Exploring sexual and gender minorities' experiences of sexual violence and access to sexual violence support services

Holly McSpadden

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The University of Sheffield
Faculty of Social Sciences
Department of Sociology Studies

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Abstract

Despite research indicating that sexual and gender minorities experience similar rates of sexual violence to those of their cisgender, heterosexual counterparts, these victims/survivors have largely been omitted from sociological accounts of sexual violence. The impacts of this omission are not limited to the academic sphere, but rather, are identifiable within the everyday lives of sexual and gender minority victims/survivors. Notably, the social and cultural prioritisation of cisgender, heterosexual women – as the typical victims/survivors of sexual violence – has resulted in sexual and gender minorities experiencing significant barriers to support. Existing research indicates that sexual and gender minorities face barriers to mainstream sexual violence support services in the UK. This thesis addresses these barriers by presenting findings from its qualitative study, which centres the narratives of the 11 victims/survivors and five service providers who participated within this research. As such, this thesis can be situated amongst a growing body of literature aimed at accounting for LGBTQ+ individuals' experiences of sexual violence – and their access to sexual violence support services – more generally. This study, in particular, addresses a gap in the sociological literature on sexual violence, by incorporating an analysis of the intersections between homophobia/biphobia, transphobia, sexism, and misogyny. By centring sexual minorities who belong to marginalised gender categories, and, through its application of a queer poststructuralist feminist lens, this thesis contributes new insights to sociological conceptualisations of sexual violence. Departing from dominant feminist investigations of sexual violence, this thesis attends to the harms caused by the 'typical script' of sexual violence, and in doing so, calls for an analytical approach to sexual violence that extends beyond a singularly (binary) gendered analysis.

Key words: LGBTQ+, sexuality, gender, sexual violence, support services, misogyny, sexism

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Declaration

I, the author, confirm that the Thesis is my own work. I am aware of the University's Guidance on the Use of Unfair Means. This work has not been previously presented for an award at this, or any other, university.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

In the context of a patriarchal society, and, given the gendered power imbalances pervasive within this social structure, sexual violence is understood to be a widespread phenomenon (Bart and O'Brient 1985; Gordon and Riger 1989; Helliwell 2000; Girshick 2002; 2009; Kelly 2013; Griffin 2015). Whilst the topic of sexual violence has gained attention within sociology – primarily through feminist anti-violence scholarship – certain voices have been omitted from the discourse surrounding this issue (Duke and Davidson 2009; Donovan and Hester 2014; Mortimer, Powell and Sandy 2019). Indeed, the absence of diverse voices within feminist anti-violence scholarship has been a long-standing concern, first emerging from the third wave of feminism, which sought to counter the "Second Wave's seeming essentialist and rigid positioning of women's politics and lives" (Nguyen 2013, p. 157). This ongoing critique of early feminist anti-violence scholarship has therefore centred its neglect of intersecting factors – such as race, disability, age, class, and sexuality – in its approach to sexual violence (Crenshaw 1990; Nguyen 2013).

This omission has not only produced a rigid conceptualisation of sexual violence within sociological scholarship, but additionally, has resulted in further implications for policy and practice regarding the recognition of, and support provided to, silenced victims/survivors. Notably, and with particular significance to this thesis, the experiences of sexual and gender minorities have largely been silenced due to this universalising approach to sexual violence, which prioritises the experiences of heterosexual, cisgender women (women whose gender aligns with that which they were assigned at birth, and who are only attracted to men) as the typical victims/survivors of sexual violence (Ristock 2002; Barnes 2008; Duke and Davidson 2009; Donovan and Hester 2014; Mortimer et al 2019).

This thesis presents findings from a qualitative study centring sexual and gender minorities' experiences of sexual violence and their access to sexual violence support services. This introductory chapter serves to define and outline the key ideas and concepts underpinning the research. Hence, it begins with an overview of the key terminology used throughout. Identity categories are considered first, in order to specify who is included, within this research, under the umbrella of sexual and gender minorities. Such a consideration

additionally allows for the introduction of the central theories of queer and trans studies. Following this, concepts relating to the marginalisation of sexual and gender minorities are outlined. These include the concepts of heteronormativity and cisnormativity, homophobia, biphobia and monosexism, and cisgenderism. Additionally, I provide a definition of patriarchy and cis-heteropatriarchy, as well as sexism and misogyny, since these are central concepts utilised throughout this thesis. Alongside this, I consider the concepts of transmisogyny and oppositional sexism, coined by Serano (2007). Next, a broad definition of sexual violence is provided. An in-depth theoretical analysis of each of the concepts and terms identified within this section are provided in chapters two and three, where a review of relevant literature is presented. Finally, within this section, I outline the nature of sexual violence support provision within the UK.

A rationale for this research project follows. Here, I draw attention to the barriers faced by sexual and gender minorities attempting to access sexual violence support. I note how mainstream sexual violence support services are largely tailored towards cisgender, heterosexual women, and in doing so, I highlight how such an approach leads to misconceptions and stereotypes surrounding LGBTQ+ victimhood and the unique forms of violence sexual and gender minorities often face (Ristock 2002; Barnes 2008; Duke and Davidson 2009; Donovan and Hester 2014; Mortimer et al 2019). Thereafter, I address the decision to omit cisgender men from the study, acknowledging the issues involved in positioning the LGBTQ+ community as a homogenous group (Rogers 2020). Additionally, I provide a justification for centring sexual minority victims/survivors who are marginalised by their gender, highlighting a central aim of this thesis: to explore the ways in which sexism and misogyny intersect with homophobia/biphobia and/or transphobia, and how this impacts victims/survivors' experiences of sexual violence and their access to support. Furthermore, I provide an overview of the ways in which the research design was adapted and developed throughout the research process in order to progress this aim. Finally, the structure and contents of this thesis is outlined, and my research questions are stated.

Terminology

Sexual and gender minorities

To start, it is vital to define who is included under the umbrella of sexual and gender minorities, since these individuals are at the forefront of this research. The purpose of defining who is included when referring to this group is twofold: first, it will help to clearly distinguish between individuals and their experiences (as opposed to positioning these individuals as a homogenous group), and secondly, it will form a basis through which further concepts relating to their identities can be understood and scrutinised. However, it is worth noting that whilst the labels (outlined below) used to define sexual and gender minorities within this thesis are most commonly used within both real-life settings and within the literature itself, these identities are by no means representative of all people who "do not conform to heteronormative, cisnormative models of gender and/or sexuality" (Donovan and Barnes 2019, p.2). Cis-heteronormativity, here, refer to the cultural and social prioritisation of cisgender identities (when an individual identifies with the gender they were assigned at birth) and heterosexual identities (when an individual is only attracted to people of the opposite gender). Furthermore, many participants within this research experience intersecting and overlapping identities, and therefore, the categories used to define sexual and gender minorities cannot be treated singularly, or as fixed or static. Nevertheless, these categories require attention since they are necessary for identifying and representing participants. It is also important to highlight here that whilst gay, bisexual, and queer cisgender men would traditionally be included under the umbrella of 'sexual and gender minorities', these individuals have been omitted from the current research project. This decision will be outlined further when considering this project's rationale.

Transgender (trans)

In opposition to an essentialist viewpoint of sex and gender – which sees such categories as fixed, immovable, and innate – feminist and queer studies have positioned sex and gender identities as socially and culturally constructed and situated (Nagoshi and Brzuzy 2010). Nagoshi and Brzuzy (2010) suggest that trans studies "encompasses and transcends feminist and queer" theorisations of sex and gender, by:

> "...explicitly incorporating ideas of the fluidly embodied, socially constructed, and self-constructed aspects of social identity, along with the dynamic interaction and integration of these aspects of identity within the narratives of lived experiences."
>
> (Nagoshi and Brzuzy 2010, p.432)

In consideration of the lived experience of trans individuals, Nagoshi and Brzuzy (2010) therefore recognise the vastness of identities categorised under the umbrella of transgender; they explain how fluidity may be accepted "only to the extent that one can switch between two otherwise separate, essentialist, and pure gender categories", whilst for others, "embodied gender identity is still malleable" (Nagoshi and Brzuzy 2010, p.432). The category of trans is therefore used, throughout this research, as an umbrella term to describe individuals whose gender does not align with that which they were assigned at birth (Ellison et al 2017).

Queer

Defining queer is a complex task, due to its insistence upon remaining unknowable and unfixed (Jagose 2009). Despite this, queer theory has become synonymous with the anti-normative critique of "subject boundaries and dominant paradigms" (Jagose 2009; McCann 2016, p.238). Specifically, and in line with the focus of this research project, queer theory deals with gender and sexuality; it seeks to interrogate the binary logics through which gender and sexual categories have come to exist (Jagose 2009; Love 2014; McCann 2016). Hence, queer theory attempts to problematise normative constructions of gender and sexuality through an exploration of identity as uncertain and fluid (Green 2002). Queer theory therefore rejects the binary categories of male/female and hetero/homo as ideological fictions which fail to acknowledge the complex realities of gendered/sexed bodies (Valocchi 2005).

Queer, as an identity category, is, in many ways, closely connected to the scholarly interpretation outlined above, insofar as queer identities may be said to "reject specific labels of romantic orientation, sexual orientation and/or gender identity" (Stonewall 2024, online). Queer can therefore be used as an identity category to represent a person's sexual or romantic orientation and/or gender identity when one's identity and experience does not

conform to heterosexual (hereafter 'hetero') and/or cisgender (hereafter 'cis') norms. Furthermore, although the word queer has, historically, been used as a slur directed towards the LGBTQ+ community, it is now more commonly understood to be a term reclaimed by the community, not only as a way to reject labels of romantic orientation, sexual orientation, and/or gender identity, but moreover, as a way of "rejecting the perceived norms of the LGBT community (racism, sizeism, ableism, etc)" (McGregor 2023, p.475).

The following definitions, pertaining to participants' sexual and gender identities, will also be used throughout this thesis:

> *Bisexual, or Bi:* An umbrella term describing a romantic and/or sexual attraction towards more than one gender. Bisexuality encompasses a wide variety of terms relating to non-monosexual/non-monoromantic identities (where monosexual/monoromantic refers to an attraction to only one gender) (Stonewall 2024).
>
> *Gay:* Most commonly refers to men who have a romantic and/or sexual attraction towards other men. However, some women define themselves as gay rather than as lesbian (McGregor 2023; Stonewall 2024).
>
> *Lesbian:* Lesbian women are defined as women who have a romantic and/or sexual attraction towards women. The term lesbian may also be used by non-binary or genderqueer people (Stonewall 2024).
>
> *LGBTQ+:* An acronym used to account for individuals who do not identify entirely within hetero and/or cis categories. This includes lesbian, gay, bi, trans, queer, questioning, and ace (Stonewall 2024).
>
> *Non-binary:* Is "a term that defines several gender identity groups, including (but not limited to): (a) an individual whose gender identity falls between or outside male and female identities, (b) an individual who can experience being a man or woman at separate times, or (c) an individual who does not experience having a gender identity or rejects having a gender identity" (Matsuno and Budge 2017, p.117).

Heteronormativity and cisnormativity

Now that it is clear who is included when referring to sexual and gender minorities within this thesis, it is important to define the ways in which these individuals experience marginalisation. Indeed, there are multiple concepts used to describe the discrimination faced by sexual and gender minorities within contemporary society. Most commonly, the terms homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia denote a fear of, or dislike towards, members of the LGBTQ+ community (Girshick 2009; Pyne 2011). However, some scholars have suggested that the terms homo- and bi-phobia should be replaced by homo- and bi-negativity, since these concepts are arguably more illustrative of the discrimination faced by those with non-normative sexual identities (Eliason 1997). This research recognises the difficulties associated with naming, and defining, the discrimination faced by sexual and gender minorities. However, since the terms homophobia, biphobia and transphobia were most commonly used by participants within the research, these terms are adopted within this thesis.

Nevertheless, injustices against the LGBTQ+ community may not be sufficiently understood through the use of these terms alone, since they only measure the marginalisation of sexual and gender minority individuals on the basis of direct discrimination (Pyne 2011). Moreover, these terms do not account for social prejudices against LGBTQ+ people which are not based upon an irrational 'fear' or 'phobia', but are, instead, intentional forms of discrimination driven by anger or hatred (Eliason 1997; Yost and Thomas 2012). Hence, these terms – with their emphasis upon individual prejudices and fears – fail to comprehend the systemic nature of the subordination of LGBTQ+ people (Pyne 2011). As such, scholars have suggested that terms such as cis-heteronormativity can provide an additional insight into the discrimination faced by LGBTQ+ individuals, insofar as these terms account for the normalisation of cis and heterosexual identities, and subsequently, the demonisation of identities which fall outside of these normative sexual and gender binaries (Girshick 2009; Pyne 2011).

Whilst the terms homo/bi/transphobia account for individual acts of discrimination, cis-heteronormativity goes further, by acknowledging how hetero and cis identities have been established as natural and normal, and how this is part of a "larger sociopolitical system" which, consequently, labels all other sexual and gender identities as abnormal (Girshick 2009,

p.2). Additionally, the marginalisation of trans people will be better understood through terms such as cissexism and cisgenderism as opposed to transphobia, and these terms will be defined further on. First though, it is important to distinguish between the concepts of homophobia and biphobia, which are often categorised together, despite their different meanings and effects (Eliason 1997).

Homophobia, biphobia and monosexism

As has been established, heteronormativity is understood as the cultural and social ideology which positions heterosexual identities as natural and normative (Girshick 2009). Heteronormativity is therefore the ideological basis through which negative social attitudes towards homosexual people (i.e., homophobia) have come to exist. Yet, for bisexual (and other non-monosexual) people, there is an additional social stigma pertaining to their sexual identities, which may be understood through the concept of monosexism. Monosexism refers to the demonisation of non-monosexual sexualities (including bisexuality and pansexuality), on the basis of the "cultural privileging of sexuality directed toward only one gender" (Girshick 2009, p.2). Hence, monosexism operates on the belief that sexuality is dichotomous, and therefore must fit within the binary categories of hetero/homosexual (Ochs 1996; Eliason 1997). Negative social attitudes towards non-monosexual individuals are therefore distinct from those directed towards homosexuals, insofar as monosexist values discriminate against identities which do not exist within the binary categories of hetero/homosexual (Eliason 1997). As such, biphobia, or binegativity, may be perceived not as an extension of homophobia, but as a conception of the discrimination faced by bisexual people within a monosexist society (Eliason 1997; Girshick 2009).

Cisgenderism and cisnormativity

As has been noted above, the umbrella term of trans is used to describe individuals who do not identify with the gender they were assigned at birth (Green and Bey 2017). Trans identities are therefore perceived as "between, beyond or outside of the binary way in which society describes gender" (Rymer and Cartei 2015, p.155). Contrastingly, as noted earlier, the term cis is used to refer to individuals who are not trans, or, in other words, whose gender expression is aligned with the gender they were assigned at birth (Green and Bey 2017). However, the term 'cis' does not simply connote the opposite of 'trans', but rather, is the

basis through which a cissexist society has prevailed (whereby cis identities are prioritised over trans identities). This is underpinned by the concept of cisgenderism, which, as defined by Lennon and Mistler (2014), refers to a cultural ideology that "denies, denigrates, or pathologizes self-identified gender identities that do not align with assigned gender at birth, as well as resulting behaviour, expression, and community" (Lennon and Mistler 2014, p.63).

Cisgenderism creates a rigid set of rules and beliefs pertaining to gender, which are sustained by a hierarchy of acceptable gender expressions (Lennon and Mistler 2014). Individuals who break or bend the rules of gender prescribed by the ideology of cisgenderism are consequently perceived as a threat to the gender order (Lennon and Mistler 2014). Furthermore, within the hierarchy of gender expressions, those who conform to the rules of gender (i.e., those who obtain a cisgender identity), are awarded a level of "power and privilege […] over trans people due to the influence and workings of gender normativity at both micro and macro levels" (Rogers 2020, p.22). This form of power, known as cis privilege, is further solidified by the normalisation of cis identities – cis identities have long been positioned as natural, and subsequently, trans identities are understood as deviating from the norm (Pyne 2011; Rogers 2020).

Cisnormativity is "understood as the belief system underpinning transphobia", yet, as has been determined, the concept of transphobia alone does not account for the "systemic nature of trans marginalization" (Pyne 2011, p.131). Hence, some scholars have suggested a departure from the use of the term transphobia when attempting to conceptualise the marginalisation of trans people, since the term fails to account for the cultural ideology (of cisgenderism) which underpins discrimination towards the trans community (Lennon and Mistler 2014). Moreover, just as the concepts of heteronormativity and monosexism are more representative of the systemic nature of negative social attitudes towards homosexual and bisexual individuals, so too are the terms cisnormativity and cisgenderism better suited to exposing the structural basis of discrimination against trans people, by highlighting the normative status of cis identities.

An exploration of the ways in which these systems of oppression shape and inform both sexual and gender minorities' experiences of sexual violence, and their relationship to

support, is found in chapter three, and is incorporated throughout the analysis chapters (chapters five, six, and seven).

Cis-heteropatriarchy

Within feminist theory, patriarchy refers, quite simply, to the system of social structures which sustain men's domination over, and oppression of, women (Walby 1989; Richardson-Self 2018). In this sense, patriarchy is the ideological force sustaining violence against women (feminist perspectives on sexual violence are explored further in chapter two) (Clark 1987; Walby 1989).

However, contemporary feminist perspectives have extended this analysis further through the conceptualisation of *cis-heteropatriarchy* to account for the ways in which cis, heterosexual men exert domination over cis women and other individuals with marginalised sexual and/or gender identities (Alim et al 2020; Phipps 2020). In this sense, cis-heteropatriarchy is:

> "…an ideological system that naturalizes normative views of what it means to 'look' and 'act' like a 'straight' man and marginalizes women, femininity, and all gender non-conforming bodies that challenge the gender binary; it is a system based on the exploitation and oppression of women and sexual minorities."
>
> (Alim et al 2020, p.292)

Such a concept is vital to understanding the unique positionality of sexual and gender minority victims/survivors of sexual violence – this will be further explored in chapter two, where the *typical script* of sexual violence is outlined and explored.

Gender-based discrimination: sexism, misogyny, transmisogyny and oppositional sexism

The terms sexism and misogyny are used, throughout feminist theory, to highlight the effects of patriarchal control (Walby 1989; Richardson-Self 2018). Several feminist scholars note the interconnections between sexism and misogyny, but they also highlight that these terms refer to two distinct mechanisms of patriarchal control. Indeed, Wrisley (2023, p.192) emphasises the importance of distinguishing between these two terms, suggesting that "feminists need

more than one word to describe and, more importantly, specify the complex forms of hostility, contempt and infantilisation that characterise their existence". As such, Wrisley (2023) defines these terms as follows:

> "...misogyny (with its etymological roots in 'hatred' and 'women') should be broadly understood as a negative affective or emotional orientation towards women as a group. Sexism (with its roots in sex and '-ism', or the 'process or action of' systematic prejudice/discrimination) should be understood as the institutionalised expression of individual misogyny (e.g. lower wages for women, lack of access to comprehensive reproductive healthcare, etc)."
>
> (Wrisley 2023, p.192)

A further distinction between sexism and misogyny can be made when considering the ways in which they operate. Manne (2017), for instance, notes how misogyny operates through coercion – where patriarchal controls are achieved through force, and where the *aim* of misogyny is compliance – whereas sexism functions through its "justificatory component", where men's superiority is positioned as natural, and therefore, as justified (Manne 2017; Richardson-Self 2018, p.261). Taken together, sexism and misogyny serve to enforce patriarchal norms through their systemic oppression of women "in a man's world" (Manne 2017, p.33; Richardson-Self 2018).

Two related terms that are also of relevance to this thesis have been coined by Serano (2007). The first, transmisogyny, refers to the intersectional struggles of both transphobia and misogyny. This concept enables an analysis of the ways in which trans women and trans feminine individuals are subjected to unique forms of structural violence due to the convergence of these two mechanisms of oppression – the particular manifestations of which are discussed in chapter three (Serano 2007; Ussher et al 2020). In addition, the term oppositional sexism – or binary genderism (Nicholas 2019) – refers to the way in which binary logics of gender are upheld within society (Serano 2007; 2013; Armitage 2020). These binary logics of gender – which rest upon the belief that only two genders (those of male and female) exist – serve to "delegitimise gender nonconformity and non-binary genders" (Armitage 2020, p.14). Furthermore, as highlighted by Armitage (2020, p.14), the term oppositional sexism

rests upon a belief in gender determinism, which sees "(binary) gender differences as inevitable consequences of biology". Hence, gender-based discrimination is not solely directed towards women – and therefore cannot be understood, solely, through the traditional conceptions of sexism and misogyny – but rather, can be weaponised against "anyone who does not meet classically masculine standards" within a patriarchal society (Armitage 2020, p.14).

These concepts outlined above are central to the aims of this research; they enable an analysis of the unique experiences of sexual violence faced by sexual and gender minorities, and, furthermore, they help to highlight the structural barriers limiting these victims/survivors' access to sexual violence support services. Accordingly, a definition of sexual violence, and an outline of sexual violence support provision within the UK, are provided next.

Sexual violence

Defining sexual violence is a complex task since it can encompass a wide spectrum of abuse (Kelly 2013). Generally, sexual violence is understood to include all forms of unwanted sexual activity, including acts of rape, sexual assault, childhood sexual abuse, sexual harassment, female genital mutilation (FGM), and being forced to watch sexually explicit material (Girshick 2002; Basile et al 2014; Rape Crisis England and Wales 2024a). Sociological approaches have positioned sexual violence as a gendered phenomenon, reflecting the high rates of victimisation experienced by women (Kelly 2013; Griffin 2015). The Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW), for instance, indicates that 3.3% (798,000) of women were victims of sexual assault between March 2021 – 2022, compared to 1.2% (275,000) of men (ONS 2023). Within the UK, sexual offences are prosecuted as part of the Crown Prosecution Service's (2024, online) wider Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) strategy, which "address crimes that have been identified as being committed primarily but not exclusively by men against women".

A more thorough exploration of sociological accounts of sexual violence is offered in chapter two, where approaches to defining sexual violence – such as where definitions result in a hierarchy of acts – are interrogated (Kelly 2013). Nevertheless, it is worth highlighting here that cultural and legislative understandings of sexual violence typically reinforce cis-

heteronormative assumptions pertaining to *who* can be categorised as a victim/survivor, *who* can be categorised as a perpetrator, and, moreover, *what* acts constitute violence (Ristock 2002; Barnes 2008; Duke and Davidson 2009; Donovan and Hester 2014; Mortimer et al 2019). This can be understood through the concept of the 'typical script', which, according to Mortimer et al (2019, p.340), "assumes a heterosexual relationship and the dynamics of an 'active', aggressive man against a 'passive', victimised woman". Hence, throughout this thesis, I challenge these cis-and-heteronormative assumptions, which not only ignore sexual and gender minorities' experiences of sexual violence, but, furthermore, significantly impact their access to support.

Sexual violence support services

In the UK, sexual violence support has largely been facilitated through the voluntary sector (Westmarland and Alderson 2013; Hester and Lilley 2017). In particular, Rape Crisis Centres (RCCs) have played a crucial role in providing support for victims/survivors of sexual violence (Hester and Lilley 2017; Rape Crisis England and Wales 2024a). Whilst RCCs were initially founded in response to men's violence against women, now over half of RCCs across England and Wales offer support to male victims/survivors (Rape Crisis England and Wales 2024b). Within the statutory health sector, Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs) have also provided support to victims/survivors of sexual violence, offering practical support through the reporting and legal processes (Hester and Lilley 2017). Whilst support for victims/survivors of sexual violence can take a multitude of forms – as is explored further in chapter six – the importance of specialist sexual violence support service provision cannot be understated (Brown et al 2010; Hester and Lilley 2017). Several studies indicate that specialist sexual violence support provision is indeed necessary, given the significant impact sexual violence can have upon the lives of victims/survivors (McNaughton Nicholls et al 2012; Hester and Lilley 2017). It is with this in mind that this research project's rationale can now be stated.

<u>Rationale</u>

Despite research emphasising the importance of specialist sexual violence support provision, sexual and gender minority victims/survivors report low rates of engagement with support services (Simpson and Helfrich 2005; Stotzer 2009; Harvey et al 2014; Brown and Herman 2015; Rymer and Cartei 2015; SafeLives 2018). The cultural prioritisation of heterosexual,

cisgender women as the typical victims/survivors of sexual violence has unsurprisingly shaped the ways in which mainstream support services operate (Girshick 2002; 2009; Duke and Davidson 2009; Donovan and Hester 2014; Field and Rowlands 2020; Rogers 2021). Indeed, research indicates that support services frequently reinforce stereotypes surrounding sexual violence, leading to harmful misconceptions pertaining to LGBTQ+ victims/survivors experiences of sexual violence (Simpson and Helfrich 2005; Stotzer 2009; Harvey et al 2014; Brown and Herman 2015; Rymer and Cartei 2015; SafeLives 2018). This, coupled with a lack of sexual violence support provision directly tailored towards LGBTQ+ individuals across the UK, has resulted in sexual and gender minorities facing significant barriers to accessing support (Simpson and Helfrich 2005; Stotzer 2009; Harvey et al 2014; Brown and Herman 2015; Rymer and Cartei 2015; SafeLives 2018). These barriers are explored, in depth, within chapter three, as well as throughout this project's findings and discussion chapters (chapters five, six and seven).

Whilst the unique experiences and support needs of sexual and gender minority victims/survivors are addressed within existing research, many of these studies centre the LGBTQ+ community as a whole (see: Harvey et al 2014; Brown and Herman 2015). This approach is useful, insofar as it enables a critique of the cis-heteronormative response to sexual violence adopted by mainstream support services. Furthermore, it allows for a consideration of more broad policy recommendations aimed at promoting the inclusion of LGBTQ+ victims/survivors of sexual violence in general. However, there are notable disadvantages to addressing the LGBTQ+ community as a homogenous group. Rogers (2020) highlights this, placing a particular emphasis upon trans individuals, who, when subsumed under the umbrella of LGBTQ+, are often left with their specific experiences and service needs being neglected.

During the initial stages of research design and recruitment, I intended to prioritise LGBTQ+ women within this study. A focus was placed upon the ways in which LGBTQ+ women experience the intersecting oppressive forces of sexism, misogyny, homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia, and how this interacts with both their experiences of sexual violence, and their experiences (or lack thereof) of accessing sexual violence support services. This decision reflected existing research centring LGBTQ+ women; Mortimer et al (2019, p.36), for instance,

highlight how, just as "sexism is widely acknowledged to shape many [cis] heterosexual women's experiences of sexual violence", so too can "heterosexism and cissexism" uniquely shape the experiences of sexual violence for LGBTQ+ women. A call for participants aimed at LGBTQ+ women was therefore circulated at the beginning of the recruitment stage (see: Appendix 1). However, after advertising the study widely, I received expressions of interest in participating from non-binary and genderqueer survivors. As a result, I made the decision to amend the project design, and moving forward, the research became focused on sexual minorities (including people who identify as lesbian, bisexual, queer), who also belong to a marginalised gender category (this includes the categories of woman, non-binary, queer, genderqueer, genderfluid, and agender). This enabled me to continue to focus upon the ways in which sexism and misogyny interact with experiences of homophobia/biphobia and transphobia, whilst also allowing for a representation of a wider range of experiences.

Once this decision had been made, a new call for participants was circulated (see: Appendix 2). Within this, I noted that a self-defining approach to participation had been adopted, which meant that anyone who self-identifies as a sexual minority and as marginalised by their gender could participate, regardless of whether their specific gender identity was listed within the advertisement. It was essential to incorporate a self-defining approach within this research, since as Donovan and Barnes (2019) suggest, and as stated earlier on within this chapter, the most commonly used identity categories found within sociological literature are not necessarily representative of all individuals who exist outside of cis-heteronormative gender and/or sexuality models. Furthermore, enabling potential participants to self-categorise as having experienced marginalisation through their gender would provide space for individuals whose experiences of gender marginalisation are not necessarily accounted for when strict definitions and restrictions are in place. For instance, whilst no trans men expressed an interest in participating within this research, the self-defining approach to gender marginalisation would have made this a possibility. Indeed, the inclusion of trans men would have been worthwhile to this research, since existing studies indicate that trans men face unique disadvantages in their attempts to access sexual violence support services (Shultz 2020). This issue is addressed in chapter eight, where recommendations for future research are shared.

Hence, the decision to omit gay, bisexual, and queer cis men from this research provided an opportunity to centre an analysis of the ways in which sexism and misogyny intersect with experiences of homophobia/biphobia and/or transphobia, and to examine the extent to which these intersections impact sexual and gender minorities' experiences of sexual violence and their access to sexual violence support. With the focus of this study in mind, the project's research questions can now be stated.

Research questions:

1. What are sexual and gender minority victims/survivors' experiences of sexual violence, and how do these compare to the 'typical script' of sexual violence found within current sexual violence literature?
2. To what extent do sexual and gender minority victims/survivors' experiences of sexism, misogyny, and homophobia/biphobia and/or transphobia intersect with, or impact, their experiences of sexual violence?
3. Do sexual and gender minority victims/survivors' experiences of homophobia/biphobia/transphobia, sexism and misogyny influence their likelihood of accessing sexual violence support services?
4. In what ways do support services take a cis/heteronormative approach to sexual violence, and how can this be rectified to ensure that sexual and gender minority victims/survivors can access better, more tailored support?

Structure of the thesis

Chapters two and three of this thesis provide a review of the relevant literature concerning the focus of this study. Both chapters offer an exploration of literature pertaining to the central themes of this thesis, those being sociological theorisations of sexual violence and related concepts, as well the cis-and-heteronormative discourse surrounding sexual violence, and the barriers to support this discourse sustains. The contents of these chapters therefore help to establish a theoretical framework upon which the three discussion and findings chapters are built.

Chapter two, 'theorising sexual violence: power, embodiment and victimhood' offers an engagement with poststructuralist, feminist, queer and trans perspectives on key concepts

and theories related to sexual violence and sexual and gender minority identities. In the first half of this chapter, a Foucauldian approach to power is interrogated, whilst considerations of the construction of vulnerability are also explored (Foucault 1980; Bordo 1994; Munro 2003; Butler 2004; Gilson 2016; Cousens 2019). Theories of embodiment are then explored, before the impacts of stigma, guilt and shame are addressed. Finally, theories of victimhood pertaining to the construction of the deserving and typical victim are examined, exposing the ways in which sexual and gender minorities have been silenced (Donovan and Hester 2014; Mortimer et al 2019). An engagement with each of these areas has facilitated a more thorough understanding of the identities and experiences of participants within this research, as demonstrated, primarily, within chapters five and six.

Chapter three, 'situating sexual violence: sexual and gender minorities' experiences of sexual violence and barriers to support' addresses the existing body of work centring LGBTQ+ experiences of sexual violence. It begins with an exploration of the unique forms of sexual violence experienced by sexual and gender minorities (Simpon and Helfrich 2005; Ristock and Timbang 2005; Donovan and Hester 2014; Calton, Cattaneo and Gebhard 2016; Donovan and Barnes 2019). The latter half of this chapter concerns the personal, institutional, and structural barriers to support for sexual and gender minorities (Simpson and Helfrich 2005; SafeLives 2018). The considerations made within this chapter inform the analysis of participants' experiences found within chapters five, six and seven.

Chapter four sets out the project's methodological approach. Here, I justify the incorporation of a queer, poststructuralist feminist approach to the subject, before outlining the specific benefits of utilising feminist interviewing techniques within sensitive research (Bhopal 2010). Additionally, within this chapter, I address my positionality, noting the impact my own identity categories (as a white, middle-class, cis, bisexual woman with experience of sexual violence) have had upon the research. In addressing this impact, I also highlight the limitations of this research, centring, in particular, the concerns of incorporating an entirely white sample (Harvey et al 2014; Love et al 2017).

Chapters five, six and seven are dedicated to a discussion of this project's findings. Chapter five centres the narratives of the 11 victims/survivors who participated in this research. Building upon theorisations of power, vulnerability, guilt, and shame outlined in chapter two,

I discuss sexual and gender minorities' experiences of sexual violence, and, furthermore, I consider how these experiences are socially and culturally situated. Here, cis-heteronormative assumptions pertaining to sexual violence are interrogated, challenged, and ultimately disrupted through an engagement with participants' narratives.

Chapter six explores sexual and gender minorities' help-seeking practices and their access to sexual violence support services. Participants' narratives are considered against the backdrop of existing research outlined in chapter three. In particular, I provide insight into the associated benefits and drawbacks of both mainstream and LGBTQ+ specific sexual violence support. Moreover, I explore how participants' access (or lack thereof) to both informal and formal support is dependent upon multiple factors related to their identities, their location, and the extent to which their experiences can be situated within, or close to, the typical script of sexual violence (Duke and Davidson 2009; Donovan and Hester 2014; Mortimer et al 2019).

Chapter seven introduces the narratives of the five service providers who took part in this research. Here, I discuss the role of by-and-for services, the incorporation of specialist LGBTQ+ service provision within mainstream services, and the position of gender-specific services. Ultimately, this final analysis chapter is dedicated to highlighting the ways in which sexual violence support can be inclusive and affirming of sexual and gender minority victims/survivors. Finally, in the concluding chapter (chapter eight), I revisit the key findings from this thesis, situating these as original knowledge contributions within the field. The conclusion closes with recommendations for future research and practice aimed as representing and supporting sexual and gender minority victims/survivors of sexual violence.

Chapter 2. Theorising sexual violence: Power, embodiment, and victimhood

Introduction

Before centring sexual and gender minorities' experiences of sexual violence, it is important to understand how sexual violence has been theorised, more generally, within the discipline of sociology. Furthermore, it is necessary to situate sociological interpretations of sexual violence alongside related theoretical bodies of work concerning issues of power, vulnerability, embodiment, victimhood, and stigma (Foucault 1980; Cahill 2000; Munro 2003; Gilson 2016; Kennedy and Prock 2018; Cousens 2019).

This literature review therefore begins with an interrogation of cultural, legislative, and scholarly definitions of sexual violence. Within this section, I draw attention to the ways in which sexually violent acts are often rigidly categorised through a hierarchy of severity (Kelly 2013). After considering the extent to which such rigid definitions of sexual violence may impact victims/survivors, I highlight the significant contributions to sexual violence scholarship made by feminist theorists, noting, in particular, their focus upon the relationship between power and violence (Bart and O'Brient 1985; Gordon and Riger 1989; Helliwell 2000; Girshick 2002; Kelly 2013; Griffin 2015).

In the next section of this chapter, I consider conceptualisations of power more generally, highlighting how a Foucauldian approach has been adopted by poststructuralist feminists through explorations of the relational position of power (Foucault 1980; Bordo 1994; Munro 2003). Next, I explore theorisations of vulnerability, focusing specifically on its negative connotations and the harms this generates (Butler 2004; Gilson 2016; Cousens 2019).

Sexual violence is an embodied experience and thus, explorations of theories pertaining to the body and embodiment are critical. I explore feminist theories of the body in relation to the cultural forces that impact it, drawing further upon a Foucauldian approach to power (Foucault 1979; Piran 2017). Additionally, I examine Butler's theory of performativity in relation to the construction of sexual and gender minority bodies (Butler 1990; 1995). Furthermore, I consider the contribution of transgender studies in relation to the body, highlighting how trans experiences of embodiment may be neglected within Butler's work (Prosser 2006; Goetz 2022). Finally, I end this section with an exploration of how the body is situated within sexual violence discourse. Each of these bodies of literature are relevant and

necessary to include here since they help to situate the embodied experiences of sexual violence for sexual and gender minority victims/survivors.

The concept of stigma is closely related to both the experience of being LGBTQ+ and the experience of sexual violence. Thus, I consider how sexual and gender minorities victims/survivors of sexual violence experience stigmatisation on both accounts (Donovan and Hester 2010; Kennedy and Prock 2018; Flanders et al 2019; Worthen 2020). In addition to this, I explore how the feelings of guilt, shame, and self-blame may be exacerbated for sexual and gender minority victims/survivors who may experience layers of shame pertaining to both their LGBTQ+ identity and victim status (McClennen 2005; Donovan and Barnes 2020; Ovesen 2023).

The final section of this literature review is dedicated to the conceptualisation of the deserving, or respectable, victim. Within this section, I note how access to the identity of the deserving or respectable victim is restricted along social parameters including race, class, gender, and sexuality. Furthermore, I consider LGBTQ+ perspectives on sexual violence, noting how the typical script and public story of violence function to silence particular victims/survivors (Donovan and Hester 2014; Mortimer et al 2019).

Defining sexual violence

Definitions of sexual violence encompass a wide spectrum of abuse (Kelly 2013). Rape Crisis UK, for instance, describe sexual violence as all forms of unwanted sexual activity, including (but not limited to) rape, sexual assault, sexual abuse, child sexual abuse, sexual harassment, and female genital mutilation (FGM) (Rape Crisis England and Wales 2024a). Additional definitions of sexual violence include non-contact sexual acts, such as being forced to watch or view sexually explicit material through exposure to pornography, voyeurism, or related activities (Girshick 2002; Basile et al 2014). The Crown Prosecution Service (2024) defines rape and sexual assault across three levels: rape is defined as penile penetration of the vagina, mouth, or anus of another person; sexual assault refers to touching another person, with sexual intent, without their consent; and assault by penetration involves intentional, sexual penetration of the body part(s) of another person, without their consent.

Culturally, and legislatively, then, sexual violence is, generally, conceptualised on the basis of *acts* of violence themselves. Whilst such approaches to defining sexual violence are

worthwhile, – insofar as they set the parameters through which such acts may be identified, exposed, and categorised – Bagwell-Gray et al (2015) highlight the challenges in ascribing rigid meaning to such acts. They acknowledge the potential for victim/survivors to *reject* the categorisation of their experiences within these definitions, noting how, within specific contexts, such framings are not representative or useful, but may, on the contrary, cause more harm than good (Bagwell-Gray et al 2015). In particular, they note the complexities involved when perpetrators and victim/survivors are in an intimate relationship together, addressing how victim/survivors may be reluctant to define their experience in line with official, legal definitions, for fear of sustained violence and repercussions (Bagwell-Gray et al 2015).

A further issue of defining sexual violence in these terms – where acts of violence themselves are centred – is the potential for such acts to be placed within a hierarchy of severity (Kelly 2013). In these instances, rape perpetrated by men is positioned as the most devastating form of sexual violence (Kelly 2013). More specifically, as Armstrong, Gleckman-Krut and Johnson (2018) explore, stereotypes of 'real rape' are ingrained within our cultural understandings of sexual violence, to the extent that clear-cut images, of what the *legitimate* 'perpetrator' and 'victim' look like, exist. Such stereotypes centre heterosexual, cisgender, middle-class white women as victims, targeted by a violent stranger (Armstrong et al 2018). Hohl and Stanko (2015) further explore the myth of 'real rape', highlighting how an individual is expected to have sustained bruising or marks upon their body during the event of sexual violence in order to be categorised as a legitimate victim. The impacts of such myths cannot be understated. Indeed, as Kelly (2013) asserts, when a person's experience differs from a rigid categorisation of sexual violence, they may be deterred from labelling their experience as such, and consequently, may fail to seek support.

These framings of sexual violence are not only a direct result of the hierarchy of severity in place – that which governs and classifies sexually violent acts – but, as Collins (1998) notes, such definitions are constructed by those most powerful within society (i.e., those privileged by the structures of white supremacy, capitalism, heteropatriarchy, and cis-heteronormativity). Indeed, the racist, classist, cis-heteronormative framings of sexual violence can be said to reinforce the power these individuals hold, and, furthermore, solidify systems of oppression (Collins 1998; Armstrong et al 2018). It may be argued, therefore, that

definitions of sexual violence cannot be removed from the social inequalities they uphold, but are, in fact, a direct representation of such inequalities (Collins 1998; Armstrong et al 2018).

In an effort to locate the boundaries of sexual violence, the arguments posed thus far suggest that definitions resting upon a rigid categorisation of sexually violent acts may be harmful to victims/survivors (Muehlenhard and Kimes 1999; Kelly 2013; Bagwell-Gray et al 2015; Armstrong et al 2018). In this sense, it may be useful to steer away from definitions of sexual violence centring particular *acts* of violence, so as to avoid the stereotypes and assumptions such definitions perpetuate. Indeed, through her challenge to the hierarchy of severity imposed by rigid definitions of sexual violence, Kelly (2013) rejects the notion that acts of violence, themselves, carry an innate impact or severity. Instead, she suggests that the impact of sexual violence can differ depending on individual influences and contextual factors (Kelly and Radford 1998; Muehlenhard and Kimes 1999; Kelly 2013).

With Kelly's (2013) arguments in mind, it is useful to consider additional understandings of sexual violence which also encompass a broader framework. Indeed, maintaining a broad framework – through which sexual violence may be understood – will be of particular importance to this thesis in its exploration of sexual and gender minorities' experiences (Ristock 2002). A starting point to this may be found within feminist theory, since its conceptualisation of sexual violence, as an act of power, can help to expose the social implications of sexual violence.

Feminist perspectives on sexual violence

Feminist theory has contributed significantly to the literature surrounding sexual violence. From a dominant feminist perspective, sexual violence is seen to be rooted in unequal gender relations (Bart and O'Brient 1985; Gordon and Riger 1989; Helliwell 2000; Girshick 2002; Kelly 2013; Griffin 2015). In this sense, sexual violence is thought to be a tool through which patriarchal control is maintained and gender roles are reinforced (Kelly 2013; Griffin 2015). Patriarchy is, therefore, at the centre of feminist perspectives on sexual violence, and can be defined as "a system of social structures, and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women" (Walby 1989, p.214). According to this feminist analysis, sexual violence is a condition of patriarchal social controls; sexual violence reinforces dichotomous gender relations which position women in opposition to men (Clark 1987).

The feminist approach outlined above therefore positions all women as vulnerable to sexual violence, maintaining that "women are targeted because they are women" (Boyle 2019, p.23). It follows that sexual violence, within feminist thought, is positioned as an instrument of men's power, control, and privilege over women (Girshick 2002). In an attempt to illustrate the threat of sexual violence within patriarchal society, Clark (1987, p.1) suggests that "…all women know the paralyzing fear of walking down a dark street at night…it seems to be a fact of life that the fear of rape imposes a curfew on our movements". Here, Clark (1987) draws attention to the ways in which men's power, control and privilege operate as omnipresent forces restricting women's choices and movements within time, space, and place.

A gendered analysis of sexual violence is crucial, insofar as it permits an understanding of the pervasiveness of men's violence, and their subsequent power, within a patriarchal society (Walby 1989; Girshick 2002; Kelly 2013; Griffin 2015; Boyle 2019). Hence, feminist approaches will be considered throughout this chapter. However, as will be noted through an engagement with LGBTQ+ perspectives on sexual violence within this chapter and beyond, with their focus upon women, specifically, mainstream feminist approaches do not account for the experiences of sexual and gender minority victims/survivors of sexual violence, since their conceptualisation of sexual violence is, typically, situated within cis-heterosexual context. Yet, as will become clear throughout this thesis, feminist approaches to sexual violence *can* be adjusted, adapted and utilised in order to showcase how cis-heteropatriarchal forces shape the experiences of all individuals marginalised by their gender.

Power

Sociological reflections on sexual violence have often been built upon, and understood alongside, explorations of power. This is in large part due to the influence of feminist thought, since as noted above, the role of power is fundamental to understandings of sexual violence within patriarchal conditions (Walby 1989; Radtke and Stam 1994). In considering the theorisation of sexual violence, power is therefore a necessary starting point.

In an attempt to expand feminist analyses beyond considerations of gender difference – whereby gender difference is understood as the determinant of women's oppression –radical feminists have drawn attention to the ways in which certain social systems and structures

have facilitated the oppression of women (Frye 1983; MacKinnon 1987). In particular, radical feminist perspectives see patriarchy as the root cause of men's power and women's subsequent subordination (Frye 1983; MacKinnon 1987; Munro 2003). In this sense, power rests upon an oppressor/oppressed model of domination, "which theorise[s] men as 'possessing' and wielding power over women, who are viewed correspondingly as being utterly power-*less*" (Bordo 1994, p.190). Indeed, this consideration of power as domination is adopted by Clark (1987) in her analysis of sexual violence above, thereby demonstrating the actualities of patriarchal domination according to radical feminist theorisation.

However, radical feminist approaches centring domination, such as those proposed by Frye (1983) and MacKinnon (1987), have faced criticism. The positioning of male dominance as "the most pervasive and tenacious system of power in history" fails to account for intersecting systems of oppression, and, consequently, rests upon essentialist understandings of gender and power (MacKinnon 1983, p.636-7; Munro 2003). Hence, in contrast, an intersectional feminist approach to power recognises how "overlapping and intersecting identities affect the experiences of individuals in society" (Bhopal 2018, p.147). In this sense, patriarchy is not the sole, most pervasive system of domination within society, but rather, exists alongside, and within, a network of oppressive structures (Crenshaw 1990; Bhopal 2018).

Alternative feminist theorisations to the *power as domination* approach have positioned power as a *resource,* leading to calls for power to be distributed equally in line with liberal values (Munro 2003). Such conceptualisations, however, fail to consider the relational properties of power, instead rendering it a static entity (Munro 2003). The model of *power as empowerment* goes some way in addressing these shortcomings, highlighting the emancipatory potential of re-claiming relations of power through the incorporation of feminine attributes – becoming powerful without diminishing the power of others, for instance (Miller 1992; Munro 2003). Indeed, Hartsock (1985) asserts that through the writings of women, power has been re-imagined as "capacity, energy, and potential", leading to a shift in the perception of women as "active participants" in resistance to their subordination (Radtke and Stam 1994, p.7). Yet, the feminine characteristics preceding these constructions of power may, themselves, be said to be "shaped by patriarchal patterns of domination" (Munro 2003, p.81).

Notwithstanding Munro's critique, many feminists attempting to move beyond "the essentialism and determinism implicated in the radical thesis", have adopted a Foucauldian approach to power (Munro 2003, p.81). For Foucault, power cannot be understood as a localised possession belonging to certain systems, groups, or individuals (Foucault 1980; Munro 2003). Instead, Foucault conceptualises power as something which is:

> "...employed and exercised through a net-like organisation. And not only do individuals circulate through its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power. They are not only its inert or consenting target; they are always also the elements of its articulation. In other words, individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application."
>
> (Foucault 1980, p.98)

Poststructuralist feminist arguments, concerning the self-normalisation, and self-regulation, of gender inequality within a patriarchal society, can therefore be understood through the influence of Foucault's theorisation of power (Foucault 1980; Bordo 1994). Thus, in these terms, patriarchy, rather than existing as a system capable of exerting *power-over* individuals, is, instead, necessarily sustained by the actualities of everyday life (Bordo 1994).

It is, however, important to note the feminist critiques of a Foucauldian approach to power. Notably, several feminist scepticisms towards Foucault centre his omission of a gendered analysis of power, and in particular, his neglect of domination. Munro (2003) summarises such critiques:

> "…the predominant charge against Foucault…is that he has failed to accommodate the phenomenon of domination within his analysis of power relations, and that therefore his theory falls short both for feminist and more general critical purposes."
>
> (Munro 2003, p.88)

According to some feminists, then, Foucault's conceptualisation of power ignores structural, overarching processes of domination – those which are fundamental to feminist theorisations surrounding patriarchal control (Munro 2003). Yet, other feminist readings of Foucault suggest that considerations of dominations can, and do, exist within the parameters of his

understanding of power. Indeed, as Bordo (1994) notes, Foucault's "'impersonal' conception of power does *not* entail that there are no dominant positions, social structures of ideologies emerging from the play of forces", and just because power is not a tangible, fixed entity *belonging* to certain groups or individuals, does not mean that its effects or implications are felt *equally* amongst social actors (Bordo 1994, p. 191). Rather, as Bordo (1994) succinctly highlights, power "is 'held' by no one; but people and groups *are* positioned differently within it" (Bordo 1994, p.191). Likewise, Allen (1996) argues whilst women's access to the relations of power is significantly limited, it is not completely out of reach. Further, Munro (2003) draws attention to Foucault's later analyses of power, demonstrating how these are more closely aligned to radical feminist conceptions of power relations as a "kind of commodity". Munro (2003) explains how Foucault conceives of specific contexts whereby power shifts and becomes stagnated. Within these specific contexts:

> "The ordinary free-flowing and (arguably) normatively neutral power forces of modern society become stagnated. Within this stagnant state, significant benefits are conferred upon the power-holder at the expense of the powerless and the power relationship in question becomes conceivable as a kind of commodity in the manner outlined by radical feminist theory."
>
> (Munro 2003, p.89)

Hence, it is through this conception that the forces of patriarchal domination can be understood through relational terms. Power, in this sense, encompasses processes of domination which are unequally exercised, sustained, and created through the social activity of everyday life (Foucault 1980; Munro 2003).

Vulnerability

Vulnerability, as a concept closely related to the experience of (or *risk* of experiencing) sexual violence, is often understood solely through the lens of its negative connotations (Gilson 2016; Cousens 2019). As such vulnerability is characterised as a condition of "weakness, dependency, passivity, incapacitation, incapability, and powerlessness" (Gilson 2016, p.74). It is through these characteristics that vulnerability has been positioned as a gendered phenomenon.

In some ways, the negative association of vulnerability with femininity – and in turn, with powerlessness, weakness, and passivity – can form "part of strategies of resistance" (Cousens 2019, p.32). Feminist anti-violence movements, for instance, have highlighted the structural implications of vulnerability, in order to expose the pervasiveness of previously invisible forms of gendered violence (Cousens 2019). Hence, the naming of gendered vulnerability has historically challenged the naturalisation of men's violence towards women – rather than positioning men's violence towards women in individualistic terms, structural characterisations of gendered vulnerability enable an understanding of men's violence as systemic (Arnold and Ake 2017; Cousens 2019). Such constructions of gendered, structural vulnerability are therefore positioned as "a strategy of resistance against the very discourses that naturalised, and thereby reproduced, sexual violence" (Cousens 2019, p.33).

However, much like radical feminist theorisations of power, this depiction of vulnerability omits any consideration of intersectional "axes of inequality" and has therefore faced significant criticism (Crenshaw 1991; McCall 2005; Cousens 2019, p.33). Likewise, such characterisations of vulnerability rest on the rigid conception of power as something possessed by a certain few – in this case, men – thereby rendering women helpless and unable to perform resistance in their everyday lives (Bordo 1994). Cousens (2019) addresses the problematic potential of such characterisations of vulnerability, highlighting how:

> "A dualistic articulation of vulnerability – where vulnerability is attributed to some and not others – frequently rests on and reproduces the problematic binary logic of active/passive, oppressor/victim."
>
> (Cousens 2019, p.37)

Indeed, as Gilson (2016) suggests, such approaches necessarily demarcate between women, and are therefore at risk of reproducing essentialist assumptions surrounding the feminine (female) body:

> "This conception of vulnerability not only contracts and rigidifies the meaning of the (feminine) female body, destining it for violation, but also precludes recognition of victimisation among those who are not [cisgender] women by tying victimisation to a

particular kind of vulnerability that is thought to be the property of particular kinds of bodies."

(Gilson 2016, p.76)

Further still, the structural perspective on vulnerability, which rests upon a rigid association of vulnerability with harm and suffering, is contested by scholars who consider the ontological foundations of vulnerability (Gilson 2016; Cousens 2019). Ontological approaches position vulnerability as a "constitutive condition arising from embodiment", one that is multifaceted and relational (Cousens 2019, p.40). In this sense, such perspectives "point towards what vulnerability illuminates about the subject and its relations with others, rather than the maldistribution of power and the effects of inequality" (Cousens 2019, p.40). Following this, ontological approaches attempt to move away from the conception of vulnerability as "unduly negative", instead, rendering the condition of vulnerability ambivalent, and thereby detaching it from any predetermined value (Gilson 2016; Cousens 2019). This approach therefore rejects the binary logic of oppressor/victim, or more specifically, invulnerable/vulnerable, through its illumination of the potentially positive aspects of vulnerability, and, furthermore, detaches the condition of vulnerability from its stigmatised position outlined by structural approaches (Butler 2004; Gilson 2016; Cousens 2019).

Embodiment

Tolman, Bowman and Fahs (2014) highlight how, within the social sciences, embodiment "refers to two distinct processes of phenomena": those of "*being embodied*", and "*embodying the social*" (Tolman et al 2014, p.761). The first process of "being embodied" involves an "experiential awareness of the feelings and sensations within one's body", which itself leads to the experience of "*lived embodiment"* (Grosz 1994; Tolman et al 2014, p.761). The second process of embodiment highlighted by Tolman et al (2014, p.761), that of "*embodying the social*", or as others have conceptualised it, "*social inscription*", refers to the ways in which social norms and discourses are internalised, and therefore *embodied*, by social actors.

The study of the body and embodiment has gained significant attention within feminist theory. Yet, many feminist theorists have, historically, been reluctant to account for the

materiality of the body, in large part, due to an avoidance of the mind/body dualism found within traditional, mainstream philosophy (Witz 2000; McLaren 2002; King 2004; Woodward 2015). This mind/body dualism sees man as "mind", representing "culture: the rational unified thinking subject", in contrast to woman as "body", representing "nature: irrational, emotional, and driven by instinct and physical need" (King 2004, p.31). Indeed, as Witz (2000) notes, feminist theory has favoured an appreciation of the "absent, more-than-fleshy *sociality* of women traditionally repressed within sociological discourse", since within sociology, "women have been under-socialized and overwhelmingly corporealized in accounts of the social" (Witz 2000, p.1-2). In this sense, "discursive understandings of the social positions of women" have often been favoured over questions of the materiality of the body (Alaimo and Hekman 2008; Coffey 2019, p.76).

In opposition to the separation of the mind and body found within traditional philosophical approaches, feminist theorists have sought to establish the body as a site of political and social struggle:

> "[Feminists] have acknowledged not only the importance of the body as a vital, if contentious, dimension of social relations and of the interrelationship between individuals and the societies in which they live, but also one in which relations of inequality are deeply invested."
>
> (Woodward 2015, p.103)

It follows that feminist considerations of embodiment have existed alongside conceptualisations of power (Piran 2017). According to Piran (2017), embodiment "refers concurrently to the breadth of lived experiences as one engages with [their] body in the world, and to the shaping of these experiences by cultural forces" (Piran 2017, p.3). Likewise, Phipps (2010) describes embodiment as a process whereby power relations are inscribed on the body, ultimately impacting individuals' everyday lives. Hence, the embodied gendered experience, for feminists, cannot be understood as separate from the cultural forces directly impacting it (Piran 2017).

Foucault's theorisation of power and the body are, according to Piran (2017), essential to poststructuralist feminist approaches to embodiment. In particular, Piran (2017) notes the

relevance of Foucault's conceptualisation of the *docile* body in understanding gendered embodiment:

> "The body is directly involved in a political field, power relations have an immediate hold upon it, they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks."
>
> (Foucault 1991, p.25)

Hence, Piran (2017) maintains that it is through such understandings of embodiment, and "the social mechanisms that produce 'docile' feminine bodies", that feminism is able to conceptualise gender power relations (Piran 2017, p.3). Indeed, Foucault's work on the body, which sees the rejection of the mainstream philosophical association of "subjectivity with consciousness", is further evidence of the ways in which feminist and Foucauldian perspectives on the body are linked (Foucault 1979; McLaren 2002, p.81). McLaren (2002) exposes this link further, by noting how the body has been *politicised* and *prioritised* within both approaches. McLaren (2002) demonstrates how the "notions of disciplinary practices and micropower" are central to "feminist analyses of the body" – in particular, due to their ability to "illuminate the patriarchal power of feminine cultural norms" (McLaren 2002, p.81).

However, as outlined previously, Foucault's approach has been heavily criticised by feminists for its omission of a gendered analysis. Indeed, as King (2004) states:

> "For someone whose project was to elaborate on how power produces subjectivity by focussing on the ways it invests the body, his accounts are curiously gender-neutral and he has been roundly criticised for failing to address or perhaps even to recognise the significance of gender in the play of power."
>
> (King 2004, p.29)

Allegations of gender blindness therefore raise concerns surrounding the applicability of Foucault's work to feminist thought (McLaughin 2003; King 2004). Nevertheless, as demonstrated through an engagement with the work of McLaren (2002) and Piran (2017), Foucault's theorisation of the body has been adopted, and *adapted*, by feminist thought, highlighting the ways in which his theory can be expanded to account for the gendered body.

