

Understanding the nuance of the pansexual identity: Exploring the experiences of those who
identify as pansexual in different contexts.

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Abstract

Pansexuality is a plurisexual identity that has become widely adopted over the last decade (Belous & Bauman, 2017). Pansexuality is most commonly defined as a romantic or sexual attraction to individuals regardless of gender (Gonel, 2013). However, the term is nuanced and often personal to those who identify with it. Despite data indicating a rise in the number of individuals identifying as pansexual (UK Census, 2020), there remains a notable gap in the literature concerning the experiences of those who use this label. This research focuses on pansexual identity expression and marking within specific contexts, the experiences of those who identify as both pansexual *and* gender diverse within relational contexts, and the types of content on TikTok around the pansexual identity. This research consists of 3 studies: The first study involved an online survey with 45 pansexual participants, followed by a second study that used online interviews with 21 participants who identified as pansexual and gender diverse to understand their relational experiences. Finally, the third study analysed 100 TikTok posts to explore online content about pansexuality. Reflexive thematic analysis and qualitative content analysis were used as the analytical approach for this research.

Participants constructed pansexuality as a nuanced and fluid identity that was personal and unique to them. Participants' accounts also reflected a lack of information, representation and education concerning pansexuality and gender diversity, which directly impacted their decisions regarding identity marking and disclosure. Across differing contexts participants experienced discrimination, stigma and stereotyping, and these challenges were often attributed to limited public understanding of pansexuality and the internalised effects of mononormative and heteronormative biases. Particularly on TikTok, online activism was used as a catalyst for change, with users actively sharing educational content, challenging stereotypes and fostering community support. Overall, this research offers insight into the contemporary conceptualisation of pansexuality, where gender and sexuality are viewed on a

spectrum, and identity labels and expression are understood as inherently nuanced and fluid. The findings highlight how a lack of societal understanding is impacting the experiences of pansexual individuals, throughout different contexts, which indicates an urgent need for societal adaptation.

Keywords: *Pansexual, Pansexuality, Gender Diversity, Reflexive Thematic Analysis, Qualitative Content Analysis*

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction to the research area

This thesis is situated broadly within Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer+ psychology. While the field has made considerable progress in acknowledging diverse identities, there remains a notable gap concerning a-spectrum identities and their unique experiences; particularly concerning plurisexual identities. Plurisexuality is an umbrella term that encompasses individuals who experience attractions to more than one gender (Galupo et al., 2015). Some common plurisexual identities include bisexual, pansexual and queer. When researching plurisexual identities, some researchers (Flanders et al., 2017; Robinson, 2018) use the 'bisexual umbrella', to explore all these identities together. However, plurisexual individuals do not all use the same terminology and language to describe their sexuality (Galupo et al., 2018), which suggests that conceptualising identity within the context of such an umbrella may not provide an accurate representation of the diversity of identity expression and experience. This thesis specifically focusses on the pansexual identity, an identity that is often overlooked within LGBTQ+ psychology (Hayfield, 2020).

Pansexuality is a plurisexual identity that has become widely adopted over the last decade (Belous & Bauman, 2017). It often refers to attraction to anyone regardless of gender expression, gender identity, or biological sex (Rice, 2015). Research has found that those who are younger are more likely to identify as pansexual (Morandi et al., 2016), and those who identify as gender diverse are more likely to adopt more non-traditional identities, such as both pansexual and queer identities (Katz-Wise et al., 2015). Research about the pansexual identity has primarily focussed on defining and conceptualising pansexuality (Belous &

Bauman, 2017; Galupo et al., 2017; Lapointe, 2017). Research exploring pansexual experiences has often grouped them under the 'bisexual umbrella'. Doing this can obscure important differences, such as how individuals understand and experience their identity, which can cause invalidation and erasure of discrete identities (Flanders, 2017). However, researchers such as Hayfield and Křížová (2021) have focussed their research solely on experiences within the pansexual community. This is important to explore and understand the discrete experiences that pansexual individuals are facing, to create and implement support services that meet the pansexual community's specific needs. This thesis adds to the gap in LGBTQ+ psychology by exploring the experiences of those who identify as pansexual, and specifically in different social, relational and online contexts. The current social and political climate around LGBTQ+ identities may influence the way in which pansexual individuals are experiencing their identity. While awareness has increased, pansexuality is still less widely understood than other sexual orientations, such as bisexuality (Galupo et al., 2018). This lack of understanding can lead to misunderstandings, stereotypes and pan erasure (Gonell, 2013; Galupo et al., 2018). In addition, the pansexual identity's inclusion of attraction to gender diverse individuals directly intersects with ongoing debates surrounding transgender rights. The heightened visibility of transgender issues has led to increased scrutiny of all gender and sexual minority identities, including pansexuality (Ruprecht et al., 2024). Research by Stonewall (2022) highlights that homophobic crimes are at an all-time high, with transphobic discrimination and hate speech prominent among the experiences of the LGBTQ+ community. In addition, as those who identify as gender diverse are more likely to identify as pansexual and queer identities, in comparison to identities such as lesbian and gay, they may experience the combined effects of discrimination related to both their sexual orientation and gender identity. Overall, this research gives voice to the pansexual

community, and those who identify as both pansexual *and* gender diverse, helping advance LGBTQ+ psychology through including nuanced and marginalised identities.

1.2 Structure of the thesis

Following on from this introduction, Chapter 2 introduces relevant literature for this thesis. It covers the history of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer (LGBTQ+) psychology, and how sexuality has been, and is being, conceptualised across different eras. The chapter provides insight into different plurisexual identities, and the nuance of these labels and expressions. Gender identities and the diversity in gender expression are also addressed, including gender ideology from a binary to a more inclusive spectrum. A broad overview of research focusing on pansexuality and the wider spectrum of plurisexual experiences is presented and contextualised within the current social and political landscape. The influence of social, relational and online contexts is discussed, and highlights the importance of these contexts on plurisexual individuals' experiences. Finally, the chapter concludes with the rationale, research aims and questions for the current research.

Chapter 3 outlines the methodological approach taken for the research and provides justifications for the chosen approaches. It begins by explaining the qualitative design employed for the project, and the relativist constructionist theoretical position of the research. The methods and types of data utilised for all three research studies are also presented and justified. This includes a thorough description of the development of the research materials (survey and interview questions), as well as a detailed account of the recruitment process, sample demographics, and study procedures. The analytical approach

(reflexive thematic analysis and qualitative content analysis) chosen for this research is also explained and justified. The chapter concludes with ethical considerations, particularly concerning work with a marginalised community, and a reflexivity section reviewing the overall research process.

Chapter 4 presents a reflexive thematic analysis of how pansexual individuals mark and express their identity. The chapter presents findings around the ways in which participants understand and define their identity; this includes nuanced and diverse approaches. Safety is highlighted as an influential factor in the decision to mark one's identity and is present across various social and relational contexts. The use of the pansexual identity is presented as strategic, with participants choosing specific terminology based on the context and who is present. Intimate partner relationships are frequently mentioned as a significant part of how pansexual individuals understand and experience their identity; however, these experiences are often characterised by issues related to stereotyping and erasure of their pansexual identity. The final theme of this analysis explores how political resistance and activism are highlighted as reasons for participants' decisions to mark their sexuality; this includes some participants' desires to engage in activism by challenging the visibility and representation of their pansexual identity.

Chapter 5 addresses the second research question, which focusses on the intersectionality of gender and sexuality. It presents a reflexive thematic analysis of how individuals who identify as pansexual and gender diverse experience their identity within different intimate relationships (Family, Friends, and Intimate Partners). The chapter explores intersectional identities of pansexual and gender diverse individuals, participants discuss experiences with their gender and sexual identity. The findings presented

include descriptions of families as lacking education and knowledge of gender diversity, which often impact responses around the disclosure of identity, whereby families require adjustment periods to understand gender identities. Friendships are highlighted as a distinct support system from family members, affirming and supporting participants' identities. Two themes focus on intimate relationships and reveal that participants emphasise the importance of visibility within these relationships. It is acknowledged that participants often manage change and re-negotiation of relationships relating to their identity, and communication is a vital factor to manage change and developments.

Chapter 6 presents a qualitative content analysis of TikTok content related to the pansexual identity. The analysis presents three themes, focusing on providing education and information pansexuality, including conceptualisations of pansexuality and the similarities between pansexuality and bisexuality. Visibility and identity development is another common theme among the videos, which focuses on promoting representation of the pansexual identity, both through creators' personal narratives, and broader representation highlighting pansexual characters and related merchandise. The final theme highlights myths, stereotypes and prejudice that the pansexual community face, these videos are used to both highlight and challenge such prejudice.

Chapter 7 presents the general discussion of the thesis and summarises the research aims and overall findings. It then provides an evaluation of the methodology, for example, the strengths of the qualitative design for the research aims. Key implications and contributions are also covered and highlight the academic contributions, such as the potential impact of the findings within LGBTQ+ psychology, as well as wider implications for support services working with the pansexual community. The chapter concludes with directions for

future research and discusses specific recommendations, for example, understanding older individuals' experiences with their identity and their journey with identifying as pansexual. The thesis is then summarised and ends with concluding marks.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will provide a critical review of the relevant literature for this thesis. It will begin by considering the history of LGBTQ+ psychology, and how sexuality has been conceptualised over time. Current definitions and understanding of plurisexual identities will be presented, with discussion around the nuances of sexual and gender identity terminology and expression. The chapter will then present an overview of research that has explored pansexuality and literature relevant to plurisexual experiences, while situating this within the current cultural and political climate. Finally, social, relational, and online contexts will be discussed, as well as highlighting the importance of these contexts on plurisexual experiences. The chapter will conclude with the research aims, questions and rationale for the current research.

2.2 History of LGBTQ+ psychology, and influence on plurisexual identities

Sexual orientation is a multi-faced concept that reflects an individual's personal romantic and/or sexual interests and attractions (Diamond, 2003). Sexuality has been an area of interest for researchers for centuries, with different theorists offering distinctive perspectives on human sexuality (Clarke et al., 2010). Early sexologists, such as Krafft-Ebing and Ellis, developed binary classifications of sexuality, whereby individuals were understood to be biologically predisposed to being either heterosexual or homosexual (Ellis, 1942). Heterosexuality was considered the natural sexual orientation, and consequently

homosexuality was viewed as a mental illness, and ‘disease’ (Ellis, 1928). This pathologization of homosexuality, implying a treatment or cure, contributed to the development and practice of conversion therapies, which aim to convert individuals to the ‘natural’ sexual orientation heterosexuality (Graham, 2018). This historical pathologisation of homosexuality can be understood as influencing the oppression and marginalisation of all LGBTQ+ individuals today (Ellis, 1942).

As a result of the binary classification of homosexuality and heterosexuality, the idea of plurisexual identities was disregarded in research, as it did not align with the dichotomous model at the time (Storr, 1999). Plurisexuality can be defined as an umbrella term that encompasses individuals who experience attractions to more than one gender (Galupo et al., 2015). Ellis (1927) and Freud (1959) both attempted to categorise plurisexual individuals, however, this created misunderstandings around plurisexuality. For example, Ellis (1927) proposed that individuals who identified as bisexual were considered fundamentally homosexual. Similarly, Freud (1959) and other psychoanalysts around the 1950s also viewed plurisexual individuals as confused, and unable to choose a sexuality (George, 1993). This view of plurisexuality being a temporary identification continues to influence plurisexual individuals to this day and has been linked to negative health and wellbeing outcomes for plurisexual individuals (Angelides, 2001; Flanders et al., 2016).

In the late 1940’s, second wave sexology sought to challenge previous dichotomous and psychoanalytical approaches by changing the way plurisexual identities were conceptualised (Angelides, 2001). Kinsey (1948) was one of the first researchers to represent human fluidity in sexuality. This was achieved through the development of the Kinsey Scale (1948), a seven-point scale measuring sexual preference along a continuum, rather than

categorising sexualities as exclusively homosexual or heterosexual. Compared to previous researchers, like Ellis (1927) and Krafft-Ebing (1902), Kinsey (1948) and colleagues challenged the view that homosexuality is unnatural and instead highlighted the diversity of sexual attraction (Hunter et al, 2022). In the 1970s and 1980s, gay affirmative research continued to pave the way for bisexual research, as the bisexual identity was still often stigmatised as a ‘passing phase’ and being ‘in denial’ about their homosexuality (Cass, 1979). Following on from Kinsey’s (1948) work, other researchers such as Klein (1978) challenged the dichotomous model of sexuality, and early gay affirmative research sought to validate bisexuality as its own identity. Early gay affirmative research overall aimed to emphasise the normality of homosexual, heterosexual and bisexual individuals, and researchers, such as Siegelman (1972) and Kitzinger (1987) sought to replace the pathologising model with more objective approaches, such as positivist-empiricism. This foundation of positivist research is still relevant in LGBTQ+ Psychology, and positivist research continues to promote the wellbeing of LGBTQ+ individuals, challenge discriminatory assumptions and explore more affirming aspects of identity development and experiences (Pachankis, 2019). The development of this area of research allowed for greater diversity and flexibility in human sexuality and ultimately paved the way for the conceptualisation and understanding of plurisexual identities, such as bisexual, pansexual and queer identities (George, 1993).

During the 1990s and 2000s, critical approaches to sexuality such as queer theory, feminist perspectives and LGBTQ+ affirmative research challenged binary conceptualisations of sexuality, representing a wider range of identities (Hemmings, 2012). Queer theory also played a critical role in understanding and conceptualising sex and gender fluidity, influencing the emergence of fluid identities, such as pansexuality (Piantato, 2016). Queer theorists have done this by deconstructing binary categories and recognising the

heterogeneity of gender roles and sexual behaviour (Lorber, 1996). Judith Butler (1990) was one of the first gender theorists that offered a new understanding of gender identity that differed from essentialist beliefs. Butler (1990) argued that the assumption of sex dichotomy as a natural truth provides a justification for the dominant understanding of gender in binary terms and heterosexuality as the norm, since they seem to be direct and natural consequences of the biological sex difference. Instead, she conceptualised gender as performative, manifested through repetitive practices that individuals constantly enact, such as body movements and clothing choices. This deconstruction of sex and gender gives the possibility to expand the ways in which sexual orientation is understood, by rejecting the notion that sexuality is defined by a mutually exclusive gender preference (Piantato, 2016). This is evidenced with the emergence of fluid identities, such as pansexuality and queer. This growth in sexual identities, offers more inclusive and nuanced terminologies for those who are attracted to gender diverse individuals. This helps individuals express their identities in ways that accurately reflect their attractions, which is important for individuals to be able to validate their experiences and build community with other people (Flanders et al., 2016).

2.2.1 Understanding Gender, Gender Identities and Diversity

Throughout both lay society and in psychological research, the terms ‘gender’ and ‘sex’ are often confused or used interchangeably. It is important to understand the differences when acknowledging the intersections of gender and sexuality. Sex refers to the biological aspects of an individual as determined by their anatomy, which is produced by their chromosomes, hormones, and their interactions (Official National Statistics, 2019), whereas gender is a social construction relating to behaviours and attributes based on labels of

masculinity and femininity (Official National Statistics, 2019). Cisgender is a term used to describe someone whose gender identity is congruent with the sex they were assigned at birth (Schilt, 2009). In contrast, transgender often refers to someone whose gender identity does not correspond with the sex assigned at birth. Gender diversity is an umbrella term for gender identities that demonstrate a diversity of expression beyond the binary framework (Richards, 2013). Common gender identities that fall under the gender diverse umbrella include transgender, non-binary and gender queer. These identities represent how gender is expressed outside of the binary, which often encompasses fluidity in identity and expression.

In recent years, gender diverse identities have gained wider recognition and adoption (McNabb, 2018). Caitlyn Jenner, a celebrity known for her Olympic achievements and her role on the popular TV show *Keeping Up with the Kardashians*, came out as a transgender woman in 2015. Other celebrities such as Sam Smith, a famous singer from the UK, also came out as non-binary and changed their pronouns to they/hem in 2019. Even with the increase in representation and recognition of gender diversity, there is still a lack of understanding and acceptance for gender diverse identities, and in particular identities that go beyond the gender binary (Glotfelter et al., 2017). Non-binary can be used as an umbrella term for identities that fall outside of the gender binary (Barker, 2013). Individuals who identify as non-binary may use nuanced labels to describe their gender, such as non-binary, genderqueer, genderfluid, agender etc (Richards et al., 2016). Non-binary identities are sometimes considered as part of the broader transgender umbrella, however not everyone who identifies as non-binary describe themselves as transgender, nor cisgender (Beischel et al., 2021). This nuance in definitions and expressions of gender often mean that individuals with the same gender identity label may still experience their identity differently and thus should not be viewed as a homogenous group.

Thorne (2020) found that non-binary individuals report poorer health and wellbeing outcomes, in comparison to gender diverse individuals who identify as a binary gender. Reasons for this include society's deeply rooted view of gender as a binary, which makes it easier for people to understand and accept someone who identifies as a transgender man or transgender woman, in comparison to someone who identifies as nonbinary or 'no gender' (MacKinnon et al., 2021). Societal norms and structures also exist around the binary framework, which make it harder for those who identify as non-binary to feel validated and accepted (Thorne, 2020). This includes everyday language and gendered terms, such as referring to groups as 'ladies and gentlemen' and extends to structures such as restrooms that reinforce binary genders (Jones et al., 2018). How gender identity is viewed and understood can pose barriers to understanding sexualities that includes attraction to gender diverse individuals, such as pansexuality. As pansexuality directly challenges the gender binary, by implying that attraction is not limited by the two-gender framework, it leads to erasure or misunderstanding of the identity, with some dismissing the identity as a 'made up term' due to not understanding or accepting gender as a spectrum (Hayfield, 2020). Therefore, it is critical to understand that gender and sexuality are not isolated concepts, and instead influence each other in complex ways, such as how one's understanding of gender shapes how attraction, relationships and sexual identity are perceived and experienced.

It is important to note that the term intersectionality originated from black feminism, and was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) in her article "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Anti-discrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics,". In her foundational work, Crenshaw (1989, 1991) demonstrated that women of colour experience unique forms of subordination due to the intersecting nature of both racism and feminism. She described intersectionality not as an

abstract notion, but instead as a description of the way multiple oppressions are experienced. Although Crenshaw's (1989, 1991) work originally focussed on black women in the US, intersectionality includes multiple identities such as sexual, gender, racial and ethnical identity, and how they interact with one another to influence an individual's psychological and interpersonal experiences (Bowleg, 2012, Hancock, 2007).

Whilst the researcher recognises the many external factors including an individual's gender, sexuality, race, age, class and disability can influence the participant's experience, this thesis uses the term intersectional identities in reference to pansexual *and* gender diverse identities and to acknowledge how individuals who identify as both pansexual and gender diverse may experience their identity in nuanced ways. This is important as previous research has found that those who identify as pansexual are more likely to identify as gender diverse compared with other plurisexualities, such as those who identify as bisexual (Katz-wise et al., 2015). In addition, the research aims to explore the discrete experiences of those who identify as pansexual and gender diverse within different intimate relationships.

2.3 Understanding Plurisexualities and the nuances in identity terminology

Plurisexual identities are those defined as including attractions to more than one gender (Galupo et al., 2015). The most common plurisexual identities include bisexuality, pansexuality and queer. Research into plurisexual individuals often proceeds with the assumption that those attracted to more than one gender have unique experiences in comparison to monosexual individuals: Lesbian, gay, and heterosexual identities (Callis, 2014). However, even when acknowledging the important differences between LGBTQ+

identities and experiences, plurisexual identities often get subsumed together and included under the bisexual umbrella, which often means discrete identity experiences are left unexplored (Eisner, 2013).

The bisexual umbrella is an overarching term that is often used to describe anyone who has a romantic and/or sexual orientation towards more than one gender (Galupo et al., 2015). This identity label symbolises solidarity for many, providing a welcoming space and acting as a metaphorical gathering point for a community that may feel they do not belong elsewhere (Swan, 2018). However, for some individuals, being included under the umbrella is perceived as a forced attempt to promote homogeneity, which may not reflect their individuals experiences (LeBreton et al., 2017). Self-identification and understanding are important for LGBTQ+ individuals, and many researchers (e.g. Flanders, 2017) advocate for this to be recognised when grouping identities under the bisexual umbrella. Flanders et al (2016) note that bisexual individuals do not all use the same terminology and language to describe their sexuality, and thus suggest that conceptualising identity under an umbrella may not provide an accurate representation of the diversity of identity expression and experience. In addition, plurisexual individuals are more likely to identify with more than one sexual identity label (Mitchell et al., 2015). It is important to note that intersectional identities may influence one's experience, and equitable inclusion under the umbrella. Thus, if an individual identifies as both biromantic and asexual, they may not fully relate to the bisexual umbrella due to the varied or distinct nature of experiences. Additionally, for an individual who identifies as both bisexual and transgender, they may refer to themselves only as being included under a 'trans umbrella'.

2.3.1 Pansexuality

Pansexuality is a plurisexual identity that has become widely adopted over the last decade (Belous & Bauman, 2017). Rice (2015) suggests that pansexuality has come to refer to attraction to anyone regardless of gender expression, gender identity, or biological sex, while also acknowledging that use of the term is debated, nuanced, and may depend on the personalised meanings individuals attach to their identity. Data from the latest UK Census (2021), the first to include a question about sexual orientation, shows that 48,000 people identified as pansexual. An increase in the visibility of gender diversity, including communities, identities, and activist movements, may have contributed to the rise in individuals identifying as pansexual (Elizabeth, 2013). Although pansexual can be adopted by anyone who wants to explicitly acknowledge their awareness of the gender spectrum, and attractions to individuals who are gender diverse (Lapointe, 2018), research has found that those who are younger are more likely to identify as pansexual (Morandi et al., 2016), and those who identify as gender diverse are more likely to adopt more non-traditional identities, such as both pansexual and queer identities (Katz-Wise et al., 2015). For nonbinary and gender diverse individuals, labelling one's sexuality can be difficult, due to traditional identities implying a gendered component. Indeed, Elizabeth (2013) argues that gender-queer individuals may resonate with pansexual and queer labels because they promote fluidity and challenge binary domains.

2.3.2 Queer

Like pansexuality, queer is another label that is inclusive and encompasses attractions to those that go beyond the gender binary. However, queer has not always been used to describe someone's gender or sexual identity. To understand how queer is utilised in contemporary society, it is important to recognise the unique history that underpins queer terminology. Historically, queer was first used as a term meaning strange or odd (Barker et al., 2016). Throughout the 1900s, queer was used as an insult to refer to typically gay men who displayed feminine behaviours (Chauncey et al, 1995). Around the 1980s, amidst the AIDS crisis, and growing LGBTQ+ activism, the term queer was reclaimed by the LGBTQ+ community as an identity label and signified a rejection of binary ideas of gender and sexuality (Kolker et al., 2019). Although queer is still used as an identity label it can also be used as an umbrella term to describe someone who identifies as non-heterosexual or non-cisgender individuals (Morandini et al., 2016). Like pansexual, queer offers a broad spectrum of inclusion, and is often understood and defined in different ways depending on the preference of the individual endorsing the label (Mann, 2023). Similarly, due to the de-construction of binary understandings of both gender and sexuality, queer can also be seen as an anti- or non-label, which may be favoured by those who view their sexuality as fluid (Callis, 2014).

Kolker et al (2019) explored experiences of those who identify as queer, and their findings reveal a diversity of interpretations among participants. For some, queer represented attractions towards multiple genders, while others used queer to express their attraction to exclusively one gender (Kolker et al., 2019). This highlights how queer identification transcends monosexual and plurisexual categories. Like pansexual individuals, those who used queer as their primary sexual identity label were more likely to identify as transgender than cisgender. This emphasises the importance of pansexual and queer labels for gender diverse individuals, as these identities resonate more with those who reject binary categorisations of gender (Katz-wise et al., 2017; Kolker et al., 2019). Interestingly, although Kolker et al (2019)

explored the experiences of those who identified as queer, only 15% of participants used one single sexual identity label (queer). Other participants used multiple identity expressions alongside queer to describe their identity. This demonstrates that while some individuals identify under the queer umbrella, others prefer additional labels to describe their sexual identity.

2.3.3 Bisexuality

In discussions of plurisexuality, it is essential to acknowledge bisexuality, as it is one of the most recognised plurisexual identities (Angelides, 2001). Bisexuality was one of the first conceptualised plurisexual identities, therefore, there is a larger body of research on bisexuality compared with pansexuality and other plurisexual identities (Angelides, 2001). Understanding bisexuality can be difficult due to its evolving definition (Nelson, 2022). Historically, bisexuality has been understood as a third identity category, and sometimes as a midpoint between heterosexual and homosexual (Galupo et al., 2014). However, representing bisexuality in this way creates misunderstandings that reinforce a binary conceptualisation of the identity (Mitchell et al., 2016). Early research on bisexuality defined the identity as an attraction to both men and women (Angelides, 2001), however this understanding of bisexuality reinforces the gender binary and thus excludes individuals who experience attraction beyond the binary. Queer theory offers new perspectives on plurisexuality and how bisexuality may transcend binary understandings of gender and sexuality (Galupo et al., 2017). Despite findings that advocate for the inclusion of attraction to those outside the binary within bisexuality, its history has led to the emergence of the "bisexuality vs. pansexuality debate" (Galupo et al., 2018). This debate often positions pansexuality as explicitly inclusive of trans and nonbinary identities (Hayfield, 2020), leading some people to

believe bisexuality is therefore "exclusionary" (Cipriano et al., 2022). However, it is important to focus on how individuals identifying with these labels understand and express their identities, rather than relying on a single definition of each label. This is due to the unique and nuanced interpretations and experiences associated with these labels.

2.3.4 Similarities and differences in understandings and definitions of bisexual, pansexual and queer individuals

All identified plurisexualities (pansexual, queer, and bisexual) can be understood in similar and overlapping ways. The common thread is that they all encompass attractions to more than one gender. However, individuals identifying under these labels may have unique understandings, definitions, and experiences with these identities. Galupo et al (2018) explored how bisexual, pansexual, and queer individuals conceptualise their identities. Using a qualitative online survey, they found that individuals who identified as queer, pansexual, and bisexual often relied on overlapping labels to describe their identity. This supports the notion that those who identify as plurisexual may utilise multiple identity expressions to capture their full identity (Galupo et al., 2015). Though differences were found between the groups, pansexual individuals were less likely than bisexual and queer participants to indicate partner preferences. Pansexual participants were also more likely to describe their identity as transcending gender (Galupo et al., 2018). Bisexual and queer participants also understood their identities to include attraction to individuals outside the gender binary. This demonstrates the nuanced ways in which different plurisexual identities can be understood.

Other research by Flanders et al (2017), compared how both bisexual and pansexual participants defined bisexuality. They found that both bisexual and pansexual individuals defined bisexuality, similarly, including the idea that bisexual individuals can be attracted to nonbinary and transgender people (Flanders et al., 2017). This study was useful in highlighting how other plurisexual individuals (pansexual) understand bisexuality. This is important as pansexual individuals have been stereotyped and misunderstood as perpetuating biphobia, based on the belief that pansexuality is the only identity to be inclusive of gender diverse identities (Norman, 2021). However, this can vary, as other research indicates that some bisexual women do perceive the bisexual identity as inclusive of attraction to both binary and non-binary genders (Cipriano et al., 2022). However, in this study, those who identified as queer and pansexual described bisexuality to be limited to attraction to two genders, which was not inclusive of individuals outside the gender binary (Cipriano et al., 2022). This highlights how bisexual women are not only defining their identity as being inclusive of gender diverse individuals but defending their identity against misconceptions from other plurisexual individuals.

2.4 Overview of Pansexual Research

To situate the current research, it is essential to recognise the existing research within LGBTQ+ psychology around pansexuality. Although pansexual individuals have been included in research, there are limited studies that solely focus on pansexual individuals (Hayfield, 2020). Instead, pansexual participants are more likely to be grouped in plurisexual samples. Gonel (2013) was one of the earliest studies that explored different aspects of the

pansexual identity, through utilising an online survey. His research found that pansexuality was understood as an identity that considers attraction ‘beyond’ gender and is inclusive of ‘all’ genders. Participants in this study consistently expressed the view that pansexual individuals perceive gender as a spectrum rather than a binary (Gonel, 2013). With this understanding that pansexuality doesn’t invest in binary social constructions of gender, Gonel (2013) suggested that pansexuality could be considered an anti-identity, that positions against conservative conceptualisations of identity. Thus, pansexuality was initially understood as a transgressive identity. However, these findings should be considered in context of the time it was conducted, where pansexuality was a relatively new and emerging identity. As this was one of the earlier studies on the pansexual label, it helped to highlight the need for further research in the area and paved the way for researchers to study minority plurisexual identities.

Belous and Bauman (2017) examined the published expression of a pansexual identity, definition, or description, within material posted on the internet. This included posts from media outlets, personal websites, educational forums, blogs, and news reports that attempted to explain or define the term pansexual. Supporting findings by Gonel (2013), pansexuality was conceptualised as an identity that included attractions to all, and/or regardless of gender. In addition to this, ‘pan-erasure’ was also evidenced through online posts of individuals who identified as pansexual, where they posted their personal stories of struggles when coming out as pansexual, including experiences of stigmatisation and discrimination based on their pansexual identity. Despite accounts of pan-erasure, pansexuality appeared to be gaining recognition and visibility among online communities. Belous and Bauman (2017) highlighted the rise in celebrity discussions, and disclosure of pansexual identities which has influenced awareness and acceptance of pansexuality. This

research provided additional insights into pansexuality through online contexts, and in doing so raised potential issues that pansexual individuals face, such as pansexual erasure. This study by Belous and Bauman (2017) serves as a valuable initial step in understanding the unique experiences of pansexual individuals. However, future research should employ other qualitative methods such as interviews or qualitative surveys, to understand the lived experiences of pansexual individuals.

One study that does explore discrete experiences of those who identify as pansexual, is that of Hayfield and Křížová (2021). Their research was among the first to explore how pansexual individuals experience and understand their identities in a UK context. They recruited a sample of 80 participants and used an online survey for data collection. Hayfield and Křížová (2021) found that boundaries between bisexual and pansexual identities are often blurred, with both identities viewed as somewhat fluid. However, pansexual individuals considered their identity to be unique from other plurisexual identities and considered themselves to be educated and enlightened about gender and sexuality (Hayfield & Křížová, 2021). Participants frequently discussed having to explain pansexuality to other people, an experience they viewed as tiring. In addition, pansexual individuals used multiple terminologies strategically and in context dependent ways to express their identity (Hayfield & Křížová, 2021). As this research was one of the first to qualitatively explore experiences in a UK setting, the findings present different avenues for future research to develop upon, for example the disclosure and marking of identity. The research helped advance LGBTQ+ psychology by including marginalised communities in research and can be understood as a valuable starting point for qualitative research into the UK experiences of those who identify as pansexual.

This section presented research on pansexuality, focusing on studies that utilised exclusively pansexual participants. This overview provides an understanding of findings specifically related to the pansexual identity. However, due to the limited amount of research conducted exclusively on the pansexual community, it is important to review other research that has used plurisexual samples, including bisexual, pansexual and queer individuals, to gain a broader understanding of the plurisexual experience.

2.5 The plurisexual experience of heterosexism and monosexism, and its influence on stereotypes

Plurisexual individuals often share experiences of heterosexism and monosexism in comparison to heterosexual, lesbian, and gay individuals (Gonell, 2013). Research on plurisexualities has found that plurisexual individuals experience poorer physical and mental health outcomes compared with heterosexuals (Colledge et al., 2015). Plurisexual individuals are often subject to unique forms of prejudice, harassment, and discrimination (Cunningham et al., 2013). One explanation for this is the influence of heteronormativity, the societal belief that heterosexuality is normal and natural (Habarth, 2015). Expectations of heterosexuality require not only sexual attraction and desire toward a different sex but also gender conformity and attraction to people of a different sex who are also gender-conforming (Eisner, 2013). Plurisexual individuals experience not only the effects of heteronormativity but also mononormativity (Herz, 2015). Mononormativity refers to the idea that there are two natural orientations, heterosexual and homosexual, and thus anything in between is a transient identity (Roberts et al., 2015). This has been termed "double discrimination" by

scholars, whereby those who identify as plurisexual experience both heterosexism and monosexism from both heterosexual and LGBTQ+ communities (Friedman et al., 2014). Furthermore, due to this rejection by both heterosexual and LGBTQ+ individuals, plurisexual individuals are potentially less connected to the LGBTQ+ community, resulting in invalidation and poor support networks (Galupo et al., 2018). The importance of support and community networks has been identified as crucial for LGBTQ+ youth's well-being and personal acceptance of their identity (Flanders et al., 2017).

The effects of monosexism have been found to influence discrimination and stereotypes around plurisexualities (Roberts et al., 2015). A common stereotype surrounding plurisexual identities is the belief they are illegitimate (Grove, 2022). This erasure and marginalisation may perpetuate discrimination and violence against plurisexual individuals (Klesse, 2019). Yoshino (2000) suggests that bi-erasure occurs in every-day contexts and is an unconscious social phenomenon. In short, the term bi-erasure, is the tendency to question and to deny the existence of bisexuality (Diamond et al., 2017). The perception and stereotype of plurisexual individuals being illegitimate, or simply a pathway to either homosexuality or heterosexuality, has been found to differ between men and women (Alarie et al., 2013). Stereotypes around men who are attracted to multiple genders portray them as being in denial of their gay identity (Rico, 2011). In contrast, stereotypes about plurisexual women, include them being more experimental or seeking male attention, and instead are perceived as heterosexual (Lanutti, 2012). Even with these differences in gendered experiences, these findings indicate a general perception that plurisexual individuals are dishonest, due to the monosexist belief that they are either heterosexual or homosexual (Nelson, 2020).

In addition to the erasure of plurisexual identities, many other negative perceptions and stereotypes are held around plurisexual individuals. They are often presumed to be more sexually adventurous and promiscuous, due to the potential to experience attractions to more than one gender (Groom, 2011). This assumption has led to the stereotypes of plurisexual individuals being perceived as kinky, non-monogamous, sexually depraved or needing to be in concurrent relationships with different genders to fulfil their sexuality (Feinstein, 2023). This positioning of plurisexual individuals as promiscuous and hypersexual, influences the way in which other individuals view the security of the relationship. Consequently, plurisexual individuals are labelled as risky partners (Klesse, 2015). This stereotype and perception of plurisexual individuals being untrustworthy extends outside of romantic relationships, with Mohr (2004) indicating that an individual's whole character and personality is often targeted in different contexts. This includes friendships, in which lesbian women not only reject bisexual women as romantic partners, but also as friends, due to being untrustworthy (Mohr, 2004). These negative views and behaviours towards plurisexual individuals, may ultimately impacts their mental health and self-esteem (Maliepaard, 2021).

2.5.1 Positive Experiences of identifying as plurisexual

When plurisexual individuals' experiences have been explored, research has often focussed on negative aspects including, stereotypes, discrimination, and mental health outcomes, as discussed in the previous section (Israel et al, 2004). Despite this being important research, due to the frequent negative experiences that the community face, focussing solely

on these areas, portrays a negative depiction of the plurisexual experience. Other researchers have highlighted the positive experiences of identifying as plurisexual. Flanders et al. (2017) found that their participants described feelings of validation from romantic partners who accepted their identities, as well as feelings of belonging from similar LGBTQ+ friends. Social media was also highlighted as a positive space for participants, as it facilitated interactions that affirmed their identities (Flanders et al., 2017), this research highlighted the importance of peer support in affirming plurisexual individuals' identity.

Wang and Feinstein (2022) built on Flanders et al. (2017) by exploring the ways bisexual, pansexual, and queer men characterised their positive experiences in relation to their sexual identity. They found that those who identify as plurisexual described their experiences as positive when they were able to experience personal growth, celebrate their identity or community, discuss shared experiences, and provide or receive support. Identifying as plurisexual was considered a positive experience, as it meant they were not limited by the gender of potential partners and enjoyed being able to care for people regardless of their gender (Wang & Feinstein, 2022). These experiences were also dependent on context and who was present, for example positive experiences with other LGBTQ+ individuals were the most common type of experience described by participants. These findings highlight the diverse ways in which plurisexual men find joy and meaning in their identities, particularly within supportive and affirming communities.

Intersectionality of identity experiences were also captured by some researchers, with Galupo et al (2019) exploring the positive aspects of being both bisexual and biracial. The study revealed unique insights into the experiences of individuals with these intersecting identities, showing that they often have a broader, multifaceted understanding of the world and can connect with multiple communities. Galupo et al (2019) acknowledged that

participants' experiences were often contextualised as occurring in contrast to, or despite, other aspects of experiences that were not explicitly positive. For example, some positive experiences were framed as occurring within the context of minority stressors.

2.5.2 Minority Stress

Minority stress (Meyer, 2003) is defined as “the excess stress to which individuals from stigmatised social categories are exposed as a result of their social, often minority position” (p.675). It is used to conceptualise the oppression experiences by minorities who are sexual and/or gender diverse. Minority stress related to one’s sexual identity is often unique, though it regularly reflects society’s negative attitudes towards LGBTQ+ identities (Rosario et al., 1996). Meyer (2003) proposed distal stressors as a root cause of minority stress, which could include discriminatory policies and laws, or everyday experiences of discrimination, such as being called a homophobic slur. Proximal stressors are internal, subjective experiences that result from distal stressors; these can include internalised stigma and identity concealment. The experience of these stressors puts the LGBTQ+ community at greater risk of negative health outcomes compared with cisgender heterosexual people (Pachankis, 2020).

Recent research suggests that while bisexual individuals share some minority stress experiences with lesbians and gay men, they also face unique challenges, such as bi-negativity (Balsam et al 2007; Paul et al., 2014). Bi-negativity describes the specific prejudices directed towards the bisexual community, however it can also be related to the treatment of anyone who identifies as plurisexual. Those who identify as plurisexual face

‘bi-negativity’ or anti-plurisexual discrimination from *both* heterosexual and LGBTQ+ individuals (Doan Van et al., 2019). These can include, negative attitudes and stereotypes directed towards plurisexual identities, such as ‘bisexuals are just confused’ (Grove, 2023). Coping mechanisms are strategies individuals use to help reduce the negative impact of minority stressors, and social support has been found to be one of the most significant factors in reducing stress and promoting health and wellbeing (Timmins et al., 2020). However, social support is not always accessible to those who identify as plurisexual (Flanders et al., 2016). Some critics have argued that improvements in social climate, for example the increasing acceptance of positive attitudes towards LGBTQ+ communities have reduced minority stressors (McCormack, 2013). However, these recent successes are necessary for promoting inclusion and protecting the well-being of sexual minorities, but are not sufficient to eliminate minority stress and related health and well-being inequalities (Fish, 2020).

2.6 Cultural and Political Context

Generation Z or ‘Gen Z’ is often said to be the queerest generation yet, with young people more likely to identify as LGBTQ+ than any generation before (Campbell et al., 2023). One reason for this is due to increased recognition, visibility, and the celebration of LGBTQ+ identities. One way this has been made possible is through advances in education and visibility of LGBTQ+ identities through social and online platforms, which has helped to facilitate connection, community, and representation of queer livelihoods (Pollit, 2024). Additionally, not only has there been a change in societal attitudes towards LGBTQ+ communities, but also advances in legalisation.

