasons not to disclose sexuality. However, as Fassinger and Miller (1996) contend "disclosure is so profoundly influenced by contextual oppression that to use it as an index of identity

development directly forces the victim to take responsibility for his or her own victimization” (p. 56). Thus, we may re-read Tom’s description of the ‘rough borough’ and likelihood of ‘getting stabbed straightaway’ in the previous extract as a discursive move to highlight exceptional circumstances for why he was previously unable to adopt an ‘out and proud’ position.

#### 1.18.2. Out And Proud

As discussed in relation to the previous extracts, knowing one’s own sexual identity and being ‘out and proud’ about this was framed as a highly valued status that signalled strength of character. Sophia’s account exemplifies this position:

#### **EXTRACT 4 (63-66)**

Sophia:           It’s like everyone can see what I am by one the way I dress and I actually just label myself ‘cause on my hat I have ‘I heart boobs’, ‘some people are gay’, ‘I’m gay so what?’ and it’s like I dunno I’m just out and proud I don’t care what people say about me.

Sophia’s mention of the badges that ‘out’ her moves the practice of self-labelling from a purely linguistic phenomenon to one that also has material form. However, although she describes her sexuality as self-evident from the way she dresses, the wearing of badges removes the possibility of doubt or her being questioned. Through her statement about not caring, Sophia raises the possibility that others may say negative things about her due to her sexuality. Laying her cards on the table on the one hand might be seen as a risky strategy opening up the possibility of negative reactions. However, by deciding to demonstratively ‘be out’, Sophia does not need to decide moment-to-moment whether to ‘come out’ to others and risk relationships being spoilt by a revelation of her sexuality. Thus, the problem is shifted from her sexual identity to the attitudes or behaviour of others, allowing Sophia to hold the position of not caring about what people say.

‘Coming out’ can be viewed as a *technology of the self* (Foucault, 1988), grounded in a wider Western discursive tradition of confession, whereby individuals align themselves publically to a minority sexual identity and act to claim a status of truth for an internal reality of ‘sexuality’. Knowing one’s true self,

identifying and classifying its form, and sharing this knowledge, is a highly valued exercise and is viewed as a developmental achievement for mature adult (minority) sexuality. However, this practice of identifying and confessing oneself as 'Other' meets resistance from an alternative discourse of 'individuality', which is explored further in section 3.5.

### 1.18.3. Identity Synthesis

The final stage in Cass' (1979) model is 'identity synthesis' where homosexual identity is "given the status of being merely one aspect of self" (p. 235), which Cass argues, "completes the homosexual identity formation process" (ibid.). Indeed, in the extract below, sexual identity is framed as being low in importance in one's sense of self.

#### **EXTRACT 5** (1910-1916; *lines omitted*)

Laura: I think it's like the bottom of my list, like [...] because other stuff that's more important about me instead of like liking girls. That's like, like liking boys isn't a part of someone that, important to a straight girl ...

Laura frames sexual identity as being 'the bottom of [her] list' in what is important about her. This goes beyond the suggestion of being merely one aspect of identity as Cass (1979) describes, instead suggesting it is the least important aspect. Such utterances casting sexual identity as of little importance can be viewed in terms of their action orientation to minimise a socially devalued aspect of the self and emphasise that other (perhaps more socially valued) aspects are of greater importance. Cox and Gallois (1996) argue that the privileging of 'identity synthesis' in stage models as the final stage of development "suggests the existence of a best identity, specifically an identity that supports the dominant heterosexual hegemony, or at least is not antagonist to it" (p. 9).

Although Laura asserts that the sexual aspect of her identity is of low importance, it is clear from the discursive work performed to establish this that minority sexual identity is often seen as the defining aspect of the self. Furthermore, Laura's suggests that 'liking boys isn't [...] important to a straight girl'. Given the privileged

status of heterosexuality, one might argue this is in fact an important aspect of straight girls' overall identity. Both 'gay' and 'straight' subject positions restrict and enable conduct albeit in differing ways. However, as minority sexual identities are constructed as 'Other', this becomes viewed as what defines individuals. Therefore, in this case, 'identity synthesis' could be seen as a rejection of the 'Othering' of minority sexual identity.

Epstein (1987) argues that whilst the radical gay liberation movement of the late 1960s and 1970s sought the abolition of fixed categories, by organising politically they in fact "helped to further the notion [...] that gays constitute a distinct social group" (p. 19). Rather than overthrowing the existing sexual order, the emergence of 'gay' as a category analogous to an ethnic group facilitated a deployment of (legislative) equality within a civil rights framework to bind the previously subversive into existing social structures. With such equality supposedly achieved (e.g. Stonewall's (2013) claim that "one strand of [their] domestic focus – legislative equality – is effectively complete") the political impetus shifts from being a distinct group to being the same as anyone else. Thus, a deployment of equality can be seen to enable the subject position of 'identity synthesis' where a stigmatised gay identity is minimised.

#### 1.18.4. Summary

The stages of Cass' (1979) model are described as a developmental process within a cognitive framework of personal congruency theory. It is also possible to understand these stages as subject positions afforded through discourse which young people take up and resist depending on the contexts into and out of which they speak or act. However, as Eliason and Schope (1997) note, criticisms have been levelled against "the apolitical nature of sexual identity stage models in that they focus on individual adjustment so the person can ultimately "fit in" society rather than alter it" (p. 17).

### 1.19. **Being Normal**

In the previous section, I noted how the construction of minority sexual identities as 'Other' may be resisted. However, in doing so these identities may also be

reformed and bound into heterosexist power structures (Duggan, 2003).

Participants in this study frequently framed themselves as 'normal', drawing upon a discourse of 'equal love'. Love was promoted as what defines relationships and was seen as being common to all regardless of sexual identity. Sex, on the other hand, appeared to be a domain that was a mark of difference and stigma.

#### 1.19.1. Love

One function of a discourse of romantic love is to resist the construction of minority sexual identities as different or 'Other', as the extract below exemplifies.

#### **EXTRACT 6** (from *Topic 27, Post 2; lines omitted*)

Rainbow identity: I think that it's a good thing that the law is recognizing that we are all the same that it shouldn't be called something different because we are gay. [...] This may sound cliché but love is love whatever form it comes in.

Goggin (1993) suggests that the terms 'gay' and 'lesbian' arose to emphasise romantic relationships in contrast to the construction of 'homosexual', which focuses instead on sexual attraction and behaviour. In the above extract, romantic love is constructed as a universal experience and therefore a point of commonality. In this extract, the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act was praised not as providing equal rights to two distinct groups (i.e. opposite- and same-sex couples) but rather was seen as going some way to eliminating such a distinction. Furthermore, constructions of love cast legislative equality as not only legitimate but also as logical and morally correct.

D'Emilio (1997) argues that capitalism "continually weakens the material foundation of family life making it possible [...] for a lesbian and gay male identity to develop" and yet "needs to push men and women into families [...] to reproduce the next generation of worker" (p. 175). Thus D'Emilio argues, on the one hand capitalism creates the conditions of possibility for gay identities to emerge, but on the other hand it does the same for heterosexism and homophobia. However, the construction of 'equality of love' has been used to support the case for same-sex marriage (e.g. Cameron, 2013) and in turn

suggests that marriage is the legitimate and moral form of romantic relationships regardless of the partners' gender. For Duggan (2003), by tying gay and lesbian identities into heterosexist power structures and institutions, they become a "privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption" (p. 50).

On the other hand, D'Emilio (1997) suggests that, due to exclusion from families, gay men and lesbians have had to create alternative networks of support outside of traditional family and marriage structures, which might challenge the social structures enabled by capitalism. However, given the social and legislative changes of recent years, the premise of this argument may not hold so true. Whilst many young people do still experience exclusion from families due to their sexuality, this is not necessarily so clear cut, as the extract below highlights:

**EXTRACT 7** (from *Topic 40, Post 2*)

Rainbow Panda: My mum was extremely mad about it and there was no way that she accepted me, because she's religious and said that its a sin and also that I'm being greedy? I have no idea how falling in love with someone can be greed, but that's her thought on it. My dad at first said that its all a phase and that I need to read about it more, but now he knows I am with someone and he accepts it, because I told him that I am in love, so yeah.

In this extract RainbowPanda describes coming out to her parents and their reactions to this. She contests the negative constructions of her sexuality as 'a sin' (explained by her mother's religiosity) and 'greed' (framed as incomprehensible). This can be viewed as a debate between constructions of sexuality as choice or constraint (Epstein, 1987). RainbowPanda also notes that her father's first reaction was that it was "all a phase" and that she needed to learn more about sexuality.

In the above extract the constructions of sexuality as 'sin', 'greed' and 'a phase', are all countered with the construction of 'love', in what we might term a game of truth (Foucault, 1988). 'Love' seems to function here as a trump card: it is used to

frame the construction of RainbowPanda's sexuality as 'greed' as incomprehensible. It also affirms a lesbian identity, as she suggests that for her father it establishes this as something true rather than an adolescent phase. Thus, a romantic relationship is seen as having greater truth-value than sexual attraction: it establishes a base for possible acceptance but also renders it comprehensible within traditional family structures.

#### 1.19.2. Sex

Whilst love as a discursive resource may function to establish gay relationships as 'true' and as belonging firmly within heteronormative social structures, sex, on the other hand, was spoken about in less favourable terms by young people in this study. Whereas love was framed as being the same regardless of sexual identity, sex on the other hand was constructed as a mark of difference. Whilst love might be the acceptable, sanitised face of minority sexual identities, sex is perhaps still seen as its corrupted, sinful or shameful side that should be hidden.

#### **EXTRACT 8** (249-253)

Beth: Whenever you see TV shows usually the gay people it's always, they are always having sex or getting wasted on drugs and it's always the lesbians who are the ones with the family and actually settling down so I dunno is that a good way to portray the gay community or we're just getting it wrong I don't know, just –

Roof (1987) suggests that lesbian sex is constructed as being less 'real' than heterosexual sex and as requiring the symbolic representation of the phallus in the form of 'masculine' women. However, the other aspect of this phallocentric discourse is the suggestion that lesbians are not even interested in sex, focussing instead on domesticity and emotions (Markowe, 2002) whilst gay men are seen to lead hyper-sexualised party lifestyles. This extract comes from a wider discussion of how television dramas do not portray gay characters as leading 'normal' lives and that this is perhaps what audiences want to see as it is what is different (and therefore interesting) about gay people. However, benefits of such portrayals, and their accuracy as representative of lived experiences, was contested.



As the extract above suggests, for participants in this study sex was seen as important but was framed as desirable only within 'normal' romantic relationships. This was a theme also discussed by participants in the other focus group:

**EXTRACT 9** (2112-2137; *lines omitted*)

- Matt<sup>8</sup>: Mm. So there's maybe like, certain ideas about, what type of sex you should have, who you should have it with, when you should have it?
- Tom: Mm... and the gay, gay guys you're either top or bottom<sup>9</sup>, you can't be anywhere in between, you can't be, nothing you know, you have to be either top or bottom.  
[...]
- Tom: It's like one of the first things you say when you're a gay guy, it's weird, it's like I don't get it, why you should say that.  
[...]
- Maria: Like, they ask me like, how can you have sex with a woman without getting penetrated, without, without a vibrator or something like that, but the truth is that like, I tell them that um like, it's, it's not about the penetration, but about the connection.

In this extract Tom is dismissive of the centrality of sex, in particular discussion of sexual 'roles', in relationships between gay men. Whilst he states that these conversations are commonplace, he suggests that it is 'weird'. Similarly, Maria rejects that sex is about penetration but instead is about an emotional 'connection'. As well as reading this as a rejection of phallocentric constructions of sex, it also raises the question of whether sex can be seen as 'moral conduct' only when it is within the confines of a loving, monogamous relationship. Perhaps these accounts reflect the availability of 'scripts' or discourses about sexuality, in particular that women and girls must be interested in love whereas men are only interested in sex (Moore & Rosenthal, 1993).

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<sup>8</sup> The researcher

<sup>9</sup> Top: 'insertive' sexual partner (particularly in relation to anal sex); bottom: 'receptive' partner.

Tom's account also suggests a dichotomy of sexual roles into 'top' or 'bottom' and – although not explicitly mentioned – that anal sex is central to gay men's sexual experiences. It is striking that Tom does not use the word 'versatile' (someone who both 'tops' and 'bottoms') as an available option, suggesting that in the arrangement of sexual activity 'you can't be anywhere in between.' Underwood (2003) suggests that versatility "is a unique and important feature of male anal sex" and that "the reciprocal scenario, where both men take turns fucking each other, is often exercised as a celebration of equality" (p. 9). However, he notes that some gay men view versatility as "an annoying, sometimes even frustrating, complication" (ibid.). From Tom's account, however, these nuances may be lacking in how sexual roles are performed at least in the initial negotiation of sexual relationships or meetings, which may reflect a wider silence about this aspect of gay men's sexual lives. For example, despite providing information about a range of sexual practices, the BPS (2012) *Guidelines and literature review for psychologists working therapeutically with sexual and gender minority clients* make no explicit mention of versatility, with 'top' and 'bottom' only mentioned in terms of BDSM. Whilst under the section describing key issues for lesbian women the document states "it is often assumed that lesbian sexual practices are entirely focused on oral and/or manual sex. However, there are many other common practices including the use of strap-on dildos and vibrators, fisting, anal sex and BDSM practices" (BPS, 2012, pp. 21-22) no similar statement is made about common assumptions about sex between men under the corresponding section. A cultural assumption that one must be either top or bottom (as well as that anal sex is the 'true' form of gay male sex) might suggest a replication of heterosexist discourse on sex as domination and submission (Boyle, 1993) with clearly defined, gendered roles. For Butler (1990), the presence of heterosexual gender norms in gay and lesbian sexuality "not only constitute a site of power that cannot be refused, but they can and do become the site of parodic contest and display that robs compulsory heterosexuality of its claims to naturalness and originality" (p. 169). However, the challenge that lesbian and gay sex poses to the 'heterosexual matrix' (Butler, 1990) is somewhat neutralised if its actors are constructed as possessing essential qualities associated with the opposite gender (e.g. the 'passive' gay 'bottom', the 'butch, dominant' lesbian).

### 1.19.3. Summary

'Love' appears to be a discursive resource that is deployed in support of 'equality' and establishing the 'truth' of minority sexual identities as legitimate and moral. However, heteronormative discourse may not only influence when sex is seen as moral and acceptable (i.e. within loving, monogamous relationship) but also influence which sexual practices are discussed (e.g. penetrative sex) and which are silenced. Given the diversity of sexual practices and roles, it remains a question whether this influences the availability for these to be practised and performed, or to what extent discourse renders them impermissible to articulate.

## 1.20. **Rainbow Sheep**

Most of the young people spoke about becoming socially isolated due to their sexuality. For example, **Steph** (103-106) said after coming out in Year 9 she became the "black sheep", or rather "rainbow sheep", at school. Two prominent explanations were provided for why young people developing minority sexual identities may become isolated: stigma by association for straight peers and the perception of gay or bisexual young people as sexual predators. This section discusses each of these in turn, before examining how young people describe regulating their conducting in different social spaces.

### 1.20.1. Social Isolation

A discursive construction of sexuality as contagious is drawn upon to explain one way in which young people can become isolated from their peers, as any social contact with a person of the same-sex is construed as being romantic or sexual. In the extract below Sophia describes how she lost friendships due to female friends not wanting to be seen as lesbian:

#### **EXTRACT 10** (79-85; *lines omitted*)

Sophia: I've lost so many friends because people think that we're dating and they hated that so it's like they stopped being friends with me to actually get rid of the title of being a lesbian [...] people are just scared of the fact that because you're with someone you're classed as that as the same thing when it's not actually true they

can't be brave and stand up to it.

Here, Sophia's explanation is that others would conclude her female friends were also gay simply by their association with her, which the friends sought to avoid by ending the friendship. Using Goffman's (1968) theory of stigma we might understand this as the friends seeking to move from the group of the 'wise', who may bear the stigma of a stigmatised group, to the non-stigmatised 'normal' grouping. However, for Sophia this should not be a necessary outcome as the friends should 'know what they are' and not be influenced by others. The discourse of 'knowing who you are' and being secure in your own sexuality allows the friends to be described as not being brave or being scared. However, this description is also an indirect way of establishing a subject position for Sophia as a brave, strong individual who can take on the name-calling and not be bothered by it. Therefore negative experiences are transformed into part of a self-narrative about being a stronger person for the adversity experienced.

Similar to the description of gay as 'the long-running insult' in Extract 2 (Section 3.1.1), in this extract the possibility of being perceived as lesbian seems to signify a substantial threat to social status – regardless of one's own self-identity. In doing so, it serves to separate young people into distinct groups based on sexual identity and police a strict heterosexual-homosexual dichotomy. In Cass' (1979) stage of 'Identity Pride', she suggests that during this phase of development homosexuals shun heterosexual society and socialise primarily within gay groups. However, this rejection of heterosexual society may also be a rejection by heterosexual society.

Whilst a discourse of contagion was one way that participants accounted for their social isolation, another was that they were perceived as a sexual threat, or predator:

**EXTRACT 11 (2407-2409)**

Maria:           When they find out that I'm gay, like they, they just walk away. So yeah it is quite hard, because they think I'm going to rape them or

something...

In this extract, Maria explains her loss of friends not because they fear being seen as lesbian/gay themselves, but that she will 'rape them or something'. Maria notes that it is 'quite hard' for her: unsurprisingly so, perhaps, with her sexuality framed in terms of violent dominance. Whilst contemporary views of male-female sexual relationships are frequently based on the view of male 'demands' for dominance and female 'invitations' for submission (Boyle, 1993), in this extract Maria's position towards other women is constructed as unwarranted, dangerous dominance. Her desire towards other women threatens the heterosexual contract where 'woman' is only an intelligible category in terms of her social relation to a man (Wittig, 1992).