In opposition to the above theorisations, which primarily position the body as a product of the social (and power, therefore, as enacted upon the body), alternative feminist approaches seek to establish a deeper connection between the body and power. In contradistinction to theories that conceptually distinguish between the two – but that still aim to establish their relatedness – new materialist perspectives assert that, when considering the physical and the social, one must understand them to be "inextricably fused together, and no event, no matter how energetic, can tear them asunder" (Barad 2007, p.3). Thus, the body, from a feminist new materialist standpoint, is much "more than a canvas from which cultural expression can be read" (Coffey 2019, p.75). Rather, it is informed by the material, social and cultural forces it comes into contact with (Coffey 2019). Accordingly, power also cannot be understood as a detached solitary force, either; it is alternatively conceived as mutually constituted within, and alongside, the material and the social (see: Barad 2007). Thus, the relationship between power and the body is understood, by feminist new materialism, to be one of dynamic coalescence.

Moreover, from this ontological view of reality as an interrelated and active substance – and in direct opposition to Foucault's formulation of the docile body – feminist new materialism (FNM) firmly acknowledges an "active, forceful and plural" dimension to all matter (Lemke 2015 p.4). Therefore, both the body and power are simultaneously perceived to be a part of an assemblage, but are also understood as active and forceful entities (Lemke 2015). On this view, feminist new materialism – particularly that which is concerned with 'intra-action' (see: Barad 2007) - grants a level of agency to humans and the physical, and further acknowledges the possibility of resistance (see: Alaimo and Hekman 2008; Braidotti 2012).
However, a critical analysis of FNM's ontological standpoint brings into question both its theorisation of agency and resistance, and additionally, the validity of its claims.

As Sullivan (2012, p.299) provocatively asserts, feminist new materialist's representation of "the body [...] is imbued with or animated by something (they perceive as) [...] 'more-than-human' or 'other-than-human'". Here, Sullivan (2012, p.299) argues that the view of the body, as situated within an entangled and connected mass of active matter and culture, implies a conceptual configuration of reality as being "natural, fundamental, a priori" (Sulivan 2012, p.299). Sullivan (2012) notes how FNM's agentic approach, that acknowledges social and physical matter as active and self-driven, presumably rests upon a level of automation that is

"separate from, at odds with and prior to 'humans'" (Sulivan 2012, p.299). This essentialising approach, can, however, be countered through further engagement with poststructuralist feminism. In particular, Butler's theorisation of the body demonstrates how the material is brought into existence through the discursive (Butler 1990; 1993).

Queer and trans theories of embodiment

Whilst feminist new materialism directs substantive critique towards the "linguistic turn" (Lemnke 2015, p.4) and its neglect of meaning and matter, approaches to the body which prioritise its discursive construction are nevertheless significant when it comes to understanding how bodies have been socially situated. Notably, Butler's (1990; 1993) theorisation of the body provides an explanation of how bodies come to be discursively materialised, and, furthermore, illustrates the ways in which the *abject* body is accounted for. Butler (1990; 1993) suggests that sexed embodiment is constituted through heterosexual regulatory norms. In this sense, the body is:

> "...orchestrated through regulatory schemas that produce intelligible morphological possibilities. These regulatory schemas are not timeless structures, but historically revisable criteria of intelligibility which produce and vanquish bodies that matter."
>
> (Butler 1993, p.14)

Hence, bodies, as sexed sites, are understood by Butler (1990; 1993) as produced through the heterosexual matrix (a system of norms which rest upon the connection between "sex, gender, sexual practice, and desire") (Butler 1990, p.23). It follows, then, that bodies which transcend these normative boundaries are considered abnormal, or *abjected* bodies (Butler 1990; Butler 1995; Elliot and Roen 1998). As Tolman et al (2014) suggest, queer theorisations of the body – which expose the ways in which bodies are subjectified through the heterosexual-homosexual binary – demonstrate how "non-normative bodies and sexualities help to constitute and consolidate heterosexual bodies and sexual practices as natural, normal, and prior to culture" (Tolman et al 2014, p.764). However, as Butler (1990; 1993) illustrates, the existence of these abjected, or non-normative bodies necessarily destabilises the "the process of sexed embodiment itself because as a 'constitutive outsider' they haunt the normative identities" (Elliot and Roen 1998, p.244). Queer theorisations of the body

therefore enable an understanding of the ways in which normative embodiment is regulated, and moreover, provide space for this regulation to be resisted (Halberstam 1998; Tolman et al 2014).

Yet, Butler's theorisation of embodiment has faced criticism, in large part, due to its neglect of the "physicality of the body" (Tolman et al 2014, p. 763). Indeed, both poststructuralist feminist (as noted above) and queer approaches have been critiqued for their preoccupation with the discursive impacts of embodiment (Grosz 2008; Tolman et al 2014). Such criticisms suggest that the materiality of the body has been omitted from their considerations (Grosz 2008; Tolman et al 2014).

Elliot and Roen (1998) suggest that transgender studies, much like feminist and queer theories, "raises crucial questions about how dominant conceptions of the body, gender, and sexuality reduce what are complex and ambiguous processes to simple or natural 'givens'" (Elliot and Roen 1998, p.237). However, Keegan (2020a; 2020b) argues that trans studies challenges the deconstructionist perspective on the body put forward by queer theory, noting, instead, the way in which trans studies "places high value on the embodied, speaking transgender subject as the producer of the constative self-knowledge" (Keegan 2020a, p.67). Indeed, as Prosser (2006) suggests, trans studies has questioned the presentation of trans within queer conceptualisations of the body. In particular, Prosser (2006) highlights how Butler's focus on the performative potential of certain forms of gender divergence serves to undermine embodied trans experiences. Prosser (2006) demonstrates:

> "…the way that certain types of transgender phenomena, notably camp and drag, are valorized while others, notably transsexualism, are disparaged—the former being deployed to support a theory of gender performativity, the latter held up as an example of an intellectually suspect "foundationalism" or "essentialism."
>
> (Prosser 2006, p.257)

Further, Prosser (2006, p.264) explains how the "materiality of the sexed body" is negated when trans is understood to "signify subversive gender performativity" within queer theorisations of the body. Indeed, Prosser (2006) highlights how some embodied trans experiences are denied through this association of trans and performativity: "there are

transsexuals who seek very pointedly to be nonperformative, to be constative, quite simply, to *be*" (Prosser (2006, p.264). Hence, queer theory's emphasis upon the performativity of gender, when considering trans identities specifically, may be said to overlook the corporeal experience of "authentic gender" (see: Levitt and Ippolito 2014). However, in her consideration of gender difference, Hines (2006, p.52) maintains that poststructuralist and queer approaches are well placed to account for the multitude of experiences and identities represented under the umbrella of 'transgender', so long as such approaches not only "examine how power is discursively and materially produced and resisted at a macro level", but additionally consider "subjective experience at a micro level". Without doing so, poststructuralism risks producing a homogenising concept of transgender – whereby trans is understood, only, as the transgression of gender binaries. Accounting for the subjectivities of the trans experience – at the micro level – however, reveals differences between and across trans identity. Certainly, within trans communities, beliefs about the rigidity of gender identity vary; gender is understood, by some, to be fluid and unfixed, whilst for others, gender is viewed in essentialist terms, cemented within binary categories. The variations in such subjectivities are contingent upon the social, political and personal aspects of trans people's everyday lives, played out across time, space and place (Hines 2006). Therefore, as Hines (2006) posits, a queer sociological analysis of transgender must incorporate an examination of both the macro structures which discursively produce gender, as well as the lived experience which shape the subjective trans identity.

The body and sexual violence

As Hines (2020) posits, the body continues to hold significant political relevance to feminist and trans studies. The goal of "self-determination around how the body is understood, portrayed and treated", in the context, for instance, of, "reproductive choice and sexual agency, autonomy around childbirth and sexual health, the fostering of positive body image", remain key aspects of feminist aims of liberation (Hines 2020, p.710). Likewise, Hines (2020) accounts for the ways in which the body has, within trans studies, been the site of political struggle. In particular, Hines (2020) highlights how "the right to embodiment is the political motivator" at the heart of many campaigns within trans movements (Hines 2020, p.711). Further still, and within the context of violence, specifically, Hines (2020) notes how trans women – and particularly trans women of colour – have "endure[d] extremely high levels of

sexual violence and domestic abuse" (Hines 2020, p.710). Indeed, as will be discussed further in chapter three, through an exploration of trans women's experiences of fetishisation and objectification, "the bodies of trans women of colour are subjected to additional marginalization, through the tyranny of transmisogyny" (Ussher et al 2022, p.3576). Thus, both feminist and trans studies illuminate the ways in which the body exists as a site of multidimensional oppression, embedded in a range of sociopolitical power struggles (Hines 2017; 2020).

Considering the position of the body within the context of sexual violence, Cahill (2000) explores how the "threat of sexual violence" plays a significant role in the "production of the feminine body" (Cahill 2000, p.56). Cahill (2000) suggests that:

> "...feminine bodies are produced within a context which, because of a hierarchy based on sex, marks them disproportionately and gender-specifically as weak, hostile, and responsible for the danger which constantly threatens them."
>
> (Cahill 2000, p.54)

Cahill (2000) further argues that the feminine body is, through the persistent threat of sexual violence, not only conditioned as the body of the "pre-victim", but more specifically, as "the body of the *guilty* pre-victim", insofar as it is through:

> "...feminine gestures and bodily comportment [that] we see the effects of a power dynamic which holds women responsible for their own physical victimisation."
>
> (Cahill 2000, p.56)

In this sense, the power relations inscribed upon the feminine body are those which position "women [as] responsible for their own physical victimisation" (Cahill 2000, p.56). The feminine body is, therefore, the site through which gendered power relations come to exist. However, whilst Cahill (2000) recognises how the act of conceptualising the victimised state of the feminine risks reproducing racial assumptions pertaining to both victims and perpetrators of violence (insofar as such assumptions rest upon stereotypes derived from colonial knowledge), Cahill's (2000) preoccupation with the *feminine* body, in relation to sexual victimisation, omits the multidimensional nature of victimhood, and, furthermore,

silences victims/survivors whose bodies are not deemed feminine. Indeed, Mortimer et al (2019) note how such a positioning of sexual violence – through a heteronormative and cisnormative framework, centring the victimised, *feminine* body – reproduces harmful stereotypes about LGBTQ+ people's bodies and the forms of violence they experience. They argue that "without a discursive framework that understands how sexual violence can involve a diverse range of bodies and acts, some LGBTQ+ victims/survivors may not feel 'justified or validated' in talking about their experiences". (Mortimer et al 2019, p.342) (see: chapter three).

Stigma

The concept of stigma has been applied to a wide range of social phenomena within the social sciences, and thus, its definition varies (Link and Phelan 2001). Goffman's (1963) theorisation of stigma is, nevertheless, popular throughout diverse applications of the concept; he defines stigma as an "attribute that is deeply discrediting", consequently transforming an individual, "from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one" (Goffman 1963, p.3; Link and Phelan 2001). Whilst some conceptualisations of stigma have been critiqued for their focus on stigma as "something in the person rather than a designation or tag that others affix to the person", others have highlighted the social underpinnings of stigma, recognising that the process of stigmatisation is constituted through acts of labelling and discrimination (Link and Phelan 2001, p.366). In particular, Link and Phelan (2001) expose the social production of stigmatisation by emphasising the role of power within its process. According to Link and Phelan (2001), stigma "exists when elements of labelling, stereotyping, separation, status loss, and discrimination occur together in a power situation that allows them" (Link and Phelan 2001, p.377). Indeed, power is the legitimising force behind stigma – power relations enable labelled differences and stereotypes to persist (Link and Phelan 2001).

In an attempt to situate the concept of stigma within the context of this thesis, there are two considerations to be made. The first concerns the ways in which sexual and gender minority identities are stigmatised within a hetero-and-cissexist society. Building upon existing conceptualisations of stigma, Worthen (2020) developed the Norm-Centred Stigma Theory (NCST), in order to account for the unique stigmatisation of LGBTQ+ individuals. Worthen's (2020) NCST is made up of three components: the central position of norms within the process

of stigmatisation; the position of power in sustaining this connection between norms and stigma; and the position of power dynamics in legitimating discrimination against *norm violators* (Worthen 2020). According to Worthen (2020), LGBTQ+ individuals experience stigmatisation due to the imposing structure of cis-heteronormativity. Violations of the norms sanctioned through such structures therefore serve to stigmatise sexual and gender minority identities (Worthen 2020).

Furthermore, in situating the concept of stigma within this thesis, an additional consideration must be made regarding the stigmatising effects of sexual violence. Scholarship centring the stigmatisation of sexual violence explores the ways in which social reactions to, and stereotypes surrounding acts of sexual violence shape how individuals experience their status as a victim/survivor (Kennedy and Prock 2018). Kennedy and Prock (2018) explain how stigma manifests itself through sexual violence:

> "...a survivor of abuse or assault may learn through the broader societal context, via media representations, dominant narratives, stereotypes, and so on, that certain behaviors are considered to be morally and socially unacceptable, and certain statuses—incest victim, rape victim, and abused woman—are stigmatized and blameworthy. This broader, more general stigma conveyed to the survivor may be compounded by specific victim-blaming responses from family members, friends, partners, and/or service providers upon disclosure."
>
> (Kennedy and Prock 2018, p.513)

Hence, the cultural stigmatisation of sexual violence is shown here to have significant implications for the ways in which individuals respond to, speak about, and experience their status as victims/survivors of sexual violence (Kennedy and Prock 2018).

It is important to note here how experiences of stigmatisation may be exacerbated for sexual and gender minority individuals who have experienced sexual violence. Indeed, the intersecting struggles of these stigmas – of violating cis-and-heteronormative standards, alongside having experienced sexual violence – have been addressed, at length, by scholars researching experiences of violence *within* the LGBTQ+ community, and violence *towards* the LGBTQ+ community (Donovan and Hester 2010; Flanders et al 2019). For instance, Flanders

et al (2019) highlight how bisexual-specific stigma, and the stereotypes it sustains, may be partly responsible for the high rates of violence against bisexual women, whilst Girshick (2002a; 2002b) illustrates the unique stigma attached to acts of sexual violence perpetrated by women. Moreover, Donovan and Hester (2010) suggest that the stigma surrounding (minority) sexualities may prevent victims/survivors of domestic violence from seeking help. Further still, research suggests that the stigmatisation of trans individuals within society not only increases their vulnerability to sexual violence, but additionally presents significant barriers to support (Ristock and Timbang 2005; Rymer and Cartei 2015; Jordan, Mehrotra and Fujikawa 2020). The impacts of these experiences of stigmatisation will be explored further in chapter three.

Guilt, shame, and self-blame

Research indicates that the feelings of guilt, shame, and self-blame are closely related to the experience of stigmatisation (Grubb and Turner 2012; Kennedy and Prock 2018; Delker et al 2020). More specifically, scholarship examining the social stigma associated with sexual violence has centred victims/survivors' experiences of internalised guilt, shame, and self-blame (Kennedy and Prock 2018; Delker et al 2020). Such internalised feelings are evocative of harmful social stereotypes surrounding victims/survivors of sexual violence – most notably, that victims/survivors are responsible for, or deserving of, their own victimisation in some way (Cahill 2000; Gavey 2005; Hawkey et al 2021). A consideration of shame, in the context of sexual violence, is essential, due to its potentially harmful implications for victims/survivors; research indicates, for instance, that shame may led victims/survivors to conceal their experience from friends, family, and service providers (Cavanagh 2003; Baker 2013; Kelly 2013).

Neckel (2020) explains how the feeling of shame is a social phenomenon – it is constructed through "a network of social relations" which themselves maintain social norms (Neckel 2020 p.40). In this sense, then:

> "Shame ultimately cannot be separated from the feeling of having violated a norm. This is what makes shame a moral emotion: the loss of personal worth that is felt is always accompanied by a feeling of guilt, by the feeling that the individual is responsible for their own inadequacy."

(Neckel 2020, p.40)

Neckel's (2020) conceptualisation of shame here is reminiscent of Worthen's (2020) theorisation of stigma, insofar as both see the *violation of norms* as the marker for discrimination. Power dynamics can therefore be situated as central within both Neckel's (2020) and Worthen's (2020) interpretations of shame and stigma, since it is *power* that allows these norms to exist. Indeed, as Worthen (2020) highlights, power not only serves to maintain the connection between norms and stigma, but, furthermore, legitimises the negative treatment of those who defy these norms.

From a feminist perspective, Bergoffen (2018) examines the way in which shame serves to reinforce unequal gender power dynamics. Bergoffen (2018) notes how an individual's position within social structures – of race and gender, for instance – determines their role in the shaming process; individuals are, therefore, "either in the position of having the power to shame or being seen as shameful" (Bergoffen 2018, p.5). In particular, Bergoffen (2018) notes how women are subjected to *debilitating* shame – that which "forms the horizon of a person's life" (Bergoffen 2018, p.5). Debilitating shame, according to Bergoffen (2018), operates as an invisible force of violence, enabled through the internalisation of misogynous cultural values which serve to demean women. Hence, Bergoffen (2018) suggests that "when the silent violence of [women's] lives becomes the overt violence of cat calls, a hostile workplace, sexual harassment, or rape", internalised misogynous values position women as responsible for their own victimisation (Bartky 1990; Bergoffen 2018, p.5).

Shame has therefore been exposed as a tool utilised in the preservation of power relations, and, within the context of sexual violence specifically, shame can be seen to reinforce patriarchal norms through its ability to simultaneously *blame* and *silence* victims/survivors (Bergoffen 2018). Baker (2013) explores the patriarchal power of shame further, by highlighting its function as a self-regulatory practice. Applying Foucault's (1991) conceptualisation of normalisation, as a form of disciplinary power – whereby subjects are regulated in line with social norms – Baker (2013) highlights how a "discourse of shame" has "normalising effects of power upon women experiencing male violence, as a self-regulatory practice" (Baker 2013, p.152). For the women in Baker's (2013) research, self-regulatory

practices of shame took the form of “isolation, hiding, embarrassment, concealment of the violence, humiliation and low self-esteem” (Baker 2013, p.159).

The theorisation of shame is also central within queer studies. As Sedgwick (1990) demonstrates, shame is a defining element of “the closet”, insofar as LGBTQ+ identities are demonised within the cultural system of cis-heteronormativity (Sedgwick 1990, p.71). As such, sexual and gender minority victims/survivors of sexual violence may experience *layers of shame* pertaining to both their minority sexual and/or gender identity, as well as their experience of sexual victimisation (McClennen 2005; Donovan and Barnes 2020; Ovesen 2023). For instance, Ovesen (2023, online) notes how, for LGBTQ+ victims/survivors of IPV who are closeted, the “shame of exposure” can be “two-folded”, since these individuals are at risk of outing themselves on both accounts. In regard to victims/survivors of same-gender relationship abuse, McClennen (2005) describes these individuals as “double closeted – entombed in their same-gender identity and in their personal pain of abuse” (McClennen 2005, p.150). Furthermore, Donovan and Barnes (2020) account for the potential impacts of these intersecting experiences of shame, highlighting how they may “result in low relationship expectations, tolerance and/or normalisation of abusive behaviours'' (Donovan and Barnes 2020, p.563). It is evident, then, that shame functions as a normalising process across multiple areas of social life, and, when these forms of shame intersect, as they do for sexual and gender minority victims/survivors of sexual violence, these *layers* of shame can have detrimental effects (McClennen 2005; Donovan and Barnes 2020; Ovesen 2023).

The deserving victim

The social construction of the deserving, or *ideal* victim of sexual violence has been central within sociological analyses of sexual violence, insofar as it is this construction which culturally determines the validity of an individual’s victim/survivor status (Eelma and Murumaa-Mengel 2022). Indeed, the concept of victimhood, itself, is largely disputed, due to its reliance upon an *audience’s* perception of the individual or group claiming its label (Jacoby 2015). In accordance with a social constructivist perspective, the stereotype of the deserving victim can be seen to be sustained through “socioculturally situated'' myths surrounding sexual violence, which themselves involve “stereotypes and misconceptions about gender, sexuality, power dynamics, and roles in violence'' (Eelma and Murumaa-Mengel 2022, p.264).

Applied to the case of child sexual abuse, specifically, Eelma and Murumaa-Mengel (2022) identify several stereotypical characteristics of the ideal victim. First, vulnerability is central to the construction of the ideal and deserving victim – the victim must be perceived as "weak and defenceless'' (Eelma and Murumaa-Mengel 2022, p.267). Additionally, the ideal victim must demonstrate an adequate attempt at resistance, and the situation in which the violence occurred must be considered completely unavoidable (Eelma and Murumaa-Mengel 2022). Furthermore, the act of abuse itself must be physically violent, and result in visible injuries, in order for the victim to receive a legitimate victim status (Little 2005; Eelma and Murumaa-Mengel 2022). Christie (1986), however, notes how many of the requirements needed to fulfil the image of ideal victimhood are contradictory, highlighting how victims: "must be strong enough to be listened to, or dare to talk. But she (he) [they] must at the very same time be weak enough not to become a threat to other important interests" (Christie 1986, p. 21).

Myths and scripts surrounding sexual violence not only denote who can be classified as the ideal or deserving victim, but, moreover, also prescribe what the ideal offender looks like. Notably, the "'ideal offender' is antisocial, extremely violent, ideally a stranger, and always a male" (Eelma and Murumaa-Mengel 2022, p.271). The construction of the ideal offender as male is, according to Denov (2001), part of a wider culture of denial which positions women exclusively as victims, rather than perpetrators, of sexual violence.

The stereotype of the deserving victim also functions through the construction of respectability, and more specifically, through the model of the respectable woman (Skeggs 2005; Phipps 2009). The respectable woman has, historically, been characterised by her whiteness, fragility, disciplined (hetero)sexuality, and middle-class status (Skeggs 2005; Pietikäinen and Kragh 2019). This construction is closely linked to earlier discussions of vulnerability, insofar as both respectability and vulnerability have been tied to particular kinds of (feminine) bodies (Gilson 2016; Cousens 2019). Women who defy the normative categories of respectability (and, indeed, of vulnerability) have consequently been marked as unrespectable – as sexually deviant, immoral, and unworthy of respect or sympathy. Skeggs (2005) highlights how Black and working-class women, in particular, have been marked by unrespectability. Stereotypes surrounding sexual promiscuity and deviancy have consistently been applied to these women, resulting in their access to the status of victimhood becoming significantly limited (Phipps 2009). The effects of this mark of unrespectability are notable.

Indeed, as Jacoby (2015) highlights, access to a victim status is dependent upon the social perception of individuals and groups – by failing to achieve this status, victims/survivors marked by unrespectability are not only mistreated through public opinion, but additionally, are often discriminated against within a legal setting (Stanko 1985; Lees 2002).

The typical script of sexual violence

As explored thus far, restricted access to the identity of the *respectable* or *deserving* victim is significant within the social construction of sexual violence. In addition to the harmful constructions of victimhood explored above, LGBTQ+ perspectives on sexual violence highlight how sexual and gender minority victims/survivors have often been omitted from the discourse surrounding sexual violence (Ristock 2002; Donovan et al 2006; Barnes 2008; Duke and Davidson 2009; Donovan and Hester 2014; Mortimer et al 2019). In particular, the dominant feminist approach to sexual violence – which focuses on men's violence and women's victimhood – has been criticised for its silencing of acts of violence which fall outside of a cis-and-heteronormative framework (Duke and Davidson 2009; Mortimer et al 2019). Without a consideration of the *additional* power dynamics underpinning sexual and gender minorities' experiences of sexual violence, dominant feminist approaches – that rest upon a singularly gendered analysis – may be seen to reduce sexual violence to something that only happens within cis-heterosexual contexts. Furthermore, mainstream feminist understandings of sexual violence often negate additional, intersectional factors contributing to the victimisation of particular groups – namely, as has been established, mainstream feminist theory lacks an analysis of class, race, disability, and age within its approach to sexual violence (Crenshaw 1991; Mishra 2013; Davis 2016).

Feminist theory's omission of LGBTQ+ voices within its conceptualisation of sexual violence is, according to Duke and Davidson (2009), no mistake or oversight. They note that within the early feminist movement of anti-violence against women, organisers were expected to present an acceptable vision of the female survivor of male violence, in order to captivate social attention (Duke and Davidson 2009). The respectable victim of male violence therefore became the white, middle-class, cisgender, heterosexual woman (Duke and Davidson 2009; Mortimer et al 2019). This has, unsurprisingly, positioned victims/survivors who do not fit within this prescribed mould of victimhood on the outskirts of sexual violence discourse.

Following similar patterns of silence found within feminist theory, dominant cultural understandings of sexual violence are, according to Mortimer et al (2019), also exclusionary of sexual and gender minorities. They explain how sexual violence is generally understood through the lens of a *typical script*:

> "…the 'typical script' for sexual violence and domestic violence assumes a heterosexual relationship and the dynamics of an 'active', aggressive man against a 'passive', victimised woman."
>
> (Mortimer et al 2019, p.340)

The typical script therefore rests upon cis-heterosexual contexts of sexual violence. Consequently, it ignores victims/survivors outside of the man/woman binary, and, furthermore, denies victim/survivors who have experienced abuse perpetrated by women, gender-diverse individuals, or any person who is not a cisgender man (Jauk 2013; Mortimer et al 2019). In doing so, it also ignores particular forms of sexual violence experienced by some sexual minority women – corrective sexual violence is just one example (see: chapter three).

Donovan and Hester (2014) apply similar analyses in their approach to domestic violence and abuse (DVA) in LGBTQ+ relationships. DVA is an umbrella term which involves a range of abuses, including sexual violence, within the context of intimate or familial relationships (Rogers 2019). Donovan and Hester (2014) maintain that the *public story* of domestic violence, much like the typical script of sexual violence outlined above, centres heterosexual relationships. The public story of domestic violence, according to Donovan and Hester (2014):

> "…locates the phenomenon inside heterosexual relationships within a gendered victim/perpetrator dynamic (the stronger/bigger man controlling the weaker/smaller woman), and forefronts the physical nature of the violence."
>
> (Donovan and Hester 2014, p.9)

The framings – of domestic violence, and of sexual violence, more specifically – outlined by Mortimer et al (2019), and Donovan and Hester (2014), reveal the consequences of narrowly defining such forms of abuse within cis-and-heteronormative terms. Not only do such scripts and stories exclude LGBTQ+ voices from conversations surrounding these forms of violence, but they make it near impossible for sexual and gender minorities to recognise their

experiences of abuse (Ristock 2002; Donovan et al 2006; Barnes 2008; Donovan and Hester 2014).

Despite being largely omitted from the dominant discourse surrounding sexual violence, several studies thus indicate that sexual and gender minorities are in fact likely to experience comparable, or higher rates of sexual violence than their cis, heterosexual counterparts (Ristock and Timbang 2005; Basile et al 2014; Langenderfer-Magruder 2016; Field and Rowlands 2020). In an attempt to comprehend the scale of the issue, a review of the literature centring sexual and gender minorities' experiences of sexual violence is vital and will be tackled in the following chapter.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored sociological theorisations of sexual violence alongside related bodies of work centring power, vulnerability, embodiment, victimhood, and stigma (Foucault 1980; Cahill 2000; Munro 2003; Gilson 2016; Kennedy and Prock 2018; Cousens 2019). Beginning with an interrogation of commonplace definitions of sexual violence, this chapter has located sexual violence as a phenomenon that can be said to be socially and culturally situated within systems and structures of inequality (Kelly and Radford 1998; Muehlenhard and Kimes 1999; Kelly 2013). Indeed, a feminist approach has illuminated the ways in which power operates through acts of violence, serving to uphold unequal gender relations (Walby 1989; Girshick 2002; Kelly 2013; Griffin 2015; Boyle 2019).

In considering feminist approaches to power more broadly, this chapter has incorporated a range of feminist conceptualisations of power (Frye 1983; MacKinnon 1987; Munro 2003). Ultimately, and in line with this thesis' epistemological and ontological approach (outlined in chapter four), power is situated, through a Foucauldian lens, as relational. In this sense, power is thought of as enacted *through* individuals and as sustained by everyday interactions (Foucault 1980; Bordo 1994; Munro 2003). This understanding of power rejects its depiction as a static entity, and, moreover, moves away from characterisations of power based upon a *power-over* model.

Additionally, this chapter has considered vulnerability in the context of sexual violence. In doing so, it has highlighted the socially constructed dimensions of vulnerability – namely, that the label of vulnerability is assigned selectively, and as such, its application rests upon the

binary logics of active/passive, oppressor/victim, and vulnerable/invulnerable (Cousens 2019).

An engagement with theories of embodiment and the body within this chapter has served to situate the (embodied) experience of sexual violence within feminist, queer and trans scholarship, and thus, has highlighted both the similar and contradictory ways in which these schools of thought approach the body (Butler 1990; 1993; Prosser 2006; Piran 2017).

The concept of stigma has also been explored within this chapter. In doing so, I have highlighted the stigmatising effects of sexual violence, as well as the stigma attached to LGBTQ+ individuals (Kennedy and Prock 2018; Worthen 2020). Moreover, this discussion led me to consider the social construction of guilt and shame, and, furthermore, enabled an exploration into the *layers* of shame often felt by, and ascribed to, sexual and gender minority victims/survivors of sexual violence (McClennen 2005; Donovan and Barnes 2020; Ovesen 2023).

Lastly, the chapter has introduced the notion of the deserving, or *ideal* victim (Eelma and Murumaa-Mengel 2022). An analysis of the ways in which victimhood has been constructed, limited, and policed has drawn attention to those individuals who are denied – or restricted in their access to – a victim status. As demonstrated, such restrictions exclude a wide range of victims/survivors based upon cultural stereotypes and biases (Skeggs 2005; Phipps 2009). Significantly for this research, an evaluation of the cis-and-heteronormative limitations placed upon victimhood has provided insight into the silencing of sexual and gender minority victims/survivors (Donovan and Hester 2014; Mortimer et al 2019). As such, the next chapter incorporates further investigation into sexual and gender minorities' experiences of sexual violence, and their access to support services.

Chapter 3. Situating sexual violence: Sexual and gender minorities' experiences of sexual violence and barriers to support

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a critical overview of current sociological literature addressing sexual and gender minorities' experiences of sexual violence. In doing so, I highlight the ways in which heavily gendered approaches towards sexual violence may alienate sexual and gender minority victims/survivors, both in theory and in practice. Through an engagement with literature centring LGBTQ+ experiences of sexual violence, I explore alternative framings of sexual violence, addressing, in particular, the unique forms of sexual violence experienced by sexual and gender minorities (Ristock and Timbang 2005; Simpon and Helfrich 2005; Donovan and Hester 2014; Calton et al 2016; Donovan and Barnes 2019).

In the first half of this chapter, I explore research surrounding LGBTQ+ victims/survivors experiences of sexual violence, noting the ways in which experiences of homo/bi/transphobia intersect with sexism and misogyny, to sustain unique forms of sexual violence experienced by sexual and gender minorities. First, I explore literature focusing on the specific experiences of lesbians – both in terms of relationship abuse, and corrective forms of violence (Girshick 2002; Ristock 2002; Duke and Davidson 2009; Doan-Minh 2019). Additionally, I consider the position of bisexual individuals – particularly bisexual women – including the stereotypes they face, and the vulnerability to sexual violence these stereotypes contribute to (Bostwick and Hequembourg 2014; Bermea 2017; Johnson and Grove 2017). Finally, I address the literature concerning trans individuals' experiences of sexual violence, exploring how cissexist structures contribute to unique forms of sexual violence motivated by transphobia (Stotzer 2009; Rymer and Cartei 2015; Ussher et al 2020).

In the second half of this chapter, I explore how sexual and gender minority victims/survivors have faced significant barriers to sexual violence support services (SafeLives 2018). This final section begins with an overview of the types of services typically available to victims/survivors in the UK, before moving onto a consideration of the ways in which LGBTQ+ victims/survivors may experience personal, institutional, and structural barriers preventing them from seeking and accessing support (Simpson and Helfrich 2005). I explore several proposed solutions to these barriers, and finally, conclude by suggesting that research interrogating the

intersections between homo/bi/transphobia and sexism – and their impacts upon the experience of sexual violence – is necessary.

Rates of violence

Several research studies indicate that sexual and gender minorities may experience similar, or even higher rates of sexual violence compared to cis, heterosexual individuals (Ristock and Timbang 2005; Basile et al 2014; Langenderfer-Magruder 2016; Field and Rowlands 2020). Despite this, official statistics, relating to the rates of sexual victimisation experienced and reported by sexual and gender minorities, are limited (Field and Rowlands 2020; Galop 2023). Multiple factors are said to contribute to the lack of data surrounding LGBTQ+ victims/survivors' experiences of sexual violence. Langenderfer-Magruder et al (2016), for instance, note how a general lack of trust towards the police amongst sexual and gender minorities – particularly for trans people and LGBTQ+ people of colour – makes reporting less likely (Stotzer 2014; Langenderfer-Magruder et al 2016). Lev and Lev (1999) further suggest that when it comes to forms of violence which fall outside of the typical script – woman-to-woman sexual assault, for example – such experiences, when reported, are often categorised into general sexual assault statistics.

Whilst official statistics are therefore limited, research continues to indicate that LGBTQ+ individuals experience high rates of sexual violence. A recent study from Galop, the UK's LGBTQ+ anti-violence charity, provides an overview of this issue within the UK specifically (Galop 2023). Galop (2023) undertook an online survey of over 1,000 LGBTQ+ individuals and found that: 74% of respondents reported experiences of sexual harassment, 65% reported experiences of sexual assault, and 44% reported experiences of penetrative sexual assault. 28% of respondents who had experienced sexual violence after the age of 18 reported experiencing four or more different forms of sexual violence (Galop 2023).

An earlier report released by Galop (Magić and Kelley 2019) suggests that lesbians experience similar rates of domestic violence (including emotional abuse, physical abuse, sexual violence, and controlling behaviour) to that of heterosexual women, whilst bisexual women are more likely to report experiences of domestic violence than both lesbian and heterosexual women (Magić and Kelley 2019). The same report indicated that trans people may be at a higher risk of experiencing domestic violence than any other section of the population (Magić and Kelley

2019). However, it is important to note that data from this report – and others like it – cannot be used to represent the LGBTQ+ community and their experiences as a whole. Specifically, the report from Galop relies on community studies, those which differ in their 'geographical scope, sampling and methods of data collection', and, moreover, the findings of which are 'often limited by underreporting and inconsistent monitoring of sexual orientation and gender identity by the services' (Magić and Kelley 2019, p.14). Hence, whilst these reports provide an insight into the experiences and needs of sexual and gender minorities, they cannot be used to predict the prevalence of sexual violence experienced by the LGBTQ+ community.

Some findings from general population surveys do, however, showcase the high rates of intimate partner violence experienced by lesbian and bisexual women. Drawing upon data from the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW), the Office for National Statistics (ONS) (2018) reports that bisexual women -10.9% - and lesbian women - 8% - were more likely to report partner abuse than heterosexual women - 6% (ONS 2018; Donovan and Barnes 2019). Yet, these figures are also constrained by the cis-heteronormative assumptions underpinning the survey's methodological approach. For instance, cis identities are assumed within the ONS report, and the gender and/or sexuality of the victim/survivors' partner(s) is not reported (Donovan and Barnes 2019). It is clear, then, that generalisable data concerning the prevalence of violence within, and against, the LGBTQ+ community is limited. As Donovan and Barnes (2019) suggest, such a limitation is, in large part, due to the cis-heteronormative assumptions perpetuated by general population surveys, those which reflect both the 'public stories' and 'typical scripts' of violence (Donovan and Hester 2014; Mortimer et al 2019).

Types of violence

As established in chapter two, culturally accepted ideas surrounding sexual violence tend to prioritise rapes perpetrated by strangers to the victim/survivor – 'real rape' is, therefore, thought of as a surprise, sudden attack by a stranger, typically occurring at night, in a public place rather than within the home (Ellison and Munro 2010; Hohl and Stanko 2015). Yet, as feminist research has highlighted, such depictions of rape are, in fact, not representative; the majority of perpetrators are known to the victim/survivor, and, furthermore, instances of sexual violence are more likely to occur within the home (Ellison and Munro 2010). Indeed,

Galop's (2023) report on sexual and gender minorities' experiences of sexual violence mirrors this – 25% of respondents said their experience of sexual violence took place in the home of the perpetrator, whilst 24% said it happened in their own home.

Whilst LGBTQ+ victims/survivors' experiences of sexual violence may, therefore, occur within similar settings to those of their cis, hetero counterparts, research suggests that the *forms* of violence experienced by sexual and gender minorities often differ (Ristock and Timbang 2005; Simpon and Helfrich 2005; Donovan and Hester 2014; Calton et al 2016; Donovan and Barnes 2019). Research into LGBTQ+ individuals' experiences of domestic violence, for instance, showcases specific forms of violence found within LGBTQ+ relationships. These include: threats of outing a partner; isolating a partner from friends and support networks within the LGBTQ+ community; convincing a partner that abuse does not happen within LGBTQ+ relationships; reinforcing a partner's internalised homophobia/biphobia/transphobia; suggesting that a partner's sexuality and/or gender identity makes them less attractive or worthy of love (Ristock and Timbang 2005; Simpon and Helfrich 2005; Donovan and Hester 2014; Calton et al 2016; Donovan and Barnes 2019).

Further still, Galop's (2023) recent report demonstrates how LGBTQ+ individuals may be subjected to sexual violence on the basis of their marginalised sexual and/or gender identity. Within their study, almost half of respondents reported being targeted due to their LGBTQ+ identities, through experiences of hyper-sexualisation and fetishisation, and, moreover, through perpetrators' attempts to convert or punish their sexual and/or gender identities (Galop 2023). Galop therefore highlight a unique form of sexual violence aimed at LGBTQ+ individuals – that being, corrective sexual violence, which includes "all practices that have the predetermined outcome to change, "cure", or suppress an individual or group of individuals' orientation or gender identity" (Galop 2022, online).

In the context of queer relationships, Donovan, Butterby and Barnes (2024) demonstrate how acts of sexual violence may remain hidden due to an unequal distribution of experiential power. For Donovan et al (2024, p.164), experiential power is characterised as "a form of capital" existent within queer communities. Specifically, when the "sexual power dynamics become established in [queer] intimate relationships", access to this capital is dependent upon several factors, including a person's age, previous experience of queer relationships and intimacy, and length of time being out (Donovan et al 2024, p.164). In this sense, Donovan et

al (2024) highlight how an unequal distribution of experiential power within queer relationships may lead to abuse. They explain how young people – or adults who are newly 'out' – entering into their first queer relationship may be particularly vulnerable to "abusive partners who groom them to believe that their victimisation is to be expected and 'normal' in queer relationships" (Donovan et al 2024, p.165). This abuse of power – which operates on the basis of an individual's knowledge (or lack thereof) of queer relationship dynamics and intimacy – therefore enables abusive partners to manipulate and control their partner through this specific deception.

The growing body of work surrounding LGBTQ+ experiences of sexual violence therefore highlights the prevalence of violence against the LGBTQ+ community, and, moreover, illuminates the unique forms of violence faced by sexual and gender minorities (Ristock and Timbang 2005; Donovan and Hester 2014; Galop 2023). However, whilst LGBTQ+ experiences of sexual violence may differ from the typical script and public story of violence, it is vital to acknowledge here that members of the LGBTQ+ community are not a homogenous group, and, by extension, their experiences of violence are not always comparable. This is a particularly significant point to centre within this research, given its choice to focus, specifically, on sexual minorities who self-identify as marginalised by their gender (see: 'Terminology' in chapter one).

The next section of this literature review will therefore address the specificities of sexual and gender minorities' experiences of sexual violence, considering groups existing under the LGBTQ+ umbrella. As outlined in the introduction of this thesis, the research centres lesbian, bisexual and queer women, non-binary, and genderqueer individuals, and therefore, attention will be paid to these groups, specifically. In particular, the section which follows will address the struggles of homophobia, biphobia and transphobia (Eliason 1997; Girshick 2009), exploring how these struggles impact upon the experiences of sexual violence for sexual and gender minority victims/survivors – for just as "sexism is widely acknowledged to shape many [cis] heterosexual women's experiences of sexual violence", so too can "heterosexism and cissexism" uniquely shape the experiences of sexual and gender minorities (Mortimer et al 2019, p.36).

Lesbian experiences of sexual violence

An investigation into lesbian experiences of sexual violence necessarily requires a consideration of the impacts of heterosexism – "the assumption that the world must be and is heterosexual" (Ristock 1991, p.74) – and oppositional sexism, insofar as lesbians may be seen to subvert, or challenge, normative constructions of femininity (Swarr 2012; Mortimer et al and 2019). Indeed, this is especially pertinent when considering female perpetrators of sexual violence; women who perpetrate violence (particularly in lesbian relationships) are seen to disrupt the status quo of culturally accepted gender roles; they disrupt heterosexist gender and sexuality stereotypes not only by having sex with women, but moreover, by exhibiting violent behaviour (Hassouneh and Glass 2008). In the following section, lesbians' experiences of violence within their relationships will be explored, with a focus on gender role stereotypes and the myth of a 'lesbian utopia' (Girshick 2002). Furthermore, the experience of corrective sexual violence will also be highlighted, demonstrating how the subversion of gender norms may be targeted through this specific form of violence (Lock Swarr 2012; Brownworth 2013; Doan-Minh 2019).

It is important to note that whilst the forms of violence centred within this section have, within the literature, been, most notably, mapped on to the experiences of lesbians, these forms of violence may be experienced by a range of sexual and gender minorities. Stereotypes surrounding non-violence, for instance, are frequently applied in conjunction with cis-and-heteronormative framings of what constitutes violence – hence the framing of cis men's violence (in particular, rape by the penis) as the most severe form of sexual violence (Girshick 2002; Mortimer et al 2019). Stereotypes of non-violence may therefore be applied within any relationship defying cis-heteronormative assumptions. Further still, the experience of corrective sexual violence, whilst perceived to effect lesbians most commonly (Doan-Minh 2019), can be seen to impact all sexual and gender minorities who subvert normative sexual and gender expectations – particularly, individuals who are seen to defy the boundaries of 'womanhood' (Galop 2023).

Lesbian relationships and the myth of a lesbian utopia

As established in chapter two (see: 'The typical script of sexual violence'), the typical script surrounding sexual violence has situated cis, hetero men as the typical perpetrators, and cis,

hetero women as the typical victims, of sexual violence (Girshick 2002; Ristock 2002; Duke and Davidson 2009). This – alongside gender-role stereotypes, which position women as passive and weak in comparison to men – has led to the cultural depiction of all women as nonviolent (Girshick 2002; Sanger and Lynch 2018). Furthermore, as Donovan et al (2024, p.159) posit, public stories, surrounding "how sexualities are cis-heteronormatively shaped in binaries", reinforce notions of female passivity within sexual relationships.

Lesbian relationships, in particular, have been stereotyped as nonviolent and harmonious, resulting in the myth of a 'lesbian utopia' (Girshick 2002; Barnes 2011). The concept of a lesbian utopia implies that violence does not occur within lesbian relationships, despite lesbians reporting similar rates of domestic violence to that of heterosexual women (Ristock 1991; Field and Rowlands 2020). Nevertheless, this stereotype of lesbian relationships as nonviolent not only fits within the dominant discourse surrounding sexual violence – which has been exposed as heavily reliant upon gender-based, heterosexist assumptions – but, additionally, it is a defining feature of lesbian feminism (Clarke 1983; Hassouneh and Glass 2008; Barnes 2011).

Lesbian feminism exists as a resistance to predatory and compulsory heterosexuality, and, furthermore, promises women's emancipation from harmful heteronormative and patriarchal forces (Rich 1980; Clarke 1983; Barnes 2011). Lesbian feminism therefore seeks to unite women in the rejection of heterosexuality, with the aim of escaping male domination (Barnes 2011). This goal – of escaping male domination through the rejection of heterosexuality – rests upon an understanding of violence as an inherently male act (Barnes 2011; Kelly 2013). However, the promise of harmony within lesbian relationships creates a particularly hostile environment for victims/survivors of violence within lesbian relationships to speak out (Ristock 1991; Barnes 2011). Indeed, Ristock (1991) suggests that discussions of violence within lesbian relationships have been limited – this is, in part, due to the pervasive myth of a lesbian utopia, but additionally, Ristock (1991) suggests that such discussions have been restricted due to fears surrounding the consequences they may have. In particular, Ristock (1991) notes a reluctance to contribute to, or sustain, further negativity and prejudice towards the lesbian community.

The existence of violence in lesbian relationships not only challenges the foundations upon which lesbian feminism is built, but also disputes the aforementioned assumption that

violence is, solely, the act of cis men – thereby challenging assumptions made within wider feminist anti-violence arguments (Barnes 2011; Kelly 2013). Alongside the myth of a lesbian utopia, victims/survivors of lesbian relationship violence may also face their experiences being compared to, and measured against, those of heterosexual couples. The assumption that the roles of perpetrator/victim can be determined by gender in heterosexual couples (i.e., that men are perpetrators and women are victims) cannot be applied within lesbian relationships. Yet, lesbian couples may be stereotyped according to their appearance, with more masculine appearing partners being perceived as the perpetrator of violence, whilst femme presenting partners are expected to be the victims (Renzetti 1998; West 2002). Indeed, within their study, highlighting the role of heteronormative scripts in explaining interpersonal violence in lesbian relationships, Sanger and Lynch (2018) note how participants used gendered stereotypes to characterise butch and femme lesbians: "butch lesbian identities were associated with toughness, aggression, control and active sexuality, and femme lesbian identities conversely with weakness, vulnerability and passivity" (Sanger and Lynch 2018, p.207). This demonstrates the pervasiveness of gendered stereotypes of sexual violence, and furthermore, illustrates the harms of approaching interpersonal and sexual violence through a heterosexist lens.

The additional myth of mutual abuse is also frequently attached to lesbian relationship violence, despite research indicating that this form of violence is often a security tactic, used by victims/survivors, in an effort to protect themselves (West 2002). Furthermore, Ristock (1991) highlights how, within lesbian abusive relationships – much like within abusive heterosexual relationships – there is generally a perpetrator of violence and a victim/survivor, rather than violence being mutual. The myth of mutual abuse rests upon the depiction of violence within lesbian relationships as *cat fighting* – such a depiction reduces the perceived severity of violence within lesbian relationships, denying the existence of a single abuser within the relationship through the suggestion, instead, that both parties are responsible (Hassouneh and Glass 2008; Donovan and Barnes 2020). Indeed, this depiction is reminiscent of the hetero-and-cissexist assumptions outlined above, which position women as passive and nonviolent (Girshick 2002; Barnes 2011; Donovan et al 2024). The positioning of violence within lesbian relationships as less severe than violence within heterosexual relationships has been shown to have significant consequences (Farley 1992; Hassouneh and Glass 2008).

Namely, victims/survivors may not recognise their experience(s) of violence for what they are, and moreover, may be discouraged from speaking out, for fear of not being taken seriously (Hassouneh and Glass 2008; Donovan and Barnes 2020). The practical implications of these stereotypes will be detailed further in the second section of this chapter, where barriers to services are considered.

Corrective sexual violence

As has been established, corrective sexual violence is a unique form of violence experienced by sexual and gender minorities (Doan-Minh 2019; Galop 2023). The homophobic/biphobic and/or transphobic intentions behind this form of abuse are what make it unique – corrective sexual violence is aimed, specifically, at punishing, or *converting*, an individual's sexual and/or gender identity (Doan-Minh 2019; Galop 2023). Whilst any member of the LGBTQ+ community may be subjected to this form of violence, research indicates that the subversion of gender norms – in particular, the subversion of normative understandings of 'womanhood' – may result in particular individuals being targeted (Lock Swarr 2012; Brownworth 2013; Doan-Minh 2019; Galop 2023). Hence, it is therefore important to recognise that acts of corrective sexual violence, with the intention of correcting or punishing an individuals' *subversion* of womanhood, are not limited to the lesbian experience.

For instance, in their recent report, Galop (2023) highlight how lesbians, trans men, and non-binary individuals are particularly vulnerable to this form of violence. Within Galop's study, these participants described being targeted on the basis of their subversion of gender norms, and specifically, the perception that they were "doing womanhood wrong" (Galop 2023, online). Indeed, Doan-Minh (2019) explains how the homophobic/biphobic and/or transphobic intentions behind corrective sexual violence are often framed through the notion of 'teaching' individuals how to become 'real women'. As one participant in Galop's study revealed, they had been sexually harassed for "looking like a dyke", having been told, by their perpetrator, that a "good dick" would sort them out (Galop 2023, online).

In these instances, the homophobic/biphobic and/or transphobic intentions behind corrective sexual violence can be seen to intersect with (cis)sexist assumptions surrounding bodies and womanhood. As will be demonstrated in the upcoming section, the intersections between homophobia, biphobia, transphobia and (cis)sexism can be seen to impact sexual

and gender minorities in different ways. For instance, the experiences of bisexual women outlined within the literature demonstrate their unique vulnerability to violence, shaped by binegativity and gender-based inequalities (Girshick 2002; Davis 2016; Johnson and Grove 2017).

Bisexual experiences of sexual violence

Bisexual people face particular stigmas attached to their sexuality, which are likely to be further exacerbated when they experience intersecting struggles on the basis of their identities (Davis 2016). This section will highlight, in particular, bisexual women's experiences of sexual violence, paying close attention to the stereotypes and stigmas attached to bisexuality, and how this shapes bisexual women's victimisation (Bostwick and Hequembourg 2014; Bermea 2017; Johnson and Grove 2017).

The negative stereotypes and labels associated with bisexuality include greediness, disloyalty, untrustworthiness, and confusion (Girshick 2002; Johnson and Grove 2017). Bisexuality has frequently been positioned as an illegitimate sexual identity, with additional stereotypes including that bisexual people are addicted to sex and unwilling to commit to monogamous relationships (Johnson and Grove 2017). These negative associations with bisexuality are not only held outside of the LGBTQ+ community but can also be found amongst its members as well. In particular, the literature centres bisexual women, whose identities are often subjected to scrutiny both inside, and outside, of the LGBTQ+ community (Bostwick and Hequembourg 2014; Bermea 2017; Johnson and Grove 2017).

Bostwick and Hequembourg (2014), for instance, note how bisexual women's queerness is frequently questioned within queer spaces, due to the stereotype that they are confused, or that they are performing their same-sex attraction in order to please men and fulfil male sexual fantasies (Bostwick and Hequembourg 2014; Bermea et al 2018). It is also argued that there is a pervasive expectation that bisexual women will always 'end up' with male partners – a perception arguably relating to the stereotype of bisexuality as a phase of experimentation. (Bostwick and Hequembourg 2014; Bermea et al 2018). This particular stereotype assigned to bisexual women is arguably the result of pornographic and popular cultural depictions; bisexual women have frequently been positioned as a "trope in the

straight male fantasy repertoire and, consequently, ensconced in the straight male psyche as a constantly willing sexual plaything" (Johnson and Grove 2017, p.439).

The stereotype of bisexual women as hypersexual is therefore pervasive, and prevails within, and outside of, the LGBTQ+ community (Bostwick and Hequembourg 2014). This particular stereotype may have an impact upon both the rates of bisexual women's victimisation, as well as their perceptions of the violence they experience. For instance, Johnson and Grove (2017) suggest that the stigma of hypersexuality attached to bisexual women may inform perpetrators' motivations. Johnson and Grove (2017) highlight that corrective rape may be a particularly common theme in bisexual women's rates of victimisation, with perpetrators attempting to force victims/survivors to 'pick a side'. Furthermore, Bermea et al (2018) suggest that bisexual women experience higher rates of sexual objectification due to the false perception that they are more sexually experienced (and therefore more likely to partake in sexual experimentation) than lesbian and heterosexual women.

In terms of relationship abuse, Donovan et al (2024, p.160) highlight how, due to "the public stories that privilege cis-heteronormativity", bisexual identities are positioned as "inherently problematic", and subsequently, are – within a cis-heterosexist society – thought to require control. Indeed, the stereotypes of hypersexuality, promiscuity and greediness outlined above contribute to this narrative surrounding the control of bisexuality within abusive relationships. Using the experience of one survivor of domestic violence they spoke to as an example – Clare, a bisexual woman – Donovan et al (2024) demonstrate how control of a person's bisexuality may be obtained through the tactic of biphobic identity abuse. Clare's experience of biphobic identity abuse manifested itself through her abuser's denial and rejection of her identity; Clare's abusive partner suggested that her identity was "damaged by having been sexually intimate with men" (Donovan et al 2024, p.160). Furthermore, Coston (2021) notes how the stereotype of hypersexuality in particular, may increase bisexual women's likelihood of experiencing violence in relationships with men. Within these instances, the intersection between biphobia and gender-based discrimination is exposed (Coston 2021).

Given the pervasiveness of these stereotypes, it is not surprising that research has shown them to have a significant effect upon how bisexual people view their own victimisation. For instance, the bisexual women who participated in Flanders et al's (2019) study thought that

the stereotype of hypersexuality – or the false perception of bisexual people as 'willing to have sex with anyone' – contributed to their victimisation in some way. Furthermore, the label of hypersexual is said to cause negative social reactions to bisexual women's experiences of violence (Johnson and Grove 2017). Victims/survivors of sexual violence are already treated with public hostility and are frequently blamed for their own victimisation, so the stereotype of hypersexuality only serves to perpetuate this victim blaming narrative (Johnson and Grove 2017).

It is important to note that the stereotypes outlined here are not reserved solely for bisexual women. For instance, the label of hypersexuality is assigned to multiple groups of women who fall outside of the typical characterisation of a respectable woman and/or victim (Skeggs 2005). Working-class and Black women are among those who experience the impacts of this stereotype also (Skeggs 2005; Johnson and Grove 2017). Working-class women have been marked as "excessive, immoral, disgusting" (Skeggs 2005, p.970), whilst Black women may experience the stereotype of the 'jezebel' – "engaging in early sexual activity, becoming sexually aroused with little foreplay" (West 1995, p.462). Since working-class and Black women are rarely granted access to the label of 'respectability', but are, in contrast, positioned as sexually deviant and immoral, these victims/survivors are often perceived as inconceivable victims of sexual violence (Johnson 2008; Phipps 2009). It is therefore vital to keep in mind that when women experience multiple struggles on the basis of their intersecting identities (i.e., sexuality, gender identity, race, class, disability), the stereotype of hypersexuality is likely to cause even more severe consequences (Crenshaw 2018). In addition, it is crucial to highlight that whilst the majority of literature centres women's experiences of hypersexualisation, Galop (2023) note the ways in which trans people, in particular, may be vulnerable to sexual violence involving hypersexualisation and fetishisation. The following section will, therefore, centre trans experiences of sexual violence.

Trans experiences of sexual violence

As suggested by Galop (2023), trans people may be particularly at risk of experiencing sexual violence related to the fetishisation, or sexual objectification, of their bodies. Sexual objectification refers to the process of a person being reduced to their body parts and/or sexual functioning (Fredrickson and Roberts 1997). Galop (2023) found that several trans

participants in their study had experienced sexual violence motivated by sexual fetishisation. One participant explained their experience on dating apps: "…being open about being trans has caused me to be targeted by chasers who see me as a fetish" (Galop 2023, online). Matsuzaka and Koch (2019) also found that trans victims/survivors participating in their study had experienced unique forms of sexual victimisation relating to fetishisation and objectification on the basis of their trans identity. Likewise, Ellis, Bailey and McNeil (2016) reported that half of respondents in their UK-based study had been objectified and/or fetishised in relation to their trans identity. In the context of relationship abuse, specifically, Donovan et al (2024, p.160) note how perceptions of trans people as "unnatural" – due to cissexist assumptions surrounding their (in)ability to "conform to biologically essentialist norms of cis-heteronormative sexual desire and reproduction" – further entrenches this objectification, and leads to the harmful stereotype of trans people as "objects to be sexually coerced and/or undermined".

Trans women, in particular, are vulnerable to experiences of fetishisation, since the intersecting pressures of transphobia and misogyny – or transmisogyny (Serano 2007) – uniquely shapes their position in society. As set out in the introduction to this thesis, transmisogyny refers to the intersection of transphobia and misogyny, resulting in a unique form of discrimination faced by trans women (and other gender non-confirming individuals whose gender expression is feminine, or who are perceived to be feminine) (Serano 2007). The effects of transmisogyny may include:

> "Being subjected to transphobic and derogatory comments, including being mocked, insulted, laughed at, and threatened with or subjected to physical or sexual violence in the public domain because of being trans."
>
> (Ussher et al 2020, p.22)

In regard to sexual violence specifically, then, trans women may be targeted based on both their trans identity, as well as their subordinate position as women within a cis-heteropatriarchal society. Furthermore, since trans women may be subjected to both transphobia and sexism, it can be difficult for victims/survivors to characterise their victimisation (Ussher et al 2020). For instance, Ussher et al (2020) note that when trans women experience verbal harassment, they may struggle to discern whether such violence

was meant as a sexist display directed at them as women, or, whether it was transphobic abuse due to not 'passing' (Ussher et al 2020). Passing, here, refers to the process of being perceived as cisgender in accordance with society's rigid gender norms (Matsuzaka and Koch 2019).

