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**Exploring Power and Control in Bisexual Women's  
Relationships**

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**Submitted in partial fulfilment for the requirements for the  
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## **Abstract**

This dissertation seeks to explore the ways that bisexual women narrate experiences of power and control within their relationships. Using oral history methodologies, this research undertook semi-structured interviews with five women who identified as bisexual (or another non-binary sexual orientation) in Scotland. Exploring experiences of both abusive and non-abusive relationships, it will highlight how these women's intersecting identities and experiences impact on how they conceive power and control.

Drawing on Evan Stark's concept of coercive control, the research finds that for the women who disclosed abuse, their experiences are indistinguishable from a feminist gendered analysis of heterosexual women's. More generally, looking at how the women narrate stories of equality and power within their relationships with both men and women, the research will highlight what Sarah Oerton describes as the 'gender full' nature of these intimate relationships.

Highlighting the limited scholarly focus in this area, it will call for a continued focus on bisexual women's lives and relationships in the development of future research and service provision.

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## **Abbreviations**

<b>Bi</b>	Bisexual
<b>CTS</b>	The Conflict Tactics Scale
<b>GBV</b>	Gender Based Violence
<b>LGB</b>	Lesbian, gay, bisexual
<b>LGBT</b>	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender
<b>LGBTQI</b>	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex
<b>VAW</b>	Violence Against Women

## Introduction

A growing body of literature has acknowledged and sought to rectify the heterocentricity of work examining relationships, particularly abusive and controlling relationships, and has increasingly highlighted the very similar and more specific ways that power and control are used in intimate same-sex relationships (Donovan et al., 2006; Donovan, Barnes & Nixon, 2014; Goldberg & Meyer, 2012). However, despite a turn towards more LGBT inclusive research, the 'B' has consistently been left out of the discussion (Head & Milton, 2014). For bisexual women, this means that their experiences have been subsumed into work on lesbian women's relationships when dating women or forgotten entirely when dating men. Bisexual people sit at the intersection of homo-heterosexuality meaning that their lives are an important site of study for understanding the gendered dynamics of relationships and how power manifests. Their experiences of abuse can also bring much insight into the ongoing debates surrounding gender and domestic abuse.

This dissertation seeks to explore the ways that bisexual women narrate accounts of power and control within their relationships. Using semi-structured oral history interviews I will explore the ways that five women living in Scotland talk about their lives and relationships and the ways that their intersecting identities as women and as bisexual impact on these. Power and control is used to describe the dynamics of abuse, where a person seeks to limit the freedom of their intimate partner. However, these concepts also manifest in non-abusive everyday life and relationships. How do bisexual women navigate these dynamics and to what extent are they aware of their existence when in relationships with men and women? Through exploring the ways that these women narrate their lives and relationships, this research seeks to discuss how they conceive of and narrate power and control in their relationships with both men and women. The focus of this research is on bisexual women (as opposed to all bisexual people) for a number of reasons. Research has tended to focus on heterosexual women's experiences of abuse, meaning that there is a larger body of literature to work with as a comparison. Secondly, research



that has been done more specifically on LGBT people's experiences of domestic abuse have found that bisexual women are one of the groups most likely to experience abuse (Goldberg & Meyer, 2012), therefore it is an important area of work to explore. Finally, research shows that bisexual men and women's experiences of biphobia and discrimination manifest in different and gendered ways (Yost & Thomas, 2012).

Chapter one will provide an overview of current literature exploring bisexual women's lives and identities, highlighting the limitations and binary nature of much of the current literature on sexualities. Outlining bisexual women's experiences of biphobia, it will describe the specific ways that they experience discrimination due to their intersecting identities as women and bisexual. It will then look more specifically at literature focusing on conceptions of power and equality in intimate relationships. Finally, exploring the debates and current literature on domestic abuse more generally as well as within LGB people's relationships, it will highlight the growing awareness of the need for a more intersectional analysis of power and control. Chapter two will outline the methodological considerations of the dissertation, including the use of oral history methodologies, the process of recruitment, undertaking interviews, and subsequent analysis. It also considers the ethical implications of the research and acknowledges my role within the research process.

Three of the five women interviewed identified having previously been in abusive relationships (all with men). Chapter three will focus on their narratives of these relationships, exploring the ways they recount experiences of controlling and violent behaviours and the extent to which these narratives fit within a feminist gendered analysis of abuse. Chapter four will explore all five women's experiences of relationships more generally, with a focus on how the women narrate stories of equality and power within their relationships with both men and women.

Finally, the dissertation will conclude that despite these women having very different experiences and beliefs, their narratives highlight the 'gender full' nature of bisexual women's relationships, evidencing the need for a gendered

analysis to uncover the intersecting layers of power that are present. Highlighting the need for further research in this area, it will call for continued focus on bisexual women's lives and relationships in the development of future research and service provision.

A bisexual person is defined as someone who is attracted to both men and women. Throughout this dissertation this term will be used as an umbrella term to encapsulate the many ways that the women within this research identified their sexual orientations. The term 'queer' will be used to reflect the broader spectrum of non-normative genders and sexualities that fit outwith the homo-heterosexual binary (Kulick, 2000).

Due to the ongoing debates within the field of domestic abuse there are conflicting terms, definitions and measures for domestic abuse. Throughout this dissertation different terms will be used depending on the focus of the literature being discussed. Within this dissertation domestic abuse is defined thus,

Domestic abuse can be perpetrated by partners or ex-partners and can include physical assault (assault and physical attack involving a range of behaviour), sexual abuse (acts which degrade and humiliate and are perpetrated against the person's will, including rape), and mental and emotional abuse (such as threats, verbal abuse, racial abuse, withholding money and other types of controlling behaviour such as isolation from family or friends).

(Scottish Government, 2009)

## **Literature Review: What do we know about bisexual women's identities, lives and relationships?**

This chapter will focus on the academic literature exploring bisexual women's lives. Firstly it will explore the extent to which bisexual identities conform or challenge binary conceptions of gender and sexuality, and the categorisation of bisexuality as a transitionary identity. It will then provide an overview of literature focusing on biphobia, and the attitudes and stereotypes that persist in relation to bisexual people and their lives. Turning to the ways in which bisexual people (and in particular bisexual women) navigate their romantic lives and relationships, it will explore the difficulties in 'doing bisexuality' (Hartman, 2013) within relationships. This includes how bisexual women make their identities visible, and the ways that concepts of power impact on both same-sex and opposite-sex relationships. Finally, with a focus on Evan Stark's concept of 'coercive control' (2007), it will look at current research on domestic abuse and the limitations of this when seeking to understand the experiences of bisexual women, identifying the need for a more intersectional approach to analysis of bisexual women's abusive relationships.

### **Bisexual identities: Subverting or supporting the binary?**

For many academics, the process of individuals identifying and living as bisexual is an intrinsically political act, where bisexuality is a place of resistance that challenges binary concepts of sexuality (Butler, 1990). Studies dating back to the 1950s have shown that not everyone fits into the binary categorisations of heterosexual and homosexual (Kinsey et al., 1953). Nonetheless, this 'dualistic conception of sexuality continues' (Hartman, 2013:40). As Butler explains using the concept of the heterosexual matrix (1990), everyone is expected to fit within this either/or framework. This matrix makes bisexuality and other sexual identities outside this framework invisible. Within this framework the expectation of heterosexuality (or homosexuality) means that bisexual people are often ignored or misrecognised (Miller, 2006).

Therefore the radical potential of openly identifying as bisexual challenges this system. Berenson argues that bisexuality is more about a refusal to exclude and allows people to avoid the oppressive regimes that operate within the heterosexual matrix (Berenson, 2008). By framing sexuality within a spectrum, rather than as a binary, bisexuality constructs a 'place of resistance' where definitions can be challenged (Berenson, 2008:17).

While for many bisexual women, their identity allows them to challenge or remove walls and binaries, the word itself unavoidably perpetuates binarism. Vernallis (1999) argues that bisexuality reinforces categories of gender and sexuality. Therefore, while for many women bisexual is a comfortable identity position to occupy, for others terms such as 'queer' offer preferable positioning as they more readily reflect understandings of gender and sexuality (Tabatabai & Linders, 2011). As Tabatai and Linders found in their research on non-straight identity narratives of women in relationships with women and men, it was more important to these women that their identity not be read as straight, rather than that they fitted into any specific label or category (2011:589).

Much of the research concerned with bisexual identity focuses on and problematises the transitional nature of bisexuality for many people (Tabatabai & linder, 2011; Guittar, 2013; Ochs & Rowley, 2005; Rust, 1993a; 2000). As Nicholas Guittar found in his study of LGBTQ youth, bisexuality is often a stage of transition for some young people during the coming out process (Guittar, 2013). He terms this interaction, the 'queer apologetic' (2013:167), where young people identify as bisexual in an attempt to satisfy both their personal attraction to people of the same sex and societal expectations. While this may be the case for some young people, as Tabatabai and Linders contend, this is not the case for most (2011). However this pervasive view that bisexuality is 'just a phase' is a key factor in how people act to invisibilise bisexuality (Alarie & Gaudet, 2013). By continuing to focus on the impermanence of bisexuality as an identity position, there is a corresponding lack of focus on it within academic literature, as evidenced in the limited nature of work focusing specifically on bisexual identities.

## **Biphobia**

While the discrimination experienced by bisexual people has often been subsumed within a broader analysis of homophobia (this being a fear or hatred of someone because they are or are perceived to be gay (Lough Dennell & Logan, 2012)), bisexual experiences of discrimination differ in sometimes small, but significant ways. Biphobia refers to, 'negative attitudes, behaviours and structures specifically directed towards anyone who is attracted to more than one gender' (Barker et al., 2012:19). In her work focusing on prevention of antibisexual violence, Messinger highlights four distinct forms of structural violence experienced by bisexual people; heterosexism, homophobia, biphobia and monosexism (2012). The first two can be seen to intersect with lesbian and gay identities. However, the final two are distinct to the experiences of bisexual people. Experiences of biphobia often mirror experiences of homophobia, including negative attitudes to sexual orientation and relationships. In addition, bisexual people will often experience homophobia due to their sexual orientation being misread (Barker et al., 2012). In their 2008 research, Stonewall found that one in twenty bisexual people had experienced a homophobic crime over the previous three years (Stonewall, 2008). However, there are also experiences that are distinct for bisexual people, which are overlooked if we only examine homophobia.