Rose (2000) suggests, "cultural scripts for romantic relations and friendship operate from a heterosexual norm" (p. 325). Therefore one way the 'heterosexual matrix' (Butler, 1990) is policed is that sexual/romantic relationships are for the opposite sex, and friendships are for the same-sex (Werking, 1997). In contrast, Peplau and Fingerhut (2007) suggest friendships and sexual relationships are more fluidly or complexly defined for people with minority sexual identities than heterosexuals. However, within a heterosexual framework it is not easily possible to be friends with someone who might be potentially attracted to you as this crosses into romantic or sexual territory (Werking, 1997) and thus, lesbian/gay women wishing to be close to straight women may be construed as unwanted sexual advances. Whilst Maria's disclosure of being gay appears to threaten her participation in heterosexual friendships, the segregation of 'gay' from 'straight' might also allow young people to seek out spaces where they can forge different forms of friendships outside of a heterosexual framework. This might pose a challenge to young people attracted to both men and women or with non-binary gender identities, if the spaces that are available are delineated on monosexual<sup>10</sup> terms. However, several young people in this study, including Maria, appeared to use 'gay' (and to a lesser extent 'lesbian') as identities that could include opposite-sex attraction.

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<sup>10</sup> Monosexual refers to a heterosexual-homosexual dichotomy, which excludes possibilities of e.g. bisexuality

### 1.20.2. Places To Be Gay (Or Not)

The preceding extracts examine how heterosexual young people regulate their conduct in relation to minority sexual identity 'Others'. The following extracts focus on how young people with a minority sexual identity regulate their own behaviour depending on social context.

#### **EXTRACT 12 (974-982)**

- Maria:            Yeah, it depends where you are, because in here like I feel really comfortable and I can like scream like, "I'm gay" everyone will be alright, but like in my neighbourhood it's like, it's full of Muslim people, so like I can't -
- Matt:            Mm, mm.
- Maria:            - be gay in there because like I'm afraid that I can get killed or something, yeah.

Here Maria suggests that her behaviour is different across contexts due to concerns about her personal safety. Maria describes the LGBT youth group as somewhere she feels comfortable and can be open about her sexual identity. This is contrasted with her neighbourhood in London and her country of origin, which are described as being dangerous places to be gay due to the religious beliefs of others, and thus are places where she is afraid to or cannot 'be gay'. There were 1008 recorded homophobic hate crimes reported in London in 2012/13, a decline of 20% on the previous year, though it is thought likely that many crimes go unreported (Galop, 2013). While homophobic crimes represented just 11% of recorded hate crimes nationally in 2011 (cf. 81% for racism) this proportion is increasing (idem.). From the above extract, it appears that fear for personal safety means that in some contexts Maria attempts to 'pass' as heterosexual or to hide her sexual identity. Maria's account suggests that public and private spaces are organised so as to create safe zones (such as LGBT youth groups) where the normal rules of heterosexism do not apply and people can be themselves, even screaming "I'm gay!" should they wish. Therefore, a subject position of 'out and proud' may be available in certain situations but not others.

**EXTRACT 12 (2377-2380)**

Kate: Your confidence like decreases, you kind of feel insecure about yourself, like “What if I say something wrong” that’s a wrong move like, okay don’t say what you’re thinking, just make up something off top of your head.

Here, Kate describes situations where she did not feel able to be ‘out’. She describes her subjective experience of this as decreasing her confidence as she might risk making a wrong move. This process of self-regulation is framed as a false presentation of the self. However, Foucault (1983) challenges the conception of authentic or inauthentic selves and instead suggests that our focus should be on the activity of how subjectivities are created. In this instance, however, the discourse of authenticity shapes Kate’s subjective experience: thus, an LGBT youth group becomes not only a meeting place for people with common identities, it becomes a location to ‘be yourself’, that is to speak or act in ways which may be viewed as undesirable or impermissible in other contexts. This is highlighted in the following extract:

**EXTRACT 13 (2281-2297; *lines omitted*)**

Maria: Mm, I love this group and it’s like the only place where I can hug people.

Kate: Yeah, when I came now I was rushed with hugs.

Laura: I loved it.

Kate: [*Laughs*]

Tom: I brought my straight friends last week [...] erm and one of my friends afterward said, “Oh my god they hug, like everyone hugs you”, they are so weirded out...

Here, the discussion of hugging at the LGBT youth group highlights this as being different to experiences elsewhere. Whilst the young people in this discussion noted that in single-sex girls’ schools some forms of touch were seen as acceptable for between friends (e.g. holding hands), others were not and were seen as ‘lesbian’ (e.g. sitting on someone’s lap), and that for boys such forms of

touch were never tolerated in boys' schools (**Maria, Kate and Laura: 1470-1527**). Thus, the permissibility of touch depended on sexual identity, context and gender.

This group saw hugging as an activity that cannot be performed in other contexts, particularly if you are not 'out' as it would reveal your sexuality to others. It is unclear from the discussion whether Tom's straight friends were 'weirded out' by the hugging as it is perceived as sexual, or whether because this is behaviour that is unexpected between heterosexual young people. Hugging as an affectionate and intimate activity may be related to the construction of LGBT youth groups as 'safe spaces' where you can be yourself in a physical sense, but also as a demonstration of this openness towards others not possible elsewhere.

### 1.20.3. Summary

In this section, I first examined how constructions of minority sexual identity as contagious or predatory function to isolate young people from their heterosexual-identified peers. Thus, the presentation of the self as having a minority sexual identity (either explicitly by coming-out or inferred by others through behaviour) can have serious social consequences. The risk of social isolation, or even violence, can lead young people to attempt to "pass" as heterosexual in certain contexts; thus, public space is organised into unsafe environments, which produce a subjective experience of inauthenticity, and semi-private 'safe spaces' where an authentic, gay version of the self can be performed.

## 1.21. **Coherence And Stability**

Models of sexual identity development posit that establishing a coherent sense of self is an important developmental process for young people. A fixed identity is accorded the status of truth as something real, and labels can sometimes be viewed as helpful in establishing this as a knowable truth. However, a number of issues may arise with this: the 'fit' of identity labels, the relative truth value accorded to different labels, and the possibility of change or fluidity in identities.



### 1.21.1. Individuality or Group Identity

As Hall (1996) suggests, identities are never a perfect fit. Young people in this study described a number of challenges with how well or not identities may fit them.

#### **EXTRACT 14** (from *Topic 37, Post 1*)

Minh1000: So I've been thinking that maybe the GSM (gender and sexual minorities) community puts too much emphasis on labels, and having a label for each part of you. I mean, I understand that some people find them really helpful, but personally I've kinda felt like I have to label myself (and as something that fits me really accurately), because of (perceived) pressure from the GSM community.

In this extract, Minh1000 writes about pressure to label oneself accurately. This rests on a premise of a knowable self, an essentialist conception of identity. Identification is commonly understood in essentialist terms as the “recognition of some common origin or shared characteristics with another person or group [...] and with the natural closure of solidarity and allegiance established on this foundation” (Hall, 1996: 2). However, as Hall (1996) suggests, a discursive construction of identification is to view it as a never-ending process, constituted by what is left ‘outside’ and where a perfect ‘fit’ is never achieved. Minh1000's phrase ‘a label for each part of you’ suggests multiple, distinct and separable identities that must be organised and categorised to form a coherent whole. As Butler (1990) suggests:

“Coherence” and “continuity” of “the person” are not logical or analytic features of personhood, but, rather, socially instituted and maintained norms of intelligibility. Inasmuch as “identity” is assured through the stabilizing concepts of sex, gender, and sexuality, the very notion of “the person” is called into question by the cultural emergence of those “incoherent” or “discontinuous” gendered beings who appear to be persons but who fail to conform to the gendered norms of cultural intelligibility by which persons are defined (1990, p. 23).

We can read in Minh1000's account a resistance to the pressure to provide absolute coherence. However, this requires discursive work to establish 'personhood' outside of strict norms of gender and sexual identity. **Dan** (36-38) also rejects categorisation, saying that you are "not choosing who you like" and that "I'm just what I am." Using Epstein's (1987) framework we can read Dan's account of 'not choosing' as constructing sexual attraction in terms of constraint. However, both Minh1000 and Dan's rejections of categorisation could also be viewed as a construction of sameness within Epstein's model, inasmuch as one is being no more 'different' than anyone else.

Cox and Gallois (1996) argue self-categorisation is not simply a linguistic act but also entails the gradual adoption of normative behaviour and values of the identified group. The pressure Minh1000 describes can be seen as a meeting point for discourses of 'identity politics' based upon membership of a particular group, and 'individuality' emphasising individual agency and self-expression. Thus, young people with a minority sexual identity are problematised (Foucault, 1999): how can one be both part of a minority group (with particular collective interests) and at the same time an individual like any other?

In the above extract a 'gender and sexual minorities community' is talked into being, which we might read as similar to 'LGBT' removed of the standard labels of identity politics and its implications of certain identities. However, a 'community' also suggests shared values or interests. The pressure to find one's place within this community, as well as in relation to society as a whole, is to have a defined status from which certain actions or positions become more or less possible.

**EXTRACT 15** (from *Topic 23, Post 6; lines omitted*)

Radiation banana:	The word [ <i>lesbian</i> ] (in my opinion) has stereotypes attached to it in that lesbians are either 'butch' (which I'm not) or 'lipstick' (which I'm also not) and it does make me feel like people will assume things about me based on that. [...] I think 'gay' is more general overall and fits me better as I've always thought my sexual identity was a little more fluid than lesbian [...] Using a separate term for
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homosexual girls can make some people feel like women and girls are excluded from being gay in the same way men are (if that makes sense- it's more of a subtle split along gender than a real issue, but I think splitting anything by gender in any LGBT culture or similar is ridiculous, purely because there are, by definition, people in LGBT culture who will identify as a different gender to the one they are born as, both, or anything in between).

In this extract, radiationbanana suggests that 'lesbian' is a limiting term in two ways: firstly, in that it is associated with 'butch' or 'lipstick' poles with little space in-between for alternative ways of being; and secondly, that it separates gay women and gay men. Similar to the previous extract, the perceived 'fit' of labels is highlighted here and radiationbanana suggests that 'gay' is a looser, more general term that encompasses a wider range of positions. However, it raises the question of the extent to which we can choose labels for ourselves as opposed to them being prescribed to us.

Rich (1980) argues that the term 'lesbian' allows women to be explicitly included in a way that 'gay' being seen as synonymous with 'gay men' might not. For Rich, subsuming both men and women under the label 'gay' acts to erase the differences in experience of women. However, whilst participants agreed that lesbian/gay women continue to hold a less visible position than gay men in society, the term 'lesbian' itself was seen as talking an artificial gender divide into being. In our patriarchal culture, a separation between lesbians and gay men may also mean that 'gay' holds masculine privilege and valued status whilst 'lesbian' is denigrated and vilified. 'Gay', constructed in terms of independence and individuality, thus becomes associated with positivity and strength whereas 'lesbian' is seen as an uncomfortable imposed identity.

However, Radiationbanana also calls upon a discursive resource of a singular 'LGBT culture' to question the role of gendered divisions. The inclusion of 'transgender' functions here to cast 'LGB' as belonging to a culture that throws traditional gender norms into question, whilst at the same time maintaining a separation between gender and sexual identities. This construction of sexual

minority identity is not the same as viewing it as Ulrichs' 'third sex' but nor is it the wholesale rejection of the 'gender deviance' that Levine (1992) describes. Perhaps the position of 'LGBT' in this account is to point to a disruption in the embodiment of gender norms of idealised femininity and masculinity (Butler, 1993) and a rejection of fixed identities which some might label as 'queer' (Jagose, 1996). However, as well as not being directly mentioned in the above extract, 'queer' as a group identity label itself tended to be rejected by participants in this study (e.g. **crs**: Topic 23, Post 7; **Minh1000**: Topic 23, Post 15) "due to its connotations". Queer may be seen as the disruptive, dissident or transgressive part of this 'LGBT' culture, whereas lesbian and gay are the 'good citizens' (Bell & Binnie, 2000). In the above extract, although queer itself is not directly apparent, elements of a 'queering discourse' may be present in the constructions of 'gay' and 'LGBT'.

Though labels may be viewed as constraining or undesirable, the above extracts suggest that it is not possible to avoid them completely. Though the right of individuals to assert a preferred label over those with a less comfortable 'fit' is championed in these two first extracts, it is left unclear as to what extent this can be achieved and to what extent this labelling is performed by others.

#### 1.21.2. Questions Of Validity

Identity labels are one way of communicating to others something about the self. However, the value of such labels in being able to establish 'truth' varies. In this sub-section, I contrast the more limited power of bisexuality as 'truth' compared to that of 'lesbian/gay'. I then explore the relationship of minority sexual identities to constructions of heterosexuality as a prototypical norm.

#### **EXTRACT 16** (1090-1101)

- Maria: The thing about being bisexual is that people think that you're just curious.
- Kate: Yeah, I got told, or get told like, like obviously not to myself, but like people go, "Oh yeah if you're bisexual you're just greedy, you're not really, you just like both..."

Laura: It's not fair [*laughs*] it's not fair like...  
Kate: It's not fair, you're just confused, it's not a real thing.

Sexuality is frequently constructed on a heterosexual-homosexual dichotomy and bisexuality is not seen as legitimate an identity as gay or straight identities are (Barker, 2007). In this extract, these two young women highlight some of the ways in which this discourse of dichotomy operates to frame bisexuality as 'curiosity', 'greed' and 'confusion'. Previous research has shown that bisexuality is frequently portrayed in such negative terms in media representations (Barker, Bowes-Catton, Iantaffi, Cassidy & Brewer, 2008). Bisexuality is also frequently viewed as a transitory stage of sexual development (Barker & Langdridge, 2008); indeed, this was evidenced in some of the narratives of the young people in this study who had previously identified as bisexual before labelling themselves as gay/lesbian (**Sophia**: 789-793) or straight (**Beth**: 228-230). Thus, as Kate suggests, bisexuality can sometimes be rejected as not being 'a real thing', whilst hetero- and homosexuality are constructed as having a real existence. According to bisexuality the same value of true existence could therefore be seen to threaten the stability of these identities, which are premised upon a dichotomous construction of sexuality.

Whereas bisexuality is a label that is frequently questioned and disbelieved, other labels may be seen as holding a greater power in establishing truth:

#### **EXTRACT 17 (30-36)**

Sophia: I think I actually like having a label, it kind of just I dunno it defines me in a sense that I'm, it's like I know who I am by having this label and no-one can sway from it or say anything else or say something different so having that label I'm not the black lesbian with dreadlocks but it's I'm more the kind of butch dominant lesbian that I am and that's how I kind of describe myself as.

In this extract, self-labelling is described as providing security in an identity. Having a label is described as defining who Sophia is and giving her knowledge of this, whilst at the same time she exercises some choice over adopting a label

that fits how she sees herself. In Sophia's description labels function not only as a guide for the people they apply to, but also as a defence against others who might question one's identity. Thus, labels have the value of establishing identities as true and fixed. For Sophia a label means that 'no-one can [...] say something different.' Whereas bisexuality might be construed as a phase or confusion, 'lesbian' appears to hold a position of certainty, which can resist challenge.

Sophia also uses the words 'butch' and 'dominant' to describe what type of lesbian she is. Here sexual identity is something that goes beyond attraction or behaviour and is constructed as personality or social role. Butch-femme roles have sometimes been criticised for (at least potentially) reconstructing the power imbalances of heterosexuality (e.g. Wilson, 1986), thus Sophia's construction of minority sexual identity might be seen as simply following heterosexual norms. Roof (1988) posits that hegemonic masculinity has an interest in lesbians being portrayed as masculine, so that masculinity (or the phallus as its representation) is seen as necessary and essential, even if only symbolically appropriated and masquerading, rather than 'real'. Butler (1991) argues that the performance of gender roles in homosexual relationships exposes them as such, that the "parodic replication and resignification of heterosexual constructs" (p. 23) are performance rather than having an essential nature. Thus, for Butler, lesbian sexual identities can be understood to imitate heterosexuality but that "gay is to straight *not* as copy is to original, but, rather, as copy is to copy" (1990, p. 43; italics in original) and that lesbian sexuality might be seen to "redeploy its 'derivativeness' in the service of displacing hegemonic heterosexual forms" (1991, p. 17).

Another young person in the study, who is attracted to both men and women, saw their sexual identity primarily in terms of BDSM<sup>11</sup> and Dom(me)/sub. Chris described power dynamics as inherent to all relationships, but suggested this is often overlooked as it is obscured by constructions of heterosexuality:

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<sup>11</sup> Bondage and discipline, dominance and submission, sadomasochism.

**EXTRACT 18** (3109 – 3179; *lines omitted*)

- Chris: Well umm I think D/s's are more important than ... more important than gay/straight [...] because umm all relationships are power dynamic. All relationships are a power dynamic between two objects.
- Matt: Uh huh.
- Chris: And I think the dynamic is slightly more important than what bits the objects have.  
[...]
- Matt: It sounds like you're saying that umm these are the power dynamics, power differentials that exists in all relationships or -
- Chris: Yes.
- Matt: - in relationships in general but perhaps the difference is other people don't acknowledge those or think about it in those terms, in that frame of reference.
- Chris: No mostly because umm the most traditional power dynamic is the most, well it's also the most common one.
- Matt: Uh huh.
- Chris: Which is umm boy, boy brings the condom, boy leads, girl follows.
- Matt: Uh huh. So is that then related to ... it gets tied up with heterosexuality?
- Chris: Yes.

For Chris, the power dynamic between partners is more important than 'the bits they have'. Chris suggests that power dynamics are inherent in all relationships (indeed there are a number of reasons beyond gender for power imbalances) and that these power differentials are frequently overlooked because of how it is seen as an integral part of heterosexuality. Indeed, Boyle (1993) notes that the sexological literature in much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was premised upon male dominance and female submission as healthy, natural, or obvious. Jeffreys (1985) sees this construction of (hetero)sexuality as a response to the rise in women's social and economic independence in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Boyle (1993) suggests that for heterosexual women the enactment of the submissive sexual role is a replication of their social subordination. Boyle suggests we have

been indoctrinated into an eroticisation of dominance/submission; however, in the above account Chris suggests that embracing inevitable power dynamics allows for increased intimacy (**Chris**: 3557-3567). Chris suggests that gender is the most visible power dynamic in sexuality but that this does not exclude other sources of power differences. However, in Chris' account there is little to suggest that decentring gender means traditional power is challenged, but rather that we should enjoy inherent power imbalances rather than ignore them.

### 1.21.3. Contagion

As described previously, one discursive construction of minority sexual identity likens it to a contagious disease. In the extract below, Maria describes how her grandparents understood her coming out as being because she lives with her aunts (a lesbian couple).