One of the biggest legislative changes in the UK in the last decade is the Marriage (same sex couples) Act 2013, with the first same-sex marriage taking place in March 2014. Despite this progress towards equal marriage rights for LGBTQ+ couples, there have been no further significant legislative changes for LGBTQ+ individuals in the UK. While parliamentary debates on banning conversion therapy have taken place over the past few years, as of 2025 no official ban is in place. Although the UK government announced its intention in 2022 to ban conversion therapy for sexual orientation, this ban has yet to be implemented and does not extend to gender identity. In addition, while The Gender Recognition Act (2004) was intended to be a positive step for gender diverse individuals, it has faced criticism. In its current form it requires individuals seeking legal gender recognition to undergo a lengthy process, including providing medical evidence of gender dysphoria. This requirement is widely seen as dehumanising and pathologising transgender identities and creating unnecessary barriers. Despite criticisms of The Gender Recognition Act (2004), particularly regarding its intrusive and outdated requirements for a diagnostic report (Dawson & Sturge, 2024), there have been no legislative or policy advancements addressing the needs of the gender diverse community.

While there has been limited recent political progress for the LGBTQ+ community in the UK, there has been a notable increase in cultural awareness. Transgender and gender-diverse identities have received increased attention, although this has not always been positive. Western media outlets have pronounced that young people are leading a ‘Gender Revolution’ (National Geographic, 2017), with greater outness of gender diverse identities within younger populations (Thoma et al., 2021). Though this visibility and recognition of gender diversity may appear to be progressive, research has found hate crimes to have increased rapidly over recent years (ONS, 2023); with incidents of transphobic hate crimes

increasing by 11% from 2021 to 2023. The increase in transgender discourse on various media outlets and social media sites is said to be one factor promoting the increase of transphobic crimes (Walters et al., 2020). As the current research focuses on the pansexual community that reside in the UK, including those who also identify as gender diverse, understanding the current cultural and political context is essential, as this is another factor that may influence how individuals experience their identity.

2.7 Coming out and disclosing one's identity

Previously, this review discussed broad experiences relating to identifying as plurisexual and highlighted both adverse and affirming experiences. However, a key factor in being able to achieve peer support, and other affirming experiences relating to identity, is navigating the disclosure of one's identity. Coming out of the closet, which is often shortened to coming out, is a metaphor used to describe LGBTQ+ people's self-disclosure of their identity (Brown, 2006). It is a common phrase used within lay discourse and research to denote disclosure of one's identity. The coming out narrative sets up a binary opposite between being 'in' and 'out' and creates a false dichotomy that positions coming out as a 'good', and non-disclosure as 'bad' (McLean, 2007). In addition, by positioning disclosure in this binary way, it fails to represent the nuance in experience of disclosing one's identity. LGBTQ+ individuals often describe coming out and self-disclosure as an on-going journey, rather than a one-dimensional experience (Wandrey et al, 2015).

Even though coming out and disclosing one's identity can be a positive and empowering experience for many plurisexual individuals (Knous, 2006), McLean (2007) notes that for many bisexual individuals it is often a complex process. Wandrey et al (2015)

found that bisexual individuals often challenge the idea of coming out as an organised and habitual activity. Instead, they view disclosure as an informal action, that occurred naturally in everyday practices. LGBTQ+ individuals have multiple networks, meaning they continually face the decision to disclose their identity to new people or in new settings (Meyer, 2003). This highlights how coming out is not a single act but instead is a multi-dimensional, ongoing process that occurs over time and in different contexts (Groß et al., 2006).

McLean (2007) was one of the earlier researchers to explore bisexual coming out and found that bisexual individuals used sexual identity management strategies when faced with decisions to disclose their identity.. These include hinting or making suggestive comments about same-gender attraction, without specific reference to their identity, as a strategy to find out the potential reactions of other individuals towards same-sex attractions. Bisexual individuals were also found to be selective in their disclosure, revealing their identity only when necessary (McLean, 2007), this challenges traditional models of identity disclosure. This resistance to the traditional "coming out" narrative and the selective disclosure of identity can be linked to the concept of sexuality marking.

No known research has specifically explored pansexual individuals' experiences of coming out and disclosing their identity. However, when researching how pansexual individuals make sense of and experience their identity, Hayfield and Křížová (2021) found that pansexual individuals would select terminology to express their identity, depending on the context they were in. This is similar to McLean's (2007) findings around bisexual individuals being selective in their disclosure. Other research by Caba et al (2022) examined sexual minority youth's outness and disclosure within different settings, which included

pansexual, asexual, nonbinary, and transgender individuals. It was found that pansexual individuals were less likely to come out in settings involving family, LGBTQ+ peers and school contexts, compared to lesbian and gay individuals. However, due to the use of quantitative methodologies, explanations for this phenomenon and the specific experiences pansexual individuals may encounter when disclosing their identity remain unclear. This is important to explore, as there may be unique factors that influence their decision to disclose their identity. For example, pansexuality is one of the less understood plurisexualities, in comparison to bisexuality, which may influence decisions around identity disclosure (Flanders et al., 2017).

2.7.1 Sexuality Marking

Research indicates that bisexual and pansexual individuals carefully choose when and how they reveal their sexual identity (McLean, 2007; Hayfield & Křížová, 2021). This selective disclosure may involve using different terms for their identity depending on the context. This can be understood as a form of sexuality marking, which serves to assert one's sexuality to others. Davila et al (2021) conceptualise sexuality marking broadly, and suggests that it can occur through language, behaviour, aesthetics, and other nonverbal cues. However for plurisexual individuals, and those who identify as bisexual, pansexual or queer, relying on non-verbal cues like appearance can be particularly complex and often less effective (Hayfield, 2020). Unlike some lesbian and gay identities, there is a noted lack of distinct 'dress code' or clear aesthetic cues that reliably communicate plursiexual identities (Clarke & Turner, 2007). This suggests that individuals who identify as bisexual, pansexual, queer and those using other plurisexual identities are less likely to express their identity through

appearance. Thus, plurisexual individuals may have to mark their sexuality in more direct and explicit ways, for example, by verbally marking or disclosing their identity. Therefore, this thesis focusses on sexuality marking as a broader concept to understand how individuals chose to express their identity. This closely aligns with, but offers a distinct lens on, the contemporary and more casual nature of disclosure and expression of identity and moving beyond traditional often binary conceptualisations of ‘coming out’. Thus, for this thesis sexuality marking encompasses the diverse ways pansexual individuals may express or mark their identity.

To date only two studies explored sexuality marking among individuals who identify as plurisexual (Gonzalez, 2016; Koller et al., 2019). Gonzalez (2016) studied the ways in which bisexual individuals mark and express their identity and found that those who identify as bisexual express their sexuality with the purpose of making this visible and to oppose normative assumptions of heterosexism and monosexism. These individuals stated that they would initially mark their sexuality to prove that they were neither heterosexual or monosexual. In addition, individuals would often report having to dispute stereotypes around bisexuality, for example bisexuality being a legitimate identity and not just ‘confused’ or ‘in between’.

Other research focusing on different plurisexual communities includes Kolker et al (2019) who explored how individuals who identify as queer mark and make sense of their identity. Findings suggest that individuals often mark their queer identity to offset pressure or judgement around other plurisexual labels. Motivating factors for individuals to mark their sexuality relate to who is present, with individuals being more open to mark and express their

sexuality when in the company of those they feel more comfortable with. In contrast, Kolker et al (2019) suggest that individuals will use queer with non-LGBTQ+ individuals as a way of avoiding explanations of other plurisexual labels, as well as explaining the reasons why they may have chosen one label over another. Kolker et al's (2019) research contributed to centring the lives of queer individuals and offers a broader understanding of sexuality marking within this community. Such research can be considered a first step towards a more profound understanding of sexuality marking, the motivations behind it and how and when it is taking place. Individuals who identify as pansexual may mark their sexuality differently to bisexual and queer individuals, due to pansexuality encompassing different attractions. In addition, the physical environment, such as who is present, and the cultural and political context may also influence an individual's decision to disclose their identity.

2.8 Social and relational contexts, and experiences of social support

As previously highlighted, when research has explored experiences of those who identify as LGBTQ+, often different social or relational contexts have been discussed as an important factor in shaping experiences. These include discussions around support, wellbeing, or acceptance, through family, friendships, intimate relationships, or partners. It is important to explore these relational contexts, as they are often a fundamental part in many people's lives and influence how they experience their world (Weinhardt et al., 2019).

2.8.1 Family

Families are an important developmental and relational context for individuals across their lifetime (Grossman et al., 2015). The transition from adolescence to young adulthood is often a crucial developmental period for LGBTQ+ youth, and where identity disclosure is most likely to take place (Needham et al., 2010). A parent's reactions to their child coming out is often critical to psychological wellbeing (Eisenberg et al., 2020). Family acceptance and support has been associated with improved wellbeing, lower suicidality, depression, and substance abuse (Haas et al., 2010), as well as higher self-esteem and improved mental health (Russel et al., 2016). Conversely, family reactions involving conflict around sexual and gender identities have been identified as a key risk factor associated with poor mental health (Grossman et al., 2015).

Family support is crucial for those who identify as LGBTQ+, due to growing up in heteronormative societies (Woodford et al., 2015). Social climate is imperative to an individual's wellbeing, and considering heterosexism is perpetuated through enduring social structures, these environmental challenges are embedded within LGBTQ+ individuals everyday experiences (Meyer, 2003). The daily exposure of heterosexism is a reminder of one's marginalised status in society, and has a cumulative impact that contributes to an individual's wellbeing (Harper et al., 2015). Social support and acceptance from family members can help individuals feel more connected to their identity, through helping provide a safe space to explore and express themselves freely (Higa, 2014).

Family reactions to identity disclosure are often more complex than simply acceptance versus rejection. Researchers have attempted to distinguish different parental responses, with D'Amico et al., (2015) observing three types of reactions; parental support, parental struggles, and parental attempts to change their child's gay, lesbian or bisexual identity. In addition, other researchers such as Van Bergen (2021) have suggested a "neutral" category, for parents who are indifferent; while this does not include negative reactions, it is not characterised by supportive actions. Quantifying and categorising parental responses can be too simplistic when researching identity disclosure, as coming out is often a complex multidimensional phenomenon. Mixed method or qualitative research should take priority when exploring these experiences with minority youth, to understand the individuality and influence of participant identity within family settings, with this in mind this thesis will utilise a qualitative methodology.

One study examining plurisexual individuals' disclosure to family found that that deciding to disclose their identities to family members was complex for many individuals (Abreu et al., 2022). Factors that influenced disclosure included fear of being excluded, perceived negative attitudes towards bisexuality, and presence of religiosity. Family reactions were varied and range from, acceptance, rejection and invalidation/erasure. Plurisexual individuals also reported how family reactions impacted their relationships, with reports documenting positive and negative outcomes. For example, while some felt that they had stronger bonds after they disclosed their identity, others noted damage to the relationships as they reported distance, disruption and strain (Abreu et al., 2022). This study highlights

variance in family reactions, as well as how these reactions may influence relationships overall.

Support from family is not just important for plurisexual individuals when they initially disclose their identity, but the ongoing support they receive afterwards is crucial for maintaining relationships. Weinhardt et al (2019) found that transgender and non-binary youth experienced an important distinction between acceptance and support when they disclosed their gender identities. Participants shared experiences where family members expressed initial verbal acceptance of their identities but did not follow up with any supportive actions. These actions were often described as facilitating gender affirmation and transition, for example, putting in honest efforts to use correct names and pronouns and helping facilitate access to medical and transition services (Weinhardt et al, 2019). This research is important in understanding how sexual minority youth understand support, and how family reactions may play an important part in affirming their sexual and gender identities.

These studies by Abreu et al (2022) and Weinhardt et al (2019), offer insight into the importance of family reactions for both plurisexual individuals and gender diverse individuals. These studies examined family reactions, pre-disclosure decision-making, and overall relationship impacts (Abreu et al., 2022), while also identifying specific types of support that may be useful for LGBTQ+ individuals (Weinhardt et al, 2019). This thesis expands on these two studies by using these findings to explore how pansexual individuals may experience their identity within family contexts.

2.8.2 Friendships

LGBTQ+ individuals often describe friendships as chosen family, particularly for those who may not have supportive family networks (Gillig, 2019). Friendships are an important social relationship for individuals, as they offer distinct forms of support, characterised by mutual affection and interaction (Meyer, 2003). LGBTQ+ individuals report choosing friendships based on mutual understandings and experiences, which often end up being friends who share similar identities (Snapp et al., 2015). This shared understanding can help individuals feel connected with one another, which is important due to LGBTQ+ individuals feeling marginalised and isolated in a heteronormative society (Connolly et al., 2016). Therefore, building friendships with other individuals who identify as LGBTQ+ can help individuals feel validated, and in turn build resilience in the face of adversity (Robinson, 2024). This sense of belonging has been found to be important for those who identify as plurisexual (Flanders et al., 2017).

No research has focussed specifically on the pansexual community and how they experience friendships, however some research has utilised pansexual individuals among plurisexual samples, when researching friendships (e.g. Wang et al, 2022). Wang et al (2022) found that participants described friendships with other individuals of the same sexuality as affirming, for example through being able to discuss shared experiences and celebrate one's identity and community with each other. This suggests that friendships may facilitate and encourage authentic self-expression for those pansexual individuals that engage in

friendships with other pansexual individuals. It is important to note that the analysis, provided insight into the participant demographics, by stating their identity (bisexual, queer, or pansexual), and thus offered insight into experiences from specific identities. By including the specific demographics, the research can be understood as offering insight into the understanding of how the pansexual individuals in the sample experienced friendships. Wang et al (2022) consisted of 46 participants, with 12 of these participants identifying as pansexual. As this thesis specifically utilises a pansexual sample, this will add to Wang et al's (2022) findings by offering a larger scale sample and giving voice to the pansexual community.

While research from Wang et al (2022) offered insight into the importance of pansexual individual's friendships with other individuals of the same sexuality, it must be understood that not all pansexual individuals can meet and befriend other pansexual individuals. Instead, cross-category friendships are also popular among LGBTQ+ individuals (those of different gender or orientation). Research that has explored cross-category friendships between LGBTQ+ and heterosexual individuals found conflicting results. Galupo (2011) found that their identity was erased within heterosexual friendships or not taken seriously. This was especially true for bisexual women who were in relationships with men, and therefore a 'heterosexual passing' relationship (Galupo, 2011). This highlights, how erasure can manifest among friendships between plurisexual and heterosexual individuals. In contrast, Baiocco et al., (2012) found that cross-orientation and cross-gender friendships have been tied to positive well-being outcomes.

Despite the lack of research around friendships among the pansexual community, some researchers have focussed on friendships among other minority and marginalised groups, such as gender diverse individuals (Boyer et al., 2017). Boyer et al (2017) found that transgender participants reported having more cisgender friendships, compared with transgender friendships. However, transgender and nonbinary participants that considered themselves connected to the LGBTQ+ community tended to have more sexual minority friendships (Boyer et al., 2017). This research specifically explored the friendship patterns among the gender diverse community, with 35% of the participant sample identifying as queer/pansexual/fluid as their sexual orientation. This research should be considered when exploring friendships experiences among the pansexual community.

As Boyer et al (2017) employed a quantitative methodology, the meanings gender diverse individuals assigned to their friendships were not explored, therefore it is important to use qualitative methods, when exploring friendships, to provide a more in-depth exploration of experiences. Qualitative research around transgender friendships include that by Pulice-Farrow et al (2017), who found that all participants in their study had experienced microaggressions within friendships. The most common one being challenges to the authenticity of their identities, which were seen across all identities, with trans men and trans women being viewed as ‘not real men or women’, and their nonbinary cohorts being viewed as ‘not really trans’ (Pulice-Farrow et al., 2017, p. 6). These findings demonstrate how cisgenderism and binary assumptions are present in society and influence how gender diverse individuals experience their identity among friendships. Unlike, Boyer et al (2017) which included sexual identity among the demographics, this was not included for Pulice-Farrow et al’s (2017) research. However, this thesis will build upon previous qualitative research on

marginalised communities and specifically explore pansexual individuals' experiences of their identity.

2.8.3 Romantic Relationships

Another important social and relational context includes romantic relationships. Romantic relationships can be characterised as voluntary, loving exchanges (Felmlee, 1994). Involvement in romantic relationships is a significant event in the development of emerging adults (Arnett, 2000) and offers several mental and physical benefits to everyone involved (Snapp et al., 2015). For LGBTQ+ individuals, romantic relationships often act as a buffer against stressors relating to their identity, such as prejudice, discrimination and disapproval from family and friends (Peplau, 2007). When plurisexual individuals engage in romantic relationships or are seeking out partners, there are unique challenges that they face (Feinstein et al., 2016). These include initial struggles of finding a partner, as some partners were unwilling to engage in relationships, or rejected individuals based on their plurisexual status (Li et al., 2013). When plurisexual individuals do engage in romantic relationships, research has found that it is an ongoing struggle to have to prove their sexuality, and make their identity visible (McGorray, 2023).

Man (2023) explored the experiences of those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual and pansexual and who engage in polyamorous relationships. Findings suggested that the historical prejudice and stigmatisation against plurisexual individuals, may be exacerbated when bisexual and pansexual individuals engage in consensual non-monogamy, adding more stress and impacting relationship satisfaction and experiences (Man, 2023). Other researchers

sought to explore how gender diverse individuals experience romantic relationships. Platt and Boland (2018) found similar challenges to those who identify as plurisexual, in addition to additional challenges based on their gender identity . Disclosing one's gender identity to a partner is often a vulnerable experience (Moran, 2013), due to potential risks of stigma, discrimination and transphobia. Gender diverse individuals often hold the fear that they will be objectified or ridiculed (Hammack et al., 2019). It can be especially challenging for individuals who transition during their relationship, particularly for those who experience gender dysphoria. Gender diverse individuals face physical and emotional struggles when in relationships, in comparison with cisgender individuals, yet this intersection has not been explored in literature. An individual identifying with multiple marginalised identities may experience their identity in different relational contexts in unique ways.

2.9 Online Environments for LGBTQ+ Sexuality Minority Youth

As offline environments can often be unsafe, or physically hostile for LGBTQ+ youth (McInroy et al., 2019), it is perhaps no surprise that they are finding safe alternative spaces through online platforms and communities (Boyd, 2007). The internet, in particular social media sites, have provided LGBTQ+ individuals with safe spaces to not only develop relationships through communicating with other individuals, but also the opportunity to explore and express their identities, which may not be supported in other contexts of their lives (Russell, 2019). These connections to online communities have been found to increase resilience in LGBTQ+ youth (McInroy, 2019).

Social media has been found to provide easily accessible information and education for those who identify as LGBTQ+ (Fox et al., 2016). This is important as specific information may

not be accessible outside of online spaces, due to societal heteronormative, homophobic, or transphobic spaces (Shmitz et al., 2024). Online education and information have been found to be a helpful resource for pansexual individuals, with Hayfield and Křížová (2021) reporting that pansexual individuals highlighted online spaces as a context where they were first exposed to pansexuality; Tumblr was a notable platform that helped participants discover and educate themselves on the identity. Pansexual participants in Hayfield and Křížová's (2021) study discussed not knowing what pansexuality was until they encountered the term online. This suggests how online environments are providing LGBTQ+ individuals with terminology and education around identities, as well helping individuals navigate their identities.

Experiences of social media use among the pansexual and bisexual community has also been explored by Nelson et al (2022), who specifically focussed on aspects of connection, harassment and mental health associated with social media use. In comparison with lesbian and gay individuals, bisexual and pansexual individuals experienced higher incidence of harassment and exclusion in digital spaces. These findings suggest that bisexual and pansexual individuals may face additional barriers to building community online (Byron, 2019; Nelson et al., 2022). However, even with these negative experiences in online spaces, bisexual and pansexual individuals were found to experience more benefits of connecting with the LGBTQ+ community online, in comparison to lesbian and gay individuals (Nelson et al., 2022). These findings can be applied to numerous social media sites, for example Tumblr, Instagram, Snapchat and Facebook; however, one social media site that was not included in this research is TikTok.

TikTok was the most downloaded app of 2021, with over 1 billion downloads and is one of the most popular social media platforms (Jammet-Lange and Duguay, 2024). Notably, TikTok's popularity surged during the coronavirus pandemic, becoming a primary outlet for entertainment and connection. Penfold (2024) sought to explore how LGBTQ+ individuals' online experiences intersected with the coronavirus pandemic, and TikTok was the most frequently mentioned social media platform by participants. Penfold (2024) found that due to pandemic restrictions, many individuals were granted the opportunity to engage more frequently with online content and communities, due to the disruption to regular routines. Gender minority youth expressed how LGBTQ+ online content assisted in their understanding of their own identity, as the pandemic helped facilitate a unique opportunity for individuals to explore their identities (Penfold, 2024). This suggests that as online content offered visibility into various LGBTQ+ identities, individuals were then able to explore their own identities through online education and representation of different identities. No research to date has explicitly explored pansexual individuals' engagement or experiences with TikTok. Considering the contemporary research findings around the importance of TikTok for LGBTQ+ individuals in aiding with identity development (Penfold, 2024); this is an important area for research to explore.

2.9.1 Rationale for The Present Study

The literature discussed in this chapter clearly highlights the emergence of pansexuality as a discrete sexual identity. Research has provided insight into those who identify as pansexual finding that that that those who identify as gender diverse are more likely to identify with fluid labels, such as pansexual and queer (Gonell 2013; Katz-Wise et al., 2015). Research has

also explored how pansexuality may be conceptualised and understood in comparison with other plurisexual identities (e.g. Galupo et al., 2018). This body of work is important as it gives an understanding into how pansexuality can be defined and expressed by individuals who endorse the label, however more research is needed to explore the lives and experiences of those who are part of the pansexual community. Although the current body of literature provides some insights into the lived experiences of those who identify as plurisexual, and some research has included pansexual individuals in these samples (Flanders et al., 2016), the discrete experiences of pansexual participants in these samples is still underrepresented, and not reflective of pansexual experiences. This research will centre the lives of pansexual individuals through giving them a voice and exploring how they personally experience their identity.

More specifically, this research explores identity disclosure and marking within important contexts of pansexual individuals lives. As Gonel (2013) and Hayfield and Křížová (2021) highlight, pansexual individuals strategically disclose or conceal their identities, and this offers insight into the potential for sexuality marking among pansexual individuals. This strategic use of different plurisexual labels will be explored further in the present study, to understand why, and in what specific contexts, pansexual individuals may mark their sexuality. This is important to understand as disclosing one's identity is often a vulnerable experience (Kolker et al., 2019). Therefore, understanding specific contexts and reasons why pansexual individual may choose to engage (or not) in marking their identity helps identify supportive environments, and where more protection is needed.

In addition to sexuality marking, this thesis will also explore experiences within social, relational and online contexts for pansexual individuals. These contexts and different social relationships, such as family, friends and significant partners, provide crucial social and emotional support (Meyer, 2003). These relationships and contexts significantly shape how individuals live and experience the world (Silk, 2013). Research has been conducted around how plurisexual individuals and sexual minority youth may experience friendships, family and romantic relationships (Platt & Bolland, 2016), but no specific research has explored how pansexual individuals may experience their identity within these different contexts. This is crucial to explore because pansexual individuals may experience contexts, such as family and/or romantic relationships, in discrete and nuanced ways compared to other plurisexual individuals.

As previously mentioned, those who identify as gender diverse are more likely to identify with fluid labels, such as pansexual and queer (Gonell 2013; Katz-Wise et al., 2015). Despite this intersection between pansexual and gender diverse identities, no research has investigated the intersectionality between pansexual and gender diverse individuals. This is important to explore, due to research on gender diverse individuals highlighting distinct experiences, such as transphobia within different contexts, such as family and relationships (Lampis et al., 2023). Thus, pansexual individuals with intersectional identities may understand their identities in even more nuanced and discrete ways. This research offers a comprehensive understanding of the synergism between gender and sexuality by exploring the experiences of those who identify as pansexual and gender diverse.

Online contexts are also a vital part in LGBTQ+ people's lives, as it is one way to escape the real-life challenges of growing up in a heteronormative society. Online media has been found to provide information and education to LGBTQ+ individuals, and pansexual individuals in particular (Hayfield & Křížová, 2021), by promoting visibility and representation of the pansexual identity. In addition, Belous and Bauman (2017), found that pansexuality appeared to be becoming more normalised and visible among online communities. As online communities are becoming increasingly popular in everyday life, and contemporary forms of media are emerging, such as the platform TikTok, it is important that research addresses the online aspects of LGBTQ+ individuals lives. This research will further build on both Hayfield and Křížová (2021) and Belous and Bauman's (2017) findings around online media as an informative platform for pansexuality and specifically explore how information is portrayed on TikTok, regarding the pansexual identity.

The focus on pansexuality is important and timely, as it has become an increasingly adopted label over the last decade in the UK. The current social and political climate around LGBTQ+ identities may influence the way in which pansexual individuals are experiencing their identity, especially for those who identify as pansexual and gender diverse. Research by Stonewall (2022) highlights those homophobic crimes are at an all-time high, with transphobic discrimination and hate speech prominent among the experiences of the LGBTQ+ community. The impact of the rise in discrimination warrants this focus on the pansexual community, and those with intersectional identities. By focussing on solely pansexual participants and experiences within everyday contexts, this research offers a distinct understanding into the nuances of the identity, and the experiences pansexual individuals may be facing. This gives voice to the pansexual community, which not only

offers personalised visibility and representation of the identity but helps advance LGBTQ+ psychology to include nuanced and marginalised identities.

To explore these research aims, this thesis will address three research questions to comprehensively explore the experiences of those who identify as pansexual:

1. How do individuals who identify as pansexual mark their sexuality within different contexts? (Study 1)
2. How do individuals who identify as pansexual and gender diverse experience their identity within different intimate relationships? (Family, Friends and Intimate Partners). (Study 2)
3. What types of content are TikTok users sharing regarding the pansexual identity? (Study 3)

2.9.2 Conclusion

This chapter provided an overview of current research in LGBTQ+ psychology, with a specific focus on the pansexual identity. This was achieved by situating the research within a broader context, encompassing general LGBTQ+ experiences, plurisexual identities, and research on gender-diverse individuals. The current cultural and political climate was also reviewed to understand the social context shaping the experiences of the pansexual individuals in this study. Finally, the chapter outlined the rationale, research aims, and research questions for this thesis. The following chapter will outline the methodological approach taken for this research, to explore the research questions and aims.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter provided a comprehensive review of the literature within LGBTQ+ psychology. It did this by covering historical underpinning of sexuality, and the development of the current understandings of identity labels. Research around pansexuality was reviewed, and additional research around other plurisexual identities was covered to give a comprehensive understanding of the field of research for individuals with attractions to multiple genders. The chapter concluded with the current research aims, questions and rationale for this research project. The present chapter will outline the methodological approach taken for this research, and justifications for these approaches. The research aims, theoretical position, design, methods, and types of data used for each of the three studies in this research will be described and justified. The analytical approach for each of the three studies will also be fully explained. Finally, the chapter will conclude with a discussion of the ethical considerations involved in this research and the researcher's reflexive position in relation to the research topic.

3.2 Research Questions and Aims

The aims of this research are to explore how pansexual individuals experience their identity within different interpersonal, relational, and online contexts. The thesis is split into three different studies and the research questions for each of the three studies are:

1. How do individuals who identify as pansexual mark their sexuality within different contexts? (Study 1)
2. How do individuals who identify as pansexual and gender diverse experience their identity within different intimate relationships? (Family, Friends and Intimate Partners). (Study 2)
3. What types of content are TikTok users sharing regarding the pansexual identity? (Study 3)

All research questions are designed to capture a nuanced approach to how pansexual individuals experience their identity. Sexuality marking has been explored in different plurisexual populations, such as queer and bisexual identities (Gonzalez et al., 2017; Kolker et al., 2020), but no studies have been conducted on sexuality marking among the pansexual community specifically. Previous research findings by Hayfield and Křížová (2021), shows that pansexual individuals are using identity terminology (bisexuality and pansexuality) strategically and in context dependent ways. This strategic use of different plurisexual labels highlights that the pansexual community is engaging in sexuality marking. This thesis will explore this further to understand why, and in what specific contexts, pansexual individuals may mark and express their identity.

This research aims to capture the synergism between gender and sexuality, by exploring the specific experiences of those who identify as pansexual and gender diverse. It is significant that this thesis explores the intersectional elements of pansexual individuals' experiences, as previous research has found that those who identify as pansexual are more likely to identify as gender diverse compared with other plurisexualities, such as those who identify as bisexual (Katz-wise et al., 2015). This is crucial to explore, as individuals with

these intersectional identities may experience their identity in complex and intersecting ways compared with cisgender pansexual individuals. By exploring how these intersecting identities further shape experience, this thesis offers insight into in-group differences among the pansexual community.

It is important that this thesis not only captures social and relational contexts for pansexual individuals, but also online contexts. Previous research has often looked at media usage among sexual minority youth as a whole community, rather than specific groups interactions with social media. Hayfield and Křížová (2021) found that pansexual individuals emphasised the importance of online spaces in the development of their identity and in finding a sense of community. Social media sites provide education and inclusive information for the pansexual community; however, these findings were related to Tumblr (Hayfield & Krizova, 2021). More recent and widely used social media sites include TikTok, which has been found to support marginalised LGBTQ+ communities through education and community building (Hiebert & Kortes-Miller, 2021). This research will explore the types of content and information being shared about pansexual identities on TikTok.

The focus of this thesis is important and timely based on the pansexual label becoming increasingly used over the last decade in the UK, with data from the last UK Census (2021) showing that 48,000 people stated that they identified as pansexual. Even with this increase in visibility and recognition of the pansexual identity, psychological research continues to subsume the pansexual population under broad plurisexual samples (Hayfield, 2020). Doing this can obscure important differences, such as how individuals understand and experience their identity, which can cause invalidation and erasure of discrete identities (Flanders, 2017). The current research is informed by Hayfield and Křížová (2021) research,

but aims to explore discrete experiences further, by offering insight into how pansexual identities are expressed and experienced within specific social, relational and online contexts.

3.3 Research Design

The present thesis utilises a qualitative design to explore the experiences of those who identify as pansexual. Qualitative designs are well suited to gaining an nuanced understanding of group experiences, situated in their social contexts, and thus fits with the main research aims of this thesis (Maher, 2018). In addition, qualitative research that centres the interests of participants has the power to transform inherent power imbalances of research into an experience that is fulfilling and empowering for everyone involved (Gough & Lyons, 2016). This is done by centring participants voices, providing them with a personalised opportunity to express the nuances of their identity through their own experiences within social, relational, and online contexts. This is essential for this research due to the pathologisation in previous research studies involving LGBTQ+ individuals (Diamond, 2007). Instead, by utilising an exploratory qualitative design, the participants experiences are at the forefront of this thesis, ensuring that their voices and experiences are captured in a sensitive and empowering manner.

3.4 Theoretical Position of The Research

For this thesis the researcher adopts a relativist ontology, which is deemed appropriate for this research as the research explores how pansexual individuals experience their identity throughout different contexts. Participants' identities and experiences are understood as unique to the individual, and thus truths are not attainable (Crotty, 1998), only participants

own perspectives and reality of their identity should be understood. The epistemological standpoint for this research is constructionist, where reality is viewed as socially constructed, and knowledge is generated through interactions and interpretations (Robson, 2011). Constructionism assumes that an individual's meaning is situated in a social context (Gergen, 1999). As this research focusses on experiences within family, friendships and other relationship environments, a constructionist epistemology was deemed fitting, based on the understanding that individuals mentally create a sense of the world when they integrate their personal constructs with different external encounters (Gergen, 2000). Constructionism as the epistemological framework ensures that the experiences of pansexual individuals throughout different contexts of their life are captured. The next section will explain the research methods and types of data used to explore the research questions.

3.5 Methods and Types of Data

The choice of methodology is influenced by the aims and objectives of this research, as well as the researchers' epistemological and ontological position. As this thesis adopts multiple research questions, to explore how the pansexual identity is experienced in different contexts, it is fitting for this research to employ a combination of different types of data collection methods. The choice of research methods includes an online qualitative survey, online qualitative interviews, and secondary data analysis of online social media content. This use of mixed methodologies is advantageous to explore and facilitate a comprehensive understanding of how identity shapes experiences for the pansexual community.

3.5.1 Study 1: Online Qualitative Survey

For the first study, an online qualitative survey was employed to explore how individuals who identify as pansexual mark and express their identity. The qualitative survey offers a ‘wide angle lens’ on the research topics, which has the potential to capture diverse perspectives and experiences (Toerien & Wilkinson, 2004). The online qualitative survey has been used in previous research exploring sexuality marking among other plurisexual communities (Kolker et al., 2019), however, sexuality marking has not yet been explored exclusively within the pansexual community. As the pansexual population are an understudied and underrepresented group (Galupo et al., 2017), the online aspect of this method is beneficial over face-to-face methods, as it typically gives an opportunity to pansexual individuals who may not feel comfortable engaging in face-to-face methods (Silverio et al., 2022). The online qualitative survey has also been used in previous research exploring sexuality marking, and the experiences of plurisexual communities (Hayfield & Křížová, 2021; Kolker et al., 2019) and researchers have noted that despite the lack of opportunity for follow up questions, participants provided detailed answers to the survey questions about their identity. Importantly for the pansexual community, the online qualitative survey offers a sense of anonymity, which stigmatised populations may feel more willing to participate in, due to the relative anonymity and privacy of the online context (Battles, 2010). As this survey involves potentially sensitive questions around participant experiences relating to their sexuality, the anonymity of this methodology is advantageous. Indeed, Bouchard (2016) found that participants may feel more comfortable engaging with questions in more detail, compared to those face-to-face approaches that include the presence of a researcher. In addition, participants have control over when and where they complete their survey. This is advantageous for the participants, as it allows them to complete the survey on their own terms. Due to a history of pathologisation of LGBTQ+ populations in psychological research, utilising methodologies that participants have more control over

reduces harmful power dynamics between the researcher and participants (Hayfield & Huxley, 2015) and instead offers a sensitive approach for participants to engage in research.

3.5.1.1 Survey Design

The qualitative survey was designed by the researcher and consists of 4 demographic questions and 16 open ended questions (See Appendix A for the full survey). Demographic questions asked participants their age, current gender identification, racial background or ethnic group, and their present country of residence. These demographic questions were chosen specifically to understand and give context to the participants that took part in the survey. It is important to understand the age of participants, due to previous research suggesting that pansexual individuals are of a younger cohort (Galupo, 2017). In addition, gender identification was asked and framed in a manner that resonated with how participants currently expressed their gender. This is important to capture as previous research by Katz-Wise et al., (2015) suggests that individuals who identify as gender non-conforming are more likely to identify with non-traditional identities, such as pansexual and queer. The racial background and country of residency of participants were also asked, to understand how intersectionality may influence participant experience.

All questions were informed by existing literature on plurisexualities and sexuality marking (Caba et al., 2022; Gonzalez, 2017; Hayfield & Krizova, 2021; Kolker et al., 2019). Initial questions were designed to allow participants to provide context to their identities, by giving them opportunities to discuss personal understandings of their pansexual identity, how inclusive they felt the identity was, and how it captures their views of gender and sexuality. Participants were then asked to describe any other identifications they may use currently or in

the past to describe their sexuality. This was deemed an important question as Ruberg and Ruelos (2020) have shown that individuals often use multiple identities, or terms, to describe their sexual identifications. The inclusion criteria for this research also stated that individuals could identify with multiple identity expressions, but pansexual had to be one of them, thus giving the individuals the opportunity to discuss the nuance of how they may understand and express their identity.

Questions then moved onto topics around sexuality marking more specifically, whereby participants were asked about the importance of other individuals knowing their identity, and any experiences they may have had where they have chosen not to disclose their identity (Kolker et al., 2019). It was essential that participants were given the opportunity to discuss these experiences as previous research has found that individuals who identify as plurisexual often conceal their identity in their day-to-day life (Feinstein et al., 2020). These questions were designed to explore the different experiences of pansexual individuals specifically and give participants the opportunity to discuss their understandings and experiences of sexuality marking.

The final section of the survey explored participant experiences within specific social/relational contexts. These included family, friends, colleagues or peers, intimate partners and any other communities' participants may be a part of. These were chosen specifically as previous research findings highlighted these were common contexts that plurisexual individuals associated with identity development, marking and experiences (Caba et al., 2022; Watson et al., 2020). Participants were given prompts to elicit depth, these included 'experiences could be related to outness/visibility/acceptance and could be either negative or positive'. It was important that these contexts were asked independently, as

previous research has found that individuals may identify differently depending on contextual situations (Scheffey et al., 2019; Hayfield & Křížová, 2021). The study concluded with questions that gave participants the opportunity to add any final comments or messages they would like to express regarding their pansexual identity.

3.5.2 Study 2: Online Qualitative Interview

For the second study, online qualitative interviews were utilised to explore how individuals who identify as pansexual and gender diverse experience their identity within different intimate relationships. A semi-structured interview style was deemed appropriate for this study, as it allows the interviewer to fully explain and clarify questions to participants and to follow up with appropriate prompts based on participant responses (Irvine et al., 2012). . As participants often have identities with unique meaning and definitions, the qualitative interview allows for participants to speak about this more openly and in more detail, in comparison to other methods, such as focus groups, where the presence of others when discussing a sensitive topic may discourage open discussion (Mealer & Jones, 2016). The interview also enables the researcher to capture more personalised language, and concepts that participants themselves use to describe their identity, ultimately offering a more personalised opportunity for participants to be able to express the nuances of their identity. In addition, previous research that explored motivations behind LGBTQ+ participation in research, found that for some LGBTQ+ individuals, interviews were said to be a therapeutic experience that focussed on the importance of their experiences, where they have otherwise felt ignored or dismissed (Shmitz et al., 2019). This is important as it helps to dismantle power issues, offering a more sensitive and participatory lead approach to research (Tebbe & Budge, 2016). Overall, the interview offers the opportunity to yield more detail into the

personal experiences of identity, enabling the researcher to better explore the complexities of how intersectional identities may shape experience (Henrickson et al., 2020).

3.5.2.1 The Interview Guide

The interview guide (see Appendix B) was designed by the researcher and consisted of 27 open-ended questions. The interview guide was informed by previous literature around identity experiences within social and relational contexts (Platt & Bolland, 2016; Pulice-Farrow et al., 2017). The interview covered broad topics around identity expression, influence of identity on relationship experiences within family and friendship settings, the importance of disclosing identity when meeting new people, experiences within intimate partner relationships, and experiences with pronouns, language and misgendering.

Initial questions invited participants to talk about their sexual and gender identity histories and how they may interconnect. This was important to explore, as research has found that millennial and post millennial generations have largely embraced a post-structuralist approach to gender and sexual identity, resulting in multi-term identity constructs (Winer et al., 2024). Topics then moved onto exploring participant experiences within specific relational contexts. Family, friends and intimate partners were specifically chosen as these are fundamental relationships in individuals lives and influence their experiences (Mason, 2021). Questions explored family relations and were split between extended and immediate family based on previous research that highlights diverse support dynamics between different types of family members (Grafsky et al., 2018). Participants were offered opportunities to expand and discuss experiences around closeness and comfort within family contexts and how these experiences shaped their relationship with their family

The topic and context of friendships were then explored, where participants were given the chance to discuss the importance of friendships in their life and explore unique ways these may support pansexual and gender diverse individuals. Questions then moved onto disclosure of identity within friendships. This was explored as previous research on gender diverse individuals indicates that this population may experience gendered or homophobic microaggressions during friendships (Pulice-farrow et al., 2017). Other questions invited participants to discuss any experiences they perceived as significant within friendship settings, prompts included any standout experiences involving acceptance or unsupportive experiences (Flanders et al., 2017).

Romantic and/or intimate relationship topics were then explored, including the importance of disclosing identities for participants. Previous research around transgender individuals in relationships highlighted unique challenges, for example how gender dysphoria may impact physical intimacy (Platt & Bolland, 2018). As research has highlighted fluidity within gender and sexual identities (Diamond, 2017) participants were given the opportunity to discuss experiences related to their own and/or their partners identity changing or developing during the relationship. Although this is not an area that has been thoroughly explored in previous research, there have been some findings to suggest engaging in relationships with other gender diverse individuals may evoke feelings around questioning and exploring one's own gender identity and expressions (Hall, 2021).