While research is limited, studies on societal attitudes to bisexual people have found negative associations with bisexuality. In a study of heterosexual people's attitudes to bisexual men and women in the US, Herek found that heterosexual people's attitudes to bisexuals were more negative than to a range of other minority groups, including religious groups, lesbian and gay people, people with HIV/AIDs, racial and ethnic minorities and people who were anti/pro-choice (2002). Other research has shown prejudice towards bisexual people as potential marriage partners. A study by Breno and Galupo (2007) asked participants to match profiles of gay, lesbian, bisexual and heterosexual people together as potential marriage partners. It found that bisexual individuals were rarely matched up with heterosexual, gay or lesbian

people and were more likely to be paired with other bisexual people. Societal stereotypes of bisexual people as promiscuous and unfaithful persist (Hackl et al., 2012; Cashore & Tuason, 2009; Meyer, 2004). As Rust has argued, these negative attitudes are not just exhibited within a heterosexist society, but are also held amongst sexual minorities, such as within lesbian communities (Rust, 1993b). Research also indicates that there is a gendered component to this discrimination, with attitudes towards bisexual men being more negative than those towards bisexual women (Yost & Thomas, 2012). However, while attitudes to bisexual men may be more negative, research has found that (men's) positive attitudes to bisexual women often stem from an assumption of sexual availability (Eliason, 2000).

The key difference between biphobia and homophobia, is that biphobia often manifests within the LGBT 'community'<sup>1</sup> (Messinger, 2012; Cashore & Tuason, 2009; Lannutti, 2008). This can manifest in different ways, including views that bisexuals are traitors who are benefitting from heterosexual privilege (Hartman-Linck, 2014), or that their identity does not exist or is invalid (Messinger, 2012; Berenson, 2002; Dworkin, 2001). Rust identifies two distinct ways that biphobia is made visible within lesbian communities. The first is through 'explanatory' beliefs that claim that bisexuality is not a valid or true sexual orientation. The second is through 'depoliticising' beliefs that claim bisexual women are problematic as they lack loyalty to lesbian communities (Rust, 2000). The metaphor of fence-sitting has been highlighted in research exploring biphobia within LGBT 'communities' (Bradford, 2004; Kaplan & Tucker, 1995; Berenson, 2008). For many bisexual people, their experiences of biphobia within LGBT spaces and heterosexual spaces mean that they do not feel part of either 'community'. Recent research in Scotland found that 69% of bisexual people felt 'a little' or not at all part of a 'heterosexual community' and 66% said the same about an 'LGBT community', with 25% of people saying that they had experienced biphobia within LGBT organisations (Rankin, Morton & Bell, 2015). This is supported by research that interviewed bisexual women, finding

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<sup>1</sup> The concept of an LGBT 'community' is a contentious one and is problematic due to the political and ideological tensions amongst people who identify as LGBT(QI). See, for example, Formby (2012) for a broader discussion of this.

that they felt neither LGBT communities or wider heteronormative society understood or accepted their identities (Hayfield et al., 2014).

## **Doing Bisexual Relationships**

Just as society invisibilises bisexuality (Alarie & Gaudet, 2013), so does academic literature, through a focus on binary conceptions of sexuality. Research that seeks to understand the experiences of people in relationships tends to identify people as heterosexual if in an opposite-sex relationship or homosexual if in a same-sex relationship (Head & Milton, 2014). Research that does identify and include bisexual people, through for example exploring lesbian and bisexual women's relationships, rarely identifies the specific experiences of bisexual women, but rather assumes them to be the same as those of lesbian women (Ard & Makadon, 2011). Just like societal preconceptions at large, when research does look specifically at bisexual relationships, there is a disproportionate focus on polyamory and open relationships (Klesse, 2007), despite research suggesting that bisexual people are no more likely to be promiscuous than any other group (Klesse, 2011). That bisexuality research so closely mirrors the stereotypes and biphobic patterns of wider society is something that should be reflected upon and challenged.

The lack of available space for self-actualisation in relationships has an impact on how bisexual women are able to 'do bisexuality' (Hartman, 2013). As many academics have highlighted, when bisexual women are in relationships, their identity is assumed in relation to the gender of their partner (Hartman, 2013; Tabatabai & Linders, 2011; Pennington, 2009; Hackl et al., 2013). Hartman (now Hartman-Linck) has explored the ways in which bisexual women enact a 'bisexual display' within relationships to ensure that their bisexuality is made visible. As she argues, this is made difficult through a heterosexual matrix (Butler, 1990) that does not provide space for this. According to her, 'this renders the concept of "doing bisexuality" problematic, because bisexuality is not possible at the structural level in the way that "doing" requires' (Hartman,

2013:40). Gender cues do not convey bisexuality in the same way as heterosexual and gay and lesbian identities (Hartman, 2013:42) and as a result, bisexuality is often misidentified as a lesbian or heterosexual identity (Miller, 2006). Hartman(-Linck)'s work has highlighted the ways in which bisexual women seek to make their identity visible within their relationships and to their friends and family. Within her research women in monogamous relationships with men sought to make visible their identity through study, everyday desires, and creating bisexual space within their homes (Hartman-Linck, 2014).

While the charge that bisexual women experience heterosexual privilege is a common one (Hartman-Linck, 2013:179), research has found that for many, there is discomfort with assumed and pervasive heterosexuality (Tabatabai & Linders, 2011). Supporting Hartman(-Linck)'s work on bisexual display, Tabatabai and Linders argue that, 'strategies used to denote non-straight are ineffective once partnered with men' (2011:590). In their work with non-straight women [their terminology], they found that the women in their study used certain strategies to build a coherent self-narrative of their lives and relationships with men. These were specifically highlighting their attraction to their male partners, queering those men, and challenging homophobia. By positioning their male partners outside of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005), they argue, the women seek to compose an identity that fits within their non-straight lives.

Research shows bisexual people experience their identities and their relationships differently depending on the gender of their partners (Weinrich, 2000; Shokeid, 2001; Pennington, 2009; Vernallis, 1999). Exploring gender and power in bisexual people's relationships, Pennington found that participants felt that gender roles were more easily navigated within same-sex relationships (2009:51). However, unlike other research that has highlighted the 'queering' of same-sex relationships (Tabatabai & Linders, 2011), the men and women in the study reinforced many binary ideas about conventional masculinity and femininity (Weinberg et al., 1994). While there was a belief amongst participants that same-sex relationships allowed for more equality and



power balance within their relationships, Pennington found that power imbalances persisted, and that there were tensions between the perceived and actual balance of power within relationships. In fact, individuals adapted their gender performance to reflect more traditional gender roles, despite this creating power differentials (2009:61). This research supports other work that looks more widely at women's same-sex relationships, finding that while women may strive towards equal relationships, this is often not the case in reality (Barnes, 2013; Carrington, 1999; Gabb, 2004; Taylor, 2007; 2009). As Carrington argues, 'lesbigay families are neither as egalitarian as they would like to believe nor as we would prefer that others believe' (1999:11).

Throughout existing literature, gender is both explicitly and implicitly highlighted as having a profound impact on bisexual women's relationships and lives (Oerton, 1997). This intersection of sexual orientation and gender complicates the ways that bisexual women 'do' their identities and relationships. While some have argued that women in same-sex relationships can remove themselves from this gender hierarchy, research shows that the reality is often quite different.

### **Power and Control in same-sex and opposite-sex relationships**

While the public narrative of domestic abuse is one of violence, Evan Stark has argued that this should not be the focus. Rather than individual acts of violence, he argues that we should be understanding abusive behaviours as 'coercive control' (2007), where abuse is an ongoing pattern of controlling behaviours that should be understood as a liberty crime. Through this model, abuse is understood as a cause and consequence of gender inequality. While physical violence is part of coercive control, the focus of this model is not so much on what perpetrators (who are disproportionately men) do, but rather on what those experiencing the control (mostly women) are unable to do (Stark, 2006). For women who experience coercive control, the violence is often not the worst part; rather it is the constant fear and expectation of what might happen (Stark, 2007). This framework is used extensively within feminist

scholarship and service provision to understand and support women who experience abuse. Based on the feminist understanding of power and control, the Power and Control Wheel was developed to explain the ways in which men use violence and intimidation against their female partners (Domestic Abuse Intervention Project, 1984 see appendix 1). It describes the tactics that perpetrators use, including threats, isolation and male privilege to control their partners' actions and freedom. This model is used widely internationally within domestic abuse organisations, the police and the criminal justice system.

This feminist, gendered approach to domestic abuse has been subject to ongoing debate and contention (Dempsey, 2013). It has been claimed by those who criticise this gendered analysis that women are as likely to perpetrate violence and abuse in relationships as men (Hines & Douglas, 2010). The research that is used to counter the feminist approach to domestic abuse tends to use The Conflict Tactic Scale (CTS). This tool has been used within studies exploring violent relationships to provide evidence of the gender symmetrical nature of violence in intimate relationships (Straus, 1979). The CTS tends to be used in large-scale research and has led to claims that women are just as likely as men to be violent in relationships, if not more so (Archer, 2009). However, the methodology used within the CTS has been the source of much criticism, with detractors arguing that the scale fails to understand or account for the dynamics or significance of violence in this context (Stark, 2007). As Holzworth-Munroe argues, these differences in results can be found to be due to the intrinsic differences in how acts of violence are measured and what behaviours are categorised as problematic (2005:1120). For example, acts of sexual aggression are not included within the CTS. This is a form of domestic abuse that is much more likely to be perpetrated by men (Johnson, 2008) and so, as Johnson argues, rather than either side of the debate being wrong, they are in fact simply measuring different phenomenon (2008).

Over the last three decades there has been a growing acknowledgement that research exploring domestic abuse and power within relationships has been extremely heteronormative and heterocentric (Brown, 2008). This has led to a failure to understand the experiences of LGB people in abusive and controlling

relationships (Johnson, 2008; Renzetti, 1988). This failure of feminist academics to explore and account for LGB people within a gendered framework (Merrill, 1996:14) has led proponents of a gender symmetrical approach to argue that this proves that gender is not an issue in same-sex domestic abuse (Island and Letellier, 1991:255). Elliot contends that, 'the phenomenon of same-sex domestic violence illustrates that routine, intentional intimidation through abusive acts and words is not a gender issue, but a power issue' (Elliot, 1996:3). However, a growing number of studies employing feminist and gendered analyses of same-sex relationships are highlighting that, in fact, the ways that power and control manifest in same-sex relationships are extremely gendered (see for example, Donovan et al., 2006; Donovan, Barnes & Nixon, 2014; Goldberg & Meyer, 2012).