#### **EXTRACT 19 (1198-1214)**

- Maria: I think that sometimes people says that, um being gay is like a disease, because like when I came here and talked to my grandparents they told me, because I live in a gay family in here, like I live with my aunts and they told me that um, I'm gay because they made me gay, because like they're together, so like right now I, I see that as normal, so that's why I came out apparently like, that's what like my family thinks, but I think it's not something that can be spread.
- Kate: Yeah.
- Maria: You just like, there are like a good example for me because they're free and they, they show themselves the way they are.
- Kate: Yeah.
- Maria: So like, I learned from them, but I'm, I'm not lesbian because of them, or I'm not bisexual because of them.

Here, Maria rejects the suggestion that living with her aunts caused her sexuality and that being gay is something that can be spread like a disease. However, Maria's description of her aunts as role models bears some relationship to her grandparents' account of her coming out because of them. Her grandparents'



account perhaps relies upon a construction of sexuality as practice, which can be chosen or be susceptible to outside influence. Maria accepts some element of the idea of 'sexuality as practice' but only insofar as it is living in concordance with an essential sexuality (as evidenced by the phrase 'the way they are'), a construction absent from her grandparents' explanation. Thus, Maria's aunts' influence is portrayed as enabling her to be 'free' and true to herself rather than having to deny whom she really is.

#### 1.21.4. Myth Of 'Turning'

As described in the previous section, constructions of sexuality as fixed or fluid are both available. The construction of sexuality as fluid can be perceived as threatening, either to the individual with a minority sexual identity or to others. Similar to the idea of contagion discussed above, the idea of 'being turned' suggests that sexuality is unstable and can be easily changed by outside influence, or is untrue in the first place.

#### **EXTRACT 20** (1308-1323, *lines omitted*)

- Maria: But I think it's different because like, if you go to the street and you're guy and you kiss a guy you will be like, the, the guys will like be scared of the other guys, like the straight guys will be scared of that and they will be like, "eww", but if you're a woman and you kiss a woman, like um, last time I was with a girl and a coffee, and like I was about to kiss her, and then like three guys passed and like, they stopped in the window and they were like... Because like we, they see us like lesbians, like sexual objects.  
[...]
- Kate: They make it like a game, like, "Ah, which one can turn her straight?"

In this discussion, these young women reject the premise of the straight men's 'game' that it is possible to change someone else's sexuality, framing this as an ignorant suggestion. However, beyond this, Maria's account suggests the idea of being able to 'turn' lesbian women also renders straight men's own sexuality as less secure as it makes them vulnerable to themselves being 'turned' by gay

men. Kimmel (2003) argues masculinity is constructed as power not only over women, but also over other men, and that “homophobia is the fear that other men will unmask us, emasculate us, reveal to us and the world that we do not measure up, that we are not real men” (p. 104). However, although they would be scared of being sexual objects to gay men, Maria suggests that straight men see lesbian women as legitimate sexual objects for themselves. Though the example of the idea of ‘turning’ is linked to a construction of sexuality as fluid, it is also located within a wider societal discourse of women generally being viewed by men as sexual objects.

In subsequent discussion the young women dismissed the suggestion that you cannot know for certain that you are not straight if you have not tried it out and you just need a ‘real man’:

**EXTRACT 21 (1340-1346)**

Laura:           Some guy asked me, like told me like be told like lesbian woman like, you haven’t found the right guy yet, like I could be like unsure, if you’ve never, like someone who’s never experienced it, just you know they’re like you need a “real man” (**Kate**, *simultaneously*: “real man”). No, I don’t need a man I need a woman, that’s the whole point.

Lacan (1958) suggests, “the orientation of feminine homosexuality, as observation shows, follows from a disappointment which reinforces the side of the demand for love” (cited in Butler, 1990, p. 66). For Butler (1990), Lacan concludes that “female homosexuality issues from a disappointed heterosexuality” (pp. 66-67) and is a refusal of (heterosexual) desire. She suggests that:

We can understand this conclusion to be the necessary result of a heterosexualized and masculine observational point of view that takes lesbian sexuality to be a refusal of sexuality *per se* because sexuality is presumed to be heterosexual, and the observer, here constructed as the heterosexual male, is clearly being refused. Indeed, is this account not the

consequence of a refusal that disappoints the observer, and whose disappointment, disavowed and projected, is made into the essential character of the women who effectively refuse him? (p. 67).

The young women in the above extract clearly refute the suggestion that their sexuality is the result of the lack of a 'real man', who presumably would render them into 'real women'. The presence of non-heterosexual women appears to challenge the assumptions of hegemonic masculinity, predicated upon the availability of women to be possessed as men's sexual conquests. As Butler's analysis suggests, the destabilising effect this has on the supposed certainty of masculine dominance is thus projected into the young women who are positioned as 'unsure' or inexperienced. However, the young women reject the notion that women need men to complete them and reaffirm their certainty in their own sexuality.

#### 1.21.5. Summary

In this section, I have explored the pressures that young people describe for them to present a 'coherent' and 'accurate' self. Although the labels may be an uncomfortable fit, the ability of young people to choose which labels are applied to them may depend, amongst other things, on the status of 'truth' ascribed to these terms. Minority sexual identities may be constructed as subversive, for example bisexuality as threatening to the monosexual dichotomy of homo- and heterosexuality, or lesbian desire as threatening to hegemonic masculinity. Identities such as 'butch lesbian', or 'domme' and 'sub', can also be seen to expose heterosexuality as constructed rather than prototypical.

## EVALUATION AND CRITICAL REVIEW

Spencer and Ritchie (2012) argue that qualitative research should be assessed by its contribution to knowledge (i.e. its value and relevance), credibility of the analysis performed, and rigour (e.g. assessing the impact the researcher has played in the research process; providing an audit trail). In this chapter, I revisit the original aims of this research and discuss these with reference to the analysis and discussion, and provide a critical evaluation of the study. Implications for research, service provision and clinical psychology will be discussed.

### 1.22. Research Aims Revisited

As highlighted in the first chapter, previous research has primarily used retrospective accounts of adults to construct stage models of adolescent sexual identity development. The aim of this study was to explore how sexual identity was constructed in the talk of young people developing a minority sexual identity, the material practices which accompany these constructions, and how related subject positions may be taken up or resisted. The main research question has been addressed by presenting four discursive 'sites', where certain subject positions are enabled and others restricted or silenced.

The first 'site' was 'Identity development or identity positioning?', within which young people constructed their experiences of disclosure of sexual identity within a psychological framework such as being 'insecure' or 'out and proud'. This is similar to the (psychological) stages of identity development models (e.g. Cass, 1979). Stage models have been criticised for being apolitical in nature and suggesting a hierarchy of development which privileges heterosexist power structures (Eliason & Schope, 1997). Young people's accounts reflected this, with subject positions of 'out and proud' or 'identity synthesis' (where sexual identity is constructed as only a minor aspect of the self) seen as holding more valuable social status than experiences of 'insecurity'. However, subjugated alternative constructions of 'insecurity' were available, such as being the result of homophobic bullying. As Fassinger and Miller's (1996) critique of using disclosure as an index of identity development suggests, the psychologisation of

heterosexist and homophobic discourse serves to render young people responsible for the effects of their own victimisation. It also functions to obscure, for example, the failure of government policy and educational practice to protect young people from homophobic abuse and to ensure their social and educational inclusion.

The second discursive site was 'Being normal'. Using Epstein (1987)'s framework of 'choice' versus 'constraint' and 'sameness' versus 'difference', the construction of sexuality as 'choice' was clearly resisted in young people's talk as this serves to delegitimise their identities. However, subject positions of being 'the same' or 'different' were taken up or resisted in a more complex fashion. 'Love' was a discursive resource drawn upon to construct minority sexual identities as holding a legitimate and moral status equal to heterosexual identities. However, this deployment of equality in young people's talk functioned to bind minority sexual identities to a heteronormative idealisation of romantic, monogamous relationships as the 'normal', legitimate site for sexuality. Duggan (2003) has termed such constructions 'homonormative' in their replication of heterosexual power structures. Whilst 'love' was constructed as being the same for all, heteronormative discourse constructs gay and lesbian sex as different. However, sex was constructed as being understood only within a heterosexual frame (e.g. penetrative sex; 'masculine' dominance and 'feminine' submission). In their accounts, young people resisted the dominance of these constructions and practices, suggesting that alternatives are or should be available. It remains a question to what extent the availability of such constructions limits the types of relationship or sexuality that can be practised and performed, and to what extent more subjugated experiences are rendered taboo or silenced.

The third site was 'Rainbow sheep'. Two constructions of minority sexual identity were talked in to being: gay as 'contagious' and as 'sexual predator'. Although the young people in this study resisted the validity of such claims, these constructions, along with heteronormative, gendered frameworks for friendship (Rose, 2000; Werking, 1997), function to isolate young people from their heterosexual-identified peers. The availability of such constructions in wider society can lead young people to attempt to "pass" as heterosexual to avoid

negative consequences such as social isolation or violence. However, it may also enable young people to seek out peers similar to themselves in other contexts. Public space may therefore be organised into unsafe environments, associated with subject positions of 'inauthenticity' or 'insecurity', and semi-private 'safe spaces' where an 'authentic' and 'out and proud' subjective experience is possible.

The final 'site' was 'Coherence and stability'. Young people described pressures to present a 'coherent' and 'accurate' self. Identity formation has been viewed as the central task of adolescence (e.g. Erikson, 1959, 1962). However, others view identification as a never-ending and imperfect process (e.g. Hall, 1996) and that 'coherence' is not a feature of individual personhood but rather of social norms (Butler, 1990). Thus, a tension was talked into being between discourses of 'individuality' and 'identity politics'. Furthermore, identity labels appeared to be valued to varying degrees in terms of 'coherence', 'stability', or 'truth' – with the highest value ascribed to identities least challenging to the 'heterosexual matrix' (Butler, 1990). Indeed, minority sexual identities may be constructed as subversive, for example bisexuality as threatening to the monosexual dichotomy of homo- and heterosexuality, or lesbian desire as threatening to hegemonic masculinity. However, identities such as 'butch lesbian', or 'domme' and 'sub', which may challenge gender norms in complex ways can also be seen to expose heterosexuality as constructed rather than prototypical, and thus no more or less valid than other identities.

## **1.23. Critical Review**

### **1.23.1. Epistemology And Methodology**

Yardley (2000) suggests qualitative research should demonstrate coherence across the research questions asked, epistemology, methods and analysis. The epistemological stance adopted in this research was one of critical realist social constructionism. My position has been informed by Burr (1998), and Pujol and Montenegro (1999), who argue against a dichotomy of the 'real' and the 'constructed'.

A critical realist approach allowed an exploration of the links between material practices and conditions, and discursive constructions of sexual identity. For example, homophobic bullying might make the disclosure of minority sexual identity undesirable. However, the practice of 'coming-out' was constructed as overcoming insecurity and displaying pride. Such constructions produced certain subjectivities, e.g. hiding your true identity to protect yourself from negative consequences. However, LGBT youth groups were described as places where you could 'be yourself'. Thus, these constructions were viewed as both material and discursive as part of a complex relationship between the 'knowledge' of sexual identity development and the material practices enabled, such as the forming of different scripts for friendship within LGBT spaces, or the failures of the State to ensure educational and social inclusion of young people in schools.

Critical realist approaches have also been criticised for inconsistency in what is reified as material and what is deemed to be discourse (Speer, 2007). However, more relativist positions have been accused of failing to critique the socio-economic and material structures underpinning positivist categories (Willig, 1999) and to address the embodied realities formed through discourse (Cromby & Nightingale, 1999).

Qualitative methods, such as those employed in this study, have been criticised from a positivist stance for inconsistency, lack of predictive power, and a reliance on interpretation (Willig, 2008). However, from a more relativist epistemology (such as critical realism), it is acknowledged that multiple, alternative readings are possible and that researchers' own subject positions influence the knowledge produced (idem.). As well as detailing the analytic process in Chapter 2, I have presented examples of worked transcripts in Appendix B to illustrate how I have performed this and my readings of the data. I acknowledge that the discursive 'sites' used to present the analysis of this study are but one, possible reading of the transcripts, and not a definitive account of minority sexual identity development. This representation of the data is subject to my own constructions, both from a professional, psychological perspective as well as my experiences and positions as a white, atheist, gay, and cisgender man in his late 20s.

Whilst wanting to explore in this study how minority sexual identities were constructed in young people's talk, I was also keen to draw upon understandings from queer theory that challenge the conception of such identities and to highlight the institutional and material forces holding them in place. I was particularly interested in (non-)normative and (anti-)essentialist understandings of identity. However, to draw solely upon queer theory would have been problematic from a number of perspectives. Firstly, I was interested in the experiences of minority-sexual identified young people as a marginalised and subjugated group within society. Whilst remaining critical towards the ontological status of such categories, I believe that these categories hold some 'reality' in both subjective and material experiences. However, as Halperin suggests, "queer theory proper is often abstracted from the quotidian realities of lesbian and gay male life" (2003, p.343). An approach fully consistent with queer theory would perhaps have precluded such a focus on minority sexual identities, as it would destabilise the categories that allow us to speak of 'minorities' at all. Nonetheless, whilst relying on the notion of minority sexual identity, in recruiting to the study and in my analysis I attempted to avoid the suggestion of stable and fixed identities and that 'minority' automatically equals 'LGB' or even that it should be limited to same- or both-sex attraction. Secondly, given the focus of the study, I planned to recruit from youth groups, which are formed upon the basis of LGBT identity labels. However, my view of such spaces was that they provided the opportunity to challenge norms of identity, gender, and sexuality, whilst at the same time owing their existence to the difficulties in escaping these. Thus, to see and do 'queer' it was necessary to first accept the very identities that queer challenges. Finally, many of the young people in this study did describe themselves in terms of having a coalesced "coherent" identity, which produced material effects in the way they experienced their sexuality. Whilst at times young people in this study rejected the notion of identity, at other times 'queer' was rejected in favour of (binary) identity categories. Therefore by holding in mind different critical paradigms, I have attempted to honour participants' self-conceptions whilst also retaining a critical distance and avoiding a singular analytic lens.



### 1.23.2. Reflexivity, Power, And Rigour

Yardley (2000) suggests qualitative researchers should be transparent about the nature of their involvement in the research, how they may have influenced participants' actions, and how power was balanced between the researcher and the researched. Harper (2003) also highlights the need for discourse analytic researchers to develop a critically reflexive position. One way I sought to do this was to keep a reflective journal (extracts presented in Appendix A), where I noted my thoughts and reactions at various stages of the study. I returned to this during the analysis to remind myself, for example, of how participants or I may have been positioned during the focus groups.

As previously noted, my position as a researcher is informed by my own experiences of developing an identity as a gay man. I informed participants of my sexual identity and my age, explaining that I was interested in not only how their experiences might be similar to mine but also how they might differ. I reasoned that disclosing my own sexual identity might facilitate talk that may have been otherwise uncomfortable. Furthermore, this was in line with being at LGBT youth groups with openly LGB staff. However, I sought to position myself not as someone who had 'been there and done that' but as someone whose experiences might be out of date. In doing so, I hoped the young people in this study would be able to occupy the position of experts in their own experience. For example, during the second focus group I disclosed that I had not been 'out' at school and wondered whether the situation in schools had changed over the past decade (lines 1413-1428). Before this, there had been a lot of similarity and agreement in the group. However, following my disclosure different perspectives were discussed, e.g. Laura said that times had definitely changed (e.g. 1435), whereas Tom provided his account of difficult experiences at school (as presented in Extracts 2 and 3 in the previous chapter).

Similarly, participants were aware of my professional status. I explained that previously psychologists had tended to ask adults to remember what it had been like to be developing a minority sexual identity as a teenager and I was therefore interested in hearing from young people directly. I attempted to address some of the power imbalance by encouraging young people to decide what topics to

discuss and how I should participate (both online and in the focus groups and interview). For example, for the first focus group I had offered an option to hold the group at a nearby location just prior to the youth group's meeting. However, the group decided they would prefer to meet in the normal youth group space at its normal time. The focus group began with me sat with the group in a horseshoe formation. However, noticing the discussion was slow and stilted I offered to move to the edge of the room, which the young people wished me to do. Following this, the conversation became much livelier.

I was also aware that as a white, gay-identified man I held a number of privileged positions in relation to young people in this study. Furthermore, both research and service provision has tended to assume that white, gay male experience is prototypical and can be unproblematically applied to women, ethnic minorities, and other sexual minority identities (e.g. bisexual, queer). I sought to mitigate this in a number of ways. Firstly, I consulted both with youth workers and young people about what sort of questions I should ask or what types of topic would be useful to discuss; I also asked how I could ensure the spaces for discussion were welcoming for women and trans people and implemented the suggestions given into the study (e.g. a self-identified women's space on the online forum). In my analysis I also sought to attend to talk about: the differences of young women's and young men's experiences; issues related to race, religion and culture; and the intersection between gender (identity) and sexual identities.

Though I had initially been concerned as a male researcher not to privilege male voices in this study, in reality women were not only more numerous than men in this study but also were the most active participants in discussions. However, given that previous research in this area has often had a male focus, perhaps this study also goes a small way to addressing a wider gender imbalance towards men in the literature.

In listening to the young people in this study and analysing the transcripts of their talk, I was struck by their sophisticated understandings of sexual identities and how they cogently deconstructed taken-for-granted constructions of gender and sexuality. I was unsure of whether I would have presented similarly complex

arguments at the same age. This may have been partly related to their attendance at LGBT youth groups, perhaps either due to having experienced particular difficulties, or being confident and secure in their identities at an early age and thus able to seek out similar peer groups. LGBT youth groups also provide young people the opportunity to discuss issues with peers and youth workers and have educational and support programmes, which may promote different understandings to those available elsewhere. However, these constructions may also be available more widely among young people, particularly given that two participants were attending an LGBT youth group for the first time. However, I make no claims of representativeness beyond reasoning that the availability of discursive constructions to these young people suggests they are also available more widely (Willig, 2008).

### 1.23.3. Usefulness

Harper (1999) questions who gets to decide the usefulness of research. In the following section I propose my own suggestions for the research, service and clinical implications of this study. However, in my view it is young people themselves and the organisations that work with them who determine the usefulness of this research.

Roman and Apple (1990) suggest research should be judged on the educative and emancipatory impact it has for participants. Young people described their participation in focus groups as useful in itself; for example, through learning something new or discovering others share similar experiences or perspectives:

Kate:                You realise that people have the same views as you. Like  
(2596 –                obviously I don't go around school going like, "Yep" and shouting  
2599)                out my views, I think I'd be like stoned or something.