The interviews ended with topics that explored pronoun use and misgendering within the different relational contexts. This was a crucial area to explore for this research, as previous research has found that misgendering is a prominent experience in gender diverse

individuals' lives, and can negatively impact their wellbeing (Jacobson et al., 2024).

Participants were also asked about any other significant moments they had experienced relating to any other contexts/relations in their life. The interview ended with an invitation to discuss any further points or final comments they want to add relating to their identities.

3.5.3 Study 3: Online Secondary Data

The third study used online secondary data to explore the types of content that TikTok users share regarding the pansexual identity. Secondary qualitative data analysis can be a useful method to gain insights that primary data analysis may not offer, this includes internet-mediated research (Heaton, 2008). Over the last decade, social media data has become a popular method for researchers to explore insights into current events, trends, and various social phenomena as they unfold (Snelson, 2016). Social media data is valuable to qualitative researchers seeking to understand opinions, insights and lived experiences through online platforms (Patton et al., 2013). The online aspect of this method is crucial to this research, as pansexual individuals, and other LGBTQ+ youths, have been found to frequently use various social media platforms as a mechanism of social support (Belous & Bauman, 2017). As LGBTQ+ youths are typically socially stigmatised yet digitally active (Galupo et al, 2015), exploring secondary data that is already accessible online is important to explore the types of information portrayed on TikTok around pansexuality.

TikTok was chosen as the platform for secondary data to be collected, due to the contemporary popularity of this platform, particularly since the global COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, where TikTok application downloads rapidly increased (Hiebert et al., 2021). Many gender and sexuality minority youth turn to social media platforms for information, identity

development, and support (Bates et al., 2020). Connection to online communities has been found to increase resilience and support among the LGBTQ+ community (Craig et al., 2015).

Hiebert et al (2021) found that TikTok is a supportive community for LGBTQ+ youth, as it offers a nuanced approach to social media, through the development of the 'For you page', which contains an ongoing stream of videos that an algorithm curates for the user. The content of TikTok videos can range widely from comedy bites to singing or dance performances, however, research has also found the platform to increasingly be used to promote activism (Sainsbury, 2021). Due to the popularity of the application TikTok, and emerging research around LGBTQ+ communities on TikTok (Simpson et al., 2021); this research explores specifically how TikTok is used to convey information around pansexuality.

3.6 Recruitment, Sample and Procedure

3.6.1 Online Qualitative Survey

Purposive volunteer sampling was used to recruit participants for this first study, as it meant that the participants selected would provide specific information and relevant experiences based upon the inclusion criteria (Etikan et al., 2016). The inclusion criteria for this study required participants to be aged 18 or over, from the UK and identify as pansexual. Participants could use multiple terms alongside pansexual to describe their sexuality. A UK sample was originally chosen due to the UK Census (2021) showing that 48,000 individuals in the UK are identifying with the pansexual label. Focussing on the UK allows for a deeper understanding of pansexual experiences within a specific sociopolitical context that is

actively shaping its approach to sexual diversity and equality. The current social and political climate around LGBTQ+ identities in the UK, may influence the way in which pansexual individuals experience and express their identity. In addition, this research sought to expand on findings by Hayfield and Křížová (2021), who conducted their research on a UK sample, thus a UK sample was deemed crucial for this research to specifically explore experiences within different contexts. The specific cultural and political context is important for understanding how UK individuals express and mark their sexuality, in relation to social and legislative discourse.

A call for participants was distributed on various social media platforms. These included Instagram, TikTok, Reddit, Tumblr, and Twitter (See Appendix C, for recruitment message used). These sites were specifically chosen because of the potential for members to identify as pansexual, as previous research has found LGBTQ+ individuals use these sites for means of social support (Belous & Bauman, 2017). Participants were encouraged to share the survey link, utilising snowball sampling methods, which promoted accessibility to the recruitment of such a minority group (Hayfield, 2020). The decision to encourage participants to share the research links, highlights the importance of LGBTQ+ youth networks, where participants themselves were able to recruit additional members (Robinson & Schmitz, 2021).

A total of 60 participants clicked on the link, with 45 participants completing the survey in full. These 45 participants were included in the analysis. Despite the inclusion criteria outlined on the poster/recruitment message, the information sheet (See Appendix D) and consent form (See Appendix E), 11 participants outside of the UK also completed the survey. Like other researchers (e.g. Hayfield & Křížová, 2021), a decision was taken to

include these responses in the analysis, based on a view that it would be unethical to exclude these given the level of time and investment these participants put into completing the survey.

Participant ages ranged between 18 and 58, with the largest group of participants aged between 22 to 25 (18 participants). This is reflective of previous research stating that younger individuals are more likely to identify with the pansexual identity (Galupo et al., 2017). 12 participants were aged over 25. Participants mostly identified as cisgender women (17 participants), with the second largest group being participants identifying as gender non-binary/non-conforming/gender queer (10 participants). In addition, seven participants identified as cisgender men, and three as transgender women, whilst eight participants stated that their gender identity was not listed, and self-described as gender fluid (4 participants), transgender man and non-binary (1 participant), demiguy (1 participant) and 2 participants stated that their identity could change in the future. This highlights the diversity of gender identity, and the importance of change and experimentation depending on what the individual feels appropriate (Diamond, 2003). Most participants were White British (32 participants), with 34 participants living in the UK.

3.6.1.1 Procedure

The online qualitative survey was created and distributed using Qualtrics. A call for participants was distributed on various social media platforms. These included Instagram, Tiktok, Reddit, Tumblr, and Twitter. The recruitment message informed potential participants about the topic of the survey; sexuality marking among the pansexual community. A link and QR code were included on the recruitment posts, where participants could then click on and be directed to the Qualtrics website. Prior to the survey questions, participants were first prompted to read and signify agreement with an informed consent

form, which gave participants an overview of the survey, and the inclusion criteria for participation. Once informed consent was given, demographic questions were displayed to participants (age, current gender identification, racial background or ethnic group and their present country of residence). Participants were then presented with the 16 open ended questions described above. At the end of the survey Qualtrics presented participants with a debrief information sheet (See Appendix F), which included the researcher's contact details, in case participants had any further questions or wanted to withdraw their data after their participation. Participants were then thanked for their time.

3.6.2 Online Qualitative Interviews

A purposive volunteer sampling method was used to recruit participants. This was beneficial for this study as the inclusion criteria included an intersectional minority population; individuals who identified as pansexual and gender diverse. A call for participants was distributed on various social media platforms. These included Instagram, TikTok, Reddit, Tumblr, and Twitter. The recruitment poster (See Appendix G) included that participants should identify as both pansexual and gender diverse, be aged 18 and over and live in the UK. The poster also stated information regarding the topic of the interview being around experiences within intimate relationships relating to identity. The researcher's email address was also included for participants if they wished to obtain further information regarding the study, and to arrange a potential interview. Those who emailed to participate were then sent an information sheet (See Appendix H), a consent form (See Appendix I), and a demographic information sheet (See Appendix J) to read, complete, and return in their own time. An interview was then arranged when all forms were received, and the participant had

chosen a time and date for the interview to take place. Participants were also encouraged to share the recruitment message, utilising snowball sampling methods.

The inclusion criteria for this research required participants to be aged 18 or over, from the UK, and identify as pansexual and gender diverse. Participants could use multiple terms alongside pansexual, to describe their sexuality. Participants could also identify with any gender identities that they understand to fall under the gender diverse umbrella. A total of 21 individuals participated in an online interview and made up the final sample. On the demographic information sheet 12 of these participants documented additional identity labels to pansexual/panromantic. For example, queer, bisexual, and asexual were common labels also used by participants. This sample is consistent with previous research findings around how pansexual individuals may simultaneously identify with other sexual identity labels (Galupo et al., 2015). The age range for this sample was 18 to 59, and 20 of the participants were aged between 18 and 26. 13 participants identified as nonbinary, 4 participants identified as trans men and 4 participants described their identities as demi boy/unlabelled, female but questioning, gender queer and fluid/non gender. During the qualitative interview, participants were given the opportunity to discuss in detail how they may describe and understand their identities.

3.6.2.1 Procedure

The online qualitative interviews were conducted using Microsoft Teams, with audio only (both researcher and participant had their cameras turned off), the participants were all made aware at the start of the interview that the interview would be recorded. All interviews lasted between 18 and 88 minutes, with the average length of interviews lasting around 45

minutes. The interview schedule was used flexibly and sensitively to provide a comfortable interaction between the participant and the researcher. The interview guide as previously highlighted, was followed for each interview, with flexibility around the use of follow up questions and prompts depending on suitability for each participant. At the end of each interview participants were thanked for their time, and some participants also showed gratitude to the researcher for exploring the topic and giving them the opportunity to discuss their experiences. Participants were then emailed a debrief sheet (See Appendix K) and invited to get in touch with any questions they may have regarding the interview.

3.6.3 Approach for Online Secondary Data

The research question for this study involved exploring the types of information disseminated on TikTok regarding the pansexual identity. The data collection took place on the social media application TikTok, over 4 weeks, between the dates 15th May 2023 and 15th June 2023. The inclusion criteria required videos to be tagged with at least one of the following hashtags: #pansexual or #pansexuality. In line with previous research conducted on TikTok (Herrick et al., 2020; Marynak et al., 2022), 100 videos were collected and made up the final data sample. 25 videos were collected per week, based on the filters of 'Most Liked' and 'Uploaded this week'. These filters were used to make sure the data collected was contemporary and gave a clear indication of the current information that was being portrayed. The first 25 videos that were presented each week were then saved and used for data collection. This was due to the algorithm and filters presenting the most liked (engaged with) content that week, and thus the videos would be presented in that order. These videos were then transcribed, including any text on the screen, verbal speech, and captions of the video. Any background music edited into the video and visual aspects were also noted, to capture a

detailed reflection of the data. The usernames, like count, and comments were not documented, as this information was not specifically needed to explore the research aims.

3.7 Analytical Approach

Reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019) was utilised as the analytical approach to explore the research questions of how individuals who identify as pansexual mark and express their identity (Study 1), and how individuals who identify as pansexual and gender diverse experience their identity within different intimate relationships (Study 2). Reflexive thematic analysis is an interpretive approach to qualitative data analysis that facilitates the identification and analysis of patterns or meanings among the dataset that addresses the research questions and aims (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Reflexive thematic analysis is theoretically flexible, meaning it can be used within a range of theoretical frameworks to address a wide range of different research questions (Terry & Hayfield, 2020). This is important for the current research as it enables the researcher to examine the meanings that people attach to identities, how they understand their identities and how their social contexts may reflect the reality of participant experiences (Evans, 2018) within a relativist and constructionist framework.

An inductive approach was taken when analysing the data, whereby the analysis was not shaped by existing theory but instead was data driven (Patton, 1990), allowing the researcher to identify and focus on how pansexual individuals may understand and construct their identity through experiences. Recognising that pansexual identity experiences have often been subsumed within broader psychological research (Hayfield, 2020), this study sought to offer the pansexual community an opportunity to discuss the nuances of their

identity experiences. Reflexive thematic analysis was chosen over other qualitative research methods, such as discourse analysis, as Kiger and Varpio (2020, p.3) states that it is often a powerful method to use when seeking to understand a set of experiences, thoughts, or behaviours. This aligns with the aims of this research and motivations for placing pansexual individual's voices at the forefront of this research.

Qualitative content analysis was chosen as the analytical approach to explore the types of content that is posted on TikTok around the pansexual identity. Qualitative content analysis is a method for identifying patterns in qualitative data (Cho & Lee, 2014). The method involves a systematic process of coding and theme identification, where the researcher's subjective interpretation of the data's context is central to identifying patterns (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). As this study used online secondary data, qualitative content analysis was appropriate to thoroughly explore the themes among the TikTok videos, and additionally the latent content (the underlying, hidden or implied meanings) within these videos. The latent codes included creators' emotions, mood, and gestures, as this gave additional meaning and context to the content (Vears & Gillman, 2022). This was important, as some videos had little written or verbal content. Qualitative content analysis is often conflated with forms of thematic analysis such as reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019) due to potential perceived similarities and some researchers also label their approach thematic content analysis (Brewster et al., 2014). These similarities include data familiarisation, approaches to coding (inductive or deductive), and theme or category development that represent the data sets (Humble et al., 2022). Although the approaches to analysing data appear to be similar, the approach and focus of both analyses' can differ depending on the type of research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Reflexive thematic analysis is more interpretative and focuses on understanding broader themes, meanings and

experiences. However, qualitative content analysis focusses more on explicit content and identifying patterns within qualitative data (Chlo & Lee, 2014). As the research question involved explored the *types* of content that TikTok users are sharing regarding the pansexual identity, the qualitative content analysis was deemed better suited for this specific study.

3.7.1 Reflexive Thematic Analysis

There are 6 stages to reflexive thematic analysis, which will now be outlined, and how each phase was conducted will be described (Braun & Clarke, 2019). For the online qualitative survey, the researcher downloaded the data from Qualtrics and organised this into Microsoft Word. The interview data was initially organised by transcribing each interview, no software was used, and transcription was manually completed by the researcher. The researcher made sure that the data was transcribed orthographically, including breaks, pauses and noting inflections, by both researcher and participant (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The researcher then started to familiarise themselves with the datasets. Familiarisation with the data ensures that the researcher comprehensively understands and becomes intimately familiar with the data to identify the appropriate and relevant information for the research aims and questions (Byrne, 2021). Familiarisation occurred by re-reading the data set from the survey and the interview transcripts.

In accordance with the 6 step guidelines set out by Braun and Clarke (2019; 2021), the researcher then started to work systematically through the data sets, making sure equal consideration was given to each participant's data. The researcher started to note down and code all of the data line by line, writing these in the margins on the transcripts. The research

questions and aims were kept in mind when generating and reviewing codes to ensure the data was reflective of the research aims. For the survey data, codes often indicated sexuality marking, and disclosure, for example codes included ‘not disclosed due to unsafe’. When all the data had been coded, using both semantic and latent codes, the researcher continued to review and analyse how the codes may share meaning. Potential themes were then drafted out by highlighting and grouping similar codes. Some examples of these include ‘Only talks about it with close friends’ and ‘Only talks about it when feels safe’. These codes and those similar were first grouped together and labelled as ‘will tell people they are close to and feels safe with’. The researcher found that some codes had clear connections, for example codes around the importance of safety, compared to other codes that took more consideration to identify patterns.

As the researcher continued to review the codes, they started to identify patterns with a political element, for example some codes included ‘in straight passing relationship, experience erasure, wants people to know’, ‘desire to come out to show representation and visibility’ ‘important to educate and inspire other people’. The researcher started to observe patterns and participant narratives of activism and political reasoning for sexuality marking. The researcher then reviewed initial theme names to ensure they related to the research questions and were reflective of the coded data (Patton, 1990). This was done by writing down and reflecting on what the themes were capturing. During the final phase it was essential that the researcher understood how the themes connected in a logical and meaningful manner, producing a coherent narrative of the data (Byrne, 2021). The researcher reviewed and mapped out the order of the themes. During the write up the researcher continued to rework and develop the themes, making sure the report was coherent and written in a meaningful manner: which is a relevant and appropriate part of the reflective thematic

analysis process (Braun & Clarke, 2019). (See Appendix L and M, for examples of the coding process).

3.7.2 Qualitative Content Analysis

A standard or conventional qualitative content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) was chosen to explore this research question; What types of content are TikTok users sharing regarding the pansexual identity? (Study 3) This analysis is appropriate when existing theory or research literature on a phenomenon is limited. It involves inductively coding the data, meaning that the analysis is solely focussed on the content of the videos rather than previous knowledge or theory (Lauri & Kyngas, 2005). In accordance with the five-step process to qualitative content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005), the researcher first immersed themselves into the data by re-watching and re-reading TikTok video transcripts to get a sense for the data. The second step involved highlighting key thoughts and concepts derived from the data. When it came to coding the data, the researcher noted down direct codes from the videos, such as types of verbal and written data, or actions that were being portrayed, for example 'pan means regardless of gender' and 'can't be pan if dating a guy'. Latent codes were then noted, such as tone of voice etc, to fully understand the context to the video. The third step involved labelling these codes, for example 'definitions of pansexuality' and 'information on stereotypes', which are reflective of the direct codes. (See Appendix N for examples of the coding process)

After all videos had been coded, they were then grouped together to form categories, to complete the fourth step. According to Cavanagh (1997) the purpose of creating categories is to provide a means of describing the phenomenon, to increase understanding and

knowledge. Categories are formed based on the researcher's interpretation of related codes that belong together (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz., 2017). The researcher initially noticed how some codes such as definitions of pansexuality and differences between bisexual and pansexual, fit together through underlying and latent meaning. The researcher then approached this category and interpreted the data as 'educational content', with videos often including educational and informational content around the pansexual identity. The final step included developing and fine-tuning definitions for categories and identifying examples from the data. For example, the category/theme name became "It Means Regardless of Gender" Educating and Informing Others on Pansexuality. The researcher then started to write up the findings of the data, with focus on both descriptive and latent understandings of the TikTok videos.

3.8 Research Ethics

3.8.1 Working with the Pansexual Community

An informed understanding of the history of LGBTQ+ psychology has significantly shaped the design and conduct of this research, and influenced the approach taken to ensure the research was sensitive and followed specific ethical considerations for the pansexual community. This includes following guidelines set out for working with LGBTQ+ individuals and marginalised groups, for example The British Psychological Society (2024), guidelines for psychologists working with gender, sexuality and relationship diversity and good practice guide to researching LGBT communities and issues (LGBT Foundation, 2015).

As the pansexual population are a minoritised and marginalised group (Hayfield, 2020) it is important that the research centres the experiences of the pansexual community (Levy & Harr, 2018). To effectively include pansexual individuals at the forefront of this research, it is not sufficient to simply include pansexual individuals in research samples, but rather centre and promote the community's voices (Suen, 2015). Previous psychological research involving LGBTQ+ participants has often pathologized LGBTQ+ behaviours, and researchers have been reported to lack sensitivity when engaging with LGBTQ+ participants (McDermott et al., 2011); due to this history of pathologization, pansexual individuals may feel reluctant to participate in psychological research (Vincent, 2018). Throughout the research project, the researcher prioritised sensitivity towards participants.

The research design and materials were informed by previous literature around pansexual and gender diverse communities (Dowers et al., 2020; Platt & Bolland, 2016; Pulice-Farrow et al., 2017). In addition, the author of this research identifies as pansexual and thus is an insider to the community, which helped inform the materials in a way that sensitively reflects pansexual individuals' experiences. When exploring previous research among plurisexual communities (Hayfield & Křížová, 2021), the researcher engaged with LGBTQ affirmative research, as opposed to previous research that pathologized LGBTQ+ communities. By the researcher understanding the past and present impacts of pathologization, it helps produce affirmative research that is sensitive and empowering to the pansexual community (Henrickson, 2020)

This research was non-assumptive and was not shaped by existing theory, it instead aimed to capture pansexual experiences in relation to online and social/relational contexts.

This research ensured that participants had the opportunity to express and define their own identities, offering them the chance to describe what those identities personally meant to them. This is important to consider as some pansexual individuals may understand and define their identity in unique and nuanced ways (Galupo et al., 2015). By following BPS (2024) guidelines, the researcher understood the potential for a variety of forms of relationships between participants, including types of experiences within different social, relational and online contexts. Understanding context is also at the forefront of the research, where experience and knowledge is to be understood and situated within a social context (Gergen, 1999) and thus should not be generalised outside of one's own social context.

3.8.2 Online Qualitative Survey

Ethical approval for the first study was granted on the 06/07/2022 (See Appendix O for full letter). For this first study, the participants were all informed of the aims, focuses and purposes of the research before participating, using information sheets and consent forms on Qualtrics. At the start of the survey, on the first page of the Qualtrics survey, participants were asked to provide a pseudonym which contained the first and last letter of their favourite food and 3 random numbers of their choice. This was to ensure that participants did not include any identifying information, to enable anonymity and confidentiality of participants data. Participants were reminded to remember this pseudonym, as the pseudonym would be used to identify their data, should they wish to withdraw participation after completing the survey. During the analysis and write up of the data, the pseudonym was not used, and instead participants were only identified by their participation number, for example P1, or P40, as this was in line with previous qualitative studies (Hayfield & Křížová, 2021).

The physical risks to participants were low, due to the online nature of the data, however there was a potential for psychological harm to participants. This was due to the sensitive nature of the questions, for example asking participants to recall experiences around their sexuality. However, this was minimised by making the participants aware of their right to withdraw on the information sheet and throughout the study. Participants were also informed that they were not required to answer any questions they did not wish to and could provide as much or as little detail as they felt comfortable with. If participants felt like they needed support after this online survey, the debrief sheet contained LGBTQ+ specific services that participants could access. As this data was all online, the participants' data was saved and stored on a password protected device and saved through OneDrive. This data will be kept for 10 years, and then will be deleted, according to faculty policy.

3.8.3 Online Qualitative Interview

Ethical approval was granted for the second study on 14/03/2023 (See Appendix P for the letter of approval). To fully inform participants of the research aims, purpose and practicalities of the online interview, participants were emailed a full copy of the interview guide, with the consent and information forms. This was deemed appropriate to offer participants the opportunity to understand the questions that would be asked, as some of the topics covered in the interview could potentially be sensitive (Haylock, 2022). This meant that there was some possibility for psychological harm to participants, due to the nature of the questions being asked, and asking participants to recall experiences around their identity. This was minimised by giving participants a copy of the interview questions and informing them of their right to withdraw on the information sheet and again at the start of the

interview. The debrief sheet included contact details for relevant support services for participants if they felt that they needed to gain extra support.

To ensure anonymity and confidentiality was upheld, all participant names were removed and were only identifiable via a pseudonym, which was provided via the demographic information sheet prior to the interview. Participants were asked to create a pseudonym, which would be a fake name distinct from their full name, shortened name, or nickname. This was used for the data storage, write up and for participants to withdraw their data should they wish. Asking the participants to create a pseudonym, rather than the researcher producing one, was appropriate for this study, as the participants identified as gender diverse, and could therefore design a pseudonym that they felt would resonate with their gender identification. As the data collection was online, the participants' data was saved and stored on a password protected device and saved through OneDrive. This data will be kept for 10 years, and will be deleted, according to Faculty policy.

3.8.4 Online Secondary Data

Ethical approval for this study was granted on the 23/05/2023 (See Appendix Q for full copy of the approval letter). Publicly published and accessible social media posts are part of the public domain. In line with previous studies researching online secondary data from TikTok, direct consent from creators was not perceived as necessary for this research (Herrick et al., 2021). Instead, ethical clearance and consent would have been obtained during account creation, ensuring all users agreed to third-party data access (Bruckman, 2010). TikTok users can control who views their account and posts via their privacy settings. Users have the choice to make their accounts, accessible to everyone via the public account option,

or only accessible to followers, via the private account option. This study only collected video data from accounts that were publicly accessible and able to be downloaded. All user's data was anonymised and confidential, as no identifying information was documented at the time of the transcription to protect the identity of the creators, this included usernames, comments, or likes. During the write up of the analysis, the videos were numbered (for example, Video 1, Video 2 etc), these numbers were based on the order that they were analysed. The approach used throughout this research was informed by the Internet Mediated Research, BPS Guidelines (2021).

3.9 Reflexivity

In this section, I will provide a reflexive account of the potential ways that my own beliefs, positions, personal assumptions and backgrounds may have influenced the research processes. A main motivational factor for conducting this research and advocating for the pansexual community is due to my own personal relationship with the community. I, as the researcher of this thesis, identify as pansexual/queer, and thus can be understood as an 'insider' researcher, due to belonging to the group to which my participants of this study also belong to, based on their sexual identity (Gair, 2012). Researcher's reasonings for their topics of interests are often related to personal experiences (Tang, 2007). Having personal motivations attached to this meant that I understood the importance of representing pansexual individuals' voices through promoting their experiences (Knott, 2009) However, being an 'insider' researcher is often contested among academics and must be understood as influencing the research project (Glassner, 2004). It was important to understand how my own identity may have influenced the data collection, and motivations for participant engagement of this research. As Hayfield and Huxley (2015) state, power dynamics between

researcher and their participants will be prevalent, due to the way that they perceive one another. It was important to navigate this communication of insider/outsider status to participants during the data collection, as providing specific information may influence participants' willingness to participate and engage with the researcher (Vincent, 2018). Participants may wonder about my identity as a researcher and assume that as I am researching LGBTQ+ topics, I am a part of the community (Hayfield & Huxley, 2015).

In this research I decided not to outwardly share my identity to participants before data collection. However, after some of the online interviews, informal post-interview discussions occurred, whereby some participants were curious around my motivations and reasonings of conducting this thesis. During this time, I chose to openly share my identity with participants as it offered them insight and understanding into my reasonings for conducting this research. As participants were encouraged to share the recruitment message and poster, snowball sampling could then have occurred. Upon reflection, this could have influenced the recruitment, whereby participants could have informed other individuals of my 'insider' position, and thus influenced potential participants decisions to whether to participate. These recommendations from existing participants could have provided me with social capital, due to being considered trustworthy in my motives as an insider of the community (Sixsmith et al., 2003). This is important when researching a marginalised community, as they often feel reluctant to engage in academic research, due to the previous pathologizations of minority groups in research (Robinson, 2007). Therefore, if a researcher is viewed as sensitive and empowering, this can foster trust and encourage engagement.

I believe that when conducting the interviews, my own experiences may have shaped how I approached topics, or questions. For example, understanding participant experiences within family settings I found particularly interesting, which could be related to my own complex family experience. Participants that spoke about rather challenging experiences they faced with disclosing their identity to family members, I felt myself being able to relate and associate with. This personal connection may have shaped my interview technique by asking further questions, and potentially contributed to gaining more detail during the interviews. A particular interesting reflection of the online interviews included how gender identity was discussed. Many of the participants in these interviews discussed experiences around their gender identity than their pansexual identity. This appeared a priority for most participants, therefore I ensured a sensitive environment for their expression, without redirecting them towards the discussion of their sexuality. It is important to acknowledge that the interviews were conducted during a period of heightened media attention and sociopolitical debate regarding gender diversity, including non-binary and transgender rights (Bower-Brown, 2023). As a researcher I was aware of this, and this invariably guided my personal and emotional motivations for ensuring that the intersectionality of pansexual and gender diverse participants were captured. As well as being motivated to produce positive research that also advocated for gender diverse individuals' voices and experiences, that were currently being socially and politically targeted.

As is typical in qualitative research, the analysis presented here reflects an interpretive process, drawing both from the data and my own understanding as a researcher (Altheide & Johnson, 2013) When coding and reviewing themes, I could have focused on certain elements of the data that I connected with and may have wanted to particularly highlight. On the other hand, when it came to analysing online secondary data, I had a tendency towards overlooking

aspects of participant accounts due to my perceptions of it being simplistic or ‘common knowledge’, but I managed this with reflexivity. For example, educational content was a common theme found among the TikTok videos, these included describing what the pansexuality was. As an insider to the community, with more personal understandings of this identity, I initially overlooked the importance of this content as a theme, and it wasn’t until I re-read the write up on this theme that I understood the significance of portraying this content, and how definitions of pansexuality may still be misunderstood to other individuals.

3.9.1 Summary

This chapter has provided a comprehensive overview and justification for the research methodology employed in this study. The research aims, and the researcher’s relativist and constructionist position for this research was discussed. The qualitative design and methods were described, and include an online qualitative survey, online qualitative interviews, and secondary data analysis of online social media content. Reflexive thematic analysis and qualitative content analysis were highlighted as the analytical procedures chosen for this thesis, whilst explaining how this was utilised for each research aim. Finally, ethical considerations around working with a marginalised community were discussed, concluding with a reflexivity on the general research process. The next chapter will explore the findings from the online qualitative survey and provide a reflexive thematic analysis of how individuals who identify as pansexual mark their sexuality within different contexts.

Chapter 4: Exploring How Pansexual Individuals Mark and Express their Identity

4.1 Introduction

The earlier chapters provided a critical review of the literature relevant to LGBTQ+ psychology and plurisexual communities. It specifically highlighted the limited research on sexuality marking within the pansexual community. The previous chapter outlined the qualitative design and data collection method used to address this gap. Building on this, the current chapter presents the analysis into sexuality marking within the pansexual community, by addressing the research question: How do individuals who identify as pansexual mark their sexuality within different contexts?

A purposive volunteer sampling method was used to recruit participants through social media platforms, such as Instagram, TikTok, Reddit, Tumblr, and Twitter. A total of 60 participants clicked on the link, with 45 participants completing the online qualitative survey, these 45 participants made up the final sample and were included in this analysis. Through conducting a reflexive thematic analysis four themes are presented: 1: 'It can still be personalised': The nuance and strategic use of the pansexual label 2: 'You just don't want to risk it': The importance of safety on sexuality marking, 3: 'My sexuality wasn't real': Dismissal and stereotyping of the pansexual identity within intimate partner relationships, and 4: 'The everyday politics of (Non)Disclosure': Sexuality Marking as acts of political resistance and activism.

4.2 ‘It can still be personalised’: Nuance and strategic use of the pansexual label

This first theme describes the ways in which participants defined and understood their pansexual identity, often acknowledging the inclusive nature of the identity. In addition, participants also recognised the nuance of the label, often expressing this through both their understanding and use of the identity. The pansexual identity appeared to be used strategically, with participants utilising specific terminology based on who was present in a particular context.

All participants collectively recognised and emphasised a fundamental aspect of pansexuality as an identity that encompasses attractions to individuals of any gender identity, or regardless of gender. However, participants also emphasised a more personalised understanding of what pansexuality means, which suggests greater nuance in understandings and use of the pansexual identity, as seen with P31:

‘I think it's nice to say that it is viewed as "regardless of sex" but it doesn't mean that to some people. Pansexuals can still have preferences on sexes and can still have preferences for particular looks for each gender.’ (P31, 24, Non-Binary).

P31 begins by emphasising the commonly understood description of pansexuality as including attraction to individuals “regardless” of sex but highlights how this may not be how others view pansexuality. By stating “it doesn’t mean that to everyone”, P31 explains that while the pansexual identity is often viewed as inclusive and all-encompassing, it should not be assumed that all pansexual individuals align with this definition. Instead, personalised, nuanced understandings of their identity are still possible, referenced here as ‘preferences’.

This suggests that while pansexuality may be commonly understood as attraction regardless of sex, for P31 pansexuality does not preclude the ability to have preferences for a particular gender. This emphasises the individuality of sexual identity, a point supported by Flanders et al., (2017) whose study found that plurisexual individuals define their sexuality in a multitude of ways, which varied across individuals and contexts.

Like P31, other participants were also keen to emphasise the inclusive nature of the pansexual identity, often on a personal level, with P5 also acknowledging preferences within the pansexual community.

'I think it is incredibly inclusive as (for me personally) I can love or be attracted to anyone regardless of their gender or sexuality. However, everyone has preferences (not to be confused with biases) so you may prefer a certain gender or characteristic/feature that is most common with a certain gender' (P5, 18, Cisgender Female).

P5 begins by acknowledging the inclusivity of the pansexual identity. However, P5 then presents pansexuality as a more nuanced identity by highlighting that it can still include preferences. P5 specifically differentiates between preferences and “biases”, indicating that a bias would contradict the inclusive nature of pansexuality. By contrast, a “preference” is emphasised as a natural and personalised aspect of an individual’s identity. Like P31, P5 highlights those preferences could include certain genders but stresses further that these could simply include certain characteristics. This highlights that pansexual individuals may have specific desires and attributes they prefer in a partner. By emphasising these preferences, it positions pansexuality as not just a broad and inclusive identity, but one that can include personalisation of preferences similar to other LGBTQ identities. This is

supported by research that pansexual individuals are more likely to find androgynous features more attractive compared with gay and lesbian individuals (Gunn et al., 2021).

Other participants highlighted similar understandings of pansexuality, with inclusivity identified as one of its fundamental characteristics. However, participants continued to emphasise the more nuanced and personalised elements of pansexuality. P16, in the quote below, highlights an understanding of pansexuality as it is included under the bisexual umbrella, an umbrella term often used to describe and encompass the experiences of those who identify as plurisexual (attractions to more than one gender).

‘Pansexuality is attraction regardless of gender, or in the way I personally see it (being under the bisexual umbrella) it is attraction to all genders.’
(P16, 29, Cisgender Female)

P16 emphasises the commonly understood definition of pansexuality, as an attraction regardless of gender, whilst also acknowledging that it can include a personal element of identification, as indicated by the statement “I personally see it”. This highlights that pansexual individuals can still have distinct understandings and definitions of their identity. Another aspect of the personalisation of pansexuality is evident where P16 positions the pansexual label under the “bisexual umbrella”. By locating pansexuality within the bisexual umbrella, this places emphasis on pansexuality being able to be grouped with other plurisexualities. This suggests that for P16, they view their identity as similar to other plurisexualities, rather than a completely discrete identity, as some scholars have suggested (Galupo et al., 2016). This emphasises one way that the pansexual label can be unique to those who endorse the label.

Nuances were consistently emphasised across responses, with participants expressing a right to identify in a way that best reflects their individual expression and experience. P16 describes themselves as someone who identifies with multiple plurisexual labels, such as both bisexual and pansexual.

'I think that pansexuality is inclusive of all genders, and gender expressions, however pansexuality is not necessarily a term that includes all experiences of people attracted to multiple genders. I think sometimes people outside of the community see pan as the real inclusive term and bi as somehow transphobic or non-binary excluding - which has never been the case. Bisexuals and Pansexuals can coexist, some bisexuals such as myself experience the same attraction as pansexuals. It is down to the individual, and I fully support everyone that choose either label for their fully gender inclusive attraction.' (P16, 29, Cisgender Female).

P16 stresses the limits of inclusivity of the pansexual identity; she highlights the importance of experience in identity expression and emphasises how the inclusive nature of the pansexual label should not be applied to describe “all experiences” for those who identify as plurisexual. P16 highlights the issues around characterising pansexuality as the primary inclusive identity, due to other plurisexual identities then consequently being viewed as somewhat exclusionary by individuals outside of the LGBTQ+ community. P16 argues how plurisexual identities can “co-exist”, and to further highlight this, she explains how they identify as both pansexual and bisexual, but with the same inclusive definition as pansexual. This illustrates the nuances and personalised nature of identity expression and how definitions of identities can be seen as becoming more fluid and flexible depending on individual's preferences. This is supported by research that documents the way that LGBTQ+ individuals now use multiple terminologies and expressions to help describe their sexual identity (Hammack et al, 2022)

Similar to P16, other participants shared their understandings regarding the similarities and differences between both pansexual and bisexual labels. P2 expresses this by discussing their own experience with identifying as both bisexual and pansexual.

'I think that there is a misconception that pansexual and bisexual are mutually exclusive, but that's not the case at all. I believe that pansexuality is an identity which lives within the broader bisexual (multi gender attraction) definition - for me I identify as both Bi and Pan but Pan actually describes my sexuality just as well. I think it's nice that pan is available for those that want to specify their identity more clearly!' (P2, 23, Cisgender Female)

P2 identifies as bisexual but states that the pansexual label would also accurately describe their sexuality, due to its inclusive definition. P2 defines pansexuality as sitting within broader bisexual definitions, as others have described as the under the “bisexual umbrella”. As P2 is someone who identifies with multiple plurisexual labels, the bisexual umbrella is an overarching term which may be appropriate for individuals with multiple labels to position their identity under, due to being broader in understanding and including various plurisexual labels. However, P2 does highlight how pansexuality can be used to define someone’s identity more “clearly”. This suggests that participants use the pansexual label in a nuanced way, that can be adapted to an individual’s expression. Where some participants, like P2, may position pansexuality as a broad term that can be included in the bisexual umbrella, it can also be used for individuals who want clarity and specificity of attraction.

The inclusivity of pansexuality is further highlighted by participants when describing experiences of sexuality marking. Specifically, the ways in which they would strategically utilise terminology dependent on others’ perceptions and understanding of pansexuality.

'I have described myself as bisexual in the past, before I knew of the term pansexual, and sometimes still do so when talking to older people like my parents, who might not understand what pansexual means.' (P25, 19, Transgender Woman)

P25, as someone who previously identified as bisexual before they self-defined as pansexual, describes the complexity of identity that can evolve, or change based on one's own sense of self. Research has shown that it is common for pansexual individuals to have previously identified with other plurisexual identities (Galupo, 2018). This suggests that awareness of the pansexual identity may not have been as widely understood compared to that of other plurisexualities such as bisexuality. P25 emphasises that even though they identify as pansexual they actively conceal this around "older people", including their parents, and instead describe themselves as bisexual. This suggests that participants are strategically utilising terminology they perceive others to be more familiar with. Thus, P25 chose to use the bisexual label around their parents, based on the assumption that they would not understand the pansexual identity.

Other important features such as the gender spectrum were highlighted as a factor in the perceived understanding of pansexuality, where participants refrained from identifying as pansexual in certain contexts due to others perceived (lack of) understanding.

'When I first came out to my parents I used the term bisexual. They don't really have a good grasp on the gender spectrum so it helped them understand.' (P22, 18, Cisgender Female).

This suggests that viewing gender as a spectrum is important in not only acknowledging pansexuality but also understanding what the pansexual identity encompasses. Without this knowledge pansexuality may be misunderstood, and thus P22 chose to come out as bisexual instead. This highlights that participants are taking other peoples' understanding of identities into account in certain contexts. However, this can result in choosing the most widely understood identity terms to utilise (e.g. bisexual), rather than those which accurately describe their identity (e.g. pansexuality), resulting in the erasure of identities in certain contexts.

Different generational understanding of identities were highlighted by participants as a factor in choosing how to mark their sexuality, with P39 explaining how they navigate their sexuality marking as someone who uses multiple identities to capture their sexuality.

'Nowadays I refer to myself as bisexual when talking with Gen Xers and boomers because they seem to be more familiar with that term. I refer to myself as pansexual when talking with millennials because most of them aren't yet familiar with asexuality. I refer to myself as panromantic-asexual when talking with other zoomers because they usually understand both terms.' (P39, 21, Non-Binary).

P39 states that the label panromantic-asexual most accurately reflects their sexuality. P39 describes how they strategically choose what identity/ies to disclose and mark their sexuality as, depending on who is present. Like other participants, P39 uses the term bisexual when talking with older generations such as Gen Xers, suggesting that bisexual is the plurisexual identity that they are most familiar and understanding of. In contrast, P39 identifies as pansexual when talking with Millennials, signifying the emergence of the pansexual identity in more recent generations, compared with that of Gen Xers.

P39 describes how they only refer to their preferred identity, panromantic-asexual, when talking with “other zoomers”. By disclosing their multiple identity terms only to zoomers, P39 illustrates that this current generation is more likely to understand both panromantic and asexual, compared to older generations. This suggests that they perceive them to be more tolerant of those who identify with multiple identity terms to describe their identity. This highlights how participants are choosing when to disclose and mark their sexuality based on perceptions of others’ understanding of pansexuality. The emergence of fluidity and expansions of identity terminology has also been highlighted in recent research (Thorne et al., 2020).

Whilst other participants described using monosexual language to mark their sexuality, P2 stresses how they are not always comfortable utilising other terms to describe their identity.

‘Gay or Bisexual are terms that I use when I’m around people who don’t fully understand the pansexual community, however I’m trying to break that habit since that isn’t who I am.’ (P2, 18, Cisgender Male)

Similar to other participants, P2 discusses using terms other than pansexual to describe their sexuality when talking with those who are less familiar with the community. P2 describes themselves as bisexual but also uses the term gay. This use of monosexual language is used when around those who do not understand pansexuality, suggesting that they are accommodating other’s people’s lack of understanding around associated terminologies. Unlike other participants, P2 indicates that they are not fully comfortable using the terms

bisexual and gay since it “isnt who I am”. This highlights that this effort to accommodate other people’s lack of understandings is not always done willingly but often out of necessity.

