Journal of Bisexuality

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/wjbi20

It's Like Bisexuality, but It Isn't: Pansexual and Panromantic People's Understandings of Their Identities and Experiences of Becoming Educated about Gender and Sexuality

Nikki Hayfield & Karolína Křížová

To cite this article: Nikki Hayfield & Karolína Křížová (2021) It's Like Bisexuality, but It Isn't: Pansexual and Panromantic People's Understandings of Their Identities and Experiences of Becoming Educated about Gender and Sexuality, Journal of Bisexuality, 21:2, 167-193, DOI: 10.1080/15299716.2021.1911015

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/15299716.2021.1911015

© 2021 The Author(s). Published with license by Taylor & Francis Group, LLC.

Published online: 10 Jul 2021.

Submit your article to this journal

Article views: 11966

View related articles

View Crossmark data

Citing articles: 12 View citing articles

Full Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at https://www.tandfonline.com/action/journalInformation?journalCode=wjbi20

JOURNAL OF BISEXUALITY
2021, VOL. 21, NO. 2, 167–193
https://doi.org/10.1080/15299716.2021.1911015

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

OPEN ACCESS Check for updates

It's Like Bisexuality, but It Isn't: Pansexual and Panromantic People's Understandings of Their Identities and Experiences of Becoming Educated about Gender and Sexuality

Nikki Hayfield and Karolína Křížová

Department of Health and Social Sciences, Frenchay Campus, University of the West of England (UWE), Bristol, UK

ABSTRACT

In this paper, we report on our survey research which sought to explore how pansexual and panromantic people experience and understand their identities. Eighty participants, mainly in the U.K., were recruited via social media and internet forums. Thematic analysis resulted in the development of two key themes. In *The label depends on the context: It's like bisexuality, but it isn't,* we report the blurred lines between pansexual and bisexual identities and discuss how, despite often having a preference for pansexual and panromantic, these participants nonetheless engaged in strategic use of both bi and pan terms. In the second theme entitled *Educated and enlightened pansexuals* we report how participants portrayed pansexual and panromantic identities as requiring an advanced understanding of gender and sexuality. This meant that those who engaged in these terms were represented as educated and enlightened. In the subtheme *An internet education*: *Tumblr-ing into pan identities and communities,* we discuss how educational resources and inclusive spaces were largely understood to exist only online. In this research, participants understood pansexual and panromantic identities to be related to, but distinct from, other identities (including bisexuality) and presented their identities as entailing distinctive experiences, including of prejudice and discrimination. We discuss the contribution and implications of our findings.

KEYWORDS

Bisexual; bisexual umbrella; online communities; plurisexual; thematic analysis; *Tumblr*

The increasing interest in plurisexual and pansexual identities

The term plurisexual has been used to collectively refer to a range of identities broadly defined by attraction to more than one gender; including bisexuality, pansexuality, omnisexuality, and queer, among others (Brown & Lilton, 2019; Hayfield, 2020; Maliepaard & Baumgartner, 2020). Plurisexual identities have become increasingly recognized and taken up within western cultures over the last decade (Mitchell et al., 2015; Office

CONTACT Nikki Hayfield Nikki2.Hayfield@uwe.ac.uk Department of Health and Social Sciences, Frenchay Campus, University of the West of England (UWE), Bristol BS16 1QY, UK.

© 2021 The Author(s). Published with license by Taylor & Francis Group, LLC.

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

for National Statistics [ONS], 2019; Pew Research Center, 2013). Whilst in 2012, 0.4% of the U.K. population identified as bisexual, by 2017 this figure had increased to 0.7% (ONS, 2012, 2019). This increase has most notably been among young people, with the ONS reporting that 2.3% of people aged between 16 and 24 years identified as bisexual (ONS, 2019). Whilst the most commonly recognized and frequently taken up plurisexual identity has been bisexuality, pansexuality is also becoming increasingly embraced (Belous & Bauman, 2017; Galupo et al., 2015).

Perhaps in response to the turn to pansexuality among young people within wider western societies, there has been a gradual increase in the recognition of pansexual identities within some mainstream media and popular culture. Programs on both television and streaming services have begun to include characters who are portrayed as, or interpreted to be, pansexual (GLAAD, 2020). These include Vignette Stonemoss in Amazon's U.S. fantasy series *Carnival Row*, Jack Harkness in the British sci-fi drama, *Torchwood* (who has variously been described as bisexual or pansexual), and David Rose Jake in Canadian sitcom *Schitt's Creek*, among others (Ahearn, 2018; GLAAD, 2020; Reem, 2019; Wilde, 2015). Further, some celebrities have publicly identified as pansexual, such as U.S. singer Miley Cyrus, and British comedian Joe Lycett (Belous & Bauman, 2017; De Casparis, 2015; Jones, 2016; Morandini et al., 2017). Despite this increased recognition of pansexuality within western societies and the wider culture, there has been a paucity of academic research focused specifically on exploring pansexuality and pansexual people's understandings and lived experiences of their identities (Belous & Bauman, 2017; Green, 2019). In this paper, we highlight the progression of sexualities research from monosexual, to bisexual, to the more recent interest in plurisexualities, and pansexuality in particular. We review existing scholarly knowledge within the social sciences and introduce our qualitative survey, through which we were interested in exploring how pansexual and panromantic people made sense of and experienced their identities. We then report our thematic analysis of the data and discuss the contribution and implications of our results before recommending areas for future research.

Mononormative and homonormative frameworks

Scholars have noted that monosexual identities (those defined on the basis of attraction to only one gender) have received more academic attention than plurisexualities (broadly defined on the basis of attraction to multiple genders) (Brown & Lilton, 2019; Galupo et al., 2015; Hayfield, 2020; Monro et al., 2017). This monosexual research focus may be informed by – and further perpetuate – the broadly mononormative and monosexist view of sexuality within wider society (Roberts et al., 2015). Within bisexual

theorizing, the term mononormativity has been used both to refer to the taken-for-granted assumption that people can only be attracted to one gender, and as a term to capture the privileging of monogamous relationships (see, Hayfield, 2020; Maliepaard & Baumgartner, 2020). The result – of both forms of mononormativity and monosexism – is that bisexual, pansexual, and other plurisexual people's identities, experiences, and relationships are often invalidated or erased (Barker et al., 2012; Hayfield, 2020; Maliepaard & Baumgartner, 2020). There are a number of factors which have informed this focus on monosexualities, including that gay and lesbian identities are both longer established, and traditionally more prevalent within the population, than bisexuality and pansexuality – although as noted above, the latter is changing (Hayfield, 2020; Monro et al., 2017; ONS, 2019). Further, dichotomous models of monosexualities have dominated everyday understandings. This binary model of heterosexual/homosexuality has led to the overlooking or subsumption of identities which relate to attraction to more than one gender (Hayfield, 2020; Maliepaard & Baumgartner, 2020; Monro, 2015). Broadly speaking, research and theory on identities, experiences, and attitudes have contributed to greater understanding and acceptance of lesbian and gay identities within western cultures, compared to in the past – although this is complex and ever changing (e.g. McFarland, 2018; Umberson et al., 2015). However, bisexuality, and by extension pansexuality, have not necessarily benefited from research in comparable ways (Barker et al., 2012; Hayfield, 2020). This may partly be attributable to how bisexual affirmative research – in which researchers validate bisexuality and recognize it as a distinct identity in its own right – is somewhat in its infancy, having first emerged during the 1970s (see, Bowes-Catton & Hayfield, 2015; Hayfield, 2020). Pansexual affirmative research is an even more recent phenomenon, with only a handful of studies to date having focused specifically on pansexuality.

Despite increasing acceptance of same-sex attraction and lesbian and gay identities, nonetheless, the monosexual notion of attraction being to only one gender retains its hold as a regulatory norm or 'social ideology' (Gonel, 2013; Maliepaard & Baumgartner, 2020, p. 11). Further, some scholars have drawn attention to how increased acceptance of lesbian and gay identities into heterosexual societies may represent progress, but how their assimilation may also have contributed to what has been termed 'homonormativity'. This term refers to how lesbians, gay men, and bisexual people who mirror heteronormative relationship practices – such as monogamy, matrimony, and having children – may be more readily accepted than those who do not. Therefore, particular versions of lesbian and gay (and perhaps bisexual, plurisexual, and asexual) lives that mirror heteronormative practices become normalized, whilst those

which deviate from and potentially challenge these norms, may be at threat of (further) stigmatization and erasure (Galupo, 2018; Gonel, 2013; Roseneil et al., 2013). Whilst affirmative bisexual research has increased since around the 1990s, other plurisexualities, including pansexuality, remain under-represented and under-explored, with little pansexual-specific research, particularly outside the U.S. (Belous & Bauman, 2017; Galupo et al., 2017).