In addition to the struggles of transmisogyny, Black trans women are arguably further exposed to sexual violence, since the additional, intersecting struggle of racism may exacerbate their rates of victimisation (Krell 2017; Ussher et al 2010). Some scholars have therefore critiqued the conception of transmisogyny for not reaching far enough, claiming that it omits significant intersecting identities which contribute to trans women's victimisation (Krell 2017). Krell (2017), therefore, introduces the concept of transmisogynoir, defined as "the oppression of trans women of colour, and trans feminine people of colour, more generally. It exists in the intersection between transphobia, misogyny, and antiblackness" (Krell 2017, p.236).

In regard to the sexual objectification and fetishisation of trans women, Ussher et al (2020), reported that the majority of trans women in their study felt particularly vulnerable to sexual violence due to fears of being "positioned as 'sex objects' or 'exotic'" (Ussher et al 2020, p.19). Given the intersectional factor of transmisogynoir, the risk of being fetishised and seen as exotic or as a sexual object is arguably heightened for Black trans women. As Ussher et al (2020) explain: "…exoticized stereotypes and power that white sexual partners might have over minority women, due to ingrained beliefs about race, means sexual violence is often driven by power imbalances" (Ussher et al 2020, p.20). Furthermore, in Flores et al's (2018) study, Black trans women experienced forms of sexual objectification that were based upon racialised stereotypes. One participant noted how the stereotype of Black women as hypersexual had led to her experiencing increased sexual objectification (Flores et al 2018). Flores et al suggest that since trans women of colour exist on the intersection of "oppressive social structures" and are "exposed […] to harmful racialised sexual stereotypes that denote violence, submissiveness, and/or hypersexuality", they are often reduced to their race and gender identities (Flores et al 2018, p.314).

For trans women attempting to negotiate their vulnerability to sexual violence, Ussher et al (2020) suggest that 'passing' somewhat alleviates their risk of victimisation. In Ussher et al's study, participants therefore aimed to pass as cis in order to "minimise the possibility of being

identified as trans and, as a result, being subjected to sexual violence" (Ussher et al 2020, p.22). Yet, whilst passing may reduce victimisation for trans women, it is also likely to "create issues with internalised stigma rooted in transphobia [and] transmisogyny" (Matsuzaka and Koch 2019, p.31). This particular issue of passing is also a potential barrier to trans women's access to sexual violence support services and will therefore be further considered, within this literature review, when barriers to support services are discussed.

It is worth highlighting here that whilst a focus upon trans women's sexual victimisation, within the literature, is vital, there is a notable lack of research centring trans men, non-binary, genderqueer, and agender individual's experiences of sexual violence. Research does, however, address trans people's experiences of violence more generally (Stotzer 2009; Rymer and Cartei 2015). Jordan et al (2020), for instance, explore several forms of interpersonal violence used, specifically, against trans people. They explain how social stigmas and structural exclusions surrounding trans identities can facilitate forms of abuse based on a person's trans identity (Ristock and Timbang 2005; Rogers 2013; Rogers 2017; Jordan et al 2020; Wirtz et al 2020). These specific forms of violence may include:

> "…threatening to disclose a person's trans identity against their interests, refusing to acknowledge a trans person's gender identity, monitoring or scrutinizing a trans person's gender expression […], withholding or controlling access to gender-affirming medical treatment…"
>
> (Jordan et al 2020, p.533)

The social stigma attached to trans identities, as well as the structural exclusion of trans individuals, not only gives rise to these additional and unique forms of abuse, but, moreover, limits trans people's access to support after *experiencing* these specific acts of violence (Ristock and Timbang 2005; Rymer and Cartei 2015; Jordan et al 2020). The next section of this literature review, therefore, will address these barriers, focusing, specifically, on the limitations of mainstream sexual violence support services available to sexual and gender minority survivors.

Barriers and solutions to support

As has been established, multiple studies have uncovered the high rates of sexual violence experienced by sexual and gender minorities, and, moreover, have highlighted the unique forms of violence experienced by these victims/survivors (Ristock and Timbang 2005; Basile et al 2014; Donovan and Hester 2014; Langenderfer-Magruder 2016; Field and Rowlands 2020). Despite this, SafeLives note that in 2018, less than 2% of victims/survivors accessing domestic violence support services in England and Wales were identified as LGBTQ+ (SafeLives 2018).

Having illustrated how sexual and gender minorities' experiences of sexual violence are uniquely shaped by struggles of homo/bi/transphobia and sexism (alongside additional intersecting struggles they may face), the final section of this chapter identifies some of the barriers preventing sexual and gender minorities from accessing support services. Parts of this section will apply, broadly, to the LGBTQ+ community as a whole, reflecting the majority of the literature on this topic. However, whilst there may be overlaps in LGBTQ+ victims/survivors' experiences of accessing support services, it is important to prevent homogenising the experiences of LGBTQ+ victims/survivors. Notably, when trans people's experiences are subsumed under the umbrella of LGBTQ+, their specific needs and issues are often neglected (Rogers 2020). It is therefore crucial to differentiate between the experiences of cis and trans members of the LGBTQ+ community, by highlighting how the barriers to support – sustained through cis-heteronormativity – may differ for these victims/survivors.

Identifying sexual violence support services

Before addressing the barriers to support faced by sexual and gender minorities, it is first important to establish which services are included under the umbrella of sexual violence support. In the UK, sexual violence support has typically been provided through the voluntary sector, with Rape Crisis Centres (RCCs) playing a central role in the provision of support to victims/survivors (Westmarland and Alderson 2013; Hester and Lilley 2017). Founded during the second wave of the women's movement, RCCs positioned themselves as an alternative welfare service, dedicated to the feminist principles of anti-violence against women (McMillan 2004). RCCs support victims/survivors who have experienced a range of sexually violent acts, including rape (whether defined as recent or historical), sexual assault, and

childhood sexual abuse (Hester and Lilley 2017; Rape Crisis England and Wales 2024a). Given their commitment to feminist principles of anti-violence, RCCs have typically centred the needs of women and girls. However, over half of RCCs across England and Wales now also provide support to men and boys who have been affected by sexual violence (Rape Crisis England and Wales 2024b).

In addition to support provided by RCCs, Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs) have been established within the statutory health sector (Hester and Lilley 2017). Unlike RCCs, which are positioned to support victims/survivors of abuse regardless of whether such abuse is historical or recent, SARCs are typically aimed at supporting recent cases of sexual assault and can provide forensic examinations and practical support with reporting and advocacy (Hester and Lilley 2017).

The importance of specialist sexual violence support service provision has been stressed by several studies; the recognition that rape and sexual assault are social issues, implicated by gendered power imbalances and inequalities, is thought to be significant in the support of victims/survivors (Woody and Beldin 2012; Hester and Lilley 2017). Indeed, Brown et al (2010) indicate that specialist sexual violence support services rank highest amongst victims/survivors where helpfulness and victim satisfaction are concerned. Given the significant impacts of sexual violence upon the lives of victims/survivors – including long-term psychological and physical impacts such as post-traumatic stress, depression, anxiety, and trouble sleeping – effective sexual violence support is vital (McNaughton Nicholls et al 2012; Hester and Lilley 2017). It is essential, therefore, to identify the barriers faced by sexual and gender minorities in accessing such vital support.

Personal and individual barriers to sexual violence support

According to Simpson and Helfrich (2005), the barriers to sexual violence support, for LGBTQ+ survivors, may be categorised into three forms. Their analysis of lesbian victims/survivors of interpersonal violence – and the barriers these victims/survivors experienced when attempting to access support – can be applied, more generally, to the wider LGBTQ+ community (Simpson and Helfrich 2005). Hence, their categorisation of these barriers –as systemic, institutional, and individual – are useful here:

> "Systemic barriers resulting from the heterosexism of society and its cultural systems; Institutional barriers resulting from policies, training, resources, and services of IPV agencies; and Individual barriers resulting from the attitudes, concerns, and actions of individuals."
>
> (Simpson and Helfrich 2005, p.45)

In considering individual barriers to support, LGBTQ+ victims/survivors' *fears* surrounding support services are identified. SafeLives (2018) suggest that sexual and gender minority victims/survivors may experience a common fear pertaining to their sexual orientation and/or gender identity, and the risk of being treated negatively by service providers on the basis of this (SafeLives 2018). This anxiety may stem from past experiences of discrimination from organisations, health care professionals, employers, etc., or it may be the effect of a pervasive typical script of violence, which, as been established, renders some experiences of sexual violence invisible (Mortimer et al 2019).

Additionally, LGBTQ+ victims/survivors may not believe that support services are available to them, and if they are, victims/survivors may question whether these services will welcome sexual and gender minorities; participants in Harvey et al's (2014) study, for instance, were reluctant to seek support from mainstream sexual violence support services due to fears of homo/bi/transphobia from service providers. Another report indicates that sexual and gender minority victims/survivors may fear being stereotyped by service providers – in Hester et al's (2012) study, a lesbian participant worried that she would be branded a "man hater". Hence, even when LGBTQ+ victims/survivors do wish to access support, studies show that most do not know where to turn (Harvey et al 2014; Rape Crisis Scotland 2014).

There are additional personal barriers to LGBTQ+ victims/survivors' access to support, including the fear of betraying one's community – a report from Rape Crisis Scotland (2014) indicates that in cases whereby violence is committed amongst member of the LGBTQ+ community, LGBTQ+ victims/survivors must grapple with the fear of betraying their community and re-inscribing the stereotype of sexual and gender minorities as deviant and untrustworthy. LGBTQ+ victims/survivors may also experience fears of outing themselves and/or a partner/ex-partner when attempting to access support, which can be a particularly

frightening experience if they are unaware of which services will be LGBTQ+ friendly (Brown and Herman 2015; SafeLives 2018).

From this brief exploration into the personal barriers to support, it is clear that these barriers contribute significantly to the exclusion of LGBTQ+ victims/survivors from support services. However, there are further (and perhaps more crucial) barriers, which rest on the systematic subordination of LGBTQ+ survivors. These systemic barriers must be addressed in relation to the wider struggles of homo/bi/trans-phobia, and the cis/hetero-normative structure of society.

Systemic and institutional barriers to sexual violence support

Systemic barriers refer to the discrimination faced by LGBTQ+ victims/survivors on the basis of their sexual/gender identity (SafeLives 2018). As Simpson and Helfrich (2005) outline, systemic barriers to support are the result of heterosexist structures within wider society – indeed, this point can be developed further, by highlighting the additional cissexist structures impacting trans victims/survivors' access to services (Rymer and Cartei 2015). Institutional barriers to support may include inadequate policies, a lack of training for service providers, and a general lack of understanding, within an organisation, of the unique needs of LGBTQ+ victims/survivors (Simpson and Helfrich 2005). Significantly, these barriers may result in LGBTQ+ victims/survivors being dismissed, mistreated, or abused by support services (SafeLives 2018). Since these systemic and institutional barriers are rooted in the wider structures of cis-and-heteronormativity, they must be addressed as such. Hence, I will first identify the unique barriers to support experienced by trans victims/survivors, before considering the ways in which heteronormativity impacts sexual minorities attempting to access support.

Cisnormativity and sexual violence support: trans victims/survivors and barriers to sexual violence support services

Although prevalence rates are limited, research continues to indicate that trans people experience high rates of sexual violence (Stotzer 2009; Rymer and Cartei 2015). Despite this, the number of trans victims/survivors accessing sexual violence support services is reportedly low (Rymer and Cartei 2015). Whilst there is a limited body of literature exploring trans victims/survivors' access to sexual violence support services, Rymer and Cartei (2015) found

that 78% of trans victims/survivors they interviewed had not acquired support from such services.

Rymer and Cartei (2015) attempt to explain these low rates of access. They report, for instance, that 40% of the 42 participants in their study failed to access support due to fears of discrimination on the basis of their gender identity (Rymer and Cartei 2015). Furthermore, participants in their study additionally reported fears of transphobia, being outed, not passing, being misgendered, and general ignorance from service providers, with one participant admitting: "I was concerned they would hear my voice on the phone and think I am a man pretending to be a woman" (Rymer and Cartei 2015, p.158). This particular fear of not 'passing' – of fitting into a particular image of binary gender categories and being perceived as cis – is rooted in transphobia and cissexism (Rymer and Cartei 2015). The notion of 'passing', in these terms, rests upon the assumption that cis identities are the norm and are "in alignment with societal expectations of gender" (Matsuzaka and Koch 2019, p.30). Since the typical script and public story surrounding violence rest also upon cisnormative assumptions, the issue of passing may be even more pertinent for trans victims/survivors attempting to access sexual violence support services (Donovan and Hester 2014; Mortimer et al 2019; Rogers 2021).

In general, studies highlight how mainstream sexual violence support services lack adequate knowledge and training on the specific needs of trans victims/survivors (Inclusion Project 2003; Rymer and Cartei 2015; Matsuzaka and Koch 2019). Indeed, Rymer and Cartei (2015, p.161) suggest that amongst services there is "widespread ignorance about gender expression and identity of trans people". This includes a general lack of understanding of how gender dysphoria may be exacerbated when trans people are asked to speak about their bodies – particularly when the language given to do so is binaried and unrepresentative (Rymer and Cartei 2015). The common framing of services in binary terms – labelled as 'for men' or 'for women', for example – is a further indication of the lack of awareness surrounding gender-diverse victims/survivors (Rymer and Cartei 2015; Jordan et al 2020). Furthermore, Rogers (2021, p.14) suggests that, within existing services, practitioners are generally "fixed to notions about gender as a binary conception". The highly gendered approach to sexual violence, perceivably taken by the majority of mainstream support services, therefore acts as

a significant barrier to support for victims/survivors who do not exist neatly, or at all, within the gender binary (Rymer and Cartei 2015; Jordan et al 2020; Rogers 2021).

Cissexist assumptions have, therefore, evidently dominated sexual violence support services, resulting in trans victims/survivors experiencing significant barriers when attempting to access support (Rymer and Cartei 2015; Matsuzaka and Koch 2019; Jordan et al 2020; Rogers 2021). For trans women, in particular, there are specific barriers preventing their access to support services – in particular, their access to women-only services (Matsuzaka and Koch 2019). It has been established that cis women are prioritised by sexual violence support services – they are depicted as the *preferable victims* of violence (Kenagy 2005). Yet, trans women have not only faced barriers to support on the basis of this prioritisation of cis women's experiences; rather, there have been active attempts to exclude trans women from support services (Kenagy 2004; Matsuzaka and Koch 2019).

'Women-only' spaces were established as a result of widespread violence against women at the hands of men (Gottschalk 2009). These spaces were intended to provide relief from the constant threat of violence faced by women within a patriarchal society (Gottschalk 2009). However, some groups have attempted to exclude trans women from these spaces, arguing that such spaces should be reserved for cis women (Gottschalk 2009; Raymond 1979). For instance, Raymond (1979) has argued extensively for the exclusion of trans women from women-only spaces; she suggests that trans women pose a threat to cis women, penetrating "women's mind, women's spaces, women's sexuality" (Raymond 1979, p.104). This line of argument has therefore sought to exclude trans women from women-only spaces on the basis of protecting cis women's safety (Gottschalk 2009). Such arguments are part of a wider movement of gender-critical feminism – which sees sex as immutable and defines womanhood on this basis. Barriers to support, for trans women, are therefore not only founded through the cissexist nature of support, but as demonstrated here, are additionally cemented through active, transphobic attempts at exclusion (Kenagy 2005; Gottschalk 2009; Matsuzaka and Koch 2019).

It is important to note here that such exclusions – within the context of single-sex spaces – have been given legal legitimacy under the Equality Act. Notably, the Equality and Human Rights Commission (2022) report that:

> "There are circumstances where a lawfully-established separate or single-sex service provider can prevent, limit or modify trans people's access to the service. This is allowed under the [Equality] Act."
>
> (Equality and Human Rights Commission 2022, online)

This legal framework surrounding single-sex spaces not only impacts trans women's access to support, but furthermore, it has been used to challenge services' trans-inclusive policies. For instance, Survivors' Network – the Rape Crisis Centre for Sussex – are currently facing legal action regarding their inclusion of trans women within their women-only group support spaces (Survivors' Network 2022). Trans victim/survivors – and trans women, specifically – therefore face direct barriers to support due to the legal legitimacy afforded to gender-critical beliefs.

It is clear from the above discussion that cisnormative framings of sexual violence – solidified, culturally, through the typical script and public story of violence – operate to exclude trans victims/survivors from support services (Donovan and Hester 2014; Mortimer et al 2019). These exclusions, in some cases, can also be situated as the direct result of transphobic policies surrounding service provision. The next section of this chapter discusses the ways in which support services additionally perpetuate heteronormative understandings of sexual violence.

Heteronormativity and sexual violence support services

Despite the comparable rates of violence experienced in queer relationships to those of heterosexual relationships, research shows that support services are ill-equipped to deal with victims/survivors of abuse within LGBTQ+ relationships (Girshick 2002; Duke and Davidson 2009; Donovan and Hester 2014; Field and Rowlands 2020; Rogers 2021). Heteronormative assumptions surrounding sexual violence – particularly when sexual violence has occurred within a relationship – arguably form the basis through which sexual minority victims/survivors are excluded from support services (Duke and Davidson 2009; Donovan and Hester 2014).

Gendered, heteronormative assumptions pertaining to sexual violence not only shape the public discourse surrounding the phenomenon, but also heavily influence how support

services operate (Simpson and Helfrich 2005). Given the pervasiveness of these gendered assumptions surrounding violence, it is not surprising that many victims/survivors of abuse within LGBTQ+ relationships do not seek help for their experiences. Ristock and Timbang (2005) note how victims/survivors within their study assumed that mainstream service providers would not understand their experiences, with one participant, in particular, believing she would have "too much explaining […] to do" (Ristock and Timbang 2005, p.2). Using the specific example of lesbian relationship violence, Simpson and Helfrich (2005) highlight how gendered assumptions may alienate particular victims/survivors from services. They explain:

> "Although not deliberately exclusive, the use of gender-specific pronouns can contribute to a lesbian's feelings of alienation and may lead her to determine that the services provided are not relevant to her relationship."
>
> (Simpson and Helfrich 2005, p.50)

The fixed, gender-based lens through which services approach sexual violence is therefore threatened by the existence of violence within LGBTQ+ relationships (Girshick 2002; Donovan and Barnes 2019). In particular, in cases where women have been the perpetrators of violence, research suggests that services often lack the knowledge or expertise to deal with such experiences (Girshick 2002; Duke and Davidson 2009; Field and Rowlands 2020). For instance, the service providers in Hester et al's (2012) study admitted that they could not envisage a woman as a perpetrator of rape. When woman-to-woman sexual violence is not only silenced by the typical script surrounding violence, but is also taken less seriously by service providers, this inevitably has consequences for victims/survivors attempting to access support (Duke and Davidson 2009). For instance, Duke and Davidson (2009) note that when service providers reinforce gendered stereotypes around violence, victims/survivors of same-sex abuse are less likely to seek adequate support, and this, in turn, may increase the likelihood of continued violence.

Furthermore, the assumption – founded through heavily gendered stereotypes surrounding violence – that men's violence is more *severe*, or more *serious*, than violence perpetrated by women, can cause significant barriers to support (Farley 1992; Duke and Davidson 2009; Walters 2011; Coston 2021). As has been established, cultural stereotypes surrounding

lesbian relationship violence, in particular, have involved the depiction of such violence as mutual abuse, catfighting, and ultimately, as nonviolent (Ristock and Timbang 2005; Hassouneh and Glass 2008). Duke and Davidson (2009) explain how, when these stereotypes infiltrate service provision, they can have significant consequences:

> "When suggested by service providers, this response is terribly dangerous, as it lessens the ability for individuals in violent partnerships to obtain adequate assistance, thereby increasing the possibility for continued assault and abuse."
>
> (Duke and Davidson 2009, p.800)

For bisexual women, whose experiences of sexual violence may be shaped by stereotypes surrounding bisexuality, experiences of accessing support may also be tainted by negative assumptions and stereotypes perpetuated by services. For instance, Harvey et al (2014) note how some service providers hold stereotypical opinions of LGBTQ+ people, and in the case of bisexual women, may position these victims/survivors as greedy and as "neither a real gay [person] nor a real heterosexual" (Harvey et al 2014, p.36). As has previously been established, stereotypes surrounding bisexuality can lead to bisexual women blaming themselves for their experiences of violence (Johnson and Grove 2017; Flanders et al 2019). This is especially damaging in the aftermath of victimisation, for when a victim/survivor fears they will be blamed for their own victimisation, or that their experience will be doubted and undermined, they are less likely to seek help (Johnson and Grove 2017).

Overall, the literature addressing sexual and gender minorities' access to sexual violence support services highlights several pervasive barriers in the way of support. Nevertheless, several studies provide guidance on how services can attempt to redress these barriers, and as such, these solutions will now be explored.

Solutions to barriers

Some studies have proposed comprehensive solutions to the barriers faced by LGBTQ+ victims/survivors attempting to access sexual violence support services. These suggested improvements to support services have been led by an understanding of LGBTQ+ victims/survivors' wants and needs. For instance, Hester et al (2012) state that participants in their study would have benefited from support services providing more practical advice,

particularly in the form of assistance when leaving abusive relationships. Furthermore, Hester et al (2012) additionally note the importance of LGBTQ+ victims/survivors being given the space to talk about how issues of sexual and/or domestic violence had affected the way they viewed their own sexuality and/or gender identity. Hester et al (2012) therefore propose that support services allow for LGBTQ+ victims/survivors to discuss both their victimisation and their sexual orientation and/or gender identity, in order to explore how experiences of homo/bi/transphobia may intersect with their experience of sexual victimisation.

Similarly, Harvey et al (2014) suggest that support services should be able to recognise how experiences of homo/bi/transphobia often shape LGBTQ+ victims/survivors' experiences of sexual/domestic violence. In their study, Harvey et al (2014, p.18) found that some LGBTQ+ victims/survivors' experiences of sexual/domestic violence were "compounded by, abuse, harassment, violence and threats outside of their intimate relationship", thereby overlapping with discrimination on the basis of their gender identity and/or sexual orientation. Following this, Harvey et al (2014) provide a comprehensive outline of how domestic and sexual violence services can provide LGBTQ+ supportive service provision. They consider LGBTQ+ support service provision over three areas:

- Flexible and confidential access (including online or telephone access and drop-in services)
- LGBT-inclusiveness (including the promotion of services, working with organisations in the LGBT sector and providing specialist LGBT domestic and sexual violence service provision)
- Informed and diverse staff (including representation of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities amongst staff members and staff understandings of LGBTQ+ specific experiences of domestic and sexual violence)

(Harvey et al 2014, p.41)

It is also important to note that since trans victims/survivors are often subsumed into, or left out of, LGBTQ+ anti-violence initiatives, their needs are frequently dismissed (Rogers 2013). Harvey et al (2014) therefore propose that support for trans victims/survivors must be developed alongside existing services within the trans community. Within existing services, Rogers (2021) suggests that practitioners must adopt cultural competence when supporting

trans and non-binary victims/survivors of violence. She encourages practitioners to "put aside norms and stereotypes that are, in essence, gender normative beliefs and constructs, in order to learn about gender diversity and a person's background, culture and gender identity." (Rogers 2021, p.15). Furthermore, Roch et al (2010) suggest that services must demonstrate that they are trans inclusive by explicitly advertising trans friendly services – this is particularly crucial given the transphobic rhetoric surrounding access to sexual violence support services within public discourse. However, as discussed above, the legal legitimacy given to gender critical beliefs – by the Equality Act (see: Equality and Human Rights Commission 2022) – means that Roch et al's (2010) suggestion of *explicit* inclusion may not always be feasible. This raises questions regarding mainstream support provision's ability to be truly LGBTQ+ inclusive – an issue that will be accounted for in the upcoming discussion chapters (specifically, chapters six and seven).

Conclusion

This chapter has engaged with key literature surrounding sexual violence, and, more specifically, has showcased the unique ways in which sexual and gender minorities may experience sexual victimisation (Ristock and Timbang 2005; Simpon and Helfrich 2005; Donovan and Hester 2014; Calton et al 2016; Donovan and Barnes 2019; Donovan et al 2024). In highlighting how sexual and gender minorities' experiences of sexual victimisation are frequently shaped by homo/bi/trans-negativity (alongside additional intersecting struggles), this literature review has revealed the dissimilarities amongst LGBTQ+ and cis, heterosexual women's experiences of sexual violence – those which are frequently prioritised both within public discourse, feminist analysis, and, moreover, by support services (Donovan and Hester 2014; Mortimer et al 2019). Hence, whilst dominant feminist approaches to sexual violence are significant, an exploration of LGBTQ+ perspectives on sexual violence reveal the shortcomings of an approach based narrowly through a gendered lens (Donovan and Hester 2014; Mortimer et al 2019).

Further, this chapter has highlighted the barriers LGBTQ+ victims/survivors often face when attempting to access sexual violence support services (SafeLives 2018). Through an exploration of the personal, institutional, and systematic barriers to support faced by sexual and gender minorities, the cis-and-heteronormative approaches to sexual violence, taken by mainstream services, have been interrogated (Simpson and Helfrich 2005). Whilst these

barriers are significant, several researchers have proposed comprehensive solutions to the eradication of these barriers (Roch et al 2010; Hester et al 2012; Harvey et al 2014; Rogers 2021).

Ultimately, this chapter has confirmed the need for further research into sexual and gender minorities' experiences of sexual violence and the subsequent support they seek. In particular, an analysis of the ways in which sexual violence impacts sexual minorities marginalised by their gender is significant, since little attention has been paid to the intersection between homo/bi/transphobia, sexism and misogyny – especially regarding its impact upon the experience of sexual violence within cis-heteropatriarchal conditions. It is with these gaps in mind that the methodological approach of this study can now be outlined.

Chapter 4. Methodology

Introduction

This research incorporates a queer, poststructuralist feminist lens and, as such, its methodological process has been highly influenced by these approaches (Riley 1988; Green 2007; Jagose 2009; Marinucci 2016; McCann 2016). This chapter therefore begins with an outline of my epistemological and ontological positioning, drawing on theoretical and methodological contributions from interpretivism, queer theory, feminism, and poststructuralism (Hirschmarm 1998; Green 2007; Stanley and Wise 2002; 2008; McCann 2016).

Next, the research strategy is considered. In alignment with the epistemological and ontological position of this research, the method of in-depth semi-structured interviewing was chosen. In this section, I explore the benefits of incorporating feminist approaches to interviewing, and address the complexities involved when interviewing potentially vulnerable participants (Bhopal 2010). Given these complexities, the ethical approach taken within this research is paid particularly close attention, noting the particular risks involved in sexual violence research (Downes, Kelly and Westmarland 2014; Burgess-Proctor 2015; Mortimer et al 2019).

The final section of this chapter is dedicated to my positionality and reflexive approach. Within this section, feminist reflexivity is outlined, before a consideration of my positionality within the insider-outsider binary is made (Hayfield and Huxley 2015; Rosenberg and Tilley 2021). Specifically, my position as a cis researcher working with trans participants is interrogated, and I demonstrate the measures taken to ensure these participants' stories are represented ethically and authentically (Stone 2006; Vincent 2018; Rosenburg and Tilley 2021). Following this, I address the limitations of this research, highlighting the issues presented by its entirely white sample (Harvey et al 2014; Love et al 2017).

Epistemology and Ontology

It is crucial to question *what* knowledge is possible to acquire about the social world in order to ascertain *how* one might go about acquiring it, and indeed, vice versa. Further still, feminist methodologies have considered the conundrum of "who can know" – they question *who* has

the power to construct and deliver knowledge (Wigginton and Lafrance 2019, p.6). Indeed, in her consideration of the construction of knowledge, Code (1991) highlights the masculinist bias underpinning objectivist epistemologies. Code notes that, in their search for objectivity, such epistemological approaches privilege the white male knower, and subsequently, the differences between individuals (based on their race, gender, class, sexuality), are overlooked (Code 1991). Code's (1991) critiques of traditional social science approaches to knowledge construction therefore reflect wider feminist considerations of *who* can know – these perspectives are discussed further below (Hartsock 1983; Harraway 1990; Harding 1993).

This thesis is situated within a queer, poststructuralist feminist paradigm (Riley 1988; Green 2007; Jagose 2009; Marinucci 2016; McCann 2016). Incorporating queer, poststructuralist feminist thought within this thesis is necessary in order to account for the multiple and varied realities of the participants represented within it. However, the epistemological approaches of these bodies of thought – their ways of measuring, doing, and disseminating knowledge – are, oftentimes, contradictory. Furthermore, gender and sexuality are complex social phenomena, surrounded by extensive debate. Such debates tackle the semantic issues concerning sexual and gender identities, alongside socio-political concerns about their impact. Thus, a thorough exploration of the ontological and epistemological perspective of gender and sexuality adopted within this thesis is necessary.

Interpretivism: a feminist inflection

In opposition to positivist thinking – which rests upon the belief that there are real, observable facts within social life, and, subsequently, that it is the job of a social researcher to explain these facts through the use of empirical evidence (Bonache 2020) – an interpretivist paradigm centres human experiences, thoughts, and feelings (Thanh and Thanh 2015). Interpretivism asserts that understandings of social reality are constructed (Prus 1990; Thanh and Thanh 2015). Rather than seeking to measure observable facts, interpretivist models of research aim to understand how people experience, and make sense of, the world around them (Thanh and Thanh 2015). Researchers who employ an interpretivist paradigm have been criticised for their inability to act as "disinterested observer[s]" in the face of social phenomena (Schwandt 1998 p.247). Yet, the basis through which researchers are expected to become objective observers rests entirely upon a positivist understanding of reality as singular and easily identifiable (Prus 1990). In contrast to this position, interpretivism emphasises "the human

capacity for multiple realities" (Prus 1990 p.356); since reality is contrived through human experience, it does not exist as a singular, observable fact (Prus 1990).

Throughout this thesis, reality is approached with interpretivist principles in mind, with an emphasis upon the point that the social world is made up of multiple and conflicting realities which cannot be reduced to simplified generalisations (Prus 1990; Thanh and Thanh 2015). Moreover, since this research incorporates the experiences of individuals who's sexual and gender identities exist on a broad spectrum, and whose experiences of sexual violence inevitably differ from one another, it is important to recognise that multiple realities will be under analysis. Yet, it is vital to acknowledge here that whilst this thesis recognises and values the existence of multiple truths, its incorporation of a feminist perspective necessarily results in the prioritisation of victims/survivors' truths above those of perpetrators. Indeed, I chose to centre victims/survivors' narratives within this thesis, whilst perpetrators' perspectives were not considered. By taking a feminist-inflected interpretivist approach, and, by positioning victims/survivors' narratives as 'truth', I sought to resist, and counter, the patterns of victim-blaming and disbelief so often faced by victims/survivors in wider society. This approach not only allowed me to centre victims/survivors' narratives, but, furthermore, it enabled me to account for the embodied effects and harms of sexual violence – those which, unlike other *'truths'*, cannot be contested or constructed in the same way.

Interpretivism and queer

Interpretivist principles are closely aligned to those of queer – they share an ontological view of gender as socially constructed and situated (Green 2007). Indeed, as Green (2007) highlights:

> "...long before queer theorists had located gender in performativity and representation, symbolic interactionists had deconstructed gender into moments of attribution and iteration, driving a stake into the heart of prior essentialist accounts."
>
> (Green 2007, p.32)

According to Green (2007, p. 32), interpretivism and queer share a common "unit of analysis" in what he refers to as the "performative interval". Green (2007, p.32) states that, when considering the interaction order, queer and interpretivist thinkers do not make claim to the

existence of a "presocial or prelinguistic self" (as would be prescribed by essentialist constructions of the self). Instead, these frameworks point towards the performative nature of identity construction, highlighting how "doing and identity are nonidentical", and, in fact, it is the 'doing' or 'performing' which creates the illusion of a stable self or subject (Green 2007, p.32).

However, the similarities between these paradigms should not be overstated, for Green (2007) also notes where their shared analytical method ends. Whilst neither a queer nor an interpretivist framework would arrive at the conception of a *stable* self in their analyses of identity and performativity, Green (2007) argues that their conceptions of the self may differ. Interpretivism, generally, according to Green (2007) may recognise the "performative interval as a point of arrival for the social accomplishment of the self", whilst queer theorists may "find in the performative interval a point of departure in which the self is exposed as an artifact of discourse, absent a stable interior" (Green 2007, p.33).

In its rejection of a "stable interior" of the self, queer theory, in particular, centres the binary distinction between hetero/homo, and questions the legitimacy of dichotomous sexual identities – i.e., it challenges the perceived 'naturalness' of heterosexuality, and, by extension, the deviance of homosexuality (Green 2007, p.33; Nagoshi and Brzuzy 2010). The depiction of sexual and gender identities within binary formations is therefore challenged by queer theorists, who suggest, instead, that the "reality of sexed bodies" is much more complex, unstable, and varied (Valocchi 2005, p.753). Furthermore, by unpacking the dominant conceptualisation of gender and sexuality within contemporary society, queer theory necessarily encompasses an engagement with a range of identities and states of human existence. Given the nature of this research, which centres the narratives of participants whose gender and sexual identities exist on a broad spectrum, the incorporation of queer theory is not only relevant but necessary. Thus, a queer lens is adopted within the methodological approach of this thesis, for it moves beyond "a stagnant hetero/homo opposition", recognising, instead, "the multiplicity of identity" (Namaste 1994 p.230), making it a comprehensive lens through which to understand the experiences of sexual and gender minority victims/survivors of sexual violence.

Yet, the queer approach to the self has faced significant criticism. The central aim of queer theory requires researchers to submit to a process of "unmaking and undoing the subject",

since, to inscribe a 'subject' or subject category is to reproduce a level of rigidity, which not only fails to account for a wide variety of lived experiences, but, significantly, can exclude, and cause harm to, some individuals in the process (McCann 2016, p.232). However, this anti-identity approach has raised concerns for both feminist and gay and lesbian studies. Love (2007, p.302), for instance, notes how the "blurring of identities advocated by queer activists and scholars" could result in "the reassertion of age-old hierarchies" whereby elite academics and men could claim dominance. Likewise, feminist approaches emphasise the importance of identity categories, specifically, through the inscription of 'women', 'woman', and 'womanhood' (McCann 2016). Indeed, Modleski (2014) raises concerns about destabilising the category of woman, arguing that to do so is only beneficial to women who are otherwise privileged through intersecting identities (e.g., by their race, class, sexuality). Further, Hammers and Brown (2004, p.97) maintain that "[evading] all categorical thought" may be difficult when attempting to "orient and group [a] debate, and, of course, to allow one's voice to be heard", whilst Duran (2001, p.256) contends that committing to a level of essentialism ensures a dedication to "the goals of empowerment and enfranchisement". To further explore feminism's dedication to the category of woman, an outline of the feminist approach to research will be necessary.

Feminist methodologies

Feminist methodologies rest upon emancipatory principles (Stanley and Wise 2008; Rogers 2013). In this regard, feminist methodologies generally seek to highlight (and dismantle) social inequalities, to influence social change, and, crucially, to disrupt normative relations of power (Stanley and Wise 2008). My interpretation of a feminist methodology is based upon the aims emphasised here.

Ultimately, in their analyses of methodological practices, feminists have countered the mainstream ways of constructing, doing, and disseminating knowledge within the field of sociology – arguing that traditional methods of analysis are based upon androcentric standards (Hartsock 1983; Harraway 1990; Harding 1993). The production of knowledge has, according to feminist theorists, been dominated by white, Western, bourgeois men – these men, the social problems they centre, and their proposed solutions to these problems, have therefore existed as the building blocks to traditional forms of social science knowledge (Hartsock 1983; Harraway 1990; Harding 1993).

In considering an alternative to this masculinist form of knowledge production, feminist epistemologies, generally, are focused upon "the ways gender influences what we take to be knowledge" (Anderson 1995, p.50). Since feminist epistemologies are concerned with who constructs and delivers knowledge, as well as the types of knowledge that can be produced, they consider how "socially constructed conceptions and norms of gender and gender-specific interests and experiences" have influenced the production of knowledge (Anderson 1995, p.54). Hence, the issue which arises for feminists attempting to counter dominant, androcentric knowledge claims, is that of imagining how to do knowledge differently.

From the perspective of feminist standpoint theory, a feminist method of inquiry would centre women's experiences – in line with a view that women's experiences inevitably differ from those dominating traditional knowledge claims (i.e., experiences portrayed through the male construction of knowledge) (Smith 1990; Walby 1990). Hartsock's influential text, *Money, Sex and Power*, introduced a "methodological grounding" for the truth claims of feminism (Hartsock 1985, p.341), highlighting how, through a feminist standpoint, social research may uncover the foundational, lived, and everyday experiences of womanhood. Smith (1991) interrogates the standpoints of 'rulers' and 'women' (Longino 1993). She argues that traditional sociological research has reinforced "asymmetric power relations", insofar as sociological knowledge has been produced from the standpoint of a "bureaucratic elite" and has therefore rendered women's voices silent (Smith 1991; Longino 1993, p.474). Feminist standpoint theory has thus committed to the development of an epistemology based on "knowledge created by women for women", in an attempt to uncover the power dynamics underpinning sociological knowledge (Longino 1993; Wigginton and Lafrance 2019, p.4).

However, this approach – the feminist standpoint approach – to research has received criticism, insofar as it assumes a common, or universal, experience of womanhood, thereby excluding important analyses of the difference in levels of sexism faced by women across time, space, and social categorisations (Brooks and Hesse-Biber 2007). Indeed, Black feminists have long critiqued the essentialist notions found within white, western feminist thought; focusing on women's experiences of oppression as a singular unit implies that:

> "…women share a common lot, that factors like class, race, religion, sexual preference, etc. do not create a diversity of experience that determines the extent to which sexism will be an oppressive force in the lives of individual women."

(hooks 1984, p.544)

Further, whilst much feminist scholarship typically centres women, it would be wrong to assume that this is a requirement of feminist methodology. Rather, feminist research is not in fact "limited to the category of 'woman' in terms of research participants, experiences, or research topics" (Rogers 2013, p.112). Indeed, in the case of my research, I incorporate a methodology informed by feminist principles without focusing solely on the experiences of women. Instead, feminist methodology – and the one which I have chosen to follow within this thesis – may be better understood as a departure from "masculinist forms of knowledge production", or, in other words, as the departure from the dominant approach to knowledge production found within social science research (Rogers 2013, p.111). The characteristics of this departure may include, for instance, the avoidance of a rigid hierarchical relationship amongst researchers and those being researched (Campbell et al 2010). Instead, feminist researchers are typically "sensitive to our place in such hierarchies, so we disclose the multiple, historically specific positions we hold in relation to both study questions and participants" (Presser 2005, p.2067). Such an approach - based upon these feminist principles - may therefore be incorporated within social research, regardless of whether or not the subjects of these studies are women.

A poststructuralist feminist approach to the subject

Theoretical assumptions concerning the existence of an "unmodified group of 'women'" are not only incompatible with Black and intersectional feminist theory, but, furthermore, are also unaligned with poststructuralist and queer thought (Hirschmarm 1998, p.78). For poststructuralism, "the notion of an unmediated 'experience' is by definition impossible", and therefore, cannot be captured by a particular standpoint (Hirschmarm 1998, p.82). The fundamental task of poststructuralist feminism, is, therefore, to reject and redefine the category of woman – it is in feminism's interests to acknowledge, and interrogate, the "impossibility of 'women'", in order to challenge the naturalised and assumed gender binary, and, furthermore, to avoid essentialising women's experiences (Riley 1988; Jagose 2009, p.162). In line with this task, poststructuralist feminist analyses of gender, power, and the self, must address, and account for, intersecting structures of oppression. Hence, through its application of a poststructuralist feminist theoretical framework, this thesis not only incorporates an intersectional lens, but, furthermore, seeks to problematise the rigid

categorical thinking offered by the white, western feminist perspective of 'womanhood'. It is here, also, that a (poststructuralist) feminist approach may be united with a queer one.

Much like queer theory, poststructuralism questions the ways in which subjects have been constructed through, and by, their social and geographical locations (Davies and Gannon 2005). According to poststructuralist thought, subjects are "embedded in a complex network of social relations" (Namaste 1994 p.221). Rather than existing as an autonomous body, then, the subject is, instead, according to poststructuralism, constituted through the "specific socio-political arrangement" in which they find themselves (Namaste 1994 p.221).

This also has implications for the way in which gender identities are constructed. Poststructuralist feminism, specifically, interrogates the gendering of bodies; it challenges the binary logics of gender and sexuality, which have served to normalise a rigid system of power between two opposing categories – i.e., man/woman, heterosexual/homosexual (Davies and Gannon 2005). Hence, poststructuralist feminist thought problematises these categorisations; rather than assuming their natural existence, poststructuralist feminism calls for a recognition that such binary categories are "historically specific and socially regulated" (Davies and Gannon 2005, p.313). Poststructuralist feminism therefore acknowledges the power of discourse – through which binary logics have come to exist – in upholding normative conceptions of gender, sex, and sexuality (Davies and Gannon 2005).

The dismantling of the subject – of the category of 'woman', specifically – within poststructuralist feminism can be highlighted most notably through the work of Butler (Butler 1990; Hines 2020). Butler demonstrates how gender is not a fixed, material entity, and consequently, the subject of woman is, itself, not stable:

> "The very subject of woman is no longer understood in stable or abiding terms. There is a great deal of material that not only questions the viability of 'the subject' as the ultimate candidate for representation or, indeed, liberation, but there is very little agreement after all on what it is that constitutes, or ought to constitute, the category of women."
>
> (Butler 1990, p.4)

Central to Butler's (1990) interpretation of gender, is, therefore, the performative interval (Green 2007). According to Butler (1990), gender has, over time, been *performatively* constructed, developed through a series of repeated patterns, built upon throughout history so as to appear stable and permanent. In Butler's terms, then, "there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender", since it is the very act of doing gender which constitutes a gendered subject – not the other way around (Butler 1990, p.25). It is important to distinguish, here, between 'performativity' and 'performance' (Butler 1990; Salih 2007). Butler characterises gender not as a performance (which would assume that the gendered subject "pre-exist[s] the deed"), but rather, as the accumulation of repeated, 'gendered' acts, which, themselves, constitute (or seem to constitute) the subject (Butler 1990, p.25) Central to this argument is the notion that "there is no gender identity that precedes language" (Salih 2007, p.56). Gender, according to Butler, is therefore constituted through discourse – the naming of subjects as 'man', 'woman' calls these subjects into being (Butler 1990).

Within feminism, Butler's (1990) troubling of gender can therefore be viewed as a departure from the rigid definition of womanhood often prescribed by feminist standpoint theories (McCann 2016). Rather than "[promoting] an approach based on experience as ground for understanding subjectivity", Butler (1990) takes the view that "we are called into subjectivity via language", and it is therefore this language – the language of "identifying terms" – that must be interrogated (McCann 2016, p.230).

Yet, the theory of performativity, with its rejection of stable gender identities, may be seen to hinder the self-determination of queer and trans individuals (Finlay 2017). The framing of gender as performatively constructed necessarily denotes the deconstruction of identity politics – upon which Finlay (2017) suggests the gay and trans rights movements have been based. For trans and non-binary people, in particular, Butler's conception of gender, which denies the existence of any ontological, '*real*' gender, may be harmful:

> "Without an ontologically real gender that is epistemologically knowable to the subject, trans and non-binary people's capacity for self-identification with a gender category different from that which we were assigned at birth, and with which we are traditionally interpellated, is compromised."
>
> (Finlay 2017, p.65)

Such critiques are also made towards queer theory more broadly – the argument that sexual and gender identities can be understood, entirely, as "effects of normative power", suggests that any theorisations of gender as "felt or innately experienced" are not compatible with queer or poststructuralist feminist thought (Keegan 2022, p.8). This, as Keegan (2022) argues, is problematic when the experiences of trans individuals are under analysis. Most notably, Keegan (2022) highlights how an interpretation of gender, based upon social construction, denies claims made by trans studies that gender may be materially embodied and innately sensed. Indeed, as (LeMaster and Stephenson (2021) assert, the queer focus upon performativity renders sex and gender transition a regression – "in this framing, the trans(sexual) subject is understood as being duped into perpetuating their own hegemonic oppression" (LeMaster and Stephenson 2021, p.193). LeMaster and Stephenson (2021, p.194) are therefore hesitant to accept queer theory's approach to gender, namely, due to its perceived inability to "engage the vastness of transness". Whilst they are critical of queer approaches, they encourage nontrans researchers who are using queer theory to remain mindful of the "complex and vast infinity" of gender (LeMaster and Stephenson 2021, p.193). Hence, they suggest nontrans scholars must begin queering their own sense of cisgender experience:

> "…decentring nontransness in the queer (cissexist) theoretical imagination enables us to affirm both the vastness of genders generally and of trans formations specifically."
>
> (LeMaster and Stephenson 2021, p.193)

In this sense, the stability of the nontrans subject is brought into question, and the treatment of gender transition as 'exceptional' can be interrogated (LeMaster and Stephenson 2021). Furthermore, Stryker (2017, p.163) highlights how Butler's theory of performativity demonstrates the ways in which both trans and cis gender expressions are constituted "in the same fundamental way", through the repetition of gendered acts. Indeed, Butler's theorisation of biological sex, as constituted and made *natural* via cultural understandings of gender, rather than the other way round, demonstrates that "transgender genders are as real as any others" (Butler 1990; 1995; Stryker 2017).

Furthermore, and as outlined in chapter two (see: Queer and trans theories of embodiment), a queer sociological approach, which incorporates both micro-and-macro level analyses, can

account for both the discursive (re)production of gender structurally, and the lived, subjective experience of trans people – those which are varied and multiple (Hines 2006). Indeed, through its incorporation of an interpretivist lens, this research prioritises participants' subjective understandings (and self-definitions) of their identities and experiences. Such an approach therefore accounts for how gender may be conceptualised, at the individual level, as either fixed within binary categories, or as fluid and moveable.

Overall, then, approaches to sexuality and gender, across the fields of queer theory, poststructuralism, feminism, and trans studies, remain complex and varied. Whilst this research project operates, both ontologically and epistemologically, through an approach based upon the social construction of gender and sexuality, it is essential to recognise how meanings and realities are shaped differently through these constructions. Indeed, as Marinucci (2016, p.109) states: "while meaning cannot be fixed permanently, it can be, indeed must be, constantly negotiated for reference in particular contexts". Given this, a self-defining approach was imperative within this research – not least because of the varied, individual experiences under analysis here, but, also, because of the vast and complex nature of sexual and gender identities. This approach will be interrogated further in the next section of this chapter, tackling this research project's strategy.

Research strategy

Having situated this thesis within a queer, poststructuralist feminist paradigm, qualitative methods appeared the most appropriate form of data collection. Qualitative methods are most closely aligned with interpretivist and constructionist approaches – those, like queer and poststructuralist feminism, which recognise that understandings of social reality are socially constructed, and cannot, therefore, be understood as strict, observable facts (Prus 1990; Thanh and Thanh 2015). However, before addressing the particular qualitative methods used within this research, it is first important to outline this research project's approach to recruitment.

Recruitment

Recruitment, for this research project, was completed over two stages: the recruitment of sexual and gender minorities who have experienced sexual violence, and the recruitment of service providers of sexual violence support. I incorporated both opportunistic and

snowballing sampling methods, with the aim of ensuring that participants felt secure in choosing whether or not to take part in the project (Bryman 2012).

Given the sensitive nature of this research project, a self-defining approach to participation was deemed necessary. The reason behind this approach was twofold. Firstly, as identified within chapter two, rigid definitions of what constitutes sexual violence can cause significant harms to victims/survivors – such rigid definitions may be particularly harmful to sexual and gender minority survivors, whose experiences often fall outside of the typical framing of sexual violence (Kelly 2013; Donovan and Hester 2014; Mortimer et al 2019). As such, a broad interpretation of sexual violence was employed within this research; a 'call for participants' flyer was designed, asking people who had experienced 'sexual assault, harassment, or violence' to participate. Additionally, definitions of sexual violence were omitted from the participant information sheet provided to potential participants (see: Appendices 5 and 6), in order to avoid re-inscribing rigid definitions and stereotypes surrounding sexual violence (Kelly 2013).

The second reason for employing a self-defining approach within this research was to ensure that people with a wide spectrum of gender and sexual identities could be reached. This research project centres sexual minorities (including individuals who identify as lesbian, bisexual, and queer), who are marginalised by their gender. The centrality of cis men, throughout sociological research, has been highlighted through this thesis' engagement with feminist critiques of traditional masculinist forms of knowledge production and knowledge claims (Hartstock 1983; 1985; Longino 1993; Wigginton and Lafrance 2019). Furthermore, approaches to sexual violence which centre sexual and gender minorities frequently address these individuals' experiences of violence under the umbrella of the LGBTQ+ community. Such approaches may consequently neglect an analysis of the unique ways in which experiences of sexism and misogyny may intersect with experiences of homo/bi/transphobia, creating unique circumstances of abuse (Mortimer et al 2019). Further still, the unique experiences, and needs, of trans victims/survivors are likely missed when LGBTQ+ experiences of sexual violence are generalised (Rogers 2020). Hence, marginalised genders were prioritised. Yet, it was important to ensure a broad definition of marginalised genders was utilised, and thus, a self-defining approach was applied.

Recruitment of sexual and gender minority victims/survivors was, primarily, conducted through social media. A 'call for participants' flyer (see: Appendix 2) was distributed across multiple social media platforms, including Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. Specific LGBTQ+ groups, pages, and accounts were targeted for the aim of advertisement. Additionally, I attended several LGBTQ+ events – where representatives of local LGBTQ+ organisations and charities were present – in order to advertise and distribute the 'call for participants' flyer.

Recruitment of service providers proved to be a more complex endeavour. Attempts to make contact with national sexual violence support organisations were unsuccessful – this is unsurprising, given the limited time and resources within the domestic abuse and sexual violence sector, due to general a lack of funding, under-resourcing, and high demands placed upon services (Ishkanian 2014; Hine, Bates and Wallace 2022). However, I was able to utilise my supervisor's – Dr Michaela Rogers – contacts within the sector. I also developed a 'call for participants' flyer to reach service providers across a range of social media platforms (see: Appendix 3). Furthermore, whilst, initially, I had planned to conduct focus groups with service providers – in order to understand their shared experiences and opinions (Gibbs 1997) – such a method was not feasible for the majority of participants. Instead, I utilised the same method of data collection with both sexual and gender minority survivors, and service providers – that of in-depth semi-structured interviewing (the suitability of this method will be interrogated later on in this chapter).

Participant overview

Initially, the intended sample for this research had been 15 sexual and gender minority survivors, and between 10-15 service providers of sexual violence support. As established, the decision to focus on sexual minorities with marginalised genders was taken due to the thesis' aim of analysing the intersectional struggles of homo/bi/transphobia, sexism, and misogyny (Mortimer et al 2019). In the final round of recruitment, the number of victims/survivors participating in this research totalled 11. All participants were white, and their ages ranged from 22 to 65 years old. This final number of participants was lower than initially planned, and the limitations of this will be discussed further on within this chapter, where I additionally discuss the issues concerning the whiteness of the interview cohort. An overview of the personal characteristics of the interview participants is included as Appendix 4.

The cohort of sexual violence support providers totalled five. Again, the limitations of this small sample will be addressed further in this chapter. However, whilst this sample was small, it included service providers from a range of support services and organisations; three participants were from mainstream services, one was from an LGBTQ+ specific service, and one was a private therapist, specialising in trauma support for queer and trans individuals. This cohort reflects the small number of specialist LGBTQ+ sexual violence organisations across the UK, since although three of the service providers interviewed identified as part of the LGBTQ+ community), only one worked with a specialist service.

Data collection: In-depth, semi-structured interviews

In-depth, semi-structured qualitative interviewing was chosen as the primary method of research within this project for a number of reasons. In-depth interviews – described as conversations with a *purpose* – enable an interviewer and interviewee to "co-create knowledge and meaning in the interview setting and thereby co-create reality" (Hennink et al 2011, p.109). The prospect of producing co-created knowledge was a compelling reason for incorporating in-depth interviews within this research, since the co-creation of knowledge, and reality, are fundamental principles of feminist research design (Oakley 1981). Furthermore, due to the range of identities and experiences under analysis within this thesis, it was important to choose a method of data collection which would reflect and honour these.

Feminist Interviewing

The question of whether feminist research demands a unique methodology remains a contested issue for many feminists (Mauthner 2020). Thus far, I have established that feminist principles are, generally, opposed to the mainstream methodological processes found within the social sciences (Haraway 1990). Therefore, in a rejection of masculinist forms of knowledge production, feminist researchers may opt to break-away from traditional methods – most notably, those founded within the search for objective, quantifiable data. Instead, feminist research has, on the whole, been associated with qualitative methods, since such methods have been linked to more thorough understanding of "women's lives on their own terms" (Mauthner 2020, p.2). It is important to note here, however, that whilst traditional feminist approaches have centred women's voices – as a distinct methodology in and of itself

– research need not include women as its 'subject' to be considered feminist. Rather, contemporary feminist research may challenge traditional methods – which prioritise "objectivity and neutrality", by engaging with "the experiences, stories, and voices of diversely gendered subjects" (Whittingdale 2021, p.15).

Furthermore, the association between feminist research and qualitative methods has been contested, with arguments suggesting that quantitative methods may be useful, and sometimes necessary, in feminist research. For instance, quantitative data may be effective in measuring the widespread impact of gender inequality within particular facets of social life (Mauthner 2020). Letherby (2011) contends that perceiving qualitative/quantitative methods as fundamentally distinct from one another undermines feminism's ability to utilise quantitative methods for its own emancipatory aims. Consequently, feminist methodology may take multiple forms – it may "[encompass] a variety of methods and outlooks", and therefore be reduced to the use of qualitative methods alone (Whittingdale 2021, p.15). Hence, whilst feminist research demands a unique *approach* to methodology – insofar as it must counter the masculinist forms of knowledge production traditionally found within social science research (Hartsock 1983; Harraway 1990; Smith 1990; Walby 1990; Harding 1993; Longino 1993) - there are multiple and varied ways in which feminist research can be conducted. As such, no singular method can be deemed the sole *feminist* method.

Nevertheless, the qualitative interview remains the most popular method amongst feminist researchers – (Mauthner 2020), and indeed, is the chosen method of research within my thesis. In justifying this choice, it is first important to outline why feminism has developed such strong ties to this method. As I have previously demonstrated, feminist approaches to research have challenged the dominant (masculinist) forms of knowledge production found within social science research (Hartsock 1983; Harraway 1990; Smith 1990; Walby 1990; Harding 1993; Longino 1993). Through the process of qualitative interviewing, feminists may reject positivist methods of research – which centre objectivity and value-freedom as their core goals of data collection – in favour of a method centring "the *lived experiences* of participants" (Linabary and Hamel 2017, p.99). By doing so, feminists can hope to establish a non-hierarchical, empathetic relationship between the interviewer and interviewee (Oakley 1981). Indeed, feminist researchers have provided guidance on how best to conduct interviews with these principles in mind. For instance, Oakley (1981, p.41) recognises the

power of interviewers investing their "own personal identity in the relationship". Oakley (1981) also suggests that the existence of a *common identity* between the researcher and those being researched may allow for the production of a more equal and ethical relationship – this idea will be explored further when discussing my insider/outsider positionality within this research project (Oakley 1981; Doucet and Mauthner 2008).

Whilst, in theory, non-hierarchical relationships between interviewers and interviewees are ideal, questions regarding the possibility of establishing such relationships within the research setting have been raised. Feminists have questioned whether "the power differentials could be equalised between women'' during the research process (Doucet and Mauthner 2008, p.331). In particular, criticisms have stemmed from Black and poststructuralist feminist thinkers, who have highlighted how power imbalances pertaining to social characteristics other than gender (i.e., race, class, age, sexuality, transgender identity, disability) must be taken into consideration when making claims of non-hierarchical relationships between interviewer and interviewee (Doucet and Mauthner 2008). When these additional factors are at play, the existence of a shared identity with participants is not always enough to absolve the researcher of their power within the relationship. Hence, Reynolds (2002) notes how, within the research setting, power:

> "…is not a fixed and unitary construct […] power is multifaceted, relational and interactional and is constantly shifting and renegotiating itself between the researcher and the research participant according to different contexts and their differing structural locations."
>
> Reynolds (2002, p.307)

Fundamental considerations about the power dynamics between the interviewer and interviewee – between the researcher and those being researched – must be made throughout the interviewing process and beyond. My own positionality throughout this research process will be addressed in a further section of this methodological chapter, where I account for my reflexive approach to the research.