This theme illustrates the ways in which participants understand pansexuality. This often included highlighting the nuances of the pansexual label, such as specific preferences and the diverse ways pansexuality may be understood. Participants also expressed how multiple identifications may be utilised subject to individual experiences with participants employing specific terminology depending on context and who was present. Perceptions regarding others’ understanding around pansexuality was a factor that influenced how participants marked their sexuality.

4.3 ‘You just don’t want to risk it’: The importance of safety on sexuality marking

As the previous theme highlights, participants strategically choose terminology based on the context and the individuals present. This theme presents other factors and considerations that participants highlight as being influential for identity marking. When discussing experiences where they chose not to disclose their pansexual identity, participants emphasise safety as a fundamental aspect in their decision of whether and how they mark their sexuality.

“I have chosen not to come out when I haven’t felt safe in a situation and when it’s been assessed as being unsafe.” (P33, 20, Gender Non-Binary, Gender Non-Conforming, Gender Queer)

“I specifically choose not to disclose my pansexual identity to those who have had a history of negative views towards the LGBT community.” (P30, 22, Cisgender Male).

Both P33 and P30 discuss how they evaluate their environments regarding how safe it may be for them to disclose their identity. P33 highlights that they have “assessed” situations as being unsafe, which suggests that they are making evaluations of how safe they assess the reaction of their conversational partner/s to be if they were to disclose their identity. P30 supports this and highlights their own experience of choosing not to disclose their identity “specifically” to individuals with a previous history of anti LGBTQ+ attitudes. This deliberate decision not to disclose to certain groups of people who may hold negative and homophobic attitudes and is a strategic way of keeping safe.

Other participants explicitly referenced homophobic attitudes and behaviours as influencing their decisions as to whether they disclose their pansexual identity.

“It mostly is about safety. In the debates with homophobic people or if someone does something homophobic, I know it is not within my best interest to tell them my sexuality as it may be dangerous. And in those situations, you just don’t want to risk it” (P5, 18, Cisgender Women).

In this quote, P5 emphasises the influence of known homophobic attitudes on the motivation to disclose their sexuality in specific contexts, suggesting that such knowledge becomes the basis for which a decision to disclose is made. For participants such as P5, there is a perception that “it may be dangerous” to disclose their identity in specific contexts which positions pansexual identities as being potentially exposed to unwanted remarks or homophobic reactions from people with known homophobic attitudes. This is supported by previous research which finds that plurisexual individuals experience unique forms of discrimination, compared with gay and lesbian individuals, for example bi/pan-phobia (erasure, stereotypes, aggression) (Flanders et al., 2017). This indicates that participants are having to assess and determine the level of risk that they may be exposed to if they choose to

share their identity. Consequently, as P5 states, they may not want to “risk it”, as it is often easier and safer for pansexual individuals to suppress and hide their identity, to keep themselves safe by reducing the possibility of being faced with homophobic reactions.

Other pansexual individuals documented experiences where they have not only hidden their pansexual identity but other marginalised identities as well. P36 discusses their unique experiences relating to their queer identities.

“It isn't exclusive to my pansexual identity, but in any situation where I don't feel safe as a queer person in general I most likely won't disclose any of my queer identities, such as when confronted with bigoted people who I know or think will harass or discriminate me if I do. Or for example in professional situations where I feel that it's not necessary to disclose that kind of information” (P36, 22, Gender Non-Binary, Gender Non-Conforming, Gender Queer)

As P36 identifies as gender diverse, they have additional concerns around coming out and disclosing their identities. This is supported by observations that those who identify as transgender and non-binary are less likely to be out compared to cisgender individuals (Bockting et al., 2020). P36 specifically identifies harassment and discrimination from “bigoted people”, who they perceive to be prejudiced against LGBTQ+ individuals, as a barrier for them in disclosing their identity. This added discrimination towards gender identity, put individuals who identify as pansexual and gender diverse with additional safety concerns and barriers when marking their sexuality.

This was also identified as a barrier within the workplace, as P36 highlights they don't feel that it is “necessary” to disclose their queer identities in a professional setting. This suggests that when given the opportunity not to disclose their identity, P36 chose not to, as

they did not feel it was essential. This suggests that sexuality marking and disclosure is dependent on contexts where both sexual and gender identities are not required or perceived to be pertinent and demonstrates that participants will choose strategically based on these perceptions/factors.

The importance of context was frequently identified by participants as a factor in decisions to disclose their sexuality, with friendships often being expressed as an important dynamic, within which they could comfortably and safely mark their sexual identities.

“I’ve tried to only surround myself with people who either are allies or are in the community themselves. When I told my friends they were nothing but supportive” (P9, 18, Gender Non-Binary, Gender Non-Conforming, Gender Queer)

“My friends have been very accepting and responsive. a lot of my friends are also pansexual as i try to create an inclusive space” (P29, 24, Cisgender Female)

Both P9 and P29 highlight positive experiences and reactions from their friends when coming out, however both individuals discuss how they are selective with choosing friendships to create a safe space. P9 discusses how they actively choose to surround themselves with “allies or people in the community”. This suggests that participants are active in creating supportive environments and specifically creating friendships that are understanding and accepting of their identities, thus creating safe spaces where they know they are protected and understood. Research supports this with friendships being found as a fundamental part LGBTQ+ individuals' life, by acting as a support system (Forstie, 2017).

The choice to disclose one's identity was also assessed within family contexts. P43 below expresses how they felt accepted and safe enough to disclose their sexual identity to various family members.

"My mom has told me that she dated a girl in college, so I knew I was safe with her, and I would constantly talk about homosexual things with my Aunt, and she told me that everyone is at least a little gay, so I knew I could tell her I was Pansexual." (P43, 21, Gender Non-Binary, Gender Non-Conforming, Gender Queer).

P43 shares their experience of feeling safe enough to disclose their identity to their mother. This was informed by previous conversations around their own LGBTQ+ experiences. This highlights the importance of family members being open and honest in sharing personal experiences, as it provided P43 with a safe and trustworthy environment in which they felt able to openly disclose their identity. P43 also highlights how everyday conversations with family members around LGBTQ+ subjects influenced their decision to mark their sexuality. This stresses that affirmative interactions within family environments positively impact participants' decisions to mark their sexuality.

Participants discussed similar experiences of being able to be open about their sexuality with family members, but P19 describes how this is not always straightforward.

"I was very openly accepted by my close family when I came out to them. I already knew my parents were supportive of the LGBT community, but there was still some pressure anyways. They were confused at first, not understanding the meaning of the label I'd chosen, but I can't fault them for that. They made every effort to understand and loved me just the same" (P19, 18, Genderfluid).

This highlights the coming out process as something that still can be stressful, even when knowing that the family members are generally accepting of LGBTQ+ people. P19 describes the initial confusion that their parents experienced with their chosen label of pansexuality, but that they later made an effort to understand and accept their identity. This emphasises the gap in generational understanding of pansexuality, with younger individuals understanding and acknowledging the pansexual identity more so than older individuals (Galupo et al., 2014). This suggests that even with accepting family environments there may be additional pressure for pansexual individuals to explain or justify their identity.

Many other participants discussed negative experiences with family members and shared aspects of these that they felt had influenced their ability to disclose their identity within this context.

“All throughout growing up I heard homophobic comments from my family, saying how all lgbtq ppl will be going to hell etc. This obviously caused me to not disclose my identity to them.” (P15, 23, Gender Non-Binary, Gender Non-Conforming, Gender Queer)

P15 highlights homophobic language within their family environment as a factor in choosing not to disclose and mark their sexuality, including exposure to the common punishment as sin discourse “going to hell”. This comment underscores a religious rhetoric that frames homosexuality as a sin, implying it is wrong. This suggests that P15 did not feel this environment was safe to mark their sexuality due to a history of extreme homophobic and religious views surrounding the LGBTQ+ community. This emphasises that in family contexts where participants are exposed to negative and homophobic surroundings, they

strategically choose not to disclose their sexuality in order to reduce the risk of experiencing prejudice and homophobic reactions.

The influence of religious ideology in family contexts appeared within other participants' accounts as a negative factor in their decisions to not disclose their identity.

“I have not told my parents, since they are conservative Christians who are leaders in their church. I didn't want the scrutiny and confusion they've expressed in the past when others have come out to them.” (P27, 41, Cisgender Female)

P27 shares her experience of growing up with Christian parents and how this influences their decision to not mark their sexuality. Christianity as a religion upholds essentialists and homophobic views around LGBTQ+ communities, with research supporting that LGBTQ+ individuals within Christian households experience higher levels of social strain with their family members (Dahl & Galliher, 2012). This suggests that when individuals hold these religious ideologies that do not support LGBTQ+ individuals, participants choose not to mark and disclose their identity based on previous negative reactions.

Other participants also discussed the impact of religious ideologies relating to sexuality as a reason for not disclosing. P15 discusses this, in the quote below, in the context of experiences within friendships specifically.

“My upbringing was religious, my only friends were part of the religious community I was in. This meant that when I figured out I wasn't straight, I had no friends to turn to which was hard. I know that they wouldn't accept

me. I heard stories from the community about people who were outed and were forced to go to therapy for their 'mental illness' obviously this made me even more sure that I couldn't come out to anyone.” (P15, 23, Gender Non-Binary, Gender Non-Conforming, Gender Queer.)

P15 explains how they had previously heard negative stories of LGBTQ+ individuals going to therapy due to their “mental illness”. This highlights the impact of a religious upbringing, which may pathologize the LGBTQ+ community, on participants’ decision to disclose their sexuality. Other participants such as P9, highlighted being selective with their friends and specifically surrounding themselves with supportive friends, or friends who are a part of the LGBTQ+ community. However, P15 was unable to build a supportive friendship group, due to their religious upbringing. Indeed, P15 discusses the isolating impact of not having any friends outside of this religious community when they discovered they were LGBTQ+. This emphasises the importance of friendships for pansexual individuals as a support system in coming out, and that when individuals do not have this support system, they may intentionally conceal their sexual identity to ensure their safety and to reduce the likelihood of experiencing any homophobic or discriminatory reactions.

Religious ideologies have also been highlighted as extending to workplace contexts. P13 explains how this prevented disclosure of their identity to their co-workers.

“Whilst working as a TA in a Catholic school I chose not to share this with my colleagues as several of them were quite religious and held strong traditional values so I was unsure of how they would react.” (P13, 23, Cisgender Female)

P13 shares their decision to not mark their sexuality within their workplace as they held “traditional values”. These traditional values within the Catholic religion have often condemned homosexuality and deemed same-sex activity as sin (Subhi, 2012). Rather the Catholic religion instead promotes and reinforces heteronormative lifestyles. P13 discusses how they were “unsure” of their co-worker’s reactions, suggesting that they made a decision not to disclose their sexuality due to low likelihood of acceptance, based on these religious and traditional beliefs. This emphasises that participants are strategically choosing not to disclose their sexuality within environments that they perceive are unsafe.

This theme explored participant experiences around marking and disclosing their identity. Many participants expressed safety as a fundamental factor in whether they disclose their identity within certain contexts. If participants perceive that they would have negative reactions to disclosing their identity, they strategically choose not to mark their sexuality. Specific contexts were discussed such as family environments, where participants expressed varied experiences, with some choosing to disclose to family members they recognised would be accepting. In contrast, other participants chose not to disclose in family environments where homophobia had previously been presented. Participants highlighted religious family members, co-workers, and friends as contexts where they chose not to disclose their identity due to perceived negative reactions.

4.4 ‘My sexuality wasn’t real’: Dismissal and stereotyping of the pansexual identity within intimate partner relationships

Partners and intimate relationships were frequently mentioned as a significant aspect of how participants understand and experience their pansexual identity. Participants' experiences within intimate relationships were often impacted by issues relating to stereotyping and erasure of their pansexual identity. Concerns around infidelity were often highlighted by participants as things their partner would mobilise against them and described as issues that impacted their relationships. The influence of stereotypes was also emphasised as contributing to dangerous situations for some participants. In contrast, when these issues and stereotypes were not present in the relationship, participants framed their experiences in more positive ways.

P4, in the quote below, discusses an experience whereby their pansexual identity was dismissed due to their partner perceiving the relationship as heteronormative.

“My ex told me that because I was with him, I was in a straight relationship and was therefore straight at the time. Which was very upsetting because a. I'm pansexual and I don't just like men. He also told me my sexuality wasn't real.” (P4, 19, Gender Fluid).

P4 describes how their previous partner dismissed their pansexual identity and forced them to conceal their identity within the relationship. This can be evidenced with P4's partner telling them that they were 'straight at the time' because they were in a relationship with someone who identified as heterosexual. This highlights the importance of understanding a partner's perception of identity, who in this example positions this as something changeable depending on the gender of the partner they are in a relationship with. This is constructed as an upsetting experience for P4, as they recognise their identity to encompass attractions to different genders, and not only men, which their partner does not acknowledge. This illustrates how

pansexual individuals' identities may be dismissed by their partners, thus creating a negative impact on the relationship.

Stereotypes around infidelity were frequently highlighted by participants as present in their current and previous relationships. P6 describes, in the quote below, how their ex-partner expressed unease over their pansexuality, and specifically their attraction to women.

“As i have never really dated a woman, or had any romantic interaction beyond a forehead kiss, my previous long-term boyfriend expressed concern that I would look back on life and wish I had dated a woman/would then leave them for a woman.” (P6, 21, Cisgender Woman).

P6 discusses their partner's perception of experiences with other genders as being essential to fulfil their identity. This suggests that P6's partner views sexuality as being legitimised by physical experiences, whereby romantic desires or psychological attractions are often not as easily understood. This emphasises how dominant plurisexual stereotypes can be used to restrict the identities of participants and are often perceived as negatively impacting the relationship. This is supported by research that highlights these stereotypes and beliefs around plurisexual individuals having to explore various experiences with different genders to legitimise and fulfil their desires (Maliepaard, 2021).

Other participants also shared experiences of distrust, not only by heterosexual male partners, but also with partners who may identify in other ways. P13, below, discusses how their lesbian partner had pre-conceived presumptions around their pansexual identity and how these presumptions resulted in resistance towards their pansexual identity.

“My ex-girlfriend (Lesbian) found it very hard to accept the fact that I was pansexual and would try to persuade me that I was a lesbian and get extremely upset if I disagreed with her and was constantly scared that I

would cheat on her, and especially with a man.” (P13, 23, Cisgender Female).

Research finds that, in comparison with plurisexual individuals, lesbians often uphold more bi-negative stereotypes, such as believing plurisexual individuals are more likely to cheat (Feinstein et al., 2016). These findings represent P13's experience with a lesbian partner who expresses concerns around infidelity; however, this concern about infidelity is directed towards potential relationships with men. This is highlighted with "especially with a man," which signals a mononormative bias that prioritises same-sex relationships, via a reluctance to accept opposite-sex attraction. Furthermore, the ex-girlfriend's attempt to "persuade" P13 to identify as a lesbian represents an invalidation of their pansexual identity. This reflects how partners' internalised stereotypes affect participants' relationships, via the invalidation and dismissal of plurisexual identities, due to mononormative views.

Participants also described how stereotypes held by their partners could lead to dangerous situations for them. P16 shared the violence they had experienced within their relationship, which was influenced by their sexuality.

“I was in an abusive relationship from ages 20-25, with a straight male partner who used my identity to mock me, and for significantly worse things. He would rape me and say he was "correcting my sexuality", he would assault me and make me feel afraid of being hurt if I ever made any comment about women being attractive or mentioning my sexuality in general.” (P16, 32, Cisgender Woman).

P16 discusses erasure of their sexuality within their relationship, as they could not signify their plurisexuality in any way, without experiencing abuse. P16 describes how their partner framed their behaviour as “correcting” their sexuality, which emphasises the harmful

influence of compulsory heterosexuality on P16's relationship. The social construct of compulsory heterosexuality, with the belief that women have an innate preference for men, is not only assumed, but in P16's experience, is imposed through coercion and the threat of violence. This highlights how heteronormative views can lead to dangerous situations for participants, as partners have framed their violence around these social constructions. This echoes previous research that found bi-negativity mixed with interpersonal factors can lead to types of intimate partner violence (Klesse, 2019).

In contrast, other participants described more positive experiences with their partners, which exemplifies the importance of partners' understanding of their pansexual identities. Below, P30 describes positive experiences within their relationship with someone who also identified as pansexual. This was shared as having a positive impact on their relationship.

"My first partner was also pansexual, and I had come out before we started dating, so we both had same understandings and knew we were accepted. I've not dated, or attempted to date, anyone who has been uncomfortable with or hostile towards my identity". (P30, 22, Cisgender Man).

P30 explains that having a partner who also identified as pansexual influenced the relationship as they had similar 'understandings' and recognised that their identity would be 'accepted' by each other. The use of "same understandings" suggests that this is an important factor for relationships, as both individuals can have mutual support for one another, as they share the same identity. In addition, the use of "accepted" highlights this as another element in the influence of a positive relationship, where there are fewer barriers compared with other partners, who may not be accepting of the pansexual identity. P30 also describes how they chose not to engage with individuals that did not feel comfortable with their sexuality. This suggests that P30 navigates who they choose to engage with in relationship contexts based on acceptance and understandings, which may be easier with similar identifying individuals.

This theme shows how the context of intimate relationships was constructed as an important part in how participants understood their identity. Concerns around infidelity were often highlighted by participants as a common stereotype that their partner would uphold and described how these influenced their relationships. The influence of stereotypes was also highlighted as leading to dangerous situations for some participants. In contrast, when stereotypes were not present in the relationship, participants framed their experiences positively.

4.5 ‘The everyday politics of (Non)Disclosure’: Sexuality Marking as acts of political resistance and activism

When participants explained the reasoning behind whether to mark their sexual identity, a common theme among participant responses was political reasoning and activism. Participants discussed the importance of representation, and why it is important for them to be involved in making their identity visible. Education was also discussed by participants with varied views around who should be the educator of gender and sexuality. Below, P3 highlights the influence of heteronormativity on their decision to not mark their sexuality.

“It is not important to me at all. I like who I like and I have never felt the need to specifically disclose to anyone that I am pansexual. Of course, when I date different genders, people notice and ask questions and I have no problem talking about it when that happens. But if straight people don't have to disclose that they're straight, why would anyone with a different sexuality need to?” (P3, 24, Cisgender Woman).

Here P3 explains that it is not essential for them to explicitly reveal their sexuality and justifies this by explaining that this is not something that heterosexual individuals have to do.

By questioning why anyone of other identities would “need to” disclose this information, P3 emphasises their resistance to heteronormativity and compulsory heterosexuality by rejecting traditional views that LGBTQ+ individuals should “come out” and disclose their identities (Khuzwayo, 2021). By challenging expectations to “come out” and choosing not to disclose their sexuality, P3 is taking part in forms of activism in a non-traditional manner, to be viewed as equal with other sexualities.

Identity politics and heteronormativity were frequently expressed by participants as influencing their decisions to disclose their sexuality. P8 discusses how they do not announce their sexuality unless it’s around close friends or romantic interests.

“I do not broadcast this unless it is to my close friends, or romantic interests that it may be important for them to know ahead of time. It is not so much closeted behaviour, more so I want my identity as a whole to be more than my sexual identity.” (P8, 23, Cisgender Male)

This suggests that in these relational contexts it may be more important for P8 to disclose and talk about their identity. This emphasises the significance of closeness or shared attachment in decisions to disclose identity, compared to interactions with strangers or acquaintances. P8 highlights how they do not view this as “closeted” but discusses the importance of wanting other people to view them as more than just their sexuality. This highlights choice and control over one’s identity as fundamental for participants. This is particularly important for pansexual individuals, as research has found that gender diverse individuals may identify more with the pansexual identity (Belous & Bauman, 2017) and thus have multiple identities. In addition, as pansexual individuals face stigma and prejudice (Flanders et al., 2017), P8 wishes to take control over their identity by strategically choosing when to mark their sexuality.

Like other participants, P37 suggests how sharing their identity with others is not a priority for them, and in doing so constructs a form of resistance towards educating other individuals around their identities.

“It’s not awfully important for people to know my identity, as I’m not going to use my energy to educate those who don’t seek such education to learn what my identity is. This goes for both sexual and gender” (P37, 32, Gender Fluid).

P37 discusses how they actively choose not to discuss their identities or educate others who have not already educated themselves on their identity. This suggests a resistance towards a perceived responsibility to educate and inform other individuals about their pansexual identity. P37 positions understanding diverse identities as a personal responsibility of others, rather than a requirement to educate by those within the community. They highlight this to be important not just for their sexual identity, but gender identity as well, as they identify as gender fluid. For those that identify as gender diverse, there is often a lack of understanding around their identities, leading to discrimination and stigmatisation (Matsuno & Budge, 2017). This suggests that P37 may be opposing the need to educate others on their gender identity, due to the consistent discrimination that the gender fluid community face (Conlin et al., 2019).

Other pansexual participants had a different perspective of queer responsibility to educate others on their identities. With education emphasised as a positive factor, P42 discussed the importance of disclosing and educating others of their identity.

“It’s extremely important so that my clients/friends/family and others know that there is another way of being (NOT JUST STRAIGHT!) and that bigotry ignorance and prejudice and hate and persecution - STOPS I am 58 and I want anyone else who is terrified ashamed can feel that someone is standing out / standing up / is proud and walks out and can be a professional and

accepted for who they are. I want to educate and inspire and encourage and support I wear my pansexuality proudly along with my neurodiversity and disability I want to fight against hate and prejudice” (P42, 58, Gender Fluid).

P42 emphasises the political importance of identifying outside of heterosexuality and highlights the significance of visibility and acceptance of other identities. By highlighting this, P43 takes a stance in becoming a role model for other individuals, which positions visibility as an important factor in helping other pansexual individuals acknowledge and accept their identity. In addition, this visibility can help against “hate and prejudice”, which LGBTQ+ individuals have historically faced and are still subject to today (Pollit, 2021). Through stressing a need to challenge ongoing discrimination and prejudice, P42 positions themselves as wanting to challenge and contest negative attitudes and behaviours towards pansexual individuals. This highlights activism as a factor in how and why pansexual individuals may want to disclose their identities, suggesting not just for personal importance, but also societal and political significance.

Other individuals also emphasised the importance of visibility and disclosure of their identity. P32 discusses personal reasons why it’s politically important for them.

“I find it incredibly important for people to know as often i experience erasure due to being in a straight passing relationship. Also, multiple LGBTQ+ people have been able to open up to me safe in the knowledge that I am part of the community and can be themselves fully where they may not otherwise be comfortable doing so. Challenging stereotypes is another reason I'm very loud and proud! Visibility and representation are the first steps to acceptance” (P32, 29, Cisgender Woman).

P32 discusses the importance of disclosing their pansexuality, due to experiencing erasure whilst in heterosexual relationships. This emphasises motivations for sexuality marking

to be of political importance and to challenge heteronormativity by spreading awareness of pansexuality through the disclosure of individuals' pansexual identities. Like P42, P32 also highlights the importance of challenging stereotypes through representation. This emphasises a political stance against heteronormativity and microaggressions that LGBTQ+ individuals are subject to. By participants not only disclosing their identity but dynamically engaging in activism to represent and make the pansexual identity visible it challenges these heteronormative views. This emphasises that participants are strategically marking their sexuality not only for their own personal reasonings but also political motivations.

This theme explores how political resistance and activism were commonly highlighted as motivations and reasons for participants decision to mark their sexuality or not. This positions participants as wanting to enthusiastically engage in activism by challenging visibility and representation of their pansexual identity. Education was also highlighted as an important part of visibility, with participants discussing varied views of who should be responsible for educating others about gender and sexuality.

4.6 Summary

In conclusion, the analysis explores the ways in which pansexual individuals mark and express their identity. The analysis offers insight into how pansexuality is understood as nuanced and personal to those who use the label. Participant accounts demonstrate that pansexuality is presented in a strategic way, based on the context and audience. Perceptions of others knowledge and level of understanding around pansexuality was also a factor in participants decisions to mark their identity. Another fundamental factor throughout the analysis, was safety; if participants anticipated negative reactions when disclosing their identity,

they choose not to mark their sexuality. During family contexts, participants described making these decisions based on prior experiences with family members and those within this context. For example, participants who described hearing conversations around LGBTQ+ communities chose to disclose their identity to these family members. In contrast, participants exposed to homophobic views within the family context did not feel safe to disclose their identity. Where possible, participants described being active in creating safe spaces for surrounding themselves with friends who were accepting and understanding of their identities, those of whom were often other LGBTQ+ individuals, or allies. In the context of intimate relationships, participants' pansexual identity was often known to their partner, however accounts revealed experiences of stereotyping and erasure of their identity. These experiences were primarily associated with relationships involving monosexual partners. In contrast, participants who described relationships with other pansexual individuals framed these experiences positively. The final theme highlighted political resistance and activism as motivations and reasons for participants' decision to mark their sexuality. It was clear that challenging representation and visibility of the pansexual identity were important elements for some participants.

As the current chapter established foundation for understanding experiences of individuals who identify as pansexual, it was important to further explore relationships, including those with family, friends and intimate partners. Given that 46% of participants identified as gender diverse, it was also important to examine the intersectional experiences of the pansexual community. The next chapter provides insight into the analysis of the experiences of those who identify as pansexual *and* gender diverse, and different intimate relationships.

Chapter 5: Exploring how individuals who identify as pansexual and gender diverse experience their identity within different intimate relationships

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter explored how and when pansexual individuals choose to mark and disclose their identity. The analysis offered insight into the nuance of the pansexual label, the importance of safety on sexuality marking, the influence of stereotypes among partner understanding, and sexuality marking as an act of activism and political resistance. The current chapter goes on to provide an analysis of the experiences of those who identify as pansexual *and* gender diverse by addressing the research question: How do individuals who identify as pansexual and gender diverse experience their identity within different intimate relationships? (Family, Friends and Intimate Partners).

A purposive volunteer sampling method was used to recruit participants through social media platforms, such as Instagram, TikTok, Reddit, Tumblr, and Twitter. 21 participants who identified as pansexual and gender diverse made up the final sample and took part in an online qualitative interview to discuss experiences with their identity within different intimate relationships. By conducting a reflexive thematic analysis four themes are presented 1: ‘I didn’t think I would have a relationship with them’: Navigating gender diversity and family relationships, 2: “Without friendships I don’t think I would have fully embraced myself this quickly”: The role of friendships in affirming one’s gender identity through understanding, knowledge, and supportive actions. 3: “An unsupportive relationship is not one worth

having”: The importance of early disclosure and the influence of assumptions/perceptions of gender identity among intimate relationships, and 4: “When you are in a queer relationship involving gender queer people there may be additional communication needs”: The importance of managing change and re-negotiating needs within intimate relationships.

It’s important to note that participants were given the opportunity to discuss their experiences as they relate more broadly to both sexual and gender identity. Many of the participants chose to discuss experiences with their gender identity in more detail, rather than their sexuality. By doing this, it was clear that this was an area of personal importance for participants. In addition, identity formation was frequently discussed as a journey and an ongoing process of experimentation and exploration, with this typically beginning during adolescence. This highlights how the teenage years were regarded as a crucial developmental period, when participants began to recognise and understand their identities. This process involved experimenting with different terminologies, altering their appearance, and exploring pronoun use. These experiences represent a vital phase for participants to understand, explore and affirm their identities.

5.2 ‘I didn’t think I would have a relationship with them’: Navigating gender diversity and family relationships

Most participants discussed having conversations about identity with their family members. Participants’ accounts varied depending on the specific family member; for example, multiple participants explained they were less likely to disclose their gender identity to extended family. Reasons for this included not seeing them enough, wanting to educate or

explain their identities, and to prevent potential discrimination. Rather, participants spoke about sharing their identity more primarily to immediate family members. Specifically, siblings were frequently mentioned as family members with whom participants felt most comfortable and were often the first to whom they disclosed their sexual and/or gender identities. While participants did touch upon experiences around their sexuality within family contexts, they focused their accounts on their experiences regarding gender identity.

Participants that disclosed their gender identity to family members, often described these reactions as something that evolved over time. They recounted experiencing shifts in how family members responded to their identity. Here, Gary explains how they navigated their parents' reaction to their identity.

“Sexuality they did not care, but gender was hard on them initially to the point where I didn’t think I would have a relationship with them but over time most of them have gotten used to it. However, I had a really significant experience when I got my first son birthday card from my dad, which was this year. I actually felt seen and understood.” (Gary, 21, Trans man)

When Gary disclosed both their gender and sexual identity to their family, they described receiving different reactions based on which identity they shared. As Gary states “they did not care”, about the disclosure of their pansexual identity. However, the disclosure of their gender identity to family members involved more of a gradual process of adaptation. This contrast in reactions, based on sexuality and gender identity, highlights the differential impact of disclosure for participants with intersecting identities, demonstrating how each identity can be received and understood differently. Gary’s use of ‘over time’ highlights the initial lack of acknowledgment, with family members needing time to adapt to their identity

before recognition came later. The act of gifting a card with Gary's preferred pronoun, symbolised the family's acknowledgment and progress in accepting his gender identity, which he describes as significant moment in that process. This highlights the importance of visibility within family relationships for Gary, and this experience reflects how families often need time to adjust and fully recognise and understand identities (Grossman, 2020).

The importance of knowledge and understanding amongst family members around identity was emphasised across participant accounts. Those who spoke about their family members having greater understanding around LGBTQ+ identities were often described as positive and affirming relationships for participants. However, many participants described their family members as lacking education and understanding around LGBTQ+ identities, and specifically gender identities. Rose highlights how becoming more informed became an important factor in helping their parents develop an understanding of identities and in turn, how this then enabled their parents to be more supportive.

“They had a parent's group, for the parents of the kids to come along and talk about it, and I think that was by far the most useful part of it for me is my parents could begin to understand me. Just like the bare minimum of the concept of gender identity and transness.” (Rose, 21, Nonbinary/Queer)

Rose shares that their parents attended a group for families with children who were gender diverse, aiming to educate and inform families around different gender identities. In describing this, it is clear the importance Rose ascribes to this group in offering their parents the understanding into concepts of trans identities. This knowledge and awareness of gender identities were crucial for Rose in helping them feel understood by their parents. This demonstrates the importance of visibility within family settings, where they could feel their

identity was not only recognised by family members, but their gender queerness was also accepted. This aligns with Weinhardt et al (2019) findings, that gender diverse youth experience an important distinction between acceptance and support when they disclose their gender identities; some family members display initial verbal acceptance but lack any follow up supportive actions that facilitate gender affirmation.

In discussing gender identity, four participants disclosed that they had received gender affirming medical care along their gender journeys and transitions. These participants highlighted this as an area of uncertainty for their family members, to which they took time to adapt and understand. Jay discusses this in further detail.

“Again my parents have been really good, they’ve took it on board really easily, ive come out as loads of different things over the years trying to figure things out and they’ve never held any judgement. They were worried about the medical aspect of transitioning, but after id been on hormones for a few months and they realised I was comfortable they understood my need for it. So that’s the only thing they’ve really been sceptical of.” (Jay, 22, Trans Masc/Nonbinary)

Describing his family’s attitude to his gender identity, as “really good”, Jay recognises his experience with his family as positive and supportive. Despite being positive, he describes the initial worries regarding certain aspects of that process; most specifically, medical transitioning. He explains that their family’s initial concerns dissipated when they recognised the importance of gender affirming medical care for gender diverse individuals. Overall, Jay’s experience of identity was characterised by ongoing understanding and acceptance from their family, throughout different stages of transitioning.

Other aspects of transitioning, such as a change in pronouns, were also highlighted by participants as a difficult adjustment for family members. Tom explains this further and highlights how this impacted their relationship with their family members.

“They still use the incorrect pronouns even after all this time, but I’m scared to keep correcting them as I’m worried about the consequences, but it hurts a lot when they don’t get it right I think I distance myself from them or at least when I’m around them I have to hide a bit of myself. I almost feel like I can’t present feminine in anyway because I need to prove to them that I’m nonbinary.” (Tom, 25, Nonbinary)

Tom describes misgendering from family members as an emotionally taxing experience. Their use of ‘hurts’, highlights the feeling associated with this misgendering and the impact this has on their relationship, the result of which leads to them distancing and “hiding” a part of themselves from family members. Tom’s experience suggests that their family did not understand or support this aspect of their transition. This highlights the importance of pronoun use for Tom, and as research supports, other gender diverse individuals in feeling accepted and understood (Allen, 2020), and the impact this has on family relationships.

Overall, participants described their families as lacking education and knowledge of gender diversity, which often impacted responses around the disclosure of their identity, whereby families required adjustment periods to understand gender identities. Even in cases where family experiences were accepting and supportive of their identities, medical transitions and pronoun use often required more adjustments, leading to some participants being misgendered which impacted their relationship with their family members.

5.3 “Without friendships I don’t think I would have fully embraced myself this quickly”: The role of friendships in affirming one’s gender identity through understanding, knowledge, and supportive actions

Friendships were highlighted as a fundamental aspect in participants’ lives. They emphasised the ways in which friendships provide social support through mutual understanding and acceptance of their identities. In doing so, they positioned friendships as an important social system distinct from family, and emphasised their importance, not just as an individual support system, but as a crucial relational one for when family members were not present. During the interviews, some participants discussed how they experienced their sexuality within friendship groups. However, most participants focussed more specifically on how friendships assisted and supported them through their gender identity journeys. Jack discusses this further in the quote below.

“Without the friendships I have I don’t think I would have fully embraced myself this quickly. My friends were all immediately supportive and knowledgeable, and encouraged me to try out different names and pronouns and experiment until I found something that I felt worked for me. Without that push, it might have taken me a lot longer” (Jack, 24, Trans Man)

In Jack’s experience, his friends not only supported their gender identity exploration, but actively encouraged and aided them throughout their gender identity journey. His account highlights how his friends were knowledgeable and educated on aspects of gender identity, and how this was a crucial part in receiving affirming advice and encouragement with his identity. In Jack’s experience friends supported them to experiment with different names and pronouns, which can be understood as a vital part in socially transitioning (Durwood et al.,

2022). This highlights how Jack's friends were not only helpful in understanding his identity but additionally were able to offer advice and provide supportive actions to help him through his identity journey. Jack frames his experience with friendships as positive, and a crucial aspect in being able to embrace his identity as quickly as he did.

Whilst Jack did not refer to the identities of friends who had supported his gender identity journey, other participants specifically highlighted the support they had received from other LGBTQ+ friends. Peach discussed this further and explained the help and support they received from a friend who was also LGBTQ+ in shaping their identity journey.

"I made a friend at uni who initially introduced me to the thought that I could be queer and supported me through my gender journey. Like becoming friends with them helped me shape my journey and have some guidance on language, dysphoria and how to work through that. I almost like looked up to them as a mentor through it all as they were also queer and had been through similar with their gender identity." (Peach, 26, Nonbinary)

Peach describes how particular friendships were integral in supporting them with understanding their gender identity. Peach highlights the support they received regarding challenging aspects of their gender identity journey, particularly in relation to gender dysphoria. The perceived usefulness of this education and advice, and the implication that this may not be possible in other relationships, positions LGBTQ+ friendships as being able to offer a specific type of support, which Peach describes as "mentors". This highlights the importance of having LGBTQ+ friends, as they not only offer shared understanding and insights, but also the support that comes from their shared experiences. This proves crucial for Peach, as it helps them connect through a mutual understanding of minority experience. This highlights how friendship contexts for gender diverse individuals may facilitate a

particular type of support, for example by serving as a role model or mentor that assist and inform about gender-specific issues.

The importance of shared similar experiences within friendships were also emphasised by other participants, particularly in helping them in scenarios where there was a potential risk of experiencing discrimination.

“Most of my friends are queer, which helps with them understanding me better, as we have shared similar experiences. My best friend though is amazing, she will shout or correct anyone that misgenders me, she’s better at correcting people than I am as I’m more shy and don’t want conflict”
(Diaz, 22, Nonbinary)

Like Peach, Diaz explains how LGBTQ+ friends provide a greater level of understanding, due to shared similar experiences. In Diaz’s experience, this shared understanding proved valuable when they encountered being misgendered. By Diaz describing themselves as ‘shy’, it suggests they find it difficult to correct others’ on misgendering when alone, due to potential ‘conflict’. This is supported by research that suggests gender diverse individuals can face negative experiences when explaining pronouns to other individuals (Brown et al., 2020). However, In Diaz’s experience, they emphasise the crucial role that friendship plays in being able to support each other through challenging experiences such as misgendering, which they struggle to tackle alone.

The use of correct pronouns was further highlighted as a vital aspect in gender affirmation for gender diverse individuals, which they often felt took time for others to acknowledge and/or understand. Tom explains their experience with friends and how they willingly recognised and engaged in using their chosen pronouns.

“A significant moment for me was a couple of friends that when I told my new pronouns to, they immediately got them right over a few weeks, and this was at the time when my partner was still not getting it right and was accidentally calling me a woman and things like that. And when I asked them how they did it. They explained that they would set a reminder every evening and would have a 10 minute conversation about me using my new pronouns to ensure they got it right. This made me feel so safe and comfortable that they just accepted it straight away and knew the importance of pronouns” (Tom, 25, Nonbinary)

Tom describes a significant moment in their journey, where their friends had independently taken the time to practise their new pronouns as a way of avoiding accidentally misgendering Tom. In relaying this, and emphasising safety, Tom highlights how having friends who not only accept and understand but also actively support, by using the correct pronouns, is both affirming and reassuring. This stresses the importance of friendships, and the role they play in fostering security, and acceptance.

This theme illustrates how participants emphasise the importance of friendships in supporting them through their identity journeys. This was characterised through participants' accounts and experiences of friendships as knowledgeable and understanding. Participant's described LGBTQ+ friends as being able to offer mutual support due to shared similar experiences. Along with offering emotional support, friends often followed up with supportive actions to assist participants in their identity journeys. They described the importance of friends using the correct pronouns and were helpful and supportive to participants in instances of misgendering. These experiences were emphasised as playing a fundamental role in affirming participant's gender identity.

5.4 “An unsupportive relationship is not one worth having”: The importance of early disclosure and the influence of assumptions/perceptions of gender identity among intimate relationships.

The navigation of identity disclosure was emphasised by participants as crucial when engaging in romantic relationships. Accounts of those participants who identify as nonbinary in particular highlight the unique experiences they face in intimate and romantic relationships. These experiences illustrate the ways that cisgendered and heteronormative assumptions held by partners impact participant relationships. For example, many described partners as questioning the authenticity of their identities. The timing of sharing one's identity with others appeared to be important for participants, specifically in helping to ascertain if a person is a viable romantic partner or not. Gary highlights their experiences with this further.

“Its one of those things where it comes down to preference, there are people that would happily date a trans person and there are people that wouldn't like to and that's fair enough. But I would rather find out straight away, so we aren't wasting each other's time by pursuing something that isnt gonna happen.” (Gary, 23, Trans man)

Describing people as those who are either happy to date a trans man or those who aren't, becomes the reason why it is important for Gary to ascertain early on if someone is a potential partner. Despite framing this preference as 'fair enough', this speaks to the potential experience of disappointment from both parties should this be revealed at a later stage. This emphasises how disclosing their identity as a transman early on can reduce 'wasting time',

via emotional labour. Gary's account highlights the strategic and emotional considerations involved in disclosing their identity to potential partners.

The timing of disclosure within intimate relationships was emphasised across participants' accounts, with Frankie expressing the importance of sharing one's gender identity as a means of helping to assess the level of a partner's understanding.