The bisexual umbrella

Due to their shared characteristics and experiences, research has sometimes considered multiple plurisexual identities under one overarching "bisexual umbrella" (Galupo et al., 2015). The bisexual umbrella encompasses a range of plurisexual identities, including bisexual, pansexual, fluid, and queer, among others (see Eisner, 2013, for the origins of the bisexual umbrella). The concept of a shared umbrella is understood to offer the prospect of solidarity through the potential of shared experiences based on the notion of similarities across identities (e.g. not fitting within a binary framework; complex patterns of multiple forms of discrimination; and so on). Therefore, it has been argued that the bisexual umbrella offers possibilities to gather together, give voice, and empower those who fall under it, through providing a platform for advocacy and activism on a larger scale than via individual identities (Eisner, 2013; Flanders, 2017; Hayfield, 2020). However, the bisexual umbrella has also been contested, by researchers and research participants alike. Whilst the umbrella holds potential, so too may there be risks, in particular through the homogenization of experience and the erasure of the diversity of discrete identities (Flanders et al., 2017; Smalley et al., 2016). While some may personally affiliate themselves as under the umbrella, so too can it be the case that researchers and others *assign them* to belonging beneath it, sometimes without their knowledge or consent (Flanders, 2017). There is not (and perhaps cannot be) a consensus on whether pansexuality 'belongs' under this umbrella. Additionally, studies have compared the conceptualisations of pansexuality and bisexuality, with little consensus on how these differ due to their interwoven and complex nature (Flanders et al., 2017). However, to conflate multiple identities risks erasure of the experiences of those who identify with distinct plurisexual identities (Galupo et al., 2015). Pansexuality is an increasingly popular sexuality and by far the most taken-up of more recently emerging plurisexualities (Belous & Bauman, 2017). Yet, to the best of our knowledge, no psychological research has specifically explored how pansexual people experience and understand their identities, particularly within a U.K. context.

The development of pansexual and panromantic identities

The small body of extant (mainly U.S.) research has focused primarily on the definition and conceptualization of pansexuality, particularly in relation to other identities (e.g. Galupo et al., 2017). The emergence of panromantic identities reflects the increasing visibility of asexual identities, often understood as existing on a spectrum ranging from aromantic, through romantic, to occasional sexual attraction (Jay, 2008; Yule et al., 2017). It has been argued that there is little consensus on a singular definition of the term pansexual (or panromantic) (Belous & Bauman, 2017). This argument arises on the basis that pansexual (and panromantic) people may conceptualize and construct their identities in multiple and complex ways (Lapointe, 2017). In some instances, pansexual (and panromantic) have been conflated with bisexual (and biromantic) identities (Galupo et al., 2015). However, in other instances, pansexual/panromantic identities have been understood to have distinctive characteristics which delineate them from other plurisexualities. Early conceptualisations established pansexuality as an anti-identity, or anti-label, and this concept continues to be favored by increasing numbers of young people who do not want to label themselves (Callis, 2014; Galupo et al., 2017; Gonel, 2013). This framing of pansexuality may be an alternative to, or sit alongside, other conceptualisations. Some suggest that pansexuality represents a fluid understanding of sexuality, as something that is not tangible and cannot be neatly categorized. However, pansexuality has most commonly been defined as romantic and sexual attraction to all genders, or regardless of gender, on the basis of 'hearts not parts' (Galupo et al., 2017; Gonel, 2013). Similarly, panromantic has been defined as romantic (rather than sexual) attraction to all genders, or regardless of gender (Pearce, 2012; Yule et al., 2017). The inclusion of *all* genders or *regardless* of gender reflects how pansexual and panromantic are understood to explicitly recognize a range of gender identities.

Pansexual and panromantic as moving beyond the gender binary: the explicit recognition and inclusion of trans identities

Many pansexual (and panromantic) people cite explicit resistance to gender binaries as a key reason for choosing to identify with pan identities (Belous & Bauman, 2017; Elizabeth, 2013; Greaves et al., 2019; Green, 2019). The concept of bisexuality has been positioned as theoretically deconstructing a dichotomous model of sexuality (e.g. the heterosexual/homosexual binary; Elizabeth, 2013). However, some see bisexual (and biromantic) identities as upholding sex and gender binaries (male/man and female/woman) by being positioned in 'the middle' of a dichotomous model (Elizabeth, 2013; Galupo et al., 2017; see below for further discussion and elaboration). In

contrast, pansexual/panromantic have been portrayed and perceived as transgressive identities which explicitly deconstruct the gender binary (Elizabeth, 2013).

Consequently, pansexual/panromantic have been positioned as explicitly inclusive of trans and non-binary identities (e.g. genderfluid, genderqueer, and other identities outside the gender binary; see Stonewall, 2019), and in the interests of trans communities, in two ways (Elizabeth, 2016). First, choosing a sexuality label may be complex for trans and non-binary people. A binary model of sexuality remains dominant and therefore existing labels may not feel appropriate for those whose gender is outside the binary, and/or whose gender identity is different from the gender they were assigned at birth (Morandini et al., 2017). Therefore, pansexual/panromantic can be particularly fitting for trans people and give a sense of continuity, consistency, and coherence (Elizabeth, 2016). Second, some have argued that monosexual and bisexual labels can be understood as excluding or even erasing trans and non-binary identities (Elizabeth, 2013). This has been contentious and has informed the emergence of what has sometimes been termed the 'bisexuality versus pansexuality debate' (see, e.g. Dingle, 2017). This 'debate' serves to position bi and pan identities as in opposition to each other, rather than in solidarity through their shared experiences, which many have noted is problematic. Academics and activists (many of whom are bisexual) have argued that definitions of bisexuality should not be stripped down to meaning only two (see discussion with Robyn Ochs and Heron Greenesmith in Doyle, 2019; Hayfield, 2020). Contemporary definitions of bisexuality have evolved beyond the binary and bisexual communities have been inclusive of – and included – trans and non-binary people for many years (Dingle, 2016; Doyle, 2019; Flanders et al., 2017; Hayfield, 2020; Lapointe, 2017). Nonetheless, pansexuality has been perceived as more *explicitly* inclusive of a gender spectrum and therefore as more explicitly inclusive of trans and non-binary identities (Belous & Bauman, 2017; Dingle, 2017). In sum, pansexual/panromantic may be favored by those who are trans or non-binary themselves, and/or who wish to acknowledge their attraction to trans and non-binary people.

To date then, researchers who have specifically focused on pansexuality have tended to be U.S. based, and have primarily explored how identity is conceptualized by pansexual individuals. However, at present we have little empirical understanding of pansexuality and panromantic identities within a U.K. context. We aimed to contribute to filling this gap in the literature. Therefore, our research question was: *How do pansexual and panromantic people make sense of and experience their identities within the U.K.?*

Method

Procedure

A qualitative design was chosen to explore people's experiences of pansexuality in depth and detail. Qualitative surveys are an increasingly popular way to gather data and have various advantages, including participant convenience (Terry & Braun, 2017). We delivered the survey online via *Qualtrics*, to enable geographic reach when recruiting this potentially hard-to-find group and due to the suitability of online participation for LGBTQ + populations, particularly given the sense of felt-anonymity (Terry & Braun, 2017; Trau et al., 2013).

The open-ended survey questions were informed by existing literature on plurisexualities including pansexuality; cultural sources; and our personal and academic interests in the topic. Early questions offered participants the opportunity to broadly discuss the identity terms they used and what these meant to them. Other questions focused on where participants had learnt about and come to identify as pansexual/panromantic, others' responses and understandings of their identities, and their experiences of communities. Finally, participants were invited to include anything else that they would like to say about pansexual/panromantic identities and asked to complete demographic questions.