Due to time constraints I was unable to present my findings to participants prior to submission of this thesis. However, I plan to return to the youth groups to discuss the research and my findings with young people who participated in the study, as well as inviting discussion on the online forum. Any necessary amendments will be made in with their feedback.

This study has sought to contribute to the literature by addressing some of the methodological and theoretical issues of previous research in this area, such as using a sample of young people under the age of 18 rather than relying on retrospective recall of adults of their adolescent development, and exploring the discursive and material contributions to the lived experiences of minority sexual identity. Furthermore, in light of the socio-political changes of recent decades in the UK, I have sought to highlight accounts that may have been less familiar to preceding generations. In the section below I seek to highlight possible ways of working with young people in ways that address some of the issues raised in this study.

## **1.24. Implications**

### **1.24.1. Directions For Future Research**

This study has explored some of the material and discursive influences on minority sexual identity development. Despite my hope to also recruit younger participants, the young people who participated in this study were mostly aged 16 or 17. Several participants mentioned first coming out to others in Years 9 or 10 (aged 13-15). The experiences of this younger age group may differ from older peers.

This study investigated constructions of sexual identity in the talk of young people developing a minority sexual identity. Research analysing the accounts of heterosexual-identified young people may, for example, provide richer insights into the discursive and material forces that function to separate young people into 'straight' and minority sexual identity social groups. Furthermore, conducting studies in other settings (e.g. schools) may also enable researchers to talk to young people developing minority sexual identities who have different experiences or understandings to those attending LGBT youth groups.

This research highlights how relationships and sex are frequently constructed within heteronormative frameworks and how a deployment of equality serves to privilege a politics of 'homonormativity'. Further research could explore how

young people navigate the possibilities for romantic and sexual relationships and how non-heteronormative experiences are positioned and governed.

#### 1.24.2. Policy And Service Provision

In line with previous findings (e.g. Stonewall, 2007, 2012), this study highlights the detrimental effects homophobic abuse can have on young people's mental health, social inclusion and educational achievement. Schools and other statutory services should therefore consider local policies and practice in line with their duties under the Equality Act 2010 with regards to sexual orientation. National policy and legislation currently requires only limited Sex and Relationship Education, which may be out-of-step with the lived experiences of young people. Furthermore, this study highlights the difficult position of young people developing minority sexual identities at, for example, faith schools, where teaching may be actively homophobic. Consideration should be given to how the needs and beliefs of wider religious and cultural communities can be balanced with those of young people within them who are also developing minority sexual identities.

Young people in this study highlighted the importance of LGBT youth groups as spaces where they could 'be themselves' without fear of homophobic abuse or rejection by peers. These young people may be less able to access other generic groups for young people given the social isolation and rejection they experience from heterosexual peers. However, the participants also noted the paucity of available groups and several participants described travelling long distances to attend these. Whilst adults are able to access a commercial 'gay scene' in cities and large towns, given licensing restrictions this is not equally applicable to younger LGBT people. During the course of this study, one of the LGBT groups which I worked closely with was threatened with closure due to lack of funding; anecdotal reports from conversations with youth workers also suggest that many other groups have recently closed. LGBT groups have previously obtained funding through the NHS for sexual health prevention. Under the Health and Social Care Act 2012 responsibilities for public health were transferred from NHS Primary Care Trusts to local government. Local authorities should consider the importance of LGBT youth groups to young people's well-being and possibilities for working with third sector organisations and NHS Mental Health Trusts to

ensure an holistic focus on social and emotional well-being as well as physical health.

#### 1.24.3. Clinical Psychology

Eliason and Schope (2007) suggest stage models are popular amongst professionals “because they provide guidelines for what interventions the individual in therapy may need” (p. 20). However, this assumption of individual developmental need places the responsibility for change onto young people themselves rather than addressing wider societal issues (Fassinger & Miller, 1996). At an individual level, psychologists should seek to empower clients and validate their experiences by acknowledging the influence of homophobia and heteronormative discourse on young people’s experiences. However, greater focus on interventions beyond the individual should also be considered, working in partnership with other services relevant to young people. For example, clinical and educational psychologists could work with schools to reduce stigma and homophobic bullying. Jones (2011) suggests schools could support the formation of Gay-Straight Alliance groups as is more common in the USA; this may be one way to reduce the social isolation of pupils with minority sexual identities from their heterosexual-identified peers. Psychologists could play a useful role in supporting the development of such groups.

Furthermore, the accounts of young people in this study suggest there is not only pressure to ‘hide’ minority sexual identities, but also that minority identities and practices which are intelligible and valued within a heteronormative framework (e.g. sexual identity as of low importance, penetrative sex with defined roles) are privileged over other ways of being. Psychologists should be aware of the political values inherent to stage models and how these may promote and enable certain subjectivities and practices, whilst others are silenced or constrained. Psychologists should also be aware of assumptions that both they and clients may bring of how sex and relationships ‘should’ be performed, and how these assumptions are influenced by wider discursive and material factors. Professional guidelines (e.g. BPS, 2012) should therefore consider further highlighting common assumptions about sexual practices and roles and critiques of these. In working with young people, space should be given for curiosity and flexibility

around how they wish to conduct friendships, romantic and sexual relationships, in ways that empower and make sense to them.

### 1.25. Conclusion

This study has highlighted the manifold, complex ways that (minority) sexual identities are constructed. Powerful social and institutional forces may simultaneously seek to cast young people with minority sexual identities outside of heterocentric social structures but also incorporate and subsume them within a heteronormative moral code. The young people in this study constructed a narrative of negotiating their identities between two discursive poles of 'being the same' and 'being different' suggesting that there is a space for creativity and resistance in forging a variety of ways of organising their emotional, sexual and romantic lives, whilst also being part of wider society. Indeed, the young people involved in this project were hopeful about prospects for the future:

Kate:	I think it's good, I think it's a step like for humanity ... Like, now gay
(1856 –	marriage is legal, and that song [' <i>Same Love</i> '], and everyone's
1863; <i>lines</i>	coming out [...] I can imagine like three years ago that wouldn't,
<i>omitted</i> )	that wouldn't have happened.

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## **APPENDICES**

### **Appendix A: Extracts From Reflective Journal**

#### Online forum: November 2013

I feel really unsure how to react to one young person's mention of 'fapping' (masturbation) in the 'introduce yourself' thread. On the one hand, I don't want to be closing discussions down and saying that sex isn't something that can be talked about in this project. But on the other hand, I don't want it to feel unsafe - whatever that means. I'm aware that this person is 17 and male and there are younger, female participants who I imagine might feel uncomfortable by this comment. Or is that my own prejudices coming through about gender and adolescents' sexuality? I do though feel a bit uneasy about the context of these remarks. I am a bit worried about taking up the responsible adult position here but think I may have to. I'm thinking of trying to keep my response quite light and not too disciplinary, although I then worry I might come across as condescending and disingenuous by not 'owning my position'. I've spoken to a fellow trainee about my dilemma and she agreed that I needed to make some response but not to be too heavy-handed.

#### 1st focus group: January 2014

Tonight went really, really well. Not so much at the start, when it felt like a stilted Q&A at times ... But most of it was great. I feel incredibly proud of myself for having asked if it would be better if I left the circle. I think it really worked! I think I got the thought to do this (and confidence to do it) from the family therapy training I am getting on placement. After I did this, it became much more a conversation between the young people than a series of interviews led by me. The young people seemed extremely passionate about the discussions and were actually disappointed when I said time was up! Although the participants were still clearly regulating the conversation to stay 'on topic' rather than chatting amongst themselves about whatever else, the discussion felt much more natural than at the beginning.

My concern this evening was that at times the conversation seemed dominated by a couple of characters. Interestingly it seems like the young women who were most vocal. I had been worried about being a male researcher and the general lack of attention to female voices in research. But I wonder if I also create the conditions for women to speak and be heard whilst neglecting men. Socially and professionally my main interactions are with women - does this come through in how I set the research up? Perhaps though it is also a reflection of the membership of the group.

The talk about religion was really interesting. I think had I been still actively facilitating the discussion at this point I might have shut this conversation down through my questions. As an atheist, I think I find it harder to connect to these experiences. But also when I was a teenager I attended a youth group at a local church at a time when I was first becoming aware of my own same-sex attraction and this didn't feel a safe space to be gay. I think I tried to cultivate a 'heterosexual' identity, or at least to repress any sign of being attracted to men at this time. By being out of the discussion, I think it was able to unfold in a way I might have found harder to tolerate if I was still contributing, and was richer for this.

#### 2nd focus group: March 2014

Well, tonight was different from expected. I had not met the young people who participated in the group before, and the person I had met previously and was expecting turned up afterwards (so I decided to still meet with him and to do an individual interview).

I noticed on a couple of occasions I was asking questions informed by the previous focus group rather than going with what the young people this evening had brought themselves. I think the occasions when I did this were usually to keep the conversation going. I was feeling quite tired after a busy day at work and I think it was harder for me to really listen and respond in the moment to what I had heard rather than simply link it back to previous ideas. Nonetheless, the

questions and comments I did ask and make weren't a million miles away from the discussion. Also tonight's group felt much more conversational with more equal contributions from the different participants and so my own participation was perhaps reflecting this different tone. I think this was partly due to being in a small room with fewer people involved in the discussion. There were three young women and one young man in tonight's group and again I heard less from the male participant than the others. However, I did try to create opportunities for him to be heard when I thought he had something to say but wasn't breaking into the conversation.

There was quite a lot of discussion about 'love' tonight. I specifically asked about sex this evening, as I was aware it was something that hadn't been talked about and wondered if that was partly because I needed to make it clear it was a topic that could be discussed. I had positioned myself as an adult, a professional and a researcher and felt I needed to act to break down some of the assumptions about what that meant in how the people 'should' orient their talk to me. I also made a self-disclosure in saying that I hadn't been 'out' at school and said how this was now over a decade ago and I wondered how things might have changed (or not) in that time. This came after some discussion on the topic of experiences at school from the participants themselves. I think I did this to out myself to the young people in the focus group and I had made the judgement that leaving the possibility open in their minds that I might be heterosexual could be constraining in what they felt able to say. This has made me think about the social pressures on what is acceptable and taboo to talk about for LGBT people to say when amongst wider audiences. My disclosure seemed to have the effect of allowing more uncertainty and discussion of more problematic experiences.

#### Interview: March 2014

This interview was challenging for me. I wanted to explore this young person's experiences as I felt in his comments on the forum he had represented a position of difference from the majority opinion. I wanted to find out more about the Dom(me)/sub stuff he had talked about. I was aware this represented a different view of how relationships 'should' be from my own but did not want to allow this to silence what might already be a more marginalised voice. However, I was

concerned that at times my questions might have positioned the interviewee as different or an outsider. Although at other times I felt this is what he was bringing himself.

#### Reflections on coverage of Same-Sex Marriages: March 2014

There's been a lot in the press about same-sex marriages, the first of which in the UK are happening this weekend. I read an article by Sandi Toksvig in the Guardian (<http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2014/mar/28/sandi-toksvig-gay-marriage-renewing-vows>), which seemed to hold some similar themes to the ones I have seen in the discussions for this study around the 'equality of love'. It makes me think that I might be on to something with this and that it has some wider availability and relevance.

#### Analysis: April 2014

In some ways it feels like I have developed reasonably coherent 'sites', although I keep on noticing the interconnections between them and wondering whether I have 'got it right'. I think I need to get away from the mindset that there is a 'right' way to read the data and that my task is to discover this. Neil has suggested that I am quite 'close in' at the moment and doing well at exploring action orientation but that I need to push it further on things like subjectification and technologies. I've also noticed that the young people themselves do a fantastic job in the talk of deconstructing taken-for-granted concepts, so I need to work at a different level to bring something to the analysis rather than simply reporting their own social analyses. I'm finding it harder to see evidence of practice in the talk, so this is one area I need to focus on.

## Appendix B: Example Analysis Of Transcript (Stage 2)

Stage 2 of the analysis was 'Identifying what is being talked about and how'.

Below are two examples of worked transcripts at this stage of the analysis.

Focus group 1 (January 2014) 30

Yunus: Okay yeah.

Sophia: My dad's Jamaican but it doesn't even matter that, but umm the thing is <sup>Race/ Culture - not important?</sup> when I was straight like this may sound a bit racist but I was only <sup>identity development: pre awareness or coming-out</sup> interested, I still am only interested in white people. <sup>sexual attraction other than on basis of gender/sex</sup>

(Laughter).

Sophia: Don't worry I prefer white and that's the only thing that turns me on, <sup>sexual desire, attraction.</sup> black people scare the shit out of me.

(Laughter).

Yunus: I like black people a lot. <sup>Coming-out: parents' reactions</sup>

Sophia: And I told mum and then when I told my dad this he was like right at first I wasn't gonna get any black grandkids then I'm not gonna get any <sup>reproductive discourses - what are relationships for? children, family, heteronormative</sup> grandkids, he wasn't happy about that but it's like "dad I can still have kids as well which I probably won't because I'm too posh to push but it's still a possibility. <sup>multiple ways to be LGB</sup> <sup>not due to sexual identity?</sup>

(Laughter).

Sophia: My uncle was really fine about it, my aunty, one of my aunties completely fine about it and I always go to her about my relationships and stuff like that, my other aunty she still believes it's a phase, she still <sup>phase: immature, how do you know? threat to legitimate status - rejected, ignored by society</sup> goes on about oh you don't know yet you're still young this, this and this. I completely ignore her but it's like now my mum and my aunty's got into the habit of actually saying "oh when you meet this girl, when you meet that girl, when you get married to a girl" it's like it's not "oh when you eventually get married to this man and have kids and this and this". It's like the way they think has totally changed, it's like with my dad even though he seems okay with it because we can laugh about it and we chat but if I mention to him like the girl situation he kind of like whoa, back off a little bit. <sup>acceptance, family support</sup> <sup>marriage, heteronormativity</sup> <sup>changing attitudes</sup> <sup>limits to acceptance</sup>

(Laughter). <sup>disgusting? abnormal? taboo</sup> <sup>limits to what can be comfortably discussed</sup>

Steph: Fine if it works though.

Focus group 1 (January 2014)

30

- Kate: Like our friend, she was like, she was like, "Oh, I want a gay best friend, we can take her shopping and you can like help me shop" [laughing] and I was like, "Wait, what?"
- 1950 *object, toy: stereotypes, assumptions*  
*must like fashion and shopping*  
*lesbians like shopping more than other women?*  
*non-threatening, non-sexual neutered.*  
*gay male stereotypes applied to all LGBT people.*
- Laura: Yeah, that won't happen [laughing].
- Kate: But it's going the whole, in fact that's stereotype of what a gay person...
- 1955 *stereotype, caricature*
- Laura: Yeah, and I think the media, that again is media...
- Kate: And I'm like no [laughing].
- 1960 *media influence on availability of constructions, "queer eye for straight guy"?*  
*resisting being straight*  
*person's plaything - not needed, necessary*
- Tom: Well, I certainly like the whole men's and women's toilets and changing rooms, I don't like that.
- 1960 *separate toilet facilities.*  
*note: similar discussions currently at my service; provision of unisex toilets given gender-variant client population.*
- Researcher: Mm, mm.
- 1965 Tom: Because I'm like, why can't I go into the lady's changing room because like, because you might get horny and rape someone or something [laughing], like I'm like, "Yeah but I might do that in the men's room because I'm gay and they're like, "Ssh, ssh" yeah, I, I think it should be unisex.
- men constructed as out of control of sexual urges?*  
*institutional prohibitions*  
*rape, danger*  
*heteronormative framework*  
*women need protection from men gay or straight?*  
*straight men don't need protection from gay men - too 'passive'?*  
*argument dismissed by others*  
*- weak?*  
*gay men less masculine and therefore a lesser threat, but not same as women -> segregation needed.*
- 1970 Researcher: Mm.
- Kate: I agree with that.
- 1975 Maria: I don't know the fact that they separate like, if you go to a pyjama party or something, like boys have to sleep like in one room and the girls have to sleep in another room...
- what about same-sex sexual exploration for 'straight' teens*  
*heterosexual framework of friendship.*  
*protecting girls? preventing pregnancy?*  
*teenage gay sex unthinkable?*  
*normal? - taboo?*  
*- not considered?*
- Kate: Yeah, mine's a whole ban of, not allowed to have, no, no boys, no, I'm like okay, whatever, have the girls instead [laughing].
- 1980 *rules not only hetero-normative, but understood - able only in monosexual terms - what about bisexuality?*

NB: Note in red ink is a reflective comment (here: about a connection I have made to discussions at my clinical placement)

## Appendix C: Application For Research Ethics Approval

### UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON School of Psychology

#### APPLICATION FOR RESEARCH ETHICS APPROVAL FOR RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN PARTICIPANTS

#### FOR PROFESSIONAL DOCTORATE RESEARCH IN CLINICAL, COUNSELLING & EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

Before completing this form please familiarise yourself with the latest *Code of Ethics and Conduct* produced by the British Psychological Society (BPS) in August 2009. This can be found in the Professional Doctorate Ethics folder on the Psychology Noticeboard (UEL Plus) and also on the BPS website [www.bps.org.uk](http://www.bps.org.uk) under *Ethics & Standards*. Please pay particular attention to the broad ethical principles of respect and responsibility.

#### HOW TO COMPLETE & SUBMIT THE APPLICATION

1. Complete this application form electronically, fully and accurately.
2. Type your name in the 'student's signature' section (5.1).
3. Include copies of all necessary attachments in the **ONE DOCUMENT SAVED AS .doc**. See page 2
4. Email your supervisor (Director of Studies) the completed application and all attachments as **ONE DOCUMENT**. INDICATE 'ETHICS SUBMISSION' IN THE SUBJECT FIELD OF THIS EMAIL so your supervisor can readily identify its content. Your supervisor will then look over your application.
5. If your application satisfies ethical protocol, your supervisor will type in his/her name in the 'supervisor's signature' section (5.2) and email your application to the Helpdesk for processing. You will be copied into this email so that you know your application has been submitted. It is the responsibility of students to check this. Students are not able to email applications directly to the Helpdesk themselves.
6. Your supervisor will let you know the outcome of your application. Recruitment and data collection are NOT to commence until your UEL ethics application has been approved, along with other research ethics approvals that may be necessary (See 4.1)



## **MANDATORY ATTACHMENTS**

1. A copy of the invitation letter or text that you intend giving to potential participants.
2. A copy of the consent form or text that you intend giving to participants.