"As I previously stated, an unsupportive relationship is not one worth having, especially when it comes to selecting a partner. There is a surprisingly large amount of biphobia and transphobia out there (being nonbinary technically places you under the trans umbrella) so I'd need to get that out of the way first before I can continue the relationship. I'm not going to hide myself around the person/people I might end up with for the rest of my life" (Frankie, 28, Nonbinary)

With the acknowledgement of how biphobia and transphobia may present challenges when pursuing a partner, Frankie emphasises the importance of choosing a partner that they can express themselves to without any discriminatory beliefs. This highlights unique challenges for Frankie who identifies with intersectional identities and has the potential to experience discrimination around both their pansexual identity and nonbinary identity. This stresses a core value of prioritising supportive and affirmative relationships and highlights a conscious decision to reject relationships that compromise their wellbeing. Frankie navigates this through addressing their identity early on, as it ensures they can experience more accepting, supporting and healthy relationships.

The need for early disclosure of gender diverse identities is also helpful in challenging preconceived ideas and assumptions that are common for those who may be misperceived.

Eli, who identifies as nonbinary, highlights how their gender presentation and expression has impacted their relationships.

“Its very important to tell potential partners straight away, because often being seen as a woman, especially by male partners as they often just assume by how I look, due to being fem presenting, its very important, cuz I do not want to be perceived as a woman or them think they're getting into a relationship with a woman, as I am not one.” (Eli, 21, Nonbinary)

For Eli, it's important that potential partners are aware that they identify as nonbinary. This stems from their experience with assumptions relating to their 'fem presentation', meaning that Eli may choose to dress or express themselves in feminine ways. This highlights how binary assumptions and expressions such as femininity and masculinity, are commonly attributed to gender identity. In addition, this impacts how an individual's gender is perceived. In Eli's experience, assumptions are often held by male partners and thus demonstrate how heteronormativity can impact relationships, specifically gendered assumptions of 'straight' passing individuals.

Partners' perceptions were a point of discussion for many participants. In particular, participants expressed feeling uncertain around being recognised and understood as their gender identity. Lain explains how, as a nonbinary person, it is hard to understand where they fit in with other identities.

"I think it does mean that I have to feel respected and understood by people, that can be intimidating. For example if someone identifies as straight, lesbian or gay, that makes it difficult to know if they'd pursue me as a nonbinary person, or if they have, are they actually viewing me as a non binary person. That's the main thing I worry about" (Lain, 22, Nonbinary)

As monosexual identities often encompass attractions to those on the gender binary, this poses uncertainty for Lain as a nonbinary individual when pursuing relationships. For Lain, this complex interaction between potential partners' sexuality and their own gender identity leads to the questioning of the intentions of partners' perceptions of their nonbinary identity. This uncertainty around partner perceptions of their gender identity, can be seen as influencing Lain's experience in relationship settings.

The experiences shared by Lain were echoed by other nonbinary participants, such as Diaz below. They share some of the difficulties they experienced when in a relationship where their identity is not recognised or validated.

"I think it's definitely hard being nonbinary, and I feel like if you are nonbinary and you dress and looked like the gender you were born as, it is very hard to not be seen like that for a potential partner. I've had issues with people I've tried to date viewing me as a girl, you know, they might use the right pronouns, they might reuse the right name, but they look at me, they look at my body and I'm a woman to them. And then that, that's it. You know, I'll make a comment about how I'm nonbinary and this relationship is kind of queer, because technically I'm nonbinary and, you know, they brush it off because in their heads, they don't view me as that" (Diaz, 22, Nonbinary)

Like Eli's earlier accounts, Diaz explains how binary assumptions around gender are made based on appearance. For Diaz, token acceptance is prevalent with partners following and using affirming language, but ultimately not understanding or acknowledging their personal experience with their nonbinary identity. This reflects heteronormative views and assumptions where, even with the emotional labour of the persistent clarification of Diaz's queer relationship, their partner still holds perceptions of a heterosexual relationship.

Throughout the theme, participants emphasised the importance of early disclosure of their identity, noting that this was crucial for their own, and others potential as partners and avoiding relationships with those who may not understand or support their identity. Participants who identified as nonbinary also shared their unique experiences and challenges they faced in intimate relationships. These were often characterised by partner perceptions and assumptions of their gender, which were influenced by heteronormative views.

5.5 “When you are in a queer relationship involving gender queer people there may be additional communication needs”: The importance of managing change and re-negotiating needs within intimate relationships

This theme was characterised by experiences relating to how participants managed change and, in some cases, the re-negotiation of relationships during and post transitions. Participants mainly discussed experiences relating to their gender identity, and how they experienced transition processes while in their relationship. Participants shared various elements of their gender identity journeys and transition processes, for example gender dysphoria and physical intimacy, and described ways they worked through this. This change and re-negotiation of relationships was not only in response to their identity, but also their partners. Nearly half of the participants highlighted how their partner’s gender identity developed or changed while being together. Lucas explains further how they experienced this change.

“I’ve had multiple relationships where my partner has changed their pronouns or explored their gender identity while being together. You both

just need to readjust to things and address boundaries of what you both want from each other. it's the same as any other relationship but I think when you are in a queer relationship involving gender queer people there may be extra communication needs as people's identity can develop and language can change" (Lucas 18, Demiboy/Unlabelled)

Lucas describes how they managed change and the re-negotiation of boundaries within relationships, when a previous partner explored their gender identity whilst in the relationship. Lucas acknowledges that being in a queer relationship, involving gender diverse individuals, can lead to developments in one's identity. Lucas discusses how they managed this change via a need for readjustment, suggesting how, for Lucas, adaptation and communication are key for navigating identity development in relationship settings. In Lucas' experience, identity developments included language and pronoun use, where additional communication of these developments is beneficial in navigating relationships.

Other participants emphasised the importance of communication within specific areas and realms of relationships. Intimacy was highlighted as a sensitive topic within relationships by participants. Jay explains how they feel it's important to be open and transparent with partners regarding their gender identity.

"I think it's really important because, especially with dating sites and things like that, you do have to have that kind of transparency because it's also, if you're gonna be romantically involved with someone there, there is gonna be physical things going on potentially. So I think it, it does make you somewhat vulnerable, but you do have to be honest about that kind of thing I think you have to be honest kind of with physical attributes as well as I'm trans and taking hormones. I think it is because they're worried about the conversation, but actually I think. The best way is just to be honest about it and be forward about it" (Jay, 22, Trans Masc/Nonbinary)

Jay emphasises the importance of transparency and co-operation with partners and in romantic relationships where physical intimacy may occur, due to perceived vulnerability. Jay navigates this by being transparent and open with potential partners, not only about their gender identity, but also about aspects of their transition. For Jay, this includes physical and medical transition aspects. It was clear that discussing elements of the transition processes before physical intimacy occurred was crucial. Jay recognises the value of openness and communication in their experience but acknowledges that these type of conversations may be challenging for others, as they involve vulnerability, emphasising the emotional pressure required for these conversations and managing relationships.

Like Jay, Snow also discusses transparency in intimate relationships and explains the impact of gender dysphoria during intimacy with partners.

“I would need a partner who understands, like how gender dysphoria works and how being trans would affect me and UM in a relationship. So if I was going through like a really bad stage of, like gender dysphoria, and it would be nice for them to kind of understand, uh, how I was feeling and stuff like that in terms of where to touch and where not to touch. So like if there were to touch my chest or something and that would make me feel really uncomfortable because of not having surgery, I'd feel really dysphoric about it.” (Snow, 26, Trans Man)

Snow emphasises the importance of having a partner who can understand trans experiences and gender dysphoria. For Snow, this level of understanding is crucial, and specifically in physically intimate moments, as they communicate boundaries and areas on the body they would not want to be touched. This communication of boundaries highlights how Snow navigates their discomfort and gender dysphoria. This discomfort was attributed to

not having top surgery, which demonstrates that, without this medical affirmation, physical intimacy during relationships may pose additional challenges. This highlights how participants are navigating these experiences, through consistent communication of boundaries, comfort and trust. Research also supports this and demonstrates that receiving gender affirmative medical procedures can positively impact intimacy between gender diverse individuals and their partners (Siboni et al., 2023).

Conversely, other participants discussed challenges associated with managing and re-negotiating relationships, particularly where both individuals identify as transgender. Jay provides some insight into how dating other gender diverse individuals may be complex and influence dysphoria.

“And I think when you’re with another trans guy and you see that they’re on hormones and you’re not on hormones, it kind of change is a bit of jealousy in a way. And like, you’re simultaneously really happy for them, but also really feeling down and depressed about yourself because you’re not where you want to be” (Jay, 22, Trans Masc/Nonbinary)

Jay shares how dating someone in a different stage of a medical transition may influence how they experience the relationship, with Jay expressing paradoxical feelings of joy and jealousy. For Jay, having a partner going through a similar journey evoked emotions and reminders of factors/stages of their transition, that they have not been able to achieve yet, which was attributed to hormonal medical treatments. Research has found that affirming medical procedures may not always be easily accessible to gender diverse individuals (Lindley et al., 2020). This emphasises that the challenges and inaccessibility to medical affirming care can pose emotional challenges for Jay and specifically influence how they experience and manage relationships.

Other participants discuss positive experiences around managing change and re-negotiation of the relationship during their transition process.

“When I was in a relationship and first kind of socially transitioning, my partner at the time helped me with clothes shopping and helped me pick out some like really masculine outfits and stuff like that and just complementing how masculine I looked and how handsome I looked. It really like boosted my confidence and made me feel happy in myself. They made me feel affirmed.” (Snow, 26, Trans man)

Snow discusses a time during the early stages of their transition, with clothing practices being highlighted as an affirming part of their social transition process. Snow explains how their partner was not only supportive and helpful, but actively engaged in their transition journey. This highlights how supportive partners can be a source of affirmation through transitions. Snow explains how their partner affirmed their gender through supporting clothing, and words of affirmation towards their gender identity and chosen expression, via compliments. This was expressed as helping Snow feel ‘confident’ and demonstrates how partners can promote wellbeing through supporting and affirming their transition process while navigating the relationship.

The importance of feeling accepted and comfortable around partners, was also highlighted by participants, which often involved managing physical boundaries in relationships. Tony explains how feeling comfortable was an essential factor in being able to not have to cover parts of their body in the relationship.

“In previous relationships, I'd always be wearing my binder even to sleep cause I've I just would be so uncomfortable about it. And that was the first

relationship where I felt really comfortable to not have to wear it. And I was so thankful. Like Wearing a binder in the day, let alone to try and sleep. So that was really cool cause I just I just felt 100% comfortable to do that and I just felt safe around them, that was a great moment in our relationship.”
(Tony, 24, Trans man)

Tony explains how throughout different relationships they would cover their chest, due to feeling uncomfortable. This demonstrates that, for Tony, body dysphoria had a negative impact on previous relationships, where they subsequently concealed areas of their body. Tony contrasts this with another relationship, where they felt comfortable enough to not have to cover their chest, describing this as something they are thankful for. The use of “thankful”, suggests that not having to cover their chest, provides a sense of relief, and emphasises how supportive and comfortable relationships can help participants feel safe and affirmed in their gender, enabling them to be physically open in the relationship.

This theme is reflective of how participants often managed change, and re-negotiation of relationships, relating to their identity. This was prominent when both the participants and/or their partners were exploring their gender identity journeys. Many participants discussed how transitioning influenced their relationships and how they managed this. Having an understanding partner was discussed as being beneficial for participants who may be experiencing gender dysphoria. Overall, transparency was highlighted as a vital factor to understand each other’s identity and was also crucial for participants in relationships where physical intimacy was present. This communication was vital for participants to manage and negotiate change and developments in their relationships.

5.6 Summary

This chapter provides insight into those who adopt intersectional identities and identify as pansexual and gender diverse. The analysis presents findings around the unique experiences of pansexual and gender diverse individuals within specific intimate relationships. Participants' accounts offer insights into how individuals experience their identity in unique ways, throughout different relational contexts. Disclosure of identity was often a crucial part of identity development for participants. When participants discussed disclosure to family members, reactions often evolved over time. Even when participants described family reactions that were positive, specific elements of transitions, such as medical transitions and pronoun use, were often difficult adjustments for families. Participants described experiences with their friends as being supportive of their identity and helped to affirm their gender through knowledge, understanding and supportive actions. Disclosure of identity was also emphasised as important among potential partners; particularly early disclosure to ensure their partners were understanding and accepting of their identity. Nonbinary participants expressed specific challenges they experienced within intimate relationships, due to their identity not always being recognised or understood by partners. Other unique experiences among intimate partner relationships were discussed by participants, whereby transparency, change and re-negotiation of boundaries was a crucial factor in queer relationships involving gender diverse individuals.

The analysis presented here builds upon the findings of the previous chapter, which offered insight into how pansexual individuals mark their sexuality within different contexts. The marking and disclosure of sexuality was often based around safety, with participants assessing and making evaluations regarding the potential reaction of others, should they

disclose their identity. This was an area of importance for gender diverse and pansexual participants in this study, with transparency being crucial, particularly to potential partners. In addition, the previous chapter emphasised how pansexual individuals often experienced issues relating to stereotyping, erasure and heteronormativity among relationships. This was also highlighted among gender diverse and pansexual participants in this study, with nonbinary participants discussing experiences that were often characterised by partner perceptions and assumptions of their gender, which were related and influenced by heteronormative views. This offers unique understanding into the challenges that those with intersectional identities may experience specifically within relationship settings. As this and previous chapters offered insight into how pansexual individuals experience their identity within social and relational contexts, the next chapter will explore the pansexual identity within online contexts. This online context is important, as this chapter highlights experimentation and exploration of identity as frequently starting during adolescence. Social media plays a fundamental role in adolescence, and thus the next chapter will explore this further in relation to sexual minority youth. By doing so, it will present findings around how individuals are presenting and using information about pansexuality on TikTok.

Chapter 6: Exploring the types of content on TikTok relating to the pansexual identity

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter explored how individuals who identify as pansexual and gender diverse experience their identity and intimate relationships. The analysis offered insight into the importance of friendships in affirming and supporting individuals with their identity journeys. In contrast, family environments were found to be characterised through ongoing developments and changes. The analysis highlighted unique experiences for those who identify as pansexual and gender diverse in romantic settings, where participants stressed the importance of early disclosure of their identity to potential partners. Adolescence was also presented as a time of experimentation and exploration of identity. This finding is key for the current chapter, as it explores the type of content related to pansexuality on TikTok. Previous research has found social media to be important for LGBTQ+ youth and adolescents specifically (McInroy, 2019). This is because social media sites have provided LGBTQ+ individuals with safe spaces not only to develop relationships through communicating with others, but also to explore and express their identities, which may not be supported in other contexts of their lives (Russell, 2016). This current chapter will build on previous chapters that explored social and relational contexts, focusing specifically on the online context for the pansexual identity. The current chapter analyses how individuals are presenting and using information about pansexuality on TikTok.

Creators on TikTok used #Pansexual to share videos relating to the pansexual identity. Through conducting a qualitative content analysis (Anderson, 2007), three themes were generated across the data: “It means regardless of gender” Educating and informing others on pansexuality; “It’s not a real identity”: Challenging myths, prejudice and panphobia; and “I’m proud to be pansexual”: Promoting visibility, identity development, and intersectionality. Each of these themes are presented with data from the TikTok videos used to support the analysis.

6.2 “It means regardless of gender” Educating and informing others on pansexuality

The first theme identified in the data focusses on the use of TikTok for sharing educational and informative content about the pansexual identity. The videos contained definitions and explanations of pansexuality that clearly position the identity as distinct and unique from other sexualities. Like findings from the first study in this thesis, where participants highlighted the nuances of pansexuality and bisexuality, this theme also demonstrates a focus on conceptualisations of these identities. The relationship between pansexuality and bisexuality, including similarities and differences, was commonly presented, with some videos also exploring the history of LGBTQ+ labels and their definitions in contemporary society. Pansexual flags were frequently used within videos as visual aids among videos, as well as content that discussed the importance of this pride symbol. By sharing this specific content, creators highlight these aspects and characteristics as important in understanding the pansexual identity and community.

Definitions and explanations of the pansexual identity were frequently highlighted within those videos created and shared on TikTok. Some creators chose to define the

pansexual identity orally, while other's presented text on the screen to convey the information. These definitions were included in various types of videos around pansexuality, as a brief introduction and context to the viewer. However, amongst the videos analysed, most were specifically created to highlight and discuss definitions and explanations of pansexuality. The decision to create content around pansexuality as a distinct identity could be a way of increasing understanding of an identity that is not widely known. The definitions of pansexuality used in the videos include:

"Pansexual people are attracted to people regardless of what gender they identify as, and as a result they're attracted to all genders" (Video 7)

"Pansexuality is attraction regardless of gender, many say their attraction comes from personality over physicality, so they can be attracted to male, female, non binary, or any gender". (Video 3)

These definitions of pansexuality emphasise attraction regardless of gender, which highlights a common distinction between pansexuality and other plurisexual identities. These definitions also reflect understandings of pansexuality from participants in earlier studies of this thesis, with emphasis on pansexuality as an inclusive identity that encompasses attractions to individuals regardless of gender. With this distinction and emphasis on gender diversity, pansexuality's inclusive nature is highlighted as the unifying characteristic of the identity. However, whilst TikTok creators generally used similar definitions across the data analysed, some videos also emphasised the more personalised aspect of the identity, by explaining *'some people might have their own definition of pansexual as well, so it's always best to check.'* (Video 15). By clarifying this, it highlights the nuance in how the identity is understood, expressed, and experienced. Thus, while creators typically present a common understanding of pansexuality, they also construct a broader sense of freedom and nuance in

the understanding and expression in how pansexual is expressed. This nuance is also supported by the first study of this thesis, that found that pansexual individuals may still experience and express their identity in unique ways to each other. Creating and sharing videos that focus on the different ways of understanding pansexuality serves as an important tool in informing viewers about this identity.

Other videos explicitly discussed the relationship between bisexuality and pansexuality, by outlining the definitions and acknowledging similarities and differences. One creator posted a video in response to a request made by a commentor who asked *'can you do a video on the difference between pan and bi? My friend doesn't know which one she is but doesn't get the difference'*. (Video 2). This comment highlights how, despite increased cultural visibility for pansexuality, many people lack understanding of how it differs from other plurisexual identities. In response to the above comment and to help clarify the differences, the creator posted a video, presenting a two-way role-played conversation that discussed the distinctions between the bisexual and pansexual label:

1: "Yeah I am pansexual", "Do you know what that is"

2: Well isnt it the same as bi?

1: No

2: oh wait how is it different?

1: So bisexuality is the attraction to two or more genders, whereas pansexuality is attraction to all genders, including nonbinary and transgender, and normally pansexual people don't have a preference for a certain gender." (Video 2)

The use of a role-play style video allows the creator to highlight common misunderstandings and myths about pansexuality being *'the same'* as bisexuality. Indeed, by posing this question as part of the role-play, the creator can emphasise the differences in

attraction between the two identities, through explicit use of binary/non-binary language to make these distinctions clear. In addition to attraction, the video also explicitly refers to 'preferences', and further distinguishes identities by emphasising that pansexual individuals may not have specific preferences towards a particular gender. While this video portrays pansexual individuals as not typically having preferences, participants in the online qualitative survey emphasised that they can still have preferences. This further highlights the nuance of the pansexual identity and the different ways individuals can express their identity. The creator's choice to present the information through role-play likely reflects how such conversations might naturally unfold. This approach allows viewers of all identities to relate and connect with the information, overall offering a more personalised aspect to informational online content

Other creators took a more formal educational approach to content creation. One creator chose to portray pansexual information like that of a teaching lesson with a caption of 'Class 101: Pansexuality' (Video 6). This creator posted a video that covered the history and origins of pansexuality and bisexuality, and focussed on the evolution of both labels, and their current meanings:

'1859= the word bisexuality was created meaning 'a body with both male and female physical feature'

1910= the word was changed to describe sexual orientation.

1914= the word pansexualism was created as a psycho analysis term for sexual desire (not orientation) by Freud

1920s in the US there were reports of pansexuality meaning 'loving across labels and boundaries' (Video 6)

The creator ended the video with current understandings of the pansexual and bisexual identities and stated:

‘Back to 2023=2023 with more queer people than ever and limited queer education there's a lot of confusion. Yes bi means 2, and in the 1910s meant men and women, but it was due to the lack of knowledge about gender. As that changed, so did the way people used the labels. Its not Bi Vs Pan, both labels have evolved over the years and all definitions are valid today, which one you choose is up to you’ (Video 6)

This creator provides insight into how both labels have developed over time and highlights how education and knowledge about gender contributed to this. The evolution of identity labels is highlighted in the video where it explains how pansexuality was not originally understood as a sexual orientation, and thus how language and meanings have evolved over time. The video also offers insight into how knowledge around gender has evolved and influenced the way in which gender and sexuality labels are understood. The increased visibility of trans and nonbinary identities is also supported by research that suggests the emergence of pansexuality is related to the increase in gender diversity (Hammack, 2023) By the creator referencing *‘It’s not Bi vs Pan’* directly challenges the strict binary between the two identities. It suggests that both labels are not mutually exclusive but rather, represents overlapping ways of understanding attraction. The video also validates self-identification by emphasising the ability for people to choose: *‘all definitions are valid today, which one you choose is up to you’*. This demonstrates the complexity and validity of identity terminology and marking. Despite commonalities in understandings of bisexuality and pansexuality, individuals have autonomy in defining and expressing their identity in a way that works for them. By sharing information and clarifying definitions and distinctions between bisexuality and pansexuality, it serves not only as an educational tool, but also raises awareness and validates sexual identities and self-expression.

Despite increased awareness of both pansexual and bisexual identities, there remains controversy between the two communities, and what scholars refer to as the ‘Pan vs Bi debate’ (Callis, 2014). While the previous video included content aimed at debunking oppositions between these identities, other videos addressed reasons why there may be controversy between the two communities, including how definitions of both identities may be problematic for the bisexual community.

“So what's so controversial? First many bi people think all pans are technically bi, since being bi means liking multiple genders, all pan people fall into that category technically. So bi people think pan people may contribute to bi-erasure and bi-phobia, but many pans disagree saying they're just more comfortable using the word pan” (Video 62)

By raising the question ‘*So what's so controversial?*’, it speaks to the controversies between bisexuality and pansexuality. This creator’s focus on how pansexual individuals could be understood as falling into the same category as bisexual, offers insight into the complexities of the bisexual umbrella, and the plurisexual identities that come under this. Tensions between the two communities is emphasised as influencing problematic experiences for the bisexual community, through the understanding that pansexuality may influence bi-erasure/phobia. Though, like previous videos, this creator also emphasises self-expression and individual choice of identity, highlighting the importance of self-identification and the nuance that identity expression is unique to each individual. The video highlights that pansexual individuals may feel more comfortable using that identity. This supports Galupo et al (2017), who also suggest that pansexual individuals who identify as gender diverse may prefer using the term pansexual, as it encompasses and validates their own gender expression.

In line with content that centred around informing and promoting greater recognition around the pansexual identity, some creators shared videos around the history of the pansexual flag. These videos explained the importance of flags, and how they represent the community, as well as offering visibility and a sense of personal expression. Pride flags have been a part of political and social intervention for decades and are often used as a way for the LGBTQ+ community to express their identity, whether that be in private spaces in their home, or public areas such as pride marches (Cappellato et al., 2016). The use of pride flags has been shown to positively facilitate individuals' identity development, through community belonging (Wolowic, 2017). By creators producing informative content around the pansexual flag, they offer knowledge, and a sense of belonging, through recognition among pansexual users on TikTok.

One video analysed explains that the original and most common pansexual flag, is the pink, yellow and blue striped flag. The video explains what each colour represents in relation to attraction: *“pink represents attraction to those who identify as woman. Blue represents attraction to those who identify as men, yellow represents nonbinary people”* (Video 9). The explanation of each component of the pansexual flag provides viewers with information and knowledge about the history of pride flags. This video also discusses different flags used on various social media sites to represent pansexuality, and in doing so emphasises the ongoing changes and relationships to pansexual identities. The video ended with *“But at the end of the day you should just use whichever flag you identify most with”* (Video 9). In this sense, the evolution in pride flags, including pansexual flags, represents increasing recognition around identity, expression and experience.

Overall, a key theme in the data analysed centred on providing information and education on the pansexual identity. Creators producing and sharing educational and informative content can help viewers understand and stay informed of queer livelihoods and subsequently could positively affect personal identity constructions for viewers (Hiebert & Miller, 2023). Videos did this primarily by drawing distinctions between pansexuality and bisexuality, documenting the history and evolution of plurisexual identity labels and promoting the diversity and visibility of pansexuality through important symbols of sexuality, such as the pride flag.

6.3 “I’m proud to be pansexual”: Promoting visibility, identity development and intersectionality.

The second theme generated from the data highlights the ways in which TikTok creators use the platform to promote visibility of the pansexual identity, identity development and intersectionality. Similar to the study two that captured the synergism between pansexuality and gender diversity, the videos in this theme also address this intersectionality. Videos often represented the fluidity in identity, with creators producing content that showcased identity formation and development. All videos in this theme focused on promoting visibility and representation of the pansexual identity, both through creators' personal narratives, and broader representation highlighting pansexual characters and related merchandise.

One-way creators promoted the visibility of the pansexual identity was by sharing and representing various pansexual characters from different media sources. These videos often

featured images of pansexual characters, including names and what movie or television shows they were from. There were a range of these videos that included bisexual/pansexual characters from American adult cartoon shows, such as Big Mouth; UK comedy shows such as Sex Education, and drama series from Thailand, such as Until We Meet Again (Videos, 14, 25, 65, 90). As these shows included pansexual characters from a diverse range of countries, this highlights the growth in recognition around the pansexual identity outside of Western societies. The importance of this representation among some countries, such as Thailand can be understood in the context of wider political inequalities in human rights for LGBTQ+ individuals. For example, the bill for same-sex marriage was only passed in Thailand this year in 2025. The inclusion of LGBTQ+ identities in Thai media programmes, such as Until We Meet Again, and this additional promotion through TikTok, helps to welcome positive change among Thai society, through representation outside heteronormativity. This type of representation can be important for viewers who identify as pansexual, as seeing their identity authentically represented even in countries where pansexuality is under attack can help validate their experiences (Craig & McInroy, 2018). In addition, positive portrayals of pansexual characters in the media and on TikTok serves to increase visibility, acceptance and support for the pansexual community.

Visibility and support towards the pansexual community was also encouraged in other videos, with some creators promoting pansexual specific merchandise. None of these videos included paid advertisements from big corporate brands, instead creators promoted their own small businesses, where creators displayed merchandise relating to pansexuality. One video included the creator walking around their shop showing various items, and stating:

'Pansexual baby this is for you, I know you are all slept on and I haven't slept on you all, So this is my pride store, it's affordable so you don't have to go with large anti LGBTQ corporations, but everyone sleeps on pansexual so I'm helping ya'll out.' (Video 13)

The creator displayed merchandise of pansexual flags, and pansexual flags on t-shirts, badges, and jewellery. The term '*slept on*' is used in social media to suggest a concept is deserving of recognition and appreciation. Acknowledging this highlight's how pansexuality is understood as an identity that is often erased in society, and within LGBTQ+ merchandise. Promoting items that represent pansexuality, such as badges and jewellery that includes the pansexual colours and flags, offers visibility and recognition to the audience. This representational content exemplifies how viewers may benefit from the internet gift economy (Fox & Ralston, 2016), as their identity is not only being represented but they may utilise this merchandise to mark and express their identities.

In addition to showcasing characters and merchandise related to pansexuality, other videos presented more personal representations of the pansexual identity, with some creators discussing the fluidity and ongoing developments and changes of their identity. Some creators highlighted these developments in identity through a 're-coming out' narrative, and utilised pride flags to symbolise these changes. For example, one creator, filmed themselves dancing with a pansexual pride flag, and another creator recorded themselves taking down their bisexual flag from their wall, and replacing this with a pansexual flag. Text on the screen in these videos included:

'Me thinking I was bi this whole time...turns out I'm actually pansexual, love will always win.' The caption to this video included '*Me re-coming out, and I'm proud to be pansexual*' (Video 22)

'It's time to take down my bisexual flag, and happy to come out as pansexual'
(Video 33)

As both these creators previously identified as bisexual before pansexual, this demonstrates ongoing developments and fluidity of identities for some individuals. The creators use of *"love will always win"* and *"I'm proud to be pansexual"* emphasises the celebration and pride of pansexuality, and offers viewers a positive space, via representation and support for the pansexual identity. Although these videos do not offer explanations for the change from bisexual to pansexual, both these identities are inclusive of plurisexual attraction, and can be defined in personalised and nuanced ways. One of the creators also included background music, a song called Freefall by Rainbow Kitten Surprise (an indie American band) that is trending among the LGBTQ+ community on TikTok. This band includes members of the queer and transgender community, and this creator appears to have used this music specifically to support and celebrate the representation of their community. These videos offer visibility and awareness of identity developments through the celebration of discovering one's pansexual identity.

Nonbinary and transgender identities were commonly represented as intersecting with the pansexual identity. Examples of this include creators discussing pansexuality as an identity that led them to question and discover their gender identity. One creator captioned their video *'It's been over 4 years, and I'm still trying to understand my gender identity lmao'* (Video 50). The video included the creator looking at the screen and miming to an audio *'wanna see a magic trick'* with text that says, *'me who just got used to being pansexual'*. Then miming of audio *'good abracadabra'*, and text *'my brain then starts to question non-binary'*. For this creator identifying as pansexual led to the questioning of their

gender identity. In sharing that they are still trying to understand their gender identity, this emphasises how identity development is not always a straight-forward process and is characterised by ongoing developments. This is also supported by previous research that found that those who identify as pansexual are more likely to describe themselves as gender diverse (Katz-Wise & Todd, 2022). Using audio in the video helped the creator adapt lyrics to fit their own narrative and share their own stories. The video captures internal questioning, that many people go through when exploring their own sexual and gender identities, and thus TikTok users can connect to this and feel a sense of belonging and validity about their identity journeys.

Humour and parody were used throughout TikTok videos to address the intersectionality of pansexual and gender diverse identities. One video included a stand-up comedian on stage, making a joke to address common stereotypes that pansexual and gender diverse individuals face. The video content includes:

*'I am pansexual, polyamorous non-binary person, and you don't know what that means, that means I've never made a single decision in my entire life
Laughter from the audience' (Video 36)*

The identities shared in this video can be understood as identities that defy dichotomous, heteronormative, and essentialist views of identity. The notion that individuals who identify with identities that promote freedom and “encompass all”, often are stereotyped as not having a stable sense of self, and as being confused (McLean, 2008). By the comedian presenting and laughing at their own identities, this highlights how self-deprecating humour is used to address common stereotypes around plurisexual and gender diverse individuals being greedy, confused, and on the fence. Furthermore, by including identity in stand-up

humour, it helps the comedian on a personal level but additionally may have macro-level outcomes to tackle heteronormative and cisgenderist stereotypes within society; by offering audiences and TikTok viewers a space to think and reflect on topics covered. This video not only offers representation to the intersectionality of identity, and specifically how pansexuality may intersect with gender diverse identities, but how these intersecting identities may influence one's experience.

Rather than using humour to depict the intersectionality of pansexual and gender diversity, other creators shared more direct, personal videos about their identity, with the aim to connect with members of the LGBTQ+ community. One creator shared a video that discussed their pansexual and nonbinary identity. During this video the creator sat down in front of a screen holding a stuffed animal and addressed the camera by stating:

'I'm 53, I make fake animals for a living and I'm just discovering that now the weird me that never fit in, there are terms for it, and it looks like I am pansexual and non-binary or agender or gender queer, and I'd like to know is there anyone else out there that's my age that's the same, cuz I'd like to know a bit more, I have a lot to learn and I would like new friends, so if you're there come and say hi and tell me stuff' (Video 70)

The creator describes feeling isolated until they discovered the pansexual and gender diverse labels. As the creator shares their age of 53, they may not have had this terminology growing up and thus struggled to make sense of their intersectional identities. This highlights the importance of language in individuals' self-discovery and identity expression. As pansexual and nonbinary discourse is understood as a recent phenomenon (Callis, 2014), for this creator fluidity in identity would not have been understood or represented during their adolescence and early life. This creator shares their personal experience with their identity

and seeks community support to help continue their learning (*“I have a lot to learn, and I would like new friends”*). This plea to connect with community of a similar age and identity can be seen as vital for this specific creator, particularly as they come from a generation where individuals often delayed coming out, due to internalised stigma and fear of discrimination (Hurd et al., 2022). As this creator shares their personal experience with their identity development and intersectionality of their pansexual and gender diverse identity, they may serve as a role model for other older LGBTQ+ individuals and help build a sense of community and space. This video offers a unique insight and representation into older generations intersectional identities, and personal motivations for engaging in TikTok.

This theme focussed on the representation and visibility of the pansexual identity. Videos that shared and represented pansexual characters within TV shows, and promoted merchandise around pansexuality, serve to validate and help normalise the pansexual identity for viewers. This normalisation and representation of the pansexual identity among TikTok users can help to influence how society views and understands pansexuality. Other videos offered representation to the fluidity and intersectionality of gender and sexuality, with videos highlighting the synergism between pansexual and gender diverse identities. Through promoting recognition of these intersectional identities, it may also offer visibility and an opportunity to find a community through TikTok.

6.4 “It’s not a real identity”: Challenging myths, prejudice and panphobia

A third theme generated from the data focusses on TikTok videos where creators address and tackle common stereotypes and myths around pansexuality. Videos (11, 17, 35,

88) frequently referenced stereotypes and myths such as: *'So you're just bisexual'*, *'Does that mean you're attracted to pans'* *'So you're attracted to everyone'* *'That's not real/it's a made-up new term'*. One of the most common misconceptions around pansexuality is that it's just another term for bisexuality, this myth comes from the potential similarity of both identities (Rivera, 2024) which can lead to misinformation and understanding. However, by referencing pansexual as *'just bisexual'*, it ignores meaningful differences in identity understanding, expression, and attraction between both the pansexual and bisexual community, contributing to the erasure of pansexuality. Given that pansexuality is inclusive of attractions to all genders and/or regardless of gender, there is a myth around pansexual individuals automatically being attracted to *'everyone'*. This myth mirrors the homophobic notion that all gay and/or lesbian individuals are also attracted to every man or woman they meet (Stonewall, 2021). This myth is perpetuated in experience, where many LGBTQ+ individuals are faced with acquaintances and/or friends questioning their attraction.

Pansexuality is often erased and not recognised as a legitimate identity (Flanders et al., 2016). Myths that centre around this include the belief that pansexual individuals are attracted to *'pans'* and that it is a *'made-up new term'*. The stereotype and disrespectful humour around pansexual individuals' attractions to cookware can come from a lack of education and knowledge around identity, and thus these myths use the 'pan' label to poke humour and dismiss the identity. However, this is another way of erasing the identity, and individual expression and experience. The notion that pansexuality is *'made-up'*, can come from individuals who view gender as a binary, and thus the belief that individuals can be attracted to those who identify as gender-diverse and beyond the gender binary may not be considered and understood. These myths influence how the pansexual community experience their identity and can be related to negative health outcomes (Flanders et al., 2019). Given

these challenges were frequently referenced across content about pansexuality, it highlights the prevalence of these stereotypes, and the types of perceptions levelled against pansexuality.

Content that addressed and outlined common stereotypes that the pansexual community face were often framed in ways that called for these stereotypes to be challenged. For example, many videos included captions such as *'Pansexual stereotypes we need to break'* (Video 11), *'Things not to say to someone who's pansexual'* (Video 19), and *'Things pansexual's are tired of hearing'* (Video 88). Directly addressing these issues helps to raise awareness of these stereotypes amongst viewers. By sharing videos that state *'help us break these stereotypes'*, these creators are using TikTok to advocate for the community and to help debunk stereotypes about the pansexual community. Vivienne (2016) highlights how social media is often an effective way to share and spread information, and in turn can help provide social change through the circulation of activist voices. These videos all address the same issues that relate to questioning pansexuality as a valid and discrete identity. The creators are producing content advocating for individuals who identify as pansexual, and thus viewers are also exposed to this form of activism, which helps to change how society in general views pansexuality.

Light-hearted and humorous content was also created and shared to address stereotypes around pansexuality. One creator posted a video (Video 39), in response to a comment on a recent post where the creator came out as pansexual, which stated, *'pansexual isn't real'*. In response the creator filmed themselves dancing, wearing a pansexual pride flag, with text on the screen stating, *'okay let me just'* before performatively disappearing (to suggest that they were in fact not real), before promptly reappearing (continuing to dance)

with the accompanying text: *'we exist and are valid'*. Even though, humour was used as a form of entertainment to address these issues, the view that pansexuality is not a legitimate identity is a common view that people use to erase and invalidate the experiences of pansexual individuals (Belous & Bauman, 2017). This content helps to promote resilience, validity, and representation of the pansexual community, through promoting self-expression and sharing their pansexual identity online.

Discrimination and prejudice were also highlighted in the TikTok videos analysed. The LGBTQ+ community were named as those who often target the pansexual community. One video was captioned *'panphobia within the LGBTQIA+ community'* (Video 40) and involved content that described prejudice that exists within the LGBTQ+ community and directed at pansexual individuals in relationships, this includes: *"You're not pan, if you're in a straight relationship"*. Another creator portrayed a similar argument of panphobia and exclusion from the LGBTQ+ community, with the creator acting/miming a song with the text on the screen stating *'LGBTQ community: We support you being bi/pan, you are one of us now. Bi/pan person: Even if I date a guy? LGBTQ community: errr no!'*. (Video 27)

These videos illustrate the contrast in perceived support from members of the LGBTQ+ community towards pansexual individuals when engaging in straight-passing relationships. By the videos highlighting panphobia towards relationships, it upholds the assumptions around identity being congruent with sexual behaviour and relationship types. This stems from heteronormative views which promote heterosexuality as the default identity (Pollitt, 2021) and thus erases and marginalises pansexual individuals, especially those engaging in 'straight passing' relationships. This is a common experience that pansexual individuals face, especially from other LGBTQ+ members. Indeed, Mitchell et al (2015)

found that plurisexual individuals are commonly discriminated against by lesbian individuals and are less likely to be chosen for relationships. As one of the creators captioned their video “*I am still LGBTQ+*”, this emphasises that their identity is still valid regardless of the gender expression of their romantic partner. This notion that pansexual individuals are ‘less queer’ when engaging in ‘heterosexual passing’ relationships, can impact one’s own identity expression and visibility (Chonody et al., 2020). By creating content about panphobia within the LGBTQ+ community, and addressing these misconceptions and stereotypes, it raises awareness among viewers of the ‘double discrimination’ (from both heterosexual and LGBTQ+ individuals) that plurisexual individuals are facing.

Prejudice from within the LGBTQ+ community was also expressed through creators sharing their personal experiences with panphobia. One creator produced a short video that included a close-up shot of their face appearing angry/annoyed, with text on the screen stating, *‘I’m tired of constantly being demonised by other members of the community this isn’t fair’* (Video, 56). By describing their treatment as being ‘demonised,’ the creator suggests that the LGBTQ+ community is not only excluding them but also positioning them as harmful. Research suggests that in today’s contemporary Western society, LGBTQ+ identities are often affirmed and celebrated (Jones & Cisternino, 2024). However, this video highlights the prevalence of prejudice within the LGBTQ+ community, with the pansexual community often facing discrimination and panphobia from other queer communities. The creator also captioned this video *End panphobia I hate it*’ suggesting a personalised plea to viewers to reduce panphobia towards the pansexual community. This highlights how creators are using TikTok to advocate for change on both a community and personal level.

Further videos portrayed creators' own personal experiences with panphobia, and specifically within family settings. Some creators shared their coming out stories, which often involved negative reactions, and a lack of support from family members. One creator produced a video that included a blank screen for the background and used emojis to represent themselves and their mom. The creator added text to the screen to describe their coming out experience:

Me: hey mom I've been wanting to tell you something.