Interviewing in sexual violence research

With particular importance to the subject matter of the research, Campbell et al (2009) note the benefits of employing a feminist methodology when conducting research with victims/survivors of sexual violence. They highlight some vital feminist goals of sexual violence research, including a commitment to consciousness raising, the encouragement of recovery, and the dispelling of myths related to sexual victimisation (Campbell et al 2009). Further, they advise researchers to develop an in-depth knowledge of sexual violence before entering the field, with an emphasis upon understanding the potential cultural sensitivities, myths, and stereotypes surrounding the phenomenon (Campbell et al 2009).

These goals – founded through a feminist methodological approach – were particularly pertinent to address within my research, given the fact that sexual and gender minority victims/survivors may face additional stereotypes and myths attached to their experiences (Girshick 2002; Stotzer 2009; Rymer and Cartei 2015; Ussher et al 2020). Hence, in accordance with this, Campbell et al (2009) maintain that interviewers should avoid making assumptions about participants, both in terms of their experiences of sexual violence and their answers to questions. This is especially important to consider when conducting sexual violence research, due to the common feelings of guilt, shame and self-blame surrounding victimisation – feelings that can be exacerbated by judgements and stereotypes. Furthermore, and as outlined in chapter two, the layers of guilt and shame felt by sexual and gender minority victims/survivors may be heightened, due to the potential for them to be "double closeted", and for their shame to be "two-folded" (in relation to both their minority sexual and/or gender identity, and experience of sexual violence) (McClennen 2005, p.150; Donovan and Barnes 2020; Ovesen 2023).

Interviewing with sexual and gender minorities

Another element of feminist in-depth qualitative interviewing – and one that has been prominent within my research – is its ability to represent "the voices of those who are marginalised in a society" (Hesse-Biber 2007, p.6). Qualitative methods – and qualitative interviews especially – are useful in reaching marginalised, and oftentimes silenced, communities (Bhopal 2010). They are "flexible, fluid and better suited to understand the meanings, interpretations and subjective experiences" of marginalised individuals (Bhopal

2010, p.189). Furthermore, the participants in my research may be deemed "vulnerable interview subjects" – defined as participants who:

> "…experience inequalities, or who are subjected to discrimination, intolerance, subordination and stigma, or those who would suffer actual or potential harms if their life situations were revealed."
>
> (Suen 2015, p.725)

Given that participants were (potentially) vulnerable on the basis of their victim/survivor status *and* because of their sexual and gender minority identities, it was particularly important to utilise a method which allowed for their voices to be heard. A feminist approach to qualitative interviewing therefore not only complimented my queer poststructuralist feminist epistemological and ontological positionality, but, furthermore, enabled me to conduct fluid and sensitive interviews based upon the individual needs of each participant, and with a commitment to understanding the subjective experiences of these participants.

In-depth, semi-structured interviews were also conducted with service providers, so as to account for their subjective experiences of supporting sexual and gender minority victims/survivors of sexual violence. The interview schedule, for interviews with both victims/survivors and service providers, is attached as Appendix 8.

It is important to note, however, that there are drawbacks to using qualitative methods alone – most notably, the fact that small-scale, qualitative research rarely produces generalisable findings and data. I recognise, therefore, that this thesis is limited in its ability to make generalisations about its topic. Instead, this thesis values the richness of data it has produced, and in its ability to portray the stories of its participants. Furthermore, the limitations of this research project's methodology will be discussed at the end of this chapter.

Online and telephone interviewing

The majority of interviews conducted for this research project took place either online or via telephone – a decision taken in response to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and the safety issues it presents. However, one interview was conducted in-person, a decision taken in response to the barriers associated with online and telephone interviewing. Since telephone and internet-based methods of qualitative research have transformed, moving from "a niche

to mass method" in a short space of time, it is important to acknowledge, and account for, the differences between in-person and virtual methods of communication (Andrejuk 2020, p.56).

There are multiple barriers to consider when conducting research over the phone and online. Firstly, the obvious lack of face-to-face contact *may* result in non-verbal communication between the researcher and participant during the interaction being missed (Edwards and Holland 2013). This issue may be alleviated somewhat through video calling, although both the interviewer and interviewee's entire body language will not be observable during the interaction, due to webcams providing only a 'head shot' angle of an individual (Cater 2011). In Archibald et al's (2019, p.4) study on Zoom as a platform for online interviewing, participants expressed that the ability to see the interviewer, and read their non-verbal cues, was useful in establishing rapport and "building [an] interpersonal connection". This may have been a particular draw of video interviewing for the participants in my study, since 12 participants chose to partake in an interview via video-conferencing platforms, whereas only two participants chose to partake in an interview via telephone. Hence, whilst face-to-face, in-person interactions may ultimately forge better relationships between the researcher and the participant, it is clear that online methods can facilitate similar interpersonal connections.

There are, however, several benefits to interviews in which the researcher and participant are occupying separate spaces (Edwards and Holland 2013). The first and most necessary advantage being that the safety issues presented by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic can be eliminated. Online and telephone interviews are also highly flexible methods, providing participants with greater freedom to choose a time that works best for them, and, additionally, allowing the researcher to connect with participants who would otherwise be unable to attend a face-to-face interview (Edwards and Holland 2013). Hence, for these reasons, I chose to conduct the majority of my interviews online and via the telephone.

However, an additional and particularly significant barrier to online and telephone interviewing, which I have encountered throughout this research project, has involved participants' access (or lack thereof) to a private space from which they can participate in an interview. One participant – Trudy (24, lesbian cis woman), who was living at home with her parents at the time the interviews were being conducted – expressed discomfort at the idea of participating in an interview from her own home. She explained that the risk of being

overheard by family members would be too distressing for her. I therefore made the decision to amend my ethics application to include in-person interviews.

Many researchers have noted the benefits of conducting interviews online or over the phone, highlighting the potential for participants to feel a greater sense of safety and security when participating in an interview from their own home (Andrejuk 2020). This, in comparison to traditional, in-person qualitative interviews, which are typically conducted in public spaces, such as cafes or parks – oftentimes, places which may feel crowded, loud, or overwhelming – may reassure participants of their privacy (Andrejuk 2020). Furthermore, this may be particularly beneficial in cases where participants experience heightened emotions during an interview; certainly, I have found this to be the case with most of my participants, who have expressed a sense ease and comfort with exploring their trauma in the safe, private, and familiar space of their own home (Edwards and Holland 2013). Yet, as I discovered when speaking to Trudy, home may not be a private – or, importantly, a *safe* – place from which to meet.

The issue of *where* interviews are conducted, has, for social researchers, typically been an issue of logistics (Herzog 2005). Social researchers have therefore tended to make decisions regarding the location of interviews based upon participants' comfortability and specific requirements (Herzog 2005). In the case of Trudy, it was made clear, after consulting with her about location, that home was not a viable option, as specifically, she was concerned about being overheard by her parents during the interview. Given the nature of Trudy's experiences of sexual violence (family-related sexual abuse), it is clear why the home, as a 'safe space' for interviewing, is contestable.

Much feminist literature on domestic violence has challenged the notion of home as a safe space, highlighted most obviously by the fact that home is the place where women are most likely to experience violence (Pfitzner et al 2022). Indeed, for women, "home – and thus safe space – are invariably tenuous; they are often desired for their promise of safety, but they are simultaneously always vulnerable to disruption" (Karell 1998, p.148). Pfitzner et al (2022) encountered this barrier when attempting to conduct research with victim/survivors of domestic violence during the COVID-19 pandemic. They note how, because many victim/survivors would be with their abusers 24/7 whilst lockdown measures were in place, home was neither a private nor a safe space from which to conduct an interview (Pfitzner et

al 2022). The potential for perpetrators to overhear what is being discussed during the interview may put victim/survivors at an increased risk of violence and abuse (Pfitzner et al 2022). Whilst this is clearly a significant issue associated with interviewing in the home – and one that is relevant to this research project – it arguably rests on a rigid definition of (un)safety – that is, (un)safety resulting from ongoing, or existing, violence. It does not address instances where – like Trudy – victims/survivors may be at risk of being overheard by other individuals in a shared space, but when these individuals are *not* the perpetrators of abuse – and the safety implications of this.

Significantly, the literature overlooks instances whereby home may be a 'safe space' for participants typically, and within an everyday setting, – for instance, home may be a space free from violence and abuse – but, how, in the context of an interview, home may *become* an unsafe space. This brings to light how the process of interviewing itself can cause particular risks and ethical implications regarding participants' safety. It calls into question the different ways in which the safety of a participant can be perceived, and highlights how the consequences of sexual violence go beyond the immediate dynamic of the abuser/survivor relationship; here, the survivor's safety is under threat from speaking about their abuse in their home, which is, ultimately, outside of the abusive relationship. The issue of disclosure is also significant here – whether or not a survivor has shared information about their experience with friends and family, and the implications of this when interviewing in the home. It is clear, therefore, that victims/survivors may experience a limit on *what* they can say, *how* they can say it, *who* they can speak to about it, and, significantly, in the context of interview location, *where* they can speak about it. This highlights the particular vulnerability of victims/survivors of sexual violence in an interview setting.

Data analysis

Given the oftentimes "messy" nature of qualitative research, Bryman and Burgess (1994, p.2) highlight how the processes involved in collecting, organising, and analysing qualitative data are not always separable: "qualitative research cannot be reduced to particular techniques nor to set stages, but rather that a dynamic process is involved which links together problems, theories and methods". Hence, analysis cannot simply be viewed as the stage which neatly follows data collection. Instead, the process of data analysis arguably starts when choices are made regarding methods of data collection (Clark et al 2021). Hence, the choice to

incorporate in-depth, semi-structured interviews, with the purpose of understanding and unpacking the varied experiences of participants, necessarily required an approach to analysis centring the experiences and narratives of participants. For this reason, I employed an analysis strategy based, primarily, upon a thematic approach, whilst also paying close attention to the narratives of survivors. Both thematic and narrative analysis can be categorised as modes of analysis aligned within interpretive qualitative research, based upon constructivist understandings of social realities as fluid, changeable, and varied (Lincoln, Lynham and Guba 2018; McAllum et al 2019).

Broadly speaking, thematic analysis may be defined as a "method for identifying, analysing, and interpreting patterns of meaning ('themes') within qualitative data" (Clarke and Braun 2015, p.1; Terry et al 2017). Rather than counting explicit words and/or phrases, thematic analysis takes on the task of identifying and describing both the implicit and explicit themes found within the data (Guest, MacQueen and Namey 2012). Thematic analysis is characterised as flexible – it allows researchers to consider patterns and themes "within and across data in relation to participants' lived experience, views and perspectives, and behaviour and practices" (Clarke and Braun 2014, p.2). The flexibility provided by thematic analysis was crucial to this project, due to the incorporation of two sets of data – interviews with survivors, and interviews with support providers. Indeed, since this research project aimed to deliver both theoretical and practical/policy contributions, a flexible approach to analysis was necessary.

Thematic analysis can be approached in a variety of ways. In line with this research project's queer, poststructuralist feminist theoretical perspective, reflexive thematic analysis was chosen as the primary approach to data analysis (Braun and Clarke 2019). Rather than developing codes based upon accuracy or reliability, reflexive thematic analysis allows for "the researcher's reflective and thoughtful engagement with their data and their reflexive and thoughtful engagement with the analytic process" (Braun and Clarke 2019, p.594). Taking a reflexive approach to thematic analysis means that the codes generated during the analytical process are "understood to represent the researcher's interpretations of patterns of meaning across the dataset" (Bryne 2022, p.1393). Accordingly, the process of analysis is fluid and flexible – "progression through the analysis will tend to facilitate further familiarity with the data, which may in turn result in the interpretation of new patterns of meaning"

(Bryne 2022, p.1393). Whilst the stages involved in reflexive thematic analysis may, therefore, be moveable, Braun and Clarke's (2012) outline of a six-phase approach is useful in providing a rough guide to the analytical process. Indeed, Braun and Clarke (2012) themselves suggest that the researcher should move back and forth between these phases.

The first two stages of Braun and Clarke's (2012) six-phase approach involve the researcher becoming acquainted with the dataset. Phase one requires the researcher to familiarise themselves with the data. Within this research, familiarisation with the data began at the point of transcription – each interview was transcribed manually. This process was vital – it allowed me to actively listen to, and subsequently re-learn, the narratives of participants. The next stage, phase two, involves the generation of initial codes. During this stage, the researcher is encouraged to "work systematically through the entire dataset, attending to each data item with equal consideration, and identifying aspects of data items that are interesting and may be informative in developing themes" (Bryne 2022, p.1400). In order to sort codes, I used the data management software, NVivo (R1/2020). The process of generating codes meant that I was able to read through each transcript again but in greater detail, allowing me to familiarise myself further with the data.

The third, fourth, and fifth phases involve the creation and naming of themes found within the dataset. Central to phase three, then, is the way in which codes are "combined according to shared meanings so that they may form themes or sub-themes" (Bryne 2022, p.1403). Alongside phases four and five – which involve reviewing potential themes and naming these themes, respectively – this stage of the analytical process was the most time consuming. Ensuring that participants' narratives were accurately represented, whilst considering the relevance of information included, proved difficult. Ultimately, however, Bryne (2022, p.1403) maintains that the researcher should "be able and willing to let go of codes or prospective themes that may not fit within the overall analysis".

Phase six, the final stage of the analytical process, is concerned with how themes are reported in the final research (Braun and Clarke 2012). The results and discussion portion of this thesis have been combined, so as to allow for the contextualisation of data when and where it is reported (Bryne 2022). The structure in which the identified themes have been presented emerged somewhat organically – the themes have been represented in line with how participants typically told their stories (during the interviews, victims/survivors were first

asked about their experience of sexual violence, before discussing their access/lack thereof to support services). The final analysis chapter includes the narratives of service providers. The choice to include this as the concluding chapter of the analysis chapter was twofold. First, it helped me to prioritise, and centre, the stories shared by victims/survivors – this was a significant aim in representing the narratives of these participants. Second, it allowed for the themes identified through an analysis of victims/survivors' experiences to form my approach to analysis of service providers' narratives. This was essential in ensuring relevancy and in the development of recommendations for more appropriate service provision.

Research ethics

This research project comes under the category of sensitive research, defined as: "…studies in which there are potential consequences or implications, either directly for the participants in the research or for the class of individuals represented by the researcher" (Sieber and Stanley 1988, p.49). Ethical considerations in sensitive research are generally concerned with limiting the potential for victims/survivors to experience emotional distress, re-traumatisation, or secondary victimisation throughout the research process, as a *result* of participation (Van Wijk and Harrison 2013; Mortimer et al 2021). Since the participants in my research were asked to speak about their experience(s) of sexual violence, the content of interviews may have elicited heightened emotions for some, either during, or after the interview had taken place. In line with a trauma-informed response to sexual violence – which recognises the potential harm for victims/survivors participating in research – I took measures to ensure that participants would feel as comfortable as possible when sharing their experiences (Mortimer et al 2021). I reminded participants before the start of interviews that they could refuse to answer any question, take a break, or end the interview at any time, without needing to give a reason. I also provided participants with a list of services to contact if they required support following the interviews.

Approaching research with a risk management plan in place is, in theory, an appropriate way of mitigating all perceived risks associated with a research project. As I have established, it was important for me to put measures in place to ensure good ethical conduct was followed, prior to any interviews taking place. Yet, as Mortimer et al (2021) note, a researcher may (indeed, is likely to) encounter *additional* risks along the way – risks which may not have been accounted for within their initial plan. The very nature of qualitative research – centring

individuals and their experiences – makes any attempt to *predict* the potential risks and outcomes of a research project extremely challenging (Downes et al 2014). The issue, therefore, in considering ethics *only* at the preliminary stages of the research design, is that researchers may not be equipped to deal with new, unexpected risks, both to themselves and to participants, throughout the research process (Mortimer et al 2021). Instead, then, the development of good ethical conduct may be viewed as a continual process – one which does not end with the approval of an ethics review, but rather, is constantly adapted in response to evolving risks associated with the research.

Throughout this research project, I have encountered challenges to my initial risk management plan – most notably during the recruitment and interviewing stage of my research design. As I discussed in the above section – in which I outlined my use of interviewing – I made the decision to amend my ethical procedure in response to Trudy's needs. The process of adapting and altering the ethical approach is a particularly important consideration to make in trauma-based research, when ethical issues may be "complex [and], sometimes rapidly changing or drawn out", and therefore require attention as and when they arise (Downes et al 2014; Mortimer et al 2021 p.145). I therefore remained flexible with regards to my ethical approach throughout the research project – ensuring that I was adaptable when specific issues evolved.

Furthermore, whilst sexual violence research may be subsumed under the umbrella of sensitive research, there are additional and unique factors which contribute to the difficulties associated with conducting and participating in research on sexual violence (Mortimer et al 2021). For instance, Fontes (2004) notes how the decision to 'speak out' about sexual violence, – in the context of a patriarchal society – risks being met with a barrage of abuse, victim-blaming, and disbelief. A researcher's ability to recognise the effects of this particular socio-political context is paramount to the safety and security of participants. Mortimer et al (2021 p.148) therefore suggest that sexual violence researchers may shift the focus of ethics, from a process of reducing harm by "managing the participant" – through tactics aimed at reducing distress and re-traumatisation during the interview – to a critical reflection of the ways in which the researcher *manages*, and therefore constructs, the research environment. Mortimer et al (2021) suggest, then, that sexual violence researchers must ask themselves a series of key questions:

> "How can I, as a researcher, [work] to ensure I do not dismiss or invalidate the survivor's experience?
>
> Do I have sufficient knowledge of the social and political contexts of sexual violence to undertake research with survivors?
>
> What environment am I creating during the interview/research process."
>
> (Mortimer et al 2021, p.148-149)

This, additionally, raises concerns about the assumptions sexual violence researchers may make during the research process, most notably, in how they may *expect* a survivor to respond when speaking about their experience(s). Mortimer et al (2021) note that employing measures to mitigate participants' emotional distress during the interview process may perpetuate stereotypes surrounding how victims/survivors are expected to feel, and act, during an interview. This is not to say that attempts to limit the potential for participants to experience emotional distress are not important – indeed, these are key ethical practices to follow. However, such measures should come with an understanding – from the researcher – that victims/survivors are not a homogenous group, and therefore do not experience violence, or respond to violence, in the same ways (Mortimer et al 2021). Consequently, then, it may be harmful for researchers to *assume* that "talking about sexual violence is always traumatic" (Mortimer et al 2021, p.146).

Instead, for some survivors, speaking about their experiences may not be a traumatic event. When asked about their experiences of sexual violence in a sympathetic and non-judgemental manner, victims/survivors taking part in research have reported that telling their stories can be a cathartic experience (Ellsberg and Heise 2002). Participation in sexual violence research may also give victims/survivors a sense of purpose, providing them with "an empowering opportunity to help other victims" (Draucker 1999, p. 161). Moreover, the act of storytelling for victims/survivors may elicit feelings of relief and strength, particularly when they are speaking about their experiences for the first time (Ellsberg and Heise 2002). Burgess-Proctor (2015) further suggests that by taking a feminist approach to sexual violence research, founded in the goal of empowerment, the hierarchy of power between researchers and participants may be reduced. Arguably, providing victims/survivors with the opportunity to speak, openly, about their experience(s) may provide participants a level of autonomy and

control over how their stories are told (Burgess-Proctor 2015). It was crucial, therefore, for me to ensure participants felt able to discuss their experiences *freely*, and without judgement. For instance, I reminded participants, at the beginning of each interview, that whilst I had a list of questions to ask, I hoped the interview would be guided by a discussion of their experience. This was important because it established that interviews were, primarily, led by participants, in order to delimit the hierarchical structure of interviewing, and provide participants with a level of autonomy.

Still, Mortimer et al (2021, p.147) warn sexual violence researchers against making *any* assumptions during the interview process; assuming that victims/survivors will feel empowered by participation can be "prescriptive, patronising and reduce participants' agency". Given this, I kept an open mind throughout the interviewing process, recognising that participants may respond to particular questions in various ways. The goal, therefore, was not to ensure participants *felt* a certain way during the interview, but to provide a space whereby any thoughts, feelings, and emotions were respected and valued (Mortimer et al 2021).

Ensuring the confidentiality of participants is, additionally, particularly important to this research project's ethical commitments. Following guidelines from the Data Protection Act (Clark 2006), I have ensured the anonymity of my participants through the removal of identifiers as well as the use of pseudonyms (Clark 2006). Where defining characteristics have been included, such as participants' sexuality and gender, these have been represented as participants' self-identifications. Each participant was given the option to choose a pseudonym for themselves, to be used throughout the research findings and discussion, and the majority of participants did this. Where participants chose not to, a pseudonym, chosen at random, was applied, and put forward for participants to check. Informed consent was obtained from each participant – prior to each interview, I provided participants with documents including information about confidentiality, anonymity, and data protection and storage (see: Appendices 5-7).

<u>Positionality, reflexivity and insider-outsider research</u>

A key component of feminist methodology is the acknowledgment of, and attention to, the researcher's own positionality within their research. As a "continuous process of critical

scrutiny and interpretation", reflexivity can aid researchers in the important process of recognising one's situatedness within the research process (Guillemin and Gillam 2004, p.275; Hoover and Morrow 2015).

Feminist reflexivity

Reflexivity, in social research, broadly refers to a researcher's recognition of, and reflection on, their own positionality within their research (Gilgun 2008). This may include, for instance, an interrogation of their *influence* upon the research – in terms of how their own experiences, thoughts, and emotions impact the research process, – as well as a recognition that they, the researcher, are as much a part of the research as their participants (Gilgun 2008). However, as Sweet (2020), notes, it is not enough for researchers to engage in "reflexivity talk" (Pillow 2003, p.176), whereby researchers simply recount their social characteristics, and the effects these may have on the research process. Rather, reflexivity should be viewed as a "continuous process of critical scrutiny and interpretation", as opposed to an 'accomplishment' to be made at the start of a research project (Pillow 2003; Guillemin and Gillam 2004, p.275; Sweet 2020). Furthermore, Bourdieu (2004) states that reflexivity should not be based, solely, upon the individual researcher; sociologists employing reflexivity must account for the epistemological unconscious of the field of Sociology itself, since it is from within the field that decisions are made about what is researched, and about how research is conducted (Bourdieu 2004; Lumsden 2019). In this sense, it is important, in the practice of reflexivity, to account for the "wider disciplinary, institutional and political context(s) in which reflexivity or being reflexive takes place" (Lumsden 2019, p.8).

Reflexivity is a particularly significant aspect of feminist research, insofar as feminism is committed to challenging traditional conceptions of power (Sweet 2020). Taking a reflexive approach can therefore enable feminists to critically interrogate – and potentially, reduce – the issue of power imbalances throughout the research process. Hence, the key principle of reflexivity, for feminist researchers, rests upon "[approaching] our work with epistemological unease because we are always at risk of reproducing categories that reify power" (Sweet 2020, p.924). Furthermore, reflexivity need not be a journey for a researcher to embark on alone, but instead can be a helpful, oftentimes empowering experience for research participants also (Hesse-Biber 2007). For instance, participants may engage in reflexive practices over the course of the research process, through an "[evaluation of] their own

experiences and views" (Linabary and Hamel 2017, p.99). Engaging in a reflexive approach to research can therefore help to illustrate how knowledge is socially constructed and varied (Linabary and Hamel 2017). A reflexive approach is, moreover, compatible with – and I argue, necessary to incorporate into – the epistemological approach of this research, which seeks to understand how participants' "lives, words, and meanings" are shaped, both by their own positionality, but also, by my own positionality, as the researcher (Whittingdale 2021, p.16).

Furthermore, a feminist approach goes beyond a view of reflexivity as purely a methodological issue (Whittingdale 2021). Instead, it recognises how the process of reflexivity within social research – or lack thereof – is, additionally, an issue of ethics (Whittingdale 2021). Feminists, therefore, often position reflexivity as a "moral obligation" within the research process – demonstrating a commitment to understanding the impacts of research on the real people it involves, the "webs of power relations" within which individuals exist, and the implications of this (Whittingdale 2021, p.17).

However, whilst qualitative social research has, generally, made important moves towards the inclusion of reflexivity with the research process, calls for the process of reflexivity have been met with criticism. Notably, scholars are mindful of social factors impacting agency, which, accordingly, may limit a researchers' ability to act reflexively (May 1999). This, alongside the querying of what can be known about the social world, brings into question the "in-ward-looking, non-engaged set of practices" upon which some scholars believe the process of reflexivity to be based (May 1999, p.6). It is important to acknowledge here that this research incorporates the representation of *multiple* realities and does not make claim to generalisable statements about the social world.

Insider-outsider

Much methodological literature has addressed the binary of insider/outsider research – this refers to whether or not the researcher has a connection to/shared identity with their participants. Benefits and disadvantages have been established on both sides – whilst insider researchers may find recruitment an easier task, outsider researchers may generate richer data by asking somewhat obvious or overlooked questions (Hayfield and Huxley 2015). Either way, the researcher's positionality in relation to their participants will always be an important point of reflection. Undeniably, a researcher's insider and/or outsider identity will shape the

development of the research in some way (Hayfield and Huxley 2015). Taking a reflexive approach regarding my own positionality was therefore a central concern of mine throughout this research – especially given my commitment to a queer poststructuralist feminist methodology, which recognises a researcher's own biography and its inevitable impact on the research (Pillow 2003; Guillemin and Gillam 2004; Sweet 2020).

Insider research, broadly, refers to instances where a researcher shares one or more social characteristic(s) and/or similar experience(s) with their participants. Insider research has been praised for the production of "in-depth, rich, and community-approved knowledge across multiple marginalised groups" (Rosenberg and Tilley 2021, p.925). It provides space for the development of rapport and trust with participants; insider researchers may build relationships upon the experiences and understandings they share with participants (Rosenberg and Tilley 2021). Hence, these researchers occupy a particularly important space within the research process, for they are more likely to understand the significance of particular perspectives, thoughts and emotions shared by participants (LaSala 2003).

However, insider research has faced criticism for its alleged inability to contribute to the production of objective knowledge. This critique suggests that insider researchers may be *too close, too involved,* or *too invested* in the research as a result of their insider status (Rosenberg and Tilley 2021). Because insider researchers are more likely to understand the nuanced experiences of their participants – for instance, in understanding certain language or examples used by participants – they may risk omitting seemingly 'obvious' or 'mundane' knowledge (Rosenberg and Tilley 2021). Yet, Lewis (1973) dismisses the idea that social research is somehow more objective, or less 'contaminated' by the researcher's own positionality, when conducted by an outsider. Instead, Lewis (1973), notes how, this viewpoint is a product of colonialist thought – the suggestion that only outsider researchers are capable of producing 'valid' research (research marked by its alleged unique ability to remain *scientifically objective*), immediately enforces an imbalance of power between the researcher and those they research (Lewis 1973). Lewis (1973) suggests this relationship – between the *objective*, outsider researcher and their subjects – is reminiscent of the colonial relationship; the objectification of the 'subject' is a dehumanising process, which, ultimately, results in the subject being rendered inferior. Furthermore, the assumption that research should aim to be 'scientifically objective' is incompatible with a feminist methodology, for it

limits a researcher's ability to practise reflexivity in relation to their own positionality and its effects upon the research (Oakley 1981; Vincent 2018).

My positionality in this research was significant – I experienced the research as both an insider and outsider. I am a bisexual, cis woman, and I have experienced sexual violence. I disclosed this information to my participants – it was noted in the participant information sheets provided to participants prior to interviews, as well as during my introduction at the start of each interview. This was not a difficult decision to come to; disclosure of my bisexual identity and experience of sexual violence felt important in conveying my interest in the topic of my PhD. I also hoped that sharing this information would re-assure participants that I had a personal connection to, and subsequent level of understanding of, the topic. Furthermore, Wilkinson and Kitzinger (2013) suggest that revealing one's insider position can be "utilised strategically to oil the wheels of the research process, making it easier to get high-quality data" (Wilkinson and Kitzinger 2013, p.253). Hence, whilst this was not the ultimate goal in sharing such information, it may have helped me in the recruitment and interviewing stages of my research.

However, my bisexual identity and experience of sexual violence did not dissolve me of my outsider positionality in other areas – most significantly, in my position as a cis woman. It has been essential for me to reflect upon my cis identity throughout this research – most notably because such a position has afforded me a particular level of privilege in relation to some of the trans participants within this study (Galupo 2017).

Researching with trans participants as a cis researcher

Despite often being the "subjects of inquiry" within sociological research, trans individuals have frequently occupied the position of *participant* as opposed to *researcher* within social science research; in academic literature, trans experiences have, predominantly, been "investigated, and correspondingly constructed, by cisgender people" (Stone 2006; Vincent 2018, p.105). This raises the question of whether it is appropriate for cis researchers to continue to conduct research centring the trans population, given that, for so long, cis researchers have dominated in the construction of academic narratives surrounding trans lives, and, moreover, given that these constructions have often been harmful to lives of trans individuals (see: Harrison, Grant and Herman 2012).

Since trans voices are significantly underrepresented within academic literature, Rosenberg and Tilley (2021) discuss the importance of research run by, and with, trans participants and researchers. Research, when conducted by trans researchers, can be a more positive, comfortable, and honest experience for trans participants (Rosenburg and Tilley 2021). Specifically, when participating in research conducted by trans researchers, trans participants may benefit from not having to "stop and 101 every term", may have more trust in the researcher(s) and their commitments to the research, and, most significantly, may believe that their experience(s) will be better understood and accurately represented (Rosenburg and Tilley 2021, p.929).

However, in their approach – as cis researchers conducting research centred on trans people's experiences – Rogers and Brown (2023) note the importance of adopting critical ethical reflexivity (CER) when considering the insider-outsider binary. Critical ethical reflexivity (CER) is, according to Rogers and Brown (2023), a tool which enables social researchers to consider, and challenge, the function of normativity in relation to the construction of knowledge within society. They question rigid distinctions between 'insider' and 'outsider', emphasising the importance of considering additional social characteristics and their impacts, since "people do not experience single-issue lives'' (Crenshaw 1991; Rogers and Brown 2023, p.4). Through the integration of CER within their respective doctoral research projects, Rogers and Brown (2023) were able to acknowledge, and reflect upon, the different levels of privilege experienced by themselves and their participants. They did so by exploring the structural influences – such as cisgenderist stigma – impacting upon participants' subjective experiences (Rogers and Brown 2023). As such, their approach centres the co-creation of knowledge through a narrative approach, which they argue lends itself to the development of "a trusting, relational process in which researcher and participant create meaning together" (Rogers and Brown 2023, p.5). Furthermore, Rogers and Brown (2023) maintain that cis researchers must address, and challenge, dominant understandings of gender which privilege cis identities. Indeed, they suggest that the incorporation of CER within social research allows for "deeper reflexions on cis privilege and positionality", since at its core, CER seeks to understand the relationship between structure and subjectivity, in order to account for individual's experiences (Rogers and Brown 2023, p.7).

In my research, then, there were multiple issues to consider when researching with trans participants as a cis researcher. Given that the experiences of trans people in academic literature and public discourse are significantly lacking, it is imperative that when these experiences *are* represented, they are accounted for in the most sensitive and accurate way possible (Stone 2006; Vincent 2018; Rosenburg and Tilley 2021; Rogers and Brown 2023). Whilst this research project did not seek to make generalisable claims about the experiences of sexual and gender minority victims/survivors of sexual violence, it does contribute to a discourse surrounding trans lives, and the way in which it does this must therefore be addressed.

I was conscious, throughout this research project, of my position and my potential to misunderstand or misrepresent my trans participants' experiences. I sought out methodological literature from trans researchers on how best to represent trans voices within my research. Vincent (2018) provides guidance on this, suggesting that cis researchers should consider multiple issues before embarking on research centring the narratives of trans participants. Firstly, Vincent (2018) suggests that cis researchers should be aware of the history of research involving trans participants, and in particular, should pay close attention to research studies that have been harmful to the trans community (Harrison, Grant and Herman 2012). Furthermore, Vincent (2018) implores cis researchers to be transparent with trans participants, particularly when sharing information about the motivations behind the research. Alongside this, Vincent (2018) highlights how cis researchers should study language carefully, consider adopting a feminist methodological approach, and furthermore, address intersecting identities and oppressions. In addition to these recommendations, Rosenburg and Tilley (2021) state that an important consideration to make, when researching with trans participants as a cis researcher, involves the potential for trans participants to feel as though they need to educate the researcher on specific terminology related to their gender, and to the experience of being trans. Indeed, this was something that most of the trans participants in this research noted was an issue in accessing, or attempting to access, mainstream sexual violence support services.

Given my commitment to a queer, poststructuralist feminist methodological approach, several of the recommendations – for cis researchers attempting to conduct inclusive research with trans participants – outlined above were ingrained within the research process.

However, a continual reflexive approach, regarding my cis identity, was necessary throughout the research process, and hence, I took several measures to ensure participants felt assured in my position as a cis researcher with knowledge of trans lives. Firstly, I disclosed my cis identity to all participants. I made my pronouns known to participants through email communications, as well as at the beginning of each interview. Accordingly, I asked participants to share how they self-identified their gender and sexuality – this was particularly important in ensuring participants understood my perception of gender as existing on a wide spectrum, and, additionally, in re-establishing the importance of a self-defining approach. Whilst these measures did not dissolve me of my privilege as a cis researcher, I believe that they did help to demonstrate to my participants my familiarity with trans identities, and further, reduced the possibility that participants would feel the need to educate me on specific terminology (Rosenburg and Tilley 2021).

Limitations of the methodology

A significant limitation of this research project is that all participants were white. This issue was addressed during the recruitment stage, and attempts were made to contact sexual violence support organisations run, specifically, for Black and ethnic minority survivors. However, given the time constraints and underfunding of the sexual violence support sector – as outlined earlier in this chapter – several of these organisations did not respond, or explained that they were unable to help with the research at the time (Ishkanian 2014; Hine et al 2022). Whilst this research project did not seek to be representative of an entire community – rather, it sought to understand individual experiences and narratives in-depth – it is recognised that a specific analysis of the intersections between race, gender, sexuality, and sexual violence, is omitted from this research. Several participants did, however, address these intersections during interviews – both victims/survivors and service providers made note of their perceptions of the unique barriers to support for Black and ethnic minority survivors. Likewise, existing research demonstrates how Black and ethnic minority victims/survivors are less likely to access sexual violence support, despite experiencing high levels of violence (Postmus 2015; Love et al 2017). Barriers to support for Black and ethnic minority victims/survivors may include racism from service providers, a lack of cultural understanding from mainstream services, and the fear of being 'outed' as a survivor within a tight-knit community (Harvey et al 2014; Love et al 2017). These barriers may be further

exacerbated when victims/survivors are marginalised by their race, ethnicity, and sexuality and/or gender (Harvey et al 2014; Love et al 2017). This intersection represents an under-researched area within sexual violence literature, and one that this research, regrettably, has not contributed to.

A further (and related) limitation of this research is its smaller than expected sample size. As established, this research did not intend to produce generalisable findings pertaining to the experiences of sexual and gender minority victims/survivors. Hence, analysis has centred upon the individual, subjective narratives of participants. Nevertheless, I had hoped to recruit a larger number of participants, with intended samples of 15 victims/survivors, and 10-15 service providers. The final sample included 11 victims/survivors and 5 service providers. The limited sample size of this study was inevitably impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, the spread of which was on-going throughout the research design stage of the project. Specifically, whilst the UK was not under lockdown when the recruitment and data collection stages began (in October 2021), I made the decision to conduct all interviews online and via telephone, in the event that if guidelines did change, and restrictions on movement were introduced, this would have caused only minimal disruption to the research. Towards the end of the recruitment process, I amended this measure and chose to incorporate in-person interviews, in order to meet the specific requirements of one participant (see: *Online and telephone interviewing*). However, since this adjustment to the research design happened in the late stages of the recruitment process, I was unable to offer this alternative provision to other potential participants. Whether or not the incorporation of face-to-face interviewing would have encouraged increased interest in the project is unknown. Nevertheless, it is clear that the pandemic placed restrictions upon this research project's design and development.

Furthermore, as Women's Aid (2020) suggest, in the aftermath of the pandemic, sexual violence support services in the UK have witnessed a significant increase in demand. This heightened demand – and the strain it places upon staff – may further explain this research project's small sample size of service providers.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the methodological and ethical decisions made throughout this research process, which necessarily informed the research design and strategy. The first

section of this chapter is dedicated to a consideration of the epistemological and ontological positioning of this research project. Here, I establish my queer poststructuralist feminist approach to the subject, and in doing so, I identify the similarities and differences between the epistemological approaches of these separate bodies of thought. These bodies of thought are, oftentimes, positioned as contradictory. Indeed, queer, poststructuralist and feminist approaches may be seen to subscribe to opposing conceptualisations of the subject and, furthermore, their categorisations of sexuality and gender may be thought of as incompatible. However, taken together, and incorporated within a queer poststructuralist feminist paradigm, these bodies of thought enable a deeper understanding of the ways in which meanings and realities operate as unfixed, but constantly negotiable entities, necessarily shaping individual experiences (Marinucci 2016).

The decision to centre queer and poststructuralist feminist thought necessarily required a methodological approach which could account for the social construction of reality (Marinucci 2016). Hence, the incorporation of in-depth, semi-structured interviews – the format of which was based upon feminist interviewing techniques – was fitting, and furthermore, emphasises this project's commitment to challenging traditional power dynamics within research (Whittingdale 2021). This was a particularly vital commitment to make within this research, since its overarching aim was to account for marginalised voices (Hesse-Biber 2007). The flexible and fluid nature of in-depth semi-structured interviews therefore provided a space for participants to share their subjective experiences and narratives (Bhopal 2010).

Due to the sensitive nature of this research, the ethical procedure was a central component of its research design. Hence, the measures taken to ensure this research maintained ethical standards were outlined within this chapter. In particular, the complexities surrounding the ethics of sexual violence research have been addressed (Downes, et al 2014; Burgess-Proctor 2015; Mortimer et al 2021). In reference to this research project, specifically, I have demonstrated my adaptable approach to ethics; ethics, in this research, has been thought of as a continual process, rather than as a task reserved to the initial stages of research design (Downes, et al 2014; Mortimer et al 2021).

Finally, within this chapter, my positionality has been interrogated. I have demonstrated my commitment to feminist reflexivity and, moreover, I have considered my position as a cis researcher working with trans participants, noting how methodological recommendations

from trans scholars have been significant to the development of my approach (Stone 2006; Vincent 2018; Rosenburg and Tilley 2021). A discussion of my positionality was not only necessary due to this research's foundations within feminist methodology, but, furthermore, an acknowledgement of - and challenge to - the structural inequalities present within social research is fundamental when conducting 'outsider' researching with marginalised groups (Rogers and Brown 2023). In particular, an account of my cis privilege, in relation to the trans participants within this research, was necessary to include here (Rogers and Brown 2023). Now that the methodological and ethical processes of this research have been outlined, the following chapters involve an in-depth discussion of the key findings of this research.

Chapter 5. Sexual and gender minority victims/survivors' experiences of sexual violence

Introduction

Building upon explorations of LGBTQ+ victims/survivors' experiences of sexual violence outlined in chapter three, and, drawing upon the theoretical approaches to sexual violence identified within chapter two, this chapter (as the first of three findings and discussion chapters) centres the narratives of the 11 victims/survivors who took part in this research project. Within this chapter, I aim to position this research project's findings alongside current sociological explorations of sexual violence. The choice to focus specifically on sexual minorities who belong to marginalised gender categories (see: '*Terminology*' in chapter one) enables an evaluation of the intersectional struggles of biphobia, homophobia, and transphobia, alongside sexism and misogyny, since such intersectional struggles can be seen to shape the ways in which sexual and gender minorities experience violence (Girshick 2009; Pyne 2011; Mortimer et al 2019). Furthermore, the application of a queer poststructuralist feminist approach within this chapter allows for explorations of experiences of sexual violence which fall outside of the typical script and public story of sexual violence – both of which perpetuate cis-heteronormative assumptions (Duke and Davidson 2009; Girshick 2009; Pyne 2011; Lennon and Mistler 2014; Donovan et al 2020; Rogers 2020).

Specifically, this chapter accounts for participants' experiences of sexual violence, and addresses their responses to, and framings of, the violence they have experienced. The chapter opens with a brief biographical overview of each sexual and/or gender minority participant, so as to provide context for the discussion that follows. Here, the specific forms of sexual violence disclosed by each participant during the interview process are outlined. The discussion itself is presented via four themes. An overview of each theme is provided below.

Power imbalances: Whilst power is an inherent feature of all forms of sexual violence, findings here suggest that there are *additional* imbalances of power operating within sexual and gender minorities' experiences of violence. Within this section, I consider how homo/biphobia and/or transphobia intersect with sexism and misogyny to create additional imbalances of power within sexual and gender minorities' experiences of sexual violence. Specifically, I consider unique forms of (identity-related) sexual violence. First, I account for

sexual violence motivated by homo/biphobic and/or transphobic beliefs in conversion practices, before considering experiences of objectification on the basis of gender identity, highlighting, in particular, trans women's vulnerability to sexual violence.

Self-blame and victim-blaming: In relation to their own experiences of sexual violence, participants discussed the harmful but widespread stereotype that victims/survivors are to blame for their own victimisation. Some participants explained how they had internalised this belief, leading to thoughts of self-blame and ultimately, resulting in feelings of guilt and shame. Others, however, acknowledged that sexual and gender minority victims/survivors may be susceptible to unique forms of victim-blaming relating to their identities. These forms of victim-blaming, maintained through cis-heteronormative assumptions, places blame upon the act of sexual violence, for perceivably causing an individual's minority sexual and/or gender identity. Participants discussed the impact, and harm, of these stereotypes, and these narratives are recounted here.

A hierarchy of severity: Within this section, I explore ideas surrounding a hierarchy of severity in relation to different acts of sexual violence. Here, I focus on the question of *what* constitutes sexual violence and additionally, I consider how normative representations of sexual violence – those, specifically, which are prioritised by the 'typical script' and 'real rape' stereotypes – may silence sexual and gender minority victims/survivors.

Victim/survivor dichotomy: Finally, I address participants' labelling of their own experiences, considering, in particular, participants' responses to the labels of victim and survivor, recognising the dichotomous relationship between these terms. Within this discussion, I highlight how rigid depictions of rape and sexual violence limit access to the labels of victim/survivor, and, furthermore, may be particularly inaccessible for sexual and gender minorities whose experiences of violence fall outside of the normative representation of sexual violence.

Participant overview

Participant pseudonym	Sexuality, gender and pronouns	Disclosed experiences of sexual violence
Eight	Queer (they/them)	Childhood sexual abuse (CSA), rape and sexual assault
Emma	Lesbian cis woman (she/her)	Sexual violence and abuse in a lesbian relationship. Emma also disclosed an experience of sexual assault outside of the relationship
Isla	Bisexual trans woman (she/her)	Rape
Maggie	Gay cis woman (she/her)	Corrective rape. Maggie also shared experiences of sexual harassment and assault
Frankie	Lesbian cis woman (she/her)	CSA
Ally	Bisexual cis woman (she/her)	Rape and sexual assault
Ashley	Bisexual, genderqueer (they/them)	CSA
Lucy	Lesbian cis woman (she/her)	CSA
Tracey	Lesbian cis woman (she/her)	Rape as a teenager (CSA), and sexual assault at work (as an adult)
Robyn*	Bisexual genderqueer/genderfluid (she/they)	CSA, rape, and domestic violence and abuse
Trudy	Lesbian cis woman (she/her)	CSA

Power imbalances: the intersections of homophobia/biphobia/transphobia and sexism and misogyny

Feminists agree that power serves as the root cause of violence. In patriarchal conditions, unequal power relations amongst men and women allow rates of violence against women to fester (Clark 1987; Bart and O'Brien 1985; Helliwell 2000; Rutherford 2011). The majority of participants within this research project had experienced violence perpetrated by men, and

so a feminist lens – which enables an exploration of sexual violence as *produced* and *sustained* by unequal, gendered power relations – is useful.

There are, however, often additional levels of vulnerability involved when considering sexual and gender minority victims/survivors' experiences of violence (Rymer and Cartei 2015; Langenderfer-Magruder 2016; Field and Rowlands 2020). Such vulnerabilities may exacerbate existing power imbalances amongst perpetrators and victims. Further, and as noted within chapter two, individuals in "possession of multiple marginalised identities" are at an increased risk of violence, due to structural "mechanisms of oppression" (Matsuzaka and Koch 2019, p.30). Hence, the intersections between these mechanisms of oppression – and their impact upon experiences of sexual violence – must be brought to attention, particularly when considering forms of violence *unique* to sexual and gender minority victims/survivors (Matsuzaka and Koch 2019).

Corrective rape: homophobia, biphobia, and power

The term 'corrective rape' first appeared in gender-based violence rhetoric in 2008, after the death of Eudy Simelane – a South African footballer, LGBTQ+ rights activist, and openly lesbian woman – who was gang-raped and murdered in April 2008 (Doan-Minh 2019). Her rape and murder are widely thought to have been motivated by an attempt to convert or punish her lesbian identity. Galop (2022) recognise forms of corrective sexual violence as part of a wider issue involving conversion therapies, defined as: "all practices that have the predetermined outcome to change, "cure", or suppress an individual or group of individuals' orientation or gender identity" (Galop 2022, online). Furthermore, corrective rape can additionally be understood under the umbrella of hate crime, defined as targeted violence or abuse towards someone because of who they are or who they are perceived to be (Galop 2023).

Within the context of corrective sexual violence against sexual and gender minorities, corrective rape may be used by perpetrators in order to "punish" these individuals, because of their perceived sexual orientation and/or due to their subversion of normative gender presentations (Lock Swarr 2012; Brownworth 2013; Doan-Minh 2019). In particular, research indicates that individuals who subvert the confines of *normative* womanhood are particularly vulnerable to this form of abuse (Galop 2023). In this sense, corrective rape becomes a tool through which perpetrators attempt to "teach" women (or individuals perceived to be

women) a lesson in how to become a "real woman", often framed, by perpetrators, as "doing a favour" for their victim – by teaching them heterosexuality and/or binary gender conformity (Doan-Minh 2019, p.167). For Maggie (40, gay cis woman), her experience of rape can be categorised in these terms. She describes her experience:

> "…he locked the door, and then I said no, I'm not interested in any of that […] I said that I was gay, I said that I had a girlfriend, and he said he was going to teach me to not be gay, and then it was quite a violent assault […] and he said 'there, now you know how to be straight', and left."
>
> Maggie (40, gay cis woman)

Maggie's experience of rape was fundamentally characterised by the perpetrator's focus on the corrective aspect of the encounter – on "teach[ing her] to not be gay", teaching her "how to be straight". As such, the homophobic intentions behind the assault were made clear; the use of verbal abuse prior to, during, and/or proceeding instances of corrective rapes further solidifies the homophobic intentions behind the abuse (Doan-Minh 2019). Moreover, Maggie recognised how her experience would be considered under the definition of corrective rape, and she named it as such:

> "…oh, it was a correctional rape, I know the term now. He was teaching me to be straight. He was teaching me that if I had a good dick then I'd know."
>
> (Maggie, 40, gay cis woman)

Maggie's experience highlights how corrective rape can be used as a "weapon" in attempts to instil cis-heteropatriarchal ideals onto those who defy sexuality and gender expectations (Lock Swarr 2012; Brownworth 2013; Doan-Minh 2019). The idea that a woman may be cured by "a good dick" is indicative of such heteronormative assumptions, and further reinforces the belief that heterosexuality is something that can be taught. The specific power imbalance involved in experiences of corrective rape can therefore be explored through the structurally oppressive forces of heteronormativity and heteropatriarchy. Indeed, Doan-Minh (2019, p.169) describes corrective rape as an act of "political, systemic, group-based violence", and,

accordingly, suggests that such instances of rape must be understood alongside a recognition of how power is unequally distributed across groups within society.

Maggie recognised the wider context of the structural power imbalances at play within her experience of corrective rape. She explained how she felt that her experience was part of a wider issue:

> "…mine was very much a power, and it was a correctional rape, and it was someone who was homophobic. It very much sits within that patriarchal problem."
>
> (Maggie, 40, gay cis woman)

She went onto explain how her rejection of the perpetrator's advances further demonstrated the imbalance of power within the setting:

> "…erm […] I think also that idea of he tried to flirt, and I shut him down, and the power play there, of, 'no, I'm older than you and cooler than you, you should have wanted this, and you're giving me that – [being a lesbian] – as the reason'."
>
> (Maggie, 40, gay cis woman)

Here, Maggie explains her experience of the perpetrator's sense of entitlement – specifically, his sense of entitlement in relation to having sex with her. She describes how shutting down his advances led to an additional power play, particularly because she had explained her sexuality and her disinterest in having sex with him. The perpetrator's reaction is reminiscent of Doan-Minh's (2019) exploration of perpetrators' motivations of corrective rape. Doan-Minh (2019) explains how rapists committing acts of corrective rape often absolve themselves of any culpability or wrongdoing, instead placing blame onto the victim due to their divergence from heterosexist norms of sexuality (Rivera-Fuentas and Birke 2001; Doan-Minh 2019). As Maggie suggests when recounting her experience, the notion that she "should have wanted" to have sex with the perpetrator is indicative of the heteronormative belief that one's supposedly *deviant* sexuality may be "cured" by "a good dick".

The experience of corrective sexual violence can be situated within a system of compulsory heterosexuality, where heterosexuality is "imposed, managed, organized, propagandized,

and maintained by force" (Rich 1980, p. 648). As Rich (1980) asserts, lesbian existence, within this system, is rendered an unnatural sexual *preference,* as opposed to heterosexuality, which is deemed the innate sexual orientation of women. It is precisely because of the institution of compulsory heterosexuality – which exists and operates alongside heteropatriarchy – that perpetrators of corrective sexual violence can therefore absolve themselves from any guilt or responsibility resulting from the act of violence (Rich 1980; Rivera-Fuentas and Birke 2001; Doan-Minh 2019). Indeed, as was the case within Maggie's experience, perpetrators of corrective sexual violence can make claims to the continuation of these systems and the normative sexual and gender identities they uphold.

Corrective sexual violence, then, is entrenched within unequal power dynamics – to the extent that such forms of violence occur within a system of "pervasive prejudice and discrimination against non-heterosexual and gender nonconforming individuals" (Doan-Minh 2019, p.180). Such prejudices are so deeply ingrained that sexual and gender minority victims/survivors of violence may consider the possibility that their experiences of violence were motivated by discrimination, even when such motivations are not made explicitly clear by perpetrators. Tracey (40, lesbian cis woman) questioned the motivations of the perpetrator of her assault:

> "I guess there was a question of, in the back of my mind, has he done this because he's trying to prove something because I'm gay. That kind of flipped through my mind."
>
> Tracey (40, lesbian cis woman)

Whilst the perpetrator of Tracey's assault did not, through verbal cues, give reason to suggest the assault was motivated by homophobia and/or a desire to "cure" her sexuality, Tracey demonstrates how such fears are often ingrained within the minds of sexual and gender minorities, and, furthermore, highlights the pervasiveness of the prejudice and discrimination faced by sexual and gender minorities. Indeed, the prevalence of corrective sexual violence is demonstrated by Galop's (2022, online) recent findings – 23.5% of the 935 LGBTQ+ individuals they surveyed had experienced sexual violence which "they believed was intended to convert or punish their LGBT+ identity".

Eight (35, queer) made similar references to correctional forms of violence. They stated:

> "So many queer and trans people have experienced sexual assault, and I've often wondered whether my queerness, which was visible throughout my childhood, you know, I was one of those kids where people always asked if I was a boy or a girl, I wonder whether some of my visible queerness, was like, a beacon to perpetrators, or made men want to, kind of like, impose a sort of heterosexuality on me, by like, I dunno…"
>
> (Eight, 35, queer)

Like Tracey, Eight's experiences of violence had not explicitly been motivated by homophobia or transphobia, yet they recognised how being *visibly* queer might have increased their vulnerability to corrective forms of violence. Eight specifically referenced the ways in which acts of violence towards sexual and gender minorities may be motivated by a desire to *impose* heterosexuality upon them, thereby highlighting the pervasive ideology of compulsory heterosexuality (Rich 1980). Eight also made note of the high rates of sexual violence amongst queer and trans people, further demonstrating LGBTQ+ individuals' vulnerability to violence, and, moreover, showcasing sexual and gender minorities' vulnerability to unique forms of identity-related abuse (Ristock and Timbang 2005; Stotzer 2009; Rymer and Cartei 2015; Donovan et al 2024).

Furthermore, whilst Ashley (65, bisexual, genderqueer) had not experienced corrective sexual violence, they discussed the stereotypes surrounding bisexual and lesbian women and their experiences of corrective sexual violence, further emphasising the pervasiveness of the issue within the LGBTQ+ community:

> "…for some women being bisexual, there are some men that think, oh if I fuck you you're gonna be, you know you're not gonna wanna sleep with women, you're gonna be okay, you're gonna be fixed and, you know…or lesbians, or, you know, some men have this bizarre idea that if they just had sex, you know, if they just had sex with a man then they'd be, in their eyes, fixed, which is utter crap, you know."
>
> (Ashley, 65, bisexual, genderqueer)

Here, Ashley emphasises the point, made earlier by Maggie (40, gay cis woman), that the motivation behind corrective sexual violence is to "cure" a victim of their non-normative sexuality and/or gender. Specifically, Ashley notes how these acts of corrective sexual violence are, oftentimes, gendered - highlighting, again, the intersecting structures of compulsory heterosexuality and cis-heteropatriarchy (Rich 1980). In addition to this, Ashley's point that some men believe sleeping with a bisexual women can "fix" them – or "cure" their desire to sleep with women – is supported by Johnson and Grove's (2017) findings; they argue that corrective sexual violence against bisexual women often involves attempts to force victims to "choose a side" or "commit" to a monosexual identity. Such attempts are reliant upon monosexist beliefs surrounding sexuality – beliefs which rely upon stereotypes of bisexual identities as false, confused, and uncertain (Rust 2000; Johnson and Grove 2017; Watson et al 2021).

Instances of corrective sexual violence – as well as the *threat* or *fear* that homophobic, biphobic, or transphobic intentions may be the motivations of perpetrators – therefore create an additional imbalance of power, one sustained not only through unequal gender relations, but, moreover, through cis-heteronormative expectations of sexuality and gender presentations (Rich 1980; Doan-Minh 2019) Such expectations, whilst rendering non-cis/hetero presentations of sexuality and/or gender as *deviant* and *non-normative,* also give credence to the belief that such identities are *curable.* For sexual and gender minority survivors, then, the threat, and reality, of corrective sexual violence comes with additional power structures to navigate.

Transmisogyny, cisgenderism, and sexual validation

An additional and unique imbalance of power was identified through Isla's (26, bisexual trans woman) experience of rape. Isla's experience highlights trans women's vulnerability to sexual violence, and furthermore, illustrates the intersectional struggles of transphobia and misogyny (transmisogyny) (Serano 2007; Matsuzaka and Koch 2019). Isla explained that when she was "grappling with [her] gender", she found validation from sexual encounters, predominantly with cis, heterosexual men. She would "go on hook ups quite a lot", in order to fulfil this desire. Hook ups – defined here as a meeting for sex – may be facilitated online

or through apps specifically designed for the purpose of 'hooking up' (Galop 2023). Isla explains her involvement in hook ups further:

> "…it [could] be difficult to find avenues through which I could sort of feel my gender being validated, […] so it made me feel attractive, for example, not as a guy but as a girl, so that was, you know, it was an avenue for me to experience that […] it was one way that I could use where it would be completely discrete, cos a lot of these guys that I was hooking up with, you know, wanted complete discretion anyway so you know it was very helpful for me with allowing me to remain in the closest."
>
> (Isla, 26, bisexual trans woman)

Here, Isla describes her need for sexual validation, specifically, in relation to her ability to be perceived as a woman, and, furthermore, as an attractive woman. Isla's need for validation when entering into sexual encounters, or hook ups, meant that a specific power imbalance was present when she was raped, one that meant Isla particularly vulnerable:

> "…I was going into someone else's place, with the understanding that I was in the closet, and I had needs out of this encounter and he very much didn't, so I suppose there was a big power difference there."
>
> (Isla, 26, bisexual trans woman)

Matsuzaka and Koch (2019) note the impact of internalised transmisogyny and cissexism for trans feminine victims of abuse. In their study – which centred trans feminine victim/survivors of sexual violence – they highlight how passing was considered "a desirable trait" by the majority of participants (Matsuzaka and Koch 2019, p.41). For several participants within their study, "passing, as validated by cis male sexual attention, appeared to be a means of gaining validation regarding their femininity" (Matsuzaka and Koch 2019, p.41). Indeed, this is reminiscent of Isla's desire to engage in sexual encounters with cis men. Engaging in hook ups with cis, heterosexual men enabled Isla to express her femininity – to be *treated* and *desired* as a woman was a need for Isla within these encounters.