## **OTHER ATTACHMENTS AS APPROPRIATE**

- A copy of original tests and questionnaire(s) and test(s) that you intend to use. Please note that copies of copyrighted (or pre-validated) questionnaires and tests do NOT need to be attached to this application. Only provide copies of questionnaires, tests and other stimuli that are original (i.e. ones you have written or made yourself). If you are using pre-validated questionnaires and tests and other copyrighted stimuli (e.g. visual material), make sure that these are suitable for the age group of your intended participants.
- A copy of the kinds of interview questions you intend to ask participants.
- A copy of ethical clearance from an external organisation if you need one, and have one (e.g. NHS ethical clearance). Note that your UEL ethics application can be submitted and approved before ethical approval is obtained from another organisation, if you need this (see 4.1). Please confirm with your supervisor when you have external ethical clearance, if you need it.
- CRB clearance is necessary if your research involves 'children' (anyone under 18 years of age) or 'vulnerable' adults (see 4.2 for a broad definition of this). Because all students registered on doctorate programmes in clinical, counselling or educational psychology have obtained a CRB certificate through UEL, or had one verified by UEL, when registering on a programme, this CRB clearance will be accepted for the purpose of your research ethics application. You are therefore not required to attach a copy of a CRB certificate to this application.

**\* IF SCANNING ATTACHMENTS IS NECESSARY BUT NOT AT ALL POSSIBLE, SUBMIT TWO HARDCOPIES OF YOUR APPLICATION (INCLUDING ALL ATTACHMENTS) DIRECTLY TO THE HELPDESK. HARDCOPY APPLICATIONS ARE TO BE SIGNED BY YOU AND YOUR SUPERVISOR AND DELIVERED TO THE HELPDESK BY YOU**

**N.B:** ELECTRONIC SUBMISSION IS REQUIRED WHERE AT ALL POSSIBLE AS HARDCOPY SUBMISSION WILL SLOW DOWN THE

## APPROVAL PROCESS

**REMEMBER TO INCLUDE ALL NECESSARY ATTACHMENTS IN THE ONE APPLICATION DOCUMENT AND EMAIL THE COMPLETE APPLICATION AS ONE DOCUMENT (.doc) TO YOUR SUPERVISOR WITH 'ETHICS SUBMISSION' IN THE SUBJECT FIELD OF YOUR EMAIL**

### **1. Initial details**

#### **1.1. Title of Professional Doctorate programme:**

Professional Doctorate in Clinical Psychology

#### **1.2. Registered title of thesis:** (This can be a working title if one is not yet registered)

How do young people developing minority sexual identities construct 'sexual identity'?  
(*working title*)

### **2. About the research**

#### **2.1. Aim of the research:**

The proposed study is designed to explore the following research question: "How do young people developing minority sexual identities, or who are questioning their sexuality, construct 'sexual identity'?"

#### **2.2. Likely duration of the data collection/fieldwork from starting to finishing date:**

Data collection will start in June-July 2013 and finish by May 2014.

**Methods.** (Please give full details under each of the relevant headings)

#### **2.3. Design of the research:**

(Type of design, variables, etc. If the research is qualitative, what methodological approach will be used?)

The study will use the qualitative methodology of Discourse Analysis (drawing upon both Foucauldian Discourse Analysis and Discursive Psychology approaches). Participants will be invited to participate in a private online discussion forum ('message board') over a period of several weeks or months. Written contributions will be analysed along with links shared by participants to other online content (such as newspaper articles, blog posts or YouTube videos).

#### **2.4. Data Sources or Participants:**

(Where is your data coming from? Proposed number of participants, method of recruitment, specific characteristics of the sample such as ethnicity, social category, profession)

Participants will be between the ages of 13 and 17 and developing a minority sexual identity (e.g. lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer) or questioning their sexuality. The lower age limit for this study is based on the age at which LGBT youth groups generally accept members. Participants may be of any gender and ethnicity. A minimum of 12 participants will be recruited and a maximum of 60. The wide range of possible participant numbers is due to the risk of drop-out or minimal participation when using an online message board over an extended period of time.

Using a private online message board, participants will be invited to discuss issues around sexuality and gender, and how these affect the identities of themselves and their peers. This can be likened to an online focus group. However, rather than simultaneous ‘real-time’ discussion, participants will be able to contribute over several weeks or months.

Recruitment will be via sources such as LGBT youth organisations and websites, or via other (e.g. local interest) websites.

## **2.5. Measures, Materials or Equipment:**

(Give details here about what will be used during the course of the research. For example: equipment, a questionnaire, a particular psychological test or tests, an interview schedule or other stimuli such as visual material. See note on page 2 about attaching copies of questionnaires and tests to this application. Only copies of questionnaires and tests that you have written yourself need to be attached. If you are using an interview schedule for qualitative research, attach a copy of the schedule to this application)

A schedule of potential questions / topics for discussion is attached to this application.

## **2.6. Outline of procedure, giving sufficient detail about what is involved in the research:**

(Outline the stages of the proposed research from sending out participant invitation letters and gaining consent through to what will be involved in data collection/experimentation/interview. For example, what will participants be asked to do, where, and for how long?)

Potential participants will be given an information sheet that outlines the nature and purposes of the research and their rights as participants. Information sheets will also be given to parents for all participants under 16. Consent will be sought from participants and a parent / guardian for all participants aged under 16 (clearly this is a limitation of the study, as some young people may not wish to discuss this topic with their parents). In order to discuss the study and verify parental consent, parents and young people will be asked to meet in person with the researcher.

Participants aged 16 or 17 will not require parental consent but will be encouraged to discuss the project with parents if possible (please see section 4.2 for a discussion of the rationale for this). Some participants may not wish to do so (for example if they have not disclosed their sexual identity to their parents). Extra copies of information sheets for parents will be given to these young people to give them if they wish. Participants aged 16 or 17 will be asked to meet with the researcher to verify their age and obtain consent; parents will be welcome to attend this meeting if the young person wishes.

Please see attached information sheets and consent forms for:

- Parents;
- young people aged 13-15;
- and young people aged 16 or 17.

After participant consent (and where applicable parental consent) has been obtained, participants will be invited to join a private message board. Login details will be supplied by the researcher once a minimum of 10 participants have been recruited (to avoid participants ‘waiting’ on an inactive site). Only the researcher, research supervisor and young people participating in the research will have access to this message board. Parents will not be given login details to access the site (please see section 3.2 regarding protection of participants). Participants will be able to change their username to one of their choice, subject to approval by the researcher to ensure usernames do not contain personally identifying details or inappropriate language. Participants will be requested not to use a username that they also use on other websites.

Participants will contribute to the message board over a period of several weeks or months. They will be able to log in to the site at times of their own choosing. If participants have not logged in to the site for 2 weeks or more, the researcher may send a reminder email to them asking whether they wish to continue participating in the research and if so inviting them to log in to the message board. Such messages will also restate that they are free to withdraw from the research at any time should they wish. Participants who have not responded to two reminder emails will be assumed to have withdrawn from the study.

Should it not be possible to conduct the study online for any reason, face-to-face focus groups or individual interviews with participants shall be organised (e.g. in the qualitative laboratories at UEL) and audio-recorded. These interviews would last for about one hour. Recordings (and subsequent transcripts) would be saved in a password-protected folder on a computer only accessible to the researcher. References in information sheets to the online message board will be changed accordingly to reflect these changes.

### **3. Ethical considerations**

**Please describe briefly how each of the ethical considerations below will be addressed.**

(See the BPS guidelines for reference, particularly pages 10 & 18, and the step-by-step guide in the Prof Doc Ethics folder)

#### **3.1. Obtaining fully informed consent:**

Fully informed consent will be obtained by asking participants (and where applicable a parent or guardian) to read and consider the information sheet. Participants and parents will be invited to discuss the study and ask questions before signing consent forms.

The message board shall also have a copy of this information displayed prominently (e.g. in a ‘sticky’ thread, which would appear at all times at the top of the page listing discussion topics).

**3.2. Engaging in deception, if relevant:** (What will participants be told about the nature of the research?)

The proposed research involves no deception.

### **3.3. Right of withdrawal:**

Participants will have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without disadvantage to themselves and without needing to give any reason. For participants under the age of 16, parents may also withdraw their child from the study. Should a participant withdraw (or be withdrawn by their parent), the researcher will reserve the right to use anonymous data in the write-up of the study and in any further analysis that may be conducted by the researcher, as other participants' contributions may not make sense without the context of what has been shared by them. However, where possible this will be avoided and data will be summarised.

If individual face-to-face interviews are used as an alternative method of data collection, data from participants who withdraw (or are withdrawn) from the study will not be used by the researcher. In this case, information sheets and consent forms will be updated accordingly.

### **3.4. Anonymity & confidentiality:** (Please answer the following questions)

Will the data be gathered anonymously (i.e. will you know the names and contact details of your participants?)

YES / **NO**

If **NO**, what steps will be taken to ensure confidentiality and protect the identity of participants?

(E.g. How will names and contact details of participants be stored and who will have access? Will real names and identifying references be omitted from the reporting of data and transcripts etc? What will happen to the data after the study is over? If there is a possibility of you developing your research at a later stage (for publication, for example), then you may not want to destroy all data at the end of the study. If not destroying your data, what will be kept and how? You may want, for example, to destroy audio recordings at the end of the study but keep (electronic) copies of anonymised transcripts for 3 years. Make your intentions clear to participants in your participant invitation letter also.)

Names and contact details for participants (and their parents if applicable) will be stored in a password-protected folder on the researcher's home computer. Consent forms will be stored in a locked cabinet in the researchers home. E-mails will be sent from the researcher's UEL email account. Identifying references to participants will be removed from any material used in the write-up of the study. Participants' contributions will be reported using the anonymous usernames they have chosen. At the end of the study the message board will be taken offline with a copy of the data stored by the researcher in a password-protected folder on the researcher's home computer. The data may be stored for as long as is necessary to publish the study in an academic journal, but deleted as soon as this is no longer necessary. Data will be deleted within 5 years of the end of the study.

Should audio-recordings be used, these will be transcribed and the recordings deleted after the end of the study. Transcripts may be retained for a longer period of time (as per

the above information referring to the online study).

### **3.5. Protection of participants:**

(E.g. Are there any potential hazards to participants or any risk of accident or injury to them? What is the nature of these hazards or risks? How will the safety and well-being of participants be ensured? What contact details of an appropriate support organisation or agency will be made available to participants, particularly if the research is of a sensitive or potentially distressing nature?)

The study is not intended to cause any harm or distress to participants. However, given the potentially sensitive nature of the topics to be discussed, participants may be upset or distressed within the course of the study. Information on outside sources of support will be clearly posted on the forum (both websites and telephone support lines (both LGBT specific, child-focussed and general), as well as suggestions of statutory or voluntary organisations who may be contacted). Participants will also be welcome to contact the researcher to discuss options for support (contact details will be clearly visible).

Participants will agree to a code of conduct for using the message board, including no bullying, or using offensive or derogatory language against each other or sharing contact information. Participants may be excluded from the study if they fail to adhere to this code. Private messaging functions between participants will not be provided, or will be disabled to prevent hidden bullying or other inappropriate behaviour.

### **3.6. Will medical after-care be necessary?**

YES / **NO**

If **YES**, give reasons and outline what provision has been made/will be made for this?

### **3.7. Protection of the researcher:**

(E.g. Will you be knowingly exposed to any health and safety risks? If equipment is being used is there any risk of accident or injury? If interviewing participants in their homes will a third party be told of place and time and when you have left the house?)

There are no known risks to the researcher.

### **3.8. Debriefing:**

(E.g. Will participants be informed about the true nature of the research if they are not told beforehand? Will participants be given time at the end of the experiment/interview to ask you questions or raise concerns? Will they be re-assured about what will happen to their data/interview material?)

At the end of the study participants will be given an opportunity to discuss the project and their contributions. Participants will be encouraged to raise questions or concerns throughout the period of the study given it will take place over an extended period of time. At the end of the study participants will be reminded about what will happen to the material posted on the message forum, and invited to contact the researcher if they have any questions or concerns.

### **3.9. Will participants be paid?**

YES / **NO**

### **3.10. Other:**

(Is there anything else the assessor of this application needs to know to make a properly informed assessment? E.g. if you are researching overseas have you stated where and outlined possible risks and what you will do to safeguard yourself?)

If the researcher has serious concerns about the safety of any participant, or another child or vulnerable person, the researcher will contact the participant's parents (for participants aged under 16) or professionals known to the young person (e.g. youth worker or GP). This would only occur after discussion with the research supervisor and after sending a message or e-mail to the young person to discuss this with them.

#### **4. Other permissions and clearances**

**4.1.** Is ethical clearance required from any other ethics committee? YES / **NO**  
(e.g. NHS, charities)

**4.2.** Will your research involve working with children or vulnerable adults?\* **YES** / NO

If **YES**, please tick here to confirm that you obtained a CRB certificate through UEL, or had one verified by UEL, when you registered on your Professional Doctorate programme.



If your research involves young people between the ages of 16 and 18 will parental/guardian consent be obtained.

YES / **NO**

If **NO**, please give reasons. (Note that parental consent is always required for participants who are 16 years of age and younger. You should speak to your supervisor about seeking consent from parents/guardians if your participants are between the ages of 16 and 18.)

\* 'Vulnerable' adult groups include people aged 18 and over with psychiatric illnesses, people who receive domestic care, elderly people (particularly those in nursing homes), people in palliative care, people living in institutions and sheltered accommodation, for example. Vulnerable people are understood to be persons who are not necessarily able to freely consent to participating in your research, or who may find it difficult to withhold consent. If in doubt about the extent of the vulnerability of your intended participant group, speak to your supervisor.

Participants will be aged between 13 and 17. Parental consent will be obtained for participants aged between 13 and 15. Parental consent will be not be required for participants aged 16 or 17, although participants will be encouraged to discuss the research with their parents if at all possible. All participants will be given time to consult with their parents between inviting them to the study and obtaining consent.

The reason for not requiring parental consent for participants aged 16 or 17 is that they may be unwilling to discuss a potentially sensitive topic such as sexual identity with their parents or they may have not disclosed their sexuality ('come out') to them. Young

LGBT people (or those questioning sexuality) continue “to fear rejection, intolerance and even abuse when coming out. This can have a serious and lasting impact on their mental health, leaving them vulnerable to substance misuse, unsafe sex and other risky behaviours.” (BPS, 2012).

Wallace and Monsen (2004) in a study conducted in London, found that 32% of young people were being rejected by family members when they came out, and 27% were thrown out of home after disclosing to parents or carers. The authors also found that half of those reporting violence from family members following disclosure of their sexuality still lived with those family member(s). Savin-Williams (1989) notes that rejection by parents can have serious consequences for young people as this can disrupt the achievement of developmental tasks.

With this in mind, the researcher and supervisor have deemed that requiring parental consent for 16 or 17 year olds would represent a disproportionate burden for these young people, as obtaining parental consent could involve the participant being put at risk of serious negative repercussions. Clearly, this is a limitation of the study for younger participants that must be accepted (i.e. only those young people who are able to have these conversations with their parents will be able to participate). However, for older participants who are able to give their own consent, it might be viewed as ethically dubious to exclude from the research a significant proportion of young people whose experiences are extremely important and may be of most relevance to clinicians.

#### References:

British Psychological Society (2012). *Guidelines and literature review for psychologists working therapeutically with sexual and gender minority clients*. Leicester: BPS.

Savin- Williams, R.C. (1989). Coming out to parents and self-esteem among gay and lesbian youths. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 18(1–2), 1–35.

Wallace, H. & Monsen, J.J. (Personal communications, 2004). Something to tell you: Twenty years on. *Educational Psychology in Practice*.

## **5. Signatures**

**ELECTRONICALLY TYPED NAMES WILL BE ACCEPTED AS SIGNATURES BUT ONLY IF THE APPLICATION IS EMAILED TO THE HELPDESK BY YOUR SUPERVISOR**

### **5.1. Declaration by student:**

*I confirm that I have discussed the ethics and feasibility of this research proposal with my supervisor(s).*

*I undertake to abide by accepted ethical principles and appropriate code of conduct in carrying out this proposed research. Personal data will be treated in the strictest confidence and participants will be fully informed about the nature of the research, what will happen to their data, and any possible risks to them.*



*Participants will be informed that they are in no way obliged to volunteer, should not feel coerced, and that they may withdraw from the study without disadvantage to themselves and without being obliged to give any reason.*

Student's name: Matt Bristow

Student's signature: Matt Bristow

Student's number: 0818662

Date: 10/12/2012

## **5.2. Declaration by supervisor:**

*I confirm that, in my opinion, the proposed study constitutes a suitable test of the research question and is both feasible and ethical.*

Supervisor's name: Neil Rees

Supervisor's signature: Neil Rees

Date: 21.02.13

**PLEASE CONTINUE THE APPLICATION ON THIS SAME DOCUMENT**

## **PARTICIPANT INVITATION LETTERS**

This section contains three separate participant invitation letters:

- for young people aged 13-15;
- for young people aged 16 or 17;
- for parents / guardians

## **INFORMATION SHEET 1: FOR YOUNG PEOPLE (AGED 13-15)**

### **UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON**

School of Psychology  
Stratford Campus  
Water Lane  
London E15 4LZ

#### **The Principal Investigator**

Matt Bristow, Trainee Clinical Psychologist  
E-mail: u0818662@uel.ac.uk

## **Consent to Participate in a Research Study**

The purpose of this letter is to give you information that you need to consider in deciding whether to take part in a research study. If you think you might like to take part, a copy will also be given to your mum, dad, or legal guardian. This is because they will also need to decide whether they agree to you taking part.

The study is being conducted as part of my Professional Doctorate in Clinical Psychology at the University of East London.

### **Project Title**

How do young people developing minority sexual identities construct 'sexual identity'?

### **What does the project involve?**

The aim of this project is to explore how young people who are developing a minority sexual identity (e.g. lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer) or who are questioning their sexuality talk about sexual identities. For example, topics of discussion might be: What does it mean to be gay, or straight? How are these the same or different? How do you know if you are lesbian, gay or bisexual? Are these words that are useful or are there other words that should be used?