Mom: okay what's up

Me: so I'm not unlabelled anymore, I'm pansexual

Mom: ugh what does that mean?

Me: it means I like people regardless of their gender identity.

Mom: why don't you just be yourself

Me: I am myself, what do you mean?

Mom: no you're being different, you're my sweet little girl and I want grand babies

Me: I never said I wasn't having kids, plus nothing has changed I'm just using the label because I feel comfortable with it now

Mom: but you don't have to use a label, and I don't think you really know who you like because you haven't dated anyone ever. You're not mature enough to make that decision.

Me: mom I am 19 how can you tell me that I don't know who I like

Mom: because you're my daughter' (Video, 10)

Through analysing the dialogue it is clear the creator wanted to express that they are no longer 'unlabelled' and instead identify as pansexual. Finding a label that encompasses one's feeling, and attractions is important for this creator, as they describe feeling 'comfortable' using the pansexual label. This sense of understanding and labelling one's identity can be affirming for individuals, as it is an important part in one's self-acceptance and confidence (Diamond, 2003). The self-discovery of identifying as pansexual can be seen

as a motivational factor for this creator coming out to their mom, as they now have a label they can express to their family. However, this creator goes on to talk about the reaction they faced after revealing this. The creator's experience highlights how family members' misconceptions or individual insecurities can influence reactions and impact relationships. This content reflects research findings around parents holding expectations for their children's lives and milestones, and when these expectations are not met, parents experience 'grief' (Pullen-Sansfacon et al., 2015). This is reflected in the video via the reaction and where this include reference to grandchildren. The caption to this video included "*How I came out as pansexual to my mom. Share your stories below*". As the creator uses TikTok to share their personal experiences with coming out, this may be beneficial to the users engaging with this content, but also a way of reflecting on and managing the emotions of this coming out experience for the creator.

Instead of creating content that highlights prejudices towards the pansexual community, other creators posted content aimed at reclaiming common stereotypes. For example, one captioned this as '*Sing along if you fit into the stereotype, pansexual edition*' (Video 60). These videos tended to be of a comedic tone, describing more physical stereotypes of a person who identifies as pansexual. One video presented text '*Hair to shoulders, Mushroom fairy aesthetic, Likes crystals, Dyed hair, Cat person*'. Another similar video included '*Things that give me pansexual vibes (in my opinion), lots of posters and art decorations, yellow as a favourite colours and vines as room decoration*' (Video, 28). Photos were also included to accompany the text, for example photos of hairstyles, crystals, cats etc. The stereotypes outlined in the videos can also be understood as potential examples of sexuality marking. By the creators specifically including these markers, it suggests these are popular among the pansexual community. The creator producing this content is not only

acknowledging these markers as stereotypes but reclaiming these stereotypes in a light-hearted and comedic way. The inclusion of '*hair to shoulders*' and '*dyed hair*', can be understood as a physical marker to enhance one's queer visibility, by symbolising their identity to other individuals. However, whilst dyed hair as a marker of being queer has been found to enhance one's identity to other people in the queer community, it has also been related to homophobic responses (Soini, 2022). Thus, even though dress and appearance can play an important part in expressing one's identity, it can also increase the likelihood of being targeted and discriminated against (Frith, 2004; Soini, 2022). Through creators portraying their own understanding of stereotypes and identity markers, this highlights how they are being reclaimed by the community and used to express and celebrate their identity.

This theme highlights the ways in which myths, stereotypes and prejudice that the pansexual community face was a common feature of the videos analysed in this study and were used to highlight and challenge such prejudice. Creators shared this information in different ways, for example some videos listed stereotypes, other videos included creators' personal experiences with stereotypes and prejudice, and some used humour to hit back at stereotypes. By creating this content creators both inform viewers of the myths and stereotypes that the pansexual community face, and advocate for change for the pansexual community.

6.5 Summary

This chapter highlights how individuals are utilising #Pansexual to share a diverse range of videos around pansexuality on the platform TikTok. This analysis provides insights into how TikTok is being used as a platform to educate and inform viewers around gender

and sexuality content. This includes in-depth discussions of the pansexual identity, it's definitions and understandings, history, and intersections with other LGBTQ+ identities. Content also helped to represent the fluidity and intersectionality within the pansexual identity and positioned pansexuality as an identity that is unique and individual to all who endorse it.

Chapters three and four also presented findings on the stereotypes pansexual individuals experience in intimate partner relationships. This study echoed these findings, with TikTok videos presenting information and personal experiences around stereotypes and prejudice towards the pansexual community. By sharing information around stereotypes and experiences with panphobia, individuals can help contribute to social change through the circulation of these activist voices. Thus, this chapter also highlights how TikTok is not only used to share information, but content creators are using the platform to advocate for change. Finally, TikTok can also be understood as a space for queer individuals to connect and build community, through sharing their own personal experiences and appeals for other individuals to reach out to them.

Overall, this chapter offers a new perspective into social media and online spaces to educate and inform, offer visibility and representation, and build a sense of belonging through community and advocacy for those who identify as pansexual. This chapter concludes the analysis of findings for all three research questions. The following chapter will present the general discussion to this thesis. This will include a broader consideration of the research aims and overall findings, along with evaluation of the methodological approach taken for this research. It will conclude with a personal reflexivity and implications and future directions.

Chapter 7: Discussion

7.1 Introduction

The 21st century has been a time of significant shift in the meaning and cultural acceptance of gender and sexual diversity (Russell et al., 2019). This is evidenced with the expansive vocabulary that LGBTQ+ individuals are using to describe their sexuality and gender identity (Hammock et al., 2021). The increasing diversity and fluidity of labels people use to describe their identities has shifted the understanding of traditional binaries to one that is more inclusive (Russell et al., 2016). One identity that represents this shift is pansexuality, this identity rejects binary understandings of gender and instead is inclusive of attractions to all and/or regardless of gender, for example transgender, nonbinary and any other individuals who identify with gender diverse labels (Belous & Bauman, 2017). Although media representation and the 2021 Census have contributed to greater visibility of pansexuality and other plurisexual identities in the UK, significant challenges continue to exist. Plurisexual individuals residing in the UK still face prejudice and discrimination, both within and outside the LGBTQ+ community (Feinstein, 2023). They are often the target of misconceptions and stereotypes, leading to misunderstanding and invalidation of their identities (Flanders et al., 2017; Hayfield & Křížová, 2021). A decade ago, Gonel (2013) presented pansexuality as an anti-identity as it challenged ideas of fixed and distinct sexual and gender labels. He also stated, “the anti-identity position of pansexuality as an outsider can only exist as long as it is new” (Gonel, 2013, p.56). Now, in 2025, individuals identifying with gender diverse labels, and sexual orientations that encompass these attractions, are continually increasing in number, pansexuality is a label that is favoured by many who want to embrace its inclusive nature and represent a more diverse society (Katz-Wise et al., 2017).

LGBTQ+ Psychology has started to include more contemporary identities in research; however, it is something that is still developing (Nelson, 2020). Research on pansexuality often group pansexual individuals with other plurisexual identities or under the "bisexual umbrella," obscuring their distinct experiences (Hayfield, 2020). Research has primarily focused on defining and conceptualising pansexuality (Belous & Bauman, 2017; Galupo et al., 2017; Lapointe, 2017). More recent studies have started to explore the unique experiences of those who identify as pansexual. In particular, Hayfield and Křížová (2021) explored how pansexual and panromantic people make sense of and experience their identities in a UK context. This thesis developed this body of work through including marginalised groups in research and specifically gave the pansexual community a voice to express and share their experiences around their identity. As 48,000 individuals identified as pansexual in the UK in 2021 (ONS, 2021), it is estimated that this will have further increased in 2025. Thus, research exploring the discrete experiences of pansexual individuals is timely and crucial. This thesis offers visibility and representation of pansexuality and has future implications for the community.

7.2 Research aims

Broadly, the aim of this thesis was to explore the ways in which those who identify as pansexual experience their identity within different interpersonal, relational, and online contexts. It was important that these contexts were explored as they are a fundamental part of LGBTQ+ people's lives and support systems (Flanders et al., 2016). More specific aims of the thesis involved exploring the diverse ways in which pansexual individuals mark their sexuality within different contexts. Sexuality marking and the disclosure of one's identity is

often a crucial decision in a LGBTQ+ individuals' daily life (Gonzalez et al., 2017), and as previous research has shown that pansexual individuals are using different identity expressions strategically (Hayfield & Křížová, 2021), it was important to understand why, and in what contexts, pansexual individuals mark and express their identity.

A novel aim of this thesis involved exploring the intersectionality between pansexual and gender diverse individuals. No other research has explored how intersectional identities of the pansexual community may influence how they experience their identity. This thesis explored the synergism between gender and sexuality, as previous research found that those who identify as pansexual are more likely to identify as gender diverse, compared with other plurisexualities (Katz-wise et al., 2015). This is important as previous research highlights the experience of those with multiple minoritized identities is often distinct, especially as they often encounter different types of discrimination (Grafsky et al., 2018). Another aim of this thesis involved exploring online contexts. Social media has provided LGBTQ+ individuals with safe spaces to develop relationships and the opportunity to explore and express their identities (Russell et al., 2019). Previous research has emphasised the importance of online communities for pansexual individuals as an educational and community platform (Hayfield & Křížová, 2021), and thus it was important that this thesis explored the types of content presented online around the pansexual identity, providing valuable insight into the importance of online spaces for the pansexual community.

This chapter will summarise the main findings of the thesis as they intersect across the analysis chapters and as they address the main research questions and aims of the thesis. This chapter will also evaluate the methods used in this research. Implications of the research findings will be discussed, along with future directions arising from this research.

7.3 Pansexuality as a nuanced and transgressive label

During both the online survey and online interviews participants were given the opportunity to discuss how they understood their identity, and what it personally meant to them. Even though previous research has explored how pansexual individuals define and conceptualise their identity (Galupo et al., 2018; Hayfield & Křížová, 2021; Lapointe, 2017), it was important that the participants in this study had the opportunity to share their own understanding of their identity. This is because how participants conceptualised their identity may have influenced the ways in which they mark their sexuality. Therefore, giving participants an opportunity to define their identity, provides important context through which to understand their experience. In describing their identity, participants understood pansexuality as an inclusive identity that encompasses attractions to all and/or regardless of gender. This is a common and often unifying definition of pansexuality and has been used by many other researchers (Gonel, 2013; Rice, 2015).

In all three studies, pansexuality was often mentioned with reference to other plurisexual identities, particularly bisexuality. This comparison typically focused on defining the boundaries of both pansexuality and bisexuality particularly regarding the attractions they encompass. Online TikTok videos highlighted the differences between bisexuality and pansexuality, with some content positioning this through explicit use of binary/non-binary language, to make these distinctions clear. For example, pansexuality was referenced to specifically include gender diverse identities, whereas bisexuality was understood as the attraction ‘to two or more genders’. This is similar to previous research by Lapointe (2017) who found bisexuality and pansexuality to be discrete terminologies, in which bisexuality

was associated with the gender binary and pansexuality served as a personal contestation to this dichotomy. Other videos provided insight into the history of both identities, including their evolution over time, and highlighted the role of education and knowledge about gender in this development. Overall, the video content centred on providing information and education on the pansexual identity and offered insights into how pansexuality and bisexuality may be similar and/or distinct. Though this general understanding of pansexuality is useful in understanding distinctions between bisexuality and pansexuality, during both the surveys and interviews participants discussed their own personal experiences with their identities. These experiences offered a more personalised perspective into the debates around pansexuality and bisexuality, in comparison with the online TikTok videos.

Some pansexual individuals considered their identity to be a part of the bisexual umbrella based on the understanding that bisexuality also includes attraction to multiple genders. Thus, for some individuals, they viewed pansexuality and bisexuality as being able to co-exist. These findings offer a contemporary perspective into how pansexual individuals may understand their own identity, and additionally other plurisexualities. Hayfield and Křížová (2021) found that it was often difficult for pansexual individuals to define bisexuality, as boundaries were often blurry and overlapping. The current research supports this, whilst also highlighting how, for some, bisexuality is understood similarly to pansexuality. Flanders et al (2019) also found that individuals who identify as bisexual often understand their identity to include individuals that identify as gender diverse. Importantly, participant discussions around identity emphasised individual choice and self-expression. Participants believed individuals should identify with the label they feel best represents them. This provides a new perspective into the ‘bi vs pan’ debate, indicating that the distinctions between the two identities are less rigid and more open to personal interpretation. This has

wider implications for LGBTQ+ psychology and how sexualities are defined, as this research suggests that individuals prioritise personalised meanings that align with their lived experience over traditional definitions when choosing a sexual identity label. This highlights the importance of individual agency in expressing one's own identity. Overall, it offers a more nuanced perspective in contemporary sexualities and emphasises self-expression and fluidity in sexuality.

Analysis of the survey data further highlights how pansexuality is individualised by participants. Some participants highlighted that they still had specific preferences regarding attraction to individuals. Preferences could include a specific gender over another or relate to certain characteristics or personality traits. Preferences are an innate part of attraction and are a natural expression of individuals identities, including those who identify as heterosexual, monosexual and plurisexual (Mitchell et al., 2015). The explicit reference to preferences in participants discussions around their identities highlights how they are addressing and/or clarifying a common misunderstanding that pansexual individuals are 'attracted to everyone' and 'open to all'. Thus, even though the pansexual identity is known for being inclusive to all gender identities, participant accounts highlight that it does not preclude the ability to have preferences when it comes to relationships and partners.

These findings provide insight into how pansexual individuals are expressing their identity in the 21st century by rejecting traditional binary definitions of sexuality. It highlights how definitions are not always the same, while individuals may understand the meaning of their own identity, this does not mean others will have the same understanding. In addition, previous conceptualisations of sexuality have viewed identity categories as inherent and fixed

(Callis, 2014), however this thesis offers a contemporary perspective into how sexuality is becoming more fluid and transgressive.

7.4 Sexuality marking as a strategic choice based on context and perceived safety

This research found that sexuality marking and the disclosure of one's identity were fundamental aspect in pansexual individuals' everyday lives. Participants' accounts revealed that depending on the context; they strategically chose whether to disclose their identity. Many participants avoided explicitly identifying as pansexual, instead using other plurisexual labels, most commonly bisexual. Participants highlighted older generations, or anyone they felt lacked a good understanding of the gender spectrum as contexts in which they would mark their identity as bisexual. This suggests that participants believed bisexuality would be more easily understood than pansexuality, in those contexts. This is reflective of previous findings by Hayfield and Křížová (2021) who found that pansexual individuals would utilise bisexual labels to express their identity in contexts they believed others would not understand or acknowledge pansexuality. The findings from this thesis, together with those of Hayfield and Křížová (2021), highlight how pansexual individuals are engaging in unique forms of sexuality marking, by using other plurisexual labels when in certain contexts. This thesis presents insight into the decision-making processes around marking one's identity, which was based around perceptions of other's understanding of pansexuality, whereby participants were accommodating other people's lack of knowledge around pansexuality.

It is important to note that many of the participants who took part in the online survey and interviews mentioned identifying with other additional labels to pansexuality, most commonly bisexual and queer. However, other participants identified only with the pansexual

label. These findings offer insight into how pansexual individuals choose to identify in ways they believe others may more readily understand (e.g. bisexual), rather than those which accurately describe their identity (e.g. pansexuality). This strategic choice results in the erasure of their own identity in certain contexts.

In addition to the strategic use of terms based on perceptions of others' understanding of sexual identities, safety was highlighted as a fundamental aspect in pansexual individuals' decision on whether to mark their identity. This research found that participants often assessed how safe they perceived the reactions of others would be should they disclose their identity. In situations of uncertainty, pansexual individuals often chose not to disclose, to reduce the possibility of experiencing homophobic reactions. This supports previous research findings by Kolker et al (2019) who explored sexuality marking among queer individuals and found that they were more open to mark their sexuality when in an environment they perceived as comfortable. This concealment of identity through the choice to not mark one's pansexuality is one coping mechanism for discrimination, by reducing the likelihood of experiencing negative reactions. This provides insight into unique minority stressors for the pansexual community and has wider implications for tailored support for the pansexual community. In addition, the findings indicate that the pansexual community experience similar stressors to other plurisexual communities. For example, the decision to mark one's identity is an important but stressful decision, due to the potential for prejudice or discrimination (Flanders et al., 2017). Participants' accounts which emphasise safety as a fundamental factor in the decision to mark their sexuality highlight how they still feel unsafe in certain environments. This shows that even though some individuals perceive society as more progressive and inclusive of LGBTQ+ identities (Flanagan, 2023), these concerns demonstrate issues related to expressing one's identity for the pansexual community.

7.5 Family and friendships knowledge of gender and sexuality in navigating support

Across all three analyses, participants discussed their experiences with family members. While participant accounts revealed a wide range of experiences, a central theme across all accounts was the crucial role of family support. This thesis found that pansexual individuals often still assessed their environments based on safety, even in family settings. Prior experiences influenced individuals' choices regarding identity disclosure to family. For example, participants who expressed hearing conversations around LGBTQ+ topics chose to disclose their identity to these family members. In contrast, some participants discussed past experiences with homophobic views and thus did not feel it was safe to disclose their pansexual identity. This highlights the importance of supportive environments for pansexual individuals when deciding whether or not to disclose their identity to family members. A novel finding of this thesis is the influence of historical environmental factors on pansexual individuals' decision to disclose and express their identity, for example the previous exposure homophobic views.

For participants who had disclosed their identity to family, they discussed feeling stressed that their members did not understand pansexuality. Consequently, some participants chose to refer to their identity as bisexual when around older family members and those they perceived as less supportive. This is due to them lacking in education around the identity. This adds to the literature that pansexual identities still lack understanding and that these misunderstandings impact how pansexual individuals receive social support within family settings. Previous literature has focussed on the importance of social support for LGBTQ+ youth, and family acceptance (Russel & Fish, 2019), however, this proves a challenge for the pansexual community, as their identity is still not understood or widely recognised (Hayfield,

2020) specifically with older generations. Therefore, contexts where pansexual individuals' identities are not recognised or understood hinder their ability to receive appropriate support from family members.

Another original contribution of this thesis involved the insight into experiences of those who identify as both pansexual and gender diverse. For these participants, experiences with their family members were often complex. Participants often felt that their family members lacked in education and knowledge about gender identity and diversity, both generally and more personally, and needed time to adapt to change in gender identification. This finding is crucial for developing a deeper understanding of the 'coming out' narrative, and typical 'positive vs negative' reactions (Needham et al., 2010). The family's learning process emphasises coming out as not just a single event, but an ongoing negotiation of identity within family settings. This supports the view that coming out is multi-dimensional, and that those with intersectional identities may experience more complex aspects to disclosing and expressing their identity, as they also have multiple identities to disclose (gender and sexual identity). Participants disclosed having experienced a strain in their relationships with their family members while they took time to adjust and understand their identities. However, the gradual acknowledgment and acceptance of their identities was beneficial for participants, as they described feeling supported by their family. Despite family members willingness to learn, there were some specific aspects of identity development and transition that required more time to get used to, this includes pronoun use and medical affirming care. These findings echo Weinhardt (2019) findings that transgender and non-binary youth experienced an important distinction between acceptance and support; with many often-receiving initial verbal support from family members but lacking supportive actions thereafter.

The experiences shared by participants show that for those who identify as pansexual and gender diverse, navigating and expressing their identities can be complex. This is due to participant accounts reflecting how both pansexuality and gender diverse identities continue to be misunderstood by family members. Thus, for those who identify with intersecting identities navigating both their sexual and gender identities poses uncertainty. As participants perceive family members as lacking in understanding around both gender and sexuality discourse, these findings have wider implications. They suggest that support for families including additional knowledge and information around sexuality and gender would help participants in being able to receive more affirming support quicker.

Friendships were described as more accepting and affirming regarding identity, in contrast to family members who often needed time to adapt to gender and sexuality identities. Participants were often selective in choosing friends who are part of the LGBTQ+ community or allies. This is another way that participants described creating a safe space to reduce the chance of discrimination and/or prejudice. This reflects a ‘chosen family’, which Rivera (2024) highlights as important for LGBTQ+ individuals. Friendships proved helpful in accepting and supporting individuals through their identity journeys, both sexual identity and gender identity, this was discussed in both online qualitative surveys and interviews. Participants described their friends as being informed around gender and sexuality, and with this knowledge they were able to help participants in affirming their identities. Participants who identified as both pansexual and gender diverse described their friends as being educated around the importance of pronoun use for gender affirmation. In addition, friendships with other LGBTQ+ individuals were described as particularly helpful, as they provided mutual support through shared experiences.

Within the field of LGBTQ+ psychology, friendship is considered one of the most influential relational contexts for providing support and improving the wellbeing of LGBTQ individuals (Snapp et al., 2015). This finding emphasises the importance of friendships for pansexual individuals in providing positive and affirming experiences. However, as findings suggested, pansexual individuals are selective in choosing friends who are part of the LGBTQ+ community or allies. This research develops upon previous research that LGBTQ+ individuals often find a sense of community in other LGBTQ+ friendships (Flanders et al., 2016). Importantly, when observing the age cohorts of the participants in the sample, 73% of participants in the qualitative survey and 81% of the participants in the qualitative interview were aged between 18-25. Research indicates the opportunity to make friends among this age range is considerably easier in comparison to older individuals, due to the accessibility of educational institutions, youth groups and online platforms targeted at younger individuals (Scott et al., 2022). In addition, research suggests younger individuals are identifying more inclusive and contemporary labels, such as pansexuality (Katz-Wise et al., 2017). Therefore, for older individuals who identify as pansexual, their specific experiences with friendships, and the accessibility to other older LGBTQ+ individuals may yield different findings. Future research should explore this intersectionality further and explore how age may influence one's experience with their pansexual identity. Support services could also use these findings to set up specific services targeted for older LGBTQ+ individuals to help foster community building.

7.6 Relationship experiences, stereotyping, and importance of communication

This research offers insight into the relationship experiences of pansexual individuals, an area previously unexplored by existing research. One main finding indicated that pansexual participant's experienced dismissal and stereotypes related to their sexual orientation by their significant other. The dismissal of participants identity occurred when partners did not view the identity as valid or legitimate sexual orientation and resulted in participants being viewed as monosexual. Participants discussed that they had experienced this from both heterosexual men and lesbian women. This is significant as it highlights that these pansexual participants are experiencing double discrimination. This finding around pansexuality being invalidated by individuals with monosexual identities, supports previous research on bisexual individuals' relationships experiences, which also found that they experienced double discrimination, which influenced psychological and social health outcomes (Roberts et al., 2015).

Some participants explained that their partners feared they would leave for someone of a different gender, based on the stereotyped misconception that experiencing intimacy with all genders is essential to fulfilling a plurisexual identity. This finding highlights how assumptions around identity being congruent with sexual behaviour are influencing how pansexual individuals experience their identity. While participants in this study did not specifically discuss the impact this had on their health and wellbeing, Cipriano (2022) suggests that these negative perceptions and stereotypes can influence one's wellbeing, and how they internalise their own identity. Specifically, for those who identify as plurisexual, research has shown that they often experience internal pressure and/or question their identity if they have had little or no physical experiences with other individuals of the same sex (Cipriano, 2022).

These stereotypes impact participants' agency of their identity and can be related to the lives of pansexual participants in this study. These findings contribute to understanding relationship contexts and demonstrates that pansexual individuals are having to navigate their identity and stereotypes from their partners. This adds to the body of literature around relationships for the plurisexual community, and these findings broadly reflect other research conclusions for the bisexual community. Hayfield et al (2018) found that bisexual individuals often experience bi-negativity in the context of relationships, meaning their identity was often misrecognised and marginalised by others. Thus, these conclusions emphasise some similarities between the pansexual and bisexual community experiences in relationships, as findings suggest both communities experience the same stereotypes and dismissal of their plurisexuality from other individuals. Despite the increase in individuals identifying with pansexual labels and the increase in gender and sexuality discourse in Western society (Hayfield, 2020), participant accounts continue to evidence marginalisation of identity, and how it this impacts experiences within relationships.

It must be acknowledged that for individuals who discussed experiences with other plurisexual partners, they framed their experiences as positive, and free from these stereotypes. This suggests that plurisexual individuals engaging with other plurisexual individuals in relationships may be a protective factor against discrimination and stereotypes. Future research should build on these findings by further exploring the positive aspects of relationships for pansexual individuals, specifically examining the experiences of those in relationships with other plurisexual partners.

Secondary data analysed from TikTok also highlighted the prevalence of stereotypes, particularly in relationship settings. Online TikTok posts included information around

specific stereotypes and prejudice towards pansexual individuals engaging in straight-passing relationships. For example, these individuals are stereotyped as 'straight', due to the relationship they are in. This notion that pansexual individuals are 'less queer' when engaging in 'heterosexual passing' relationships, can impact one's own identity expression and visibility (Haas, 2019). These heteronormative views, which promote heterosexuality as the default identity (Pollitt, 2021), marginalise pansexual identities. Creators producing content around panphobia within the LGBTQ+ community, and addressing these misconceptions and stereotypes, raises awareness to the users of TikTok of the issues that pansexual individuals are facing. No other research has reflected these findings for the pansexual community specifically, however, Hiebert and Miller (2023) found social media to be important environment for gender and sexual minority youth to be able to share their experiences to help build community. This study's finding adds to the literature that social media is being used by the pansexual community as a way of sharing experiences and challenging myths and prejudice.

Additionally, relationship experiences were discussed as more complex for those who identified with intersectional identities. During the online qualitative interview's participants discussed a variety of experiences they face when trying to find a potential partner. One of the most crucial aspects highlighted by participants was the decision to disclose their gender identity. Disclosing identity as early as possible was discussed as beneficial for those who identify as pansexual and gender diverse, as it allowed participants to gauge others potential viability as partners. Plus, to not waste time with partners who may not understand or support their identities. It was clear that participants understood the prevalence of transphobia and negative attitudes towards gender diverse individuals (Zimman, 2017), as this influenced their early disclosure of their identity. This suggests the vulnerability of these pansexual and

gender diverse participants when disclosing their identity, given the disproportionate risk of discrimination and violence (Meyer, 2015).

The research explored pansexual and gender diverse individuals and how they experience their relationships. However, these findings also revealed distinct experiences for participants who identified as gender diverse. Specifically, the research emphasises that those who identify as pansexual and nonbinary experience their identity in unique ways compared to those who identify as pansexual and transgender. This difference may be related to society's deeply rooted view of gender as a binary (Thorne, 2020). Thus, individuals may be more likely to understand and comprehend someone who identifies as a transgender man or transgender woman, in comparison to someone who identifies as 'no gender' (MacKinnon et al., 2025). This is evidenced in the findings of this thesis, with those who identify as both pansexual and nonbinary, expressing additional challenges. These challenges included concerns about their partners' understanding and acceptance of their non-binary identity. Participants described how potential partners often presumed their gender based on appearance, creating challenges for their relationships. In addition, even when partners used affirming language and pronouns, participants in relationships often felt their nonbinary identity was not fully understood or acknowledged. This lack of understanding was evident when partners continued to label their relationships as heterosexual, rather than queer.

Those who identified as pansexual and gender diverse also discussed their relationship experiences and the importance of managing change, and in some cases the re-negotiation of relationships, during and post transitions. For some gender diverse participants, having an understanding partner was significant. This understanding was often found in partners who also identified as gender diverse, as they understood the experience of

gender dysphoria. This was particularly influential when engaging in physical intimacy, due to the complexity of gender dysphoria on an individual's sense of self and wellbeing (Hughto et al., 2015). In contrast, some participants discussed how having a transgender partner influenced paradoxical feelings of joy and jealousy, due to comparing stages of transitions. This suggests that for those who identify as gender diverse, wider struggles and limited access to gender affirming care can pose additional challenges for those engaging in relationships. During the interviews participants discussed ways in which they managed these struggles, and highlighted transparency and communication as vital factors in how they experienced their relationships. This adds to previous work that explored gender diverse individuals' relationship experiences and found that partners can successfully maintain and strengthen their relationships through communication and openness (Platt & Bolland, 2018).

In the qualitative interviews participants were encouraged to discuss relationship experiences related to both their sexual and gender identities, however the majority focused their discussions on experiences connected to their gender identity. This highlights that gender identity was imperative in how participants experienced relationships. However, when looking at findings from both the online survey and interviews together, findings show that stereotypes, misconceptions and erasure of the pansexual identity and gender diverse identities, impact relationship experiences for pansexual individuals.

7.7 Activism as an important factor in the representation of minority identity

Previous LGBTQ+ psychology scholars have considered pansexuality being an 'anti identity' position against conservative conceptualisations of identity (Gonel, 2013).

Pansexuality has been referenced to align with queer activism, as the definitions of pansexuality starkly contrast inherent identity categories, and instead promote fluidity and inclusivity. Whilst not all pansexual individuals may identify as activists, the very concept of pansexuality can be seen as challenging the dominant sexual and gender norms, and therefore shares commonalities with queer activism (Gonel, 2013). Even though, Gonel (2013) positioned pansexuality as an ‘anti identity’, that resonates with activism, this concept has not been explored further. However, throughout this thesis, it was clear that pansexual individuals were politically motivated to take part in activism around their identity. When looking at how pansexual individuals would mark their sexuality, there were contrasting motivators in the decision to disclose one’s identity. During the qualitative survey some participants revealed that they believed they should not have to mark their sexuality, which emphasises their resistance to heteronormativity and compulsory heterosexuality. This demonstrates the rejection of traditional views that LGBTQ+ individuals should have to come out (Kitzinger, 2005). Participant’s decision not to disclose their sexuality demonstrates a form of activism, aimed at achieving equal visibility with other sexual orientations. Other participants discussed not wanting to disclose their identity, with specific emphasis on the importance of choice and control over one’s identity. This reflects John’s (2020) notion of ‘inviting in’, meaning that LGBTQ+ people do not have the obligation to disclose their identities, but instead the agency lies within themselves and whether they choose to invite others in informing them on their sexual identity. This shows how some pansexual individuals are moving away from traditional coming out behaviours, such as frequently asserting who they are, and instead choosing to take control of their own identity expression and agency.

Similarly, education was an important topic among some pansexual individuals during the qualitative survey. Some participants expressed a resistance towards having to

bear the burden and responsibility around having to educate others on their identities, and therefore decided not to mark their identity. Whereas other participants chose to mark their identity, to promote representation and visibility of their pansexual identity, due to its minority status. These findings suggest that activism may be a motivating factor in pansexual individuals' decisions to disclose their identities, highlighting the societal and political significance of disclosure beyond personal importance. Previous research has found that bisexual communities from South Africa used coming out as an act to fight for legal rights, and representation of their identity (Khuzwayo, 2021). Similar behaviours can be found in this thesis, with pansexual individuals using the disclosure of their identity to legitimise their pansexual identity through representation and visibility. This representation is politically important for the pansexual community, as their identity is still misunderstood (Hayfield, 2020). Participants' accounts in this thesis highlight experiences of marginalisation stemming from limited education and understanding of their identity. This lack of understanding illustrates why pansexual individuals are politically motivated to challenge and change this.

Activism was also clearly evidenced through data analysed on the platform TikTok. As mentioned in Chapter 5, TikTok creators used the platform, and its format of short videos, to educate and inform others about the pansexual identity. Creators did this through sharing videos that highlighted explanations and definitions of pansexuality, whilst other videos explicitly discussed the relationship between bisexuality and pansexuality acknowledging similarities and differences. Through sharing information and clarifying definitions around plurisexual identities, TikTok not only serves as an educational tool, but also raises awareness and validates sexual identities and self-expression. Some creators also shared videos explaining the importance of pansexual pride flags have in offering visibility and a sense of personal expression. By creators posting informative content around the pansexual

identity offers both knowledge and a sense of belonging among pansexual users on TikTok. Overall, this content can help viewers stay informed around LGBTQ+ communities, and subsequently could have a positive effect on the identity constructions for viewers (Hiebert & Miller, 2023). Previous research by Hayfield and Křížová (2021) found that pansexual individuals sought information around LGBTQ+ identities through online resources, with Tumblr identified as the most valuable platform for online education. This thesis supports this finding of online and social platforms as being beneficial in providing pansexual individuals with education and information on different identities. Though, more contemporarily, this thesis shows that TikTok is being utilised as the platform for LGBTQ+ youth, and pansexual individuals to build community and stay informed around gender and sexuality. This adds to the literature by Hiebert and Miller (2023) who found that gender and sexual minority youth were utilising TikTok during the 2020 global pandemic, to help feel connected while being confined in their own home environments.

The findings in Chapter 5 also show TikTok to be a useful platform not only for sharing educational information about pansexuality but also for challenging myths and prejudices within the pansexual community. Some creators posted content that highlighted stereotypes and prejudice among the pansexual community, for example pansexuality not being a legitimate identity, and misconceptions around being attracted to *everybody*. Creators also shared messages to challenge and debunk these stereotypes, posting videos directly addressing these issues creators can raise awareness of these stereotypes amongst their viewers. These findings represent how content is used as a way of advocating for the pansexual community and their experiences. This is important, as previous research has found that social media can be an effective way to share information and help circulate activist voices (Vivienne, 2016). Social media has been found to be important for

marginalised communities, as it gives as opportunity to be empowered, on both individual and community levels (Hiebert & Miller, 2023). This is evident in this thesis, as findings show how TikTok is being used to share important information and give insight into pansexual lives, which could positively influence the treatment and representation of the community. This social media empowerment provides a sense of freedom of thought, expression and social mobilisation, which can benefit marginalized groups (Yang et al., 2020).

7.8 Evaluation of Methodology

7.8.1 The approach to reviewing literature on plurisexual communities

Much of the literature reviewed and discussed throughout the thesis included a wide range of LGBTQ+ literature, though it primarily focused on plurisexual research. The decision to incorporate plurisexual research in the literature review and throughout the thesis, placed pansexuality research within a broader context of existing studies. There is a debate between researchers' when studying plurisexual communities such as bisexual and pansexual individuals, with some advocating for distinct identities and others preferring include them under the same umbrella (Galupo, 2018). Reflecting on this, the researcher has been mindful while conducting this research not to 'other' or negatively 'divide' the two communities. For example, the researcher's understanding of both communities is that both identities are nuanced and individual for each person who uses either label. This means that there may be commonalities among both identities which could include both identities encompassing attractions to gender diverse individuals. Even with the understanding that bisexuality and

pansexuality can be conceptualised in similar and overlapping ways, it is still important that discrete experiences are explored. This is due to the potential distinct and nuance in experiences. Thus, the aims and motivations for conducting this research included offering representation, visibility, and voice to the pansexual community. It was also important to contribute to LGBTQ+ psychology literature and promote pansexual individuals' experiences as a discrete area of focus. Over the last few years, researchers have included the pansexual community in research (Hayfield & Křížová, 2021), however this represents only a few number studies that focus exclusively on pansexuality, and thus research addressing pansexual experiences remains scarce. Due to the limited studies that focussed on pansexuality, this shaped how the literature review was addressed in this thesis. Upon reflection, the very act of incorporating plurisexual, and specifically bisexual, research might both contribute to and complicate the debate surrounding bisexuality and pansexuality. However, without this background and history of LGBTQ+ psychology, the research might have lacked the wider context necessary for understanding the nuances of pansexual identity as it exists today. For example, the literature gave context to previous understandings of sexuality, including the challenges of legitimising plurisexualities. In addition, research around how plurisexual identities have conceptualised attractions, and how this has evolved, can offer insight and additional context to the emergence of pansexuality.

7.8.2 Considerations taken when choosing the inclusion criteria

In establishing the inclusion criteria for this research, it was essential to ensure a broad and diverse representation of the pansexual community. Therefore, an inclusive, rather than exclusionary, approach was adopted. Instead of stipulating that participant's had to only identify as pansexual, the researcher opted to include and clarify that individuals could also

identify with other identities or terminologies, as long as pansexual was one of those identities. Previous research has highlighted how individuals often utilise multiple identities and terms to describe and express their sexual identifications (Ruberg & Ruelos, 2020), and therefore the researcher did not exclude a potentially large proportion of the pansexual community. Examining the demographics of the participants, many indicated that they identified as pansexual and bisexual, or pansexual and queer. Reflecting on this, the inclusion criteria could have shaped some of the findings of this thesis. For example, in Chapter 3, participants often expressed how plurisexual identities can co-exist. Some participants positioned pansexuality to be under the bisexual umbrella, and some individuals emphasised bisexual and pansexual to be nuanced and personal to everyone who uses the label. Had the study used an inclusion criterion that stated, ‘those who only identify with the pansexual label’ the observed positive and inclusive experiences might have been less pronounced. Instead, by embracing participants who use multiple identity labels, the research captured the inherent fluidity and nuanced understanding of pansexuality, reflecting a wider range of lived experiences.

7.8.3 Strengths of the qualitative design for the research aims

The aim of this thesis was to explore how pansexual individuals experience their identity within different interpersonal, relational, and online contexts, and therefore it was essential that the research centred pansexual individuals’ experiences, in a sensitive and empowering manner. One of the main strengths of this thesis included its qualitative design, previous research that have explored the experiences of pansexual individuals utilised one data collection method, for example an online survey (Hayfield & Křížová, 2021). This research utilised three separate data collection methods to comprehensively understand how

identities and contexts shape individual experiences. The use of ‘experiences’ in research can often be vague (Braun & Clarke, 2009), however this research clearly set out appropriate aims to explore experiences within specific interpersonal, relational and online contexts. These contexts were specifically chosen as they are a fundamental part of peoples’ lives and influence how they experience the world and more specifically their identity (Weinhardt et al., 2019). By framing the research aims and exploring pansexual individuals' experiences within specific, relevant contexts, the present research provided a structured framework and yielded contemporary insights into how pansexual individuals perceive their identity within these fundamental aspects of their lives. This also generated original insights into the experiences of pansexual individuals may be facing within family settings and relationship settings, an area that has previously received little to no research attention. By exploring these different contexts, this research provides a foundation for future studies to further examine these areas in greater depth. For instance, the contexts examined in this thesis could be developed through focused studies to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the various forms of support available to the pansexual community, particularly within family settings.

7.8.4 Reflecting upon the design of the materials for this research

When it came to designing the study materials, the survey and interview questions were informed by existing literature on plurisexual experiences (Caba et al., 2022; Gonzalez, 2017; Hayfield & Křížová 2021; Kolker et al., 2019). In keeping with the overarching aim of the thesis to amplify voice and advocate for the pansexual community, an advisory committee should have been approached to work collaboratively with the researcher of this

thesis. This would have helped provide crucial insights to ensure the research questions and methods were culturally sensitive and relevant to the pansexual community (Collins, 2020)

As discussed in Chapter 2, the researcher identifies as pansexual, and during the design stage they used their own existing and experiential understanding and knowledge of the community to help create the materials. For example, the decision to include demographic questions as an introductory topic during the survey and interviews, gave participants the opportunity to describe their identities in more detail: offering a more personalised element to understand the nuances of participants identities. Advisory committees are especially helpful for research teams who do not have any experience, or profound knowledge of the community they are researching (Slade et al., 2010). For this research, this was not the case. However, an advisory committee would have been useful to help ensure the findings have the most effective positive impact on the pansexual community, and for the findings to be disseminated to wider agencies, for example charities and support services (Vance et al., 2024). A difficulty with gaining access to advisory committees, especially for LGBTQ+ and marginalised communities, is that local community organisations often are underfunded and run-on small teams, meaning that they do not always have the resources to be able to assist on research projects.