Structural power dynamics may be uncovered here. Firstly, the desire to pass, according to Matsuzaka and Koch (2019, p.31), is layered in transphobic and cissexist assumptions

pertaining to the ideal presentation of gender, "in alignment with societal expectations of gender". Further, the specific need to be perceived as feminine by cis, heterosexual men, in particular, may, in part, be understood through the conception of the male gaze. Lefebvre (2020) explores how pressures to conform to standards of femininity and beauty, produced and sustained through the male gaze, can be especially harmful for trans women in their navigation of societal gender expectations, alongside experiences of gender dysphoria. Lefebvre (2020) explores this connection between societal expectations and dysphoria, highlighting how trans women may feel a specific pressure to conform to cis-heteropatriarchal standards of femininity, so as to avoid the potential dysphoria that may accompany being misgendered in everyday life. However, Lefebvre (2020, p.92) also recognises the potential for the male gaze (in some contexts) to act as an affirming, validating, and overall, a somewhat positive experience for trans women – insofar as experiences of the male gaze may, within cis-heteropatriarchal conditions, be categorised as "an essential experience of womanhood", and therefore, may facilitate feelings of validation in relation to one's gender. For Isla, a desire to be validated in her gender expression, specifically, by cis, heterosexual men, meant that the male gaze was something she sought within hook ups.

Yet, conceptions of the *affirming* principles of the male gaze must be understood alongside the potential *dangers* associated with this tool of cis-heteropatriarchal control. In particular, Lefebvre (2020, p.71) acknowledges the unique threat of violence trans women may experience when 'visible' under the male gaze, "in the sense that they are identified by others as being transgender". Isla's experience echoes this:

> "I think the way he was looking at it was really, I was just a body to use, one that might, you know, be especially exciting to him, because it's by all accounts a female body…and so, yeah."
>
> (Isla, 26, bisexual trans woman)

Here, Isla addresses that her body might have been viewed as "especially exciting" to the perpetrator – as a body which is "by all accounts" female. This alludes to issues of sexualisation, fetishisation and objectification that trans women often experience, as explored in chapter three. Several studies report high rates of sexual objectification and/or

fetishisation of trans women; being perceived as exotic and/or as sexual objects, for instance, were found to be common experiences for trans women (Ellis, Bailey and McNeil 2016; Flores et al 2018; Matsuzaka and Koch 2019; Ussher et al 2020). Isla's understanding of her experience of rape, from the perceived standpoint of the perpetrator – as being "just a body to use" – is illustrative of this particular vulnerability, insofar as it demonstrates the objectification of female bodies, and trans female bodies, in particular.

The imbalances of power present within Isla's experience were therefore a product of structurally oppressive forces – both in terms of the (trans)misogynistic realities of the male gaze, as well as due to the cissexist, gendered expectations that such a gaze make significant. As Isla highlighted, the imbalance of *needs* within the encounter made for a considerable imbalance of power. This, coupled with Isla's vulnerability to feelings of guilt and shame surrounding the experience of hooking up (outlined below), meant that such feelings were transferred onto her experience of rape.

Self-blame and victim-blaming: the attribution of blame to victims/survivors of sexual violence

As noted by Fontes (2004), the belief that individuals are somehow at fault for *inviting*, or *causing* the violence they have experienced is a direct manifestation of patriarchal conditions and the stigmatisation of victims/survivors (Gavey 2005; Hawkey et al 2021). Indeed, victims/survivors' internalisation of this belief is, additionally, part of a wider issue within society pertaining to the representation of, and reaction to, violence against women:

> "Attributing sexual violence to one's own behaviour or feeling as though it is deserved reflects dominant cultural discourses about sexual violence against women, resulting in feelings of shame and guilt."
>
> (Hawkey et al 2021, p.3202)

For sexual and gender minority victims/survivors, cis-heteronormative assumptions surrounding sexual violence may cause heightened patterns of self-blame (McClennen 2005; Donovan and Barnes 2020; Ovesen 2023), and, furthermore, may result in victims/survivors experiencing unique forms of victim-blaming. Hence, this section attends to participants'

thoughts surrounding their victimisation, the levels of blame they attributed to themselves, and, furthermore, the types of victim-blaming they experienced (or *expected* to experience).

Self-blame

Isla explained how, in the aftermath of being raped, she felt guilty and blamed herself for *"the situation [she] put [herself] in".* She said:

> "I suppose I felt guilty because of the situation I put myself in, which again, you know like two years on or whatever it's like, 'Isla, you naïve, naïve idiot'. You shouldn't feel that way, of course, but yeah…"
>
> (Isla, 26, bisexual trans woman)

In line with this, Isla also explained her reluctance to disclose the rape to friends, family, and professionals, due to the feelings of guilt and shame associated with her engagement in hook ups. She said:

> "…it's a combination of the guilt of it but also the fact that […] it was a hook up, it was very like, sleazy, and it just felt like it was already my dirty secret…"
>
> (Isla, 26, bisexual trans woman)

Isla recognised the potential dangers associated with hook ups, and, consequently, blamed herself for being, as she describes, "naïve" for entering into such situations – further solidifying her feelings of guilt and shame. This, coupled with the fact that, at the time of the rape, Isla was not out, meant that she was reluctant to disclose her experience to friends, family members, and professionals – reinscribing the secrecy of her engagement in hook ups. The layers of shame felt by Isla are, in this sense, reminiscent of Oversen's (2023) exploration of the "shame of exposure" felt by closeted LGBTQ+ victims/survivors of IPV. However, there were additional factors contributing to Isla's sense of shame. Notably, due to her desire to receive male validation of her gender expression and femininity through sexual encounters, Isla was forced to enter into high-risk, vulnerable situations. This, in conjunction with the need to keep hookups private and discreet - a requirement of both Isla herself as well as the men

she was meeting - further increased her vulnerability, and as such, contributed to her feelings of guilt and shame.

Isla further explained how patterns of self-blame meant that she did not report the rape to the police:

> "I basically didn't have a leg to stand on legally to accuse someone who I'd specifically gone to a hook up with, d'you know what I mean? That feels like implied consent which, like I say even though I'd made myself clear about where my boundaries lay, still, yeah, it was just the situation of it felt just sleazy enough for anything that happens to me therefore is just like almost deserved, you know what I mean."
>
> (Isla, 26, bisexual trans woman)

Here, Isla suggests that she would not be believed, or, moreover, would be *blamed* for the violence she experienced, due to the fact that the rape occurred during a hook up. Isla's feelings of guilt and shame surrounding the rape were therefore not only limited to *her* interpretation of the situation, but, moreover, she recognised how such beliefs may be shared – and legitimatised – by others.

Crosby and Pitts (2007) suggest that trans women may be at a higher chance of entering into risky and potentially dangerous sexual encounters due to cisnormative standards of femininity which trans women are expected to meet. Such standards of femininity are cemented through cis-heteropatriarchal interpretations of attractiveness, determined, as discussed earlier, through the male gaze (Lefebvre 2020). The women in Crosby and Pitts' (2007, p.44) study, for instance, felt a need to be loved and desired by men, stating that it made them feel more "girlish", and, moreover, helped them to feel accepted in their gender expression. Indeed, Isla experienced similar thoughts and feelings surrounding sexual encounters with cis, heterosexual men during hook ups. For Isla, opportunities for gender affirmation, during the early days of her transition, were significantly limited, due to the fact that she was not out to friends and family. Secretive hook ups with cis, heterosexual men therefore functioned as an avenue for gender expression and affirmation. However, when this avenue of gender affirmation coincided with Isla's experience of violence, the shame attached to the process of hooking up – coupled with the shame surrounding the fact that at

the time, she was closeted – resulted in Isla experiencing this unique form of self-blame in response to her experience.

Emma also expressed thoughts of self-blame. Specifically, she blamed herself for not leaving the abusive relationship she was in sooner. She said:

> "I definitely have like a 'victim-blamey thing' of just like I should've known straight away and left…and so many people aren't believed on like, really bad things and I stayed for a year and a half, so people see like if it was that bad you would have gone, and it, yeah."
>
> (Emma, 22, lesbian cis woman)

Emma believed that because she stayed in the relationship whilst the abuse continued, her experience may be perceived as not *"that bad".* As explored in greater depth in an upcoming section of this chapter (see: *Woman-to-woman violence and the myth of 'real'* rape), the fact that Emma's experience of violence occurred in a lesbian relationship meant that naming and recognising the abuse proved difficult. This, indeed, placed limitations on her ability to leave the relationship. Emma not only struggled to name and acknowledge the violence she experienced, but furthermore, she compared her experience to those she considered to be more *severe* – those forms of violence centred within the public story and typical script of sexual violence (Mortimer et al 2019; Donovan et al 2024). Hence, the blame Emma attributed to herself for not leaving was, in large part, a result of the pervasive assumption that lesbian relationship abuse is less *"bad"* than abuse within heterosexual relationships.

Blame for not being 'out'

Whilst both Isla and Emma attributed blame to themselves for seemingly *deserving* (in Isla's case) or *prolonging* (in Emma's case) the violence they experienced – and therefore, their experiences of self-blame mirror those presented in current sociological discourse (Gavey 2005; Hawkey et al 2021) – Maggie experienced an alternative form of self-blame. For Maggie, the fact that she was not out when she was raped led to complicated feelings of self-blame surrounding other people's reactions to her experience. She explained:

> "I guess I blamed myself for not being out for not giving people the full context."

(Maggie, 40, gay cis woman)

Furthermore, when discussing reactions from family members and her partner at the time, Maggie explained how she was not believed after disclosing the rape:

> "I told my girlfriend what had happened, she didn't believe it was sexual assault, she'd thought I'd done it on purpose and dumped me […] Because I hadn't come out, and it was, in their mind, sex with a man, maybe I'd been confusing, or given a confusing message, and things like that. And I wasn't ready then to describe the details of being grabbed round the neck or clothes ripped off me or being flung over and pinned down. None of that's consent. By any description."

(Maggie, 40, gay cis woman)

Maggie went onto explain her feelings surrounding the lack of consent in the encounter, suggesting that family members and her partner may have been more understanding if they knew she was gay:

> "I think in my head [back] then, I don't think that now, that if they'd understood that I was queer, that I was gay, then there wouldn't have been any consent, or there wouldn't have been a confusion of consent, not that they used that terminology then, it would be more the 'well you wanted it' or 'you must have known what was going to happen', so if they'd understood my identity…"

(Maggie, 40, gay cis woman)

As explained earlier, the harmful assumption that victims/survivors are somehow responsible for the violence they have endured – insofar as they are perceived to have invited the violence they have experienced in some way – is rooted in dominant social beliefs surrounding sexual violence (Hawkey et al 2021). For Maggie, however, feelings of self-blame were attributed to her not being out, and consequently, not being able to explain her non-consent, or defend herself against these harmful rape myths. Maggie's experience of self-blame, in relation to not being out, suggests that rape myths of sexual violence – which centre an active male perpetrator and 'passive' female (the typical script of sexual violence) – as sex 'gone wrong', were a barrier to disclosure; she thought people would not believe her but would, instead,

rely upon stereotypes which suggest rape is sex that has gone "a little too far" (Ellison and Munro 2009; Mortimer et al 2019, p.6). Maggie therefore felt responsible for not coming out sooner. She knew that because she was perceived as straight, other people's reactions to the rape were likely to rely on heteronormative rape myths in understanding her experience.

Cis-heteronormative victim-blaming and challenges to the legitimacy of a victim/survivors' identity

Whilst some participants therefore internalised blame for their experience(s) of sexual violence, others spoke about the victim-blaming they received (or thought they *might* receive) from others. Here, a unique form of victim-blaming was identified – that which pertains to a victim/survivors' sexual/gender identities, and the legitimacy of these identities. Specifically, several participants discussed the harmful assumption that experiences of sexual violence and abuse can *cause* non-cis/heterosexual identities. As will be discussed in this section, such stereotypes produce unique barriers to disclosure and, furthermore, to identifying and labelling one's experience as sexual violence.

Maggie, for instance, noted how such stereotypes were a significant barrier to her coming out after the rape. She said:

> "Then there was the concern that they'd think my identity was as a result of the rape, like a shunning of all men…"
>
> (Maggie, 40, gay cis woman)

Hence, not only did Maggie have to contend with disbelief surrounding her experience of rape – as outlined in the previous section – but, moreover, she had to prepare for the *additional* scepticism towards her sexuality.

Similarly, Frankie (24, lesbian cis woman) feared negative reactions to her sexuality after her experience of childhood sexual abuse (CSA). Frankie stated:

> "I felt sometimes like other people would use it against me in saying that's why you're gay, but I know I kissed girls in infant school when everyone was running around kissing boys, that was before it happened, and I'm glad I have those memories because when I felt like 'oh these people would say this', I'm like, well I know that even before

> I knew I was attracted to girls I'd want to kiss them in the playground, so I know that that's just a part of me, but I'm also aware that a lot of people would try … would be homophobic and think that being gay is a reaction to things."
>
> (Frankie, 24, lesbian cis woman)

Here, Frankie echoes Maggie's point that people may believe her sexuality is a *result* of the abuse she experienced. Nevertheless, Frankie reckons with this by taking comfort in early memories of expressions of her sexuality. Todahl et al (2009) note how such harmful assumptions pertaining to one's sexuality and/or gender identity produce additional barriers to support (discussed further in chapter six). Yet, it is clear that such issues are not limited to support services. Rather, these permeate wider social settings, to the extent that disclosure to friends and family may result in such negative reactions. In regard to victim-blaming, such beliefs indicate a potential *shift* in attributions of blame. In this case, whilst the blame is still primarily placed upon the victim, an additional level of blame is attributed to the *act* of violence itself, for the perceived effect upon, or *cause* of, a victim's sexual and/or gender identity.

Eight expressed similar concerns with regard to the perception of their gender and experience of abuse. They stated:

> "Because I had early childhood sexual assault, you know, there's some schools of thought that think that by escaping womanhood that I can somehow escape my traumatic history, or that that has sort of like influenced my experienced of my gender."
>
> (Eight, 35, queer)

Here, Eight expresses similar concerns to those shared by Frankie and Maggie – that their experience of abuse may be perceived to have *impacted* their sexuality and/or gender in some way. As Eight acknowledges, such stereotypes exist in some schools of thought and are rooted in cis-heteronormative beliefs that non-hetero-and-cis identities are *abnormal* or *devious* and must have, therefore, been *caused* by something (Todahl et al 2009). Subsequently, sexual and gender minorities may face this additional form of victim-blaming, whereby blame is attributed not only to victims/survivors themselves (as established in the wider sociological

literature) but also, to the *act* of violence in perceivably *causing* or *alternating* their sexuality and/or gender. Hence, this unique form of victim-blaming – which rests upon homo/biphobic and/or transphobic assumptions – serves to undermine and challenge a victim/survivors' account of their own sexual and/or gender identity.

Questioning a victim/survivors' reaction to violence

Tracey also expressed concerns about disclosing her experience of sexual assault for fear of negative reactions relating to her sexuality. However, she raised a different concern to those shared by participants above. Tracey worried that people would think she was overreacting to the violence she experienced. She stated:

> "I suppose I'd kind of got in the back of my mind, like I say, do people think I'm making too much of a deal about it, do people think I'm making more of a deal because I'm not, you know, I don't have any contact with men…I suppose there's just lots of different things that run through your mind, really."
>
> (Tracey, 40, lesbian cis woman)

Tracey's worry that people might think she was "*making more of a deal*" of her experience, because she does not have contact with men in a sexual capacity, meant that she was reluctant to speak about the assault. Tracey's fears are reminiscent of those felt by Eight, Frankie, and Maggie, to the extent that each of these participants believed that external responses to their experiences may be focused, unnecessarily, upon their sexuality and/or gender, in order to explain the impact of the assaults. However, for Tracey, blame may not only be attributed to *her*, but also, to her *identity as a lesbian* – in particular, this perceived *exaggeration* of (or overreaction to) the assault may be attributed to her sexuality and lack of sexual interest in men. Such a belief is reminiscent of negative social attitudes directed towards lesbians – those, in particular, which involve the stereotype of lesbians as 'man-haters' (Pharr 2000). Hence, when deciding whether or not to disclose the assault, Tracey had to additionally consider the potential for her experience to be misinterpreted due to her identity.

Whilst participants' experiences of blame therefore varied, it is clear the sexual and gender minority victims/survivors who participated in this research encountered unique forms of

self-blame and victim-blaming related to their sexual and/or gender identity. These forms of blame can be situated as a direct result of cis-heteronormative assumptions – whether they be in relation to the perceived *severity* of violence, or, moreover, in relation to the *legitimacy* of a victim/survivors' identity. To further consider the impacts of cis-heteronormativity upon understandings of sexual violence, the next section contends with the ways in which rape myths – and the typical script – perpetuate a *hierarchy of severity.*

A hierarchy of severity

Dominant perceptions of what constitutes sexual violence, and, specifically, perceptions of what is considered to be *severe* when comparing different forms of sexual violence, can, for some victims/survivors, heighten feelings of self-blame, doubt, and guilt – both in terms of *naming* the violence one has experienced and, as explored in the following chapter (chapter six), in terms of a victim/survivor's access (or lack thereof) to support. The framing of sexual violence in hierarchical terms, whereby rape by (cis, heterosexual) men is considered to be the most severe act of sexual violence, can, therefore, have significant implications for victims/survivors of sexual violence whose experiences fall outside of this script (Duke and Davidson 2009; Girshick 2009; Pyne 2011; Lennon and Mistler 2014; Rogers 2020; Donovan et al 2024). Furthermore, rigid understandings of what constitutes 'real rape' – instances of rape which happen within very specific circumstances involving sudden, surprise attacks by strangers – add an additional barrier to the process of recognising and naming sexual violence. The majority of participants within this research made note of a hierarchy of acts, the results of which were particularly damaging to those victims/survivors whose experiences were framed as less 'severe' than others (Kelly 2013).

Woman-to-woman violence and the myth of 'real' rape

For Emma (22, lesbian cis woman), the fact that the perpetrator of the abuse she had experienced was a woman meant that there were particular stereotypes to grapple with when naming and addressing her experience of sexual violence. As explored in chapter one, harmful stereotypes surrounding woman-to-woman abuse – whereby it is thought of as less violent and framed through the lens of 'cat fighting' or as 'bad sex' – can result in victims/survivors of such abuse failing to recognise their victimisation (Hassouneh and Glass 2008; Hester et al 2012; Mortimer et al 2019; Donovan et al 2024). As discussed in the previous section, Emma's

experience of self-blame was further perpetuated by her belief that she could have left the abusive relationship she was in sooner. When comparing her own experience to those of other victims of domestic abuse, Emma stated:

> "I think it's just mainly that cos some people have really terrible experiences that completely, they couldn't do anything about, and are like super traumatised by that, but I have trauma from a thing where I could have walked away…"
>
> (Emma, 22, lesbian cis woman)

Here, Emma suggests that her experience was somehow less severe than those of other survivors. We can assume, given the public story of domestic abuse, that Emma's interpretation of people's "really terrible experiences" refers to domestic abuse within heterosexual relationships, since, as Emma explained, such instances of abuse are the primary focus of media representations of domestic violence (Donovan and Barnes 2019; Donovan et al 2024). As such, Emma's belief that she "could have walked away" earlier from the abusive situation may stem from the harmful stereotypes, outlined above, that surround woman-to-woman abuse – the idea that women are "too sweet" to commit acts of violence renders experiences of woman-to-woman violence invisible, or at very least, positions them as less *severe* than acts of violence perpetrated by men (Mortimer et al 2019, p.342). Not only, then, do such stereotypes cause a reluctance to *name* the violence one is experiencing, but, moreover, these stereotypes may go one step further in causing victims/survivors to *blame* themselves for their experience. For Emma, the belief that her experience of abuse was less severe than those presented by the typical script of sexual violence (and the public story of domestic violence) may be a result of these stereotypes (Mortimer et al 2019; Donovan and Barnes 2019; Donovan et al 2024).

Furthermore, Emma's ability to recognise other people's victimisation whilst minimising her own is reminiscent of Phillips' (2000) findings from interviews with women in hetero-relational encounters. Phillips (2000) notes, for instance, how the majority of women in her study avoided naming their experiences of violence as 'abuse', – or naming their experiences of *sexual* violence as 'rape' – yet they were able to apply the same terms to the experiences of others.

Whilst Phillips (2000) identifies a pattern amongst survivors, in relation to their ability to label their experiences of violence, Emma faced an additional barrier to acknowledging the abuse she experienced – notably, her ideas surrounding sexual violence had been founded through the typical script of violence, and subsequently, were implicated by heteronormative assumptions (Mortimer et al 2019). Emma explained how, initially, she was reluctant to contact me and express their interest in participating; Emma noted how the project used the word 'violent' and, according to her, her experience did not fit within this category. As discussed above, the idea that some forms of sexual violence are more severe or serious than others is rooted in heteronormative assumptions; such assumptions perpetuate a "hierarchy of acts [of sexual violence] ordered by perceived seriousness" (Mortimer et al 2019, p.341). Within this, both vaginal and anal rape by a penis are positioned at the top of the hierarchy of severity, with additional forms of sexual violence and assault being labelled less severe in comparison (Girshick 2002; Kelly 2013; Mortimer et al 2019; Donovan and Barnes 2019; Donovan et al 2024). Emma's experience, and her framing of the abuse she experienced as nonviolent, may be a result of this script surrounding the perceived hierarchy of severity. There is, however, an additional issue to be discussed here, pertaining to the myth that all rapes and sexual assaults must fit within a particular framework of what constitutes acts of 'violence', in order to be considered under the category of sexual violence.

The myth of 'real' rape: continued

As has been established, rape myths place blame upon victims; rape is, in this sense, often framed in terms of sex 'gone too far', or, moreover, as an act brought on by, or caused by, victims/survivors themselves (Ellison and Munro 2009; Mortimer et al 2019). Subsequently, victims and victims/survivors often internalise such beliefs, leading to instances of self-blame (Ellison and Munro 2009; Mortimer et al 2019). The additional bind, pertaining to perceptions of what constitutes 'real rape' – and therefore, what constitutes real sexual violence – further exacerbates self-blaming beliefs. Furthermore, as discussed through the lens of Emma's experience, sexual and gender minority victims/survivors may be particularly vulnerable to the internalisation of self-blaming beliefs, due to their experiences often falling outside of the typical script of sexual violence due to its cis-heteronormative underpinnings.

The dominant representation of rape has been one characterised by "a sudden, surprise attack by an unknown, often armed, sexual deviant" (Ellison and Munro 2010, p.783). Such

forms of rape are expected to occur "in an isolated, but public, location", and victims are expected to "sustain physical injury, either as a result of the violence of the perpetrator or as a consequence of [their] efforts to resist the attack" (Ellison and Munro 2010, p.783). Whilst these stereotypes surrounding rape and sexual assault are unrepresentative – the majority of perpetrators are known to the victim, and many victims and victims/survivors do not physically resist – such stereotypes are, nevertheless, ingrained within social understandings of violence (Ellison and Munro 2010).

Maggie, whose experience of violence fell somewhat within this dominant depiction of rape, noted how attributing levels of seriousness or severity to individual acts of sexual violence may be harmful to victims and victims/survivors overall. Maggie explains:

> "…whilst mine might be the traditional view of a rape, that doesn't mean any of the other rapes aren't included, it's all violent, because it's all without consent."
>
> (Maggie, 40, gay cis woman)

Here, Maggie addresses a crucial point in understanding all acts of sexual assault and rape as violent, highlighting how sexual encounters without consent are inherently violent. Yet, whilst Maggie acknowledges the pitfalls of determining a hierarchy amongst acts of sexual violence, the dominant stereotype of 'real rape' still persists.

Indeed, such myths may result in victim/survivors deeming their experiences 'less severe', or, moreover, less violent than others. As Emma noted, her experience of violence fell outside of this depiction; the perpetrator of the violence she experienced was her girlfriend at the time, and rather than using physical restraint, her girlfriend used coercive tactics of abuse, telling Emma that if she did not have sex with her, then she did not love her. This mirrors Donovan et al's (2024) findings pertaining to the 'sexual contract' within intimate relationships. Donovan et al (2024) highlight that when the desire for sex is unequal between partners, the existence of a 'sexual contract' suggests that one partner may engage in unwanted sex due to a sense of duty, and, moreover, in order to meet the needs of their partner. For Donovan et al (2024, p.162), the potential for the 'sexual contract' to be used, within abusive relationships, as a form of control and coercion, thereby "…highlight[s] the limitations of consent, as it is legally defined, and the tensions between the sexual contract and more explicit, affirmative understandings of consent". Emma's experience therefore showcases the

harms of the 'real rape' stereotype, in the sense that its existence determines what constitutes a non-consensual sexual encounter, and consequently, less explicit abuses of content are silenced.

Several other participants also suggested that their experiences of violence fell outside of 'real rape' script. Isla, for instance, noted how her understanding of rape prior to her experience made her question her own experience:

> "I've always, in my mind, and I know it isn't like this, but in my mind, it was still always like, well rape is, you know, a very violent affair, you know surely you should be screaming no, being forced down, but instead it was pretty much silent…"
>
> (Isla, 26, bisexual trans woman)

Likewise, Ally (28, bisexual cis woman) explained how her experience differed from the typical depiction of sexual violence:

> "I think there was an element of like…while obviously there was kind of like coercion and alcohol and I didn't consent, I think there was an element of like… it wasn't really violent and it wasn't like properly forced, in like, in terms of like, you know, I did say no to some things, I kind of like acquiesced, or like you know went along with others."
>
> (Ally, 28, bisexual cis woman)

Here, Ally can be seen to be using strategies to "control the damage" done by her experience – attributing blame to herself by stressing the fact that she "went along" with some things (Phillips 2000, p.150). Phillips (2000) suggests that such strategies of damage control are often used by women who have experienced male violence – limiting their own claims to victimisation by assuming their complicity in "making things go badly" (Phillips 2000, p.150).

Similarly, Eight recognised the difficulty in naming their experiences of rape, highlighting how their experiences were not represented by narratives centring surprise attacks by a stranger. They explained:

> "if you had asked me that at the age of 25 I would have said that I'd never been raped, cos I'd never been violently, stranger raped in an alleyway…"
>
> (Eight, 35, queer)

Eight went onto explain their reluctancy to call one specific instance of abuse rape:

> "I would never have called it rape up until that point, cos he was my friend, we were on holiday, I was flirty, I was blowing hot and cold with him, I wanted attention, and then I didn't wanna sleep with him, and you know I just took all that responsibility…"
>
> (Eight, 35, queer)

Like Ally, Eight uses strategies of damage control here to distance themself from their victimisation – using self-blaming thought patterns and taking responsibility and blame for their experience of violence. Whilst Eight went onto say that they now recognise the experience as rape, it remains clear that acknowledging and naming experiences of sexual violence as rape is a nuanced and oftentimes challenging process for survivors.

Indeed, Robyn (35, bisexual, genderqueer) explains the difficulties she experienced in using the term rape:

> "I think words like rape make sense in a…and are kind of…they come with very specific contexts. So I, for instance, at 16, didn't understand that that term would apply to what had happened to me in a relationship, or that that term could include something, you know…grey areas that could include, you know, not violence, not even, you know, so I found it very confusing to…I didn't want to use a word that I was attributing to other people's experiences, or to a certain level of experience, shall we say, that, yeah it was quite hard to find a term…"
>
> (Robyn, 35, bisexual, genderqueer)

Robyn's point that they did not want to use a word synonymous with a "certain level of experience" also likely refers to the 'real rape' script (Ellison and Munro 2010). Robyn addressed how she was unaware, at age 16, that 'rape' could include anything other than the stereotypical acts of violence perpetuated by the rigid image of what constitutes '*real rape*'. Like many of the participants within this research project, Robyn was reluctant to use the term rape to describe their experience. Robyn's fear of "attributing to other people's experiences" by using the term is also indicative of this, and, furthermore, links to ideas explored earlier in relation to victims/survivors' being able to name other people's experiences as 'abuse', whilst diminishing their own victimisation (Phillips 2000).

Robyn went onto discuss the additional difficulty in recognising abuse within a relationship. She said:

> "At the time if you'd have asked me, 'was the relationship sexually violent?', I would have said no, because I just didn't even really have a sense of that. I thought, you know, that's just, something that happens with strangers, erm, people that you, you know, not people that you're in a relationship with."
>
> (Robyn, 35, bisexual, genderqueer)

Here, Robyn addresses the stereotype that sexual violence is something that happens outside of a relationship – depicted as an experience involving a sudden, surprise attack perpetrated by a stranger (Ellison and Munro 2010). It is clear, then, that despite such forms of sexual violence being rare – as Ellison and Munro (2010) explain, the majority of perpetrators are known to the victim/survivor – such stereotypes remain ingrained, to the extent that recognising abuse within a relationship can prove difficult.

Several participants therefore compared their experiences to those prioritised through dominant social understandings of rape and sexual assault. The idea that rape must include a victim "screaming no", alongside the act of "being forced down", or being "stranger raped in an alleyway" implies that such forms of violence sit at the top of a hierarchy of acts, and therefore, are entrenched in public perceptions of what constitutes sexual violence or 'real rape' (Mortimer et al 2019). Ally's point that her experience "wasn't really violent" is also indicative of the dominant framing of rape and sexual assault; implying that all instances of sexual violence which do not meet this script are somehow less violent and severe, or are devoid of violence entirely.

Furthermore, both Ally and Eight's descriptions of their experiences imply that they felt responsible for the violence they were subjected to, with Ally noting how she "went along" with some things, and Eight explaining how they were "flirty" and "blowing hot and cold" with the perpetrator. Both Ally and Eight take on self-blaming thought patterns here. Such thoughts are indicative of ingrained rape myths perpetuating harmful stereotypes surrounding 'real rape'. Moreover, these stereotypes not only limit an individual's ability to name their experience within the confines of labels of acts (i.e., rape, abuse, sexual violence,

sexual assault), but furthermore, such stereotypes cause additional complications when attempting to position oneself within the victim/survivor dichotomy.

Victim/survivor dichotomy

Discourses surrounding the labels of *victim* and *survivor* have addressed the dichotomous relationship between the two terms – "the survivor is allowed to retain a measure of dignity and integrity while the victim is cast to receive pity" (Spry 1995, p.2; Aizpitarte et al 2023). In this sense, a victim identity is synonymous with weakness and vulnerability, whilst a survivor is depicted as strong and recovered (Thompson 2000; Kelly 2013; Schwark and Bohner 2019). Spry (1995, p.1) suggests that those who have experienced sexual violence are denied agency in ascribing meaning to their own experiences due to the limiting choice between these terms – terms, which she argues, hold individuals "in relation to the phallus; she is a victim to it or a survivor of it". Whilst Spry's (1995) interpretation of the victim/survivor dichotomy is inherently cis-heteronormative, it is clear that the victim/survivor dichotomy is reductive and limiting. Indeed, several participants within this research felt that neither label represented them. As with naming acts of sexual violence, sexual and gender minority victims/survivors may also struggle to position themselves within the victim/survivor dichotomy, due to typical scripts and the cis-heteronormative assumptions surrounding sexual violence that these scripts perpetuate. Within this final section centring participants' experiences of sexual violence, I address participants' approaches to these labels, recognising the varied and complex feelings attached to them.

Victim/survivor labels reserved for 'severe' forms of violence

Since several participants struggled to position their experiences of violence within dominant terminology – through the use of terms such as abuse, rape, and sexual assault – it is not surprising that many felt similarly disconnected to the labels of victim and survivor, since such labels also carry particular stereotypes surrounding to the perceived severity of experiences. Emma, for instance, felt as though using such labels may evoke specific responses when disclosing the abuse she experienced. She said:

> "I think I don't talk about it enough to have like labelled it in like a victim or survivor or anything, and in saying that, I don't want people to think that something worse has happened…"

(Emma, 22, lesbian cis woman)

Emma's point that she did not "want people to think that something worse has happened" is indicative of her earlier thoughts surrounding the severity of the abuse she experienced. Since Emma felt as though other people had "really terrible experiences" in comparison to hers, she was reluctant to ascribe herself the label of victim/survivor for fear of the reaction this might create. In this sense, it may be implied that the labels of victim/survivor are reserved for those who have experienced a specific type of violence. Emma further explains her hesitancy to adopt either label:

> "…if someone wants to come to me for like support of something really bad and I'm like 'oh yeah I'm a survivor too', and sort of have to say that, even though…yeah."

(Emma, 22, lesbian cis woman)

It is clear that Emma's worries here are related to the perception of what constitutes "really bad" or "really terrible" forms of violence. As demonstrated throughout this chapter, the perceived severity of acts of sexual violence have been placed within a hierarchical frame – one which situates men's violence at the top. Consequently, when attempting to frame their own experience, Emma relies upon these hierarchical categorisations of sexual violence, therefore minimising her own. Further still, since the typical script of violence denotes that women are unable to perform the role of perpetrator – "all females […] are expected to be sexually nonviolent" – access to a victim and/or survivor status is especially limited for Emma due to her experience of woman-to-woman abuse (Girshick 2002, p.1502; Girshick 2009). Tracey also suggested that perceptions of what constitute severe forms of abuse or violence may denote who can access the labels of victim/survivor. She stated:

> "I suppose that perception of somebody being a survivor or a victim, whether right or wrong, I would align, and I think a lot of people would align, to prolonged or sustained, you know, kind of repeated traumatic events, for a survivor in particular that…I don't know why, I've not really thought about it until I'm talking about it right now, but that kind of perception that it's more than a one-off event, I don't say that's right or wrong by the way, I guess that's just sometimes how I think people see it."

(Tracey, 40, lesbian cis woman)

Tracey therefore associated both the labels of victim and survivor – but particularly the label of 'survivor' – with prolonged periods of abuse, as opposed to "one-off" occurrences of violence. Tracey's connection of the term 'survivor' with "repeated traumatic events" suggests that sustained periods of violence may be perceived as more severe than those which occur singularly. Here, Tracey recognises the impacts of violence for others – in this case, those who have experienced prolonged periods of abuse – yet in the process, she minimises her own experience, since she does not position herself in proximity to either label (of victim/survivor) (Phillips 2000). Like Emma, Tracey may be suggesting that the labels of victim/survivor are reserved for those whose experiences are "really bad" or "really terrible" – defined here by the length of time over which the abuse has occurred.

Victim/survivor labels as restrictive

For Ally, neither label felt appropriate to describe her experience. Ally suggested that the labels of victim/survivor carry with them a particular type of response to the violence an individual has experienced. She explained:

> "I think it can provide people so much to like, you know, recognise that, I think, because I've, you know, I don't feel like I've been really badly affected, like obviously there has been impact, but I think it's not something that is so defining of me, like, I've, you know, been able to have partners since, and, you know I don't think it's, I dunno, like yeah, I just don't think it's like that defining."
>
> (Ally, 28, bisexual cis woman)

Here, Ally makes note of the cathartic potential of associating with the labels of victim/survivor, but highlights how, for her, such association was not necessary. Ally implies that victim/survivor labels may be reserved for individuals who have "been really badly affected" by their experience of abuse, further emphasising the idea that access to a victim/survivor status is dependent upon the perceived severity of the violence experienced – both in terms of the act itself and, moreover, in regard to its impact. Furthermore, Ally's point that her experience of violence was not defining of her indicates that she positions such an experience as "one in a series of events that has happened", rather than the "sole significant factor in [her] identity" (Cunnington 2019, p.96).

Lucy (22, lesbian cis woman) also noted the potential for victim/survivor identities to provide comfort or empowerment to some individuals:

> "…I think some people, they really find help or strength in calling themselves a survivor, but for me it's kind of, the sexual abuse is just something that happened to me, and I don't really refer to myself as a victim or survivor I'm just me, you know."
>
> (Lucy, 22, lesbian cis woman)

Again, like Ally, Lucy positioned her experiences of violence as "just something that happened" to her, suggesting that her experience of abuse was not defining in her identity. Trudy (24, lesbian cis woman) also rejected both labels, suggesting that such terms place too much emphasis upon the perpetrator's actions, and, furthermore, ascribe too much power to the abuse in relation to its impact on her life:

> "…because I think that's like, that's associating what happened and what other people have done to me like that's a big part of me, and it's not. I'm…it impacted me in a big way, but how I've dealt with it and come out the other side, is more impressive to me, than, you know, talking about it, because, that happened, been and done, I'm, you know, fuck that, I'm not letting someone else fuck me up forever […] you know, so, yeah, no. I'm not a victim, not a survivor."
>
> (Trudy, 24, lesbian cis woman)

Trudy's point that she is not going to let "someone else fuck [her] up forever" therefore suggests that the adoption of a victim/survivor identity would, for her, indicate that the abuse was more defining than it necessarily was. Cunnington (2019) suggests that by rejecting the labels of victim/survivor, individuals are able to reduce the significance of abuse within their own life stories. It is clear that Trudy's aim is precisely this, and therefore, the rejection of such labels may be just as cathartic as their use.

Victim/survivor labels as a continuum

As established, then, an individual's ability to self-identify when it comes to the labels of victim/survivor is therefore vital. Indeed, Maggie made this point when discussing her own positionality within the victim/survivor dichotomy. She said:

> "…you don't get to tell me if I'm a victim or a survivor. Because I felt like a victim for a long time. I'm a survivor because I've worked my way through it, that's how I feel, that doesn't mean that I go 'right so everyone who feels really upset about it is still a victim, and when you feel stronger about it you're a survivor', that's not for me to set where that line is either."
>
> (Maggie, 40, gay cis woman)

Maggie makes note of the typical trajectory of transformation from the status of victim to survivor; through feeling like a victim "for a long time", and having "worked [her] way through it", Maggie illustrates the possibility of shifting from one label to the other. Maggie's shift from a victim to a survivor identity is, moreover, a depiction of how such identities are not static but are, instead, fluid labels forming part of a wider process of recovery (Kong 2021). Whilst Maggie utilised both labels, she stressed the point that self-definition was imperative to the process of recovery, arguing that the "line" between victim and survivor should not be prescriptive, but should be set by individuals themselves.

Whilst these labels bring with them a set of stereotypes surrounding victimhood and survival, it is clear that for some, such labels are imperative in their recovery. However, as suggested by Maggie, the line between victim and survivor complex, and an individual's ability to self-define within these terms (or to reject such terms) is crucial. The choice to define oneself in proximity to the labels of victim/survivor is therefore an individual one. Yet, as highlighted here, the *choice* in adopting a victim/survivor identity is limited by external, social factors. Significantly, an individual's interpretation of the perceived severity of their experience may influence their likelihood of assuming either label. In the context of sexual and gender minorities' experiences, specifically, and as made clear by Emma, such a choice may be limited further by the typical script of sexual violence.

Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted the complex and varied forms of sexual violence experienced by participants within this research project. Specifically, it has addressed the intersections between sexism and misogyny, and homo/bi/transphobia, in order to illustrate the unique positionality of sexual and gender minorities within sexual violence discourse. Whilst participants' experiences were varied, several themes emerged in regard to participants'

experiences of violence, their responses to violence, and furthermore, their positionality within a victim/survivor binary.

It is clear that unequal power dynamics are intrinsic to all acts of sexual violence, yet several participants within this research illustrated the potential for additional imbalance(s) of power to emerge when sexual and/or gender minorities experience violence. Maggie's (40, gay cis woman) experience of corrective rape, for instance, demonstrates a unique form of violence perpetrated against sexual and/or gender minorities – a form of violence motivated by homo/bi/transphobic beliefs in curing or correcting an individual's sexuality and/or gender (Lock Swarr 2012; Brownworth 2013; Doan-Minh 2019). Whilst Maggie was the only participant to experience correctional sexual violence, several participants explained how being visibly or openly queer meant that they were potentially vulnerable to correctional forms of sexual violence. As findings from Galop's (2022) findings indicated, correctional sexual violence is a significant issue for sexual and gender minorities, highlighted by the fact that 23.5% of the 935 LGBTQ+ individuals they surveyed believed that the sexual violence they had experienced was motivated by a desire to convert or punish their LGBTQ+ identity. For many sexual and gender minorities, then, the additional imbalance of power created through corrective forms of sexual violence is one they must navigate (Doan-Minh 2019).

An additional imbalance of power was also brought into question through Isla's (26, bisexual trans woman) experience, where experiences of cisgenderism alongside expectations of the male gaze resulted in a particular vulnerability to violence. The intersection of sexism and transphobia is highlighted here, illustrating the potential for transmisogyny to generate additional, unequal dynamics of power (Serano 2007; Matsuzaka and Koch 2019; Lefebvre 2020).

Thoughts of self-blame and experiences of victim-blaming are frequently recounted by victim/survivors of sexual violence, the prevalence of which may be ascribed to rape myths and stereotypes surrounding violence and abuse (Gavey 2005; Hawkey et al 2021). However, this chapter has drawn attention to additional patterns of self-blame and victim-blaming experienced by sexual and gender minority victims/survivors. For instance, several participants explained how they felt as though their minority sexual and/or gender identities could be co-opted, in some way, in an attempt to diminish the perceived impact of the violence they experienced. Both Frankie (24, lesbian cis woman) and Eight (35, queer)

suggested that their gender and/or sexuality may be perceived to be the result of the abuse they experienced. Such blaming tactics are the result of cis-heteronormative assumptions surrounding sexuality and gender, and rest upon the notion that sexual and gender minority identities are abnormal or unnatural and must, therefore, have been *caused.*

The myth of 'real rape' is harmful to all victims/survivors of sexual violence; depictions of 'real rape' fail to encompass the realities of all, or even most, victims/survivors' experiences of sexual violence (Ellison and Munro 2009; Mortimer et al 2019). However, as demonstrated within this chapter, this myth may be particularly harmful to those whose experience(s) of sexual violence are already positioned as less severe or less violent than others, due to the cis-heteronormative assumptions underpinning the typical script of violence (Duke and Davidson 2009; Donovan and Hester 2014; Mortimer et al 2019). Moreover, the impact of the myth of 'real rape' is not limited to a victim/survivor's feelings surrounding the violence they have experienced but additionally, may result in an inability to name, define, or acknowledge their experience of sexual violence. Further still, such stereotypes surrounding sexual violence may limit an individual's access to a victim/survivor identity.

To conclude, this chapter has highlighted the ways in which cis-heteronormative interpretations of sexual violence have limited participants' access to dominant terminology within sexual violence discourse – both in naming their own experiences of violence and, additionally, in positioning themselves within a victim/survivor dichotomy. Moreover, this chapter has drawn attention to experiences of sexual violence that are unique to sexual and gender minorities, demonstrating the particular vulnerability to sexual violence that sexual and gender minorities may experience. The themes identified here necessarily help to form the focus of the following chapter, which addresses participants help-seeking practices and their access to sexual violence support services.

Chapter 6. Sexual and gender minority survivors: help-seeking practices and access to sexual violence support services

Introduction

This chapter contributes to a growing body of literature surrounding LGBTQ+ victims/survivors of sexual violence, their help-seeking practices, and their access to sexual violence support services. By focusing specifically on lesbian, bisexual and queer individuals who belong to marginalised gender categories (see: 'Terminology' in chapter one), this chapter explores the intersectional struggles of biphobia, homophobia, transphobia, and sexism and misogyny, in relation to victims/survivors' access to sexual violence support services (Girshick 2009; Pyne 2011; Mortimer et al 2019). It centres the narratives of victims/survivors who have been interviewed as part of this research project. Some of these victims/survivors had accessed formal support services, some had attempted to access support but were unsuccessful, and others had made no such attempts. Furthermore, several participants received positive informal support from friends, family members, and partners, whilst others experienced negative responses from those closest to them.

To begin, a reminder of this project's research questions regarding sexual violence support services is important:

- Do sexual and gender minority victims/survivors' experiences of homophobia/biphobia/transphobia and sexism and misogyny influence their likelihood of accessing sexual violence support services?
- In what ways do support services take a cis/heteronormative approach to sexual violence, and how can this be rectified to ensure that sexual and gender minority victims/survivors can access better, more tailored support?

This chapter opens with a brief overview of each participant's access to and experience(s) of formal sexual violence support services. The discussion centres four key themes, outlines of which are provided below.

Barries to access: I begin this chapter by considering the specific barriers to support faced by participants. I consider how cis-heteronormative assumptions and 'typical scripts' of violence shape victims/survivors' access to, and experiences of, support (Donovan and Hester 2014;

Mortimer et al 2019). I then discuss the unique position of trans victims/survivors in accessing sexual violence support in the UK, against a backdrop of transphobic rhetoric surrounding inclusion, before considering *who* has access to mainstream support services. Within this section I also address some of the more *general* barriers to support, including the issue of taking up space, access by area (or lack thereof), and extended waiting times – all of which may exacerbate stresses for sexual and gender minority victims/survivors (Galop 2022). Finally, I consider the unique barriers to support faced by participants who experienced childhood sexual assault (CSA).

Perceptions of and access to mainstream services: The second section of this chapter addresses victims/survivors' access to mainstream support services. Here, I discuss the levels of privilege associated with experiences of sexual violence which fit – to varying degrees – within the typical script of violence (Girshick 2002; Ristock 2002; Duke and Davidson 2009). Furthermore, I consider how a victim/survivors' ability to 'pass' as straight and/or cis necessarily informs their access to mainstream services.

Perceptions of LGBTQ+ inclusive support: Within this section, I consider the benefits of LGBTQ+ specific support services in providing victims/survivors with more tailored, appropriate care. Specifically, I explore the role of 'by-and-for' service provision. Furthermore, since trans individuals have frequently been subsumed into wider discourses surrounding LGBTQ+ victims/survivors' access to services, I discuss the importance of trans-specific support (Rymer and Cartei 2015; Matsuzaka and Koch 2019; Rogers 2020).

Help-seeking and informal support: The final part of this chapter considers informal help-seeking approaches taken by participants. Here, I explore the role of friends, family members and intimate partners in providing support, help and guidance to victims/survivors. Specifically, I address participants' experiences of both positive and negative responses from family members, friends and intimate partners, exploring how such responses may help, or *hinder*, a victim/survivors' access to informal support.

Participant overview

Participant pseudonym	Sexuality, gender and pronouns	Disclosed experiences of sexual violence and formal help-seeking practices
Eight	Queer (they/them)	Eight received support from a project designed specifically for trans, non-binary, and intersex victims and survivors of sexual violence
Emma	Lesbian cis woman (she/her)	Emma had accessed mental health support through her GP and University. She attempted to access a specialist sexual violence support service but was turned away, and since then had not pursued specialist support
Isla	Bisexual trans woman (she/her)	Isla accessed multiple forms of therapy for her mental health, but she had not attempted to access any sexual violence support services
Maggie	Gay cis woman (she/her)	Maggie did not access any specialist sexual violence support services
Frankie	Lesbian cis woman (she/her)	Frankie had attempted to access several forms of support but shared several negative experiences. At the time of the interview, Frankie was on the waiting list to receive support from a specialist sexual violence service
Ally	Bisexual cis woman (she/her)	Ally had not accessed any specialist sexual violence support services
Ashley	Bisexual, genderqueer (they/them)	Ashley reported their experience to the police, and also received counselling as part of their job, but they did not access a specialist sexual violence service
Lucy	Lesbian cis woman (she/her)	Lucy contacted a range of specialist sexual violence support services (including one LGBTQ+ specific service) but received no prolonged support from any of these
Tracey	Lesbian cis woman (she/her)	Tracey reported the sexual assault at work to the police, but she had not accessed a specialist sexual violence service

Robyn	Bisexual genderqueer/genderfluid (she/they)	Robyn accessed therapy and disclosed their experiences at a sexual health clinic, but hadn't received support from a specialist service
Trudy	Lesbian cis woman (she/her)	Trudy accessed a range of support, including counselling and group therapy from a sexual violence support service

Barriers to access

Participants within this research experienced a range of barriers to support, several of which were a direct result of the cis-heteronormative approach to sexual violence dominating mainstream support provision. This section therefore identifies and explores these barriers. Specifically, it considers *who* support services are available to, highlighting, in particular, the transphobic rhetoric surrounding women-only spaces. Additionally, it explores how extended waiting times and increasing pressures on services have created a fear of *taking up space*. Furthermore, it addresses how access to support has been deemed a 'postcode lottery', and considers the specific implications of this for sexual and gender minorities. First, though, I explore how mainstream service provision is seen to perpetuate the typical script of sexual violence.

'Typical scripts' of violence, heteronormative assumptions and lack of representation

As outlined in chapters two and three, sexual violence has frequently been portrayed within the boundaries of cis-heteronormative assumptions pertaining to who may be perceived as a victim/survivor and perpetrator of violence (Donovan and Hester 2014; Mortimer et al 2019; Donovan et al 2024). The 'typical script' of sexual violence (which positions violence perpetrated by a man against a woman as the archetype of violence) has permeated support services, to the extent that experiences which fall outside of this construction of violence may be ignored, misunderstood, or even downplayed by service providers (Girschick 2002; Duke and Davidson 2009; Field and Rowlands 2020).

For Emma (22, lesbian cis woman), assumptions surrounding what sexual assault looks like led to apprehension about receiving support, and ultimately, resulted in a distrust of mainstream support services. Emma stated:

> "I think, I just don't know what other people's opinions are gonna be and whether [they will be] accepting of, just, gayness in general…you know, some people don't see lesbian sex as real sex anyway, so if they don't see that, then they're not gonna see sexual assault between women, and just, yeah, a lot of people only take sexual assault seriously if it's penetrative, which, with a woman is less likely."
>
> (Emma, 22, lesbian cis woman)

Here, Emma addresses her fear of accessing a mainstream service and not being taken seriously by service providers because the perpetrator of her abuse was a woman. Emma's fear not only relates to the pervasiveness of heteronormative assumptions surrounding relationships and intimacy, but also links to service providers' perceived reliance upon the typical script of violence in forming their understandings of sexual violence (Duke and Davidson 2009). Since within the typical script of violence, women are solely expected to fulfil the role of victim/survivor, any deviation from – or complete reversal of – this script may, subsequently, be met with confusion or denial. The gender-based stereotypes underpinning this typical script are therefore intrinsic to the categorisation of perpetrators and victim/survivors (Little and Terrance 2010). Indeed, Hester et al's 2012 study revealed that service providers within sexual violence support services often struggled to envisage a female perpetrator of abuse – an unsurprising finding given the pervasiveness of the typical script of sexual violence (Donovan and Barnes 2019; Mortimer et al 2019)

Furthermore, Emma's concern that "a lot of people only take sexual assault seriously if it's penetrative" is itself indicative of how women's violence is perceived to be less severe, less dangerous, and ultimately, less threatening than men's violence (Hassouneh and Glass 2008). Gendered, heterosexist stereotypes surrounding violence have led to the depiction of women as nonviolent, and, consequently, have resulted in woman-to-woman abuse frequently being undermined – often being labelled as mutual when the abuse is not – as 'cat fighting', or as 'bad sex' (Girshick 2002; Hassouneh and Glass 2008; Galop 2022). The result of these stereotypes, as Hassouneh and Glass (2008) highlight, is that victims/survivors of woman-to-woman abuse may fail to see themselves as victims and, furthermore, may be reluctant to speak out due to fears of not being believed or taken seriously by service providers. This reflects Emma's experience; Emma goes on to say how she found it difficult to come to terms

with the abuse she had experienced. Specifically, Emma struggled when it came to naming and addressing her experience of abuse:

> "I think it's probably because most of the sexual assault and rape and the big violent horrible stuff that happens is like a man to a woman, and the stuff you see is all that…"
>
> (Emma, 22, lesbian cis woman)

Here, Emma's only reference point to what sexual violence and rape look like are the examples which have continually been presented in the public discourse (Donovan and Hester 2014) – examples which differ significantly from Emma's own experience. This, again, led Emma to worry that services may misunderstand or downplay her experience:

> "I think it's the worry of being gay as well, of like, are they even gunna take that seriously? Cos, that's not the stuff that's sort of shown in the media and in the law."
>
> (Emma, 22, lesbian cis woman)

The lack of representation of experiences of abuse within LGBTQ+ relationships was, clearly, a significant barrier to accessing support for Emma. Harvey et al (2014) also note the importance of representation in promoting access to services. They highlight how providers of support must recognise how, for LGBTQ+ victims/survivors, experiences of violence may differ from those of cis, heterosexual victims/survivors (Harvey et al 2014). In Emma's case, the fear that services would lack awareness of female perpetrators caused her to develop a distrust towards mainstream support services.

For Trudy, heteronormative assumptions held by service providers impacted the way she framed her abuse and her sexuality. Trudy accessed support through a rape and sexual assault centre, after being abused by a male family member during her childhood. She generally spoke about her experience of support in a positive way during our interview, noting how accessing a sexual violence support service had been more beneficial than any other avenue of support she had explored. However, on one occasion, she described how persistent questioning from a service provider regarding her intimate relationships led her to question her sexuality:

> "In my counselling […] they said, have you, are you seeing anyone, are you doing anything, or any of that, and I went, no, I was seeing this girl for a while, and she like

> jumped on that, and started asking questions, and I was like, fuck me, is that a response, am I actually not gay, am I projecting that on myself to protect myself from being uncomfortable around men?"
>
> (Trudy, 24, lesbian cis woman)

Trudy's experience demonstrates the risks associated with 'coming out' to service providers and Todahl et al (2009) note that doing so may result in a person's sexuality and/or gender becoming the sole focus of support, or, as alluded to in Trudy's account, may lead to a victim/survivor's sexuality and/or gender being perceived of as a *result* of their experience of abuse. This harmful stereotype is rooted in heterosexist assumptions; the labelling of non-heterosexual identities as deviant, and therefore, as abnormal, implies that there must be a *cause* or *reason* as to why someone is not heterosexual (Rich 1980; Todahl et al 2009). For Trudy, this was a distressing line of questioning. She went on to say:

> "…and I remember sitting there and being like, no I'm gay […] I'm just a big gay, and they were like oh okay, and that's fine, of course, that's fine, but then kept asking questions and I was like, you're not listening I am telling you I am just a big gay, and then I clocked, oh shit, like, that's why you're saying it, because maybe I'm not."
>
> (Trudy, 24, lesbian cis woman)

Trudy had not questioned her sexuality prior to this conversation with the service provider, and so the topic felt uncomfortable and unjustified. Whilst she went on to say that she dealt with (and overcame) the worries brought up during this conversation, she suspected that the conversation would not have happened had her relationship history involved only men. Indeed, she suggested that "they'd have been like, and how do you feel in a sexual capacity with that?"

Trudy's experience therefore draws attention to the ways in which service providers might place unnecessary attention upon a victims/survivor's sexuality (Todahl et al 2009).

The cis-heteronormative approach to sexual violence may not only result in a lack of *awareness* surrounding LGBTQ+ identities and experiences of sexual violence, but, moreover, may lead to explicitly homophobic/biphobic and/or transphobic reactions from service providers. According to Harvey et al (2014), fears of such responses from service providers

are a significant barrier to LGBTQ+ victims/survivors seeking support from mainstream services. Frankie echoed this fear. She spoke generally about perceptions of same-sex couples, and related this to her reluctance to come out to service providers:

> "…when they start asking about like your relationships […] they'll be like, 'oh, your boyfriend', like, no, it's not my boyfriend, and then it kind of forces that whole coming out moment, and sometimes, when it's someone who has assumed you've got a male partner, it's a bit like, well do I correct them because I don't know if they're actually okay with it, […] I don't really want to put myself in a situation where, if they're not going to be, like the atmosphere changes, and I feel like that would be a worry in a moment like that."
>
> (Frankie, 24, lesbian cis woman)

The fear of being treated differently by service providers after coming out may stem from previous negative experiences with professionals (Brown and Herman 2015; SafeLives 2018; Mortimer et al 2019). Indeed, for Frankie, the worry that service providers may not be accepting of her lesbian identity is illustrative of negative societal beliefs surrounding queer relationships (Rich 1980; Donovan et al 2024). In the context of sexual violence support, this fear may also be a product of the underrepresentation of particular victims/survivors within the discourse surrounding sexual violence (Mortimer et al 2019). Furthermore, such responses are illustrative of the pervasiveness of heteronormative assumptions within support services – a distinct commitment to the 'typical script' of violence in forming understandings of sexual violence may be the cause of this (Duke and Davidson 2009; Mortimer et al 2019).