Previously research in this area has tended to ask adults about their experiences growing up, or young people have been asked to fill in questionnaires where the researchers have already chosen what the questions and possible answers are. This project is different in that it is giving young people a chance to speak for themselves and to shape the discussion in ways that are relevant for them.

I am inviting young people to take part in a private online discussion forum (only people involved in the research will be able to see it). Here they will be able to post messages and discuss topics with other young people. They may also choose to share links such as to things they have seen in the news or things that other people have written, or videos such as YouTube clips relevant to the project.

To take part everyone will need to sign up to an agreement to keep the forum a safe and supportive place for everyone. Though we do not want a long list of scary rules there are some things which are particularly important to remember: we cannot allow you to post content that is offensive or bullying, or to share links to pornography or other inappropriate material. Anyone who ignores the agreement may be asked to leave the project.

The research is not designed to cause you any harm, discomfort or distress. Care will be taken to make the forum a safe and supportive space. However, talking about sexual identities can be a sensitive area at times, which may be upsetting. There will be clear information on the forum about sources of support and the researcher can provide this information by email too.

At the end of the project, the messages posted will be analysed using a method called Discourse Analysis. This is a method of looking at the ways people talk about particular subjects. This may be in terms of what sort of language is used or it may be linking it to other theories or ideas (for example, in what sort of ways does society in general handle this topic?). The project will be written up as a doctoral thesis at the University of East London and may be published in an academic journal.

### **What if I don't want my parents to know?**

When young people are asked to take part in research, a parent or guardian also has to agree to this. There is a good reason for this as they are responsible for keeping you safe and helping you to make important decisions. However, I realise that some people would not feel able to talk to their parents about this topic or they are not 'out' at home. Unfortunately, if this is the case for you, you will not be able to take part in this study even if you would like to yourself.

### **Do both my parents have to agree?**

Only one parent or guardian has to agree to you taking part, though if possible it would be good for everyone to agree together. However, there are a number of reasons why this might not be possible, for example if you are in a single-parent family, or you are only 'out' to one of your parents and not the other. The important point is that an adult who has parental responsibility for you agrees to you taking part, whether this is your mum, your dad or another adult who has parental responsibility for you.

### **Where will the project take place?**

The project will take place online on a private discussion forum ('message board'). If you take part in the study you will be given the website address and login details at a later date. The login page will be visible to anyone who has the website address but it will not be possible for them to see anything that has been written in the discussions or who is taking part.

The only people who will be able to see this is you, the other young people taking part in the project, and the researchers (the principal investigator and research supervisor). The research supervisor will have access to the forum so that if you have a concern about how the project is being run, there are two responsible adults who you can choose from to help you. No-one else will be given access to the forum, including your parents or guardians. However, if the researchers think you or someone else may be at risk of harm, they may need to tell someone else such as your parents.

### **Will other people know I am taking part?**

You will be asked to create a username that is anonymous – that is to say it doesn't include your real name, or initials, e-mail address, or your age and where you live. Your username should also be one that is just used for the study rather than copying say the one you use for Facebook, MySpace, Twitter or Xbox. This is so other people cannot link what you say in the study to you as an individual – either online or offline.

Personal details such as your name, address, phone number, email address etc. will not be visible on the forum and you will be asked not to share these with the other people taking part.

### **What happens to the things I share? Will they be kept private?**

At the end of the project the website will be taken offline and the content deleted from the servers where it is being stored. A copy of the content will be kept on the researcher's computer in a password-protected folder. This is so the content can be analysed and be accessed if necessary for writing up the research for

publication. This copy as well as any personal information will also be deleted when it is no longer needed for the research.

Quotes and extracts from things you have written or shared on the forum may be used in the analysis of the research. However, no details will be shared which would mean other people could identify you (e.g. your name or where you live).

**Will I get anything for taking part?**

You will not be paid for taking part in this study. However, I hope that you will find the discussions with other young people interesting and helpful.

**Do I have to take part?**

You do not have to take part in this study and should not feel under any pressure to do so. You are free to change your mind at any time and withdraw from the study. If you choose to withdraw from the study you may do so without disadvantage to yourself and you do not need to give a reason.

If you withdraw, things that you have already shared or written may be used in the write-up of the study and any further analysis that may take place. This is because some discussions that other young people have also been involved in may only make sense when what you have contributed is included. However, where possible this will be avoided and any information that is used will be summarised.

Please feel free to ask me any questions. If you are happy to continue you will be asked to sign a consent form before you can take part. You mum, dad, or guardian, will also be asked to sign a consent form. Please hold on to this invitation letter in case you want to look at it again in the future.

If you have any questions or concerns about how the study has been carried out, please contact:

The study's supervisor: Dr. Neil Rees, Professional Doctorate in Clinical Psychology, School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ.

(Tel: 020 8223 4475. Email: n.rees@uel.ac.uk)

**or**

Chair of the School of Psychology Research Ethics Sub-committee: Dr. Mark Finn, School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ.

(Tel: 020 8223 4493. Email: m.finn@uel.ac.uk)

Thank you for considering taking part in this project.

Yours sincerely,

Matt Bristow, Trainee Clinical Psychologist

December 2012

## **INFORMATION SHEET 2: YOUNG PEOPLE (AGED 16 – 17)**

### **UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON**

School of Psychology  
Stratford Campus  
Water Lane  
London E15 4LZ

#### **The Principal Investigator**

Matt Bristow, Trainee Clinical Psychologist  
E-mail: u0818662@uel.ac.uk

#### **Consent to Participate in a Research Study**

The purpose of this letter is to give you information that you need to consider in deciding whether to take part in a research study. You can also take a copy for your parents or legal guardians if you would like to discuss it with them.

The study is being conducted as part of my Professional Doctorate in Clinical Psychology at the University of East London.

#### **Project Title**

How do young people developing minority sexual identities construct 'sexual identity'?

#### **What does the project involve?**

The aim of this project is to explore how young people who are developing a minority sexual identity (e.g. lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer) or who are questioning their sexuality talk about sexual identities. For example, topics of discussion might be: What does it mean to be gay, or straight? How are these the same or different? How do you know if you are lesbian, gay or bisexual? Are these words that are useful or are there other words that should be used?

Previously research in this area has tended to ask adults about their experiences growing up, or young people have been asked to fill in questionnaires where the researchers have already chosen what the questions and possible answers are. This project is different in that it is giving young people a chance to speak for themselves and to shape the discussion in ways that are relevant for them.

I am inviting young people to take part in a private online discussion forum (only people involved in the research will be able to see it). Here they will be able to post messages and discuss topics with other young people. They may also choose to share links such as to things they have seen in the news or things that other people have written, or videos such as YouTube clips relevant to the project.

To take part everyone will need to sign up to an agreement to keep the forum a safe and supportive place for everyone. Though we do not want a long list of scary rules there are some things which are particularly important to remember: we cannot allow you to post content that is offensive or bullying, or to share links to pornography or other inappropriate material. Anyone who ignores the agreement may be asked to leave the project.

The research is not designed to cause you any harm, discomfort or distress. Care will be taken to make the forum a safe and supportive space. However, talking about sexual identities can be a sensitive area at times, which may be upsetting. There will be clear information on the forum about sources of support and the researcher can provide this information by email too.

At the end of the project, the messages posted will be analysed using a method called Discourse Analysis. This is a method of looking at the ways people talk about particular subjects. This may be in terms of what sort of language is used or it may be linking it to other theories or ideas (for example, in what sort of ways does society in general handle this topic?). The project will be written up as a doctoral thesis at the University of East London and may be published in an academic journal.

### **Do my parents have to agree?**

If you are aged 16 or over, your parents or legal guardians do not need to consent to you taking part. However, if at all possible, I would encourage you to discuss taking part in this project with them first as it is an important decision. However, I realise that some people would not feel able to talk to their parents about this topic or they are not 'out' at home.

### **Where will the project take place?**

The project will take place online on a private discussion forum ('message board'). If you take part in the study you will be given the website address and login details at a later date. The login page will be visible to anyone who has the website address but it will not be possible for them to see anything that has been written in the discussions or who is taking part.

The only people who will be able to see this is you, the other young people taking part in the project, and the researchers (the principal investigator and research supervisor). The research supervisor will have access to the forum so that if you have a concern about how the project is being run, there are two responsible adults who you can choose from to help you. No-one else will be given access to the forum, including your parents or guardians. However, if the researchers think you or someone else may be at risk of harm, they may need to tell someone else such as your parents.

### **Will other people know I am taking part?**

You will be asked to create a username that is anonymous – that is to say it doesn't include your real name, or initials, e-mail address, or your age and where you live. Your username should also be one that is just used for the study rather than copying say the one you use for Facebook, MySpace, Twitter or Xbox. This

is so other people cannot link what you say in the study to you as an individual – either online or offline.

Personal details such as your name, address, phone number, email address etc. will not be visible on the forum and you will be asked not to share these with the other people taking part.

**What happens to the things I share? Will they be kept private?**

At the end of the project the website will be taken offline and the content deleted from the servers where it is being stored. A copy of the content will be kept on the researcher's computer in a password-protected folder. This is so the content can be analysed and be accessed if necessary for writing up the research for publication. This copy as well as any personal information will also be deleted when it is no longer needed for the research.

Quotes and extracts from things you have written or shared on the forum may be used in the analysis of the research. However, no details will be shared which would mean other people could identify you (e.g. your name or where you live).

**Will I get anything for taking part?**

You will not be paid for taking part in this study. However, I hope that you will find the discussions with other young people interesting and helpful.

**Do I have to take part?**

You do not have to take part in this study and should not feel under any pressure to do so. You are free to change your mind at any time and withdraw from the study. If you choose to withdraw from the study you may do so without disadvantage to yourself and you do not need to give a reason.

If you withdraw, things that you have already shared or written may be used in the write-up of the study and any further analysis that may take place. This is because some discussions that other young people have also been involved in may only make sense when what you have contributed is included. However, where possible this will be avoided and any information that is used will be summarised.

Please feel free to ask me any questions. If you are happy to continue you will be asked to sign a consent form before you can take part. Please hold on to this invitation letter in case you want to look at it again in the future.

If you have any questions or concerns about how the study has been carried out, please contact:

The study's supervisor: Dr. Neil Rees, Professional Doctorate in Clinical Psychology, School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ.

(Tel: 020 8223 4475. Email: [n.rees@uel.ac.uk](mailto:n.rees@uel.ac.uk))

**or**

Chair of the School of Psychology Research Ethics Sub-committee: Dr. Mark Finn, School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ.

(Tel: 020 8223 4493. Email: m.finn@uel.ac.uk)

Thank you for considering taking part in this project.

Yours sincerely,

Matt Bristow, Trainee Clinical Psychologist

December 2012

### **INFORMATION SHEET 3: PARENTS / GUARDIANS**

#### **UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON**

School of Psychology  
Stratford Campus  
Water Lane  
London E15 4LZ

#### **The Principal Investigator**

Matt Bristow, Trainee Clinical Psychologist  
E-mail: u0818662@uel.ac.uk

#### **Consent for My Child to Participate in a Research Study**

The purpose of this letter is to give you information that you need to consider in deciding whether you agree to your child taking part in a research study. Your child has also been given a copy of this information and both of you need to agree for him or her to take part.

The study is being conducted as part of my Professional Doctorate in Clinical Psychology at the University of East London.

#### **Project Title**

How do young people developing minority sexual identities construct 'sexual identity'?

#### **What does the project involve?**

The aim of this project is to explore how young people who are developing a minority sexual identity (e.g. lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer) or who are questioning their sexuality talk about sexual identities. For example, topics of discussion might be: What does it mean to be gay, or straight? How are these the same or different? How do you know if you are lesbian, gay or bisexual? Are these words that are useful or are there other words that should be used?



Previously research in this area has tended to ask adults about their experiences growing up, or young people have been asked to fill in questionnaires where the researchers have already chosen what the questions and possible answers are. This project is different in that it is giving young people a chance to speak for themselves and to shape the discussion in ways that are relevant for them.

I am inviting young people to take part in a private online discussion forum (only people involved in the research will be able to see it). Here they will be able to post messages and discuss topics with other young people. They may also choose to share links such as to things they have seen in the news or things that other people have written, or videos such as YouTube clips relevant to the project.

To take part everyone will need to sign up to an agreement to keep the forum a safe and supportive place for everyone. Though we do not want a long list of scary rules there are some things which are particularly important to remember: we cannot allow participants to post content that is offensive or bullying, or to share links to pornography or other inappropriate material. Anyone who ignores the agreement may be asked to leave the project.

The research is not designed to cause your child any harm, discomfort or distress. Care will be taken to make the forum a safe and supportive space. However, talking about sexual identities can be a sensitive area at times, which may be upsetting. There will be clear information on the forum about sources of support and the researcher can provide this information by email too (both to the young people themselves and their parents). If you have any concerns about the project, you are welcome to contact the researcher at any time to discuss these.

At the end of the project, the messages posted will be analysed using a method called Discourse Analysis. This is a method of looking at the ways people talk about particular subjects. This may be in terms of what sort of language is used or it may be linking it to other theories or ideas (for example, in what sort of ways does society in general handle this topic?). The project will be written up as a doctoral thesis at the University of East London and may be published in an academic journal.

### **Why am I being asked about this?**

When young people are asked to take part in research, a parent or guardian also has to agree to this. There is a good reason for this as they are responsible for keeping their child safe and helping them to make important decisions.

### **Do both parents have to agree?**

Only one parent or guardian has to agree to a young person taking part, though if possible it would be good for everyone to agree together. However, there are a number of reasons why this might not be possible, for example if you are a single-parent family, or your child is only 'out' to you and not their other parent(s). The important point is that an adult who has parental responsibility agrees to the young taking part, whether this is their mum, dad or another adult who has parental responsibility for them.

**Where will the project take place?**

The project will take place online on a private discussion forum ('message board'). If your child takes part in the study they will be given the website address and login details at a later date. The login page will be visible to anyone who has the website address but it will not be possible for them to see anything that has been written in the discussions or who is taking part.

The only people who will be able to see this is your child, the other young people taking part in the project, and the researchers (the principal investigator and research supervisor). The research supervisor will have access to the forum so that if you or your child has a concern about how the project is being run, there are two responsible adults who can be contacted. No-one else will be given access to the forum, including parents or guardians. However, if the researchers think your child or someone else may be at risk of harm, they may need to tell someone else such as you as their parent.

**Will other people know my child is taking part?**

Your child will be asked to create a username that is anonymous – that is to say it doesn't include their real name, or initials, e-mail address, or their age and where they live. Their username should also be one that is just used for the study rather than copying say the one they use for Facebook, MySpace, Twitter or Xbox. This is so other people cannot link what they say in the study to him or her as an individual – either online or offline.

Personal details such as their name, address, phone number, email address etc. will not be visible on the forum and your child will be asked not to share these with the other people taking part.

**What happens to the things my child shares? Will they be kept private?**

At the end of the project the website will be taken offline and the content deleted from the servers where it is being stored. A copy of the content will be kept on the researcher's computer in a password-protected folder. This is so the content can be analysed and be accessed if necessary for writing up the research for publication. This copy as well as any personal information will also be deleted when it is no longer needed for the research.

Quotes and extracts from things your child has written or shared on the forum may be used in the analysis of the research. However, no details will be shared which would mean other people could identify them (e.g. their name or where they live).

**Will they get anything for taking part?**

Your child will not be paid for taking part in this study. However, I hope that they will find the discussions with other young people interesting and helpful.

**Do they have to take part?**

Your child does not have to take part in this study and should not feel under any pressure to do so. You are also under no obligation to agree to them taking part, even if they would like to do so themselves. Both you and your child are free to

change your mind at any time and withdraw them from the study. If your child withdraws from the study they may do so without disadvantage to either of you and there is no need to give a reason.

If your child withdraws, things that they have already shared or written may be used in the write-up of the study and any further analysis that may take place. This is because some discussions that other young people have also been involved in may only make sense when what they have contributed is included. However, where possible this will be avoided and any information that is used will be summarised.

Please feel free to ask me any questions. If you are happy to continue your child will be asked to sign a consent form. You will also be asked to sign a consent form before he or she can take part. Please hold on to this invitation letter in case you want to look at it again in the future.

If you have any questions or concerns about how the study has been carried out, please contact:

The study's supervisor: Dr. Neil Rees, Professional Doctorate in Clinical Psychology, School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ.

(Tel: 020 8223 4475. Email: n.rees@uel.ac.uk)

**or**

Chair of the School of Psychology Research Ethics Sub-committee: Dr. Mark Finn, School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ.

(Tel: 020 8223 4493. Email: m.finn@uel.ac.uk)

Thank you for considering whether to agree for your child to take part in this project.

Yours sincerely,

Matt Bristow, Trainee Clinical Psychologist

December 2012

### **CONSENT FORMS**

(See pro forma in the ethics folder in the Psychology Noticeboard on UEL Plus. This should be adapted for use with parents/guardians and children.)

This section contains three separate consent forms:

- for young people aged 13-15;
- for young people aged 16 or 17;
- for parents / guardians

## CONSENT FORM 1: YOUNG PEOPLE (AGED 13-15)

### UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON

#### **Consent to participate in a research study**

“How do young people developing minority sexual identities  
construct ‘sexual identity’?”

I have read the information sheet about this research study and have been given a copy to keep. The researcher has explained to me why this research is being done and what it involves. I have had the chance to discuss the details and ask questions about this information. I understand what it is I am being asked to take part in. The researcher has also explained to me how I will be involved and what I will be asked to do. My parent or guardian has also been given a copy of the information sheet to keep and asked to consent to me taking part in the research.

I understand that my involvement in this study, and any personal data from this research, will remain strictly confidential, which means other people will not have access to this information or be able to see my personal details. Only the researchers involved in the study will have access to identifying data. It has been explained to me what will happen once the research study has been completed.

By signing this consent form, I am showing that I freely and fully consent to participate in the study, which has been fully explained to me. I understand that even once I have given this consent I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without disadvantage to myself and without needing to give any reason. I also understand that if I withdraw, the researcher may still use my anonymous data in the write-up of the study and in any further analysis that may be conducted by the researcher.

Participant's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)

.....

Participant's Signature

.....

Researcher's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)

.....

Researcher's Signature

.....

Date: .....

## **CONSENT FORM 2: YOUNG PEOPLE (AGED 16-17)**

### **UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON**

#### **Consent to participate in a research study**

“How do young people developing minority sexual identities  
construct ‘sexual identity’?”