7.8.5 Reflecting on the final sample

It must be acknowledged that the sample consisted mainly of those from a White British ethnic background, thus these findings may not fully reflect the experiences of pansexual individuals from more diverse ethnic background. This is important as research highlights the experiences of those with multiple minoritised identities is often distinct, for

example increased marginalisation of their multiple minority identities (Jefferson et al., 2013). Although the sample consisted of mainly White British participants, it still captures a range of diverse experiences within UK settings. Upon reflection it would have been useful to include location demographic data. This is due to geographic location and community influencing LGBTQ+ experiences, including identity formation (Gray et al., 2016). Some participants may have had more access to ‘LGBTQ+ spaces’, for example LGBTQ+ bars, coffee shops and safe community hubs (Valentine, 2016). The availability of supportive spaces has been found to have a positive influence of sexual identity expression both in rural and urban settings (Hulko et al., 2018). As findings of this thesis highlighted the influence of ‘safety’ upon participants decision to mark their sexuality, gaining more information around demographic location, or including questions within the survey and/or interviews, may have given more insight into how individuals experience their identity, within different parts of the UK.

7.9 Implications and Contributions

A key implication of this research lies in its potential impact on the future of LGBTQ+ psychology. As Chapter 2 highlights, research focused exclusively on the pansexual community is still in its early stages (Hayfield, 2020). Researchers have primarily focused on how pansexual people understand and define their own identity (Gonel, 2013; Galupo et al., 2018). However, knowledge around experiences of those who identify as pansexual is limited. By focusing solely on pansexual samples, this thesis, along with the work of Hayfield and Křížová (2021), contributes to greater diversity within LGBTQ+ research. This increased inclusivity can subsequently encourage more researchers to focus on marginalized communities, ultimately leading to positive change for the future of LGBTQ+

psychology. This is important as previous systematic reviews and content analyses of sexuality research show consistently less attention to plurisexual identities than lesbian/gay topics (Monro et al., 2017; Ross et al., 2017). In addition, Ross et al., (2017) found that many studies around LGBTQ+ mental health outcomes used 'bisexuality' in their keywords and titles yet did not report sufficient bisexual specific results. Studies that include bisexual individuals but do not analyse their data separately can lead to misleading conclusions about LGBTQ+ mental health and oversight the discrete vulnerabilities of the plurisexual people.

Researchers, including Pollit et al., (2018) and Hayfield (2022), have offered recommendations for increasing the visibility of plurisexual studies. These include emphasising the importance the unique experiences of plurisexual individuals through developing meaningful research questions that specifically address their experiences (Pollit et al., 2019). As well as incorporating intersectionality to understand the nuanced lived experiences of individuals with diverse gender and sexualities, as this has been an underrepresented area for LGBTQ+ psychology (Hayfield, 2022). This thesis addressed these recommendations by Pollit et al (2018) and Hayfield (2022), as the thesis is one of the first to explore intersectional identities. It specifically researched the synergism between gender and sexuality, through exploring the specific experiences of those who identify as pansexual and gender diverse. Using online qualitative interviews to explore this intersectionality proved beneficial, as it helped to dismantle power issues, offering a more sensitive, participatory approach to research (Tebbe & Budge, 2016). Indeed, the interviews were often participant led, with many individuals discussing more in-depth experiences with their gender identity, in comparison to their pansexuality. This appeared to be significant for participants, likely due to their marginalisation based on their sexuality and gender identity, as well as the limited opportunities to openly discuss their gender identity. This thesis contributes

significantly to the field of LGBTQ+ psychology by exploring diverse identities, giving voice to not only the pansexual population but also those who identify as both pansexual and gender diverse. This contributes to the advancement of LGBTQ+ psychology by providing insights into fluid and nuanced understandings of gender and sexuality that reflect the diversity of identities in the UK today.

Additionally, this thesis not only has academic implications, but is important for anyone working or supporting the pansexual community; this included counsellors and support services for LGBTQ+ individuals. These research findings give insight into the challenging experiences that pansexual individuals are facing within relationship settings, through the experiences of stereotypes and erasure of their identity. Relationship therapists can use these findings to specifically support pansexual individuals and help fulfil their relationship experiences, by working with them to recognise adverse behaviours and attitudes from partners. Similar findings by Mark et al., (2020) found that bisexual individuals who experienced illegitimacy of their identity from their partner reported lower sexual and relationship satisfaction. While this research did not specifically focus on relationship satisfaction among pansexual individuals, participants' accounts of erasure and illegitimacy of their identity provides valuable insight into potential barriers to experiencing fulfilling relationships. It is important that relationship therapists who work with couples where at least one partner identifies as pansexual address how both partners view and understand the pansexual identity, to foster more positive attitudes towards the marginalised identity. Overall, helping improve the relationship experiences of the pansexual community.

Similar to Hayfield and Křížová's (2021) finding that pansexual individuals are educated and enlightened about gender and sexuality, this thesis also supports the idea that

pansexual individuals feel that other individuals are lacking in understanding around gender and sexuality. This is evidenced throughout all three analysis chapters and is relevant to both pansexuality and gender diverse identities. Findings indicated that participants highlighted family members, or those of an older generation to have a lack of understanding around nuanced and fluid identities. This lack of understanding can be attributed to a lack of representation and limited exposure to the term pansexuality among older generations. Furthermore, a lack of understanding of the gender spectrum was also highlighted by participants as a factor that hinders understanding of pansexuality and gender diverse identities. As previous literature has emphasised the importance of family support for the psychological wellbeing on LGBTQ+ individuals (Weinhardt et al., 2019), it is crucial that families are given the appropriate education to be able to comprehensively support their relatives with their identities. Support services working with education sectors, family sectors and anyone around LGBTQ+ individuals should use this thesis findings to help produce informative workshops around more diverse identities. This includes explaining in depth conceptualisations of gender, and gender as a spectrum. This knowledge of gender diversity and fluidity can help recognise and further understand identities such as pansexuality, and nonbinary and transgender identities (Diamond, 2017). Thus, this education can then help minority communities receive the appropriate support.

7.9.1 Future Directions

One recommendation for future research is to further explore political motivations of activism among the pansexual community. This research found pansexual individuals engage in activism by challenging visibility and representation of their pansexual identity. This was

achieved through the strategic marking of their sexuality, with the aim to make their identity visible and represented. Online activism occurs through platforms such as TikTok, with the sharing of videos that inform and educate viewers on the pansexual identity, and challenge stereotypes and panphobia through the sharing of activist voices. Previous research has found engagement in activism to be associated with positive outcomes for marginalised individuals (Hope & Spender, 2017; Watts & Flanagan, 2007). For example, youth who participate in supportive groups are more likely to present with fewer depressive symptoms (McLaren, 2015). The findings of this thesis found TikTok to be a platform for LGBTQ+ individuals to build a sense of community and share queer discourse. This emphasises the importance of online spaces for meso/community activism, through users connecting with other TikTok users to build community to promote social change. Activism on a micro level was also evidenced where individuals mark and share their identity to intentionally challenge the visibility and representation of their pansexual identity. As this research highlights political activism among the pansexual community on both an individual and community level, future research should develop on this further by exploring specific individuals' motivations and potential barriers to activism. This could be conducted on the pansexual community to specifically explore micro everyday activism or pansexual individuals who use TikTok, to gain a broader understanding into content creators' motivations and purposes of creating their content. This is important to examine, as understanding what types of activism resonate with the pansexual community, can help build effective strategies for the community.

Secondly, as previously discussed, this research was one of the first to explore intersectional identities among the pansexual community. This thesis explored specific experiences of those who identify as pansexual and gender diverse. Overall, it has captured an insight into the synergism between gender and sexuality. This was important for this

study, as previous research demonstrated that individuals who identify as transgender, non-binary and other gender diverse labels are more likely to identify with pansexual and queer labels (Katz-Wise et al., 2017). However, future research would benefit from exploring how other intersectional identities influence the experience of identifying as pansexual, such as race, age, class and disability (Collins & Bilge, 2016). Despite, previous research finding younger individuals are more likely to identify as pansexual (Galupo et al., 2015), the research demographics show that 20% of individuals who took part in the online qualitative survey were aged between 31-60. It's important that future research explores the lived experiences of older individuals who identify as pansexual, as it is likely their experiences are unique compared to younger individuals. This is due to older generations witnessing and living through a change in legislative action for LGBTQ+ individuals, and societal changes, such as increased awareness and acceptance of LGBTQ+ identities (French et al., 2020). It would be beneficial to understand elder individuals' experiences with their identity, and their journey with identifying as pansexual, due to it being understood as a 'contemporary' identity.

Alongside age, future research should also explore how race may factor into experiences of those who identify as pansexual. This research included participants who were mostly white British, thus there is limited knowledge about the distinct experiences of those who identify as pansexual from minority ethnic backgrounds. This is important to understand, as previous research has suggested that people who are LGBTQ and Black and/or Indigenous People of Colour (BIPOC) face multiple jeopardies in a culture that privileges whiteness and are invisible compared to LGBTQ+ white communities (Mosley et al., 2019). LGBTQ+ individuals of colour experience racism from white LGBTQ+ communities, in addition to homophobia and transphobia (Calabrese et al., 2015). Ghabrial (2019) explored

the experiences of bisexual and gender diverse people of colour and found that individuals often discussed not belonging or feeling discontented from their identity categories.

Exploring the experiences of pansexual individuals of colour is crucial, as they could have similar experiences to those who identify as other plurisexual identities (Ghabrial, 2019). It is important that this research is conducted to be able to offer tailored support to a marginalised community that has not yet been given voice.

7.9.2 Summary

This thesis offered insight into how pansexual individuals experience their identity within different interpersonal, relational, and online contexts. It contributes novel findings around how and why pansexual individuals may choose to mark their identity. As well as, capturing the unique experiences of those with intersectional marginalised identities. This thesis highlights that pansexuality is still primarily understood as an identity encompassing attraction to all genders, or attraction regardless of gender. Importantly, pansexuality was emphasised as a nuanced identity, and personal to those who use the label. Across participant accounts, it was clear that sexuality and identity labels are becoming more fluid, and reflective of individual choice and self-expression, in comparison to 'rigid' labels with definitive definitions. This is also evidenced with many participants in this study identifying with multiple labels to try to capture their identity. This offers insight into how sexuality is conceptualised in 2025, with gender and sexual orientation existing on a spectrum, and identity and expression becoming more fluid and nuanced.

A paradox emerges where, despite the increasing diversity in gender and sexuality, and individuals' ability to express themselves more freely, this visibility does not appear to

have alleviated the vulnerable experiences faced by pansexual individuals. This thesis continues to highlight that the pansexual community faces discrimination, stigma and the invisibility of their identity across various contexts of their lives. Some of these experiences, such as stereotyping and erasure from significant others in relationship settings, can be related to mononormative and heteronormative views, which instigates panphobia. However, one key finding in this thesis is the lack of information, representation and education around pansexuality, and gender diversity. Participant accounts revealed that this lack of understanding of their identity, influenced their decision regarding identity marking and disclosure. This often led to the erasure of their own identity, by strategically using other terminologies to accommodate other people's limited knowledge around pansexuality. This was even more complex for those who identified as pansexual and gender diverse, whereby participants often felt that their family members lacked in education and knowledge of their gender identity and diversity and needed time to adapt to a change in gender identification. With pansexual individuals outwardly acknowledging that their identity is still marginalised, many of them choose to engage in forms of activism to help promote their identity. Activism was particularly predominant through online contexts, and the platform TikTok, with users both sharing informative and educational content around pansexuality and producing material that centred on challenging stereotypes and prejudice among the pansexual community.

Overall, this highlights the importance of identity within the pansexual community, and how a lack of societal understanding is impacting on their experiences, throughout different contexts. Finally, this thesis captures how identity is evolving, and with this comes an urgent need for societal adaptation. As more individuals embrace diverse and fluid identities like pansexuality, it is crucial that both lay society and academic fields remain informed and inclusive. It is important to understand that this research goes beyond simply

‘adding’ to the field of LGBTQ+ psychology, but it actively prioritises social justice, through not only expanding knowledge of the pansexual community, but advocating for positive social change.

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Appendix A: Study 1: Survey Questions

Improving understanding around pansexual identities: Understanding the experiences of those who identify as pansexual.

**First, I would like to ask you a few questions about yourself.
What is your age?**

- Please specify here: _____
- I do not wish to disclose my age

Which best represents how you describe your current gender?

- Cisgender Female
- Cisgender Male
- Transgender Woman
- Transgender Man
- Gender Non-Binary, Gender Non-Conforming, Gender Queer.
- Not listed above, please specify here: _____
- I do not wish to disclose how I describe my current gender

What best describes your racial background or ethnic group?

- **White**
 1. English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British
 2. Irish
 3. Gypsy or Irish Traveller
 4. White European
- **Mixed/Multiple Ethnic Groups**
 1. White and Black Caribbean
 2. White and Black African
 3. White and Asian
- **Asian/Asian British**
 1. Indian
 2. Pakistani
 3. Bangladeshi
 4. Chinese
- **Black/African/Caribbean/Black British**
 1. African
 2. Caribbean
- **Arab/British**
 1. Arab

- Not Known
- Not listed above, please specify here: _____
- I do not wish to disclose my ethnicity

In what country do you currently live?

- Please specify here: _____
- I do not wish to disclose the country I currently live in

These next questions are about your personal understandings of the pansexual identity.

What does being pansexual mean to you personally?

In what ways do you believe the pansexual identity captures how you view gender and sexuality?

How inclusive do you feel the pansexuality identity is and why?

These next questions are about identifying as pansexual.

Can you describe any other identifications you may currently use or that you have used in the past to describe your sexual identity?

Can you describe why the pansexual identity encapsulates your current sexual identity more accurately than other plurisexual labels, such as bisexuality?

Can you describe how important it is to you that other individuals know that you identify as pansexual?

These next questions are about experiences relating to your pansexual identity within different social contexts.

Can you explain if you have ever had any experiences where you have chosen not to disclose your pansexual identity to others?

If you have chosen not to disclose your pansexual identity to others can you explain why? (and anything about the specific situation or context that stopped you from doing so)

Can you describe any experiences you may have had with your family regarding your pansexual identity. Comments could relate to outness/visibility/acceptance and could be positive or negative.

Can you describe any experiences you may have had with your friends regarding your pansexual identity, these can be positive or negative. Your following responses could include outness/visibility and acceptance of your identity.

Can you describe any experiences you may have had with colleagues or peers regarding your pansexual identity, these can be positive or negative. Your following responses could include outness/visibility and acceptance of your identity.

Can you describe any experiences you may have had with an intimate partner regarding your pansexual identity, these can be positive or negative. Your following responses could include outness/visibility and acceptance of your identity.

Can you describe any experiences you may have had within any groups or communities that you are a part of (for example, religious, political, LGBTIQ+ groups) regarding your pansexual identity, these can be positive or negative. Your following responses could include outness/visibility and acceptance of your identity.

If given the opportunity, how would you make the pansexual identity more widely known to individuals?

If given the opportunity, what message would you like to give people outside of the pansexual community regarding your identity?

If you have any final comments about your pansexual identity, please feel free to write them here.

Appendix B: Study 2: The Interview Guide

How do individuals who identify as pansexual and gender diverse experience their identity within different intimate relationships?

How would you describe your gender identity?

Has this changed over time, and if so, can you talk me through the developments or changes?

Thinking about your sexuality, how would you describe this?

How has this changed and developed over time?

Thinking about your sexual and gender identities, how do you feel these interconnect and influence one another?

How would you describe your relationships with those family members that are closest to you?

Thinking about experiences with family members you see most regularly, how supportive have they been in relation to your sexual and gender identity?

How able are you to be yourself around these family members, in terms of your gender and sexuality identity?

- To what extent do you feel accepted?

How have these experiences shaped your relationship with these family members?

Have your experiences differed between more immediate and extended family, if so in what ways?

How comfortable are you around your extended family (for example family members you don't see as frequently) in terms of your gender and sexuality?

Can you describe any experiences you may have had with extended family members that have impacted your relationship? This could involve acceptance, supportiveness etc.

Thinking about friendships, how important is the role of friendships in your life?

- In what ways are friends important

How important is it when you first meet and make new friends, that you share your identity early in the relationship?

Thinking about friendships, how important is it for you that your friends acknowledge and understand your identity?

Thinking about experiences with your friends, have you had any experiences of friends being unaccepting or unsupportive of your gender and/or sexual identity?

Has there been any significant events or moments that occurred within friendship groups that have been significant) in shaping your relationships?

When meeting new partners, how important is it for you that they recognise your identity early in the relationship?

If at all, how do you feel your gender and sexual identity shapes your relationships with intimate partners, and in what ways?

How have your previous intimate partners own gender and sexual identification shaped your relationship and experiences?

- How important do you feel the sexual and/or gender identity is of your intimate partner?

Have you ever had any experiences whereby you or your partners gender or sexual identity has changed while you have both been together?

- If so, can you explain how this shaped the dynamic of the relationship?
- Was there any supportive and accepting experiences through this?

Can you explain any experiences with a partner(s) relating to your gender and/or sexual identity that had a positive impact on your relationship?

Thinking about experiences with intimate partners, have you ever experienced someone who was unaccepting of your gender and/or sexual identity?

- If so, how did this impact the dynamic of your relationship?

Thinking about experiences you may have had with your family, friends, and intimate partners regarding language and pronoun use, for example, do they use the correct pronouns, or have you faced misgendering?

- How has this impacted your relationship?

Thinking about your gender and sexual identity, are any other experiences you have had with anyone else that you find to be a significant relationship in your life? These can be positive or negative.

- How has this made you feel?

Please describe, is there anything that you wish others knew and understood about your identity?

This is your final question and your opportunity to elaborate on any points that you have not discussed.

Appendix C: Study 1 Recruitment Message

“Hello, I am looking for individuals aged 18 or over who identify as pansexual to take part in an online questionnaire around their understandings and experiences relating to their identity. The questionnaire will take around 15-30 minutes. If you fit these criteria and are interested, please click the link below which will give you further information on this research”

Appendix D: Study 1 Participant Information Sheet

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Improving understanding around pansexual identities: Understanding the experiences of those who identify as pansexual.

STUDY BACKGROUND

You are being asked to take part in a research study on understanding the experiences of those who identify as pansexual. You will need to identify as pansexual for this study, as the aims of the study are based around personal experiences and understandings of identifying as pansexual. This study is led by a PhD student (Emily Harvey), who is conducting this research as one of their PhD studies. This research is being supervised by Dr Keeley Abbot, Dr Samuel Parker and Dr Mariel Marcano-Olivier, who all have wide-ranging experience in conducting psychological research. This project has been approved by the Psychology Research Ethics Committee.

WHAT WILL YOU NEED TO DO?

In this study, you will be asked to complete an online survey on the platform Qualtrics. There will be 15 open-ended questions around your personal understandings of pansexuality, identifying as pansexual and experiences relating to your pansexual identity within different social contexts. This questionnaire can take anything from 10-20 minutes to complete, and you can answer questions in as much detail as you would like. This includes not answering any questions you don't feel comfortable answering.

WHO IS ELIGIBLE TO TAKE PART?

Anyone who is 18 or over and identifies as pansexual. You may use multiple terms to describe your sexuality, but pansexuality must be one of them. Anyone younger than 18 and does not identify as pansexual cannot take part in this study.

HOW LONG WILL THE STUDY LAST?

On average, this study takes 10-20 minutes.

ARE THERE ANY RISKS OF TAKING PART?

As this study involves personal experiences of identity, which can be a sensitive topic for some participants, there may be a small amount of psychological harm. If you do feel unsettled during the study, you can leave the survey at any time by either clicking the escape button or the withdraw button at the bottom of the page. If you feel unsettled after the study contacts will be provided on the debrief sheet and below.

WHO TO CONTACT IF YOU ARE AFFECTED BY THE TOPIC OR CONTENT OF THIS STUDY

Samaritans 116 123 <https://www.samaritans.org>

MindOut 01273 234839 <https://mindout.org.uk>

LGBT Foundation 03453303030 <https://lgbt.foundation>

ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS OF TAKING PART?

Although there are no direct benefits from taking part, it is hoped that your participation can aid further research around the pansexual identity and start a positive framework for LGBTQ+ Psychology becoming more inclusive of all sexualities.

YOUR RIGHT TO WITHDRAW AND WITHHOLD INFORMATION

In line with the regulations outlined by the British Psychological Society, you can stop being a part of the research study at any time without explanation. You are still entitled to the same benefits as an individual who completes the study. You can withdraw during the study by either clicking the escape button on the browser, or the withdraw button at the bottom of the screen. By clicking that option, you will then be taken straight to the debrief sheet. You can also have your data withdrawn from the time you complete until 06/01/23, a week after data collection has ended. You will need to contact myself within this time with your personal ID code, which you will have designed at the start of the survey. This allows me to withdraw your data. During the study, you also have the right to not answer any questions you do not feel comfortable answering and the detail you provide in your answers is completely your decision.

YOUR RIGHT TO CONFIDENTIALITY/ANONYMITY

The study will not involve the collection of any personal information about you except your age, gender identity and ethnicity and country you live in. Any personal information given will be unidentifiable to an external party – Your name, signature and any other identifiable information will be kept separately from the main study data, which will be stored confidentially, using a personalised ID code. You will be given instructions on how to produce this at the beginning of the study. You will need to keep this if you wish to withdraw your data after your survey has been completed.

All data will be stored in accordance with the University's data protection policy. Data will be anonymised and may be shared between the primary researcher and the supervisor, but it will not be possible to identify your data at any point. The data will be kept until the degree classification has been awarded, after which point it will be kept in line with the University's data protection policy. If you decide you would like to withdraw your data before 06/01/23 you will be asked to provide the personal ID code created at the start of the questionnaire and contact me by email to do so.

WHO IS ORGANISING THE RESEARCH?

You can contact me or my supervisor if you require further information or wish to withdraw.

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Samuel Parker – Samuel.parker@bcu.ac.uk

Mariel Marcano-Olivier Mariel.marcano-olivier@bcu.ac.uk

If you are unhappy at any point in the study, or if there is a problem, please contact the Psychology Department Research ethics committee directly at psychethics@bcu.ac.uk.

Appendix E: Study 1 Consent Form

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Improving understanding around pansexual identities: Understanding the experiences of those who identify as pansexual.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF PROJECT

You are being asked to take part in a research study on understanding the experiences of those who identify as pansexual. You will need to identify as pansexual for this study, as the aims of the study are based around personal experiences and understandings of identifying as pansexual.

In order to participate in this study, we need to ensure that you understand the nature of the research, as outlined on the Participant Information page.

Please tick the boxes to indicate that you understand and agree to the following conditions.

I confirm that I have read the information sheet for this study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily. ☐

I understand that in order to take part in this study, I must be aged 18 or over and identify as pansexual. ☐

I understand that personal data about me will be collected for the purposes of the research study including age, gender identity and ethnicity and that these will be processed in accordance with the information sheet. ☐

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time during the study and have until the 06/01/22 to withdraw the data after I have finished the study. ☐

I understand that my data is anonymous and will be stored on secure university servers. ☐

I understand that my data will only be used by the investigators for research purposes and that there is a possibility this research will be presented at conferences or published in journal publications. ☐

I agree to take part in this study ☐

PLEASE CREATE A PERSONAL IDENTIFIER CODE:

This should be made up of the first and last letter of your favourite food and then 3 random numbers of your choice.

Appendix F: Study 1 Debrief Sheet

DEBRIEFING SHEET

Improving understanding around pansexual identities: Understanding the experiences of those who identify as pansexual.

Thank you for taking part in this study! Your time is really appreciated.

SUMMARY OF PROJECT

You were asked to take part in a research study which seeks to understand the experiences of those who identify as pansexual. Over recent years, there has been an increase in individuals identifying as sexualities other than traditional and popular identities such as lesbian, gay and bisexual. Pansexuality is one of the most popular identifications that has emerged, and people are now identifying with. Psychological research however has lacked a contemporary understanding of sex, gender and sexual identities that are reflected today. Therefore, this research has been conducted to aid the emergence of LGBTQ+ Psychology becoming inclusive of all sexualities.

WHO TO CONTACT IF YOU ARE AFFECTED BY THE TOPIC OR CONTENT OF THIS STUDY

As topics discussed during this research can be quite sensitive, you can contact:

MindOut by calling 0300 123 3393 (<https://www.mind.org.uk>)

Samaritans on 116 123 (<https://www.samaritans.org>)

The LGBT Foundation on 03453303030 (<https://lgbt.foundation>).

If you are a student from Birmingham City University you can also contact the university counselling service via 0121 331 5188.

KEEPING IN TOUCH

This research has been conducted as part of a PhD research project. The results of this study will be discussed during academic conferences and publication of my thesis. If you would like to find out the results of this study, you can email me at emily.harvey@mail.bcu.ac.uk. If you wish to withdraw your data, you can happily do so any time from when you have completed your survey until 06/01/23. Please email me with your personal ID code that you created at the beginning of the survey, whereby I will then be able to withdraw your data from the research.

ANY MORE QUESTIONS?

We hope that you enjoyed participating in this study. If you have any further questions, please feel free to contact the researchers at the address below.

Miss Emily Harvey – Emily.harvey@mail.bcu.ac.uk

Dr Keeley Abbott – Keeley.Abbott@bcu.ac.uk

Dr Samuel Parker – Samuel.parker@bcu.ac.uk

Dr Mariel Marcano-Olivier Mariel.Marcano.Olivier@bcu.ac.uk

If you are unhappy at any point in the study, or if there is a problem, please contact the Psychology Department Research ethics committee directly at psychethics@bcu.ac.uk.

Appendix G: Study 2 Recruitment Poster

Do you identify as pansexual?
Do you identify as non-binary, transgender, or
gender diverse?
Are you aged 18 or over?
Do you currently live in the UK?



I am looking for participants to take part in an online interview around experiences within intimate relationships relating to their identity (family, friends and intimate partners)

The online interview should take 30-60 minutes and will be held on Microsoft Teams or over the phone.



If you are interested please email me at emily.harvey@mail.bcu.ac.uk
For further information

Appendix H: Study 2 Participant Information Sheet

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Understanding the experiences of those who identify as pansexual and gender diverse.

STUDY BACKGROUND

You are being asked to take part in a research study on understanding the lived experiences in those who identify as pansexual and gender diverse. You will need to identify as pansexual and gender diverse (not cis-gender) for this study, as the aims of the study are based around personal experiences around identity throughout different intimate relationships, for example these include family, friends and intimate partners. This study is led by a PhD student (Emily Harvey), who is conducting this research as one of their PhD studies. This research is being supervised by Dr Keeley Abbot, Dr Samuel Parker and Dr Mariel Marciano-Olivier, who all have wide-ranging experience in conducting psychological research. This project has been approved by the Business, Law and Social Sciences Ethics Committee.

WHAT WILL YOU NEED TO DO?

In this study, you will be asked to complete an online interview which can either be held on Microsoft Teams and via an online phone call. This interview will be audio only, whereby neither your camera or the researchers will be turned on. There will be 28 open ended questions around your experiences relating to your identity within different intimate relationships. These include experiences with your family, friends and intimate partners. Some example questions include "Thinking about experiences with family members you see most regularly, how supportive have they been in terms of your gender and sexual identity?", "When meeting new partners, how important is it for you that they recognise your identity early in the relationship?". The interview will take about 30-60 minutes to complete, and you can answer questions in as much detail or as little as you would like. You have the right not to answer any questions you do not want to and have a right to withdraw from the study completely at any time during the interview.

WHO IS ELIGIBLE TO TAKE PART?

Anyone who is 18 or over, identifies as pansexual and gender diverse. You may use multiple terms to describe your sexuality, but pansexuality must be one of them. Anyone younger than 18, does not identify as pansexual and anyone who identifies as cis-gender cannot take part in this study.

HOW LONG WILL THE STUDY LAST?

On average, this study takes 30-60 minutes.

ARE THERE ANY RISKS OF TAKING PART?

As this study involves personal experiences of identity, which can be a sensitive topic for some participants, there may be a small amount of psychological harm. If you do feel unsettled during the study, you can ask for the interview to be stopped at any point. If you feel unsettled after the study contacts will be provided on the debrief sheet and below.

WHO TO CONTACT IF YOU ARE AFFECTED BY THE TOPIC OR CONTENT OF THIS STUDY

Samaritans 116 123 <https://www.samaritans.org> = Samaritans offer support to anyone who is struggling to cope, or who needs someone to listen without judgement or pressure. They offer an 24hr online and telephone support service.

MindOut 01273 234839 <https://mindout.org.uk> = MindOut offer support for individuals of the LGBTQ+ community experiencing mental health concerns, they offer online chat services 24hrs a day.

LGBT Foundation 03453303030 <https://lgbt.foundation> = LGBT Foundation deliver advice, support, and information services to LGBTQ+ individuals. Online and phone services available.

ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS OF TAKING PART?

Although there are no direct benefits from taking part, it is hoped that your participation can aid further research around the pansexual identity and start a positive framework for LGBTQ+ Psychology becoming more inclusive of all sexualities and gender identifications.

YOUR RIGHT TO WITHDRAW AND WITHHOLD INFORMATION

In line with the regulations outlined by the British Psychological Society, you can stop being a part of the research study at any time without explanation. You are still entitled to the same benefits as an individual who completes the study. You can withdraw during the study at any point by asking for the interview to be stopped, the researcher will then stop the interview. You will then be emailed a debrief sheet. You can also have your data withdrawn from the time you complete the interview until 07/12/2023 a week after data collection has ended. You will need to contact myself within this time with your pseudonym, which you will have designed on the demographic information sheet. This allows me to withdraw your data. During the study, you also have the right to not answer any questions you do not feel comfortable answering and the detail you provide in your answers is completely your decision.

YOUR RIGHT TO CONFIDENTIALITY/ANONYMITY

The study will not involve the collection of any personal information about you except your age, gender identity and ethnicity. Any personal information given will be unidentifiable to an external party – Your name, signature and any other identifiable information will be kept separately from the main study data, which will be stored confidentially, using your pseudonym. You will be given instructions on how to produce this on the demographic information sheet. You will need to keep this if you wish to withdraw your data after your interview has been completed.

All data will be stored in accordance with the University's data protection policy. Data will be anonymised and may be shared between the primary researcher and the supervisor, but it will not be possible to identify your data at any point. The data will be kept until the degree classification has been awarded, after which point it will be kept in line with the University's data protection policy. If you decide you would like to withdraw your data before 07/12/2023 you will be asked to provide the pseudonym created on the demographic information sheet and contact me by email to do so.

WHO IS ORGANISING THE RESEARCH?

You can contact me or my supervisor if you require further information or wish to withdraw.

Emily Harvey – Emily.harvey@mail.bcu.ac.uk

Dr Keeley Abbott – Keeley.abbott@bcu.ac.uk

Dr Samuel Parker – Samuel.parker@bcu.ac.uk

Dr Mariel Marciano-Olivier Mariel.marciano-olivier@bcu.ac.uk

If you are unhappy at any point in the study, or if there is a problem, please contact the Business, Law and Social Sciences Ethics Committee directly at BLSSethics@bcu.ac.uk.

Appendix I: Study 2 Consent Form

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Understanding the lived experiences in those who identify as pansexual and gender diverse

BRIEF SUMMARY OF PROJECT

You are being asked to take part in a research study on understanding the lived experiences in those who identify as pansexual and gender diverse. You will need to identify as pansexual and gender diverse (not cis-gender) for this study, as the aims of the study are based around personal experiences around identity within different intimate relationships, for example family, friends and intimate partners.

Please tick the boxes to indicate that you understand and agree to the following conditions.

I confirm that I have read the information sheet for this study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily. ☐

I understand that in order to take part in this study, I must be aged 18 or over, identify as pansexual and identify as gender diverse. ☐

I understand that personal data about me will be collected for the purposes of the research study including age, gender identity and ethnicity and that these will be processed in accordance with the information sheet. ☐

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason. ☐

I understand that my data is anonymous and will be stored on secure university servers. ☐

I understand that my data will only be used by the investigators for research purposes and that there is a possibility this research will be presented at conferences or published in journal publications. ☐

I agree to take part in this study ☐

Please Sign Your Signature Underneath

Date Signed

__/__/__

Appendix J: Study 2 Demographic Information Sheet

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SHEET

Understanding the lived experiences in those who identify as pansexual and gender diverse.

How would you best define your current gender identification?

Please describe here:

How would you best define your sexual identification?

Please describe here:

How would you describe your racial background or ethnicity?

Please describe here:

What is your age?

Please specify here:

PLEASE CREATE YOUR PSEUDONYM:

This should be any fake name, that isn't your own full name, shortened name or nickname. For example, if your name is Jonathan, you should not pick John, Jon, Johnny, Jonny... Make a note of this name in case you want to withdraw from this study in the future.

Appendix K: Study 2 Debrief Sheet

DEBRIEFING SHEET

Understanding the experiences of those who identify as pansexual and gender diverse.

Thank you for taking part in this study! Your time is really appreciated.

SUMMARY OF PROJECT

You were asked to take part in a research study which seeks to understand the experiences of those who identify as pansexual and gender diverse. Over recent years, there has been an increase in individuals identifying as sexualities other than traditional and popular identities such as lesbian, gay and bisexual. Pansexuality is one of the most popular identifications that has emerged, and people are now identifying with. In addition, as gender is being increasingly seen as more of a spectrum, compared to a binary, many individuals are now identifying with non-binary identifications. Psychological research however has lacked a contemporary understanding of sex, gender identities that are reflected today. Therefore, this research has been conducted to aid the emergence of LGBTQ+ Psychology becoming inclusive of all sexualities.

WHO TO CONTACT IF YOU ARE AFFECTED BY THE TOPIC OR CONTENT OF THIS STUDY

As topics discussed during this research can be quite sensitive, you can contact:

MindOut by calling 0300 123 3393 (<https://www.mind.org.uk>)

Samaritans on 116 123 (<https://www.samaritans.org>)

The LGBT Foundation on 03453303030 (<https://lgbt.foundation>).

If you are a student from Birmingham City University you can also contact the university counselling service via 0121 331 5188.

KEEPING IN TOUCH

This research has been conducted as part of a PhD research project. The results of this study will be discussed during academic conferences and publication of my thesis. If you would like to find out the results of this study, you can email me at emily.harvey@mail.bcu.ac.uk. If you wish to withdraw your data, you can happily do so any time from when you have completed your survey until 07/12/2023. Please email me with your pseudonym that you created on the demographic information sheet, whereby I will then be able to withdraw your data from the research.

ANY MORE QUESTIONS?

We hope that you enjoyed participating in this study. If you have any further questions, please feel free to contact the researchers at the address below.

Miss Emily Harvey – Emily.harvey@mail.bcu.ac.uk

Dr Keeley Abbott – Keeley.Abbott@bcu.ac.uk

Dr Samuel Parker – Samuel.parker@bcu.ac.uk

Dr Mariel Marcano-Olivier Mariel.Marcano.Olivier@bcu.ac.uk

If you are unhappy at any point in the study, or if there is a problem, please contact the Business, Law and Social Sciences Ethics Committee directly at BLSSethics@bcu.ac.uk

If you have any questions, comments, or concerns about how we use or handle your information please contact the Data Protection Officer at: Data Protection Officer, Information Management Team, Birmingham City University, University House, 15

Appendix L: Study 1 Coding Sheet Sample

Research Question: How do individuals who identify as pansexual mark their sexuality throughout different contexts?

- Only talks about it with close friends
- Only talks about it when feels safe
- Would tell people about sexuality if felt safe
- Only tell people they care about
- Doesn't tell everyone, due to not knowing reactions of other people
- Acknowledgment of pan being a scrutinised and less understood identity by other people, influences coming out
- Will tell close friends, romantic interests.
- Will tell close friends as it makes the relationship more honest
- Will tell family and friends, so they understand themselves as a whole
- Only important for partners to know their identity.
- Will come out to who they feel appropriate, depending on what reaction they think they will get.
- Frequency of someone being around influences them coming out
- Intimate partners, family and friends should know
- Share with those who are close
- Only wants people they care about to know their identity
- Potential partners should know identity.
- Motives for telling ppl differ depending on situation
- Would tell someone if they were a potential partner
- Important that friends know identity and are accepting of it.
- Will tell people online as they can't hurt them.
- Come out Dependent on safety
- Likes to gauge people's understandings before disclosing
- Wants to ensure own safety
- Not trusting people are going to. Be accepting
- Not safe or necessary to come out
- Not important that other ppl know their identity
- Doesn't feel need to come out, why should pan ppl come out if straight people don't have too.
- Open about sexuality, but doesn't feel the need to tell everyone
- Doesn't see coming out as a big deal
- Doesn't always disclose as wants their identity to be more than just their sexuality
- People outside of family and close people don't care about them knowing identity.
- Doesn't feel need to come out to people but will talk about it if come up in conversation.
- Doesn't care if people know, but will hint on social media
- Isn't important for people to know
- Even if people ask for identity, doesn't feel a need to disclose.
- Not important to tell people, doesn't want to have to educate people.
- Went bring up out the blue, as don't like labels But will talk about it if its brought up.
- Doesn't disclose sexuality as just doesn't think its important for people to know
- POLITICAL ELEMENT RESPONSIBILITY

Will tell people they are close too and feels safe

Not important for everyone to know,

- HISTORICAL, POLITICAL, SOCIAL
- Wants to come out to others so people know they can be comfortable around them
- Wants to come out to show representation and visibility
- Important to come out as its educational to those who don't understand
- Will inform people of identity, to educate them if they don't know what it is.
- Important to come out for visibility of identity
- Important to come out to educate and inspire other people
-
- Wants people to know, as in a straight passing relationship and experience erasure.
- Identity confuses people due to being in a straight passing relationship
- Assumes straight heteronormativity
- People assume they're straight due to cis boyfriend

Wants to come out to show visibility

Straight passing relationships

POLITICAL AGAIN!!

Appendix M: Study 2 Coding Sheet Sample

- I will bring up the asexual as soon as possible, as that's not people are normally looking for. It's a big thing that could affect relationship.
- Relationships wise identity is first thing I mention. The last thing I want is to find out they wouldn't be with a trans person or have transphobic views. Waste of time and emotional effort.

Relationship Pressures/Experiences

Physical/intimacy needs/understandings

- I need a partner that understands me, and understands how gender dysphoria works and affects me for example where they can and cant touch.
- Trans guys have understood gender dysphoria over cis people. But being with another trans person when your both experience mental health issues is hard.
- And if I was with another trans guy that had surgery and I haven't, its almost jealousy. And realising im not where I want to be.
- Theres extra communication needs and understanding, my partner had only ever been with cis men before me, so it was a learning curve for him to understand my intimacy needs.
- When I had top surgery that had a positive impact on relationships, I felt more confident, and for my partner my body aligned more with what he was used to (As a gay man).
- One big experience was I used to wear my binder even to sleep as I was uncomfrtable without it, but one relationship I felt comfortable to not have to wear it. That was cool as it was first time I felt 100% comfortable to do that, I felt safe
- You have to feel comfortable with a partner, especially when body issues are present. I have boundaries etc.
- I will be a lot firmer with boundaries and who I am now, I am queer and trans and those things are non-negotiable, they have to understand.
- Own identity being (pannromantic, asexual) shapes relationship, not wanting to be intimate, wants partners to understand that.

Experiences of identity formation/changing/devolping during relationship settings.

- Experiences of partners pronouns changing, readjusting the relationship. Social restraints, new boundaries. Working together.
- Change in sexuality or names etc, handled well and respect in the relationship.
- First relationship when I was transitioning, she was almost grieving or whatever over me. Eventhough im exact same person. Strained relationship,
- Ex partner was once questioning their own gender, as I had been through that and did research was able to help them through it
- Got with my current partner and was figuring out my sexuality, I was honest and they were accepting.
- I was nervous to tell them I was NB, but they were accepting. Was lucky to keep my partner through it all.
- Relationships can be different depending on the gender you meet.
- Originally with partner I first identified as female and so did they, then I transitioned to NB. I was learning about my gender while in relationship.
- Previous partner was very good with change of name and pronouns, shocked due to age.