Through growing research focusing firstly on lesbian women's experiences of abuse and then on gay men's (Island & Letellier, 1991; Elliot, 1996; Merrill, 1996), there has been an increasing understanding of how control and abuse operate within same-sex relationships. However, this work has then been extrapolated to make claims about the whole LGBT community, which has led to bisexual and transgender people's experiences being subsumed within a discourse that has under-researched and under-theorised these experiences (Head & Milton, 2014). Head and Milton have also highlighted that through this very narrow lens, there has been a lack of understanding of perpetrators of abuse within LGBT communities, with the assumption being that they will always be of the same sex as their partner (2014). More recent research that has sought to investigate the gendered dynamics of perpetration have found that in fact men are much more likely to be perpetrators of abuse. In a Californian study of sexual minorities, Goldberg and Meyer found that of their sample, gay men and bisexual women were the groups most likely to have experienced intimate partner violence, with 95% of the bisexual women's abusive partners being male (2012). This is supported by findings from earlier studies (Messinger, 2010, 2011; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000) and supports the need for a more specific focus on the gendered nature of abusive queer relationships.

While recent research has begun to acknowledge the need to specifically explore power and control in bisexual people's relationships (Donovan, Barnes & Nixon, 2014; Head & Milton, 2014), there is a lack of in-depth qualitative work exploring these issues. While not directly comparable, it is worth investigating some of the work that has focused on women in same-sex relationships to better understand the similarities and differences between same-sex and opposite-sex abuse. Using Stark's concept of coercive control (Stark, 2007), abusive behaviours encompass not just violence, but every part of a person's life, with the abusive partner controlling even the most mundane decisions and activities. Work that has explored domestic abuse and violence within women's same-sex relationships has shown that the experiences of these women closely mirror the findings of feminist research exploring domestic abuse within heterosexual women's lives (Renzetti, 1992; Dobash & Dobash, 1992). For example, in her research focusing on lesbian women, Renzetti found that women experiencing abuse were much less likely to make decisions about what they were doing at the weekend than abusive partners, and that abusive partners were more likely to make decisions about sexual activities (Renzetti, 1988). Research has also highlighted gendered differences within experiences of domestic abuse. In research looking at same-sex domestic violence within the UK, Donovan et al. (2006) found specific differences between the abuse experienced by lesbian women and gay men. While sexual violence was a key factor for gay men, lesbian women were much more likely to experience emotional abuse. They used these differences to argue that these experiences are consistent with gender norms (2006:22). In her work on woman-to-woman partner abuse, Barnes (2013) found that despite a narrative of egalitarianism within lesbian relationships, women experienced abuse in very gendered ways, including being forced or coerced into a restrictive gender role. Women who experienced abuse reported having to undertake all or most of the housework. Women also discussed having their appearance or body image controlled by their partner and feeling the need to comply for fear of violence or abuse. She argues that while, historically, lesbian women's relationships have been 'gender empty' (Oerton, 1997), in fact gender is an important factor in the dynamics of abuse within lesbian women's relationships (2013:146).

While women in same-sex relationships may experience similar abuse to those within opposite-sex relationships, there are some specific issues that make their experiences different. As Pharr argues,

There is an important difference between the battered lesbian and the battered non-lesbian: the battered non-lesbian experiences violence within the context of a misogynist world; the lesbian experiences violence within the context of a world that is not only woman-hating but is also homophobic. And that is a great difference.

(Pharr, 1986: 204)

Research has found that, as a consequence of a homophobic society and direct experiences of homophobia, lesbian women are less likely to see their experiences as abusive, feel less able to tell people about the abuse they experience and are less likely to access support (Brown, 2008; Donovan et al., 2006; Donovan & Hester, 2010). For bisexual women, these factors could be even greater. While they may experience both misogyny and homophobia, there is the additional factor of biphobia as well. This is why many are calling for research on LGBT relationships, and bisexual relationships more specifically, to take a more intersectional focus (see for example, Todd, 2013; Barnes, 2013; Donovan, Barnes & Nixon, 2014; Whiting, 2007; Head & Milton, 2014). It has been argued that this would allow for the development of an understanding of domestic abuse that moves past the over-emphasis on individual agency and starts to better understand how power relations at both a micro and macro level impact on relationships (Klesse, 2007; Barnes, 2013).

## **Methodology**

The following chapter will focus on the methodological considerations and decisions that were made throughout the research process, including the decision to adopt a feminist qualitative interview methodology and the implications of this approach. It will also outline the research's approach to recruitment of interviewees, the interview process and analysis. Throughout this chapter reflections on the interview process and the ethical implications of the decisions made will be acknowledged and discussed.

## **Oral History**

Oral history has been defined as, 'the recording of personal testimony delivered in oral form' (Yow, 2005:3). From this basic definition, oral history has emerged as a diverse field, often working within interdisciplinary frameworks, incorporating methodology and theory from, for example, ethnography, anthropology, cultural studies, sociology, and literary studies. Oral history is commonly associated with the turn to 'history from below', as part of the thrust to recover and give expression to silenced voices and marginalised histories (Boyd & Ramirez, 2012). Emerging in the 1970s, this political move towards marginalised discourses was largely underpinned by a feminist movement that sought to make space for the documentation of women's experiences and women's histories (Abrams, 2010; Gluck & Patai, 1991). As such, oral historians and feminist academics found much common ground at a formative time for both camps. This association has continued, with the result that feminist social scientists regularly employ methodology that has its roots within oral history practice. Such approaches include a commitment to self-reflexivity, giving consideration to the power dynamics inherent in interviewing situations, and developing strategies that enable women to tell their stories outwith traditionally androcentric narrative styles. (Yow, 2005; Oakley, 1981; Barnes, 2013). Oakley (1981), for example, was deeply dismissive of what Abrams describes as the 'somewhat outmoded social-scientific approach to research

which pretended that the researcher was a neutral presence at the interview' (2010: 55).

Following on from this investment in women's experiences and a greater emphasis on gender as an identity position, academics working in the field of non-normative sexualities saw the potential of interviewing as a way in which to get at lived experiences not reflected in traditional and hegemonic academic research, which has conventionally employed heterosexuality as a default position (Kennedy & Davis, 1993; Friedman, 2012; Boyd, 2012).

This research seeks to uncover the stories of women whose experiences have been marginalised by heteronormative and patriarchal social structures at large, and, furthermore, through existing academic work, which has overlooked bisexuality in favour of a binary conceptualisation of sexuality. As a feminist scholar I believe that the approaches pioneered by feminist academics working across oral history and social science provide the best apparatus with which to undertake this work. Using an interpretivist epistemology, this research undertakes oral history interviews with five women to explore the ways they narrate experiences of power and control within their relationships, set against the wider context of their life narratives.

## **Recruitment**

It can be very challenging to recruit participants for research on sensitive or difficult topics (Browne, 2005) and as Bell has argued, for those researching sexuality, the most problematic aspect is that of access (Bell, 1997). This is extremely pertinent to this research, looking at a marginalised group within a marginalised group, or as Hartman describes, 'a hidden needle in an invisible haystack' (2011:66). As bisexual people are underrepresented within LGBT spaces and groups, the usual approaches to recruiting participants can be more difficult. In this research, this was also compounded by the specific topic of power and control in relationships. While the advertised information (appendix 2) and the information sheet (appendix 3) made clear that women

did not have to have experienced abuse to take part, and not all of the women had, it may have been the case that some women felt that their stories were not appropriate or not important enough for the research.

Snowball sampling was used to recruit participants, which is a common approach when seeking non-heterosexual groups (Browne, 2004; Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). This approach ensures that the researcher is embedded in the research, as they are where the snowball 'begins' (Duncan & Edwards, 1999). A Facebook group was set up from my personal Facebook account, which gave details of the research and how to contact the researcher. Messages were then sent to my personal contacts encouraging them to advertise and disseminate the information to their own friends. Women who were interested in the research were then asked to send a private message or email to me upon which I sent them the information sheet and asked them to contact me if they would like to take part. Once I had arranged the five interviews I then replied to subsequent enquiries to let them know that I had enough people, but would contact them if anyone dropped out. Research focusing on LGBT people has traditionally used established social groups. A key limitation of this approach is that you only recruit people who are 'out' within an LGBT setting and participate in specific LGBT activities (Browne, 2005). Research has also indicated that LGBT groups within Scotland are not necessarily a very inclusive space for bisexual people (Rankin, Morton & Bell, 2015), meaning that although LGBT groups and organisations are often seen as 'gatekeepers' to LGBT people, they are not necessarily the best avenues to recruit bisexual women. Online sampling allowed me to recruit outside of these traditional spaces.

An additional benefit to using social media within snowball sampling is that a far wider group of people can be reached. Social media networks are far wider and than traditional social networks, allowing information to spread more easily and to people outside of direct contacts. This is certainly the case within this research as I made contact with and recruited people who I did not know and who had found out about the research from friends of friends. This would have been less likely if advertising had taken place solely through email or LGBT



groups. Social media also allowed women who were interested in the research to 'check me out', by accessing my Facebook profile information and friendship groups. This has been highlighted as an important aspect of successfully recruiting non-heterosexual women (Browne, 2005) as it gives implied information about my politics, interests and social world. There are, however, limitations to snowball sampling. Firstly, it may have been the case that as the women were in some ways connected to me through friends or professional contacts, they may have been reluctant to divulge certain information about their lives and relationships (Holbrook & Jackson, 1996; Morgan, 1998). This will be discussed in more detail in a later section of this chapter. Snowball sampling has also been criticised for its lack of representativeness and generalizability (Hartman, 2011). However, as has been discussed in reference to oral history interviewing as a methodology, the aim of this research was not to be able to make generalised statements about bisexual women as a group, but rather to uncover the experiences of these individual women.

## **Participants**

The five women who took part in the interviews ranged in age from twenty three to fifty seven and all lived in Scotland. Research focusing on bisexuality tends to look specifically at younger people (Barker et al., 2008) with recruitment of older bisexual people being cited as difficult. While only one of the women was over thirty five in this research, there was a range of ages below this and, unusually for research of this type, none of the women were students. A key criticism of research into sexual minority identities is the lack of racial and ethnic diversity (Croom, 2000; Fukuyama & Ferguson, 2000; Meezan & Martin, 2003; Rust, 1996; Wheeler, 2003), and unfortunately this research does not counter this claim. All of the women were white British/Scottish. Although there was a high level of interest in the research I am not aware that any of the women who contacted me about taking part were non-white. Interestingly, within the interviews the women's ethnicity was not mentioned at all. While all of the women were asked specifically about any identity positions that they might have (over and above being women and

bisexual), none of the women described identity positions where they held privilege, such as being white, able-bodied, or cisgender, despite these being groups that, if not all, then most of the women occupied. For this reason, this research is unable to comment in any meaningful way on the intersections of ethnicity, (dis)ability and cisgender identity with sexual orientation and gender. With a greater capacity and a longer time period, a greater and more diverse group of women would have counteracted this limitation.