Who can access support? Women-only spaces and transphobia in sexual violence support services

When considering the typical script of violence – which, as suggested thus far, mainstream services are thought to subscribe to – it is crucial to question who services are for, or rather, who services are *perceived* to be for. It has been established that mainstream support services are perceived to be heteronormative in their approach to sexual violence, and, subsequently, representations of forms of violence which fall outside of the typical script are largely silenced. However, for Isla, the additional barrier of cisnormativity must inform her approach

to services. Isla describes mainstream support services as “very cis woman-centric”. She goes onto explain her reluctance in seeking support from a mainstream sexual violence support service:

> “I guess the problem is that even if a service says that it is for women, without specifying that trans women are welcome, cos the default in society is that trans people aren’t welcome, unless specified. So, it can be very difficult to reckon with, going to a sexual violence support service when it isn’t explicitly trans friendly because whenever you go into a space that isn’t specifically trans friendly as a trans person, there’s always a risk of being ostracised or worse, so…”
>
> (Isla, 26, bisexual trans woman)

For Isla, cisnormative assumptions surrounding perceptions of sexual violence are just one issue in accessing mainstream support. The additional fear of transphobia within services makes accessing services that are not explicitly trans-inclusive potentially dangerous. Roch et al (2010) highlight this issue and emphasise the importance of services demonstrating their trans-inclusive approach through explicit advertisements championing this. Similarly, this point is echoed by Rogers (2013; 2020), who illustrates the risk of subsuming trans individuals into wider LGBTQ+ anti-violence initiatives, since their unique experiences and needs are often omitted in such cases. Furthermore, as Isla suggests, services may be inclusive of LGBTQ+ victims/survivors more generally, but unless specified that trans victims/survivors are included, the “default in society is that trans people aren’t welcome.”

Isla discussed this further when addressing the current political context of transphobia in relation to women-only spaces in the UK:

> “…with women-only spaces in general, even, unless they specify that trans people are welcome, it can be very intimidating to sort of approach them, and at least as of late and at least in the UK, there’s quite a large political movement specifically against trans women inhabiting women-only spaces...”
>
> (Isla, 26, bisexual trans woman)

Here, Isla references groups of individuals who have attempted to exclude trans women from ‘women-only’ spaces, in line with the ‘gender-critical’ argument that trans women pose a

threat to the safety of cis women in 'single-sex' or 'women-only' spaces (Gottschalk 2009). Indeed, Eight described transphobia within support services as "a bit of a hot topic" – they highlight how:

> "…there's all of that, you know bullshit rhetoric around rape crisis centres and whether trans women pose a threat, just by their very being to cis women and survivors using that service…"
>
> (Eight, 35, queer)

This presents a unique threat to trans victims/survivors – and to trans women, in particular – attempting to access support services; trans victims/survivors may face both the systemic barrier of cisnormative assumptions held by service providers, as well as active attempts to exclude them from services (Kenagy 2005; Matsuzaka and Koch 2019). For Isla, the public discourse surrounding sexual violence support services (and women-only services specifically), meant that accessing mainstream support was not an option: "it really does put you off from wanting to access women-only services that aren't explicitly for trans women." The issue of trans inclusion within services will be further explored later on in this chapter, when I discuss the benefits of trans-specific support.

Taking up space

An additional barrier to access for several participants within this research was the fear of 'taking up space', or of taking space *away* from other victims/survivors. This fear prevented some victims/survivors from reaching out for support. Emma (22, lesbian cis woman) made several references to this throughout our interview, highlighting how she felt that "other people [were] 100% sure that they needed support", and because of this, she claimed that "other people need it more, I don't need to go, if I go, I'm taking someone else's space." This fear of taking up space, for Emma, was tied up in a multitude of concerns.

Within this discussion, Emma recognised a general issue of underfunding for sexual violence support services. Indeed, underfunding may be described as a sector-wide issue within the domestic abuse and sexual violence support sector (Ishkanian 2014; Hine et al 2022). The increased demand for services during the COVID-19 pandemic is said to have exacerbated this issue further, with a need for additional resources and funding in order to keep up with the

heightened demand (Women's Aid 2020). This crisis of underfunding, coupled with the high demand for services, caused Emma to question her need for support – she questioned whether other victims/survivors may "need it more."

However, Emma's fear of 'taking up space' within a service was also linked to her fear that her experience of abuse would be downplayed, undermined, or misunderstood by service providers. As discussed earlier, Emma worried that her experience of violence – which differed from the typical script of violence (insofar as the perpetrator was a woman, the violence occurred within a same-sex relationship, and the violence was not penetrative) – would not be taken seriously by mainstream service providers. Furthermore, she discussed the representation of sexual violence in the media, highlighting how she felt that people "had it worse", after witnessing "more and more stuff in the media of, like, really terrible things". Given the focus on men's violence against women within traditional media – depicted within the typical script and public story of violence (Donovan and Hester 2014; Mortimer et al 2019) – it is not surprising that Emma felt her experience was not only underrepresented, but additionally, was seen as less 'extreme' than others.

This comparison of experiences, of placing experiences of violence into a hierarchy of severity, is commonplace in the discourse surrounding sexual violence. Indeed, Kelly (2013) highlights how instances of sexual violence are frequently depicted in this way, with rape perpetrated by men existing at the top of this imagined hierarchy. Kelly (2013) explains the harms of treating experiences of sexual violence in this way, noting how the 'severity' or impact of violence may be felt differently depending on a range of contextual influences and factors. Furthermore, whilst the existence of this hierarchy is detrimental to all victims/survivors (as discussed in chapter five), it may be argued that it is particularly harmful for those whose experiences of violence differ significantly from those prescribed by the 'typical script' (Donovan and Hester 2014; Mortimer et al 2019).

As explored earlier, woman-to-woman violence is often depicted as less severe – less *violent* – than male violence (Girshick 2002; Hassouneh and Glass 2008). Emma responded to this stereotype, stating that sexual assaults involving penetrative assault are likely to be taken more seriously than those without. Such stereotypes left Emma feeling that her experience *was* 'less severe' than others, or at least, that other victims/survivors "had it worse", due to the under-and-misrepresentation of experiences like hers. Moreover, heterosexist

assumptions pertaining to *who* can be a perpetrator of sexual violence, coupled with a hierarchy of severity existing within the discourse surrounding sexual violence, led Emma to believe that her experience of violence was not "as bad" as others (Girshick 2002), ultimately limiting her access to formal support.

Ally had a different experience when it came to 'taking up space' within a service. She noted how the impact of sexual assault can vary between victims/survivors. This, again, is reminiscent of Kelly's (2013) point that the impact of violence may differ depending on a multitude of influences and contextual factors. When asked if she would attempt to access support, Ally explained:

> "…it's not something which I feel like…I know you shouldn't compare, but in like comparison to others, I know how much it can affect people, I don't feel like it has in the same sense where I've felt like…especially now, like I wouldn't feel like I need to go and be seen by one of those services, and like, you know, I know how in demand they are as well."
>
> (Ally, 28, bisexual cis woman)

Here, Ally recognised the levels of impact that experiences of sexual violence may have upon victims/survivors, and she suggested that this was a reason to avoid accessing services, which, as she highlighted, are already "in demand". Furthermore, Ally went on to discuss how she had received support from people in her life, helping her to cope with her experience. She stated: *"…*you know I've dealt with it in other ways and, like, had lots of people to speak to about it". Ally's experience of reaching out to people in her life for support is not an uncommon phenomenon for victims/survivors of sexual violence. Ahrens and Aldana (2012) state that the majority of sexual assault disclosures are made, initially, to friends, family members, or partners of the victim/survivor. However, Ahrens and Aldana (2012) also note the potential risks in disclosure to 'informal' support systems. Notably, reactions of doubt and victim-blaming may present themselves, largely due to negative social depictions of sexual assault, and the stigma associated with sexual violence (Ullman 1996; 2010; Ahrens and Aldana 2012). Nevertheless, they note how positive social reactions to disclosures of abuse can result in the strengthening of relationships between victims/survivors and members of their informal social support systems (Ahrens and Aldana 2012). For Ally, this support was

clearly significant in the process of dealing with her experiences, and thus became a reason why she felt that accessing formal support would be unnecessary. Informal support systems, their benefits, and their drawbacks, will be further discussed in this chapter's final section.

Postcode lottery

Geographical location can act as a significant barrier to a victims/survivors' ability to access specialist sexual violence support services (Coy, Kelly and Foord 2007; 2009; 2011). Often described as a 'postcode lottery', access to services can be limited by victims/survivors' proximity to specialist support (Coy et al 2007; 2009; 2011). Notably, victims/survivors living in rural areas may face particular difficulties in accessing specialist support (Neame and Heenan 2004; Coy et al 2007; 2009; 2011).

Whilst searching for sexual violence support services to access, Frankie faced this issue. She experienced difficulty finding a service suited to her needs that was also available in her area:

> "…a lot of the places were just like out of my postcode or were like, 'oh we only deal with this area'… so, I talked to a few places that were like, no, we don't deal with where you are."
>
> (Frankie, 24, lesbian cis woman)

Coy et al (2011) discuss the difficulties involved in victims/survivors from rural areas attempting to access specialist support. Having to travel long distances, with limited transportation or resources, can result in victims/survivors being unable to access support (Coy et al 2011). Whilst some services provide support via helplines – thereby eliminating several of the issues outlined here – the specific service Frankie contacted did not. Hence, in her case, restrictive catchment areas meant that even when travelling to and from services was an option, support was still difficult to source.

Whilst the issue of access by area can affect all victims/survivors living in rural areas, it may be argued that this issue is particularly detrimental for victims/survivors with additional support needs. Notably, for sexual and gender minority victims/survivors living in rural areas, specialist LGBTQ+ support is significantly limited (Harvey et al 2014; Galop 2022). Constable et al (2011) note the specific risks involved in accessing local services for LGBTQ+ victims/survivors living in rural areas – the likelihood of knowing service providers, for

instance, is considerably higher in rural areas. Furthermore, Galop's (2022) recent study highlights that whilst many victims/survivors they had spoken to had searched for LGBTQ+ specialist services, only participants from London were able to access such services. The concentration of LGBTQ+ specialist support services within larger cities with higher proportions of LGBTQ+ residents – such as London, Brighton and Manchester – means that such forms of support are inaccessible to the majority of victims/survivors. Galop (2022) suggest that, given the limited number of LGBTQ+ specialist formal support services nationwide, many LGBTQ+ victims/survivors rely on informal support systems to share their experiences. Specifically, Galop's (2022) recent study highlights the importance of sharing experiences and accessing support from other queer individuals. Indeed, many of the participants in this study expressed the importance of informal support systems, and these are addressed in the final section of this chapter.

Childhood sexual abuse and unique barriers to support

Several participants within this study disclosed experiences of childhood sexual abuse (CSA). Whilst this research project's focus has been, primarily, centred around the impacts of homo/biphobia and/or transphobia in accessing services (as well as the impacts of the typical script in perpetuating stereotypes surrounding sexual violence), participants identified additional and unique barriers to support for victims/survivors of CSA. As such, an exploration of these barriers is also vital in representing participants' experiences.

Both Frankie and Ashley noted the importance of having a safe, understanding space in which to disclose experiences of CSA. Whilst Frankie spoke about the role of family in disclosure, Ashley focused on the ways in which services could respond to victims/survivors. After speaking about her own experience, Frankie went on to highlight how *she* would respond to a child disclosing CSA. She explained this whilst recounting a conversation with her partner:

> "I want to raise children who could tell us, and like, know if anything happens it's not their fault, and to be like, to want to just come and tell us and then we can help deal with it and we'd also...like we've said, if anything happened to our child we'd want them to have that support when they were young so it could be unpacked and so they could understand it and when they're an adult it's hopefully not quite as heavy, erm,

> I think it's kind of sad that we've had those conversations about kids but, erm, I think it's also kind of needed as a reality."
>
> (Frankie, 24, lesbian cis woman)

Here, Frankie places emphasis upon receiving support at a young age, highlighting her own emotions regarding the lack of support she received at the time the abuse occurred. For Frankie, the idea that receiving support at a younger age would have made the impact of the abuse, as an adult, "not quite as heavy", reinforces the importance of support for children. Ashley echoed this point about receiving support at a young age (or at an age closer to their experience of abuse). They said:

> "Now, it probably would have been better to talk about it when I was, when it happened, to have counselling, it would have, I'm sure that that, that it would have been much better to have it back then, cos it was like, [there are] very few people that know."
>
> (Ashley, 65, bisexual, genderqueer)

Here, Ashley explains how a lack of support when they were younger meant that they had only disclosed the abuse to very few people. Ashley went on to speak about the importance of being believed by services:

> "…making services available and really believing kids, children, I think that's vital because that would make such a big difference to so many lives if they're believed in the first instance, and that environment is created where it's okay to talk about it. When I was growing up it was like, we don't talk about those things, you know, you talk about them in very general terms, but you're still not really sure what was being meant, but if there was some way of making it more general […] that the children are encouraged, […], they are encouraged to be believed if something has happened to them. I think that's really crucial."
>
> (Ashley, 65, bisexual, genderqueer)

Since Ashley was unable to speak about their experience of abuse growing up – due to a culture of not discussing "those things" – they explained the importance of services being

available to children. Ashley also highlighted a crucial point echoed within current research into CSA victims/survivors' satisfaction rates with services; the 'Focus on Survivors' study, for instance, emphasised the importance of victims/survivors feeling like they had been "listened to, believed and respected by services" (Smith, Dogaru and Ellis 2015, p.20). Such feelings were indicative of positive support. In particular, being *believed* was a vital aspect of support for victims/survivors who, as children, were told by their abusers that they would not be believed if they disclosed their experience of abuse (Smith et al 2015). Likewise, being *listened to* was a significant factor in positive responses to support for those who, as children, "lacked a voice or were ignored" (Smith et al 2015, p.20). The Focus on Survivors study reported that when asked about the most helpful support they had received, several respondents did not list different *types* of services, but instead, made reference to those which had "listened to and believed them" (Smith et al 2015, p.20).

In addition to the above barriers, and as highlighted in chapter five (see: *cis-heteronormative victim-blaming and challenges to the legitimacy of a victim/survivors' identity*), sexual and gender minority victims/survivors may face additional forms of victim-blaming related to their sexual and/or gender identity. Such forms of victim-blaming are the result of cis-heteronormative beliefs that non-cis/hetero identities are abnormal, and therefore, must have been *caused*. Eight spoke about how these assumptions are more likely to be directed to victims/survivors of CSA – in this sense, a victim/survivors' sexual and/or gender minority identity is thought to be the *result* of childhood trauma. They said:

> "It's a super common kind of discourse that like trans people, especially like trans men or people who are AFAB, that they're like, [CSA] survivors who are now like, repulsed by their femininity of whatever."
>
> (Eight, 35, queer)

Eight had, indeed, faced these harmful assumptions when accessing a gender identity clinic (GIC) – clinicians here questioned whether Eight was "*really trans*" or "*just an abuse survivor*". Research indicates that when LGBTQ+ victims/survivors have previously received negative reactions to their sexual and/or gender identity from professionals, they are less likely to access support (Brown and Herman 2015; SafeLives 2018; Mortimer et al 2019). Whilst Eight

did receive support, they only felt comfortable accessing a trans-dedicated service. As will be explored further in an upcoming section (see: *Trans-dedicated services*), Eight felt like they would not be able be themselves in a cis-dominated, mainstream service. The potential for their identity to be misunderstood, or focused on unnecessarily, was a significant deterrent to mainstream support. This indicates that for sexual and gender minority victims/survivors of CSA, LGBTQ+ specific support services may be even more necessary and worthwhile, since the risk of encountering such harmful assumptions are likely to be avoided.

Perceptions of and access to mainstream services

Whilst many participants faced barriers to mainstream services, others had a more positive experience and perception of them. The degree to which participants felt comfortable accessing (or considering accessing) mainstream support largely depended upon their proximity to the typical script – both in terms of the form of violence they experienced, and in relation to their (in)visible queerness. This section accounts for these perceptions, and additionally addresses the importance of specialist sexual violence support.

Mainstream support services as inclusive

When asked about her perceptions of mainstream support services and whether they are inclusive of LGBTQ+ survivors, Maggie responded:

> "I think they are, but maybe that's cos I get this privilege of looking like a middle-aged straight woman, erm, I don't code myself as queer unless I'm deliberately doing that […] I think that because I don't code myself as queer all the time, it's not the first thing people notice about me. I would like to naively think those services are open."
>
> (Maggie, 40, gay cis woman)

Maggie describes the privilege associated with conforming to a certain image of a survivor – that of a white, cis woman who is perceived to be heterosexual (Duke and Davidson 2009). Since the typical script of violence positions this image of a survivor as normative, and, since service providers are often expected to perpetuate this typical script, Maggie can comfortably assume that her presence within a mainstream service would not be questioned. This therefore affords Maggie – and others who can project this image of the typical survivor of sexual violence – a certain level of access to mainstream support, in contrast to those whose

queerness may be more visible, or, for individuals whose intersecting identities may cause additional barriers to support. Rymer and Cartei (2015) discuss the issue of passing in their study – several of their participants worried that their trans identities would be uncovered by service providers, and that this in turn would lead to discrimination. Whilst none of the participants within this research raised specific concerns about passing, there was a clear sense of hesitancy from Isla (bisexual trans woman) in accessing women-only support services unless they were explicitly trans-inclusive, which clearly illustrates that her access to mainstream services is precarious and limited. Hence, levels of inclusivity within mainstream services are dependent upon multiple factors relating to a survivor's ability to fit within the prescribed model of a survivor depicted within the typical script of violence.

Additionally – and as previously highlighted by Emma's (22, lesbian cis woman) experience outlined in the first section of this chapter – the common image of a perpetrator is also determined by the typical script of violence (Duke and Davidson 2009). For instance, whilst Maggie believed that mainstream services would be inclusive of LGBTQ+ survivors, she also recognised how instances of abuse which fall outside of the typical script may be responded to differently by service providers. In relation to LGBTQ+ victims/survivors' inclusion within mainstream support services, Maggie said: "I imagine the complication arises when it's queer on queer, and whether or not that's believed." Here, Maggie highlights the stigma attached to forms of violence which are not accounted for within the typical script of violence, and the potential for these forms of violence to be questioned, or not believed, by service providers (Johnson and Grove 2017). Indeed, as Emma explained in reference to her experience of abuse within a lesbian relationship, the fear of not being believed by service providers became a significant barrier to accessing support.

Ally expressed similar opinions to Maggie in regard to her positionality within mainstream support services. When asked about accessing support specifically tailored towards LGBTQ+ survivors, Ally responded:

> "I just don't think I would access that unless it was violence from a woman, like if it was from a man I think I would just go to like mainstream services, I think if it was like you know from another woman or someone who was non-binary, I dunno, then maybe I would go there, but otherwise yeah I would just go to kind of women's mainstream services I think…"

(Ally, 28, bisexual cis woman)

Ally recognised how tailored support may be beneficial for victims/survivors whose experiences of violence fall outside of the typical script of violence, but, in her case, tailored support would not be necessary. The points made by both Ally and Maggie illustrate how a survivor's access to mainstream services is not only reliant upon their ability to 'pass' as a typical victim/survivor, but, moreover, is additionally influenced by the identity of their perpetrator (Girshick 2002). This demonstrates, as suggested by Maggie, that there are levels of privilege – in terms of accessing mainstream services – afforded to LGBTQ+ victims/survivors whose experiences of violence can, to some extent, be treated within the parameters of the typical script of violence.

In addition to both Maggie and Ally's points outlined here, Lucy explained how her lesbian identity would not prevent her from attempting to access mainstream support services. When asked if she would prefer to access an LGBTQ+ specific service, Lucy responded:

> "I think as a woman, no, because I know that when it comes to sexual abuse it more commonly happens to women, who are abused by straight men, and it doesn't matter if you're gay or straight yourself, you can just go to a, I don't know like, women's rape centre things, and I don't think that would matter whether you're a lesbian or straight or not…"

(Lucy, 22, lesbian cis woman)

Lucy recognises a key aspect of the typical script of violence here, pertaining to men being the most common perpetrators of abuse. In this sense, Lucy explained how she felt her lesbian identity would not be a barrier to accessing mainstream services, since her experience of violence fit, in some way, within the typical script (Donovan and Hester 2014; Mortimer et al 2019). She went on to explain how a woman-only service would be preferable, but made clear that a service providers' sexuality would be irrelevant to her:

> "I would prefer a woman only service, but it wouldn't matter to me if they were specifically for lesbians or not, I don't think that would be relevant in any way really. Because there would be loads of things that I have a particular identity of this, that, or the other that they wouldn't share. Like race for example, it wouldn't matter to me

> what race they are, but then I can say that as a white woman, it might be different for someone else, but yeah, it doesn't matter as a lesbian to me."
>
> (Lucy, 22, lesbian cis woman)

Here, Lucy highlights how intersecting identities may, for other survivors, impact their likelihood of accessing mainstream support. She recognised the levels of privilege in *not* requiring support from a service provider with whom she shares a particular identity. For Lucy – and for Maggie and Ally, also – mainstream services were therefore deemed accessible, to the extent that they fit – or were *perceived* to fit – within the typical image of a victim/survivor.

The importance of specialist sexual violence support

As previously discussed, Trudy encountered heteronormative assumptions whilst receiving support from a mainstream sexual violence support service. On the whole, however, she described her experience of accessing support as a positive one. Trudy largely attributed the success of her experience of support to the fact that it was delivered through a specialist sexual violence service – that being a service dedicated to providing support to victim/survivors of sexual violence (Westmarland and Alderson 2013; Hester and Lilley 2017). Trudy had previously received support from mental health services, whilst presenting with depression and anxiety linked to her experiences of abuse. She described one service as "really good" but highlighted how she felt that the service was "not equipped to deal with [her]". Trudy mentioned how, when discussing her experiences of abuse, mental health professionals had responded in unhelpful ways:

> "I'd be mid-stream of trauma, and they'd go right that's it, I'll see you next week and just…out the door. And that was it, and that was not helpful, at all, cos I'd be like mid-flashback…"
>
> (Trudy, 24, lesbian cis woman)

Given such responses, Trudy stated that she made little progress within mental health services. Her experience of support outlined above stood in stark contrast to the one delivered by the sexual violence support service Trudy accessed shortly after. Notably, Trudy explained how the processes leading up to and following support sessions were entirely

different between the two services: where her previous sessions had ended abruptly, with no support in between sessions, service providers at the sexual violence specialist service allowed time for debriefs and "just chilling" following sessions. Furthermore, Trudy had "on-call" access for 2-3 months whilst receiving support, which she described as "really helpful", noting how the processing of heavy, complex emotions "doesn't stop when you walk out of the room, you have to carry on dealing with it", and having access on-call support helped significantly with this.

Multiple studies have demonstrated the importance of specialist sexual violence support services. In comparing multiple avenues of support for survivors, Brown et al (2010) highlight how victim/survivor satisfaction rates are highest within specialist sexual violence support services and rape crisis centres in the UK. Hester and Lilley (2018) echo the importance of specialist sexual violence services in their study focusing on Independent Sexual Violence Advisers (ISVAs). ISVAs are sexual violence support providers who, specifically, support victims/survivors through the process of navigating the criminal justice system (Hester and Lilley 2018). Hester and Lilley (2018) found specialist sexual violence support services to be characterised by victims/survivors as flexible, empowering, and safe. One significant advantage for many victims/survivors participating in Hester and Lilley's (2018, p. 322) study was the option of accessing support during periods of crisis – being able to speak to ISVAs, and "offload at crisis point" was an important aspect of specialist support. This, indeed, was something Trudy found beneficial whilst accessing specialist support.

For Trudy, then, it appeared that accessing specialist sexual violence support took precedence over receiving support tailored towards LGBTQ+ victims/survivors – it was more important for Trudy to receive support from service providers who understood the specific needs of victims/survivors in relation to support, regardless of their experience working with LGBTQ+ people. In fact, when asked about accessing LGBTQ+ tailored support, Trudy noted:

> "…I don't think I've ever needed that, cos I've never been, like I don't have a bad home life with that, never struggled with my sexuality really, or my gender, so I, it didn't come to me, it was always an abuse or a historical thing, not a sexual/sexuality thing."
>
> (Trudy, 24, lesbian cis woman)

Here, Trudy highlights how she had never related her experience of sexual abuse with her sexuality or gender; as discussed earlier, such questions only arose when she accessed support. Trudy went on to explain how she thought "there was an assumption that [her sexuality] would be more of an issue" than it was. In relation to support, then, Trudy felt that it would be unnecessary for her to seek LGBTQ+ specific support – such an option had "never even [been] in [her] head". This relates to the thoughts shared by Maggie, Ally and Lucy, in the sense that, because their experiences of sexual violence fell, to some extent, within the typical script, they felt that LGBTQ+ specific support was not necessary for them. This therefore highlights the vast and contrasting service needs of sexual and gender minority victims/survivors.

Perceptions of LGBTQ+ inclusive support

Whilst several participants therefore felt comfortable with the prospect of accessing support from a mainstream sexual violence support service – and indeed, Trudy had a successful experience whilst accessing one – other participants within this research did not. As has been established, mainstream services may appear inaccessible to sexual and gender minority survivors. Multiple studies have highlighted the benefits of tailored support for LGBTQ+ survivors; Hester et al (2012), for instance, note how giving victims/survivors the opportunity to discuss both their experiences of abuse and their sexual and/or gender identities may have a positive influence. Likewise, Harvey et al (2014) recognise that some LGBTQ+ victims/survivors may have experienced violence motivated by homophobia, biphobia, and/or transphobia, and space should be given to explore the unique impacts of this. This section therefore accounts for the (perceived) benefits of specialist LGBTQ+ service provision.

LGBTQ+ specific support and 'by and for' services

For Emma, services which offered tailored support for LGTBQ+ victims/survivors, or services run by and for queer victims/survivors, were the most appealing. Again, Emma mentioned her hesitancy in accessing a mainstream service. She stated:

> "…at [mainstream services] you can go in and be like, the first queer survivor that they've met, and […] they can be well intentioned, but might not know how to cope with that as much as someone who's specifically trained and experienced in that, and stuff like this, where it is super sensitive, and where you could have a massive impact

> on someone by saying something that could be a 'tiny mistake', I think it's super important to make sure they know what they're doing and aren't gonna make people turn away and not wanna go back."
>
> (Emma, 22, lesbian cis woman)

Emma's point here, about mainstream service providers being unable to "cope" with queer victims/survivors, reflects Ristock and Timbang's (2005) findings in their study with same-sex domestic abuse survivors. Ristock and Timbang (2005, p.2) discovered that victims/survivors of same-sex abuse felt they would have "too much […] explaining to do'' when discussing their experiences of abuse with mainstream service providers. For victims/survivors of same-sex abuse, such explanations may involve debunking myths surrounding heterosexist, gendered ways of thinking about violence which are often inappropriately applied to queer relationships – for instance, the assumption that the more 'masculine partner' will become the perpetrator, whilst the more 'femme' presenting partner will become the victim of abuse (Ristock and Timbang 2005; Donovan and Hester 2014). Furthermore, Emma mentions that a mainstream service provider might say something that has a "massive impact" on a survivor and leave them feeling hesitant to return for support. Again, this may include heterosexist assumptions made by service providers in the language they use. Simpson and Helfrich (2005) note how the use of gender-specific pronouns when discussing perpetrators of violence can leave victims/survivors of woman-to-woman abuse feeling alienated. The importance of LGBTQ+ specific support, then, is twofold for Emma. First, it would provide comfort in knowing that staff are equipped to deal with forms of violence which fall outside of the typical script, and second, it would limit the likelihood of having to deal with inappropriate or harmful comments relating to her experience of abuse.

An additional point made by Emma, in relation to LGBTQ+ specific support, was that "having lesbian practitioners", specifically, would serve as a significant draw towards a service. Likewise, Frankie stated:

> "I think it would be nice to have someone who was queer as well, I just think there is a bit of a shared understanding or at least like a safety from judgement."
>
> (Frankie, 24, lesbian cis woman)

Frankie's point about the "shared understanding" between queer service providers and victims/survivors, again, suggests that heterosexist assumptions may be avoided when receiving tailored support (Ristock and Timbang 2005; Simpson and Helfrich 2005). Indeed, SafeLives (2018, online) recognise how LGBTQ+ specific services are often able to provide more relevant support and guidance, having developed a "wealth of experience and understanding of LGBT+ victims". Furthermore, both Emma's and Frankie's desire to receive support from someone who also identifies as queer is not an uncommon requirement of support amongst LGBTQ+ survivors. Love et al (2017) found that 50% of the lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals they spoke to – as part of a study aimed at improving access to sexual violence support – felt that it was important to disclose their experience to someone of the same sexual orientation. Indeed, the professionals within their study also recognised how LGBTQ+ victims/survivors were more likely to access their service if there was a high representation of LGBTQ+ volunteers and staff (Love et al 2017).

LGBTQ+ representation and training for mainstream support service providers

For Robyn (35, bisexual, genderqueer, therapist) – who participated in this research as both a victims/survivor of sexual violence, and as a service provider – the idea of LGBTQ+ specific support for all survivors, whilst thought to be the most ideal scenario, was deemed unrealistic. They noted how the majority of LGTBQ+ specific support services were based within certain large cities known to have higher proportions of LGBTQ+ residents. Indeed, as highlighted earlier, Galop's (2022) recent study, involving 25 semi-structured interviews with LGTBQ+ survivors, uncovered that no interviewee had accessed specialist LGBTQ+ support outside of London. Given the lack of tailored support across the UK, Robyn suggested that mainstream services should aim for further representation of queer and trans staff members, whilst also developing greater understandings of the types of abuse queer and trans victims/survivors may experience. She stated:

> "…I don't know that you necessarily have to have a whole service that is just … queer and trans specific all the time because that's not realistic in most areas of the country […] but having a kind of awareness in existing services that that would be something to aim for, that you have staff that are representative, that can be available..."
>
> Robyn (35, bisexual, genderqueer)

Again, as Love et al (2017) suggest, higher representations of LGBTQ+ volunteers and staff make for more inclusive and appealing services for LGBTQ+ survivors. Furthermore, Robyn highlights that whilst receiving support from LGBTQ+ service providers might remove "a level of fear of judgement", she reiterates that "you can be a good therapist and not be queer", whilst still delivering successful support to queer survivors.

Here, the importance of training for cis, heterosexual service providers may be addressed. Robyn notes how they would like to see service providers receive more training on instances of sexual violence which fall outside of the 'typical script':

> "…training more generally around these, er, around the experiences that don't always fit the sort of cookie-cutter model of, you know, the idea of rape, for instance…"
>
> Robyn (35, bisexual, genderqueer)

This relates back to earlier points made by Emma in relation to the importance of inclusive language within services (Simpson and Helfrich 2005). Harvey et al (2014) note a range of training needs for mainstream service providers supporting LGBTQ+ survivors, including the provision of more specific, practical advice, as well as a recognition of how a victim/survivor's experience of abuse may be compounded by experiences of homo/biphobia and/or transphobia. For Robyn (and for many other participants within this research), such training initiatives are paramount in order to move away from the "cookie-cutter model", or 'typical script,' of sexual violence often prescribed by mainstream services (Duke and Davidson 2009; Donovan and Hester 2014; Mortimer et al 2019).

Trans-dedicated services

As previously highlighted, trans people are frequently subsumed into wider LGBTQ+ anti-violence initiatives, often leading to their unique needs being missed or entirely erased, due to cis identities being prioritised (Rogers 2013). Given the high rates of violence experienced by trans people and, due to an increased risk of discrimination from services, trans victims/survivors may express a desire to access trans-dedicated support services (Love et al 2017).

This was indeed the case for several trans participants within this research. For instance, Isla (26, bisexual trans woman) stated: "what I would like to see, really, is like, trans women

specific sexual violence services". Isla's desire for services specifically tailored towards trans women can be seen not only as a response to cisnormative assumptions within the discourse surrounding sexual violence, but, furthermore, may be positioned as a response to mainstream services being inaccessible to trans victims/survivors – whether it be due to a lack of trans-inclusive advertising, or, furthermore, because of explicitly transphobic policies aimed at excluding trans women (Gottschalk 2009). Isla's desire for services tailored, specifically, towards trans women, further highlights the need for the intersectional struggles of transphobia, misogyny, and sexism - and their impact upon experiences of sexual violence - to be addressed (Serano 2007; Matsuzaka and Koch 2019). As noted within chapter five, Isla's experience of rape was situated alongside issues of fetishisation and objectification – issues which are reported commonly by trans women who have experienced sexual violence (Ellis et all 2016; Flores et al 2018; Matsuzaka and Koch 2019; Ussher et al 2020). Isla's hope for "trans women specific sexual violence services" may therefore be fuelled by a desire to address the specific experiences of transmisogyny she has faced, within a space dedicated to, and tailored towards, such experiences.

Furthermore, receiving support from trans-dedicated services may feel more comfortable, and overall, may be more helpful, for some trans survivors. Eight expressed how attending a support group for trans victims/survivors of abuse was extremely beneficial for them. They noted how being with other trans victims/survivors helped them to feel understood:

> "…just being able to talk to, you know it was just like being ultimately understood, I just felt completely understood."
>
> (Eight, 35, queer)

Eight mentioned how speaking with other trans victims/survivors about a range of issues relating to their experiences of violence felt affirming – they felt "completely understood" by the facilitators of the group, as well as the other group members. In comparison to mainstream services, which tend to lack adequate knowledge of trans victims/survivors' specific needs, this shared understanding between the service providers and service users within Eight's example made a significant difference to their experience of support (Ristock and Timbang 2005; Matsuzaka and Koch 2019). Eight went onto explain why mainstream

services would not have provided the same level of comfort in expressing their thoughts, feelings and emotions:

> "I couldn't have shared my experiences […] I just feel like in predominantly cis or only cis environment that my transness is just like really relevant to everyone else but me…I can't, I don't really feel like I can be myself."
>
> (Eight, 35, queer)

Here, Eight expressed how, within spaces tailored towards cis people, their transness tends to become the centre of thought or the topic of conversation.

Eight's point here relates to the typical script of violence ascribed to by mainstream services, insofar as it not only renders individuals who fall outside of this script as invisible (since their experiences are under-represented) but also, as *hypervisible*. In Eight's case, their transness produces a hypervisibility categorised by difference – as a deviation from the prescribed cisnormative assumptions surrounding gender – within predominantly cis environments. Indeed, this hypervisibility is the product of the institution of cisnormativity and, subsequently, permeates all facets of social life (Pyne 2011; Lennon and Mistler 2014; Rogers 2020). However, in relation to sexual violence support specifically, this hypervisibility may result in an individual's trans identity being paid more attention than necessary by mainstream support services.

The prevalent use of gendered language throughout society is highlighted by Zimman (2017), who states that: "the use of language to gender people is so pervasive that it is often done even when a person's gender is arguably irrelevant to the discourse" (Zimman 2017, p.96). Zimman (2017) highlights how gendered language is commonplace in everyday discourse; the labelling of strangers in gendered terms, for instance, implies that one's gender can be inferred from the way they look or how they speak (Zimman 2017). Furthermore, whilst the overuse of unnecessary gendered terms can be harmful for cis people – insofar as gender stereotypes are reinforced by binary logics of gendered language (Zimman 2017) – the prevalent use of gendered language presents additional challenges for trans people. Notably, the incessant need to ascribe a rigid gender identity to all members of society becomes even more severe when individuals deviate from cisnormative, binary categories of gender in particular (Zimman 2017).

Eight's experience of their trans identity being "really relevant to everyone else" but them within predominantly cis environments may, therefore, be conceptualised as an example of oppositional sexism, in the sense that cissexist ideology expects individuals to conform to the binary gender categories of man/woman (Serano 2007; 2013; Armitage 2020). Since Eight does not identify within these categories, their gender becomes hypervisible within spaces where such categories are rigidly reinforced. Hence, within such spaces, they recognised that their gender was focused on, and pointed out, at unnecessary and irrelevant times. Zimman (2017) notes the importance of understanding when the discussion of gender *is* relevant, and crucially, when it is *not*. Within the context of sexual violence support, specifically, the dependence upon gendered language – and upon gendered understandings of violence (as seen within the typical script) – can exacerbate feelings of isolation, exclusion and hypervisibility. This, coupled with the incessant need, within predominantly cis spaces, to categorise individuals on the basis of the binary logics of gender, is further evidence that mainstream services must consider the use of gendered language when providing support, and, furthermore, cements the necessity of more specialist, trans-dedicated services.

Help-seeking and informal support: receiving support from family, friends, and partners

Participants within this research received significantly varied forms of support from their informal support systems (participants' support systems were primarily made up of friends, family members, partners and colleagues). As Ahrens and Aldana (2012) state, the vast majority of sexual assault disclosures are initially made to friends, family members, or partners of the victim/survivor. Responses from informal support systems are, on the whole, seen to be *more* helpful in a victim/survivor's recovery than those provided by formal support systems (Ahrens and Aldana 2012). Moreover, as Galop (2022) explain, sexual and gender minority victims/survivors may be particularly reliant upon informal support systems in their recovery, given the lack of specialist LGBTQ+ support services across the UK. However, several participants within this research faced barriers to disclosing their experiences of sexual violence to their informal support systems, and, furthermore, some participants received negative reactions from friends, family members and partners, thereby limiting their access to informal support.

Negative reactions from family members

Several participants grappled with negative reactions from family members. Both Trudy and Lucy experienced sexual violence perpetrated by a family member, and consequently, reactions from other family members were complex. Trudy noted how she had disclosed one instance of abuse to some family members in the immediate aftermath of the event. However, she explained that the topic was off-limits with family thereafter:

> "…it never got spoken about after that, ever, still haven't, erm, but then, I later on told friends and counsellors and other stuff, so…"
>
> (Trudy, 24, lesbian cis woman)

Trudy's experience highlights the ways in which violence in the family may be neutralised, and therefore, become an area of silence (Cunnington and Clark 2022).

Lucy also received negative reactions from family members when disclosing her experience of abuse. She explained how her family had been "wilfully forgetful" about her experience of abuse, blaming her for the "reputation" she developed as a teenager – "I was drinking, smoking, going missing, stuff like that" – and subsequently, they implied that she was lying about the abuse. Here, Lucy's disclosure of the abuse was met with distrust, thereby denying her status as a victim/survivor. Lucy reached out to services for support, but, unlike Trudy, her experience was not positive. She explained how the actions of one service, in particular, further fuelled her family's negative reactions. Below, Lucy recounts a situation that occurred once she had moved back into her family home during the COVID-19 lockdown:

> "…[they] sent the police round, and then that caused a right drama, and I got real shit from my dad and step-mum and everyone for that, cos like, you can't be bringing the police round, we're in a lockdown, you're gonna infect the house with COVID and the neighbours are gonna have questions and all that kind of stuff."
>
> (Lucy, 22, lesbian cis woman)

Here, Lucy explains how her family blamed her for "bringing the police round", and, in doing so, re-stated their denial of her victim/survivor status. Cunnington and Clark (2022) highlight how victims/survivors of CSA who have been abused by family members may be met with disbelief or neutralising tactics by other family members. Such tactics may be utilised when

family honour is threatened, since "abuse is often viewed as shameful for the whole family, who are all blamed for it" (Cunnington and Clark 2022, p.10). The concern from Lucy's family – particularly, that "the neighbours are gonna have questions" – is indicative of this, highlighting how acts of denial and neutralisation perform as protective strategies for families of victim/survivors of CSA (Cunnington and Clark 2022). Furthermore, given the complex family dynamics involved in Lucy's experience, support from services was also unhelpful. Lucy's experience demonstrates and further cements the necessity of sensitive, accessible and discrete service provision, particularly when victim/survivors have complex, strained or negative relationships with family members.

Fearing and receiving negative reactions from friends

Emma addressed the barriers she faced to disclosing her experience of abuse to mutual friends of the perpetrator:

> "…cos we were together for 4 years, a lot of our friends were the same, and I didn't want them to know, and then I kind of shut myself off from most of them, as a, cos to them, us breaking up, was just me dumping her, and they don't have any context or a reason for that, and I don't know what she's told them, cos I'm assuming she's not gonna be like 'oh it's all of this stuff', so like, our mutual friends don't know much, and I was kind of worried about them knowing in case they would like, not be friends with her anymore, and I think that that was also the threatening to kill herself stuff, I wanted her to still have a support group…"
>
> (Emma, 22, lesbian cis woman)

Here, Emma explains how she wanted to protect both herself and her partner by not disclosing the abuse. Emma expressed concerns that if she spoke about the violence with friends, her partner would lose their social "support group", resulting in Emma feeling responsible for her partner's mental wellbeing. Consequently, she became isolated from the mutual friend group – "shut[ting herself] off from most of them". Turner and Hammersjo (2023, p.12) demonstrate the dangers of victims/survivors becoming isolated from friendship groups, highlighting how the chance to ask questions like, "is this right, is this normal, would you tolerate this if it happened to you?" is removed. The chance to ask these questions may be even more vital for those experiencing same-sex abuse, since such experiences are not

represented in mainstream media or discourse surrounding domestic violence, and subsequently, victim/survivors may doubt the legitimacy or severity of the abuse they have experienced (Donovan and Barnes 2019; Donovan et al 2024). Moreover, even if Emma *had* attempted to disclose the abuse to mutual friends, Jennings and Gunther (1999) note how, within LGBTQ+ friendship groups, believing a victim involves admitting that a known or trusted member of the community has the capacity to be abusive. Admitting that abuse *does* occur within queer relationships may hinder a sense of solidarity amongst members of the community, and, furthermore, may add to negative stereotypes surrounding LGBTQ+ people as "sick" or "perverted" (Ristock and Timbang 2005, p.3; Turner and Hammersjo 2023).

Robyn spoke about a similar experience concerning mutual friends of a perpetrator:

> "…I did talk to people, because I had other friends that knew the guy, and I had told them, and actually they didn't end their relationship with [him] and so I had to end those friendships. And it was very painful that they sided with him, or made excuses for him, um, because I didn't expect them to do that, at some level, at that point. I hadn't expected that they would side with him, and they did."
>
> (Robyn, 35, bisexual, genderqueer)

Robyn describes the frustration and hurt they felt when friends "sided with" and "made excuses for" the perpetrator, and notes how, consequently, they had to end those friendships. Robyn's experience demonstrates the risks associated with disclosing experiences of violence to mutual friends of a perpetrator, and, furthermore, explains *why* fears surrounding the reactions of mutual friends may be so prevalent (Boehmer and Misch 2011).

Ally also experienced negative reactions from mutual friends of the perpetrator of her assault. She explained how two friends, in particular, discouraged her from reporting the assault, and advised against Ally disclosing the assault to additional friends:

> "…two friends were kind of like, well, you know if you do, you'll be kind of seen as, like, you know, the crazy girl, or, you know, things which were like really inappropriate for them to say, but essentially just like, all of them, all of those boys are basically just like, I don't know, I can't really remember the words that we used, but definitely those

> kinds of sentiments of like, well, if you say, then what, you know, all these boys are going to think a certain thing, you know…"
>
> (Ally, 28, bisexual cis woman)

Ally's experience, like Robyn's, highlights how reactions from friends may perpetuate negative stereotypes surrounding victims/survivors of sexual violence. In Ally's case, her friends appear to adhere to victim-blaming stereotypes pertaining to a survivor's positionality within their experience of sexual violence (Hawkey et al 2021). The implication that Ally would be perceived negatively by the boys in their friendship group is also suggestive of these victim-blaming beliefs, and, furthermore, is indicative of research suggesting that men are more likely to attribute *blame* to a victim/survivor than women (Pinciotti and Orcutt 2021). Moreover, the depiction of Ally as "the crazy girl" suggests that the assault was not taken seriously by friends, perhaps leading Ally, herself, to question the severity of the experience.

Positive support from friends

However, other participants received positive and affirming support from their peers. As outlined above, Trudy did not receive the space to discuss her experience of abuse with family members, yet she spoke about the supportive reactions she received from friends:

> "I was very lucky in that I had a lot of close friends who, erm, were quite happy to indulge it, you know, and listen…"
>
> (Trudy, 24, lesbian cis woman)

Maggie also spoke about the importance of receiving support from friends. She stated:

> "…actually, any support I've had is a community of women, many communities of women I now have."
>
> (Maggie, 40, gay cis woman)

Maggie explained that some of the women in these support systems were also queer, further supporting Galop's (2020) finding that sharing experiences with other LGBTQ+ individuals may be important and helpful for sexual and gender minority survivors. Furthermore, Maggie stressed the importance of having groups of women, specifically, to confide in. This may be, in part, a response to the gendered aspects of sexual violence – insofar as male violence

against women remains the most pervasive form of sexual violence (Kelly 2013; Griffin 2015). For Maggie, and other victims/survivors, the sharing of experiences of violence amongst groups of women is, therefore, likely to reflect this dominance of male violence against women within a cis-heteropatriarchal society (Girshick 2002; Kelly 2013; Griffin 2015).

Similarly, Isla (bisexual trans woman) noted the benefits of being surrounded by other queer individuals, explaining how living in a queer house share meant her identity was respected and accepted: "just having people around me who kind of understood and respected my identity and who would do everything they could to use my name and respect my pronouns". Informal support for sexual and gender minority victims/survivors of sexual violence may, therefore, take multiple forms, and, moreover, specific support from other queer individuals may provide a sense of belonging, acceptance and pride.

Support from partners

Both Maggie and Frankie received support from their partners. Maggie explained how shared experiences with her partner helped her to process "other complications" wrapped up in her experience of rape:

> "…in a way, she was my therapy, which is not always the best way to start a relationship, but, she'd gone through her own sorts of difficult coming out experiences, we lived through section 28 where you couldn't speak about it at school, my family's catholic, we had all that, you'll never be able to adopt or get married, we had all that, that was our upbringing, you're bad, straight out of the AIDs epidemic, but it's through that relationship that I evened myself out, if you want."
>
> (Maggie, 40, gay cis woman)

Maggie and her partner's shared "difficult coming out experiences", alongside their collective experience of growing up under homophobic legislation in the UK, meant that they were able to support each other through their respective difficulties. The support Maggie received from her partner is further illustrative of Galop's (2022) findings concerning the importance of victims/survivors receiving support from within the LGBTQ+ community – whether that be in response to experiences of sexual violence, or, in regard to struggles on the basis of gender/sexuality.

Frankie also discussed a positive experience of informal support, highlighting the significance of the support she received from her partner. However, she explained her desire to access a specialist, formal support service, since the issues associated with her experience of abuse were complex:

> "…I've spoken about it a lot to my partner because I've found I've had a lot of physical impacts, like there's a lot of things that make me very uncomfortable and I feel like I have, my body has a barrier, that I'm not in control of, erm, and my partner is very wonderful about that, erm, never any pressure, very, very understanding, and probably the most I've ever spoken to anyone about it, ever. And I feel very lucky that I'm in a relationship where I'm able to do that, but that was also part of why I seeked out help because it's very frustrating that I've got this physical barrier that I just can't get past."
>
> (Frankie, 24, lesbian cis woman)

Cunnington (2019, p.178) explains how experiences of CSA may impact "the embodied experience of sexual relationships" for survivors. Furthermore, she addresses how victims/survivors of CSA may deny or reject a relationship with their body, in an attempt to sever the relationship between the body and the mind in order to process, or deal with, trauma enacted upon the body (Cunnington 2019; Young 1992). For Frankie, the feeling that her "body has a barrier" that she cannot control may therefore be a manifestation of this. Frankie explained how her partner is "very, very understanding" about her situation, and, furthermore, noted that she is able to speak openly about her experience of abuse with her partner. Research indicates that couples who speak about "intimacy issues" triggered by CSA are, on the whole, happier than those who do not (Nielsen et al 2018; Cunnington 2019, p.177). Nevertheless, Frankie, reminded frustrated that she could not "get past" this "physical barrier". Hence, whilst informal support from her partner had been significant, Frankie believed that specialist, formal support would be helpful in overcoming barriers she could not address alone. However, as discussed earlier within this chapter, Frankie faced significant barriers to accessing formal support services; issues including location, long waiting lists, and fears of rejection all prevented Frankie from accessing the support she required (Coy et al 2007; Ishkanian 2014; Mortimer et al 2019; Hine et al 2022). Frankie's experience therefore

highlights just how vital the provision of specialist support is, illustrating that access to informal support systems, whilst significant, may not be entirely successful alone.

For participants within this research, informal support systems had a significant impact upon their recovery – whether in positive or negative ways. It is clear that social stereotypes surrounding victims/survivors of sexual violence may manifest themselves in responses to disclosure from friends, family members and partners. Positive responses from social networks have, moreover, been proven to be a vital part of support for victims/survivors (Ahrens and Aldana 2012; Galop 2022). However, as noted above, negative reactions from social networks may have the opposite effect. The provision of effective, specialist formal support for victims/survivors is therefore paramount in ensuring that victims/survivors *without* access to positive social reactions can be effectively supported.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented the narratives of the sexual and gender minority victims/survivors who participated in this research, in relation to their experiences (or lack thereof) with sexual violence support services, as well as their help-seeking practices involving informal support. Participants' access to support was significantly varied – some participants engaged with mainstream services, one participant accessed a trans-dedicated service, whilst others received no formal support. Nevertheless, several themes have emerged pertaining to the experience of seeking and receiving support for participants.

A prevalent concern demonstrated throughout this discussion has been that of the cis-heteronormative approach to support taken by mainstream services (Donovan and Hester 2014; Rymer and Cartei 2015; Langenderfer-Magruder 2016; Mortimer et al 2019). Whether such approaches involve service providers making harmful assumptions regarding the gender and/or sexual identities of both victims/survivors and/or perpetrators, or, whether services explicitly exclude victim/survivors on the basis of their gender and/or sexual identities, it is clear that cis-heteronormative ways of thinking about sexual violence are perceived to be pervasive within the sector (Donovan and Hester 2014; Mortimer et al 2019). Specifically, for victims/survivors whose experiences of sexual violence fall outside of the typical script of sexual violence, such approaches act as significant barriers to accessing support (Duke and Davidson 2009; Donovan and Hester 2014; Mortimer et al 2019). Whilst some

victims/survivors, like Maggie (40, gay cis woman), Ally (28, bisexual cis woman) and Lucy (22, lesbian cis woman), felt that mainstream services would be inclusive and open to them, they recognised how levels of access would inevitably change if their queerness was more visible, or, moreover, if their experiences of violence did not fit within a perceivably heteronormative framework. The application of a queer poststructuralist feminist lens to my analysis of victims/survivors' narratives has, therefore, drawn attention to the cis-heteronormative structures influencing such approaches to support (Duke and Davidson 2009; Donovan and Hester 2014; Mortimer et al 2019).

There were, however, instances of positive support received by survivors. Trudy's (22, lesbian cis woman) experience within a mainstream service, for instance, highlights the importance of receiving support within a space tailored towards victims/survivors (Brown et al 2010; Hester and Lilley 2018). Furthermore, Eight's (35, queer) experience within a trans-dedicated service demonstrates the importance of specialist support, without which, Eight would not have felt comfortable sharing their experience (Ristock and Timbang 2005; Matsuzaka and Koch 2019). For Isla (26, bisexual trans woman), the prospect of a trans-dedicated service – particularly, a service run by and for trans women – was ideal, however, she noted that "they aren't the kind of things that spring to mind when I think about accessing these kinds of services". Indeed, this general lack of LGTBQ+ specialist support has meant that services are, typically, only found in large cities with higher populations of LGBTQ+ residents (Galop 2022). Given the limited number of specialist LGBTQ+ support services, the need for mainstream services to accommodate sexual and gender minority victims/survivors is essential. As Robyn (35, bisexual, genderqueer) suggested, mainstream services may become safer, more appealing spaces for queer victims/survivors if representations of LGBTQ+ staff increased (Love et al 2017). Furthermore, as Isla noted, it is not enough for mainstream services to advertise their inclusion of all survivors; given the harsh reality of transphobia – particularly within the UK political discourse – services must make explicitly clear that they are trans-inclusive (Rymer and Cartei 2015; Matsuzaka and Koch 2019).

Finally, a discussion of the informal support available to participants within this research has highlighted complex and varied issues surrounding disclosure of violence to friends, family members and partners. Whilst several participants experienced positive and helpful support from their social networks, others received little to no support, or, moreover, received

negative reactions to disclosures. Such responses reinforce the importance of effective service provision, without which, victims/survivors may face additional barriers to understanding, and dealing with, their experiences of sexual violence.

To conclude this chapter, the application of a queer poststructuralist feminist theoretical lens within this discussion has enabled an analysis of the hetero-and-cis-normative assumptions commonplace within dominant representations of sexual violence (Duke and Davidson 2009; Donovan and Hester 2014; Mortimer et al 2019). Such assumptions have permeated mainstream sexual violence support services, to the extent that sexual and gender minority victims/survivors often face significant barriers when attempting to access these services. With an aim to contribute to a growing body of literature surrounding the experiences of LGBTQ+ victims/survivors of sexual violence, this chapter has sought to understand the varied levels of access to support experienced by sexual and gender minority victims/survivors. I have demonstrated, therefore, that whilst all LGBTQ+ victims/survivors may encounter barriers to support, a *closeness* to the 'typical script' of violence arguably permits victims/survivors greater access to mainstream services. Moreover, I have noted the importance of support services for those victims/survivors, in particular, whose social networks do not respond positively to their disclosures of sexual violence. The next chapter incorporates several themes identified here, and specifically, addresses the ways in which service providers can prevent, or reduce, barriers to support.

Chapter 7. Effective and inclusive service provision: addressing barriers to support through conversations with service providers of sexual violence support

Introduction

This chapter introduces the narratives of five service providers interviewed as part of this research project. As addressed within chapter six, sexual and gender minority victims/survivors can face significant barriers to mainstream sexual violence support. Several themes identified within chapter six will therefore contribute towards the basis of analysis here, with the aim of drawing a *comparison*, and, furthermore, building a *connection*, between the narratives of service providers and victims/survivors. With this connection in mind, this chapter aims to highlight the ways in which service provision can become more inclusive and effective in supporting sexual and gender minority survivors. The discussion is presented through four themes – an outline of each is provided below.

Service providers identifying barriers to mainstream support services: I begin this chapter by addressing service providers' perceptions of the unique support needs of sexual and gender minority victims/survivors, recognising how barriers to, and *within*, mainstream support mean that such needs are often left unmet. Here, I consider the barriers caused by mainstream services' reliance upon the typical script (Duke and Davidson 2009; Donovan and Hester 2014; Mortimer et al 2019). Furthermore, I address how victims/survivors may be forced to educate service providers on LGBTQ+ identities and/or specific forms of sexual violence experienced within the community.

LGBTQ+ specialist sexual violence support: Within this section, I discuss the importance of by-and-for services and LGBTQ+ specific support provision more generally, highlighting how such forms of support may be more approachable and more desirable to sexual and gender minority survivors. Throughout this analysis, I explore how shared understandings – pertaining to the experience of being a sexual and/or gender minority – between service providers and victims/survivors may foster better, more supportive relationships, and, furthermore, may alleviate some of the emotional labour involved in explaining one's identities. Whilst LGBTQ+ specific services are essential, I explore the role of specialist

LGBTQ+ service provision *within* mainstream services, highlighting, specifically, how representations of sexual and gender minority staff are significant.

Training on the specific needs of LGBTQ+ service users: Here, I examine the role of training, primarily, in supporting cis, heterosexual service providers to deliver more inclusive and affirming service provision. Within this discussion, I acknowledge the emotional labour often placed upon queer and trans members of staff within mainstream services, and explore how better training initiatives may, to some extent, negate these pressures, enabling more inclusive service provision delivered by all members of staff within support services.

Feminist principles of sexual violence support: The final section of this chapter addresses the place of 'women-only' or gender-specific service provision. Here, I attempt to reconcile feminist principles of anti-violence rhetoric with queer commitments to non-categorical thinking, recognising the implications of such an attempt. I explore how gender-specific service provision may exclude gender minority individuals – in particular, those who do not exist within the binary categories of man/woman. Within this discussion, I explore alternatives to such forms of support highlighted by the service providers who participated in this research.

Service providers' perceptions of the barriers to mainstream support services

As identified within chapter five, sexual and gender minority victims/survivors' experiences are frequently omitted from mainstream framings of sexual violence. This is unsurprising, given the culturally and socially accepted typical script of sexual violence, and the cis-heteronormative assumptions it reproduces (Duke and Davidson 2009; Donovan and Hester 2014; Mortimer et al 2019). As discussed at length thus far throughout this thesis, the typical script of sexual violence creates significant barriers to support for sexual and gender minority victims/survivors. Indeed, several of these barriers were identified by both victims/survivors and service providers who participated within this research. This section addresses these barriers, with the aim of highlighting how the unique service needs of sexual and gender minority victims/survivors are often ignored or misunderstood within mainstream service provision.