Ethics was granted by the Faculty Research Ethics Committee at the University of the West of England (UWE), Bristol. Participants were directed to *Qualtrics* online survey software and advised to read the information sheet which introduced the researchers, and included details about voluntary participation, consent, right to withdraw, data protection, and sources of support. If participants provided their consent, they were directed to the survey questions. Questions were piloted with six participants who were asked for feedback on the survey. This enabled us to review how effectively questions engaged participants and whether they generated in-depth and detailed responses (Terry & Braun, 2017). Participants provided insightful responses and made no comments on the questions, other than to report that they welcomed the opportunity to talk about their identities, hence no changes were made other than moving demographics to the end of the survey and adding a back button for participants to return to earlier questions.

Recruitment and participants

Both purposive and sampling techniques were employed to recruit participants (Robinson, 2014). A call for participants was distributed on 58 forums and discussion boards (e.g. *Reddit*), social media pages (e.g. *Facebook*), and microblogging sites (e.g. *Tumblr; Twitter*). These sites were chosen based

on the potential for members to identify as pansexual/panromantic, and included asexuality, bisexuality, genderqueer, LGBTQ+, pansexuality, and polyamory groups. They varied from discussion threads (including for research and media projects) to community and support groups. Most were predominantly focused on pansexual/panromantic identities and/or bisexuality (e.g. *Pansexual Pride*; *Panromantic*; *Bi Community News*), with fewer sources relating to polyamory, or LGBTQ + identities more broadly (e.g. *Poly People*; *LGBT Global*). Participants were encouraged to share the survey link with others. Notably, *Tumblr* was the most successful mode of recruitment.

A total of 80 participants were included in the analysis (including the pilot participants), of whom 60 completed all survey questions and provided demographic information. For participants to be eligible, they were required to be over 18 years of age, identify as pansexual/panromantic, and be based in the U.K. at time of participation. Despite these eligibility criteria being stated on the information sheet and consent form, 13 participants from outside the U.K. participated (see Table 1). We included their responses, based on the rationale that to omit them would be unethical given the time and effort they invested. Therefore, while the majority of our participants did reside in the U.K., nonetheless we amended our research question to *How do mainly U.K.-based pansexual and panromantic people make sense of and experience their identities*? In our report, we indicate the country each participant resided in at time of participation. Participants identified as pansexual (45), or panromantic (15). Some also disclosed additional terms they identified with, including bisexual (18), queer (18), and asexual (12), as well as discussing other terms within their written responses. Their ages ranged from 18 to 48 years ($M = 26$), with 18 participants over the age of 25 years. This information was of particular interest, given the tendency for pansexual and panromantic to be understood as identity terms predominantly used by young people (Greaves et al., 2019; Morandini et al., 2017). Participants were mainly women (34), with some men (8), and 32 who used more than one term to describe their gender (e.g. cisgender; demigirl; genderfluid; genderqueer; trans; see Table 1). Most participants were white (50), residing in the U.K. (47), and non-disabled (46). Full demographics of the 60 participants who completed them can be seen in Table 1.

Reflexive statement

Nikki Hayfield is a cisgender woman in her early forties who identifies as bisexual. She teaches and supervises undergraduate (e.g. bachelor's degree) and postgraduate students (e.g. Masters and Doctoral level study) in qualitative research methods and sexuality topics. In recent years she has become increasingly aware of pansexuality, partly through students,

Table 1. Full demographic information.

Demographic information	Number of participants
Age	Range: 18–48 yearsMean: 26 years
Gender	34 woman
	8 man
	6 trans
	1 female but questioning
	1 demigirl
	1 cisgender
	1 cisgender/non-binary
	2 genderfluid
	1 genderqueer
	4 non-binary
	1 non-binary/genderqueer/maverick
Pan identity	45 pansexual
	15 panromantic
Other sexuality terms	Bisexual: 18/Biromantic: 2
	Queer: 18
	Asexual: 12
	Gay: 7
	Questioning: 6
	Genderblind: 2
	Saphic: 2
	Demiromantic: 3/Demi: 1/Demisexual: 1/Demigirl 1/GrayAce 1/Gray-Asexual 1
	Pan Bellusromantic: 1
	Sapiosexual: 1
	Omnisexual: 1/Omniromantic: 1
	Pancuddly: 1
Relationship status	No relationship: 29
	Relationship(s): 31
	Monogamous: 18
	Non-monogamous/open relationship(s): 9
	Casual: 1
	Dating: 2
	Declined to provide further detail: 1
Who in your life have you told that you're pansexual/panromantic?	Most people in my life: 19
	Some selected people: 16
	Very few people: 10
	The vast majority of people in my life: 9
	No one: 5
Do you have any children?	No: 54 Yes: 5
Racial/ethnic background	White: 50
	Mixed: 3
	Latin: 1
	Latin Spanish: 2
	N/A or declined to respond: 4
Do you consider yourself to be disabled?	No: 46
	Yes: 13
Employment/student status	Students: 27
	Part-time employment: 7
	Full-time employment: 11
	Self-employed: 4
	Unemployed: 7
	Other: 3
Do you have any of the following qualifications/are you studying toward any of the following?	GCSE/O levels: 34
	Bachelors/Undergraduate degree: 33
	AS/A levels: 24
	BTEC/Vocational qualifications: 11
	HND/Professional qualification: 1
	Masters or equivalent: 10
	Postgraduate (PhD, DPhil etc.): 3
	PGCE primary: 1
	PGCE secondary: 1

Continued

Table 1. Continued

How would you describe your social class?	Working class: 22 A mixture of working and middle class: 20 Middle class: 16
Please list up to 5 words to describe your political, cultural, or religious affiliations	Most commonly listed: Atheist (15)/Agnostic (10)/Non-religious (8); Left-wing (15)/Liberal (11)/Socialist (10); Religious (8); Feminist (5)
Where did you hear about this research?	Tumblr: 32 Facebook: 15 Twitter: 5 Coursemate/friend: 2 Word of mouth: 1 Internet: 1 Online: 1 Social media: 1
What country do you currently live in?	UK: 47 United States: 7 Canada: 1 Chile: 1 Ireland: 1

which led her to become interested in how young people make sense of their identities and chosen labels (or lack thereof). Karolína Křížová is a cisgender woman in her early twenties who identifies as pansexual. She has a keen interest in how sexualities, gender, and mental health are constructed in popular culture and societal discourses. We shared our identities with participants which may have informed their willingness to share their perspectives, particularly given Karolina's insider position as pansexual (e.g. Hayfield & Huxley, 2015).

Data analysis

Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Terry et al., 2017) was chosen to enable the development of meaningful patterns. We approached the analysis from a critical realist perspective; hence experience was legitimized but recognized as mediated by the wider sociocultural context (e.g. Ussher, 1999). Our approach was inductive, with the data as the starting point of analysis. However, our personal awareness of these identities and awareness of existing literature meant that analysis was inevitably partly deductive, through the knowledge we brought to the data. We familiarized ourselves with the survey responses by reading them, initially as they were submitted, and repeatedly after transforming them into Word documents. We coded the data, creating both semantic codes at the surface of the text and latent codes at a deeper level. We interpretatively developed these codes into initial themes, which were reviewed in terms of their relationship to each other and to the dataset. We discussed codes and themes and the best way to interpret the data in order to reach agreement on the final set of themes. Themes which

did not contribute to telling an overall story of responses were dropped, while other themes became subthemes, or were incorporated into existing ones. We wrote brief theme definitions and named themes, before making minor changes as we wrote the report and finalized the analysis. In the results section, typographical and grammatical errors have been edited for ease of reading. Participants' quotes are presented with participant number, age, gender, location, and pansexual/panromantic identity.

Results

We report the two main themes which were developed: i) *The label depends on the context: It's like bisexuality, but it isn't,* and ii) *Educated and enlightened pansexuals* which includes a subtheme of *An internet education*: *Tumblr-ing into pan identities and communities*.

The label depends on the context: It's like bisexuality, but it isn't

In this theme we explore the ways in which participants understood their identities and how they offered complex and often contradictory distinctions between bisexuality and pansexuality. Their definitions and understandings of these two terms indicated both similarities and differences in their meanings. Further, they reported using different (and multiple) identity terms in carefully considered and nuanced ways, and commonly discussed how their own and others' use of particular identifiers were dependent on context:

> *I describe myself as bisexual. However I see "bisexual" as meaning "attracted to my own gender and genders that are not my own". I use "bisexual" because it's the more common term. I'm questioned enough for being bisexual, without having to explain what "pansexual" means as well, so I just don't bother to use the word "pansexual" in normal interaction with people outside the queer community* (P10, 48, woman/cisgender, U.K., pansexual).