Appendix N: Study 3 Coding Sheet Sample



Appendix O: Study 1 Ethical Approval



Faculty of Business, Law & Social Sciences Research Office Curzon Building, 4 Cardigan Street
Birmingham
B4 7BD

BLSSethics@bcu.ac.uk;

06/Jul/2022

Miss Emily Harvey Emily.harvey@mail.bcu.ac.uk

Dear Emily ,

Re:Harvey/#10709/sub2/R(A)/2022/Jul/BLSSFAEC -
Improving understanding around pansexual identities: Understanding the experiences of those who identify as pansexual.

Thank you for your application and documentation regarding the above activity. I am pleased to take Chair's Action and approve this activity.

Provided that you are granted Permission of Access by relevant parties (meeting requirements as laid out by them), you may begin your activity.

I can also confirm that any person participating in the project is covered under the University's insurance arrangements.

Please note that ethics approval only covers your activity as it has been detailed in your ethics application. If you wish to make any changes to the activity, then you must submit an Amendment application for approval of the proposed changes.

Examples of changes include (but are not limited to) adding a new study site, a new method of participant recruitment, adding a new method of data collection and/or change of Project Lead.

Please also note that the Business, Law and Social Sciences Faculty Academic Ethics Committee should be notified of any serious adverse effects arising as a result of this activity.

If for any reason the Committee feels that the activity is no longer ethically sound, it reserves the right to withdraw its approval. In the unlikely event of issues arising which would lead to this, you will be consulted.

Keep a copy of this letter along with the corresponding application for your records as evidence of approval.

If you have any queries, please contact BLSSethics@bcu.ac.uk;

If you would like to provide feedback on the ethics process, please complete the feedback form using [this link](#). I wish you every success with your activity.

Yours Sincerely,

Dr Sophie Drennan

On behalf of the Business, Law and Social Sciences Faculty Academic Ethics Committee

Page 1 of 1

Appendix P: Study 2 Ethical Approval



Faculty of Business, Law & Social Sciences Research Office Curzon Building, 4 Cardigan Street
Birmingham
B4 7BD

BLSSethics@bcu.ac.uk;

14/Mar/2023

Miss Emily Harvey Emily.harvey@mail.bcu.ac.uk

Dear Emily,

Re:Harvey/#11484/sub2/R(A)/2023/Mar/BLSSFAEC -

PansexualandGenderDiverseIdentities:ExperiencesofIdentityWithinIntimateRelationships

Thank you for your application and documentation regarding the above activity. I am pleased to take Chair's Action and approve this activity.

However, please be aware that part of the information for how to contact the Data Protection Officer was cut off from the debrief form and should be fully added before it is sent out to participants:

If you have any questions, comments or concerns about how we use or handle your information please contact the Data Protection Officer at: Data Protection Officer, Information Management Team, Birmingham City University, University House, 15 Bartholomew Row, Birmingham B5 5JU, email informationmanagement@bcu.ac.uk or call +44 (0) 121 331 5288.

Provided that you are granted Permission of Access by relevant parties (meeting requirements as laid out by them), you may begin your activity. I can also confirm that any person participating in the project is covered under the University's insurance arrangements.

Please note that ethics approval only covers your activity as it has been detailed in your ethics application. If you wish to make any changes to the activity, then you must submit an Amendment application for approval of the proposed changes.

Examples of changes include (but are not limited to) adding a new study site, a new method of participant recruitment, adding a new method of data collection and/or change of Project Lead.

Please also note that the Business, Law and Social Sciences Faculty Academic Ethics Committee should be notified of any serious adverse effects arising as a result of this activity.

If for any reason the Committee feels that the activity is no longer ethically sound, it reserves the right to withdraw its approval. In the unlikely event of issues arising which would lead to this, you will be consulted.

Keep a copy of this letter along with the corresponding application for your records as evidence of approval.

If you have any queries, please contact BLSSethics@bcu.ac.uk;

If you would like to provide feedback on the ethics process, please complete the feedback form using [this link](#). I wish you every success with your activity.

Yours Sincerely,

Dr. Angela Hewett

On behalf of the Business, Law and Social Sciences Faculty Academic Ethics Committee

Appendix Q: Study 3 Ethical Approval



Faculty of Business, Law & Social Sciences Research Office Curzon Building, 4 Cardigan Street
Birmingham
B4 7BD

BLSSethics@bcu.ac.uk;

23/May/2023

Miss Emily Harvey Emily.harvey@mail.bcu.ac.uk

Dear Emily ,
Re:Harvey/#11737/sub2/R(B)/2023/May/BLSSFAEC -
ThePansexualIdentity:TheUseofTiktokinConveyingIdentityRelatedInformation

Thank you for your application and documentation regarding the above activity. I am pleased to take Chair's Action and approve this activity.

Provided that you are granted Permission of Access by relevant parties (meeting requirements as laid out by them), you may begin your activity.

I can also confirm that any person participating in the project is covered under the University's insurance arrangements.

Please note that ethics approval only covers your activity as it has been detailed in your ethics application. If you wish to make any changes to the activity, then you must submit an Amendment application for approval of the proposed changes.

Examples of changes include (but are not limited to) adding a new study site, a new method of participant recruitment, adding a new method of data collection and/or change of Project Lead.

Please also note that the Business, Law and Social Sciences Faculty Academic Ethics Committee should be notified of any serious adverse effects arising as a result of this activity.

If for any reason the Committee feels that the activity is no longer ethically sound, it reserves the right to withdraw its approval. In the unlikely event of issues arising which would lead to this, you will be consulted.

Keep a copy of this letter along with the corresponding application for your records as evidence of approval.

If you have any queries, please contact BLSSethics@bcu.ac.uk;
If you would like to provide feedback on the ethics process, please complete the feedback form using [this link](#). I wish you every success with your activity.

Yours Sincerely,
Dr Ivana Babicova

On behalf of the Business, Law and Social Sciences Faculty Academic Ethics Committee

Page 1 of 1

Appendix R: Published Journal Article

“Context and safety are everything”: Exploring how pansexual individuals mark and express their identity.

Abstract

Sexuality marking serves to assert one’s sexuality to others. This can be done through language, behaviour, aesthetics, and/or other non-verbal cues (Morgan et al., 2016). This research explored how individuals who identify as pansexual mark their sexuality within different contexts. An online qualitative survey was completed by 45 participants aged between 18 and 58. Thematic analysis revealed 3 key themes: ‘You just don’t want to risk it’: The importance of safety on sexuality marking, ‘My sexuality wasn’t real’: Dismissal and stereotyping of the pansexual identity within intimate partner relationships, and ‘I’m very loud and proud’. This research is understood to be the first study on sexuality marking among the pansexual community and advances the understanding of the ways in which pansexual individuals navigate and express their identity.

Keywords: Pansexuality, Plurisexuality, Sexuality Marking, Thematic Analysis.

Introduction

Plurisexual¹ individuals, defined as those who are attracted to more than one gender, may have distinct experiences compared to those who identify as exclusively monosexual (Galupo et al., 2014). Pansexuality is a plurisexual identity that has become increasingly utilised over the last decade (Belous & Bauman, 2017). Rice (2015) suggests that pansexuality has come to refer to attraction to anyone regardless of gender expression, gender identity, or biological sex, but also acknowledges that use of the term is debated, nuanced, and may depend on the personalised meanings individuals attach to their identity (Hayfield 2020).

For LGBTQ+ individuals ‘coming out’, or disclosing their sexual identity, has been viewed as a critical part of one’s identity journey (Williams, 2015). Historically, ‘coming out’ was understood as the initial disclosure of sexual identity, however, Mohr and Fassinger (2000) argue that disclosure of one’s identity is often an ongoing process in an LGBTQ+ individual’s lifetime, rather than a one-off event. For plurisexual individuals, ‘coming out’ may be influenced by different factors than those who identify as monosexual. For example, McLean (2007) suggests that bisexual individuals do not always see coming out as a necessary act, and instead may conceal their identity to protect themselves from bisexual stereotyping and bi-negativity. Wandrey et al. (2015) found that some bisexual individuals reject previous ‘coming out’ imperatives, and instead, choose to disclose identity in a more casual and natural manner, through everyday conversations. This casual expression of disclosing one’s identity can be related to sexuality marking, a contemporary term relating to the communication of one’s identity. The present study expands upon previous research by specifically exploring sexuality

¹ We use the term ‘plurisexual’ instead of ‘nonmonosexual’ throughout the article because it does not linguistically assume monosexual as the ideal conceptualization of sexuality

marking within the pansexual community, who may mark sexuality differently to other plurisexual identities.

Sexuality Marking

Sexuality marking serves to assert one's sexuality to others, through language, behaviour, aesthetics, and/or other non-verbal cues (Morgan et al., 2016; Pecora et al., 2019). To date, only a limited number of studies have investigated sexuality marking among individuals who identify as plurisexual (e.g. Gonzalez et al., 2017, Kolker et al., 2020). Gonzalez et al. (2017) analysed 53 video confessionals associated with the #stillbisexual campaign to explore the ways in which bisexual individuals marked and expressed their bisexuality. They found that within these videos individuals marked their sexuality to make their bisexuality visible and specifically to show that they were not heterosexual or homosexual. In doing so Gonzalez et al. (2017) suggest that this marking functioned to oppose normative assumptions of heterosexism and monosexism and to also challenge stereotypes of bisexual individuals as 'confused' or 'in between'.

Kolker et al. (2020) examined how individuals who identify specifically as queer mark and make sense of their identity. They demonstrated how their survey respondents would often mark their queer identity strategically and use the term queer with non-LGBTQ+ individuals as a way of avoiding explaining other plurisexual labels, and the reasons for choosing one label over another (Kolker et al., 2020). Participants were motivated to mark their identity in environments that they perceived as "comfortable", identifying as queer most commonly around friends and those of a similar age (Kolker et al., 2020).

The influence of context on coming out

Orne (2011) argues that coming out is a process of identity management and emphasises the role of context and social relationships in this process. One reason for this is that identity development and coming out is an ongoing and selective process (Balsam & Mohr, 2007). Loftus (2001) suggests that coming out is not only dependent on the specific contexts, (e.g. within the family), but also to the emotions felt within these contexts. Belmonte and Holmes (2016) investigated these emotions further, specifically focussing on the ways lesbian and bisexual women navigate their identity in different contexts. Both groups described feeling accepted in LGBTQ+ and allied spaces. However, bisexual participants were more likely than lesbian participants to describe negative environments and characterise these as rejecting and unsafe. The bisexual participants were also less open and described more negative feelings about their sexual identity than lesbians. Belmonte and Holmes's (2016) research thus points to differences between plurisexual and monosexual groups in terms of the specific contexts where sexuality marking may occur and suggests that further work is needed to understand both the reason for this, and the lived experiences within these settings.

Feinstein et al. (2023) investigated sexual minority youths' outness and disclosure within different settings. In contrast to previous research, their participants varied in sexual and gendered identities, including pansexual, asexual, non-binary and transgender individuals. Feinstein et al (2023) found that their participants who identified as pansexual were less likely to come out in settings involving family, LGBTQ+ peers and school contexts, compared to lesbian and gay individuals. The present research will contribute to this literature by qualitatively exploring pansexual individuals' experiences within different contexts, and identity marking within these settings.

Research on pansexuality

Data from the latest UK Census (2021), which was the first to include a question about sexual orientation shows that 48,000 people stated that they identified as pansexual. Despite the increase in individuals identifying as pansexual (Belous & Bauman, 2017), and it being recognised in surveys such as the UK Census, there is a lack of research that focuses on the lived experiences and identity marking of this group. What has been identified in the literature is that those who identify as pansexual tend to be predominantly younger individuals, compared to those who identify as lesbian and gay Morandini et al. (2016). Katz-Wise et al. (2015) suggest that those who identify as gender-queer, non-binary and transgender are more likely to adopt more non-traditional identities, such as both pansexual and queer identities. Indeed, Elizabeth (2013) argues that gender-queer individuals may resonate with pansexual and queer labels because they promote fluidity and go against binary domains.

When pansexual individuals have been included in studies, pansexuality is rarely distinguished from other plurisexual identities, and is consequently often treated as a single homogenous group by psychological researchers (Callis, 2014). This is often referred to as the 'bisexual umbrella'. Identifying under the bisexual umbrella affords people who identify with a wide range of identities, a collective sense of belonging and as such, an identity through which individuals can gain a sense of empowerment and advocacy (Nutter-pridgen, 2015). Conversely, subsuming all plurisexual identities together can obscure important differences, such as how individuals understand and experience their identity (Flanders, 2017; Swan, 2018). This can cause invalidation and erasure of discrete identities, as well as in-group differences being left unexplored (Hayfield, 2020). For example, those who identify as pansexual may experience unique types of discrimination, often known as 'panphobia' (Bower-Brown et al., 2023). When it comes to identity marking however, the pansexual community have been underrepresented in the literature. Whilst we could extrapolate from research on other plurisexual identities, it is important not to assume experiences of identity marking are the same.

Hayfield and Křížová's (2021) findings support this argument, in which they found that pansexual individuals considered their identity to be unique from other plurisexual identities. They considered themselves to be educated and enlightened on gender and sexuality, frequently having to explain pansexuality to other people, an experience they viewed as tiring. The authors also showed that pansexual individuals used terminology (bisexuality and pansexuality) strategically and in context dependent ways (Hayfield & Křížová, 2021). This strategic use of different plurisexual labels will be explored further in the present study, to understand why, and in what specific contexts, pansexual individuals may strategically be marking their sexuality.

The present research

How individuals who identify as pansexual mark and express their sexuality has largely been ignored in previous literature. This study offers a nuanced approach to exploring the complexity of sexuality marking and outness within different contexts for individuals who identify as pansexual. With evidence suggesting that individuals who identify as pansexual are more likely to identify as non-binary gender identities, compared those of other plurisexualities such as bisexuality (Belous & Bauman, 2017), it is essential that the synergism between sexuality and gender is acknowledged. Such distinctions in attraction and identity may result in unique forms of sexuality marking, which have not yet been researched. In light of this, the current research builds on the work of Hayfield & Křížová, (2021) and more specifically, suggestions for research that explores the more contextualised nature of identity marking and experience in those who identify as pansexual. As such, we add to the literature on sexuality

marking among the pansexual community by addressing the research question: How do individuals who identify as pansexual mark their sexuality within different contexts?

Method

Design and Participants

We utilised a qualitative approach, as this allows for an in-depth exploration of participant's experiences and meanings (Braun & Clarke, 2013), which is essential, as LGBTQ+ psychology has previously underrepresented the pansexual population (Hayfield, 2020). By exploring and understanding how pansexual individuals may mark their sexuality, it gives voice to pansexual individuals, and importantly, validates their experiences. An online qualitative survey, distributed via Qualtrics, was utilised for this study. The survey consisted of 16 questions, ranging from questions around individual identity understanding and expression (e.g. what does being pansexual mean to you personally?), sexuality marking and individuals' experiences of outness and disclosure (e.g. 'can you explain if you have ever had any experiences where you have chosen not to disclose your pansexual identity to others?'), and questions based around experiences within specific social/relational contexts (family, friends, colleagues or peers, intimate partners and any other communities' participants may be a part of). All survey questions included free text entry which gave participants control over the discourse (Cobin & Morse, 2003), therefore they could determine exactly what information they chose to disclose and in what detail. This study obtained ethical approval from the Faculty Research Ethics Committee at the authors' institution.

A call for participants was distributed on social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Reddit, Tumblr, and Twitter. These sites were specifically chosen because previous research has found LGBTQ+ individuals, and pansexual individuals in particular, may use these sites for means of social support (Belous & Bauman, 2017). Participants were also encouraged to share the survey link amongst their networks, where snowball sampling then naturally occurred, which made it easier for the recruitment of such a minority group of individuals (Hayfield, 2020).

A total of 60 participants clicked on the survey link, with 45 participants completing the survey and who represent the final sample. The inclusion criteria for this research required participants to be aged 18 or over, from the UK and identify as pansexual. Participants could use multiple terms to describe their sexuality, but pansexual had to be one of them. Despite these criteria being stated on the recruitment information, the participant information sheet and consent form, 11 participants outside of the UK chose to complete the survey. These survey responses were included in the analysis, based on Hayfield and Křížová's (2021) suggestion that it would be unethical to exclude these responses based on the time and investment from participants.

Participants ranged in age between 18-58, with the most common age range being 22-25 (18 participants). This is in line with previous research which suggests that younger individuals are more likely to identify as pansexual (Galupo et al., 2017). Nevertheless, it must be recognised that 12 participants were aged over 25, which suggests that older individuals may also be increasingly identifying as pansexual. Participants mostly identified as cisgender women (17 participants), with the second most common group being participants identifying as gender non-binary/non-conforming/gender queer (10 participants). In addition, seven participants identified as cisgender men, and three as transgender women. Also, eight participants stated that their gender identity was not listed, and self-described as gender fluid

(4 participants), transgender man and non-binary (1 participant), demiguy (1 participant) and 2 participants stated that their identity could change in the future. This highlights the complexity and fluidity of gender identity, and its ability to evolve and change depending on what the individual feels appropriate (Diamond, 2003). Most participants were White British (32 participants), with 34 participants living in the UK.

Reflexivity Statement

All members of the research team conduct research in topics related to gender, sexualities and health, including research about LGBTQ+ people's experiences. The researchers have expertise in utilising qualitative methodologies, including survey design and reflexive thematic analysis, having utilised these to explore issues related to gender and sexualities. The team consists of researchers that belong to the LGBTQ+ community, with the lead author, identifying as pansexual. As such, the researchers have lived experience of being part of a minoritised community and from this position, acknowledge both their vested interest in the research and personal motivations attached to the research, including their identification with the participants. Notably, the researchers acknowledge that approaching the research from this positionality likely shaped the design, data collection and interpretation of the data in ways that served to advocate for the participants. Hence, the researchers engaged in reflexivity throughout the analysis to ensure they were aware of how personal experiences and assumptions may have guided interpretations as 'insiders'.

Data Analysis

The data was analysed by the first author using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2020) as it is theoretically flexible, and enables us to examine from a relativist ontological position and constructionist epistemological position, the meanings that people attach to identities, how they understand their identity and how their social contexts may reflect the reality of these experiences (Evans, 2018). An inductive approach to coding was taken, whereby the analysis was not shaped by existing theory. Instead, analysis was solely data driven (Patton, 1990), allowing us to identify and focus on pansexual individuals' experiences of sexuality marking. Braun and Clarke's (2006; 2020) thematic analysis guidelines were followed. By actively engaging with the data, key concepts and patterns were observed. Initial coding of the data by the first author focused on sexuality marking and participant experiences, as well as participant understandings of their pansexual identity. For example, codes such as 'Pansexual as an inclusive identity', 'Stereotypes of pansexuality' 'Supportive friendships' were developed. At this stage the coding was discussed in a meeting with the other authors and grouped into five initial themes that would address the research questions. As part of this process, we reviewed each of the coded data extracts to refine our themes further and noted during our discussions that there was some overlap between themes. We therefore refined our themes further to three final themes which we present in the next section. Naming the final themes was completed by defining a central organising concept in each theme and what aspect of the data they captured.

Results

In this section we present three themes that were developed through thematic analysis and which demonstrate the ways in which our participants described sexuality marking in different contexts. These are 1: 'You just don't want to risk it': The importance of safety on sexuality marking 2: 'My sexuality wasn't real': Dismissal and stereotyping of the pansexual identity within intimate partner relationships, and 3: 'I'm very loud and proud': Sexuality marking as an act of political resistance and activism. Quotes from the participants are used

throughout this analysis to support the themes that are presented. All quotes are reported anonymously and include demographic information to contextualise the participants' responses.

'You Just Don't Want to Risk It': The Importance of Safety on Sexuality Marking

Participants identified different factors that influenced their decision of whether to mark their sexuality, but a common thread among all participants related to the importance of safety. When discussing experiences of sexuality marking, participants such as P33 in the quote below, emphasised feeling safe as a fundamental aspect in their decision of whether to mark their sexuality.

"I have chosen not to come out when I haven't felt safe in a situation and when it's been assessed as being unsafe." (P33, 20, Gender Non-Binary, Gender Non-Conforming, Gender Queer)

P33 suggests that they evaluate their environments to decide how safe it may be for them to disclose their pansexual identity. P33 highlights that they have 'assessed' situations as being unsafe, which suggests that they are making evaluations on how safe they assess the reaction of their conversational partner/s to be if they were to disclose their identity. This deliberate decision not to mark their sexuality is a strategic way of keeping safe.

Other participants explicitly referenced homophobic attitudes and behaviours as influencing their decisions as to whether they disclose their pansexual identity.

"It mostly is about safety. In the debates with homophobic people or if someone does something homophobic, I know it is not within my best interest to tell them my sexuality as it may be dangerous. And in those situations, you just don't want to risk it" (P5, 18, Cisgender Women).

In this quote, P5 emphasises the influence of known homophobic attitudes on the motivation to disclose their sexuality in specific contexts, suggesting that such knowledge becomes the basis for which a decision to disclose is made. For participants such as P5, there is a perception that 'it may be dangerous' to disclose their identity in specific contexts which positions pansexual identities as being potentially exposed to unwanted remarks or homophobic reactions from people with known homophobic attitudes. This is supported by previous research which finds that plurisexual individuals experience unique forms of discrimination, compared with gay and lesbian individuals, for example bi/pan-phobia (erasure, stereotypes, aggression) (Flanders et al., 2017). This indicates that participants are having to assess and determine the level of risk that they may be exposed to if they choose to share their identity. Consequently, as P5 states they may not want to 'risk it', it is often easier and safer for pansexual individuals to suppress and hide their identity, to keep themselves safe by reducing the possibility of being faced with homophobic reactions.

The importance of context was frequently identified by participants as a factor in decisions to disclose their sexuality, with friendships often being expressed as an important dynamic, within which they could comfortably and safely disclose and mark their sexual identities.

"I've tried to only surround myself with people who either are allies or are in the community themselves. When I told my friends they were nothing but supportive" (P9, 18, Gender Non-Binary, Gender Non-Conforming, Gender Queer)

P9 highlights positive experiences and reactions from their friends when coming out, however they discuss how they are being selective with choosing friendships to create a safe space. P9 discusses how they actively choose to surround themselves with 'allies or people in the community'. This suggests that participants are active in creating supportive environments and specifically creating friendships that are understanding and accepting of their identities, thus creating safe spaces where they can mark their sexuality and know they are protected and understood. Research supports this with friendships being found as a fundamental part of LGBTQ+ individuals' lives, by acting as a support system (Forstie, 2017).

Other participants also discussed the impact of religious ideologies relating to sexuality as a reason for not disclosing. P15 discusses this, in the quote below, in the context of experiences within friendships specifically.

"My upbringing was religious, my only friends were part of the religious community I was in. This meant that when I figured out I wasn't straight, I had no friends to turn to which was hard. I know that they wouldn't accept me. I heard stories from the community about people who were outed and were forced to go to therapy for their 'mental illness' obviously this made me even more sure that I couldn't come out to anyone." (P15, 23, Gender Non-Binary, Gender Non-Conforming, Gender Queer.)

P15 explains how they had previously heard negative stories of LGBTQ+ individuals going to therapy due to their 'mental illness'. This highlights the impact of a religious upbringing, which may pathologize the LGBTQ+ community, on participants' decision to disclose their sexuality. Other participants such as P9, highlighted being selective with their friends and specifically surrounding themselves with supportive friends, or friends who are a part of the LGBTQ+ community, however, P15 was unable to surround themselves with supportive friends due to their religious upbringing. Indeed, P15 discusses the isolating impact not having any friends outside of this religious community when discovered they were LGBTQ+. This emphasises the importance of friendships for pansexual individuals as a support system in coming out, and that when individuals do not have this support system, they may intentionally choose to conceal their sexual identity to ensure their safety and to reduce the likelihood of experiencing any homophobic or discriminatory reactions.

Participants also discussed family contexts and experiences of being able to be open about their sexuality with their family members, but P19 describes how this may not always be straightforward.

"I was very openly accepted by my close family when I came out to them. I already knew my parents were supportive of the LGBT community, but there was still some pressure anyways. They were confused at first, not understanding the meaning of the label I'd chosen, but I can't fault them for that. They made every effort to understand and loved me just the same" (P19, 18, Genderfluid).

This highlights the coming out process as something that can still be stressful, even with the comfort and safety of knowing that family members are generally accepting of LGBTQ+ people. P19 describes the initial confusion that their parents experienced with their chosen label of pansexuality, but that they later made an effort to understand and accept their identity. This emphasises the gap in generational understanding of pansexuality, with younger individuals understanding and acknowledging the pansexual identity more so than older individuals (Galupo, 2016). This suggests that even with accepting family environments there may be additional pressure for pansexual individuals to explain or justify their identity.

In this theme we have shown how participants positioned safety as a fundamental factor in whether they disclose their identity within particular contexts. If participants anticipate receiving negative reactions to disclosing their pansexual identity, they strategically choose not to mark their sexuality. Specific contexts were discussed such as family environments, where participants expressed varied experiences, with some choosing to disclose to family members they recognised would be accepting. Contexts involving more religious friends were also highlighted by participants, where they may not disclose their identity due to the perceived negative reactions.

‘My Sexuality Wasn’t Real’: Dismissal and Stereotyping of The Pansexual Identity Within Intimate Partner Relationships

Partners and intimate relationships were frequently mentioned as a significant part of how participants understand and experience their pansexual identity. Participants’ experiences within intimate relationships were often characterised by issues relating to stereotyping and erasure of their pansexual identity. P4, in the quote below, discusses an experience whereby their pansexual identity was dismissed due to their partner perceiving the relationship as heteronormative.

“My ex told me that because I was with him, I was in a straight relationship and was therefore straight at the time. Which was very upsetting because a. I’m pansexual and I don’t just like men. He also told me my sexuality wasn’t real.” (P4, 19, Gender Fluid).

P4 describes how their previous partner dismissed their pansexual identity and forced them to conceal their identity within the relationship. This can be evidenced with P4’s partner telling them that they were ‘straight at the time’ because they were in a relationship with someone who identified as heterosexual. This highlights the importance of understanding a partner’s perception of identity, who in this example positions this as something changeable depending on the gender of the partner they are in a relationship with. This is constructed as an upsetting experience for P4, as they recognise their identity to encompass attractions to different genders, and not only men, which their partner does not acknowledge. This illustrates how pansexual individuals’ identities may be dismissed by their partners, thus creating a negative impact on the relationship.

Stereotypes around infidelity were frequently highlighted by participants as present in their current and previous relationships. P6 describes, in the quote below, how their ex-partner expressed unease over their pansexuality, and specifically their attraction to women.

“As i have never really dated a woman, or had any romantic interaction beyond a forehead kiss, my previous long-term boyfriend expressed concern that I would look back on life and wish I had dated a woman/would then leave them for a woman.” (P6, 21, Cisgender Woman).

P6 discusses their partner’s perception of experiences with other genders as being essential to fulfil their identity. This suggests that P6’s partner views sexuality as being legitimised by physical experiences, whereby romantic desires or psychological attractions are often not as easily understood. This emphasises how dominant plurisexual stereotypes can be used to restrict the identities of participants and are often perceived as negatively impacting the relationship. This is supported by research that highlights these stereotypes and beliefs around plurisexual individuals having to explore various experiences with different genders to legitimise and fulfil their desires (Maliepaard, 2022).

Participants also highlighted how stereotypes held by their partners could lead to dangerous situations for them. P16 described violence within their relationship, which was influenced by their sexuality.

“I was in an abusive relationship from ages 20-25, with a straight male partner who used my identity to mock me, and for significantly worse things. He would rape me and say he was “correcting my sexuality”, he would assault me and make me feel afraid of being hurt if I ever made any comment about women being attractive or mentioning my sexuality in general.” (P16, 32, Cisgender Woman).

P16 discusses erasure of their sexuality within their relationship, as they could not signify their plurisexuality in any way, without experiencing abuse. P16 describes how their partner framed their behaviour as ‘correcting’ their sexuality, which emphasises the harmful influence of compulsory heterosexuality on P16’s relationship. The social construct of compulsory heterosexuality, with the belief that women have an innate preference for men, is not only assumed, but in P16’s experience, is imposed through coercion and the threat of violence. This highlights how heteronormative views can lead to dangerous situations for participants, as partners have framed their violence around these social constructions. This echoes previous research that found bi-negativity mixed with interpersonal factors can lead to types of intimate partner violence (Klesse, 2019).

In contrast, other participants described more positive experiences with their partners, which exemplifies the importance of partners’ understanding of their pansexual identities. Below, P30 describes positive experiences within their relationship with someone who also identified as pansexual. This was shared as having a positive impact on their relationship.

“My first partner was also pansexual, and I had come out before we started dating, so we both had same understandings and knew we were accepted. I’ve not dated, or attempted to date, anyone who has been uncomfortable with or hostile towards my identity”. (P30, 22, Cisgender Man).

P30 explained that having a partner who also identified as pansexual influenced the relationship as they had similar ‘understandings’ and recognised that their identity would be ‘accepted’ by each other. The use of “same understandings” suggests that this is an important factor for relationships, as both individuals can have mutual support for one another, as they share the same identity. In addition, the use of “accepted” highlights this as another element in the influence of a positive relationship, where there are fewer barriers compared with other partners, who may not be accepting of the pansexual identity. P30 also describes how they chose not to engage with individuals that did not feel comfortable with their sexuality. This suggests that P30 navigates who they choose to engage with in relationship contexts based on acceptance and understandings, which may be easier with similar identifying individuals.

In this theme we have shown how the context of intimate relationships was constructed as an important part in how participants understood their identity. Concerns around infidelity were often highlighted by participants as a common stereotype that their partner would uphold and described how these influenced their relationships. The influence of stereotypes was also highlighted as leading to dangerous situations for some participants. In contrast, when stereotypes were not present in the relationship, participants framed their experiences positively.

‘I’m Very Loud and Proud’: Sexuality Marking as an Act of Political Resistance and Activism

When participants explained the reasoning behind whether to mark their sexual identity, a common theme among participant responses was political reasoning and activism. Participants discussed the importance of representation, and why it is important for them to be involved in making their identity visible. Education was also discussed by participants with varied views around who should be the educator of gender and sexuality. Below, P3 highlights the influence of heteronormativity on their decision to not mark their sexuality.

“It is not important to me at all. I like who I like and I have never felt the need to specifically disclose to anyone that I am pansexual. Of course, when I date different genders, people notice and ask questions and I have no problem talking about it when that happens. But if straight people don't have to disclose that they're straight, why would anyone with a different sexuality need to?” (P3, 24, Cisgender Woman).

Here P3 explains that it is not essential for them to explicitly reveal their sexuality and justifies this by explaining that this is not something that heterosexual individuals have to do. By questioning why anyone of other identities would ‘need to’ disclose this information P3 emphasises their resistance to heteronormativity and compulsory heterosexuality by rejecting traditional views that LGBTQ+ individuals should ‘come out’ and disclose their identities (Khuzwayo, 2021). By challenging expectations to ‘come out’ and choosing not to disclose their sexuality, P3 is taking part in forms of activism in a non-traditional manner, to be viewed as equal with other sexualities.

Like other participants, P37 suggests how sharing their identity with others is not a priority for them, and in doing so constructs a form of resistance towards educating other individuals around their identities.

“It’s not awfully important for people to know my identity, as I’m not going to use my energy to educate those who don’t seek such education to learn what my identity is. This goes for both sexual and gender” (P37, 32, Gender Fluid).

P37 discusses how they actively choose not to discuss their identities or educate others who have not already educated themselves on their identity. This suggests a resistance towards a perceived responsibility to educate and inform other individuals about their pansexual identity. P37 positions understanding diverse identities as a personal responsibility of others, rather than a requirement to educate by those within the community. They highlight this to be important not just for their sexual identity, but gender identity as well, as they identify as gender fluid. For those that identify as gender diverse, there is often a lack of understanding around their identities, leading to discrimination and stigmatisation (Matsuno & Budge, 2017). This suggests that P37 may be opposing the need to educate others on their gender identity, due to the consistent discrimination that the gender fluid community face (Conlin et al., 2019).

Other pansexual participants had a different perspective of queer responsibility to educate others on their identities. With education emphasised as a positive factor, P42 discussed the importance of disclosing and educating others of their identity.

“It’s extremely important so that my clients/friends/family and others know that there is another way of being (NOT JUST STRAIGHT!) and that bigotry ignorance and prejudice and hate and persecution - STOPS I am 58 and I want anyone else who is

terrified ashamed can feel that someone is standing out / standing up / is proud and walks out and can be a professional and accepted for who they are. I want to educate and inspire and encourage and support I wear my pansexuality proudly along with my neurodiversity and disability I want to fight against hate and prejudice” (P42, 58, Gender Fluid).

P42 emphasises the political importance of identifying outside of heterosexuality and highlights the significance of visibility and acceptance of other identities. By highlighting this, P43 takes a stance in becoming a role model for other individuals, which positions visibility as an important factor in helping other pansexual individuals acknowledge and accept their identity. In addition, this visibility can help against ‘hate and prejudice’, which LGBTQ+ individuals have historically faced and are still subject to today (Pollit, 2021). Through stressing a need to challenge ongoing discrimination and prejudice, P42 positions themselves as wanting to challenge and contest negative attitudes and behaviours towards pansexual individuals. This highlights activism as a factor in how and why pansexual individuals may want to disclose their identities, suggesting not just for personal importance, but also societal and political significance.

Other individuals also emphasised the importance of visibility and disclosure of their identity. P32 discusses personal reasons why it’s politically important for them.

“I find it incredibly important for people to know as often i experience erasure due to being in a straight passing relationship. Also, multiple LGBTQ+ people have been able to open up to me safe in the knowledge that I am part of the community and can be themselves fully where they may not otherwise be comfortable doing so. Challenging stereotypes is another reason I’m very loud and proud! Visibility and representation are the first steps to acceptance” (P32, 29, Cisgender Woman).

P32 discusses the importance of disclosing their pansexuality, due to experiencing erasure whilst in heterosexual relationships. This emphasises motivations for sexuality marking to be of political importance and to challenge heteronormativity by spreading awareness of pansexuality through the disclosure of individuals’ pansexual identities. Like P42, P32 also highlights the importance of challenging stereotypes through representation. This emphasises a political stance against heteronormativity and microaggressions that LGBTQ+ individuals are subject too. By participants not only disclosing their identity but dynamically engaging in activism to represent and make the pansexual identity visible it challenges these heteronormative views. This emphasises that participants are strategically marking their sexuality not only for their own personal reasoning’s but that political motivations may also play a role here.

In this theme we have shown how political resistance and activism were commonly highlighted as motivations and reasons for participants decision to mark their sexuality or not. This positions participants as wanting to enthusiastically engage in activism by challenging visibility and representation of their pansexual identity. Education was also highlighted as an important part of visibility, with participants discussing varied views of who should be responsible for educating others about gender and sexuality.

Discussion

The present study adds to the LGBTQ+ psychology literature on plurisexual identities as it contributes to understanding how those who identify as pansexual mark their sexuality

within different contexts. Pansexual identities are an underrepresented area within LGBTQ+ psychology, and to our knowledge this is the first research study to focus solely on sexuality marking among those who identify as pansexual. One key finding of this research is that participants focussed on safety as a fundamental factor in whether they disclose their identity within certain contexts. This supports previous findings on sexuality marking among queer individuals (Kolker et al., 2020), which found that they were more open to mark and express their sexuality when in an environment they perceived as comfortable. This research expanded on the findings by Kolker et al (2020) and found that pansexual participants not only marked their sexuality in contexts where they felt comfortable, but often assessed and made evaluations of how safe they perceived the reaction of others would be, if they were to disclose their identity. Participants often did not want to disclose their identity in environments where they were unsure of others' reactions. Instead, they felt it was safer to hide their identity, to reduce the possibility of experiencing homophobic reactions.

The importance of safety within a variety of specific contexts was also highlighted by participants, for example with friends or family. Like previous research on the LGBTQ+ community and friendships (Forstie, 2017), the participants in this study highlighted friendships as an important support system in their lives. We found participants were selective in choosing their friendships by surrounding themselves with allies or other LGBTQ+ individuals. This suggests that pansexual individuals are actively creating safe spaces through being selective in their friendships. Some participants also described the impact of not being able to create safe and accepting friendships, and the ways in which this curtailed disclosure of their pansexual identity. Feinstein et al. (2023) found that pansexual individuals were less likely than lesbian and gay individuals to come out in family contexts. Even amongst those participants that did feel safe enough to disclose their identity in family settings, they often highlighted a gap in generational understanding of pansexuality. This suggests family environments that are accepting of the LGBTQ+ community are not always sufficient to alleviate the additional pressure that pansexual individuals feel to educate, explain and justify their identity.

Another important finding involves the relational context of intimate partner relationships. Partners were frequently mentioned as a significant part of how participants understood and experienced their identity. Participant experiences within intimate relationships were often characterised by issues relating to stereotyping and erasure, particularly focussing on partner's perceptions that they would be unfaithful because of their pansexual identity. This has been found to be common among the plurisexual community, with Maliepaard (2022) identifying that bisexual individuals experience stereotyping by partners, and our findings therefore support this view and offers the unique perspectives of pansexual participants. Heteronormativity and compulsory heterosexuality were also seen to be influential in their partner's negative perceptions of their pansexual identities. In contrast, participants who expressed affirmative experiences within relationships highlighted a mutual understanding of their identity, as their partner also identified as plurisexual.

A novel finding of this research is how participants described motives for sexuality marking to be of political importance. Some participants believed that they should not have to mark their sexuality, which emphasises their resistance to heteronormativity and compulsory heterosexuality, through rejecting traditional views that LGBTQ+ individuals should come out (Khuzwayo, 2021). Education was also debated among participants, with some showing resistance towards bearing the burden and responsibility around having to educate others about their identities. Other participants took a contrasting view and wanted to take part in activism

by promoting representation and visibility of their pansexual identity. This representation is politically important for the pansexual community, as their identity is still vastly misunderstood by both individuals inside and outside of the LGBTQ+ community (Hayfield, 2020). In addition, the pansexual community are still facing ongoing discrimination and prejudice (Flanders et al., 2017).

Limitations and Future Directions

It must be acknowledged that the sample consisted mainly of those from a White British ethnic background, thus these findings don't speak to the potential identity related experiences of pansexual individuals with diverse ethnic backgrounds. This is important as research highlights, the experiences of those with multiple minoritised identities is often distinct, especially as they often encounter different types of discrimination (Jefferson et al, 2013). The sample did however include participants with a wide range of gender identities, which is an important representation of the pansexual community and supports Katz-Wise et al. (2015) who found that those who identify as gender diverse are more likely to identify with non-traditional identities such as both pansexual and queer identities. Future research would benefit from exploring distinct experiences between intersectional identities among the pansexual community, for example those who identify as gender diverse and pansexual, as they could experience different types of sexuality marking or unique ways of disclosing and expressing their identities. In addition, findings from the current research also emphasise the importance of political motivations in pansexual individuals' decisions on whether to mark their sexuality. The importance of activism and political reasoning in marking their sexuality, may warrant further study. Similarly, research highlights that homophobic crimes are at an all-time high, with transphobic discrimination and hate speech prominent among the experiences of the LGBTQ+ community (Stonewall, 2022). The impact of this rise in discrimination, transphobia and prejudice warrants additional focus on its influence among the pansexual community, and the extent to which this impacts whether or how they mark their sexuality.

Conclusion

This research is understood to be the first on sexuality marking among the pansexual community and advances understanding of the ways in which pansexual individuals are navigating and expressing their identity through sexuality marking. This research contributes meaningfully to LGBTQ+ psychology by focusing on those who identify as pansexual, who have previously been underrepresented in psychological research, or have been subsumed under broader plurisexual samples. Our findings position pansexuality as a discrete identity, and we have shown how pansexual individuals face unique and nuanced experiences often distinct from other plurisexual identities.

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