The typical script: cis-heteronormative understandings of sexual violence

Having worked within an LGBTQ+ service, Scott (27, worked for LGBT DVA program) recognised one barrier, in particular, to support – that being the *fears* that sexual and gender minorities often associate with accessing mainstream support:

> "LGBT victims feel they won't be believed, in mainstream services, they fear that the professionals won't understand their experiences, they fear homophobia, transphobia, biphobia within those services, and those barriers are what stop them from accessing that lifesaving support that they need."
>
> (Scott, 27, worked for LGBT DVA program)

Scott's point here is supported by several victims/survivors who participated in this research, many of whom explained their fears concerning mainstream services. As discussed in chapter five, Emma (22, lesbian cis woman), for instance, feared homophobic reactions from mainstream service providers, both in terms of "just, gayness in general", and additionally, in response to her experience of abuse within a lesbian relationship. Emma's fear that she would not be believed by mainstream service providers, due to gendered, heterosexist assumptions surrounding sexual violence, further solidified her distrust and fear of mainstream support services. Such a fear relates to Scott's statement that many sexual and gender minorities worry their experience will be misunderstood by professionals, and, furthermore, is supported by Ristock and Timbang's (2005) findings which suggest that mainstream service providers frequently make harmful - and often incorrect - assumptions about queer relationships, given their reliance upon cis-heteronormative frameworks.

Scott went onto discuss how the typical script of sexual violence not only denotes who can be perceived as a victim/survivor of sexual violence, but, moreover, places acts of sexual violence within a hierarchy of severity. Speaking, specifically, about instances of rape where a penis is not used, Scott highlighted:

> "There's such a problem when we're looking at sexual abuse and rape against um, trans, non-binary, lesbian, gay, bisexual women, who are being raped and sexually abused by someone with a vagina, because it's not classed as that, and because that's

> in sort of a public narrative, the impact of that is that these women don't see their experiences as 'bad enough'…"
>
> (Scott, 27, worked for LGBT DVA program)

Within public discourse, as well as within a legal setting, the positioning of rape involving penetration by a penis as the archetype of sexual violence – as the most *violent* and *severe* form of sexual violence – acts as a significant deterrent to accessing support for individuals whose experiences of rape do not fit this script (Girshick 2002; Kelly 2013; Mortimer et al 2019). Emma's experience is a fundamental example of this, evidenced by her own framing of her experience as not 'bad' enough, in comparison to the experiences of others.

Katie (36, Rape Crisis employee) also identified the typical script of sexual violence as a significant barrier to accessing mainstream services. Like Scott, she noted how, in particular, the typical script was harmful to victims/survivors of violence perpetrated by women:

> "We do have survivors come to us and certainly I've run groups, and someone's said to me in the assessment: 'can I come to this group cos my perpetrator was a woman?' You know the fear of it won't be, I won't be valid, or no one will understand my experience, or I won't be able to join in with any conversations because there'll be all about male perpetrators."
>
> (Katie, 36, Rape Crisis employee)

The assumption, or fear, that mainstream services would not understand such experiences, or, moreover, that victims/survivors of women's violence would not be valid in accessing support, implies that cis-heteronormative framings of sexual violence remain pervasive (Duke and Davidson 2009; Donovan and Hester 2014; Mortimer et al 2019). Indeed, as addressed above, this fear was expressed by Emma, who herself, positioned this fear as a significant barrier to support. Furthermore, the existence of such fears suggests that mainstream services are, perceivably, not doing enough to dismantle these rigid framings of sexual violence. Katie noted how, whilst organisations may be implementing more inclusive policies, the typical script of sexual violence may be reinforced in ways unknown to service providers:

> "…on our website, before it got updated, we used to have a thing about caring for your partner if they'd experienced sexual violence, and it was so gendered. The assumption that you're a man and you don't know what to do to help your female partner, and I think things like that, people forgot that it was on the website, and it took somebody queer to point it out to us and say: 'this really invalidated my experience'. I think that happens a fair bit with organisations, you have something, I dunno, like, a random blog post or something on there, that isn't part of the everyday part of the website, and it gets forgotten about, and it just didn't need to be written that way, but it was written however long ago…"
>
> (Katie, 36, Rape Crisis employee)

Katie's example here suggests that whilst mainstream organisations may be attempting to diversify their service provision, the use of gendered, heteronormative language and assumptions, in any capacity, can, for many victims/survivors, continue to produce barriers to access. Moreover, whilst service providers, themselves, may take steps to ensure their support provision is inclusive and free from stereotypes, the actions and policies of the organisation, as a whole – whether past, or present – may impact the likelihood of victims/survivors attempting to access a service in the first place. This issue reinforces the importance of explicit inclusion and will further be explored later in this chapter.

A lack of understanding: LGBTQ+ experiences of sexual violence

An additional and particularly concerning barrier to support is mainstream services' perceived inability to deal with – or lack of awareness surrounding – forms of sexual violence that are uniquely experienced by sexual and gender minorities. Both Scott and Katie addressed how acts of corrective sexual violence, as well as corrective behaviours in general, are a specific form of abuse experienced by LGBTQ+ individuals, and consequently, they suggested that such forms of violence need to be dealt with "as part of a spectrum". Scott discussed his concerns regarding mainstream services' abilities (or lack thereof) to support victims/survivors of corrective forms of sexual violence. Scott spoke about his hesitancy when referring victims/survivors of corrective sexual violence to trauma-informed services providing counselling, since, although these services may have been more appropriate in the

management of “intense emotions”, he highlighted how such services may be unfamiliar with the unique impacts of corrective sexual violence:

> “Along with kind of that, that crime [corrective sexual violence] in itself, cos it’s a horrible crime, but is access to services. So within [local area], you can be on a waiting list for up to about two years, for really trauma-informed, specific therapy, so we were sort of holding LGBT victims of this specific crime type, of corrective rape, not a trauma-informed, not a step four counselling service, having to really sort of manage these intense emotions, erm, and I think it’s again, when [victims/survivors] actually access that support service, it’s such a specific crime type that does only effect LGBT people, because it is trying to change their gender identity or sexual orientation, that it’s the question of whether, whether that service is going to meet their needs, and I think in my opinion, when we’re looking at corrective rape, there’s no support service out there, as far as I know, that is specifically for that type of crime, it’s just kind of in that overarching term of rape services, so I think for us as an LGBT organisation, we were a little bit concerned about referring victims of corrective rape into those services, without fully knowing whether they’re equipped to deal with those types of rape, because there are real differences with corrective rape.”
>
> (Scott, 27, worked for LGBT DVA program)

As Scott describes, the experience of corrective sexual violence is, for sexual and gender minority victims/survivors of this form of abuse, inextricably tied up with their gender and/or sexuality. Corrective forms of sexual violence – as with conversion tactics, in general – are used, by perpetrators, in an attempt to “punish”, convert, or to “teach” an individual how to be heterosexual and/or cis (Lock Swarr 2012; Brownworth 2013; Doan-Minh 2019). The unique power dynamics involved in acts of corrective sexual violence – demonstrated through the homo/biphobic and/or transphobic beliefs motivating such acts – are therefore significant. Scott’s concern that mainstream service providers would be unequipped to deal with such forms of violence is unsurprising; as has already been established, the intersection between sexual victimisation and the experience of being a sexual and/or gender minority is not only silenced within discourse surrounding sexual violence but is, seemingly, largely absent from mainstream service provision also.

Similarly, research suggests that violence within queer relationships is often misunderstood by mainstream support providers. Unique forms of abuse found within queer relationships – including forms of identity abuse – fall outside of the typical script or public story of violence, and subsequently, are not generally recognised by mainstream services (Donovan and Hester 2014). Scott explained how identity abuse experienced by bisexual women can have significant impacts:

> "for a lot of the […] bisexual women who came through our service, they came to me and they had an absolute identity crisis, because their abuser would say, 'well you're with a woman, you're not bi, you're gay, cos you're with a woman', um, and then obviously experiencing that through the relationship for so long, when the relationship ended, they really got confused with how they identified, cos they'd been gaslit for this long."
>
> (Scott, 27, worked for LGBT DVA program)

The weaponisation of a victim's sexual and/or gender identity – used, here, to undermine an individual's self-identified label of their own sexuality – is therefore a form of abuse unique to sexual and gender minorities (Donovan and Hester 2014; Donovan et al 2024). Whilst mainstream service providers may be aware of these types of abuse, it has been established that their primary focus is on heterosexual, cis women. Furthermore, the feminist principles underpinning the vast majority of rape crisis centres across the UK place a focus upon men's violence (towards women) specifically, and consequently, service providers dedicated to a heteronormative understanding of sexual violence may be unable to explain, or understand, patterns of woman-to-woman abuse (Bermea et al 2018; Coston 2021).

Both unique forms of sexual violence experienced by sexual and gender minorities discussed here – those of corrective sexual violence and identity-related forms of abuse – pose significant barriers to support, in the form of the *emotional labour* performed when victims/survivors are forced to educate service providers on these specific experiences. The term emotional labour - as coined by Hochschild (2012) - once referred, solely, to demands within the workplace, and could be defined as a person's "ongoing awareness, use, control, and management of a range of personal feelings (emotions) within the context of formal work (labour)" (Pillay 2023, p.396). However, the term is now widely used within broader cultural

and social contexts (Grandey, Diefendorff and Rupp 2012). In the context of this thesis, specifically, emotional labour is performed when sexual and gender minority victims/survivors have to educate service providers on the language used to describe their identities and lived experiences. Here, then, emotional labour is not only tied to explanations of the act(s) of violence itself, but, moreover, may involve explaining one's sexual/gender identity/identities to service providers who are unfamiliar with LGBTQ+ identities (Hester et al 2012; Harvey et al 2014; Rosenberg and Tilley 2021).

Emotional labour for victims/survivors

Several service providers discussed the impacts of the emotional labour involved, for victims/survivors accessing support services, in explaining one's experience and/or identity to service providers. Scott, for instance, recounted how victims/survivors often felt discouraged when having to educate professionals on their experience and/or identity:

> "…that's exactly what our service users told us, you know, they said: 'I'm so fed up of having to tell the police and tell my social worker and tell my counsellor about LGBT domestic abuse, I feel like I'm training them', and when you've got to…you just lose confidence when you've got to explain what that is to someone who's meant to be supporting you."
>
> (Scott, 27, worked for LGBT DVA program)

The victims/survivors mentioned by Scott therefore felt a level of frustration towards professionals, since despite their positions of authority, they still expected LGBTQ+ service users to educate, or "train" them on LGBTQ+ identities and experiences of abuse. This concern was echoed by Storm (22, Children's ISVA for Rape Crisis):

> "[I am] quite worried about clients having to perform the emotional labour of explaining their identity to someone who's supposed to be supporting them with something horrific. Erm, and that's not really okay for them to be put in that position."
>
> (Storm, 22, Children's ISVA for Rape Crisis)

As will be discussed later in this chapter – where the particular benefits of training will be addressed – service providers' lack of awareness surrounding the specific language and

terminology used to describe LGBTQ+ identities meant that Storm, themself, performed significant levels of emotional labour through their attempts to educate their colleagues. Both Scott and Storm therefore recognised the implications of victims/survivors needing to explain their sexual and/or gender identities, alongside the emotional impacts of receiving support. Likewise, through focus groups with trans, non-binary and intersex victims/survivors of sexual violence, Katie explained how participants felt a pressure to teach service providers about one's identity before support could even begin:

> "…a kind of central theme which is: 'explaining wastes my time', so having to come to the service and do a lot of work which is emotional labour and is a burden in order to get to the point where you can do the work for why you're actually there, so yeah, by that I mean, having to explain how your gender identity impacts you, even before you even get anywhere close to talking about the trauma that you've suffered."
>
> (Katie, 36, Rape Crisis employee)

For sexual and gender minority victims/survivors accessing mainstream support services, the additional emotional impacts of explaining one's sexual and/or gender identity/identities may serve as a significant barrier to support. The barriers identified here therefore call into question the ability of mainstream services to successfully support sexual and gender minority survivors. In response to this, alternative service provision, focused, specifically, upon the needs of LGBTQ+ survivors, may be better placed to support sexual and gender minorities.

LGBTQ+ specialist sexual violence support: alternative support provision

As highlighted within chapter six, multiple studies explain the benefits of tailored, specialist support for sexual and gender minority victims/survivors of sexual violence (Ristock and Timbang 2005; Simpson and Helfrich 2005; Hester et al 2012; Harvey et al 2014; Love et al 2017; SafeLives 2018). The opportunity to discuss experiences of sexual violence, *alongside* the experience of belonging to a marginalised sexual and/or gender category, can have a significant impact upon the ways in which sexual and gender minority victims/survivors may process their experience (Hester et al 2012). Such an opportunity may be even more pertinent for victims/survivors whose experiences of violence fall outside of the typical script of sexual violence, or, moreover, for victims/survivors who have experienced violence motivated by homophobia, biphobia, and/or transphobia (Harvey et al 2014; Donovan and Hester 2014;

Mortimer et al 2019). Furthermore, as suggested by several victims/survivors within this research, LGBTQ+ specific services are better placed to understand, and, crucially, to support sexual and gender minority survivors, through the use of inclusive language and framings of sexual violence – both of which are frequently missed by mainstream services. In particular, by-and-for services – services run by, and for, queer and trans individuals – are deemed especially important in providing a safe and supportive space for sexual and gender minority survivors.

By-and-for support

All service providers interviewed within this project recognised the importance of tailored, specialist support. Scott, in particular, emphasised the significance of LGBTQ+ specialist support, including by-and-for services:

> "… LGBT services, 100% are needed, we need those by-and-for services. I'm very confident in saying that a lot of the LGBT+ victims that came through our doors, were comfortable with us, comfortable to tell us about their experiences, and I don't know if that would've been the same if they went to a mainstream service."
>
> (Scott, 27, worked for LGBT DVA programme)

Scott's point is indicative of thoughts echoed by several participants, who explained how they would prefer to access a by-and-for service as opposed to a mainstream one. Frankie (24, lesbian cis woman), for instance, noted that by-and-for services provide "safety from judgement", supporting Scott's belief that sexual and gender minorities often feel more comfortable accessing LGBTQ+ specific support and sharing their experiences (Ristock and Timbang 2005; Simpson and Helfrich 2005). Given the fears of homo/biphobic and/or transphobic reactions from mainstream service providers felt by several victims/survivors within this research, Scott's suggestion that many sexual and gender minority individuals may feel uncomfortable accessing mainstream support is not surprising.

Crucially, Scott went onto explain his worry that victims/survivors would not get the support they needed if LGBTQ+ specialist services did not exist:

> "So, yeah, I'm a real advocate for LGBT services, from working in the sector, I am. I'd be concerned about some of the service users we supported if that LGBT service didn't

> exist, because they weren't in a great place, but they also weren't willing to go to mainstream domestic abuse services."
>
> (Scott, 27, worked for LGBT DVA programme)

Here, Scott's reinforces the necessity of LGBTQ+ specific support, demonstrating how the barriers associated with mainstream services may become a deterrent to sexual and gender minorities attempting to access formal support. Storm also recognised the importance of by-and-for support, highlighting how receiving support from another member of the community may be particularly affirming for victims/survivors:

> "I think it is absolutely the case that cishet people can be provided with really brilliant training that will help them be an affirming, supportive, inclusive – all of the things – professional, but I think they are still less well placed to provide sort of identity responsive, genuinely understanding support, than someone who is part of that community."
>
> (Storm, 22, Children's ISVA for Rape Crisis)

Findings from SafeLives (2018) support Storm's statement; LGBTQ+ specific services are said to provide better suited, more relevant support due to their increased understanding of sexual and gender minority victims/survivors' unique needs. Storm's point here is also upheld by several victims/survivors who participated within this research. Frankie, for instance, suggested that support from "someone who was queer as well" would help to establish a "shared understanding" – something she worried would be missed within a mainstream service. Furthermore, Storm's suggestion that, for sexual and gender minority survivors, receiving support from another member of the community would be "identity responsive" is supported by Eight's experience of accessing a trans-dedicated service. Eight (35, queer) noted how, within "predominantly cis or only cis environments", their transness was more visible, and more *relevant,* to everyone else but them. Contrastingly, receiving support within a group dedicated to trans victims/survivors enabled Eight to feel "completely understood". From Eight's perspective, then, the success of by-and-for service provision, was, in some ways, a result of service providers' abilities to recognise when gender was relevant, and, moreover, when it was not – something, they argued, would not be possible within predominantly cis

spaces (Zimman 2017). Indeed, as discussed above, the emotional labour that comes with explaining one's sexual and/or gender identity is significantly reduced when LGBTQ+ specialist forms of support are in place.

Whilst Storm worked within a mainstream service, they recognised how their queerness positioned them as more approachable to trans and queer victims/survivors accessing the service:

> "I always share my pronouns […] and a couple of times I've had really enthusiastic responses to that from trans clients, who've been like 'ooh, I'm really glad you shared them, that's really exciting, I've never had an adult do that before' [..] I think that's helped with them feeling comfortable sharing that part of themselves with me, and then kind of following on from that feeling more able to talk about how it's impacting and inflecting their experience, which I think it often does, in ways that cishet professionals don't necessarily recognise or understand, erm, so I think, yeah it seems to have made the most difference to probably my trans and non-binary clients."
>
> (Storm, 22, Children's ISVA for Rape Crisis)

Through sharing and expressing their own queer identity, Storm demonstrated how trans and non-binary clients, in turn, also felt able to discuss "that part of themselves". Storm's experience therefore illustrates the importance of representation – and furthermore, highlights the ways in which mainstream services can implement more LGBTQ+ inclusive service provision – since, although they were not working *within* an LGBTQ+ dedicated service, they were able to provide tailored, more appropriate support through their lived experience.

Making mainstream service provision LGBTQ+ inclusive

Both Katie (36, Rape Crisis employee) and Sarah (25, ISVA within charity and police) also recognised the importance of representation within mainstream services, demonstrating how LGBTQ+ specialist service provision can be incorporated within mainstream support. Sarah, for instance, explained the role of an LGBTQ+ ISVA (Independent Sexual Violence Advisor) within the organisation she worked for:

> "…we were also lucky to have an LGBTQ specific ISVA in our team, erm, so that was really good in terms of being inclusive […] it might mean that they have more expertise and experiences that they can more, that sort of like the survivor can more closely identify with, so we'd always try and do that if we could and give people the option either way."
>
> (Sarah, 25, ISVA within charity and police)

As discussed in chapter five, the role of an ISVA is to support victims/survivors through the process of navigating the criminal justice system (Hester and Lilley 2018). Given that sexual and gender minorities may experience unique challenges surrounding reporting (Langerderfer-Magruder et al 2016), the existence of specialist support for these victims/survivors is essential (LGBT Foundation 2023). Furthermore, Sarah explained the importance of victims/survivors being afforded the *choice* of specialist support:

> "I think it's very important in the sense that people should be able to have the choice, erm, because of the experience they've been through it might be that they're more comfortable speaking to someone who fully understands or maybe identifies with that community themselves, as part of that community."
>
> (Sarah, 25, ISVA within charity and police)

As has been established, several studies indicate that by-and-for support is more appealing to sexual and gender minority victims/survivors than generic forms of support (Ristock and Timbang 2005; Simpson and Helfrich 2005; SafeLives 2018). Yet, specialist service provision is not reserved, exclusively, for LGBTQ+ specific services; mainstream sexual violence support services can also provide by-and-for support, as illustrated by Sarah's example of the role of an LGBTQ+ ISVA within her organisation. The existence of specialist members of staff within a mainstream service is not only significant in terms of the unique forms of support they can deliver, but, moreover, makes access more likely – since, as Love et al's (2017) findings indicate, LGBTQ+ victims/survivors are more likely to access services that have a high representation of LGBTQ+ staff members. Indeed, Harvey et al (2014) include diversity of sexual orientation and/or gender identity amongst staff members as one of several ways in which service provision can be described as LGBTQ+ supportive. The representation of sexual and gender minority staff members *within* mainstream services is therefore significant.

Robyn also spoke about representation within existing services. Highlighting the lack of LGBTQ+ specific services across the UK, Robyn explained why representation within mainstream services is vital:

> "…within mainstream services, I don't know that you necessarily have to have a whole service that is just queer and trans specific all the time because that's not realistic in most areas of the country, […] I think for most places that isn't gonna be a realistic thing, but having a kind of awareness in existing services that that would be something to aim for, that you have staff that are representative, that can be available..."
>
> (Robyn, 35, bisexual, genderqueer, therapist)

Likewise, Katie raised the significance of representation, explaining how her organisation planned to improve their service, specifically, for trans and non-binary survivors:

> "I think [what] we would like to be doing, which I know other rape crisis centres are doing, which is things like having specialist support workers who also have lived experience, being trans and non-binary, and yeah, being able to offer counselling with a trans or non-binary person. So, essentially, it's really about hiring and having a team within our team that are kind of championing and specialising in that."
>
> (Katie, 36, Rape Crisis employee)

Furthermore, Katie's organisation held focus groups with trans, non-binary and intersex victims/survivors of sexual violence, in order to explore how their service could be made more inclusive for these individuals. Reflecting on these focus groups, Katie spoke about how participants put more trust into services with higher representations of gender diverse staff:

> "…one of the things that came up was around trust being, there's an element of trust which is dependent on…so if we have staff who feel comfortable enough and safe enough to work for us, with us, then that indicates that it's safe enough to receive support from us."
>
> (Katie, 36, Rape Crisis employee)

Again, Katie's point here is supported by Love et al's (2017) findings pertaining to sexual and gender minority victims/survivors' feelings of trust towards services with higher

representations of LGBTQ+ staff in general. Hence, the perspectives of service providers outlined here suggest that specialist forms of support for LGBTQ+ victims/survivors may be found within existing, mainstream services, so long as organisations recognise, and attend to, the unique experiences of sexual and gender minorities. With this in mind, a consideration of how mainstream services can implement better, more tailored support, through the use of training, is important and examined next.

Training on the specific needs of LGBTQ+ service users

Whilst by-and-for support is significant, several of the service providers and victims/survivors interviewed as part of this research recognised that cis, heterosexual service providers could also deliver affirming, thoughtful support to sexual and gender minorities. Central to this was the implementation of effective training opportunities, with the aim of educating staff on the unique needs of sexual and gender minority survivors.

Training as an ongoing task

Sarah spoke about her experience of delivering support to a wide range of people from marginalised communities. In doing so, she emphasised the importance of education and training:

> "I just think you can always learn more and always understand more, and I'm also very aware of the privilege I hold as sort of a white, straight woman, and the fact that although I may be able to kind of understand some experiences and educate myself as much as possible, I can't fully identify because I'm not in that position. So, I think it's really important that people have that sort of additional knowledge and that training around those issues because it can be really hard to understand them if you've not experienced those same issues if that makes sense."
>
> (Sarah, 25, ISVA within charity and police)

Through her work as an ISVA, Sarah explained how she developed better understandings of sexual and gender minorities' experiences through additional training opportunities. Sarah's point that there are always opportunities to "learn more and understand more" was emphasised by Scott, who worried that training initiatives were often viewed as "tick box exercises". He stated:

> "Attending a training session for a day is not going to make your organisation inclusive, it's actually about, you've got that information now, now it's your time to take it away and actually implement it. I think that's what gets missed quite a lot with training."
>
> (Scott, 27, worked for LGBT DVA program)

In response to LGBTQ+ training initiatives found within the UK Education system, Hunt et al (2018) recognise the pitfalls in measuring the effectiveness of stand-alone training sessions, noting how the results of effective training are likely to be seen only once trainees return to work. The worry that training becomes a tick box exercise, used by organisations to demonstrate how staff have completed necessary training programmes, is demonstrative of the importance of organisations taking measures themselves to ensure that their service is, and *continues* to be, LGBTQ+ affirming and inclusive. Indeed, as Shields (2018, p.3) explains through their study focusing on queer and trans inclusive responses to intimate partner violence, training must not be thought of as a one-off event, but, rather, must be implemented frequently, in response to "the high turnover rates and the lack of institutional memory that is common in the social services sector."

Training about LGBTQ+ identities

Whilst training was deemed necessary by all service providers who participated in this research, several participants explained how some training initiatives may be more helpful than others. Both Storm and Katie demonstrated this by highlighting the levels of (mis)understanding amongst their colleagues. Storm explained how training may be overwhelming for staff with limited prior knowledge of the common issues affecting LGBTQ+ individuals:

> "There's a tendency for training to be focused on trying to teach people loads and loads of terms, without ensuring they really understand the context behind those terms, so I think a number of my colleagues have had training before, and have had loads of words thrown at them, and what they haven't, obviously using appropriate, respectful language people recognise as affirming is crucial, but I think, where the gap has been, for my colleagues, is in helping them actually understand, gender, especially gender, and the kind of really fundamental things like the difference between someone's gender and someone's assigned sex at birth, and that kind of thing, erm,

> and sort of a deeper understanding of just really the real basics and sort of most people's trans experiences, and sort of how pronouns work and that kind of thing…"
>
> (Storm, 22, Children's ISVA for Rape Crisis)

Storm therefore hoped for training which ensured that all staff had a "basic grounding in really fundamental things they need to understand". Here, Storm recognised the differences in awareness, amongst staff, of LGBTQ+ lives, including what they deemed "the real basics" of sexual and gender minorities' everyday experiences.

Katie and Scott also spoke about discrepancies in staff members' levels of knowledge, and, furthermore, levels of comfortability surrounding LGBTQ+ experiences. In particular, both Katie and Scott considered the fears felt by mainstream service providers when addressing service users' sexual and/or gender identities. When discussing the importance of service providers' gathering information about service users' identities, Scott explained his position in commissioning services:

> "…some of the services I commission, if I see quite a high number of those 'prefer not to say' or 'other/unknown', I speak to that service and I go, right, what's going on here? And it's always, 'oh, they don't feel comfortable to ask the questions', so it's actually finding out, is that the problem within the services? Are professionals feeling uncomfortable to ask those questions? If they are, then that's fine. But do something about that, […] you know, not asking the questions because you're uncomfortable is not a good enough excuse."
>
> (Scott, 27, worked for LGBT DVA program)

By not asking these questions, Scott argues that service providers may be – somewhat unintentionally – causing harm to victims/survivors:

> "…think about how uncomfortable that victim feels when you misgender them, or you get their pronouns wrong, and actually, the risks to you offending a victim are so much higher than you just feeling uncomfortable asking that question."
>
> (Scott, 27, worked for LGBT DVA program)

Relying on cis-heteronormative assumptions, instead of getting *clarification* of a victims/survivors' specific experience, identity, or pronouns, therefore produces significant barriers for sexual and gender minorities attempting to access support. Katie also addressed this issue, specifically, when speaking about pronouns, noting the significance of training:

> "Things like introducing pronouns when you're doing a name round, a lot of people are like: 'oh my god, what if no one'…cos a lot of people who come to our group have no idea what a pronoun is, they've never heard of non-binary, so it's being able and prepared to explain that in an easy way that isn't shaming, and that is still inclusive to anybody in the group, but yeah, not making people feel stupid for not knowing what it is, so pieces of training around that, you know they take a little bit of time to write, but actually then it's happening, and it's fine, and everyone's kind of surprised by how fine it is."
>
> (Katie, 36, Rape Crisis employee)

Like Scott, Katie explained how some service providers may feel uncomfortable, or nervous, asking questions – such as recording individuals' pronouns within a group setting - for fears of getting it wrong or getting no response. Yet, as Katie addressed, developing training as a response to this was significant within her organisation. Indeed, Harvey et al's (2014) table of "characteristics of LGBT-supportive service provision" states that in order for services to champion LGBT-inclusiveness, staff must not assume service users' sexual and/or gender identities, and, furthermore, must understand the diversity of sexual orientations and gender identities. Training which facilitates these understandings is therefore essential.

Specific LGBTQ+ sexual violence training

Moving beyond the more basic, or more generalised forms of training outlined thus far – those which are aimed at improving service providers' knowledge of LGBTQ+ identities – Katie additionally explained how more specific training, on the intersections between experiences of sexual violence and the experience of being LGBTQ+, would be beneficial:

> "I think the tricky thing is that you have quite drastic levels of difference in awareness in a big staff team, when you roll out training for all staff, it can end up being quite generic… what I think we would really like is awareness training that is specifically

about how these issues intersect with sexual violence, whereas quite often you'll go to a specialist organisation that works a lot with supporting LGBTQ people and it'll be a kind of general how to support them, whereas that nuance of what does this mean for potential survivors isn't there, because, I mean maybe with the exception of Galop, because there aren't that many organisations that are working kind of specifically within that cross-section."

(Katie, 36, Rape Crisis employee)

Todahl et al (2009) recognise the importance of understanding the ways in which sexual and gender minority statuses can impact upon a person's experience of sexual violence. Indeed, as recounted by several victims/survivors within this research, one's sexual and/or gender minoritised identity can have a significant impact upon the experience of sexual violence, whether that be in terms of the specific act(s) of violence an individual has experienced, or, moreover, in regard to the way in which their experience has been positioned within dominant depictions of sexual violence. Whilst Katie explained how training on this "cross-section" was limited, she credited Galop – the UK's LGBT+ anti-violence charity – for addressing this intersection. Storm also came across useful resources from Galop when searching for training materials to share with her colleagues. They explained:

"I also had a look on the Galop website, they support LGBTQ+ domestic abuse victims and survivors, erm, and have some fantastic resources on things like sexual violence in the context of hate crimes and people's identities or rather how the marginalisation and oppression people experience acts as a barrier to accessing things like the criminal justice system and mental health care and stuff like that. So, they've got some really, really interesting stuff that I kind of printed off and shoved in a folder to be like: 'this is useful for people to look at, please look at it, I'm tired."

(Storm, 22, Children's ISVA for Rape Crisis)

Like Katie, Storm addressed the specific cross-section Galop attend to, regarding the unique experiences of sexual violence that sexual and gender minorities may face. Additionally, Storm noted how LGBTQ+ victims/survivors may face additional barriers to reporting incidents of violence, or may be reluctant to seek support, precisely because of the

marginalisation they experience on the basis of their sexual and/or gender minority identities. In this sense, both Katie and Storm felt that training on this "cross-section" was vital to ensuring that the specific service needs of sexual and gender minority victims/survivors were met.

Emotional labour and training responsibilities for queer and trans service providers

Whilst service providers believed that training could promote more LGBTQ+ inclusive service provision, it is important to address that such training initiatives are often sought out, and implemented, by queer and trans staff. Indeed, Storm alluded to the emotional workload assigned to them regarding their colleagues' awareness and knowledge (or lack thereof) surrounding LGBTQ+ experiences and identities. When asked if she felt as though it was her responsibility to educate colleagues on inclusive language and terminology surrounding LGBTQ+ victims/survivors, Storm replied:

> "Yeah, there's definitely been, there's definitely been a lot of that. Erm, so I think, again it's something that feels quite complicated and quite nuanced to me because on some level, erm, I'm very mindful that it's, like although I am absolutely being paid to perform emotional labour, that's my entire job, that's not the labour I'm being paid to perform, erm, so there's an element of slight, especially when I'm doing it a lot, or people have said something that is particularly, particularly uncomfortable or particularly unpleasant to hear, erm, there's been, there's an element of exhaustion there."
>
> (Storm, 22, Children's ISVA for Rape Crisis)

The exhaustion Storm recounts here can be attributed, in large part, to the lack of training available to their colleagues. In the context of interpersonal violence support services, Shields (2018) explains how LGBTQ+ training is frequently left to LGBTQ+ service providers to organise and implement. Whilst Storm felt a responsibility to educate her colleagues on the importance of inclusive language – stating: "I would rather they were saying these things to me than to their clients, and I would rather be the one explaining it than someone who's experienced sexual violence who's trying to access support" – they explained how such explanations came with an additional, emotional workload. Indeed, Shields (2018, p.7)

highlights the importance of organisations taking steps to "self-educate" on the issues faced by LGBTQ+ victims/survivors, with the aim of "equally dividing the labour" of organising and facilitating training.

Katie also highlighted this issue when speaking, specifically, about trans and non-binary service providers. Katie explained how her organisation aimed to diversify the staff members involved in facilitating more inclusive service provision. In particular, she felt it was important to divide the workload evenly, by:

> "…not having the one trans person that's in charge of all the trans issues but having a team."
>
> (Katie, 36, Rape Crisis employee)

Whilst the representation of queer and trans service providers within mainstream support services is vital, both Storm and Katie highlight here that the responsibility of supporting sexual and gender minority victims/survivors should not be placed, solely, upon these individuals. Indeed, and as evidenced through Storm's experience, openly queer and trans service providers may face similar demands of emotional labour to those placed up LGBTQ+ victims/survivors attempting to access mainstream services. Whilst Storm maintained that they "would rather they were saying these things to [them] than to their clients", the expectation - to educate their colleagues - placed upon them, nevertheless, implies that more thorough training interventions are needed.

The implementation of effective training, aimed at promoting LGBTQ+ inclusion within sexual violence support services, is a necessary but complex task. Whilst the priorities regarding the forms such training may take will inevitably differ across organisations, it is clear that several issues, in particular, are pertinent. A focus upon developing staff members' knowledge and awareness of the 'basics' of LGBTQ+ identities, for instance, is expected to ease some of the emotional labour assigned to queer and trans members of staff within mainstream services. Another more specific area of training focused upon within this discussion has been that which centres the intersection between victims/survivors' sexual and/or gender identities, and their experiences of sexual violence. In particular, service providers explained how education and training surrounding sexual and gender minorities' unique experiences of

sexual violence would be significant. Effective LGBTQ+ inclusion training is therefore not only significant for victims/survivors attempting to access mainstream services, but, moreover, can additionally help to eliminate some of the emotional work placed upon queer and trans service providers within these services.

Feminist principles of sexual violence support

Thus far within this chapter, a focus has been placed upon the ways in which the typical script of sexual violence produces, and sustains, barriers to support for sexual and gender minorities (Duke and Davidson 2009; Donovan and Hester 2014; Mortimer et al 2019). A critique of the rigid conceptualisation of sexual violence proposed by this script has, therefore, been central to this discussion. However, there are arguments made in favour of a dedication to rigid definitions of sexual violence, namely, within gendered approaches to sexual violence. Such arguments can be understood best through an exploration of feminist anti-violence rhetoric.

Sexual violence as a gendered phenomenon: gender-specific service provision

As outlined in chapter two, feminist principles are vital within the anti-violence arena. Indeed, such principles enable a gendered lens through which to understand the pervasiveness of men's violence within society (Girshick 2002; Kelly 2013; Griffin 2015). Rape Crisis centres were founded during the second wave of the women's movement, with the first centre of its kind opening in London in 1973 (McMillan 2004). Feminist responses to men's violence therefore took the form of alternative welfare services, with a view to empowering women and resisting unequal gender relations; centres were created and delivered by and for women (McMillan 2004). These principles remain fundamental within the domain of sexual violence support – whilst over half of Rape Crisis centres across England and Wales now provide support to men and boys, their primary focus remains women and girls (Rape Crisis England and Wales 2024b). Given the centrality, and significance, of feminist theory in the development of understandings of sexual violence within the political sphere, a commitment to, and championing of, such principles is deemed necessary (Vera-Gray 2020).

However, when considering the support needs of sexual and gender minority victims/survivors, a heavily gendered, and predominantly cis-heteronormative approach to sexual violence, has been exposed as having exclusionary consequences. As showcased

through the narratives of victims/survivors within this research, such approaches to sexual violence have produced unmoveable barriers to support. Indeed, as highlighted earlier by Scott, victims/survivors fear that they "won't be believed", or that their experience will not be understood when mainstream services reinforce the typical script of sexual violence (Simpson and Helfrich 2005; Zimman 2017; Mortimer et al 2019).

The provision of support, through binary gendered terms – i.e., through the provision of 'women-only' support – is particularly exclusionary of individuals existing outside, between, or beyond the gender binary. Indeed, as McCann (2016) notes, through a queer interrogation of feminist thinking, feminist thought frequently re-inscribes the gendered subject within its analyses: "…while theoretically there is a desire to challenge the binary of the gendered subject, undertaking a feminist approach appears to empirically necessitate gender boundaries being drawn" (McCann 2016, p.229). With the theoretical discrepancies between feminist and queer theory in mind, I now turn to an exploration of how service providers within this research attempted to reconcile feminist principles with the need to make support more inclusive, and, moreover, *less gendered*. Katie spoke about this, explaining her organisation's roots within the feminist anti-violence:

> "Our organisation, like many rape crisis organisations, has come from the (*sic*), from a very feminist place, and a recognition that sexual violence impacts women a lot more than men, so I think the journey for us has been, is currently, around: 'how do we honour the roots of the movement, while also not alienating people and really including people?' So, I think there's, with any…within our organisation there's definitely, like, there's some people that feel that there's a tension there, where, if we lose contact completely with that history then we lose some of the, we kind of lose some of the power of that legacy, I guess? But also, it's very clear to us that the very gendered language is really excluding…"
>
> (Katie, 36, Rape Crisis employee)

Katie's point that "sexual violence impacts women a lot more than men" is vital to understanding why feminist conceptualisations of sexual violence are imperative. Katie went on to say:

> "We do live in this patriarchal society, we do still have a massively imbalanced, you know, power dynamic between cisgender men and everyone else."
>
> (Katie, 36, Rape Crisis employee)

The recognition of unequal power dynamics between cisgender men and "everyone else" is crucial here, highlighting how sexual violence performs, so often, as a tool of power and control, used for the purpose of *upholding* a cis-heteropatriarchal system (Clark 1987; Girshick 2002; Griffin 2015). Furthermore, Katie notes how men's power and violence not only impacts cis, heterosexual women – as the typical script and public story of violence would suggest (Donovan and Hester 2014; Mortimer et al 2019) – but, instead, impacts "everyone else", implying that the effects of this power dynamic are felt by all individuals marginalised by their gender. This would suggest that the binary, rigidly gendered approach to sexual victimisation, promoted by feminist anti-violence rhetoric, needs to be amended.

Yet, Katie also notes how losing touch with the feminist principles underpinning the vast majority of rape crisis organisations – through attempts to diversify services – may result in a loss "of some of the power of that legacy". The power of the feminist legacy Katie refers to here is indicative of the long history of feminist contributions to the anti-violence movement (Clark 1987; Girshick 2002; Griffin 2015). Furthermore, the reluctance, or hesitancy, to diversify the representation of a victim/survivor – in order to include those who do not fit within the category of a cis, heterosexual woman – may be a response to organisational challenges and political impact. Notably, much feminist theory places significance upon identity categories – those, in particular, of 'woman' and 'women' (McCann 2016). Within these arguments, calls for essentialist, binary definitions of 'woman' are made, in order to ensure the feminist goals of "empowerment and enfranchisement are met" (Duran 2001, p.256). Hammers and Brown (2004, p.97) support such arguments, suggesting that categorical thinking is needed in order to "orient and group [a] debate". Hence, in order to capture the support of the social, and, moreover, in order to portray a clear, unwavering depiction of the goals of the feminist anti-violence movement, it is argued, by some, that rigid categorisations are necessary.

DeKeseredy (2021) develops this point further, by arguing that discourses surrounding violence must, specifically, reiterate the significance of patriarchy in relation to the violence

experienced by women. He therefore rejects 'gender-neutral' terminology, in favour of language which directly addresses violence against women (and the patriarchal structures which sustain it) (DeKeseredy 2021). An understanding of the centrality of male violence against women within a patriarchal society is therefore critical to DeKeseredy (2021), and attempts to broaden perspectives on what constitutes violence, or who can be a perpetrator/victim, (i.e., violence perpetrated by women, or violence against men) are, according to DeKeseredy (2021), harmful to feminist goals of anti-violence. Recognising the issues of representation and inclusion, DeKeseredy (2021) suggests that alternative terminology may be used by those whose experiences of violence exist outside of this heterosexist, cisnormative frame. Such a suggestion implies that, according to DeKeseredy (2021), feminist goals of anti-violence are in conflict with LGBTQ+ inclusion within sexual violence support services.

Here, we can assume that DeKeseredy (2021) is not only centring the typical script in his analysis of sexual violence, but, moreover, is prioritising it, to the extent that acts of violence which fall outside of its rigid categorisation are deemed less significant. Whilst a focus on patriarchy is, indeed, essential within framings of sexual violence, DeKeseredy (2021) negates a crucial point here, highlighted earlier by Katie, that cis-heteropatriarchal structures sustain unequal power dynamic*s* not *just* between men and women, but further, *"*between cisgender men and everyone else". DeKeseredy (2021) therefore seems less concerned with the goal of recentring patriarchy within analyses of sexual violence, but instead, appears to be more focused upon the continuation of rigid categorisations of victim/survivor and/or perpetrator through the use of binary gendered language. As Katie explained, the use of "very gendered language" within sexual violence support services is "really excluding". Hence, whilst DeKeseredy (2021) suggests the use of alternative terminology for individuals whose experiences of violence fall outside of the cis-and-heteronormative framing of violence he calls for, such a framing nevertheless continues to impact, and exclude, sexual and gender minorities, precisely because of its commitment to binary gendered language.

Excluding cis men from gender-specific services

Whilst heavily gendered assumptions surrounding sexual violence were therefore deemed exclusionary by Katie, several service providers noted the importance of spaces which did *not* include cis men. Indeed, Katie herself noted how, for many women who have survived sexual

violence - where the perpetrator of violence was a man - "men are the biggest trigger", and, indeed, as discussed earlier, Katie highlighted how men are the most common perpetrators of violence. Recognising the pervasiveness of men's violence, both Storm and Sarah also explained the significance of creating spaces without men. Storm said:

> "I think there is a conversation to be had about the value of spaces that don't include cis men, erm, specifically, for people who've experienced abuse that the vast majority of the time is perpetrated by cis men."
>
> (Storm, 22, Children's ISVA for Rape Crisis)

Likewise, Sarah explained:

> "I don't think it's a bad thing that they have women only services, just in that, what tends to happen in the large majority of these offences is that the perpetrator will be male. It's just statistically what's more than likely that that will be the case."
>
> (Sarah, 25, ISVA within charity and police)

Both Storm and Sarah, like Katie, not only explained the relevance of retaining a gendered analysis of sexual violence – insofar as sexual violence can be framed as an issue stemming from cis-heteropatriarchal control - but, moreover, demonstrated why this must translate to the provision of support (in the form of women-only services) (Clark 1987; Walby 1989; Boyle 2019). However, when it came to the organisation of such spaces, and specifically, who could be included, Storm noted:

> "I think it's a very complicated, very nuanced conversation, and I think it's very difficult to…I think it's very difficult to come up with a policy that genuinely makes everyone feel safe and supported and welcome. Erm, but I think I have a lot of time for and a lot of respect for the sort of policies that do have, that are kind of gender-specific and do provide gender-specific support, so long as they are trans-affirming and trans inclusive and are about self-identification."
>
> (Storm, 22, Children's ISVA for Rape Crisis)

Storm's point is significant here, highlighting how, whilst gender-specific spaces are important, they must be trans inclusive, and operate on a self-identification basis (Roch et al 2010). It may be argued, then, that categorical thinking, where gender-specific service provision is concerned, can be useful, so long as such provision includes policies surrounding trans inclusion and self-identification. However, given the political discourse surrounding, in particular, trans women's inclusion within women-only spaces, the language used when establishing *who* can access such spaces is significant (Kenagy 2005; Roch et al 2010; Matsuzaka and Koch 2019). Indeed, as Isla (26, bisexual trans woman) highlighted, the public narrative surrounding trans women's inclusion within such spaces "does put you off from wanting to access services that aren't explicitly for trans women." Therefore, whilst trans-inclusive policies within gender-specific spaces are important, if these are not widely and explicitly advertised, such inclusive actions may be missed, particularly because, as Isla states, "the default in society is that trans people aren't welcome". As Renz (2023) highlights, policies regarding inclusion within single-sex spaces differ across organisations, with some organisations operating on a self-identifying basis, whilst others make specific exclusions based upon sex assigned at birth. Hence, discrepancies between services mean that access to a trans-inclusive service may be determined by a postcode lottery (Coy et al 2011).

Renz (2023) maintains that single-sex, or gender-specific, approaches to service provision are crucial, insofar as they account for the structural basis of gender-based violence. Renz (2023, p. 53) argues that without this approach, "there is a risk that gender-based violence becomes reduced to individual events and the actions of individual perpetrators, rather than being understood as a systemic problem". However, Renz (2023) fails to account for *all* individuals who are vulnerable to, or impacted by, gender-based violence – and the systems which sustain it – on the basis of their marginalised gender identity. As highlighted earlier by Katie, the impacts of cis men's violence – and, moreover, the impacts of cis-heteropatriarchal control – are felt not only by women, but by everyone positioned as subordinate within a a social and political system prioritising cis men. Both Storm and Katie discussed how services can be mindful of this through adjustments to their spaces excluding cis men. Storm explained:

> "I also volunteer at [another] rape crisis centre, and their policy is that they support people for whom womanhood forms any part of their identity, and that's on the basis

> of self-identification. So, they'll support non-binary people who consider that, kind of womanhood or femininity has kind of any meaningful relationship to their identity, and that's reflected in who they recruit to their service as well. And I think that is quite a different policy and quite a different approach from the centres that essentially say we only support cis women."
>
> (Storm, 22, Children's ISVA for Rape Crisis)

Likewise, Katie said:

> "Already in our service, what used to be our women-only groups are now not described that way, they're described as groups that welcome, er, women, including trans women, non-binary, and intersex people, and then we just specify that the groups are not open to men."
>
> (Katie, 36, Rape Crisis employee)

Both approaches outlined here by Katie and Storm go some way in addressing the limits of rigid, gender-specific policies within service provision, and, moreover, allow for a more diverse range of victims/survivors to access support. However, whilst these attempts to make gender-specific policies more inclusive do, indeed, provide a further reach of support, it is crucial to note that working within any form of gender categorisation can be exclusionary. McCann's application of Butler's analysis of the subject is useful to consider here (Butler 1990; McCann 2016). In particular, Butler addresses concerns with the ways in which marginalised individuals may be harmed through any attempts to reinscribe the subject – "to 'settle' on a subject category, then, is to reinscribe a fixity that excludes some, often in violent ways (for example, those who are literally erased because their bodies do not conform to a discrete binary" (Butler 1990; McCann 2016, p.232).

As Storm discussed, the conversation surrounding gender-specific policies within services remains nuanced, and it may be "very difficult to come up with a policy that genuinely makes everyone feel safe and supported and welcome". Nevertheless, services can prioritise the aim of providing more inclusive support whilst remaining mindful of the importance of gender-specific spaces. Katie, for instance, explained how her organisation aims to tackle the issue:

> "I think what we feel would be ideal is when it comes to say, I don't know, group work, for example, that we would have groups that are for women, non-binary, and intersex people, a group that's for men, non-binary and intersex people, and then a group which is specifically for trans, non-binary, and intersex people, so that there's choice."
>
> (Katie, 36, Rape Crisis employee)

Whilst still framed within categorical terms, these groups would, in theory, be more representative, and more open, to gender diverse service users. Furthermore, the suggestion of having multiple groups would enable a commitment to gender-specific spaces and programmes, alongside a recognition of the importance of inclusion. The discussion presented here therefore demonstrates that when considering *who* is included, the issue of gender-specific service provision is a complex one. Nevertheless, service providers' recognition of this complexity proved significant in the facilitation of alternative forms of support, and, furthermore, highlighted the importance of ongoing conversations concerning inclusion.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the narratives of several providers of sexual violence support – working within both mainstream services and LGBTQ+ specialist organisations. In particular, this chapter has addressed the barriers to support experienced by sexual and gender minorities – outlined by victims/survivors who participated in this research – and, furthermore, has illustrated how service provision can aim to be more inclusive. Since participants were involved in varying roles and organisations, it is not surprising that there were discrepancies amongst service providers' levels of awareness, access to training, and general understandings of LGBTQ+ issues. However, throughout this chapter, several themes have been identified, enabling an understanding of how, and in what ways, service provision can be improved.

Significantly, all service providers who participated within this research recognised several of the barriers – that had also been identified by victims/survivors – to mainstream sexual violence support. In particular, the typical script of violence was noted as a significant barrier, therefore mirroring findings from interviews with survivors, and furthermore, supporting current research into the issue (Duke and Davidson 2009; Donovan and Hester 2014;

Mortimer et al 2019). Several service providers highlighted the barrier to support caused by mainstream services' dedication to the typical script of sexual violence, noting, in particular, the harms of re-inscribing stereotypes pertaining to who can exist as a perpetrator/survivor of sexual violence through gendered language. A related barrier to mainstream support identified by service providers came in the form of the emotional labour being performed by victims/survivors (Hochschild 2012). The pressure to explain one's identity, or to educate service providers on issues affecting the LGBTQ+ community, was therefore identified as a significant drawback to mainstream services. Moreover, Scott (27, worked for LGBT DVA program), in particular, noted the unique forms of violence LGBTQ+ individuals may experience, and expressed concerns that cis, heterosexual service providers would be unprepared to deal with such experiences (Donovan and Hester 2014; Donovan et al 2024).

In addressing these barriers, several participants highlighted the benefits of by-and-for service provision, noting how service providers who are, themselves, members of the LGBTQ+ community, are more likely to provide better suited, more tailored support to sexual and gender minority victims/survivors (Ristock and Timbang 2005; Simpson and Helfrich 2005; SafeLives 2018). Central to this was the ability of LGBTQ+ service providers and victims/survivors to form shared understandings, and, significantly, as Storm (22, Children's ISVA for Rape Crisis) explained, to ensure that service provision was "identity responsive". Whilst LGBTQ+ specialist sexual violence support services were deemed significant, several participants also demonstrated how LGBTQ+ specialist service provision can be incorporated within mainstream support services. Noting the role of LGBTQ+ ISVAs within certain organisations, as well as the benefits of services having higher representations of LGBTQ+ members of staff, participants explained how mainstream service provision can become LGBTQ+ informed.

Leading on from this, the significance of training – primarily, for cis, heterosexual service providers – on the unique needs of LGBTQ+ survivors, was stressed by all service providers. Whilst there were varying degrees to which service providers had accessed training, several participants explained how it was paramount that service providers acquire, at least, a basic level of understanding of LGBTQ+ lives, experiences and identities. Sarah went beyond this, suggesting that training initiatives which centre the intersection between experiences of violence and the experience of being queer and/or trans need to be more readily available

(Todahl et al 2009; Galop 2023). Furthermore, the importance of training was not only deemed significant in ensuring victims/survivors received the best, most appropriate care, but, additionally, participants suggested that successful training may help to eliminate or decrease the levels of emotional labour attended to by LGBTQ+ staff members within mainstream organisations (Shields 2018).

The final section of this chapter addressed the position of feminist principles within the sexual violence support sector, noting, specifically, the provision of gender-specific support. Feminist principles remain fundamental within the anti-violence sphere, and a commitment to such principles enables an analysis of violence within the context of patriarchal control. However, gender-specific service provision, when positioned in binary terms, may sustain barriers to access for victims/survivors who do not fit within, or across, the gender binary. Service providers within this research recognised the complexities involved in the provision of gender-specific support. Whilst many service providers recognised that it may be "very difficult to come up with a policy that genuinely makes everyone feel safe and supported and welcome", their commitment to inclusion meant that alternative forms of service provision were continually being explored and considered.

In summary, this chapter has centred the narratives of five service providers interviewed as part of this research. Central to the themes identified here has been a commitment to the provision of *inclusive* and *affirming* support. Whilst service providers found multiple and conflicting ways of ensuring their practice was inclusive and affirming of sexual and gender minority victims/survivors, it is clear that a commitment to these goals – regardless of the form they took – was significant. Indeed, service providers recognised several barriers to support that had been identified by victims/survivors earlier within this thesis. The final task of this thesis is, therefore, to consider the intersections between the narratives of victims/survivors and service providers further. Hence, in this thesis' concluding chapter, I position this research project's findings within the context of sexual violence support service provision, with a view to provide guidelines on how sexual violence support services can best support sexual and gender minorities.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

Introduction

The experiences of sexual and gender minority victims/survivors have largely been omitted from sociological considerations of sexual violence. The overarching aim of this research was, therefore, to contribute to a small but growing body of work aimed at accounting for these silences (see: Ristock 2002; Barnes 2008; Duke and Davidson 2009; Donovan and Hester 2014; Mortimer et al 2019; Donovan et al 2024). By focusing on sexual minorities who experience marginalisation on the basis of their gender, this thesis has addressed a significant gap in the literature pertaining to the intersecting impacts of homophobia/biphobia, transphobia, sexism, and misogyny. A queer poststructuralist feminist approach has enabled an analysis of the ways in which these intersecting oppressions shape sexual and gender minorities' experiences of sexual violence (as well as their perceptions of these experiences), and, furthermore, has provided new insights into the barriers to support these victims/survivors face.

The purpose of this concluding chapter is to draw together the main findings from this study. Accordingly, a focus is placed upon this project's research questions:

1. What are sexual and gender minority victims/survivors' experiences of sexual violence, and how do these compare to the 'typical script' of violence found within current sexual violence literature?
2. To what extent do sexual and gender minority victims/survivors' experiences of sexism, misogyny, and homophobia/biphobia and/or transphobia intersect with, or impact, their experiences of sexual violence?
3. Do sexual and gender minority victims/survivors' experiences of homophobia/biphobia/transphobia, sexism and misogyny influence their likelihood of accessing sexual violence support services?
4. In what ways do support services take a cis/heteronormative approach to sexual violence, and how can this be rectified to ensure that sexual and gender minority victims/survivors can access better, more tailored support?

This chapter begins with an overview of the thesis' theoretical contributions to current understandings of sexual violence within sociological literature. Specifically, I address this thesis' incorporation of a queer poststructuralist feminist analytical lens, which has enabled an investigation into the intersecting impacts of homo/biphobia, transphobia, sexism and misogyny in relation to sexual and gender minorities' experiences of sexual violence. Here, I suggest that an analysis of sexual and gender minority victims/survivors' experiences of sexual violence requires a unique approach that extends beyond current feminist explorations of violence. This approach would account for the gendered dimensions of sexual violence, but additionally, it would recognise how cis-heteronormativity shapes sexual and gender minorities' experiences of sexual violence and access to support services. To demonstrate this, I revisit several key findings from this research, which are incorporated under the headings of '(Im)balances of power', 'The hierarchy of severity' and 'Cis-heteronormativity, self-blame and victim-blaming'.

Next, I summarise the main findings pertaining to sexual and gender minorities' access to sexual violence support services. In this section, I address research questions three and four, and furthermore, I demonstrate the practical applications of this thesis. Here, key findings are incorporated under the headings: 'Barriers to access' and 'LGBTQ+ specialist service provision'. Thereafter, I make several recommendations for best practice within sexual violence support provision. These recommendations are directed, specifically, at mainstream support services, and they address the changes that can be made to service provision as it currently operates. However, I also acknowledge here that whilst such changes are pertinent to the immediate improvement of service provision, such amendments must be situated alongside structural goals concerning the treatment of sexual and gender minority victims/survivors within wider society. Hence, I suggest that the task of challenging the typical script of sexual violence should not fall, entirely, upon support services, but rather, additionally involves legal, cultural and political reforms.

This chapter concludes with a consideration of the limitations of this research, and accordingly, proposes several avenues for future research. Specifically, I address the limitations of this project's small, all white sample, and furthermore, I acknowledge the impacts of COVID-19 on the recruitment and data collection stages of this research. Proposals for future research include a wider-scale, intersectional analysis of sexual and gender

minorities' experiences of sexual violence and access to support services, as well as more specific investigations into the experiences of those who remain silent within current sociological literature (including bisexual, trans and non-binary victims/survivors).

Theoretical contributions

Through its utilisation of a queer, poststructuralist feminist approach, this thesis contributes to, and extends, current sociological understandings of sexual violence. Specifically, findings from this research indicate that a singularly gendered analysis of sexual violence cannot account for sexual and gender minorities' unique experiences of sexual violence. Hence, this thesis has demonstrated the necessity of incorporating a broader theoretical conceptualisation of sexual violence – one that can account for the gendered, cissexist, and heterosexist structural inequalities that underpin phenomenon of sexual violence against sexual and gender minorities. By focusing on sexual minorities who experience marginalisation on the basis of their gender, this thesis builds upon existing feminist analyses of sexual violence – which recognise sexual violence as a gendered phenomenon, maintained through patriarchal controls (Clark 1987; Griffin 2015) – and extends this further, through its additional consideration of the impacts of cis-heteronormativity. In this sense, dominant beliefs surrounding sexual violence – which position it as something that only occurs within cis-heterosexual contexts – have been challenged throughout this thesis. This theoretical contribution is evidenced, most clearly, through participants' unique experiences of sexual violence (as well as their reactions to, and perceptions of, their experiences), and as such, several of these experiences are revisited below.