I have read the information sheet about this research study and have been given a copy to keep. I have been encouraged to speak to my parents or guardians about the research, if I wish to do so. The researcher has explained to me why this research is being done and what it involves. I have had the chance to discuss the details and ask questions about this information. I understand what it is I am being asked to take part in. The researcher has also explained to me how I will be involved and what I will be asked to do.

I understand that my involvement in this study, and any personal data from this research, will remain strictly confidential, which means other people will not have access to this information or be able to see my personal details. Only the researchers involved in the study will have access to identifying data. It has been explained to me what will happen once the research study has been completed.

By signing this consent form, I am showing that I freely and fully consent to participate in the study, which has been fully explained to me. I understand that even once I have given this consent I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without disadvantage to myself and without needing to give any reason. I also understand that if I withdraw, the researcher may still use my anonymous data in the write-up of the study and in any further analysis that may be conducted by the researcher.

Participant's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)

.....

Participant's Signature

.....

Researcher's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)

.....

Researcher's Signature

.....

Date: .....

### **CONSENT FORM 3: PARENTS / GUARDIANS**

#### **UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON**

##### **Parental consent to participate in a research study**

“How do young people developing minority sexual identities  
construct ‘sexual identity’?”

I have read the information sheet about this research study and have been given a copy to keep. The researcher has explained to me why this research is being done and what it involves. I have had the chance to discuss the details and ask questions about this information. I understand what it is my child is being asked to take part in. The researcher has also explained to me how my child will be involved and what he/she will be asked to do. My child has also been given a copy of the information sheet to keep and asked to consent to taking part in the research.

I understand that my child's involvement in this study, and any personal data from this research, will remain strictly confidential, which means other people will not have access to this information or be able to see his/her personal details. Only the researchers involved in the study will have access to identifying data. It has been explained to me what will happen once the research study has been completed.

By signing this consent form, I am showing that I freely and fully consent to my child participating in the study, which has been fully explained to me. I understand that even once I have given this consent I have the right to withdraw my child from the study at any time without disadvantage to myself or him/her and without needing to give any reason. I also understand that if my child withdraws, the researcher may still use my child's anonymous data in the write-up of the study and in any further analysis that may be conducted by the researcher.

Parent or guardian's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)

.....

Parent or guardian's Signature

.....

Researcher's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)

.....

Researcher's Signature

.....

Date: .....

### **OTHER ATTACHMENTS**

(See notes on page 1 about what other attachments you may need to include)

### **POTENTIAL QUESTIONS / TOPICS**

The following list shows examples of discussion topics that may be used. Participants themselves may also suggest other topics.

- What does it mean to be gay, or straight?
- How are these the same or different?
- How do you know if you are lesbian, gay or bisexual?
- What words do you use to describe yourself and your sexual identity?
- What do they mean to you? Do other people use them in the same way?
- Are these words that are useful or are there others that should be used?

### **FIRST REMINDER E-MAIL**

Hi,

You previously agreed to take part in a research project using the message board at ....(*website address*). I notice that you have not logged in to the website recently. If you have just been busy but still would like to take part, I look forward to seeing you on the site again soon. If you have lost or forgotten your login details, please let me know and I will reset these for you.

However, if you no longer want to take part you are of course free to withdraw from the study at any time. If you want to withdraw you may let me know by email, if you wish. If I do not hear from you in the next two weeks (and you don't log back in to the website), I will send you another reminder email. If I do not hear from you after that will assume you no longer want to take part and will not contact you again. However, your login details will still work until the end of the project and you can rejoin the discussions up until that point.

If you have any questions or concerns about the project, please let me know.

Best wishes,

Matt Bristow

## **SECOND REMINDER E-MAIL**

Hi,

You previously agreed to take part in a research project using the message board at ....(*website address*). I notice that you have not logged in to the website recently and emailed you a couple of weeks ago. If you have just been busy but still would like to take part, I look forward to seeing you on the site again soon. If you have lost or forgotten your login details, please let me know and I will reset these for you.

However, if you no longer want to take part you are of course free to withdraw from the study at any time. If you want to withdraw you may let me know by email, if you wish. However, if I do not hear from you (and you don't log back in to the website) I will assume you no longer want to take part and will not contact you again. However, your login details will still work until the end of the project and you can rejoin the discussions up until that point.

If you have any questions or concerns about the project, please let me know.

Best wishes,

Matt Bristow

**REMEMBER TO INDICATE 'ETHICS SUBMISSION' IN THE SUBJECT FIELD  
WHEN EMAILING THE APPLICATION AS ONE DOCUMENT FILE (SAVED  
AS .doc) TO YOUR SUPERVISOR**

**University of East London  
Doctoral Degree in Clinical Psychology**

### **Risk assessment for interviews that are being conducted away from UEL.**

Title of study	Location(s) of interviews	Name of local contact (if available)	Severity of hazard (H, M, L)	Likelihood of hazard (H, M, L)	Risk (H, M, L)	Approved (Yes/No)
How do young people developing a minority sexual identity construct sexual	Initial meetings at UEL or community centres (e.g. LGBT youth groups)		L	L	L	



identity?	Main study conducted online					
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Brief details of nature of potential risks and how these will be addressed:

Trainee: Matt Bristow

Signature:

Date:

Director of Studies: Neil Rees

Signature:

Date:

Dean of School or designate:

Signature:

Date:

## Appendix D: Thesis Registration

**SCHOOL OF PSYCHOLOGY**  
Dean: Professor Mark N. O. Davies, PhD, CPsychol, CBiol.  
[uel.ac.uk/psychology](http://uel.ac.uk/psychology)





Date: 13 May 2013  
Student Number: 0818662

Dear Matt,

---

**Registration as a Candidate for the University's Research Degree**

I am pleased to inform you that the Research Degrees Subcommittee on behalf of the University Quality and Standards Committee, has registered you for the degree of Professional Doctorate.

**Title of Professional Doctorate:** Professional Doctorate in Clinical Psychology

**Registered Thesis Title:** How do young people developing minority sexual identities construct 'sexual identity'?

**Director of Studies:** Dr Neil Rees

**Supervisor/s:** Dr Virginia Lam

**Expected completion:** According to your actual date of registration, which is **1 September 2011**, the registration period is as follows:

**Minimum 18 months maximum 48 months (4 years), according to a full time mode of study.**

Your thesis is therefore due to be submitted between:

**1 March 2013 - 1 September 2015**

I wish you all the best with your intended research degree programme. Please contact me if you have any further queries regarding to this matter.

Yours sincerely,



Dr James J. Walsh  
School Research Degrees Leader  
Direct line: 020 8223 4471  
Email: [j.j.walsh@uel.ac.uk](mailto:j.j.walsh@uel.ac.uk)

Cc: Neil Rees

Stratford Campus, Water Lane, Stratford, London E15 4LZ  
Tel: +44 (0)20 8223 4986 Fax: +44 (0)20 8223 4937 MINICOW 020 8223 2853  
Email: [mno.davies@uel.ac.uk](mailto:mno.davies@uel.ac.uk)



## Appendix E: Ethical Approval

### SCHOOL OF PSYCHOLOGY

Dean: Professor Mark N. O. Davies, PhD, CPsychol, CBiol.

**UEL**  
University of  
East London  
[www.uel.ac.uk](http://www.uel.ac.uk)

### School of Psychology Professional Doctorate Programmes

To Whom It May Concern:

This is to confirm that the Professional Doctorate candidate named in the attached ethics approval is conducting research as part of the requirements of the Professional Doctorate programme on which he/she is enrolled.

The Research Ethics Committee of the School of Psychology, University of East London, has approved this candidate's research ethics application and he/she is therefore covered by the University's indemnity insurance policy while conducting the research. This policy should normally cover for any untoward event. The University does not offer 'no fault' cover, so in the event of an untoward occurrence leading to a claim against the institution, the claimant would be obliged to bring an action against the University and seek compensation through the courts.

As the candidate is a student of the University of East London, the University will act as the sponsor of his/her research. UEL will also fund expenses arising from the research, such as photocopying and postage.

Yours faithfully,



Dr. Mark Finn

Chair of the School of Psychology Ethics Sub-Committee

Stratford Campus, Water Lane, Stratford, London E15 4LZ  
tel: +44 (0)20 8223 4966 fax: +44 (0)20 8223 4937  
e-mail: [mno.davies@uel.ac.uk](mailto:mno.davies@uel.ac.uk) web: [www.uel.ac.uk/psychology](http://www.uel.ac.uk/psychology)



The University of East London has campuses at London Docklands and Stratford  
If you have any special access or communication requirements for your visit, please let us know. MINICOM 020 8223 2853



## **Appendix F: Changes To Participant Information Sheets**

From: Matt BRISTOW  
Sent: 7 January 2014 15:15  
To: Mark Finn  
Cc: Neil Rees  
Subject: amendment to ethics

Dear Mark,

I have another small amendment I would like to request to my ethics and updated information sheets, which I hope you will be able to approve.

I have had difficulty getting enough activity on the online forum where I was hoping to get my data from. I already have ethical approval for a back-up plan to hold face to face focus groups and have now updated my information sheets to make use of this option. I have written two versions for each group (13-15, 16-17 and parents) depending on whether it is for an existing participant (including the additional information about the focus groups), or someone new (information on both the focus groups and the website). I did not want to include information solely related to the online forum for those who have already signed up to this (and who I imagine will be the majority of those attending the focus groups) as it might feel like overkill for them!

The amendment to ethical approval I am requesting is that I have the option to have the recordings transcribed by a third party (subject to a confidentiality agreement). I have included this in the updated information sheets and consent forms. Given the delays and difficulties I have had in getting my data (and that I am recovering from glandular fever so working at less than full steam), I thought it prudent to gain consent from participants now for me to take this option should I need to.

Please do let me know if you would like to discuss any of the above.

Best wishes,

Matt Bristow  
Trainee Clinical Psychologist

School of Psychology, University of East London

---

From: Mark FINN  
Sent: 9 January 2014 12:12  
To: Matt Bristow  
Cc: Neil Rees  
Subject: RE: amendment to ethics

Dear Matt,

Thank you for your email and sorry to hear about your ill health.

Sensible decisions all the way according to your email. I am not aware of any BPS criteria to inform participants about the third party transcribers so strictly speaking approval for this intention is not necessary. However, it is good practice to inform participants about who will have access to their raw data and with ensuring continued confidentiality hopefully this should not hinder your recruitment efforts.

Best wishes,

Mark

Dr Mark Finn  
Senior Lecturer Psychology  
020 8223 4493  
Room AE2.19

## **Appendix G: Confirmation Of Approval For Minor Amendment To Ethics**

From: Matt BRISTOW  
Sent: 20 September 2013 14:24  
To: Mark Finn  
Cc: Neil Rees  
Subject: amendment to ethics

Dear Mark,

I would like to request approval for a small amendment in the procedures for my clinical psychology prof doc thesis. Participants in my study are LGBT young people (aged 13 to 17) who I am recruiting via LGBT youth groups. I have approval for 16 and 17 year olds not to require parental consent, but for 13-15 years this is clearly still needed. In my original application I stated that:

"Consent will be sought from participants and a parent / guardian for all participants aged under 16 (clearly this is a limitation of the study, as some young people may not wish to discuss this topic with their parents). In order to discuss the study and verify parental consent, parents and young people will be asked to meet in person with the researcher."

However, some of the young people I have spoken to have said it would be very difficult for their parents to come to the youth groups to meet with me in person (e.g. due to work commitments and/or the young person attending a group which is not in their local area). These young people have asked me if I could speak to their parents by phone, or to contact them by email.

I would therefore like to be able to verify parental consent by telephone or email rather than necessarily meeting parents in person. If this change is possible, would an email to me from parents confirming consent be sufficient (I would provide an electronic copy of the consent form)? The option of returning a signed paper copy following telephone/email discussion would of course also remain. I have attached revised participant information sheets reflecting the proposed changes.

Best wishes,

Matt Bristow  
Trainee Clinical Psychologist  
School of Psychology, University of East London

---

From: Mark FINN  
Sent: 20 September 2013 16:21  
To: Matt Bristow  
Cc: Neil Rees  
Subject: RE: amendment to ethics

Dear Matt,

Thank you for your email. The proposed amendment is both necessary and sensible. Please regard this email as notice of approval for the proposed amendment.

It seems that you will be flexible in letting parent/guardian communicate with you in their preferred way (i.e. phone or email). Maybe email them first and follow up with an email, or phone if you need to chase someone up or if they want to talk more.

To cover yourself fully, if you are going to take an email from a parent/guardian as documented consent, the email you receive should ideally include the content of a usual consent form - i.e. affirmation of being fully informed, understanding the information given etc. Maybe send them an email with such content and ask for it to be returned to you as evidence of consent. Anyway, I'm sure you have thought this all through.

And your participant invitation letter is excellent.

Wishing you well with your research.

Mark

## **APPENDIX H: Information Sheets For Participants And Parents**

### **INFORMATION SHEET FOR YOUNG PEOPLE (AGED 13 – 15)**

#### **UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON**

School of Psychology  
Stratford Campus  
Water Lane  
London E15 4LZ



#### **The Principal Investigator**

Matt Bristow, Trainee Clinical Psychologist  
E-mail: u0818662@uel.ac.uk

#### **Consent to Participate in a Research Study**

The purpose of this letter is to give you information that you need to consider in deciding whether to take part in a research study. If you think you might like to take part, a copy will also be given to your mum, dad, or legal guardian. This is because they will also need to decide whether they agree to you taking part.

The study is being conducted as part of my Professional Doctorate in Clinical Psychology at the University of East London.

#### **Project Title**

How do young people developing minority sexual identities construct 'sexual identity'?

#### **What does the project involve?**

The aim of this project is to explore how young people who are developing a minority sexual identity (e.g. lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer) or who are questioning their sexuality talk about sexual identities. For example, topics of discussion might be: What does it mean to be gay, or straight? How are these the same or different? How do you know if you are lesbian, gay or bisexual? Are these words that are useful or are there other words that should be used?

Previously research in this area has tended to ask adults about their experiences growing up, or young people have been asked to fill in questionnaires where the researchers have already chosen what the questions and possible answers are. This project is different in that it is giving young people a chance to speak for themselves and to shape the discussion in ways that are relevant for them.

I am inviting young people to take part in a private online discussion forum (only people involved in the research will be able to see it). Here they will be able to post messages and discuss topics with other young people. They may also choose to share links such as to things they have seen in the news or things that other people have written, or videos such as YouTube clips relevant to the project.



To take part everyone will need to sign up to an agreement to keep the forum a safe and supportive place for everyone. Though we do not want a long list of scary rules there are some things which are particularly important to remember: we cannot allow you to post content that is offensive or bullying, or to share links to pornography or other inappropriate material. Anyone who ignores the agreement may be asked to leave the project.

I am also inviting young people to take part in a focus group of around 60 to 90 minutes with other people of a similar age. The focus group discussions will be audio recorded. These recordings will either be transcribed by the researcher or by a third party transcription service. The transcriptions will be analysed (alongside the content from the website) using a method called Discourse Analysis. This is a method of looking at the ways people talk about particular subjects. This may be in terms of what sort of language is used or it may be linking it to other theories or ideas (for example, "In what sorts of ways does society in general handle this topic?"). The project will be written up as a doctoral thesis at the University of East London (UEL) and may be published in an academic journal.

The research is not designed to cause you any harm, discomfort or distress. Care will be taken to make the forum and focus group a safe and supportive space. However, talking about sexual identities can be a sensitive area at times, which may be upsetting. Information about sources of support will be made available to you should you wish this and a list of support organisations is also available on the website.

### **What if I don't want my parents to know?**

When young people are asked to take part in research, a parent or guardian also has to agree to this. There is a good reason for this as they are responsible for keeping you safe and helping you to make important decisions. However, I realise that some people would not feel able to talk to their parents about this topic or they are not 'out' at home. Unfortunately, if this is the case for you, you will not be able to take part in this study even if you would like to yourself.

### **Do both my parents have to agree?**

Only one parent or guardian has to agree to you taking part, though if possible it would be good for everyone to agree together. However, there are a number of reasons why this might not be possible, for example if you are in a single-parent family, or you are only 'out' to one of your parents and not the other. The important point is that an adult who has parental responsibility for you agrees to you taking part, whether this is your mum, your dad or another adult who has parental responsibility for you.

### **Where will the project take place?**

The online part of the project will take place online on a private discussion forum ('message board'). If you take part in the study you will be given the website address and login details at a later date. The login page will be visible to anyone who has the website address but it will not be possible for them to see anything that has been written in the discussions or who is taking part.

The only people who will be able to see this is you, the other young people taking part in the project, and the researchers (the principal investigator and research supervisor). The research supervisor will have access to the forum so that if you have a concern about how the project is being run, there are two responsible adults who you can choose from to help you. No-one else will be given access to the forum, including your parents or guardians. However, if the researchers think you or someone else may be at risk of harm, they may need to tell someone else such as your parents.

The focus group will take place either at UEL in Stratford, or at public or community building near to an existing LGBT youth group. The discussion will take place in a room only with the researcher and the people taking part in the focus group discussion.

### **Will other people know I am taking part?**

For the website, you will be asked to create a username that is anonymous – that is to say it doesn't include your real name, or initials, e-mail address, or your age and where you live. Your username should also be one that is just used for the study rather than copying say the one you use for Facebook, MySpace, Twitter or Xbox. This is so other people cannot link what you say in the study to you as an individual – either online or offline.

Personal details such as your name, address, phone number, email address etc. will not be visible on the forum and you will be asked not to share these with the other people taking part.

### **What happens to the things I share? Will they be kept private?**

At the end of the project the website will be taken offline and the content deleted from the servers where it is being stored. The audio recordings from the focus group will also be deleted. Copies of the content from the website, the audio recordings and the transcript will be kept on the researcher's computer in a password-protected folder. This is so the content can be analysed and be accessed if necessary for writing up the research for publication. This copy as well as any personal information will also be deleted when it is no longer needed for the research.

Quotes and extracts from things you have written or shared on the forum or said in the focus group may be used in the analysis of the research. However, no details will be shared which would mean other people could identify you (e.g. your name or where you live).

### **Will I get anything for taking part?**

You will not be paid for taking part in this study. However, I hope that you will find the discussions with other young people interesting and helpful.