> *I think there are many different ways to define bisexuality (being attracted to men and women, being attracted to two genders, being attracted to multiple genders, etc.), and it doesn't necessarily exclude nonbinary individuals.* […] *Older generations sometimes have trouble understanding new terms, so I've heard people my age use "bisexual" around older family members, while still going as "pansexual" to close friends* (P51, 19, woman, U.S., panromantic).

What was evident was that pan labels served a purpose in making sense of their personal identities and could be meaningfully used within particular contexts. In contrast, bi labels were often utilized pragmatically, as public identifiers to broadly express and communicate identity to others.

Many participants anticipated a context where pansexuality would not always make sense to everyone "*I use bisexual as it is easier for others that aren't in the queer community to understand*" (P6, 23, woman/genderfluid, U.K., pansexual). Further, not only might pan not be understood, but so too might it not be taken seriously, with the risk of *"kitchenware jokes"*, P2, 20, woman, U.K., pansexual). It was clear that deciding which identities to disclose involved constant navigation of the context.

> *On Tumblr, where I feel the most free to explore my sexual labels, I identify as panromantic grey asexual. To people who are close to me who understand LGBTQ labels but don't fully understand the nuances, I identify as pan ace. To people who understand LGBTQ labels and who I am comfortable enough around to reveal I'm not straight, I say I'm bisexual. To people who show attitudes of homophobia, lesbophobia, biphobia, etc., I do not reveal my identity and allow them to believe I'm straight* (P50, 24, woman/cisgender, Canada, panromantic).

Therefore, unlike in previous research, bisexuality and pansexuality were not *necessarily* or *only* delineated on the basis of upholding or resisting the gender binary (despite this gender binary being frequently referred to and sometimes utilized). Instead, the distinction between the two often also involved whether others would be acquainted with their meaning and anticipating how they might respond to the terms they disclosed. Overall, the dominant picture was of participants strategically selecting pansexuality or bisexuality according to the audience to whom their identities were being articulated.

Further, these participants both resisted and strategically employed identity labels. Perhaps due to some being reluctant to engage with labels ("*i don't really like labels*" P46, 20, woman, U.K., pansexual), participants somewhat paradoxically engaged with a wide array of identity terms rather than *only* using pan terms. These multiple labels were seemingly drawn upon because neither pan nor bi terms alone were adequate to sufficiently represent the specificities and complexities of their identities:

> *My labels for my romantic orientation are panromantic, biromantic and queer and for me personally they are interchangeable. Since my romantic orientations and my sexual orientations align as an allosexual and alloromantic (as apposed to someone on the asexual or aromantic spectrum) this is purely a clarification and not terms I generally use in public. My labels for my sexuality are pansexual, bisexual and queer. For me personally they are interchangeable* (P48, 19, non-binary/genderqueer/maverique, U.K., pansexual).

> *I now identify as numerous labels. Panromantic, due to my attraction to all genders. Grey-Asexual, due to very rarely experiencing sexual attraction, but I could easily live without sex.* […] *Omniromantic, a recent addition, as I learnt about it only last month.* […] *I also go by Queer. It's a nice blanket term that easily covers everything that I am* (P17, 24, trans/non-binary/ambonec, U.K., panromantic)

Participants also frequently used an array of (a)sexuality labels alongside a broad range of gender terms: "*pan, bisexual, non-binary, genderfluid, trans, gay*" (P29, 22, non-binary/agender/transmasculine, U.K., pansexual), or "*Straight, curious, bisexual, asexual, aromantic, demisexual*" (P32, 25, genderfluid, U.S., pansexual), with one participant's response seemingly indicating that were too many to list: "*For gender purposes I use many labels, including genderfluid, boyflux, transgender, nonbinary, autigender, etc*" (P73, 19, man, trans, non-binary, genderqueer, genderfluid, U.K., panromantic). The context the participants presented here was one in which sexual identity was multi-faceted in relation to their own gender, the gender of those to whom they were attracted, and their position on a spectrum of romantic through to sexual attraction (Yule et al., 2017). These assemblages of terms mirror literature reporting that plurisexual people use multiple labels to fully capture the diversity of their identities (Dyar et al., 2015; Galupo et al., 2017).

In this study, the most frequent concurrent sexuality label was bisexual, with multiple participants reporting they used pan and bi terms interchangeably. To some participants, these were "*two sides of the same coin*" (P30, 25, non-binary, U.S., pansexual), or even "*synonymous*" (P10, 48, woman/cisgender, U.K., pansexual), with "*very few differences between bisexuality and pansexuality*" (P16, 41, cisgender, U.K., pansexual). Therefore, these accounts partially resonate with previous U.S. research where pansexual and bisexual individuals understood and defined their sexuality in largely similar ways (Galupo et al., 2017). However, in stark contrast, some participants made clear distinctions between the two identities. They did so when they explicitly *rejected* bisexuality as an identity term and preferred pan terms as "*most fitting*" (P19, no demographics, pansexual). Bisexuality was portrayed as perpetuating binary understandings of gender: "*In my opinion, bi means both men and women and pan means all genders*" (P58, 38, man/trans/non-binary, U.K., panromantic). In this sense, pansexuality was portrayed as being different from bisexuality through positioning bisexual as meaning attraction *exclusively* to 'men' and 'women' in contrast with pansexuality which more *inclusively* extended to all genders, including trans identities (Lapointe, 2017).

For those who used pan and bi terms *concurrently*, doing so may have created potential tensions given the risk of bisexuality being understood as bolstering binaries. Participants perhaps managed these tensions, and any risk of them being seen as adhering to sex and gender binaries, by explicitly contrasting the contemporary, inclusive interpretations of bisexuality (as largely similar to pansexuality) with more traditional binary conceptions (as different from pansexuality):

> *I like the label bisexual for myself, though I suppose I would technically be defined as pansexual because I am attracted to anyone. Recently bi and pan have sort of converged, so it's really up to the person which label fits better.* […] *Most people would say bi means attraction to two genders, but since awareness has been brought to gender non-conforming people, trans people, etc. bisexuality has become more than just attraction to both girls and boys* (P56, 18, woman/cisgender, U.S., pansexual).

> *I use the label pansexual because I feel as though it is the best fit for me. I've never really labeled myself as something else, but I do call myself bisexual* […] *The traditional definition for bisexual is "attraction to two genders" and pansexuality is "attraction to all genders" or "attraction regardless of gender," but those labels are being bent and expanded more and more these days* (P35, no demographics).

What was particularly notable and novel in our data was how many of these participants distanced or disassociated themselves from *personally* defining bisexuality in binary terms. Instead, they frequently attributed such definitions to the past, or to other people, and did not take ownership of making such a distinction themselves: "*some people see bisexuality as erasing other genders than male/female and enforcing a binary view of gender. I don't, personally*" (P10, 48, woman/cisgender, U.K., pansexual). These participants proffered several *possible* interpretations of bisexuality. In doing so, they acknowledged the notion that bisexuality might be understood to reinforce binary understandings of gender and sexuality, whilst simultaneously disavowing themselves from such an understanding. Their frequent references to opposing representations of bisexuality as inherently binary may also capture the extent of cultural debates about the (non)binary of bisexuality (Lasher, 2018). The divergent and often divisive narratives of bisexuality as either interchangeable with pansexuality, or as distinct and problematically binary, have been documented within academic research and in media (Doyle, 2019; Galupo et al., 2017; Lapointe, 2017; Lasher, 2018). These debates have been contentious, often inherently associating bisexuality with exclusionary narratives and transphobia, to which members of bi communities have passionately objected (Flanders et al., 2017; Galupo, 2018). The way this debate was framed by participants provides insight into how pansexual and panromantic people may personally resist binary interpretations of bisexuality, which is in contrast to some cultural sources and previous research findings.

What was evident in our data then, was that different participants offered complex and contradictory accounts of whether pansexuality and bisexuality were tangibly different. Interestingly, these contradictions were present even within the same individual response, when participants discussed using both pansexual and bisexual, despite defining them differently:

> *I originally started by using bisexual then discovered pansexual and it just felt more inclusive and like a better fit but I use both equally now. Pansexuality feels*

more inclusive for me personally as it literally means all whilst bi generally means 2 (or more). But I often use them interchangeably now (P57, 18, woman/cisgender, U.K., pansexual).