(Im)balances of power

Feminists have exposed the relationship between sexual violence and power, highlighting, in particular, the ways in which patriarchal controls – those which restrict women's movements and choices within time, space and place – are enforced and sustained through acts of violence (Clark 1987; Griffin 2015). However, findings from this research indicate that a singularly and binary gendered analysis of sexual violence cannot account for the unique power imbalances underpinning sexual and gender minorities' experiences of sexual violence. Indeed, a key finding from this study concerns the way in which power operates through the structures of cis-heteropatriarchy and cis-heteronormativity.

Several aspects of the relationship between power and sexual violence have therefore been explored throughout this thesis, but specifically, three examples have exposed the unique power relations involved in sexual and gender minorities' experiences of sexual victimisation. These examples reference different forms of violence, including corrective rape, sexual violence motivated through objectification and fetishisation, and woman-to-woman abuse. Each of these examples demonstrates the necessity of an intersectional approach and brings into question the limitations of employing a singularly and binary gendered lens when theorising sexual violence. A summary of these forms of violence – and the ways in which they may be seen to embody the harms of cis-heteropatriarchal structures – is provided below.

Corrective sexual violence

As forms of violence with direct homo/biphobic and/or transphobic intentions, acts of corrective sexual violence can be situated as the embodiments of unequal power relations sustained through cis-heteropatriarchal structures (Lock Swarr 2012; Brownworth 2013; Doan-Minh 2019). In chapter five of this thesis, Maggie's (40, gay cis woman) experience of corrective rape was detailed, and the power imbalances underlining her experience – as well as those underlining the *threat* of corrective sexual violence felt by LGBTQ+ people more generally – were explored. As Maggie's experience specifically demonstrates, correctional forms of violence are used in an attempt to punish or convert individuals who defy normative expectations of gender and/or sexuality (Lock Swarr 2012; Brownworth 2013; Doan-Minh 2019). In particular, and as suggested by Galop (2023), these forms of violence are often perpetrated against queer women, trans men, or gender non-conforming individuals, for their perceived failures of womanhood. Findings from this research therefore directly map on to Doan-Minh's (2019) conceptualisation of corrective sexual violence – the roots of which, according to Doan-Minh (2019), are found within systems of "pervasive prejudice and discrimination against non-heterosexual and gender nonconforming individuals" (Doan-Minh 2019, p.180).

Existing feminist analyses suggest that the threat, or fear, of sexual violence – as a tool of patriarchal control – "imposes a curfew" on women's movements (Clark 1987, p.1). However, findings from this study indicate that for sexual and gender minorities, there are additional

imbalance(s) of power, and additional restrictions on movement, to contend with – those which are sustained by the threat of correctional forms of sexual violence. Several participants noted how, when their minority sexual and/or gender identity was visible or known to the perpetrator, they believed that their experience may have been motivated by correctional intentions. The threat, or fear, of correctional violence was therefore prevalent for these participants, who themselves understood the ways in which homo/biphobic and/or transphobic intentions may manifest in these forms of violence. As such, an additional imbalance of power exists between perpetrators and victims (when victims belong to sexual and/or gender minority categories), insofar as the structural forces sustaining corrective forms of violence are brought into question. As highlighted by several participants, this threat is particularly pertinent for individuals whose queerness is visible, or, furthermore, for individuals who defy heterosexist and cissexist norms of femininity – either through their homo/bisexual identity, or, through their non-conformity to gender roles, categories, or stereotypes. The unique imbalance of power sustained through correctional sexual violence therefore highlights the intersections between sexism, misogyny, and homo/bi/transphobia, and, furthermore, demonstrates the limitations of applying a singularly, binary gendered lens when theorising sexual violence.

Furthermore, given the unique power dynamics at play within correctional forms of sexual violence, and, due to the fact that mainstream services are thought to operate through a cis-heteronormative lens, service providers may be unable to recognise, or deal with, these particular forms of abuse. The barriers to support sustained by this gap, as identified by victims/survivors and service providers within this research, will be further detailed below (when the policy implications of this thesis are stated). Nevertheless, it is important to note here, specifically, that this brings into question a further imbalance of power – one that exists between the service provider and victim/survivor. In particular, when victims/survivors are placed in the position of having to educate a service provider on certain forms of sexual violence unique to the LGBTQ+ community, the emotional labour required to fulfil such a task exposes a specific power imbalance between LGBTQ+ victims/survivors and cis, heterosexual service providers.

Transmisogyny

A further imbalance of power – and one which can be situated at the intersection of sexism, misogyny, and transphobia (or transmisogyny) (Serano 2007) – was identified when Isla (26, bisexual trans woman) recounted her experience of rape, noting the imbalance of *needs* between her and the perpetrator. The pressure of cis-heteropatriarchal standards of beauty and womanhood, alongside the cissexist requirement for trans people to pass in order to meet societal expectations of gender, led Isla to seek sexual validation and gender affirmation through hook ups with cis, heterosexual men.

Findings here support the work of Matsuzaka and Koch (2019), who highlight how the notion of passing is layered in cissexist assumptions which prioritise cisgender social expectations of gender. Further still, the intersectional harms of misogyny, sexism and transphobia are exposed here, since, as Lefebvre (2020) highlights, the pressures to conform to standards of femininity and beauty sustained through the male gaze are often felt more severely by trans women, due to these social expectations intersecting with, and potentially impacting, a person's experience of gender dysphoria. The imbalance of *needs* between Isla and the perpetrator therefore manifested in a specific power imbalance – one that not only forced Isla into potentially dangerous situations due to the secrecy involved, but, furthermore, led to intensified feelings of guilt, shame, and self-blame due to the stigma attached to hook-ups. In conjunction with this, Isla grappled with the experience of fetishisation, due to her body being positioned as "especially exciting" to the perpetrator. These layers of transphobia, misogyny and sexism identified through Isla's experience therefore reveal a unique imbalance of power sustained by these structures – an imbalance that is overlooked when dominant feminist analyses frame sexual violence as a phenomenon existing solely within cis-heterosexual contexts.

The imbalance of power identified here may be further exacerbated when attempts are made to access formal support. Specifically, the layers of transphobia, misogyny and sexism evident within Isla's experience may be mirrored by the exclusionary practices of some sexual violence support services. Specifically, the boundaries surrounding 'womanhood' identified here are, indeed, reinforced through gender-critical approaches that seek to exclude trans women from 'women-only' spaces (Gottschalk 2009). The imbalance(s) of power sustained

through transphobia, misogyny and cissexism therefore not only shape the ways in which trans women may experience sexual violence, but furthermore, the intersection between these structures may place significant limits upon their access to support.

Woman-to-woman abuse

The final example to highlight here – and one that presents a challenge to feminist perceptions of power and sexual violence, specifically – is that of woman-to-woman abuse. Emma's (22, lesbian cis woman) experience of abuse falls outside of the typical script of sexual violence, insofar as her perpetrator was a woman. As Emma's experience of lesbian relationship abuse highlights, the stereotype of nonviolence ascribed to women creates a unique power dynamic between perpetrators and victims/survivors of woman-to-woman abuse – one that is not directly dealt with by mainstream feminist approaches (Hassouneh and Glass 2008). In particular, and as demonstrated within current literature, the stereotype of lesbian relationships as nonviolent and harmonious has resulted in the myth of a lesbian utopia (Girshick 2002; Barnes 2011). The existence of such a myth suggests that *power* does not operate within lesbian relationships, or that when it does, power is exercised equally by those within the relationship.

Not only does this stereotype omit a consideration of intersecting identities limiting, or impacting, an individual's power within a relationship, but, furthermore, it positions men's violence as more severe, resulting in woman-to-woman abuse being labelled as mutual abuse or catfighting (Ristock and Timbang 2005; Hassouneh and Glass 2008). As research suggests – and indeed, as Emma's experience mirrors – the impacts of these stereotypes can be detrimental. When an individual's experience of sexual violence diverges from the typical script, victims/survivors are often reluctant, or unable, to label their experience as such (Hassouneh and Glass 2008; Girshick 2002; Mortimer et al 2019; Donovan and Hester 2014; Donovan et al 2024). Not only does this enable abuse to continue, but furthermore, it significantly restricts victims/survivors access to support. Instances of lesbian relationship violence therefore challenge the reductively gendered approach to sexual violence and power adopted by both mainstream feminism and mainstream sexual violence support services. This example will be utilised further in the following section, where the severity of acts of sexual violence is considered.

Hence, in conceptualising the relationship between power and sexual violence, findings from this study suggest that the unique positionality of sexual and gender minority victims/survivors necessitates a theoretical approach that incorporates, but extends beyond, a gendered analysis. As demonstrated here, the relationship between power and sexual violence, for sexual and gender minorities, is not only sustained through unequal gender relations, but is also facilitated through the system of cis-heteronormativity. Hence, dominant feminist conceptualisations of sexual violence – which position it within a cis-heterosexual framework – fail to account for these multifaceted power dynamics. Following on from this, significant (and related) findings pertaining to the severity of acts of violence will now be reflected upon, which further demonstrate this thesis' theoretical contributions.

The hierarchy of severity

As posited by Kelly (2013), the positioning of acts of sexual violence within a hierarchy of severity - where some acts are thought to be more violent, or severe, than others – is a problematic and reductive approach. Instead, Kelly (2013) recognises that acts of sexual violence exist along a continuum. Such an approach enables an understanding of the ways in which the impacts of sexual violence may be felt differently depending upon a range of contextual influences and factors (Kelly 2013). In this sense, the impact, or severity, of acts of sexual violence cannot be accounted for, or predicted by, a hierarchical model. Nevertheless, this assumption still persists. Indeed, the existence of the typical script of sexual violence necessarily denotes a hierarchy of acts – notably, where acts of violence perpetrated by cis, heterosexual men are positioned as the most severe (Mortimer et al 2019). The typical script influences the social and cultural perception of all forms of sexual violence. Yet, in particular – and central to the findings of this thesis – the experiences of sexual and gender minorities are largely silenced and downplayed due to the pervasiveness of this script (Girshick 2002; Hassouneh and Glass 2008; Donovan and Hester 2014; Mortimer et al 2019). Drawing upon Kelly's (2013) continuum of violence, this research extends current sociological understandings of the hierarchy of severity assigned to acts of sexual violence. Specifically, and through its incorporation of a queer poststructuralist feminist lens, this thesis demonstrates how the hierarchy of severity is maintained by cis-heteropatriarchal structures – those which construct rigid depictions of victims, perpetrators, and acts of violence.

As reiterated above, Emma's (22, lesbian cis woman) experience of lesbian relationship abuse reflects existing research addressing woman-to-woman abuse, insofar as Emma was reluctant to identify her experience of abuse as 'violent', due to the pervasive myth of women's nonviolence (Girshick 2002; Hassouneh and Glass 2008; Donovan et al 2024). Yet, findings from this thesis extend such analyses further, to account for the specific way in which the *hierarchy of severity* is maintained, and perpetuated, through such myths. Indeed, as Emma's account reveals, the existence of this hierarchy necessarily leads victims/survivors to measure their experience of sexual violence against those found within the 'typical script'. Specifically, Emma compared her experience of violence to those centred within the public discourse – forms of violence which, additionally, are seen to be prioritised by mainstream support services. This notion of comparison, for Emma – and for several other participants who experienced similar thoughts – manifested itself through a reluctance to define herself as a victim/survivor; Emma struggled to position herself within this dichotomy. In particular, she believed that the labels of victim/survivor were reserved for individuals who had experienced 'really terrible' forms of abuse – forms of violence which could be situated within a cis-heteronormative script – and therefore, her proximity to these labels was challenged (Girshick 2002; Girshick 2009). Emma's experience – and her reluctance to label herself as a victim or survivor – is, therefore, a direct example of how the hierarchy of severity is maintained, and shaped, through cis-heteropatriarchal structures. Indeed, it is these structures that inform the typical script and by extension, the hierarchy of severity.

Several participants also compared their experiences of violence to those presented within the public discourse surrounding sexual violence. However, whilst Emma's process of comparison focused, primarily, upon the typical script of sexual violence – in terms of the cis-heteronormative stereotypes it perpetuates – other participants noted the pervasiveness of 'real rape' stereotypes. In particular, several participants explained how their experiences of sexual violence differed from those positioned as 'real' or 'severe' forms of violence, insofar as their own experiences did not meet these standards of severity. As Ellison and Munro (2010) highlight, the myth of real rape comprises acts of violence involving a surprise attack perpetrated by a (male) stranger to the victim/survivor. Accordingly, sexual violence – and rape, in particular – has become synonymous with this specific experience. Consequently, the impacts of this comparison can be significant for victims/survivors. Indeed, as several

participants revealed, the myth of real rape meant that they struggled to name the violence they experienced, leading to an inability to position themselves within the victim/survivor dichotomy, and ultimately, significantly restricting their access to support.

Whilst these comparisons discussed by several participants were distinct from those made by Emma (insofar as Emma was the only participant to experience lesbian relationship violence, and consequently, her comparison was made, more explicitly, in reference to the typical script of sexual violence), there are, nevertheless, similarities to note. Significantly, whilst the majority of participants experienced male violence – and therefore, their experience of violence fit, somewhat, within the 'typical script' – it can be argued that the 'real rape' myth, and the hierarchy of severity it perpetuates, is, itself, a result of cis-heteropatriarchal constructions of violence. This is true insofar as the archetypal depiction of rape, as a physically violent attack by a strong, male stranger – against a passive, weak woman (Ellison and Munro 2010) – rests upon stereotypical (and cisnormative) constructions of masculinity, femininity, and heterosexuality. The pervasiveness of this myth meant that even when participants recognised the rarity of 'real rape', the hierarchy of severity it perpetuates continued to shape their perception of their own experience. As highlighted above, the impacts of this comparison can be severe, and ultimately, can restrict victims/survivors in their access to support.

Hence, whilst approaches to sexual violence which counter this hierarchy of severity exist within sociological literature – indeed, Kelly's (2013) continuum of violence stands as a significant example – this thesis extends current theorisations of this hierarchy, by locating its foundations within the systems of heteropatriarchy, cisnormativity, and heteronormativity. In particular, this hierarchy of severity exists through the cultural and social prioritisation of the typical script of sexual violence, as well as through the myth of 'real rape', both of which are rooted in cissexist and heterosexist assumptions. The consequences of this hierarchy are significant – not only does it prevent victims/survivors from naming their experience of violence, but, furthermore, it may prevent them from accessing support. This particularly barrier is considered further when the practical and policy implications of this thesis are demonstrated below.

Cis-heteronormativity, self-blame and victim-blaming

Victim-blaming is, regrettably, a common experience for victims/survivors of sexual violence. Indeed, Fontes (2004) and Hawkey et al (2021) maintain that, within patriarchal conditions, the attribution of blame to victims/survivors serves as a tool to silence and stigmatise these individuals. The widespread issue of victim-blaming – and, by association, of self-blame – is therefore a gendered one. However, through its application of a queer, poststructuralist feminist approach, this thesis has identified additional forms of self-blame and victim-blaming unique to sexual and gender minority victims/survivors. By focusing on cis-heterosexual contexts, dominant feminist analyses of sexual violence often ignore these additional forms of self-blame and victim-blaming. By incorporating an analysis of *cis-heteropatriarchy,* this thesis draws attention to the gendered, cis-heteronormative assumptions and stereotypes concerning ideal victimhood and the legitimacy of sexual and/or gender minority identities.

Both Isla and Emma's experiences of self-blame were shaped by cis-heteronormativity. Isla (26, bisexual trans woman) blamed herself for attending "sleazy" hook ups, which she described as her "dirty little secret". Isla believed that the "sleazy" nature of the encounter meant that the rape would be viewed, by others, as "…almost deserved". This mirrors existing research, insofar as there are strict limitations placed upon access to an 'ideal' victim status – in order to be considered a victim, the situation where sexual violence occurs must be considered completely unavoidable, or else an individual will likely be blamed for their own victimisation (Eelma and Murumaa-Mengel 2022). However, Isla's experience brought with it additional aspects of blame related to her identity; Isla was not out at the time of the rape, and whilst she acknowledged that secretive hook-ups were potentially risky, she had limited avenues for gender affirmation during the early days of her transition. Isla's experience of self-blame was therefore impacted by her need for gender expression and affirmation, specifically, in the form of sexual validation from cis, heterosexual men. Hence, Isla's self-blame was the result of cis-heteropatriarchal restrictions placed upon victimhood, and was additionally implicated by her need to meet certain (cisnormative) standards of attractiveness in order to affirm her gender.

Emma (22, lesbian cis woman) also experienced self-blame – she blamed herself for staying in the abusive relationship she was in (where her experiences of sexual violence occurred) for

too long. In relation to the cis-heteronormative framing of victimisation, Emma believed that her experience was "less severe" than others. This belief was exacerbated by the fact that she stayed in the relationship for a year and a half, and consequently, she feared that her experienced would be perceived, by others, as not "that bad". Emma's experience of self-blame was therefore directly related to the dominant cis-heteronormative framing of sexual (and domestic) violence – that which downplays the severity and seriousness of women's violence and leaves victims/survivors (like Emma) unable to acknowledge and disclose their experience of abuse.

Other participants experienced – or expected to encounter – a unique form of victim-blaming related to their identity. Maggie (40, gay cis woman), Eight (35, queer), and Frankie (24, lesbian cis woman) all spoke about the potential for others to question the legitimacy of their sexuality and/or gender. Specifically, they each referred to the harmful stereotype that minority sexual and/or gender identities are abnormal or unnatural and therefore, must have been caused by something – in this case, by an experience of sexual violence. This form of victim-blaming is a manifestation of cis-heteronormative ideals of sexuality and gender and is therefore a type of victim-blaming unique to sexual and gender minority victims/survivors. Hence, whilst self-blame and victim-blaming are widely reported by all victims/survivors of sexual violence, findings from this research indicate that sexual and gender minorities may experience unique (and oftentimes heightened) forms of blame attached to their experiences of sexual violence.

As demonstrated above, the theoretical contributions made by this thesis have been facilitated through its application of a queer poststructuralist feminist approach. Such an approach has enabled a specific, and unique, analysis of the intersecting struggles of homo/biphobia, transphobia, sexism and misogyny, in relation to sexual and gender minorities' experiences of sexual violence and their subsequent access to support services. Specifically, these intersecting oppressions have been located as the basis through which the unequal power dynamics underpinning sexual and gender minorities' experiences of sexual violence come to exist. Additionally, these intersecting oppressions are further evidenced through the cultural positioning of sexual and gender minorities' experiences of sexual violence as less *severe* than those of cis, heterosexual individuals. Accordingly, this thesis extends current sociological understandings of sexual violence, which take a restrictively

(binary) gendered approach, by incorporating an additional consideration of heteropatriarchy and cis-heteronormativity. As such, the policy and practical implications of this thesis must now be addressed, to illustrate the ways in which the issues identified here can be approached, and potentially rectified, within service provision.

Policy and practical implications

In response to research questions three and four, this research project sought to understand participants' experiences (or lack thereof) of accessing sexual violence support services. Against the backdrop of participants' experiences of sexual violence – and the key theoretical contributions of which have been stated above – this research aimed to investigate the extent to which sexual violence support provision in the UK is accessible to sexual and gender minority victims/survivors. In order to extend this analysis, interviews with five professionals - who had experience within the sexual violence support sector - were conducted, and their narratives were considered alongside those of the victims/survivors who took part in this research. The key findings pertaining to research questions three and four, specifically, can therefore be summarised under the following headings: 'Barriers to access', 'LGBTQ+ specialist service provision', and 'Effective and inclusive support provision'. I end this section with an outline of the recommendations for best practice that have emerged from this research project.

Barriers to access

Due to its pervasiveness within social and cultural understandings of sexual violence, several participants within this research identified the typical script of sexual violence as the overarching barrier preventing them from accessing support (Donovan and Hester 2014; Mortimer et al 2019). This barrier manifested itself in a variety of ways. For instance, and as highlighted above, when participants' experiences of sexual violence did not align the heteronormative assumptions underpinning this script, these individuals felt that services would not take their experiences seriously. Fears that service providers would not understand these experiences, or furthermore, that they would position these experiences as less *severe* in comparison to heterosexual individuals' experiences of sexual violence, meant that these victims/survivors were reluctant to approach services.

Findings here support existing research centring LGBTQ+ victims/survivors experiences of support; Hassouneh and Glass (2008), for example, note that such fears are particularly pertinent amongst victims/survivors of woman-to-woman abuse, due to the stereotypes assigned to women's violence discussed above. Similarly, several participants noted the ways in which mainstream support services are seen to perpetuate cisnormative assumptions surrounding sexual violence. Mainstream support services were described, by Isla (26, bisexual woman), as being "very cis woman-centric", thereby further demonstrating the widely held belief, amongst participants, that the sexual violence support sector prioritises victims who fit within the typical script of sexual violence. In this sense, the typical script of sexual violence meant that, for several participants, mainstream sexual violence support services were inaccessible.

In addition, several service providers also noted how the typical script of sexual violence may perpetuate barriers to support for LGBTQ+ victims/survivors. Service providers recognised and identified several of the fears and concerns expressed by victims/survivors within this research. For instance, service providers discussed the way in which the typical script necessarily denotes a hierarchy of severity regarding particular acts of sexual violence. Within this hierarchy, and in accordance with the typical script, acts of sexual violence which do not involve penetration by a penis are considered less severe, or not "bad enough" (Girshick 2002; Kelly 2013; Mortimer et al 2019). As such, this hierarchy of severity, sustained by the typical script of sexual violence, was identified as a significant barrier to support. Indeed, even when service providers were aware of this script, and despite when steps were taken to promote more inclusive service provision, several service providers noted how, within their organisations, the effects of the typical script were still persistent.

As part of their recommendations for LGBTQ+ supportive service provision, Harvey et al (2014) note the importance of organisations making their inclusion of LGBTQ+ victims/survivors explicitly clear - for instance, through their online presence and advertisement. However, whilst this recommendation remains significant, an issue raised by the findings of this research concerns the embeddedness of the typical script within mainstream sexual violence support provision. Service providers within this research explained how the historical prioritisation of heterosexual, cis women - positioned as the typical victims/survivors of sexual violence - within the sexual violence support sector, has

meant that existing, outdated resources and/or advertisements (which use gendered, cisnormative and heteronormative language) may inadvertently prevent sexual and gender minorities from accessing their services. Hence, the capacity for service providers to implement effective, notable change is limited due to the ongoing association of support services with the typical script of sexual violence. As such, it is not enough for organisations to state their inclusion of LGBTQ+ victims/survivors. Rather, organisations should take explicit steps to challenge the cis-heteronormative assumptions underpinning their approach to sexual violence.

In addition to this, and as discussed by several victims/survivors within this research, hostility towards trans people - and trans women, in particular - within the UK has resulted in significant debate surrounding women-only sexual violence support services (Gottschalk 2009). As noted by both victims/survivors and service providers within this research, such debates create significant barriers to support for trans people. As such, the explicit inclusion of trans victims/survivors within services - through advertisement, campaigns, resources and online presence - must also consider, acknowledge and condemn the ongoing moral panic surrounding trans individuals' inclusion within sexual violence support services. Yet, as further reflected upon below, the legal legitimacy given to gender critical beliefs – specifically, in relation to the exclusion of trans women from certain women only support services – makes the task of *explicit* inclusion even more difficult. Hence, and as addressed below, LGBTQ+ specialist service provision may be the preferable avenue of support.

LGBTQ+ specialist service provision

The majority of victims/survivors within this research expressed a preference for LGBTQ+ specialist support provision. The benefits of LGBTQ+ specific service provision have been discussed within existing research (see: Ristock and Timbang 2005; Simpson and Helfrich 2005). Indeed, Harvey et al (2014) suggest that the provision of specialist LGBTQ+ domestic and sexual violence support is imperative in order to provide victims/survivors with effective and inclusive care. Participants with experience of by-and-for support provision – either as victims/survivors accessing a service, or as service providers involved in the delivery of a service – suggested that such forms of support were a necessary alternative to mainstream support options. These forms of support were described as cathartic, supportive, and

affirming. Most significantly, within by-and-for services, the levels of emotional labour that sexual and gender minorities were required to perform were said to be significantly reduced; LGBTQ+ specific services were thought to be better equipped to understand and validate sexual and gender minorities' experiences.

However, several participants recognised how access to LGBTQ+ specialist support was considerably limited due to a range of factors. Primarily, as highlighted by Galop (2022), and as discussed by participants within this research, the concentration of LGBTQ+ specialist support services within a select number of large cities in the UK has meant that access to these services is determined through a postcode lottery (Coy et al 2007; 2009; 2011). Indeed, this postcode lottery, which determines access to specialist sexual and domestic violence support, is a sector wide issue, resulting in many victims/survivors, in general, being left without support, or being forced to travel in order to receive support. This inevitably precludes many victims/survivors on low incomes from accessing support, and is particularly detrimental for victims/survivors living in rural areas (Coy et al 2007; 2009; 2011). Since the overall provision of specialist sexual violence support is limited, it is not surprising that the provision of LGBTQ+ by-and-for support, specifically, is even more restricted (Galop 2022). Indeed, Galop (2022) suggest that because of this, many LGBTQ+ victims/survivors are forced to rely on informal support systems - this finding was corroborated by victims/survivors who participated in this research.

Nevertheless, participants did highlight alternative forms of LGBTQ+ specialist support. Notably, within mainstream services, high representations of LGBTQ+ staff are thought to promote wider inclusion of sexual and gender minority victims/survivors (Love et al 2017). Indeed, Harvey et al (2014, p.41) suggest that organisations whose staff members are "diverse in terms of sexual orientation and/or gender identity" are better equipped to provide LGBTQ+ supportive service provision. Whilst this was supported by several participants – both victims/survivors and service providers suggested that services with a higher proportion of LGBTQ+ staff were more accessible – there are, nevertheless, issues presented by this solution. In particular, where services do not employ staff who are specifically trained in the service needs of LGBTQ+ victims/survivors (such as LGBT ISVAs), the task of training or informing staff on LGBTQ+ identities and/or specific forms of violence may fall upon the organisation's LGBTQ+ staff members (Shields 2018). As discussed by service providers within

this research, the additional emotional labour involved in educating colleagues on the specificities involved in LGBTQ+ individuals experiences can result in exhaustion and an unfair divide of labour (Shields 2018). Ultimately, then, representation, whilst beneficial, may serve to highlight the emotional labour placed upon LGBTQ+ service providers.

Recommendations for LGBTQ+ inclusive support provision

Examples of effective and inclusive service provision were highlighted by both victims/survivors and service providers within this study. As restated above, the provision of by-and-for support (or LGBTQ+ specific support) was, on the whole, deemed more accessible, and preferable, by the majority of victims/survivors within this study. However, given the limited access to these specific forms of support, participants recognised the ways in which mainstream support services could incorporate more affirming and appropriate approaches to care when supporting sexual and gender minority victims/survivors. As such, the examples of effective and inclusive support provision provided by participants have helped to form the basis of this thesis' recommendations for best practice. These recommendations are outlined below, and are presented under the following five headings: 'assumptions', 'inclusive language', 'representation', 'training', and 'gender-specific versus gender-inclusive support'.

- **Assumptions:** Participants noted that when service providers' held assumptions - surrounding sexuality, gender and sexual violence - this was a significant deterrent to support. When service providers held cis-heteronormative assumptions, victims/survivors felt distrusting and fearful of services. Service providers made note of the ways in which these assumptions go unaddressed. Notably, when service providers do not directly ask victims/survivors about their sexual and gender identities, the assumption is made that these victims/survivors are cis and heterosexual. The suggestion was made, then, that service providers must acknowledge gender and sexuality, so as to demonstrate to victims/survivors their understanding and acceptance of LGBTQ+ identities.
- **Inclusive language:** The use of inclusive language was, according to several participants, a central part of effective support. This included the use of non-gendered language (e.g. service providers did not make the assumption that all perpetrators are men), and pronoun checks (both within group settings and in one-to-one service

provision). Significantly, the use of inclusive language was described as an ongoing process, and one that may require service providers to revisit and address previously exclusionary resources and outputs.

- **Representation:** Participants addressed several areas of representation, including the representation of LGBTQ+ staff members within services, as well as the representation of LGBTQ+ experiences of violence within services' advertisements and resources. Ultimately, these representations were positioned as vital, however, participants noted that alone, they are not enough. In particular, participants highlighted how, without sufficient training for all staff members, LGBTQ+ staff members are likely to take on the emotional labour of educating colleagues about specific terminology, inclusive language and LGBTQ+ experiences of sexual violence.
- **Training:** In response to the areas highlighted above, participants suggested that training initiatives should aim to tackle these issues. Furthermore, service providers, in particular, noted the importance of two forms of training: those that provide staff members with a basic understanding of LGBTQ+ identities, and those that specifically address the intersection between experiences of sexual violence and the experience of being LGBTQ+.
- **Gender-specific versus gender-inclusive support:** The issues presented by gender-specific services (in particular, women-only support services) have been addressed throughout this research. Notably, a heavily gendered approach to sexual violence - based upon the *typical script* - has been shown to have negative repercussions for sexual and gender minority victims/survivors. Nevertheless, several participants recognised the need for gender-specific service provision, insofar as spaces excluding cis men are thought to be essential, due to the high rates of violence perpetrated by them. Yet, several participants also highlighted ways in which this form of service provision could be accommodating of other individuals marginalised by their gender (including non-binary, genderqueer, agender and intersex people). Therefore, services may remain dedicated to feminist anti-violence principles, but the findings from this thesis encourage services to expand their approach. Significantly, services should recognise that the effects of heteropatriarchy (and in association, the struggles of sexism and misogyny) are not felt, solely, by women. As addressed by service

providers within this research, gender-specific service provision, which approaches inclusion in this way, has been shown to have positive outcomes.

However, when discussing gender-specific support, it is important to highlight that whilst the service providers within this research championed – and indeed, provided – trans inclusive, gender-specific support, the current political debates surrounding such forms of support mean that trans women, in particular, still risk being excluded from single-sex services. The legal legitimacy given to these exclusions (see: Equality and Human Rights Commission 2022) have sanctioned gender-critical beliefs, enabling support services to (legally) refuse access to trans women for "reasons of trauma and safety" (Equality and Human Rights Commission 2022, online). This not only has implications for access, but, as demonstrated by the case of Survivors' Network – the Rape Crisis Centre for Sussex – (see: Survivors' Network 2022), services offering support to trans women (within women-only spaces) may face legal action. Such concerns therefore make an even stronger case for the delivery of specialist, by-and-for service provision.

Long-term, structural changes

The above recommendations attend to the changes that can be made to service provision as it currently operates. As suggested by several service providers in this research, such changes are not only possible, but have even been actioned – or are in the process of being actioned – by some organisations and services. Katie (36, Rape Crisis employee), for instance, spoke at length about the steps being taken in her organisation to promote more inclusive support for trans, non-binary, and intersex victims/survivors. Yet, findings from this research suggest that, in order to ensure sexual and gender minorities receive the most appropriate and helpful support, wider socio-cultural change is necessary. Indeed, amendments to service provision can only go so far when situated against the backdrop of the dominant cis-normative social discourse surrounding sexual violence. As discussed at length within this thesis, the typical script of sexual violence is pervasive not only within service provision, but rather, is perpetuated by social, cultural and legal definitions of, and stereotypes surrounding, sexual violence. The task of dismantling such a script therefore extends beyond the remit of support services. In order to resist this script in its totality, it must be challenged across multiple facets of society – through legal, political, and educational reform, and beyond. Hence, whilst

amendments to service provision are vital, they must be situated alongside wider, more radical changes to our social and cultural landscape, since the typical script is entrenched within and across its structures.

It is important to note here that the recommendations and proposed changes to service provision outlined above are reflective of participants' subjective beliefs, thoughts and feelings – whether that be in relation to their experiences of sexual violence, their perceptions of services, or (in the case of service providers) their delivery of service provision. As discussed at length in chapter four, this project's small sample size raises a number of issues regarding the generalisability of its findings. It is, therefore, worth returning to these limitations, since they have inevitably impacted the recommendations this thesis can make. In considering these limitations, I propose additional avenues for research which would attend to these gaps.

Limitations of the research

As detailed within chapter four – where this thesis' methodological approach was outlined – a limitation of this research has been its entirely white sample. As stated in chapter four, this research did not aim to be representative of an entire community. Instead, it has focused on the in-depth narratives provided by its small sample of participants, and in doing so, it has contributed to the growing body of sociological work centring sexual and gender minority victims/survivors of sexual violence. It is, however, important to acknowledge that regrettably, Black and ethnic minority voices have been omitted from this research. As existing research indicates, LGBTQ+ Black and ethnic minority victims/survivors of sexual violence face additional imbalances of power shaping their experiences of abuse, and furthermore, their access to support is often limited by these same power imbalances (Harvey et al 2014; Postmus 2015; Love et al 2017). These barriers to support were acknowledged by several victims/survivors and service providers who participated in this research, with a number of participants recognising how their whiteness afforded them certain privileges in regard to the support they were able to access/receive.

Additionally, whilst participants were given the opportunity to share their class status at the beginning of the interview - (see Appendix 4) - this did not lead to substantial discussion, and ultimately, meant that a class analysis has been omitted from this research. The impacts of additional intersecting identity categories - including age, religion and disability - did not

generate sufficient discussion and therefore, these categories have also been omitted from analysis.

A final limitation to address here is this research project's small samples, of both victims/survivors and service providers. Whilst this study did not intend to produce generalisable findings, it may be noted that the issues outlined above could have been somewhat mitigated through the incorporation of a larger sample size. However, and as highlighted in chapter four, both the recruitment and data collection processes were impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Notably, in order to avoid disruption to the research - for instance, in the event that restrictions on movement were introduced during the recruitment process - I decided to limit the method of data collection to online and telephone interviewing. The pandemic was also responsible for services experiencing heightened demands and thus, recruitment of service providers was impacted (Women's Aid 2020).

Areas for further research

In addressing the specific limitations of this study outlined above, the first avenue for future research to consider is that which integrates an analysis of the identity categories omitted from this project. Hence, future research, which centres the intersectional struggles of sexism, misogyny, homophobia/biphobia and/or transphobia (and their impacts upon the experience of sexual violence/access to sexual violence support services) must also consider the *additional* intersections of race, class, age, disability and religion. Such research would be expected to provide further, intersectional insights into the limitations placed upon 'victimhood'. In particular, an analysis of these intersecting identity categories may provide further insight into the conceptualisation of the deserving victim, through the lens of respectability (see: Skeggs 2005; Phipps 2009; Pietikäinen and Kragh 2019).

Indeed, in further consideration of the notion of respectability and its ties to victimhood, a more thorough examination of the stigma attached to bisexuality – and its impacts upon bisexual people's experiences of sexual violence and their access to support services – is necessary within social research. As illustrated in chapter three, where several forms of abuse unique to the LGBTQ+ community were outlined, existing research suggests that the stereotypes attached to bisexuality - including those of hypersexuality and promiscuity – may contribute to their high levels of sexual victimisation (Bermea et al 2018; Johnson and Grove

2017; Flanders et al 2019; Coston 2021). The stigma attached to bisexuality is significant, since as demonstrated within current research, stereotypes surrounding bisexual individuals are often held within, and outside of, the LGBTQ+ community (Bostwich and Hequembourg 2014).

However, whilst the stereotypes surrounding bisexuality were noted by a number of participants, no participants within this research disclosed an experience of sexual violence that had been directly motivated by biphobia. Hence, an analysis of this specific form of abuse was limited within this thesis. Avenues for further research therefore include a direct focus upon bisexual individual's experiences of sexual victimisation. In particular, and in line with this research project's key objectives, further research, which explores the precarious positionality of bisexual victims/survivors within the sexual violence support sector specifically, is needed. Here, the positionality of bisexual victims/survivors is characterised as precarious due to the potential for these victims/survivors to experience barriers when attempting to access both mainstream *and* LGBTQ+ specific support services, due to bisexual stigma existing outside of, as well as *within* the LGBTQ+ community (Bostwich and Hequembourg 2014).

Whilst this research prioritised a focus, specifically, on the intersectional impacts of sexism, misogyny, homo/biphobia and transphobia, there is a wider need to address the experiences and service needs of LGBTQ+ victims/survivors separately. Rogers (2020) highlights the risks of centring research upon the experiences of the LGBTQ+ community as a whole, since trans peoples' narratives often become lost within this approach. Whilst this research has focused on sexual minorities who are marginalised by their gender – and in doing so, has presented the narratives of several gender-diverse victims/survivors – there remains a significant lack of non-binary, agender, and genderqueer representation within sociological explorations of sexual violence overall. The service needs of these victims/survivors are unique, insofar as binary gendered approaches to support still persist, and such approaches may be seen to be invalidating and inaccessible to these individuals. More research, which directly addresses these service needs, is therefore necessary.

In addition to this, further research, which focuses on the unique positionality of sexual and gender minority victims/survivors living in rural areas, must be considered. As alluded to

within this thesis, the postcode lottery (Coy et al 2007; 2009; 2011) determining an individual's access (or lack thereof) to formal support may be even more detrimental to sexual and gender minority victims/survivors, who, as established by this study, often require LGBTQ+ informed support.

In order to facilitate these additional considerations, I suggest that a larger scale, mixed-methods research project is required. This would allow for a more in-depth understanding of the issues faced by sexual and gender minority victims/survivors. In particular, the incorporation of quantitative methods would enable a greater understanding of the prevalence of these issues, and, furthermore, would allow for greater generalisations – and therefore stronger recommendations – to be made.

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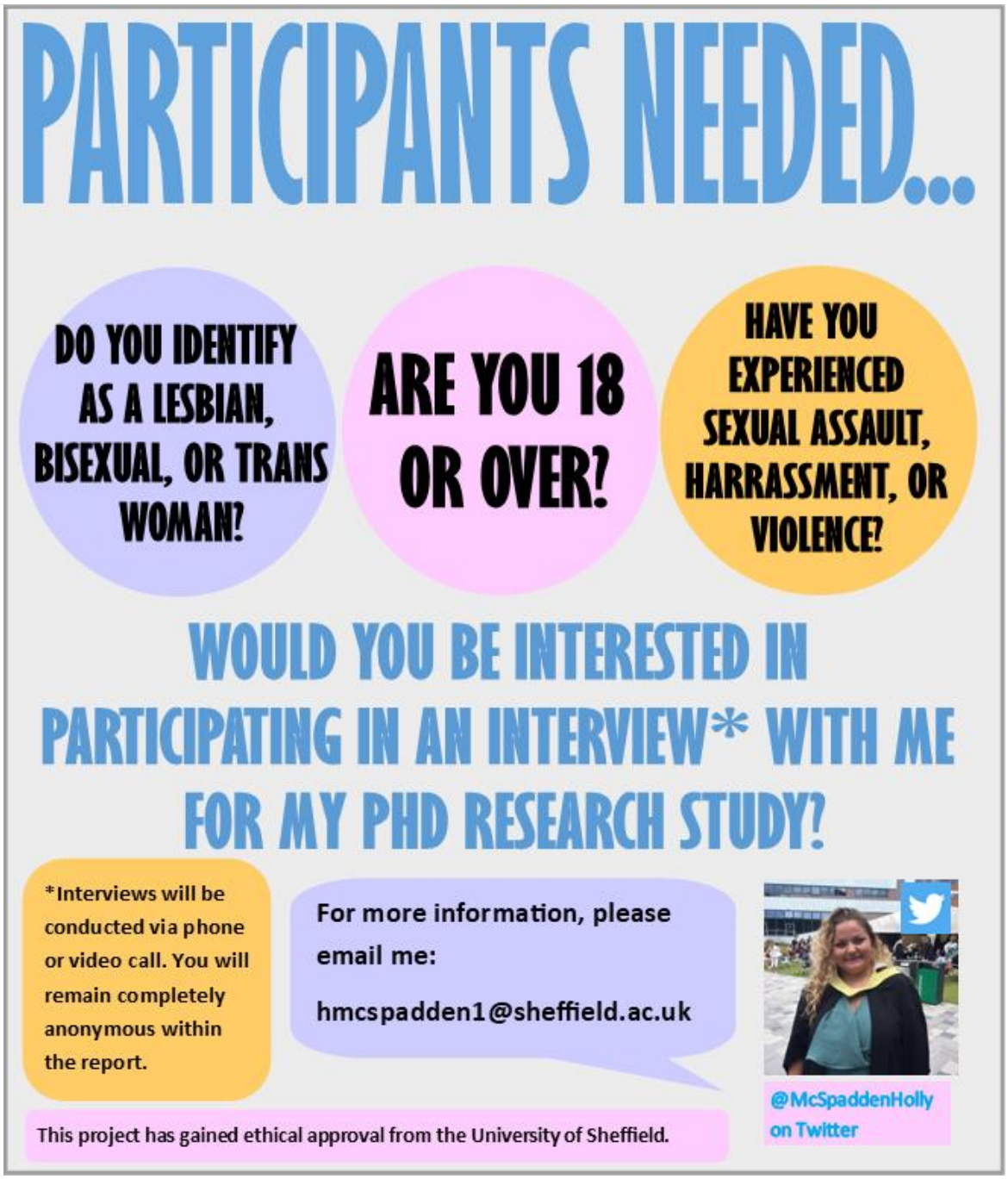
Appendices

Appendix 1 – Call for participants flyer one (victims/survivors)



Appendix 2 – Call for participants flyer two (victims/survivors)

PARTICIPANTS NEEDED...

DO YOU BELONG TO A MARGINALISED GENDER/SEX/ SEXUALITY CATEGORY?*

ARE YOU 18 OR OVER?

HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED SEXUAL ASSAULT, HARRASSMENT, OR VIOLENCE?

WOULD YOU BE INTERESTED IN PARTICIPATING IN AN INTERVIEW* WITH ME FOR MY PHD RESEARCH STUDY?

*Interviews will be conducted via phone or video call. You will remain completely anonymous within the report.

For more information, please email me:

hmcspadden1@sheffield.ac.uk

@McSpaddenHolly on Twitter

This project has gained ethical approval from the University of Sheffield.

* this research is interested in the experiences of people who identify as: lesbian, bisexual, and queer people with marginalised genders — including women (trans, cis, or intersex), and non-binary, agender, or gender-variant people. A self-defining approach is taken within this research, and so if your identities are not listed here, but you self-define as marginalised by your gender/sex/sexuality, please get in touch!

Appendix 3 – Call for participants flyer three (service providers)

PARTICIPANTS NEEDED...

For my PhD research project: Exploring sexual and gender minorities' experiences of sexual violence and access to sexual violence support services.

I am recruiting providers of sexual violence support services to be interviewed about providing support for sexual and gender minority survivors of sexual violence.

*Interviews will be conducted via phone or video call. You will remain completely anonymous within the report.

For more information, please email me:

hmcspadden1@sheffield.ac.uk

@McSpaddenHolly on Twitter

This project has gained ethical approval from the University of Sheffield.

Appendix 4 – Participant overview

Victims and survivors

Participant pseudonym	Sexuality and gender	Pronouns	Age	Other personal characteristics
Eight	Queer	They/them	35	White British, working-class upbringing
Emma	Lesbian cis woman	She/her	22	White British, working-class
Isla	Bisexual trans woman	She/her	26	White British, middle-class
Maggie	Gay cis woman	She/her	40	White British, working-class
Frankie	Lesbian cis woman	She/her	24	White British, middle-class
Ally	Bisexual cis woman	She/her	28	White British, middle-class
Ashley	Bisexual, genderqueer	They/them	65	White British, middle-class
Lucy	Lesbian cis woman	She/her	22	White British, lower middle-class
Tracey	Lesbian cis woman	She/her	40	White British, working-class
Robyn*	Bisexual queerqueer/genderfluid	She/they	35	White British, middle-class

Trudy	Lesbian/gay (masculine) cis woman	She/her	24	White British, lower middle-class

Service providers

Participant pseudonym	Professional role	Pronouns	Age	Other personal characteristics
Sarah	Had experience as an ISVA within a charity and within the police force	She/her	25	White British, heterosexual
Scott	Had experience working within an LGBT charity through their domestic violence and abuse program	He/him	27	White British
Robyn*	Private therapist working predominantly with queer clients	She/they	35	White British, middle-class, bisexual and genderqueer/genderfluid
Katie	Worked at a Rape Crisis Centre at the time of interview	She/her	36	White British, heterosexual
Storm	Worked as a Children's ISVA within a Rape Crisis Centre	She/they	22	White British, asexual

*Robyn participated in this research as both a victim/survivor of sexual violence, and as a provider of support.

Appendix 5 – Participant information sheet for survivors

Information sheet for participants

Project Title: Exploring sexual and gender minority victims/survivors' experiences of sexual violence and access to sexual violence support services

Primary Researcher: Holly McSpadden

Supervisory Team: Professor Sally Hines and Dr Michaela Rogers

About Me and the Project

My name is Holly McSpadden, and I am a second year Sociology PhD student at the University of Sheffield. This project has been funded by a studentship awarded by the Economic and Social Research Council. If you are interested in participating in this research project, please read the following information carefully. If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me (contact details are provided at the end of this information sheet).

What is the purpose of this project?

The aim of this project is to explore sexual and gender minority people's experiences of sexual violence and their access to sexual violence support services. This includes lesbian, bisexual, and queer people who self-identify as belonging to a marginalised gender (this may include trans, intersex, and cis women, and non-binary, agender, or gender-variant individuals). I am especially interested in the specific barriers faced by these groups of people when attempting to access support.

As a bisexual woman and survivor of sexual violence, I understand the importance of support services. I am therefore conducting this study with the aim of improving access to sexual violence support services for sexual and gender minority victims/survivors of sexual violence.

Why have I been invited to participate?

You have been invited to participate in this research because I am recruiting lesbian, bisexual, queer and/or trans women and people whose gender is marginalised (this may include non-binary, genderqueer and agender individuals) who have experienced sexual assault, harassment, or violence. I am particularly interested in victims/survivors who have accessed or attempted to access sexual violence support services after experiences of sexual assault, harassment, or sexual violence, although this is not a necessity. If you choose to take part in this research, your stories and experiences will guide my research.

Do I have to take part?

Participation in this research project is completely voluntary, so it is up to you whether or not you decide to take part. You can withdraw yourself from the project at any time and will not be asked to provide a reason.

What will happen to me if I take part?

If you decide to participate in this research project, you will be asked to take part in an interview with me. You will be given the opportunity to choose whether the interview takes place over the phone, via video call, or face-to-face. If you decide to participate in a video call,

this will be held over Google Meet. The interview is expected to take around an hour, but it may be longer or shorter. You can refuse to answer specific questions during the interview, and the interview can be paused or stopped at any time. If you wish to pause the interview and carry on another day, this can also be arranged. By taking part in this project, all the information collected about you will be kept confidential and you will not be identifiable.

Face-to-face interviews will be held at a location of your choosing (where possible, it would be preferable to hold interviews in a space where social distancing is possible). I will be self-testing for COVID-19 before in-person interviews, and I would ask that if you develop any symptoms of COVID-19 that you please stay home, and we can reschedule the interview.

What will happen after the interview?

After the interview, you will be given a list of sexual violence support services to contact if you wish to. These will include a range of support services, including services which are specifically tailored towards LGBTQ+ survivors.

What will happen to the data collected?

An audio and visual recording will be taken of video calls and an audio recording will be taken of telephone calls and face-to-face interviews (although you may opt out of recordings). A pseudonym (alternative name) will be used for you so that your real name is not kept in the interview data. Once interview data has been transcribed, all recordings will be destroyed. Any identifiable information (such as particular addresses, places, names, etc.) will be removed from the data. The data will be stored securely on my University Google drive and will only be accessible to me. All data will be destroyed 3 years after the completion of my PhD.

Reporting of safeguarding and welfare concerns

Minimising harm to all participants is a key priority in this research project. Therefore, if you wish to raise any complaints, or to report an incident or concern, you can either report them to me, to my supervisory team (whose contact details are listed below), or to the Head of the Sociological Studies Department at the University.

I will also be responsible for reporting any safeguarding concerns I have to my supervisory team. This includes if any participants reveal that they or someone they know is in danger. My main priority, however, is to ensure the minimisation of any harm to participants within this study.

What if there is a problem?

If you have any concerns, or to make a complaint, report an incident or concern, please see the contact details below.

Contact details:

For more information about the project, please contact:

Holly McSpadden, PhD Student, Department of Sociological Studies, Elmfield, Northumberland Road, S10 2TU. **Email**: hmcspadden1@sheffield.ac.uk

For complaints, or to report an incident or concern, please contact any of the following individuals:

Professor Sally Hines, (supervisor) Department of Sociological Studies, Elmfield, Northumberland Road, Sheffield S10 2TU **Email:** Sally.hines@sheffield.ac.uk

Dr Michaela Rogers, (supervisor) Department of Sociological Studies, Elmfield, Northumberland Road, Sheffield S10 2TU **Email:** M.rogers@sheffield.ac.uk

Professor Nathan Hughes, Head of Department, Department of Sociological Studies, Elmfield, Northumberland Road, Sheffield S10 2TU **Email**: Nathan.hughes@sheffield.ac.uk

Appendix 6 – Participant information sheet for service providers

Information sheet for participants

Project Title: Exploring sexual and gender minority victims/survivors' experiences of sexual violence and access to sexual violence support services

Primary Researcher: Holly McSpadden

Supervisory Team: Professor Sally Hines and Dr Michaela Rogers

About Me and the Project

My name is Holly McSpadden, and I am a second year Sociology PhD student at the University of Sheffield. This project has been funded by a studentship awarded by the Economic and Social Research Council. If you are interested in participating in this research project, please read the following information carefully. If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me (contact details are provided at the end of this information sheet).

What is the purpose of this project?

The aim of this project is to explore sexual and gender minority people's experiences of sexual violence and their access to sexual violence support services. In particular, I am focusing on victims/survivors who have been underrepresented in the academic literature on this topic. This includes lesbian, bisexual, and queer women (including trans, cis, and intersex women), and people who self-identify as marginalised by their gender (this may include non-binary, agender, and gender-variant individuals). I am especially interested in the specific barriers faced by these groups of people when attempting to access support.

As a bisexual woman and survivor of sexual violence, I understand the importance of support services. I am therefore conducting this study with the aim of improving access to sexual violence support services for sexual and gender minority victims/survivors of sexual violence.

Why have I been invited to participate?

You have been invited to participate in this research because I am recruiting providers of sexual violence support services to participate in interviews. I am particularly interested in providers of women-only support, providers of gender inclusive support, and providers of LGBTQ+ specific support. If you choose to take part in this research, your stories and experiences will guide my research.

Do I have to take part?

Participation in this research project is completely voluntary, so it is up to you whether or not you decide to take part. You can withdraw yourself from the project at any time and will not be asked to provide a reason.

What will happen to me if I take part?

If you decide to participate in this research project, you will be asked to take part in an interview with me. You will be given the opportunity to choose whether the interview takes place over the phone or video call (face-to-face interviews are not currently possible due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic). If you decide to participate in a video call, this will be held

over Google Meet. The interview is expected to take around an hour, but it may be longer or shorter. You can refuse to answer specific questions during the interview, and the interview can be paused or stopped at any time. If you wish to pause the interview and carry on another day, this can also be arranged. By taking part in this project, all the information collected about you will be kept confidential and you will not be identifiable.

What will happen to the data collected?

An audio and visual recording will be taken of video calls and an audio recording will be taken of telephone calls (although you may opt out of recordings). A pseudonym (alternative name) will be used for you so that your real name is not kept in the interview data. Once interview data has been transcribed, all recordings will be destroyed. Any identifiable information (such as particular addresses, places, names, etc.) will be removed from the data. The data will be stored securely on my University Google drive and will only be accessible to me. All data will be destroyed 3 years after the completion of my PhD.

Reporting of safeguarding and welfare concerns

Minimising harm to all participants is a key priority in this research project. Therefore, if you wish to raise any complaints, or to report an incident or concern, you can either report them to me, to my supervisory team (whose contact details are listed below), or to the Head of the Sociological Studies Department at the University.

I will also be responsible for reporting any safeguarding concerns I have to my supervisory team. This includes if any participants reveal that they or someone they know is in danger. My main priority, however, is to ensure the minimisation of any harm to participants within this study.

What if there is a problem?

If you have any concerns, or to make a complaint, report an incident or concern, please see the contact details below.

Contact details:

For more information about the project, please contact:

Holly McSpadden, PhD Student, Department of Sociological Studies, Elmfield, Northumberland Road, S10 2TU. **Email**: hmcspadden1@sheffield.ac.uk

For complaints, or to report an incident or concern, please contact any of the following individuals:

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Dr Michaela Rogers, (supervisor) Department of Sociological Studies, Elmfield, Northumberland Road, Sheffield S10 2TU **Email:** M.rogers@sheffield.ac.uk

Professor Nathan Hughes, Head of Department, Department of Sociological Studies, Elmfield, Northumberland Road, Sheffield S10 2TU **Email**: Nathan.hughes@sheffield.ac.uk

Appendix 7 – Participant consent form

Project title: Exploring sexual and gender minority victims/survivors' experiences of sexual violence and access to sexual violence support services

Consent Form

Please tick the appropriate boxes	YES	NO
Taking Part in the Project		
I am 18 years old or over	☐	☐
I have read and understood the project information sheet dated 01/09/2022 or the project has been fully explained to me. (If you will answer No to this question please do not proceed with this consent form until you are fully aware of what your participation in the project will mean.)	☐	☐
I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project.	☐	☐
I agree to take part in the project. I understand that taking part in the project will include taking part in either a telephone or video interview.	☐	☐
I understand that my taking part is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study until after taking part in an interview. I do not have to give any reasons for why I no longer want to take part and there will be no adverse consequences if I choose to withdraw.	☐	☐
How my information will be used during and after the project	☐	☐
I understand my personal details such as name, phone number, address and email address etc. will not be revealed to people outside the project.	☐	☐
I understand and agree that my words may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs. I understand that I will not be named in these outputs unless I specifically request this.	☐	☐
So that the information you provide can be used legally by the researchers	☐	☐
I agree to assign the copyright I hold in any materials generated as part of this project to The University of Sheffield.	☐	☐

Name of participant [printed] Signature Date

Name of Researcher [printed] Signature Date

Holly McSpadden

Contact details:

For more information about the project, please contact:

Holly McSpadden, PhD Student, Department of Sociological Studies, Elmfield, Northumberland Road, S10 2TU. **Email**: hmcspadden1@sheffield.ac.uk

For complaints, or to report an incident or concern, please contact any of the following individuals:

Professor Sally Hines, Department of Sociological Studies, Elmfield, Northumberland Road, Sheffield S10 2TU **Email:** Sally.hines@sheffield.ac.uk

Dr Michaela Rogers, Department of Sociological Studies, Elmfield, Northumberland Road, Sheffield S10 2TU **Email:** M.rogers@sheffield.ac.uk

Professor Nathan Hughes, Head of Department, Department of Sociological Studies, Elmfield, Northumberland Road, Sheffield S10 2TU **Email**: Nathan.hughes@sheffield.ac.uk

Appendix 8 – Interview guides

Victim and survivor participants

Could you tell me how you identify your sexuality and/or gender identity?

If you feel comfortable, could you tell me a bit about your experience of sexual assault, harassment, or violence?

Do you believe your experience of sexual assault, harassment or violence was motivated by your (minority) sexual and/or gender identity in anyway?

Has your sexual and/or gender identity impacted who you disclose your experiences of sexual violence to?

Do you identify with the labels of victim or survivor of sexual assault, harassment, or violence? (Or both?)

Have you ever accessed, or attempted to access, a sexual violence support service?

If **YES** – How did you find the experience? Could you tell me a bit about what it was like? Was the service LGBTQ+ inclusive?

If **NO** – Could you tell me why you have chosen not to access a service? Where do you receive support for your experience of sexual assault, harassment, or violence? Is there anything that would make you more likely to access a service?

Could you tell me about your perception of mainstream sexual violence support services? Do you think your experience of sexual assault, harassment or violence is adequately represented or dealt with by these services?

What would you like to see change?

As a final question, can I ask how has the experience of being interviewed today been for you? Is there anything you would like to add? Or anything you want to reiterate?

Service provider participants

Can you start by telling me a bit about yourself and your role(s) in providing support for victims/survivors of sexual violence?

Could you tell me, specifically, about your experience of supporting sexual and gender minority victims and survivors? (I'm specifically interested in your experience supporting women and other marginalised genders) Or could you share your knowledge of any services for sexual and gender minority victims/survivors?

What do you think are the barriers to accessing services for sexual and gender minority victims/survivors of sexual violence? How could services be more accessible?

How important have you found it for victims/survivors to receive support from LGBT-specific organisations, or LGBT service providers?

Do you think that mainstream services are equipped to support LGBT service users?

What more could be done to encourage LGBT victims/survivors to access support?