### **Do I have to take part?**

You do not have to take part in this study and should not feel under any pressure to do so. You can also choose to only participate in the online forum, but not the focus group discussion (or vice-versa). You are free to change your mind at any

time and withdraw from the study. If you choose to withdraw from the study you may do so without disadvantage to yourself and you do not need to give a reason.

If you withdraw, things that you have already said or written may be used in the write-up of the study and any further analysis that may take place. This is because some discussions that other young people have also been involved in may only make sense when what you have contributed is included. However, where possible this will be avoided and any information that is used will be summarised.

Please feel free to ask me any questions. If you are happy to continue you will be asked to sign a consent form before you can take part. You mum, dad, or guardian, will also be asked to sign a consent form. Please hold on to this invitation letter in case you want to look at it again in the future.

If you have any questions or concerns about how the study has been carried out, please contact:

The study's supervisor: Dr. Neil Rees, Professional Doctorate in Clinical Psychology, School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ.

(Tel: 020 8223 4475. Email: n.rees@uel.ac.uk)

or

Chair of the School of Psychology Research Ethics Sub-committee: Dr. Mark Finn, School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ.

(Tel: 020 8223 4493. Email: m.finn@uel.ac.uk)

Thank you for considering taking part in this project.

Yours sincerely,

Matt Bristow, Trainee Clinical Psychologist  
January 2014

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## **INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARENTS (OF YOUNG PEOPLE AGED 13-15)**

### **UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON**

School of Psychology  
Stratford Campus  
Water Lane  
London E15 4LZ



**The Principal Investigator**  
Matt Bristow, Trainee Clinical Psychologist  
E-mail: u0818662@uel.ac.uk

### **Consent for My Child to Participate in a Research Study**

The purpose of this letter is to give you information that you need to consider in deciding whether you agree to your child taking part in a research study. Your child has also been given a copy of this information and both of you need to agree for him or her to take part.

The study is being conducted as part of my Professional Doctorate in Clinical Psychology at the University of East London.

### **Project Title**

How do young people developing minority sexual identities construct 'sexual identity'?

### **What does the project involve?**

The aim of this project is to explore how young people who are developing a minority sexual identity (e.g. lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer) or who are questioning their sexuality talk about sexual identities. For example, topics of discussion might be: What does it mean to be gay, or straight? How are these the same or different? How do you know if you are lesbian, gay or bisexual? Are these words that are useful or are there other words that should be used?

Previously research in this area has tended to ask adults about their experiences growing up, or young people have been asked to fill in questionnaires where the researchers have already chosen what the questions and possible answers are. This project is different in that it is giving young people a chance to speak for themselves and to shape the discussion in ways that are relevant for them.

I am inviting young people to take part in a private online discussion forum (only people involved in the research will be able to see it). Here they will be able to post messages and discuss topics with other young people. They may also choose to share links such as to things they have seen in the news or things that other people have written, or videos such as YouTube clips relevant to the project.

To take part everyone will need to sign up to an agreement to keep the forum a safe and supportive place for everyone. Though we do not want a long list of scary rules there are some things which are particularly important to remember: we cannot allow participants to post content that is offensive or bullying, or to share links to pornography or other inappropriate material. Anyone who ignores the agreement may be asked to leave the project.

I am also inviting young people to take part in a focus group of around 60 to 90 minutes with other people of a similar age. The focus group discussions will be audio recorded. These recordings will either be transcribed by the researcher or by a third party transcription service. The transcriptions will be analysed

(alongside the content from the website) using a method called Discourse Analysis. This is a method of looking at the ways people talk about particular subjects. This may be in terms of what sort of language is used or it may be linking it to other theories or ideas (for example, “In what sorts of ways does society in general handle this topic?”). The project will be written up as a doctoral thesis at the University of East London (UEL) and may be published in an academic journal.

The research is not designed to cause your child any harm, discomfort or distress. Care will be taken to make the forum a safe and supportive space. However, talking about sexual identities can be a sensitive area at times, which may be upsetting. There will be clear information on the forum about sources of support and the researcher can provide this information by email too (both to the young people themselves and their parents). If you have any concerns about the project, you are welcome to contact the researcher at any time to discuss these.

### **Why am I being asked about this?**

When young people are asked to take part in research, a parent or guardian also has to agree to this. There is a good reason for this as they are responsible for keeping their child safe and helping them to make important decisions.

### **Do both parents have to agree?**

Only one parent or guardian has to agree to a young person taking part, though if possible it would be good for everyone to agree together. However, there are a number of reasons why this might not be possible, for example if you are a single-parent family, or your child is only ‘out’ to you and not their other parent(s). The important point is that an adult who has parental responsibility agrees to the young taking part, whether this is their mum, dad or another adult who has parental responsibility for them.

### **Where will the project take place?**

The online part of the project will take place online on a private discussion forum (‘message board’). If your child takes part in the study they will be given the website address and login details at a later date. The login page will be visible to anyone who has the website address but it will not be possible for them to see anything that has been written in the discussions or who is taking part.

The only people who will be able to see this is your child, the other young people taking part in the project, and the researchers (the principal investigator and research supervisor). The research supervisor will have access to the forum so that if you or your child has a concern about how the project is being run, there are two responsible adults who can be contacted. No-one else will be given access to the forum, including parents or guardians. However, if the researchers think your child or someone else may be at risk of harm, they may need to tell someone else such as you as their parent.

The focus group will take place either at UEL in Stratford, or at public or community building near to an existing LGBT youth group. The discussion will take place in a room only with the researcher and the young people taking part in the focus group discussion.

**Will other people know my child is taking part?**

For the website, your child will be asked to create a username that is anonymous – that is to say it doesn't include their real name, or initials, e-mail address, or their age and where they live. Their username should also be one that is just used for the study rather than copying say the one they use for Facebook, MySpace, Twitter or Xbox. This is so other people cannot link what they say in the study to him or her as an individual – either online or offline.

Personal details such as their name, address, phone number, email address etc. will not be visible on the forum and your child will be asked not to share these with the other people taking part.

**What happens to the things my child shares? Will they be kept private?**

At the end of the project the website will be taken offline and the content deleted from the servers where it is being stored. The audio recordings from the focus group will also be deleted. Copies of the content from the website, the audio recordings and the transcript will be kept on the researcher's computer in a password-protected folder. This is so the content can be analysed and be accessed if necessary for writing up the research for publication. This copy as well as any personal information will also be deleted when it is no longer needed for the research.

Quotes and extracts from things your child has written or shared on the forum or said in the focus group may be used in the analysis of the research. However, no details will be shared which would mean other people could identify them (e.g. their name or where they live).

**Will they get anything for taking part?**

Your child will not be paid for taking part in this study. However, I hope that they will find the discussions with other young people interesting and helpful.

**Do they have to take part?**

Your child does not have to take part in this study and should not feel under any pressure to do so. You are also under no obligation to agree to them taking part, even if they would like to do so themselves. You, or your child, can also choose that he or she only participates in the online forum, but not the focus group discussion (or vice-versa). Both you and your child are free to change your mind at any time and withdraw them from the study. If your child withdraws from the study they may do so without disadvantage to either of you and there is no need to give a reason.

If your child withdraws, things that they have already said or written may be used in the write-up of the study and any further analysis that may take place. This is because some discussions that other young people have also been involved in may only make sense when what they have contributed is included. However, where possible this will be avoided and any information that is used will be summarised.

Please feel free to ask me any questions. If you are happy to continue your child will be asked to sign a consent form. You will also be asked to sign a paper consent form or confirm your consent via e-mail before he or she can take part. Please hold on to this invitation letter in case you want to look at it again in the future.

If you have any questions or concerns about how the study has been carried out, please contact:

The study's supervisor: Dr. Neil Rees, Professional Doctorate in Clinical Psychology, School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ.

(Tel: 020 8223 4475. Email: n.rees@uel.ac.uk)

or

Chair of the School of Psychology Research Ethics Sub-committee: Dr. Mark Finn, School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ.

(Tel: 020 8223 4493. Email: m.finn@uel.ac.uk)

Thank you for considering whether to agree for your child to take part in this project.

Yours sincerely,

Matt Bristow, Trainee Clinical Psychologist  
January 2014

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## INFORMATION SHEET FOR YOUNG PEOPLE (AGED 16 – 17)

### **UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON**

School of Psychology  
Stratford Campus  
Water Lane  
London E15 4LZ



### **The Principal Investigator**

Matt Bristow, Trainee Clinical Psychologist  
E-mail: u0818662@uel.ac.uk

### **Consent to Participate in a Research Study**

You previously agreed to participate in an online forum as part of this study. The purpose of this letter is to give you information that you need to consider in

deciding whether to also take part in a face-to-face focus group. You can also take a copy for your parents or legal guardians if you would like to discuss it with them.

The study is being conducted as part of my Professional Doctorate in Clinical Psychology at the University of East London.

### **Project Title**

How do young people developing minority sexual identities construct 'sexual identity'?

The aim of this project is to explore how young people who are developing a minority sexual identity (e.g. lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer) or who are questioning their sexuality talk about sexual identities. For example, topics of discussion might be: What does it mean to be gay, or straight? How are these the same or different? How do you know if you are lesbian, gay or bisexual? Are these words that are useful or are there other words that should be used?

Previously research in this area has tended to ask adults about their experiences growing up, or young people have been asked to fill in questionnaires where the researchers have already chosen what the questions and possible answers are. This project is different in that it is giving young people a chance to speak for themselves and to shape the discussion in ways that are relevant for them.

I am inviting young people to take part in a private online discussion forum (only people involved in the research will be able to see it). Here they will be able to post messages and discuss topics with other young people. They may also choose to share links such as to things they have seen in the news or things that other people have written, or videos such as YouTube clips relevant to the project.

To take part everyone will need to sign up to an agreement to keep the forum a safe and supportive place for everyone. Though we do not want a long list of scary rules there are some things which are particularly important to remember: we cannot allow you to post content that is offensive or bullying, or to share links to pornography or other inappropriate material. Anyone who ignores the agreement may be asked to leave the project.

I am also inviting young people to take part in a focus group of around 60 to 90 minutes with other people of a similar age. The focus group discussions will be audio recorded. These recordings will either be transcribed by the researcher or by a third party transcription service. The transcriptions will be analysed (alongside the content from the website) using a method called Discourse Analysis. This is a method of looking at the ways people talk about particular subjects. This may be in terms of what sort of language is used or it may be linking it to other theories or ideas (for example, "In what sorts of ways does society in general handle this topic?"). The project will be written up as a doctoral thesis at the University of East London (UEL) and may be published in an academic journal.



The research is not designed to cause you any harm, discomfort or distress. Care will be taken to make the forum and focus group a safe and supportive space. However, talking about sexual identities can be a sensitive area at times, which may be upsetting. Information about sources of support will be made available to you should you wish this and a list of support organisations is also available on the website.

### **Do my parents have to agree?**

If you are aged 16 or over, your parents or legal guardians do not need to consent to you taking part. However, if at all possible, I would encourage you to discuss taking part in this project with them first as it is an important decision. However, I realise that some people would not feel able to talk to their parents about this topic or they are not 'out' at home.

### **Where will the project take place?**

The online part of the project will take place online on a private discussion forum ('message board'). If you take part in the study you will be given the website address and login details at a later date. The login page will be visible to anyone who has the website address but it will not be possible for them to see anything that has been written in the discussions or who is taking part.

The only people who will be able to see this is you, the other young people taking part in the project, and the researchers (the principal investigator and research supervisor). The research supervisor will have access to the forum so that if you have a concern about how the project is being run, there are two responsible adults who you can choose from to help you. No-one else will be given access to the forum, including your parents or guardians. However, if the researchers think you or someone else may be at risk of harm, they may need to tell someone else such as your parents.

The focus group will take place either at UEL in Stratford, or at public or community building near to an existing LGBT youth group. The discussion will take place in a room only with the researcher and the people taking part in the focus group discussion.

### **Will other people know I am taking part?**

For the website, you will be asked to create a username that is anonymous – that is to say it doesn't include your real name, or initials, e-mail address, or your age and where you live. Your username should also be one that is just used for the study rather than copying say the one you use for Facebook, MySpace, Twitter or Xbox. This is so other people cannot link what you say in the study to you as an individual – either online or offline.

Personal details such as your name, address, phone number, email address etc. will not be visible on the forum and you will be asked not to share these with the other people taking part.

### **What happens to the things I share? Will they be kept private?**

At the end of the project the website will be taken offline and the content deleted from the servers where it is being stored. The audio recordings from the focus

group will also be deleted. Copies of the content from the website, the audio recordings and the transcript will be kept on the researcher's computer in a password-protected folder. This is so the content can be analysed and be accessed if necessary for writing up the research for publication. This copy as well as any personal information will also be deleted when it is no longer needed for the research.

Quotes and extracts from things you have written or shared on the forum or said in the focus group may be used in the analysis of the research. However, no details will be shared which would mean other people could identify you (e.g. your name or where you live).

### **Will I get anything for taking part?**

You will not be paid for taking part in this study. However, I hope that you will find the discussions with other young people interesting and helpful.

### **Do I have to take part?**

You do not have to take part in this study and should not feel under any pressure to do so. You can also choose to only participate in the online forum, but not the focus group discussion (or vice-versa). You are free to change your mind at any time and withdraw from the study. If you choose to withdraw from the study you may do so without disadvantage to yourself and you do not need to give a reason.

If you withdraw, things that you have already said or written may be used in the write-up of the study and any further analysis that may take place. This is because some discussions that other young people have also been involved in may only make sense when what you have contributed is included. However, where possible this will be avoided and any information that is used will be summarised.

Please feel free to ask me any questions. If you are happy to continue you will be asked to sign a consent form before you can take part. You mum, dad, or guardian, will also be asked to sign a consent form. Please hold on to this invitation letter in case you want to look at it again in the future.

If you have any questions or concerns about how the study has been carried out, please contact:

The study's supervisor: Dr. Neil Rees, Professional Doctorate in Clinical Psychology, School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ.

(Tel: 020 8223 4475. Email: n.rees@uel.ac.uk)

**or**

Chair of the School of Psychology Research Ethics Sub-committee: Dr. Mark Finn, School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ.

(Tel: 020 8223 4493. Email: m.finn@uel.ac.uk)

Thank you for considering taking part in this project.

Yours sincerely,

Matt Bristow, Trainee Clinical Psychologist  
January 2014

## APPENDIX I: Consent Forms

### CONSENT FORM FOR YOUNG PEOPLE (AGED 13 – 15)

#### UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON

#### Consent to participate in a research study



“How do young people developing minority sexual identities construct ‘sexual identity’?”

I have the read the information sheet about this research study and have been given a copy to keep. The researcher has explained to me why this research is being done and what it involves. I have had the chance to discuss the details and ask questions about this information. I understand what it is I am being asked to take part in. The researcher has also explained to me how I will be involved and what I will be asked to do. My parent or guardian has also been given a copy of the information sheet to keep and asked to consent to me taking part in the research.

I understand that my involvement in this study, and any personal data from this research, will remain strictly confidential, which means other people will not have access to this information or be able to see my personal details. Audio recordings may be transcribed by a third party, who would be subject to a confidentiality agreement. Only the researchers involved in the study will have access to identifying data. It has been explained to me what will happen once the research study has been completed.

By signing this consent form, I am showing that I freely and fully consent to participate in the study, which has been fully explained to me. I understand that even once I have given this consent I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without disadvantage to myself and without needing to give any reason. I also understand that if I withdraw, the researcher may still use my anonymous data in the write-up of the study and in any further analysis that may be conducted by the researcher.

Participant's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)

.....

Participant's Signature

.....

Researcher's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)

MATT BRISTOW

Researcher's Signature

.....  
Date: .....

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**PARENTAL CONSENT FORM (FOR YOUNG PEOPLE AGED 13 – 15)**

**UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON**



**Parental consent to participate in a research study**

“How do young people developing minority sexual identities construct ‘sexual identity’?”

I have read the information sheet about this research study and have been given a copy to keep. The researcher has explained to me why this research is being done and what it involves. I have had the chance to discuss the details and ask questions about this information. I understand what it is my child is being asked to take part in. The researcher has also explained to me how my child will be involved and what he/she will be asked to do. My child has also been given a copy of the information sheet to keep and asked to consent to taking part in the research.

I understand that my child’s involvement in this study, and any personal data from this research, will remain strictly confidential, which means other people will not have access to this information or be able to see his/her personal details. Audio recordings may be transcribed by a third party, who would be subject to a confidentiality agreement. Only the researchers involved in the study will have access to identifying data. It has been explained to me what will happen once the research study has been completed.

By signing this consent form, I am showing that I freely and fully consent to my child participating in the study, which has been fully explained to me. I understand that even once I have given this consent I have the right to withdraw my child from the study at any time without disadvantage to myself or him/her and without needing to give any reason. I also understand that if my child withdraws, the researcher reserves the right to use my child’s anonymous data in the write-up of the study and in any further analysis that may be conducted by the researcher.

Parent or guardian’s Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)

.....

Parent or guardian's Signature

.....

Researcher's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)

MATT BRISTOW

Researcher's Signature

.....

Date: .....

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## CONSENT FORM FOR YOUNG PEOPLE (AGED 16 – 17)

### UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON

#### Consent to participate in a research study



“How do young people developing minority sexual identities construct ‘sexual identity’?”

I have read the information sheet about this research study and have been given a copy to keep. I have been encouraged to speak to my parents or guardians about the research, if I wish to do so. The researcher has explained to me why this research is being done and what it involves. I have had the chance to discuss the details and ask questions about this information. I understand what it is I am being asked to take part in. The researcher has also explained to me how I will be involved and what I will be asked to do.

I understand that my involvement in this study, and any personal data from this research, will remain strictly confidential, which means other people will not have access to this information or be able to see my personal details. Audio recordings may be transcribed by a third party, who would be subject to a confidentiality agreement. Only the researchers involved in the study will have access to identifying data. It has been explained to me what will happen once the research study has been completed.

By signing this consent form, I am showing that I freely and fully consent to participate in the study, which has been fully explained to me. I understand that even once I have given this consent I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without disadvantage to myself and without needing to give any reason. I also understand that if I withdraw, the researcher may still use my anonymous

data in the write-up of the study and in any further analysis that may be conducted by the researcher.

Participant's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)

.....

Participant's Signature

.....

Researcher's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)

MATT BRISTOW

Researcher's Signature

.....

Date: .....