The distinction between pansexual and bisexual was often presented in terms of pansexuality as more fitting for them *and* more inclusive than bisexuality. However, somewhat paradoxically, bisexuality and pansexuality were simultaneously interchangeable. Therefore, even within individual responses, a defining line between bisexuality and pansexuality is both present and absent. The result is that the distinction between the two terms was distinctly blurred. In summary, the perceived relationship between pan and bi labels was often in flux, complex, contradictory, and contingent on context. The participants' personal and contemporary definitions of bisexuality generally positioned it as largely (but not always) interchangeable with pansexuality, and their decisions around which specific terms to use was often strategic.

Educated and enlightened pansexuals

In this theme, we demonstrate how participants positioned pansexuality as an identity which required an education about gender and sexuality. Accordingly, they were able to present themselves (and other pan people) as educated and enlightened in relation to diversity and inclusivity. Notably, participants willingly took personal ownership of pansexuality, based on it being inclusionary (in a way which many did not when discussing bisexuality as exclusionary): *I think of myself as pansexual* […] *Personally, I think pansexuality disregards a gender binary* (P25, 33, cisgender/non-binary, U.K., pansexual). Further, participants presented themselves as being more progressive and better educated in relation to gender and sexuality than the wider society (see Lapointe, 2017):

I find if I have to explain the difference between bisexual and pansexual to someone, I have to bring up things relating to non-binary and transgender people. […] *For me, bisexual only really acknowledges 2 genders. When I say I'm pansexual, I mean I am attracted to people of all genders. To me it makes no difference what genitals someone has, or if the ones they do have 'match' the way they present their gender (a forcing to societal gender norms)* (P70, U.K., 26, woman/cisgender, pansexual).

Participants positioned themselves as experts in problematizing binary perspectives by noting that others might lack their understanding of gender diversity. They therefore depicted themselves as in a position to potentially explain to and educate others. To get to their position of experts had involved them becoming educated and enlightened about the meanings of gender and sexuality. Participants frequently described coming to identify

as pansexual as a 'learning curve'. This process involved researching gender and sexual diversity, often prompted by conversations with LGBTQ + peers or partners 'coming out' as trans/non-binary (Belous & Bauman, 2017). It was this education that had led to many participants having adopted a pan identity, with many participants indicating that they had identified as bi in the past before they were 'enlightened' through their education: *"Originally came out as bi, but always knew that I was attracted to people regardless of their gender identity, even before I was educated"* (P4, 24, woman/cisgender, no location details, pansexual). It was common for bisexuality to frequently be framed as a step on 'the path to enlightenment':

> *I briefly used bisexual as an identifier, as it was the most common and something that I had heard of before, but I feel that it does not adequately describe me* […] *I learnt about it* [pansexuality] *online, reading articles and op-eds about other people's identities, almost as an accident as I was learning about transgender people - my partner at the time had just come out as trans* […] *During that research, I happened upon a lot of literature about other sexualities* […] *articles that tackle a lot of the basics about sexuality and gender identity and I used it a lot to learn more about the whole LGBT + spectrum* (P3, 22, woman/cisgender, U.K., pansexual).

This learning process set pan people apart from others, who were perceived to be less knowledgeable of, or open-minded about, gender and sexuality. Throughout the data, participants presented themselves as educated and knowledgeable and others as lacking knowledge: *"I often use the label 'bisexual', particularly with my family or people who have less knowledge about gender and sexuality… for an easier life"* (P19, no demographics, pansexual). Others positioned themself as liberal and enlightened in contrast to a more conservative general society:

> *"I have talked about being pansexual with very few people. The people I am out to know me as bisexual, because it is a more familiar term, and because coming out as pansexual requires a discussion on gender politics which most people are conservative about"* (P48, 19, non-binary/genderqueer/maverique, U.K., pansexual).

Somewhat older people – particularly family members – were seen to be less likely to comprehend pansexuality or accept it as legitimate, precisely due to their lack of knowledge and understanding. However, while they themselves were educated, for them to attempt to educate those perceived as older was sometimes seen as futile:

> *In conversations with people who do not know much about sexuality - mostly people above the age of 35 - I use the term bisexual as it is easier than trying to explain my identity and have them possibly debate about the legitimacy of my chosen label or not understand and call me bi anyway"* (P3, 22, woman/cisgender, U.K., pansexual).

Conversely, young people and those who were part of LGBTQ + subgroups were perceived as generally more open-minded, understanding,

and knowledgeable. It is worth noting that this view is within a context where nearly one fifth of participants were over 35 years old, and that they too expressed a preference for pan labels for the same reasons as younger participants. Under certain circumstances, some participants presented sharing their knowledge as an enjoyable endeavor. It was perceived as an exciting opportunity to help educate others based on a perceived lack of awareness of pan and gender identities (Lapointe, 2017). They especially did not mind when their audience were interested and open-minded: *"I just enjoy talking about my sexuality openly to those who are willing to listen"* even when they had done so many times: "*I always enjoy discussions about gender and sexuality, even if I've had the same conversation a million times*" (P51, 19, woman, U.S., panromantic). However, others were reluctant to engage and could not *"be bothered with the emotional labor of having to explain what it* [pansexuality] *means every time"* (P25, 33, cisgender/non-binary, U.K. pansexual). As noted, participants strategically avoided referring to their pan identities in certain situations, limiting their use of pansexuality to among those who were open-minded or 'enlightened' audiences. However, participants also mentioned frustration and discomfort around not feeling able to openly disclose their pan identity:

> *I do not bring up my specific label unless someone directly asks. I grew tired of always explaining myself. However, that leads to me frequently being called bi or a lesbian because I am currently in a relationship with another woman. It is tiring but I don't usually feel safe enough to correct them. I wish more people understood so I could be more comfortable being myself* (P52, 19, woman/cisgender, U.K., pansexual).

The sense was that if there were wider understanding, then pansexual people would be more able to be out and open about their identities, without the emotional energy involved in educating others or accepting misunderstandings. In sum, these participants presented themselves as enlightened about sexuality and gender which informed their use of pansexuality as their preferred term. To reach this position they had educated themselves or been educated by others. Further, participants were, in the main, willing to explain and keen to help educate others about gender and pansexuality.

An internet education: Tumblr-ing into pan identities and communities

In this subtheme, we explore how the narrative of education and resulting sense of enlightenment was most frequently enabled via an internet education. Further, participants repeatedly emphasized the importance of online spaces (and associated resources) in the development of their affiliating with a pan identity and in finding a community. They underscored

the perceived *lack* of inclusive school education, offline support services, or 'real-life' community engagement for pan individuals. In contrast, the internet, specifically social media and particularly *Tumblr*, were depicted as providing inclusive information and opportunities for liaising with like-minded peers:

> *I learned of pansexuality online, and that is where I do most of my research. I first saw it on Tumblr, a blogging website where many people are open and unafraid to discuss progressive topics. There are also many online articles that are very helpful in explaining the difference between sexualities* […] *I would say the internet has been the most helpful resource.* […] *I appreciated the fact that my school tried to explain different sexualities, but I do wish they would have done more research*" (P15, no demographics, pansexual).

Most participants stated they had discovered and learned about pan identities on *"the internet, definitely"* (P45, 25, woman/cisgender, Chile, panromantic), and often through *Tumblr* specifically: '*I learned about pansexuality mainly through online friends and the internet, especially through tumblr*' (P29, 22, non-binary/agender/transmasculine, U.K., pansexual). They reported having independently engaged in often extensive online 'research' of sexualities and associated topics before settling on their pan label, hence this was framed as an almost academic endeavor, albeit via the internet. This online research was used to fill the gaps left by the largely heteronormative formal sex education reported by virtually all participants: *"My school only ever really talked about hetero relationships and at most maybe one or two gay relationships. Bi or pan people were never mentioned"* (P46, 20, woman, U.K., pansexual). Simultaneously, many expressed their wish for a more inclusive formal sex education:

> *It would have been liberating and helpful to learn about sexual orientations and genders at school. I don't remember this discussion at all and it is so important to address during adolescence, at least!* (P6, 23, woman/genderfluid, U.K., pansexual).