Within all of the information about the project the term 'bisexuality' was used for ease of use to refer to a broader group of women who were attracted to people of more than one gender. However, within the detail of all initial and follow-up information it was made clear that people who identified in a range of ways, including pansexual, queer or polysexual were welcome to take part. Allowing people to self-define their identities has been highlighted as extremely important within the research process when researching sexual minorities (Browne, 2005), and is something that I was personally very passionate about doing. Of the women, only two actively identified as bisexual. One identified as pansexual, one as queer, one as queer, bisexual and two-spirit and one did not define her sexual orientation.

## **The Interviews**

Each of the five women took part in one semi-structured interview lasting between seventy and one hundred and twenty five minutes. Each of the interviews took place in the participants' homes. This approach has the benefit of ensuring that the participants were in spaces in which they felt comfortable and goes some way to counteracting the power imbalance intrinsic in the interview process (outlined in more detail below). However, there were also limitations to this approach. I was unable to control the environment and so interruptions and distractions were common. Recording was temporarily stopped for crying babies, cleaning up cat urine and phones ringing. In two cases, the partners of the women were either in the house, or in the room while the interview took place. As Summerfield has argued, the presence of a

partner in the interview space can have a large effect on the interview (1998). This obviously has an impact on the way that women are able to talk about their lives and relationships and therefore must be acknowledged when analysing their words and meanings, as will be discussed.

When I arrived in interviewees' homes, I explained the interview process and reiterated the details on the information sheets they had previously been sent. While I was setting up the recording equipment, I gave the women the consent form (appendix 4) to look at and informed them that they could sign this at the end of the interview if they were still happy to take part, as recommended by the Oral History Association and Oral History Society best practice guidelines (OHA, 2009; OHS, no date). I again explained the purpose of the interviews and asked if they had any questions to ensure informed consent. Each of the interviews were audio recorded and all of the women were happy for the full recordings to be used. I had an outline of questions that I used in each of the interviews (appendix 5). Interviews employed a semi-structured approach, the central thrust being the major themes of power and control experienced in intimate relationships, but this being set against the backdrop of wider life themes such as childhood, school, families, and career. My goal was to give each woman as much control as possible over how she told her own story, while trying to retain a focus on the research topic. This was relatively successful as all of the women came to the interviews with an understanding of the area to be discussed and a desire to focus on this.

Intersubjectivity is a key concern amongst interpretivist and poststructuralist scholars who employ interviewing in their research. The term refers to the 'collision... between the two subjectivities in interviewer and interviewee' (Abrams, 2010:58). As Goffman has argued, we present ourselves differently depending on the context to present a public self (1959) and this is also the case within the interview context. Within feminist methodology it is acknowledged that this is the case as much for the interviewer as the interviewee. Therefore, the position of the interviewer within the interview encounter is just as important and needs to be acknowledged (Boyd & Ramirez, 2012). The positivist claim and desire for objectivity is not only

unachievable, but also undesirable (Yow, 1995). As Yow argues, subjectivity is an unavoidable presence in quantitative research as much as qualitative research, but an aim for oral history researchers is to acknowledge and explore this subjectivity within the research process. As an openly bisexual woman I am aware that my identity and experiences will have an impact on the interview encounter. While I shared many common identities with the women (sexual orientation, ethnicity, nationality), I am also aware that these commonalities may have presented obstacles in women feeling open to tell me certain things and in the way that I heard and analysed their words.

As outlined above one issue that is both a benefit and limitation of the research was that I had some sort of personal or social connection with each of the women, either as friends, friends of friends or through professional connections. Some academics have claimed that people will be less open with you if they believe that they are going to see you again (Holbrook & Jackson, 1996; Morgan, 1998) and I believe within this research this was the case to a certain extent. While my connection with them meant that there was more of a rapport from the start of the interviews, it may have been the case that at times the women were less open with me about certain aspects of their relationships than they might have been if I was a completely unknown person. However, I believe that these instances were outweighed by the benefits of having joint, if in some cases, distant social networks in common. The women were able to find out from my social media profiles and from their friends and acquaintances about me and my identity as bisexual. I believe that my visible sexual orientation and my professional background within both the LGBT and VAW sectors in Scotland ensured that the women were confident and comfortable talking to me about these issues. Ultimately, the intersections between the research process and personal relationships can never be fully knowable and so as Rose argues, 'transparent reflexivity', this being the desire for 'full understanding of the researcher, the researched and the research context', is not ever achievable (1997:306). Therefore, while it is important to acknowledge the potential consequences of this interaction, conclusions can only ever be partial.

## **Analysis**

Using close textual analysis and narrative analysis I looked at the ways in which these women narrated their lives and relationships, with a focus on how they narrated concepts of gender and power within their relationships and dating lives. These narratives covered experiences of both positive and abusive relationships throughout their lives with men and women. I focused my attention on ways in which these women's narratives compared with feminist theoretical understandings of power and control.

Some of the women who took part in the interviews had strong theoretical understandings of these concepts. However, others did not and so I was interested in seeing whether the accounts of control within their relationships differed. As will be shown, the narratives of the women who had experienced abuse were very similar, regardless of the women's theoretical underpinnings. Therefore, using these methodologies as ways of testing theory I was able to show how these theories hold up to lived experience.

## **Ethical Considerations**

A feminist approach to oral history embeds ethical considerations throughout the design and undertaking of the research process. Ethical considerations can be defined as, 'those we try to solve not in terms of expediency or gain but in terms of morality, of standards of right or wrong' (Yow 129). As has been demonstrated throughout this chapter, ethical considerations have been at the forefront of my mind when developing this research, particularly around issues of power and intersubjectivity in the interview process, as well as informed consent. The women who took part entrusted me with extremely personal and intimate details of their lives and so it is important that this piece of work does justice to their stories.

At its most basic level research should seek to do no harm to the people taking part (Helgeland, 2005:549). Within all of the interviews there were difficult and sometimes traumatic experiences that the women recounted to me. If the women became visibly upset, they were given the option to pause or end the interviews, although none of them chose to do this. I had resources and information available on local Women's Aid groups, rape crisis centres and LGBT support groups in preparation if I felt that this information would be useful. However, again the women who participated did not require this information.

Anonymity is also a key concern within any research of this type. Due to the sensitivities of the research topic and the fact that all of the women had some connection to me personally, it was extremely important that the women felt that the information they gave me would be used anonymously (Bogdan and Biklen, 1998). For this reason, each of the women was given a pseudonym and, following a feminist approach, each were asked if there was a name that they would prefer. They also spoke about various people who were part of their lives and these people were also assigned pseudonyms.

The recordings and subsequent transcriptions have been saved in password protected spaces on my personal computer and hard copies saved in locked drawers to ensure confidentiality. The full transcriptions of the interviews cannot be included within this dissertation and so the information that comes from them is selective. I am conscious that the specific quotes and sections of the interviews have been chosen by me to construct an argument and I have the power to convey the women's words in a variety of ways (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994). As Clandinin and Connelly state, 'we owe our care, our responsibility, to the research participants and how our research shapes their lives' (1994:422).

In conducting analysis I used transcripts I had created, and went back to the oral source where necessary for clarification. As has been discussed widely in oral history research, original audio sources are much richer than resulting transcripts, allowing for a deeper and more nuanced analysis of tone and

meaning (Portelli, 2006). Employing best practice from oral history methodology I worked to reflect the natural cadences of reported speech in my transcripts, so as to retain the authenticity of the primary source as far as possible (Abrams, 2010). The written nature of academic outputs necessitates the conveyance of oral sources in written form. Therefore, in order to minimise my own authorial voice in the translation from oral to written, the orality of the original source was at the forefront of my mind.

## **'It started off fabulous... well it would do': Experiences of Abuse**

Priscilla<sup>2</sup> was fifteen when she entered her first relationship. This is how she described it:

(I)t started off fabulous... well it would do. He was amazing and then it started to get a bit more... abusive... he wouldn't like the way I was dressing... my friends. And I remember the very first time that he slapped me it was because I answered him back. And he was 17 and he had a very bad temper (...) But then on my sixteenth birthday he kept nagging at me to have sex with him 'cos I was a virgin and I told him, no, no I'm not having it. And so every time I said no, was when I'd get another, sort of, kick about the bedroom. And then on my sixteenth birthday that was the very first time he raped me. And... I remember it and we were in the house ourselves and I just wanted it ... the ground to swallow me up. And I remember him saying, if you make noise, then I'll, I'll regret it. Pretty much, so... I didn't make noise, I didn't do anything. I just lay there. And then after that he just got off and then he left. And er... then, that's when it started to get progressively worse. On the... I would get hit more often and then it turned out that I fell pregnant. And erm... I said to him, 'I'm not going to get rid of it, it's not happening'. And he said, 'if you don't get rid of it, I will'. And then that's when... when I said, 'well, I'm not, so do what you want. I'm not getting rid of it' and then I remember that that was the worst, because I ended up, that's how I ended up with a broken rib. And bruises and everything like that. And I still didn't tell anyone, I kept quite.

(Priscilla)

Rachel's<sup>3</sup> first relationship started when she was seventeen. She described him as '(p)robably one of the most intelligent people I have ever met. Erm... was very well read, liked theatre, poetry, very similar political ideology. But... when it came to who I was, that was never something that was as central to the relationship'. When she was eighteen they moved in together and she delayed going to university and got a job in order to financially support him.

[H]e had also had bipolar, so he was very, very unstable as well as an addict and he... OD-ed a couple of times when I tried to leave him, so I felt very trapped in the relationship, so I thought the only way to make him better was by staying with him. And he also had a young child and so part of that was about making a stabler place as

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<sup>2</sup> Interview with Priscilla conducted by Amy Roch, 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2015.

<sup>3</sup> Interview with Rachel conducted by Amy Roch, 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2015.



possible for her. So a lot of it... he would often send me texts and things like that to go and find him when he'd been out and things like that... when he had gone to find whatever hit he was going to get that time. He was never directly violent to me, but was very good at breaking down walls and things like that.

[...]