Whilst Lapointe (2017) noted that U.S. pan individuals exchanged knowledge with their teachers, fostering a general awareness of pansexuality, anything akin to this was not apparent in this data. However, our participants' accounts are in line with previous literature which has reported that both formal education and scholarship lag behind online and 'real life' communities (Elizabeth, 2016; Lapointe, 2017). Those who discussed any involvement in sexuality-related communities would most often do so on social media, notably *Tumblr* (Lapointe, 2017). The internet was where pan was reported to be best-established as an identity and accordingly participants reported that it was social media which had the biggest community of pan people: *"Tumblr is full of pansexual nonbinary people. It's out in the rest of the world it's hard"* (P42, trans/non-binary/genderqueer,

U.K., pansexual). There was a distinct split between the relative safety of an inclusive internet environment versus an exclusionary real world. Some participants referred to specific negative experiences of prejudice, social exclusion, and discrimination in offline LGBTQ + community groups. This was in contrast to the support received via social media:

> *LGBT society at* [university] *is very dominated by gay men and doesn't feel inclusive of the other identities. FetLife* [a BDSM, fetish & kink social network] *has been great for helping me link with similarly minded people, also queer groups on Facebook* (P6, 23, woman/genderfluid, U.K., pansexual).

However, whilst many participants discussed receiving support and positive experiences online, some noted that even online spaces were potentially risky in terms of prejudice and discrimination due to negative views of pan identities. As with offline communities, negativity was sometimes reported to come from within the wider LGB community online too:

> *Straight people don't make me feel bad about my identity because they don't know what it is.* […] *But the misinformed pan posts on Tumblr from bi, gay, and lesbian persons are hard to escape./I have seen posts on Tumblr about how pansexuality is a transphobic label, a biphobic label, a label for people trying to be "even more special" than just bi.* […] *Pretty much any awful shit straight people say about non-straights, non-straights have said about pans*" (P50, 24, woman/cisgender, Canada, panromantic).

This narrative contributes to the view of the wider (heteronormative) society as reportedly lacking awareness and/or understanding of diverse sexualities. However, what was seemingly more offensive were the negative perceptions, stereotypes, and prejudice coming from within wider LGB communities. Whilst most published research focuses on the experiences of discrimination shared by plurisexuals (Brown et al., 2017; Flanders, 2017), there is little documentation of the prejudice pansexuals face from other plurisexual groups (e.g. bisexual people). These accounts of their experiences contribute to and extend existing literature on the unique patterns of discrimination pansexuals face from both heteronormative society and other LGB sexualities (Belous & Bauman, 2017). Despite these experiences, the overall picture was one of the internet as a place for becoming educated about gender and sexuality and finding a community of likeminded and similarly educated others.

Discussion and conclusion

The present study is, to the best of our knowledge, the first to explore pansexual and panromantic people's understandings and experiences of their identities within a mainly U.K. context. The findings of our analysis

both reflect and depart from previous research, where bisexuality has been framed as binary, pansexuality has been understood as breaking down gender binaries, or the two identities have been positioned as vaguely synonymous (see, Galupo et al., 2017; Lapointe, 2017). In this study, the relationship between bi and pan identities included all these elements, at times within the same response. Participants' accounts of their identities were sometimes contradictory, seemingly complex, and often contingent on context, hence they strategically selected which terms they used within which contexts. This meant that whilst at times pansexuality was clearly distinct from bisexuality, so too were the boundaries sometimes blurry. Researchers who have recently published their research are drawing similar conclusions within a European context, where for young people in Finland the boundaries between bisexuality and pansexuality were both dependent on context and somewhat fluid (Juvonen, 2019, as cited in Kangasvuo, 2020).

To be strategic in the use of identity terms may be tiring and constitute a compromise, with many reporting that the term bisexual was less fitting for them than pansexual. As in other previous research, it was also notable that pansexual and panromantic identities were associated with the desire to explicitly acknowledge, accommodate, and validate gender identities beyond a binary and to therefore disrupt dichotomous understandings of gender and sexuality. This explicit non-binary inclusivity largely underpinned the participants' preference for pan labels, despite their strategic use of bisexuality in particular contexts (Belous & Bauman, 2017; Elizabeth, 2013). Our findings are novel in demonstrating a shift away from the so-called bisexual versus pansexual debates (to some extent). Many of our participants did not *personally* position bisexuality as binary, although they perceived that others might. This played a part in disrupting boundaries between bisexuality and pansexuality and may indicate that broader definitions of bisexuality (away from *attraction to both genders* and toward *attraction to more than one gender*, or *to those of my own gender and other genders*) are being more widely recognized. Indeed, some have noted that as definitions of bisexual began to broaden to become explicitly inclusive of trans and non-binary identities, terms such as pansexuality and other plurisexualities were already emerging and becoming established (Pennasilico & Amodeo, 2019). Our results indicate that there are potential similarities between plurisexual identities, but that it is nonetheless important to recognize that those under the 'bisexual umbrella' likely have specific preferences and distinct experiences of their identities. However, it would be preferable for those who occupy marginalized plurisexual (and other) identities to also seek to be united rather than to be divided and be in solidarity with each other.

A particularly novel finding in our data was the way in which pansexual and panromantic were consistently positioned as distinct from bisexual

identities through a narrative that pan identities require those who occupy them to be educated. Participants presented themselves as enlightened about gender and sexuality through their independent and often internet-based education. The perception was seemingly that many others would not have their level of knowledge and understanding. In this sense, participants told their 'social stories' (see Plummer, 2013) in particular ways which served to present them as educated and enlightened experts of gender and sexuality. To (have to) educate others was sometimes positioned as an enjoyable activity for the benefit of others (see, Lapointe, 2017), but in other accounts, or under particular circumstances, to (repeatedly) explain their sexuality was portrayed as burdensome. This also has implications in terms of sex education which rarely (if ever) includes pansexuality, meaning that participants learnt about contemporary identities online (Lapointe, 2017). Finally, participants emphasized the importance of online spaces, which was where they could socialize with others, share experiences, and discuss their identities. This has important implications for educators and community groups when considering how to most appropriately engage in outreach and support activities.

Strengths, limitations, and future research

These participants provided detailed answers to our survey questions, despite the lack of opportunity for follow-up questions (Terry & Braun, 2017). Therefore, this method generated rich data to meet our research aims (Tracy, 2010). We found our survey an excellent method for reaching hard-to-find participants and researching this LGBTQ + topic in depth and detail (Riggle et al., 2005). Nonetheless, there were considerable challenges recruiting participants, including the paucity of specifically pansexual or panromantic online or offline sites. Moderators of groups and forums did not always respond to our request for permission to post. Others refused on the basis that researchers were intruding within these spaces. However, some participants specifically commented that they welcomed the opportunity to share their experiences and felt validated by our research. Our participants' enthusiasm indicates the contemporary relevance of this study (see, Tracy, 2010).

The most successful recruitment site was *Tumblr* which should be taken into consideration when reflecting on the results. Our success via *Tumblr* indicates that pansexual and panromantic people are actively engaged on microblogging sites. However, our participants' emphasis on the importance of cyberspaces may reflect our online data collection. The data is therefore most likely to only be transferable to those pansexual/panromantic people who participate in online communities, rather than necessarily being

representative of any broader demographic. There is also a risk that particular people were excluded through our use of an online survey and accordingly our sample and data are likely to reflect the experiences of relatively privileged individuals (Trau et al., 2013). Whilst our survey was effective, future researchers may find that in person interviews, which offer opportunities to probe participants, could be suitable to further explore the complex ways in which a range of pansexual and panromantic people define, relate to, express, experience, and navigate, their lives and identities. Researchers could investigate pan sub-groups, including those less affiliated with online communities, and seek to recruit more diverse participants (e.g. beyond mainly non-disabled white women). Indeed, previous research on sexualities has identified that plurisexual people of color are likely to have distinctive and complex lived experiences of identities, discrimination, and communities (e.g. Lim & Hewitt, 2018; Thompson, 2012).

In this study, participants reported incidents of social exclusion, and identity erasure which has important implications for future researchers considering pan prejudice and discrimination. For example, participants commonly reported that they did not disclose their identities because others lacked awareness of their meaning, whilst others described instances when their identities had been questioned or invalidated (Galupo et al., 2015, 2017). Panphobia and pan marginalization may be areas that would benefit from in-depth exploration. These participants were seemingly under particular pressures in navigating when and whether to withhold their pansexual/panromantic identities. This may be in opposition to the wider expectation that they should be out and open about their sexuality (e.g. the 'coming out imperative'; McLean, 2007; Rasmussen, 2004). Future research could be beneficial in developing our understandings of the complexities of concealing or revealing pansexual and plurisexualities and the potential implications for health and wellbeing (Feinstein et al., 2020).

Conclusion

In this study, participants' definitions of, and distinctions between, pansexual and bisexual identities varied, partly because wider society were perceived to be lacking knowledge about gender and sexuality. Participants emphasized the importance of the internet and online communities (particularly *Tumblr*), where others were seen as educated and enlightened. Disclosure of one's identity outside of online contexts was seen as potentially risky by some due to their experiences of prejudice and discrimination, especially from other LGBTQ + groups. These findings support the notion that pansexual/panromantic identities and experiences may be distinct from other plurisexual identities and that researchers need to

consider this when conducting their research. More research is needed to expand the understanding of the socially and culturally located complexities of pansexual and panromantic identities and to further inform psychological and educational practice.

Acknowledgements

This research was made possible through funding via the British Psychological Society's Undergraduate Research Assistantship Scheme. We would particularly like to thank the pansexual and panromantic participants who so willingly took part in this survey and shared their perspectives with us. We are also grateful for the carefully considered comments offered by two anonymous reviewers on an earlier version of the manuscript, and to the editor for their support with this paper.

Funding

This work was funded by British Psychological Society.

Notes on contributors

Nikki Hayfield is a Senior Lecturer in Social Psychology at the University of the West of England (UWE), Bristol. Nikki's research interests are in sexualities, including LGBTQ+identities, with a particular focus on plurisexualities such as bisexualities, pansexualities, and asexualities. Nikki has conducted research focusing on appearance, identity, marginalization, lived experience, and relationships. In 2020 she published her first book entitled *Bisexual and Pansexual Identities: Exploring and challenging invisibility and invalidation*. Her publications and current research projects can be found on her staff page: https://people.uwe.ac.uk/Person/Nikki2Hayfield

Karolína Křížová graduated with a first class honours degree in Psychology from the University of the West of England (UWE), Bristol. She lived in the UK during her time at university and currently resides in Prague, Czech Republic. Her academic interests include critical feminism, gender, embodiment, and sexualities. She currently works in sexual violence and harassment prevention in an NGO and in gender equality development at the state level in Czechia.

ORCID

Nikki Hayfield http://orcid.org/0000-0003-1250-4786

References

Ahearn, V. (2018, January 8). *Daniel Levy on playing a pansexual character on 'Schitt's Creek*. The Canadian Press. https://nationalpost.com/pmn/entertainment-pmn/daniel-levy-on-playing-a-pansexual-character-on-schitts-creek

Barker, M., Yockney, J., Richards, C., Jones, R., Bowes-Catton, H., & Plowman, T. (2012). Guidelines for researching and writing about bisexuality. *Journal of Bisexuality*, *12*(3), 376–392. https://doi.org/10.1080/15299716.2012.702618

Belous, C. K., & Bauman, M. L. (2017). What's in a name? Exploring pansexuality online. *Journal of Bisexuality*, *17*(1), 58–72. https://doi.org/10.1080/15299716.2016.1224212

Bowes-Catton, H., & Hayfield, N. (2015). Bisexuality. In C. Richards & M. J. Barker (Eds.), *The Palgrave handbook of the psychology of sexuality and gender* (pp. 42–59). Palgrave Macmillan.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *3*(2), 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Brown, C., Montgomery, D., & Hammer, T. R. (2017). Perceptions of individuals who are non-monosexuals held by graduate students: A Q methodological study. *Journal of Bisexuality*, *17*(1), 73–87. https://doi.org/10.1080/15299716.2016.1276502

Brown, M. F., & Lilton, D. L. (2019). Finding the "B" in LGBTQ+: Collections and practices that support the bisexual and pansexual communities. In B. Mehra (Ed.), *LGBTQ + Librarianship in the 21st century: Emerging directions of advocacy and community engagement in diverse information environments* (advances in librarianship, Vol. *45*, pp. 143–165). Emerald Publishing Limited.

Callis, A. S. (2014). Bisexual, pansexual, queer: Non-binary identities and the sexual borderlands. *Sexualities*, *17*(1–2), 63–80. https://doi.org/10.1177/1363460713511094

De Casparis, L. (2015, September 21). Miley Cyrus on sexuality: The new frontier. *Elle*. https://www.elle.com/uk/life-and-culture/news/a27520/miley-cyrus-interview-october-2015/

Dingle, C. (2016, February 22). "We're just not hung up about gender": Bisexuality & binary/non-binary relationships. *Biscuit*. https://www.thisisbiscuit.co.uk/were-just-not-hung-up-about-gender-bisexuality-binarynon-binary-relationships/

Dingle, C. (2017, April 18). Pansexuality vs. bisexuality: The big debate: Does "bi" really mean an attraction to just two genders and "pan" an attraction to all genders? Curve Mag. http://www.curvemag.com/Pansexuality-VS-Bisexuality-The-Big-Debate-1835/

Doyle, M. (2019, February 18). Why the "debate" around the difference between bisexual & pansexual hurts the LGBTQ community. *Bustle*. https://www.bustle.com/p/the-difference-between-bisexual-pansexual-matters-less-than-solidarity-among-lgbtq-folks-advocates-say-15959039

Dyar, C., Feinstein, B. A., & London, B. (2015). Mediators of differences between lesbians and bisexual women in sexual identity and minority stress. *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity*, *2*(1), 43–51. https://doi.org/10.1037/sgd0000090

Eisner, S. (2013). *Bi: Notes for a bisexual revolution*. Seal Press.

Elizabeth, A. (2013). Challenging the binary: Sexual identity that is not duality. *Journal of Bisexuality*, *13*(3), 329–337. https://doi.org/10.1080/15299716.2013.813421

Elizabeth, A. (2016). Pansexuality. In A. E. Goldberg (Ed.), *The SAGE encyclopedia of LGBTQ studies* (Vol. 2, pp. 833–835). Sage Publications.

Feinstein, B. A., Xavier Hall, C. D., Dyar, C., & Davila, J. (2020). Motivations for sexual identity concealment and their associations with mental health among bisexual, pansexual, queer, and fluid (bi+) individuals. *Journal of Bisexuality*, *20*(3), 324–318. https://doi.org/10.1080/15299716.2020.1743402

Flanders, C. E. (2017). Under the bisexual umbrella: Diversity of identity and experience. *Journal of Bisexuality*, *17*(1), 1–6. https://doi.org/10.1080/15299716.2017.1297145

Flanders, C. E., LeBreton, M. E., Robinson, M., Bian, J., & Caravaca-Morera, J. A. (2017). Defining bisexuality: Young bisexual and pansexual people's voices. *Journal of Bisexuality*, *17*(1), 39–57. https://doi.org/10.1080/15299716.2016.1227016

Galupo, M. P. (2018). Plurisexual identity labels and the marking of bisexual desire. In D. J. Swan & S. Habibi (Eds.), *Bisexuality: Theories, research, and recommendations for the invisible sexuality* (pp. 61–75). Springer.

Galupo, M. P., Mitchell, R. C., & Davis, K. S. (2015). Sexual minority self-identification: Multiple identities and complexity. *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity*, *2*(4), 355–364. https://doi.org/10.1037/sgd0000131

Galupo, M. P., Ramirez, J. L., & Pulice-Farrow, L. (2017). Regardless of their gender": Descriptions of sexual identity among bisexual, pansexual, and queer identified individuals. *Journal of Bisexuality*, *17*(1), 108–124. https://doi.org/10.1080/15299716.2016.1228491

GLAAD. (2020). *2019-2020: Where we are on TV*. https://www.glaad.org/sites/default/files/GLAAD%20WHERE%20WE%20ARE%20ON%20TV%202019%202020.pdf

Gonel, A. H. (2013). Pansexual identification in online communities: Employing a collaborative queer method to study pansexuality. *Graduate Journal of Social Science*, *10*(1), 36–59.

Greaves, L. M., Sibley, C. G., Fraser, G., & Barlow, F. K. (2019). Comparing pansexual- and bisexual-identified participants on demographics, psychological well-being, and political ideology in a New Zealand national sample. *Journal of Sex Research*, *56*(9), 1083–1090. https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2019.1568376

Green, A. (2019). By definition they're not the same thing": Analyzing methods of meaning making for pansexual individuals. In B. L. Simula, J. E. Sumerau, & A. Miller (Eds.), *Expanding the rainbow: Exploring the relationships of bi+, polyamorous, kinky, ace, intersex, and trans people* (pp. 23–33). Brill Sense.