I never told anyone until afterwards. I was always too scared that people would hate him and I never wanted anyone to hate him. And so I just pushed everyone away. I lost all my friends, I didn't have any friends by the time we broke up. Erm... I didn't really speak to Gemma, my sister, erm... really have any contact with my mum.

(Rachel)

Sam<sup>4</sup> also had experience of an abusive partner when she was younger,

I was with (a) guy for a while and he was incredibly manipulative. It was years and years ago. He was horrible and there was a horrible power imbalance. He would just like, he would kind of control different situations and manipulate them to make me feel powerless. So.... If he didn't like something he would up and leave and not give me an explanation. Sometimes he would be like, 'oh, I'm going to kill myself' and he'd take lots and lots of drugs and I'd be like, 'oh, no', not knowing what was happening and then he would disappear for days I would not know what had happened to him.

[...]

We worked in the same bar and I would be talking to a customer and he would lean on the end of the bar and scream at me for flirting. Like, call me horrible names in front of people. And then towards the end when things started to get a little bit shaky and he started to realise that I wasn't going to take it, he got a bit violent and then it all kinda blew up one night and I asked him about [him sleeping with someone else] and he just flipped out at the club and hit me. And the bouncers came down and threw him out and er... because he worked in that club as a DJ and everyone knew him all the staff said they hadn't seen anything even though it happened right at the bar and they all said 'oh no I didn't see anything happen'. So I was like, well I won't press charges then. So the police just let him go. Then he turned up at my house as well. So then I ended it because I was like, well it's only going to get worse from here. It isn't going to get any better.

(Sam)

These are three stories from three of the women I interviewed during the research. Each follows a very similar pattern that is familiar in the narratives of heterosexual women who have experienced abuse. Of the five women I spoke

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<sup>4</sup> Interview with Sam conducted by Amy Roch, 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2015.

to, none of them told me about any abusive or controlling relationships with women. This is obviously not to suggest this does not happen. However, this piece of research does support previous work that has found that most abuse experienced by bisexual women is from men (Goldberg & Meyer, 2012; Messinger, 2010, 2011; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000).

This chapter will focus on these three women's experiences of abusive relationships and explore the ways that power and control was exhibited in these relationships, highlighting three key areas discussed by the women: isolation, economic abuse, and coercion and threats. It will find that these women's narratives conform to Evan Stark's concept of coercive control, where a woman's freedom and space for action is limited (2007) due to the various ways that their partner seeks to control their freedom of movement.

## **Isolation**

Isolation was discussed by all three of the women in some capacity in the context of their abusive relationships. For Sam, this was done in subtle ways, through ridiculing her in front of their friends. While this may not seem like a particularly isolating activity, this strategy can be seen to have worked when he became violent in front of these same people. While Sam describes how many people had seen him assault her, none of them were willing to admit this. In this instance, her partner isolated her from her friends and colleagues through his behaviour in public, so that when they had to 'pick sides', they came to his defence. Sam's description of this event conforms to a patriarchal and old-fashioned understanding of heterosexual relationships, where violence within a relationship is seen as a 'private problem' (Stark, Flitcraft & Frazier 1979; Donovan et al, 2006). In Sam's case her friends and colleagues decided not to get involved, despite her wanting their support to report the violence to the police.

For both Priscilla and Rachel, the isolation could be seen to be self-inflicted. Priscilla felt she needed to isolate herself from her mother to protect her from

being upset. She later went on to tell me that her mother does not know about any of the gender based violence that she has experienced since this first abusive experience (as will be discussed in more detail later). Rachel also did not tell her friends or family about her abusive relationship,

I never told anyone until afterwards. I was always too scared that people would hate him and I never wanted anyone to hate him. And so I pushed everyone away. I lost all of my friends, I didn't have any friends by the time we broke up... I didn't really speak to Gemma, my sister, erm... really have any contact with my mum.

(Rachel)

While these may seem like decisions they were freely making, domestic abuse theorists would argue that these tactics are actually imposed on women as part of their partners' controlling behaviours (Dobash & Dobash, 1979). This may be done explicitly by the abusive partner, or as in these cases, where the abused partners know that there will be negative consequences to telling others (Stark, 2007).

### **Using Economic Abuse**

Both Rachel and Priscilla describe how they were financially controlled. In both cases, their partners required them to earn or borrow money to support them. Priscilla describes the controlling behaviour that she experienced in a different relationship to the one described above,

The relationship before I went out with Joanna was... he was... very controlling of me. He was a professional boxer and everything like that and he kept going on about he had no money and how he needed me to pay for everything and I would pay for it and then I ended getting into loads of debt about it and I'm still paying it off... to this day, 'cos it's so much. And he would say to me all the time... I promise I'll get the money back... and I've never got the money back.

(Priscilla)

Economic abuse is a common means of control within domestic abuse situations (Stark, 2007). Often this manifests through abusive partners

controlling access to finances by, for example, limiting access to bank accounts or cash (Johnson, 2008). However, there is growing evidence of perpetrators of abuse using debt as a means of controlling their partners, whether by setting up credit cards in their names or coercing them to incur large debts (Littwin, 2012; Adams, 2008; Outlaw, 2009). Research has also highlighted the prevalence of partners being coerced into working or incurring debt to pay for illegal drugs (Johnson, 2008). For Rachel, this obligation was a consequence of her partner's substance misuse, but also in order to provide for his child from a previous relationship,

I spent most of the time working to support him, because he was an addict, so he wasn't always able to hold down a job (...) I had taken a year out of school before university and was considering not going to university for a while, because I didn't think that I would be able to support him.

(Rachel)

In this case, this financial control was not confined to the direct consequences of taking her into debt, but also had wider ramifications that limited her freedom. As she describes, the obligation she felt to support him meant that she had deferred going to university and was considering not going at all. The significance of this is particularly telling as earlier in the interview she described at length the importance of education and career aspirations to both her and her family,

(B)oth of my parents have pushed really hard for both my sister and me to have every opportunity. That we should... to the extent that not going to university was not something that was ever really discussed in our house (...) my parents afforded me lots of opportunities on the limited budget they had (...) so we were always told that we would go to university and get an education and do whatever we wanted to do.

(Rachel)

For these women the economic control they experienced in their relationships both tied them to the relationship and limited their freedom in other aspects of their lives. While on the surface these women may have appeared to have power within these relationships, as they were financially providing for their

partners, the lack of viable alternatives and the threat of not complying meant that in fact they had very little control (Littwin, 2012). In both cases, this encroachment on their freedom can be seen within the relationship itself, but also continuing once the relationships have ended, through the large amounts of debt with which both women are now left.

### **Using Coercion and Threats**

All three of the women describe examples where their abusive partners used threats to ensure that they did what they wanted. For both Rachel and Sam, the threats were that their partner would kill himself if they didn't do what he wanted or if they left him. In Rachel's case, when she did try to leave her partner, he acted on these threats, which led to her feeling that she needed to return to the relationship to 'look after' him,

(W)e broke up a couple of times, but it was always for a really short space of time and then he'd OD, or something would happen and I'd get a call from the hospital saying he was in the hospital and getting his stomach pumped or something had happened. Or he had been found, one of his mates would call and he'd be at... one of the heroin dens and that I'd have to get him.

(Rachel)

Research has consistently shown that women will return to their abusive partners (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Johnson, 2008; Stark, 2007). As Rachel describes, many survivors of abuse talk about the guilt and emotional coercion that lead them to return (Griffing et al, 2002).

As Evan Stark argues, for many women in abusive relationships, the actual violence is not the worst aspect, rather it is the fear and expectation of what might happen (2007). For both Sam and Rachel, the threat that their partner might hurt themselves acted to restrict the women's movement and limited their options. Both Sam and Rachel talk about how once threats were made, their partners would often disappear for days on end, leaving them worried and trapped at home, waiting to hear from them,

He didn't have a mobile, he didn't like to be trackable and things like that. He used a lot of control over... making sure I was always tied down to the house, by disappearing for days as well. He was always good at disappearing. Keeping me there like that.

(Rachel)

For Sam, it is only in hindsight that she was able to identify this aspect of the relationships as abusive,

[I]t felt like I got sucked in and I didn't even realise what was happening in that situation. And then only kinda got to look at it retrospectively and was like look at all these things that he was doing that you didn't pick up on at the time. I remember feeling upset at the time, but not really being able to identify what he was doing.

(Sam)

In Rachel's case the coercion that her partner was able to exert through threats, and the displays of power through acts of violence directed at their home, meant that physical violence towards her directly was not necessary. As Stark argues, within a framework of coercive control, what the abusive partner does is less important than what the abused partner is unable to do (2006). In these cases, the abuse limited both Rachel and Sam's ability to live normal lives, preventing them from leaving the house or the abusive relationship.

The threats that Priscilla describes in her relationship were part of the sexual abuse she experienced. When Priscilla was raped by her partner, he threatened her to ensure that she would not tell anyone about the abuse. Later in the interview she goes on to say,

I was scared that if I did anything, what would happen 'cos the thought of... I would rather take my own life than him takin' it. So I didn't tell anybody. And I kept myself to myself.

(Priscilla)

Priscilla's experience describes a situation where her abusive partner had complete control over her (Johnson, 2008). At the time she was convinced that her partner would have killed her had she made anyone else aware of the

abuse. Within this context, there are no bruises or broken bones, however he had she had little control over her own life. There is a strong link between suicidal thoughts and actions and domestic abuse (Stark & Flitcraft, 1995) and this is particularly so during pregnancy (as Priscilla was at the time) (Jasinaki, 2004).

### **Escalation**

In all three of the women's narratives, the abuse escalated over time and particularly when they challenged the control these men had over them. For Sam the first time she experienced physical violence from her partner was when she challenged him about his infidelity. In Rachel's case, the threats that her partner made to self-harm became reality. And for Priscilla, the violence escalated dramatically when she told her boyfriend that she would not have an abortion. In all three of these cases, the abusive men that these women were in relationships with had their power questioned or challenged. This mirrors previous research (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Johnson, 2008). For example, Stark has highlighted that women are at heightened risk of extreme violence or murder at the point at which they leave their abusive partners (Stark, 2007).

Thus far the experiences of these women are indistinguishable from narratives of heterosexual women's experiences of domestic abuse. Their experiences conform closely to Stark's concept of coercive control (2007) in the ways in which their partners sought to limit their freedom. Priscilla, Rachel and Sam's experiences are also reflected in practitioner tools, such as the Power and Control Wheel (1984), where the key dynamics of domestic abuse are highlighted to show the ways that women experience power and control exerted over them. This could therefore be used to argue that issues of gender and sexuality are irrelevant to our understanding of domestic abuse, as some theorists have argued (Island & Letellier, 1991; Elliot, 1996). However, it is important to note that all three of these women recount experiences that happened at a young age where they were not necessarily 'out' to their partners (or even themselves). Therefore this research is unable to explore the ways in which bisexual women's experiences of abuse may be different at

various points in their lives depending on how they self-define their identities at that time.

For Priscilla, Rachel and Sam the abuse they experienced can clearly be seen as what Stark defines as a liberty crime (2007). Their experiences of abuse restricted their movement and their options, through the ways in which their partners sought to exert power and control over them. These restrictions of freedom (Johnson, 2008) impacted on their relationships with family and friends, their finances and their careers at the time and these restrictions of their lives continue in different ways after the relationships ended. Their experiences also reflect the very gendered ways in which women experience domestic abuse. While there are calls for a gender-neutral understanding of domestic abuse to better reflect the experiences of LGBT people (Island & Letellier, 1991; Elliot, 1666; Dempsey, 2013), such an analysis would make invisible the very gendered dynamics within these women's lives.



## **Looking for a knight in shining armour?: Gender and power in relationships**

The previous chapter focused on the experiences of the three interviewees who had experienced abusive relationships. However, obviously concepts of power and control are also relevant within non-abusive relationships, in that they speak to the ways in which interpersonal dynamics play out in relationships, and in how subjectivities are negotiated within intimate partnerships. Bringing in the narratives of Laura<sup>5</sup> and Pamela<sup>6</sup>, this chapter will now go on to explore the ways that all five women narrated ideas of gender, power and control in their relationships with men and women, and how these tied into their identities as bisexual women. Firstly, this chapter will look at how the women talked about their partners' attitudes to their non-straight identities. It will then go on to explore the different ways the women narrated ideas of power within their relationship. Finally, it will explore the different and sometimes contradictory ways that they talked about equality.

### **Being bi in relationships**

None of the interviewees felt that any of their current or previous partners had demonstrated any negative attitudes towards their being attracted to more than one gender. In fact, Laura and Rachel told very similar stories about their partners actively challenging other people's assumptions and biphobia within social settings,

Clare is very, feels it's very... I feel it's important as well, you know to identify as bisexual in those situations, but I'm not always I don't always say something, whereas Clare will say, 'Laura's bisexual' or 'remember that people are bisexual as well'. So she is there kinda protecting my... my bisexual honour!

(Laura)

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<sup>5</sup> Interview with Laura conducted by Amy Roch, 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2015.

<sup>6</sup> Interview with Pamela conducted by Amy Roch, 10<sup>th</sup> May 2015.

For both Laura and Rachel their identities are celebrated within their current relationships and are seen as positive parts of who they are. Despite the difficulties of 'doing bisexuality' (Hartman, 2013:40), in these examples, the women's partners supported and made visible their bisexuality to others, through encouraging and participating in the women's 'bisexual display' (Hartman, 2013). However, partners' attitudes were not always this positive. During the interview with Priscilla, her partner stayed in the room and played on a games console with headphones on. She gave the impression of not being able to hear our conversation, however at one point in the interview the following interaction occurred,

Amy Roch: Do you think you did 'come out' to them?

Priscilla: Well, no... I must of!

Joanna (Partner of Priscilla): You can't come out if you're not gay.

Described by Priscilla as a 'gold star lesbian', Joanna here demonstrates that to her 'coming out' is a process that only gay people can ever truly do. This is in sharp contrast to those interviewees who felt that for them coming out was an ongoing activity. As Laura says, 'I think coming out is a long process, that goes on and on'. As an example of what Rust describes as an 'explanatory' belief (2000), here Joanna can be seen to minimise Priscilla's experiences by rejecting the legitimacy of her coming out story. Sam also stated that a previous partner had been very positive about her identity. However, she then went on to say,

He was pretty chilled about it. He was like, he was totally fine about it. We talked about it right at the beginning of the relationship and he was, actually he didn't care. He was really the most nonchalant person you could ever meet, it was quite annoying at times. And then when I started roller derby he would make loads of jokes. He was like, 'oh I'm really worried, you're going to come back a lesbian'. But he never meant it. He was, he was fine.

(Sam)

Here, Sam's partner highlights many of the conventional biphobic assumptions made about bisexual women. Through his jokes he uses Rust's concept of an

explanatory belief to minimise bisexuality (Rust, 2000), buying into the assumptions that bisexuality is a transitional phase to a true lesbian identity (Tabatabai & Linder, 2011; Guittar, 2013; Ochs & Rowley, 2005). These jokes also refer to prevalent stereotypes relating to the promiscuity of bisexual people (Hackl et al., 2012; Cashore & Tuason, 2009; Meyer, 2004).

For some interviewees, their bisexual identity was celebrated or valued within their relationships, this being in contrast to much of the academic literature that has focused on partners' negative attitudes to bisexual identity (Tabatabai & Linders, 2011; Donovan, Barnes & Nixon, 2014; Head & Milton, 2014). Despite research highlighting the importance to bisexual women of partners positively acknowledging their identities (Hartman-Linck, 2014), little research has shown this to be the case. For others in this study, their bisexuality was not valued in the same way as Rachel and Laura's. While the examples given may not be serious or violent examples of biphobia, they nonetheless demonstrate that for these women their identities were something to be suspicious of or de-valued.

### **Who wears the trousers?**

Most of the women talked explicitly about equality as a valued commodity that they sought to work towards and uphold in their current partnerships or seek out in potential relationships,

(F)or me, any relationship has to be egalitarian in the way that things are, you know, housework, making decisions, I don't do well when one side or another... comes out... has been more dominant.  
(Pamela)

Most of the women were keen to demonstrate that previous or current non-abusive relationships with men were egalitarian in nature, often comparing these relationships with other more 'heteronormative' couples. They employed examples such as division of household labour and shared decision-making processes. For example, both Laura and Pamela, in reference to previous relationships with men, and Rachel, when describing her current (opposite-sex)

relationship, made clear that these were quite different to more conventional heterosexual relationships.

I think it's really interesting when you try to pick apart the household stuff and who does what [...] when I talk to friends, female friends who are in relationships with men, it does seem generally, but not exclusively, more divided in terms of who does what and when things are done. Like a whole lot of, well he helps around the house, that kind of approach and I don't think we have that.

(Laura)

This strategy has been highlighted by Hartman (2013), and Tabatabai and Linders (2011), who found that non-straight women used these same approaches to highlight and make visible the 'queerness' of their relationships and the ways they differed from heteronormative roles.

All of the women exhibited a general reluctance to delve too much into the gendered roles and power dynamics within their current relationships and were hesitant to place too many gendered characteristics onto their relationship dynamics. Laura's response to questions around this is typical,

I would say Clare is stronger than me, so if there is something heavy then she will move it. And so sometimes I think this is ridiculous, how rolesy is this? Even though I really wouldn't describe us as a kind of rolesy or femme-masculine relationship at all. I would say if you're going to go into all that I would say that I'm probably more femme than Clare, but I don't think it's dramatic.

(Laura)

Laura, Pamela and Rachel all spoke about being a 'team' with their partner. This was mentioned when talking about how decisions were made or reasoning behind dividing tasks in certain ways. As Rachel told me,

I think it's [being equal] something that I am very aware of, constantly to maintain our balance in our relationship.

(Rachel)

Responsibilities and obligations attached to domestic arrangements were seen to be divided according to what Desaulniers describes as 'exchanges and calculations' (1991), such as what was most practical, who preferred certain tasks or held skill-sets. None of the women talked about feeling unfairly

burdened by household responsibilities or having less control over domestic arrangements. However, four of the women did talk about how they were particularly fastidious about cleaning and that this meant they took on more of certain tasks than their partners. All four of these women also described themselves as the more feminine person within the relationships they were describing (regardless of whether these relationships were with men or women). It is interesting, therefore, that although they did eventually claim a disproportionate amount of the household chores, this was seen as an equitable 'choice'. As Oerton has argued in relation to domestic labour in same-sex relationships, these narratives makes invisible the complex gendered and other power imbalances within relationships (1997). While these women narrate their relationships as shunning conventional gendered dynamics, this 'gender-empty' lens therefore makes it more difficult to explore 'how different members of... households constitute their differences in ways that embody power relations, and how each household member benefits from the domestic arrangements constituted as a result' (Oerton, 1997:426).

When describing relationships with both men and women, the women were keen to distance themselves from conventional heteronormative dynamics. However, as has been highlighted in previous work, while shunning these roles, the women did tend to revert back to very normative gendered roles when attempting to describe how decisions and jobs were divided (Pennington, 2009). For Laura this was in relation to physical strength, for Rachel this was the fact that that her (male) partner did all of the washing up. Therefore, while they did not feel that their domestic lives were divided by gender, when asked to explain them they only had gendered narratives through which to explain them.

There was a clear difference in the way that women who had experienced abusive relationships then discussed power and control in subsequent relationships, compared with those women who had not had abusive partners. The concept of power came up again and again within the interviews with the three abuse survivors, whether explicitly or implicitly. All three discussed how the abuse had an ongoing impact on their awareness of power within their

relationships. However, this manifested in different ways. Sam described how she was very aware of the potential of having too much power in relation to her partner. At the time of the interview she had recently ended a relationship with someone she described as 'really liking' due to these concerns about a power imbalance,

And the problem with the last person is that she wasn't doing anything just now. And so her life, she could just, well she wanted to spend loads of time with me 'cos she didn't have anything else really going on. Whereas I just felt that I was being an asshole because I was really busy. So I think that I would need someone else who was equally busy. It wouldn't be just one person calling the shots, because that power imbalance would be not right for me.

(Sam)

Sam was aware of the lack of power that she had in her previous relationships with men and this led to a need not to be the one to perpetuate that power imbalance in her relationships with women. On closer inspection there is a gendered aspect to this attitude towards power dynamics. While Sam felt that she needed to end her most recent relationship with a woman because of her unequal share of power, the way she should have later on to discuss her dates with men would suggest that she may not have done the same with a man.

When I start a relationship with a guy my behaviour is very different. I play the game, I'm like, oh I need to wait like 5 hours before I reply to that message.