Hayfield, N. (2020). *Bisexual and pansexual identities: Exploring and challenging invisibility and invalidation*. Routledge.

Hayfield, N., & Huxley, C. (2015). Insider and outsider perspectives: Reflections on researcher identities in research with lesbian and bisexual women. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *12*(2), 91–106. https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2014.918224

Jay, D. (2008). *AVEN Survey 2008—Results: Asexuality visibility and education network*. http://www.asexuality.org/home/2008_stats.html

Jones, A. (2016, October 19). 'I've always had a distaste for authority': Joe Lycett on comedy, revenge and pansexuality. *i-news*. https://inews.co.uk/essentials/ive-always-distaste-authority-joe-lycett-comedy-revenge-pansexuality-26341

Juvonen, T. (2019). Nimeämisen mahti. Sukupuolta ja seksuaalisuutta kuvaavien termien suhteisuudesta [The power of naming. The relatedness of the terms that describe gender and sexuality]. *SQS – the Journal for Queer Studies in Finland*, *13*(1–2), 1–22.

Kangasvuo, J. (2020). Bisexuality as an identity and a conceptual tool in sexual politics in Finland. In E. Maliepaard & R Baumgartner (Eds.), *Bisexuality in Europe: Sexual citizenship, romantic relationships, and Bi + identities* (pp. 163–177). Routledge.

Lapointe, A. A. (2017). It's not pans, it's people": Student and teacher perspectives on bisexuality and pansexuality. *Journal of Bisexuality*, *17*(1), 88–107. https://doi.org/10.1080/15299716.2016.1196157

Lasher, M. (2018, April 27). What's the difference between pansexual and bisexual? *Seventeen*. https://www.seventeen.com/love/a20084651/pansexual-vs-bisexual-definition-difference/

Lim, G., & Hewitt, B. (2018). Discrimination at the intersections: Experiences of community and belonging in nonmonosexual persons of color. *Journal of Bisexuality*, *18*(3), 318–352. https://doi.org/10.1080/15299716.2018.1518182

Maliepaard, E., & Baumgartner, R. (2020). Bisexuality in Europe: Introduction to the field and this book. In E. Maliepaard & R. Baumgartner (Eds.), *Bisexuality in Europe: Sexual citizenship, romantic relationships, and Bi + identities* (pp. 1–17). Routledge.

McFarland, S. (2018). How psychology has helped society accept homosexuality: Attitude change and acceptance have been facilitated through psychological science. Psychology Teacher Network. https://www.apa.org/ed/precollege/ptn/2018/05/society-accept-homosexuality

McLean, K. (2007). Hiding in the closet? Bisexuals, coming out and the disclosure imperative. *Journal of Sociology*, *43*(2), 151–166. https://doi.org/10.1177/1440783307076893

Mitchell, R. C., Davis, K. S., & Galupo, M. P. (2015). Comparing perceived experiences of prejudice among self-identified plurisexual individuals. *Psychology & Sexuality*, *6*(3), 245–257. https://doi.org/10.1080/19419899.2014.940372

Monro, S. (2015). *Bisexuality: Identities, politics, and theories*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Monro, S., Hines, S., & Osborne, A. (2017). Is bisexuality invisible? A review of sexualities scholarship 1970-2015. *The Sociological Review*, *65*(4), 663–681. https://doi.org/10.1177/0038026117695488

Morandini, J. S., Blaszczynski, A., & Dar-Nimrod, I. (2017). Who adopts queer and pansexual sexual identities?*Journal of Sex Research*, *54*(7), 911–922. https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2016.1249332

Office for National Statistics. (2012, September 28). *Integrated household survey (experimental statistics): April 2011 to March 2012.* https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/sexuality/bulletins/integratedhouseholdsurvey/2012-09-28

Office for National Statistics. (2019, January 21). *Sexual identity, UK: 2017 Experimental statistics on sexual orientation in the UK in 2017 by region, sex, age, marital status, ethnicity and socio-economic classification*. https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/sexuality

Pearce, R. (2012). Inadvertent praxis: What can "genderfork" tell us about trans feminism?*MP: An Online Feminist Journal*, *3*(4), 87–129.

Pennasilico, A., & Amodeo, A. L. (2019). The Invisi_les: Biphobia, bisexual erasure and their impact on mental health. *PuntOorg International Journal*, *4*(1), 21–28.

Pew Research Center. (2013, June 13). *A survey of LGBT Americans: Attitudes, experiences and values in changing times*. http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2013/06/13/a-survey-of-lgbt-americans/

Plummer, K. (2013). A manifesto for social stories. In L. Stanley (Ed.), *Documents of life revisited: Narrative and biographical methodology for a 21st century critical humanism* (pp. 209–220). Routledge.

Rasmussen, M. L. (2004). The problem of coming out. *Theory into Practice*, *43*(2), 144–150. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15430421tip4302_8

Reem, M. (2019, July 22). Cara Delevingne says she's a 'pansexual faerie' in new Amazon series Carnival Row. *Pink News*. https://www.pinknews.co.uk/2019/07/22/cara-delevingne-says-shes-a-pansexual-faerie-in-new-amazon-series-carnival-row/

Riggle, E. D., Rostosky, S. S., & Reedy, C. S. (2005). Online surveys for BGLT research: Issues and techniques. *Journal of Homosexuality*, *49*(2), 1–21. https://doi.org/10.1300/J082v49n02_01

Roberts, T. S., Horne, S. G., & Hoyt, W. T. (2015). Between a gay and a straight place: Bisexual individuals' experiences with monosexism. *Journal of Bisexuality*, *15*(4), 554–569. https://doi.org/10.1080/15299716.2015.1111183

Robinson, O. C. (2014). Sampling in interview-based qualitative research: A theoretical and practical guide. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *11*(1), 25–41. https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2013.801543

Roseneil, S., Crowhurst, I., Hellesund, T., Santos, A. C., & Stoilova, M. (2013). Changing landscapes of heteronormativity: The regulation and normalization of same-sex sexualities in Europe. *Social Politics*, *20*(2), 165–199. https://doi.org/10.1093/sp/jxt006

Smalley, K. B., Warren, J. C., & Barefoot, K. N. (2016). Differences in health risk behaviors across understudied LGBT subgroups. *Health Psychology: Official Journal of the*

Division of Health Psychology, American Psychological Association, *35*(2), 103–114. https://doi.org/10.1037/hea0000231

Stonewall. (2019, March 27). What does trans mean? *Stonewall*. https://www.stonewall.org.uk/what-does-trans-mean

Terry, G., & Braun, V. (2017). Short but often sweet: The surprising potential of qualitative survey methods. In V. Clarke, V. Braun, & D. Gray (Eds.), *Collecting qualitative data: A practical guide to textual, media and virtual techniques* (pp. 15–44). Cambridge Press.

Terry, G., Hayfield, N., Clarke, V., & Braun, V. (2017). Thematic analysis. In C. Willig & W. Stainton Rogers (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research in psychology* (2nd ed., pp. 17–37). Sage.

Thompson, B. Y. (2012). The price of 'community' from bisexual/biracial women's perspectives. *Journal of Bisexuality*, *12*(3), 417–428. https://doi.org/10.1080/15299716.2012.702623

Tracy, S. J. (2010). Qualitative quality: Eight "big-tent" criteria for excellent qualitative research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *16*(10), 837–851. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800410383121

Trau, R. N., Härtel, C. E., & Härtel, G. F. (2013). Reaching and hearing the invisible: Organizational research on invisible stigmatized groups via web surveys. *British Journal of Management*, *24*(4), 532–541. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8551.2012.00826.x

Umberson, D., Thomeer, M. B., Kroeger, R. A., Lodge, A. C., & Xu, M. (2015). Challenges and opportunities for research on same-sex relationships. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, *77*(1), 96–111. https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12155

Ussher, J. M. (1999). Eclecticism and methodological pluralism: The way forward for feminist research. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, *23*(1), 41–46. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-6402.1999.tb00339.x

Wilde, J. (2015). Gay, queer, or dimensional? Modes of reading bisexuality on Torchwood. *Journal of Bisexuality*, *15*(3), 414–434. https://doi.org/10.1080/15299716.2014.1000473

Yule, M. A., Brotto, L. A., & Gorzalka, B. B. (2017). Human asexuality: What do we know about a lack of sexual attraction?*Current Sexual Health Reports*, *9*(1), 50–56. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11930-017-0100-y