(Sam)

For both Priscilla and Rachel, following their abusive relationships they sought to ensure that they gained or retained a level of power. Rachel was able to clearly identify the areas where she sought to retain power in her current relationship. When describing her previous abusive relationship she said,

(T)here were just no separate lives, nothing... you couldn't tell where I finished and ... Ben had his own life, but I was completely and utterly Ben's life and so it's always been... since then, I've always said that if I felt like I was losing my own time, then we have to have that separate time (...) Our finances are completely separate apart from having things to pay bills.

(Rachel)

Rachel described how having separate lives, friends and finances was particularly important to her in order for her to retain power and independence in her current relationship. After her first abusive relationship, Priscilla describes how she 'went off the rails', which included having lots of different sexual relationships, as well as self-harming and being diagnosed with bipolar disorder. These are consequences of abuse that could have been experienced by any woman regardless of her sexual orientation. However, for Priscilla, some of these casual sexual relationships were with women. As she explained when recounting this period of her life, 'I slept with so many women, because I knew what they wanted to hear, I could always tell them what they wanted to hear'. This is in sharp contrast to how she describes her sexual relationships with men during this time, which include narratives of violence, control and sexual degradation. Through this quote it could be argued that Priscilla was seeking to manipulate the women she slept with. However, looking at the wider context of her narrative and the way she describes these interactions, they allowed her to regain some power that was absent from her relationships with men.

Domestic abuse practitioners realise the importance of survivors of domestic abuse regaining power (Kasturirangan, 2008), and this has been the source of various programmes designed to support women through the recovery process. However, as Riger has argued, there is a key difference between a person's sense of empowerment after experiencing abuse and the actual power that they have (1993).

The women in this study spoke of relationship dynamics that appeared gender empty (Oerton, 1997) and sat outside of more heteronormative gender dynamics. While framing the unequal division of household labour as 'choice', they avoided having to analyse these dynamics along more gendered lines. Despite this, the women had no option but to revert to more gendered terms to describe certain characteristics within their relationships, due to the highly gendered discourse around household responsibilities. While power was discussed implicitly in all interviews, there was a clear difference in the very conscious way that the women who had experienced abuse described their

understandings of power. Therefore although gender (including one's gender identity and expression) is important in understanding power dynamics within these relationships, women's gendered experiences of abuse also impacted on these dynamics.

### **Striving for equality?**

Whether achieved or not, all of the women, regardless of experience of abuse, discussed that equality within a relationship was important. However, for some of the women, their narratives also contained contradictions to this. When asked about equality within her relationship, Laura admitted,

I think there are some times that we give ourselves credit for being like, 'yeah, we're in this queer relationship and we don't have roles' and actually we have fallen into that a little bit.

(Laura)

While Pamela discussed at length her desire for equality within her relationships, she also admitted that this was not necessarily the case,

I met Chad at university and he just swept me off my feet and he did this knight in shining armour, who didn't make me feel like two cents, he made me feel like a million dollars. A friend had invited me to this party at one of the dorms and on the door there was this stunning androgynous guy with blond hair at the door and he bows down as he says, 'greetings and salutations mademoiselle, may I take your wrap?'. And I was like, 'whoa!'

(Pamela)

Pamela was not the only one to mention the phrase 'a million dollars' in relation to how they were treated by a partner. When discussing dating and comparing this to her grandparents generation, Priscilla said,

Women pursue you and try to make you feel special. And try to go the extra mile. Whereas I have not really come across men that would do that. Because men are not as old-fashioned as they used to be [...] I'd say that women are more old-fashioned than men are, 'cos men are quite forceful about it, some women can be obviously. But most of them are... if you're interested I'll make you feel like a million dollars kind of thing.

(Priscilla)



These findings support previous work that found that despite ambitions of equality, many bisexual people reinforced gender binaries within their relationships (Pennington, 2009). For both Priscilla and Pamela a sense of romance and being treated 'like a million dollars' was an important part of a relationship. Interestingly, for Priscilla she had found that women were more willing and able to inhabit this 'gentlemanly' gender position than men were, meaning that for her she was more able to perform the traditional gender dynamic that she desired within a same-sex relationship. This is supported by previous research that has found that for some bisexual women, 'being taken care of' and protected is a key part of how their relationships should be (Pennington, 2009:50). However, as Pennington argues, this dynamic is not universal and as with the women she interviewed, the women within this study expressed and thought about the gender dynamics within their relationships in very different ways.

Much previous research has highlighted that many bisexual women hold queer and feminist ideologies (Hartman-Linck, 2011, 2013; Oerton, 1997). For some of the women in this study, this holds true. However, this is certainly not the case for all the women interviewed. While equality was something that most of the women said was important to them, this was not necessarily achieved or even desired by all five women in practice. For Priscilla in particular, her queer relationship allowed her to uphold the traditional gendered roles that she admired and desired, but was unable to achieve with men.

Across the interview set, these five women narrated diverse lives and relationships. There were differences in the ways their partners felt about their bi identities and in how they described what they wanted from a relationship and a partner. There were also key differences between how they talked about power depending on their experiences of control and abuse in their lives. These variances acknowledge the very multifaceted lives and experiences that these women have had, whether in terms of their gender identities and expressions, the ways they identify their sexualities, or the many other identities positions they hold.

The narratives of these women show no 'bisexual experience' of relationships, but rather highlight the impact that these women's intersecting identities have on concepts of power and control in their lives. Despite narratives that attempt to present a 'gender empty' (Oerton, 1997) dynamic, gender (including gender identity and expression) were extremely important to how interviewees were able to describe their domestic lives with both men and women. This is not to say that these dynamics were the case regardless of the gender of their partners, but rather that the dynamics are more complicated than simplified binary conceptions of men and women's gender roles. These women narrated lives that were 'gender full' (Oerton, 1997) and complicated by a range of identity positions and subjective experiences.

## Conclusions

This dissertation has sought to explore the ways that five bisexual women narrated understandings of power and control within their relationships. The narratives pertaining to abuse from Priscilla, Rachel and Sam were very similar to each other, but also to a gendered analysis of male violence against heterosexual women (Stark, 2007). They experienced a range of controlling behaviours from their partners including isolation, economic abuse and threats, and these escalated over time and at points at which their partners were losing control. In a field where bisexual women have often 'fallen through' the gaps of research and service provision, this research highlights the importance of including bisexual women in any analysis of domestic abuse and not subsuming their experiences into those of heterosexual or lesbian women on the basis of the gender of their partner (Head & Milton, 2014).

As has been shown, the impact of domestic abuse on these three women was not just at the point where they were experiencing the abuse, but continued into subsequent relationships. For these women their loss of power and control within their abusive relationships meant that these were concepts that were at the forefront of their minds. Whether this meant they sought to gain power or avoid it, their awareness of it within their non-abusive relationships was in stark contrast to the other two women.

This research did not seek to find conclusions about all 'bisexual women's lives', but rather to explore the ways that these five women talked about experiences of their relationships in the context of their wider life narratives. While the narratives of abuse may have been similar, the women presented very different narratives of their wider lives, non-abusive relationships and aspirations for these. While some theorists have claimed that gender is not important to an analysis of LGBT people's lives (Island & Letellier, 1991), this research argues otherwise. Whether seeking to challenge or conform to traditional gender roles in their relationships with women or men, gender was important both in how these women sought to narrate their domestic lives, but

also in explaining what they desired from a partner. This interaction, however, is far from simple, but, rather, is complicated by their sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions. These women's intersecting identities complicated the binary conceptions of men and women's roles. This highlights the need to understand the 'gender full' nature of bisexual women's relationships in order to analyse power within them (Oerton, 1997).

Any research will be limited in its scope and this work is certainly no exception. There has been little or no discussion of how the intersections of other points of oppression or privilege impact on these women's lives, including ethnicity, class and dis/ability. This is both due to the women's lack of discussion of these areas, but also due to time constraints within this research. An important development of this work would be to look more specifically at how class intersects with these women's understandings of power. In relation to domestic abuse, bisexual women's lives present an important area of research, being at the crossroads of where traditional feminist research and research looking at same-sex relationships meet. While this research has brought important insights into bisexual women's experiences of abuse, it is limited in its exploration of their experiences of abuse, as the perpetrators were all men and their experiences were at a young age. While these experiences are important, in order to develop our understanding further of the gendered dynamics of domestic abuse within LGBT lives this should be a future area of research focus.

This research highlights the need for both VAW and LGBT sectors to understand bisexual lives and identities, and to look past monosexist attitudes. It is vital that service providers acknowledge the diversity in people's relationships in order to provide inclusive services that meet the specific needs of bisexual women.

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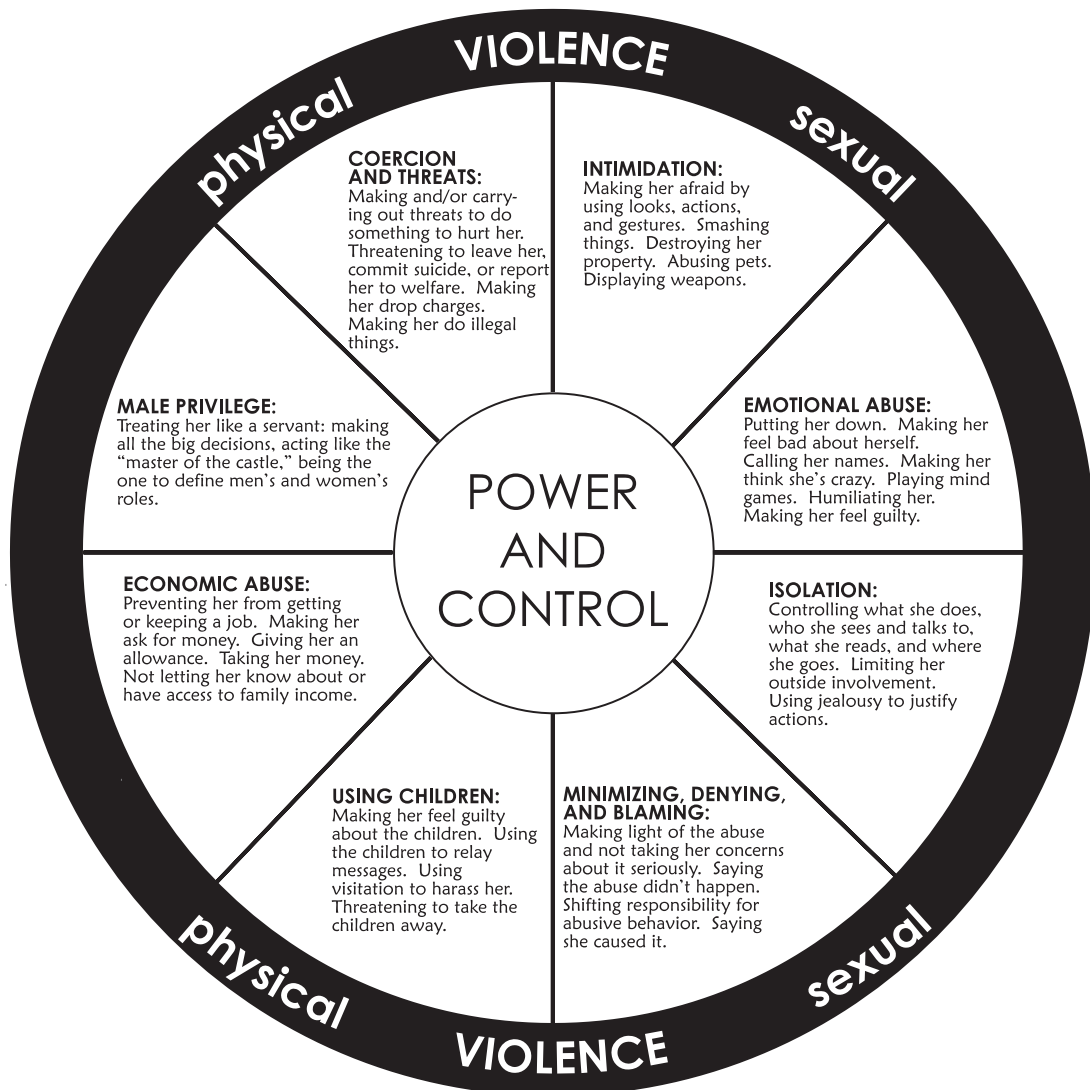
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## Appendix 1

# POWER AND CONTROL WHEEL

Physical and sexual assaults, or threats to commit them, are the most apparent forms of domestic violence and are usually the actions that allow others to become aware of the problem. However, regular use of other abusive behaviors by the batterer, when reinforced by one or more acts of physical violence, make up a larger system of abuse. Although physical assaults may occur only once or occasionally, they instill threat of future violent attacks and allow the abuser to take control of the woman's life and circumstances.

The Power & Control diagram is a particularly helpful tool in understanding the overall pattern of abusive and violent behaviors, which are used by a batterer to establish and maintain control over his partner. Very often, one or more violent incidents are accompanied by an array of these other types of abuse. They are less easily identified, yet firmly establish a pattern of intimidation and control in the relationship.



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## Appendix 2

### Facebook page

The image shows a screenshot of a Facebook page for a community titled "Research Exploring Power and Control in Bisexual Women's Relationships". The page features a cover photo with a pink, purple, and blue gradient. The page name is "Research Exploring Power and Control in Bisexual Women's Relationships" and it is categorized as a "Community".

On the left side, there are several widgets: "Add a Cover", "60 likes 0 this week" by Amanda Turner and 26 other friends, "2 post reach this week", "Invite friends to like this Page", and a "Reach a new milestone 100 Likes" badge with a "Promote Page" button. Below these is an "ABOUT" section with a right-pointing arrow.

The main content area shows a "Post" section with a "Write something..." prompt and a "Post" button. Below this is a post from the community, dated April 26, with the text: "What is the purpose of the study? By interviewing bisexual women about their lives and relationships, this research aims to explore how bi women's identities as both women and bisexual people impact on, and change within, their relationships with men and women. The research will explore how bi women's experiences differ".

On the right side, there is a "Promote" dropdown menu, a "THIS WEEK" summary showing "2 Post Reach" and "0 Post Engagement", a "Recent" section for the year 2015, and a "See Your Ad Here" section with a "Boost Post" button.

## Appendix 3



### Participant Information Sheet

#### **Research project: Exploring Power and Control in Bisexual Women's Relationships**

**My name is Amy Roch and I am currently doing a Masters in Equality and Human Rights.**

*You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.*

*Thank you for reading this.*

#### **What is the purpose of the study?**

By interviewing bisexual women about their lives and relationships, this research aims to explore how bi women's identities as both women and bisexual people impact on, and change within, their relationships with men and women. The research will explore how bi women's experiences differ when in relationships with men and women and look at how things like homophobia, biphobia and sexism impact on these relationships.

While not specifically focussed on abusive relationships, the research will explore how things like gender roles, sexuality and power impact on women's relationships. Despite there being a growing interest in research looking at LGBT people's relationships, existing research tends to focus on gay and lesbian people. However, this research aims to find out more about how bi women's experiences mirror and differ from other people within LGBTQI communities.

#### **Who can take part?**

The research is open to anyone who identifies as a bisexual woman and has been in an intimate relationship. Women who identify with another non-binary sexual orientation (for example, pansexual, polysexual, queer) are also encouraged to take part.

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

Your participation in this project is entirely voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time, without an obligation to provide a reason. You are not obliged to discuss anything you do not wish to discuss. Although you will be asked questions to guide the interview each participant is free to talk about whatever he or she feels is relevant. The interview is not intended to be an unpleasant experience for you but, if at any

point you feel uncomfortable and would like to take a break from the interview, or stop the interview altogether, please simply indicate this to the interviewer and she will switch off the recorder.

### **What will happen if I take part?**

When you contact me I will arrange a time and a place for the interview to take place. This could be at your home, in a public place (e.g. a coffee shop) or another venue that you feel comfortable (e.g. an LGBT or women's centre). Before the interview I will give you additional information about the interview and the types of questions I might ask.

Although these are officially referred to as 'interviews' they will be very informal and more like a chat between the participant and the interviewer. I will not be using a questionnaire or survey. Instead you will be encouraged to talk generally about your life and experiences, and specifically about your recollections and experiences of your relationships and sexual identity. There is no set time limit for the interview and so this will depend on what you wish to talk about and how much time you would like to spend, but interviews are expected to last between 1-2 hours.

After the interview I will ask you to sign a consent form to say that you are still happy for the information you have given me to be used.

### **Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?**

**All of your personal data will be kept confidential.** After the interview you will be asked to sign a consent form to say that you have read this information and that you consent for the interview to be used for the research. After the interviews have been completed they will be transcribed. You may ask for a copy of the recording or the typed transcript if you wish. Your interview will be stored on a laptop that is password protected and to which only myself and my supervisor have access.

### **What will happen to the results of the research study?**

The information you give me will be used to write my Masters dissertation. It may also be used in other academic articles on the same topic.

### **Who has reviewed the study?**

This research has been reviewed by my supervisor Dr Francesca Stella and the University of Glasgow ethics board.

### **Contact for Further Information**

If you have any questions about the research, you can contact me:

Amy Roch, email: [2110642r@gla.ac.uk](mailto:2110642r@gla.ac.uk)

Or my dissertation supervisor, Dr Francesca Stella, email: [Francesca.stella@gla.ac.uk](mailto:Francesca.stella@gla.ac.uk)

**If you have any concerns regarding the conduct of this research project, you can contact the College of Social Sciences Ethics Officer Dr Muir Houston, email: [Muir.Houston@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:Muir.Houston@glasgow.ac.uk)**





## Appendix 5

### 1. About you

Name

Age

Where are you from?

Where have you lived?

What is your job/profession?

How would you describe yourself?

Tell me about your sexual orientation.

How long have you identified in this way?

Can you tell me about any other identities you have had.

How important is your bi identity to you?

Do you identify differently in different places? Why?

Describe how you dress/do your gender?

How visible do you think your bi identity is?

How do people react to your bi identity?

What impact does this have on how you behave/what you do in different situations?

Do you have a 'coming out' story?

What are your experiences of coming out?

Are there any other identities that you have that are important to you?

Tell me about school.

What were your friendship groups like?

Were you 'out' at school?

Did you have any romantic relationships in school?

Tell me about your work/career.

How comfortable are you talking about your sexual orientation there?

Have you experienced any prejudice at work?

Tell me about your family.

Are you close?

Do you have any siblings?

How you experienced any prejudice from any family members?

### Physical and online spaces

Do you know many other people who are bi?

Do you consider yourself to be part of the LGBT(QI) community?

Do you spend time on 'the scene'?

Do you take part in LGBT activism?

Are you politically active in any other ways?

Where do you feel safest/most comfortable being open about your sexual orientation? Why?

Where do you feel least safe/comfortable?

Do you have experiences of sexism in these spaces?

Do you have experience of homophobia or biphobia in these spaces?

Do you have experience of any other discrimination in these spaces?  
Do you spend much time communicating online?  
Would you say you were more or less able to be open about your sexual orientation online?

### **Relationships**

Are you in a relationship at the moment?  
Tell me about them.  
How long have you been together?  
Do you live together?  
How would you describe your relationship?  
Do you think you have lots in common?  
How do you make decisions?  
Do you often argue? What about? How do you solve arguments?  
What causes tension in your relationship?  
What are the best things about your relationship?  
Do you consider you and your partner to be equals?  
How do you imagine your future together?  
Who is in charge of finances? Chores? Social engagements?  
Do you think that your roles within your relationship are gendered?  
Do you have many friends in common?  
Do you socialize much together? Separately?  
Does your sexual orientation play much of a role in your relationship?  
Has your sexual orientation ever caused problems/tensions?

Have you had many other relationships?  
Tell me about them.  
See questions above  
Why did the relationship end?  
Do you still have contact with them?

Have you ever done online dating?  
What sites did you use?  
How did you describe your identity online?  
What responses did you get?  
Were there differences between your interactions with men and women online?  
Did you experience any discrimination when online dating? Why was this?

Would you consider any of your relationships to have been controlling/abusive?  
Did you ever tell anyone else this?  
Are there any specific difference between your relationships with men and women?  
Do you think you were different in your relationships with men and women?  
How?

### **Closing questions**

Is there anything else you would like to tell me about?  
How have you found this interview?

## Appendix 6

### Participant biographies

**Priscilla** is twenty four years old and lives in Lanarkshire. She works in a pharmacist and lives with her partner, who is a woman. She does not define her sexual orientation in any particular way.

**Rachel** is twenty eight years old and lives in Glasgow. She works for a charity and lives with her partner, who is a man. She identifies as pansexual.

**Sam** is twenty eight years old and lives in Glasgow. She works for a charity and is not currently in a relationship. She identifies as queer.

**Laura** is thirty four years old and lives in Glasgow. She works for a charity and is currently on maternity leave and lives with her partner who is a woman. She identifies as bisexual.

**Pamela** is fifty seven years old and lives in Glasgow. She is an administrator and is not currently in a relationship. She identifies as bisexual, queer or two-spirit.