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Voices of lesbian, gay, bisexual and queer women

youth work practitioners:

The use of self in youth work contexts.

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Please note that the published article Hatton, J., & Monroe, S, (2019), as listed in the reference list, was written during the preparation of this thesis and some sections of that article were subsequently drawn on within the thesis. The article was all my own writing although Prof Surya Monroe did advise extensively on the editing of the article, as expected of a PhD supervisor.

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## Abstract

This thesis takes a feminist approach to researching the use of self with fifteen cisgendered professional youth and community workers who identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual or queer (LGBQ). It examined their understanding of their journeys towards their current sexual identities and how they used these identities and other aspects of their self in their youth work. The core values of youth work require professionals to develop reciprocal and authentic relationships as they work alongside young people in young people's journeys towards adulthood. This study, focussing on the experiences of these LGBQ youth workers, examined how the self was used on a daily basis within their professional contexts. Rich data was gathered through semi-structured in-depth interviews with these fifteen women who all worked in the north of England.

A template approach to thematic analysis (drawing on King & Horrocks, 2010) was used to draw out five key themes from stories told by these women youth workers. These included: first the resilience of these women through their own childhood and adolescence as they came to an awareness of their LGBQ sexuality. The second: the usefulness of understanding the experiences and current identities of these youth workers from an intersectional approach as each women's experiences was a unique combination of a range of socioeconomic and cultural factors with their LGBQ identity such as social class, ethnicity, religion and age. The third theme was the impact of colleagues and partner agencies as the youth workers negotiated how to share important information regarding their LGBQ sexuality and other personal matters with young people. The fourth theme: the importance of their continual and critical reflections on the fluid boundaries between the personal and professional lives as they developed useful and transformational relationships with young people. The final theme the challenge of working in a context where change continually impacts on their working situation.

Many of these themes will be useful for trainers and managers of youth and community workers. Some themes developed knowledge already in the field whilst other themes were new insights for youth and community work educators, managers. The new themes include bringing a focus to LGBQ issues within the youth work literature; a focus on intersectional theory in understanding how youth workers name their selves (as discussed in Hatton & Monro, 2019) and understanding how LGBQ youth workers apply boundaries and ethics in their day-to-day work.

It is hoped that the findings from this research will assist in supporting all youth workers as they use their self, their myriad different and varied identities, in their professional role. This is a role which is important in supporting young people in their journeys from adolescence to adulthood and in supporting young people to be much needed catalysts for change in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## Voices of LGBTQ women youth work practitioners: the use of self in youth work contexts.

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## Glossary

DfE/DoE	Department for Education/ Department of Education.
DCMS	Department for Culture Media and Sport.
CAMHS	Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services.
CiC	Community interest Company or 'not for profit' provision within the 'voluntary sector'.
Connexions Service (Cxs)	A nation-wide service, established by New Labour in 2012, aimed at reducing the numbers young people who were not in education, training or employment
CSE	Child Sexual Exploitation
Every Child Matters (ECM)	A comprehensive approach to working with all children and young people initiated by New Labour in 2003.
Face to face youth work	Grass roots youth work involving primary contact with young people in either group or one to one settings.
IDYW	In Defence of Youth Work - a pressure group within the profession (founded in 2009) that seeks to uphold and develop the core values of youth work.
IYW	Institute for Youth Work: a youth work member-led organisation tasked by the NYA with leading on a range of issues included a register of practitioners.
LGB	Lesbian gay and bisexual.
LGBQ	Lesbian, gay bisexual and queer.
LGBT	Lesbian, gay bisexual and/or transgendered.
Mainstream youth work	In this study mainstream youth work means working with young people regardless of their sexuality. In other contexts it may have a different focus.
NOS	National Occupational Standards of youth work which can be found at Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK), 2008.
NEET	Not in employment, education or training: usually used about young adults.
NYA	National Youth Agency which validates professional qualifying routes (level 6) into youth work. The NYA also validate lower level youth work qualifications at levels 2 & 3.
Open access youth work	Youth provision that is open to whoever wants to attend although usually restricted to a specific age group. No invitation or referral is required.
Professional Association of lecturers in Youth and Community Work (PALYCW) sometimes referred to as Training Agencies Group (TAG)	A membership organisation that, working with sector colleagues, represents the interests of academics, educators and researchers in the field of youth and community work.
Pupil Referral Unit (PRU)	PRU or alternative education projects: teach children who are not able to attend school (often due to their challenging emotional difficulties and/or behaviour) who may not otherwise receive suitable education.
Section 28	Section, or clause, 28 (amendment to the DfE local government act 1986) assumed that families with 2 adults of the same sexuality were not 'real' families. The focus for implementing the legislation was mostly within education, both formal and informal, where educators were prevented from discussing issues of homosexuality which might be seen to promote homosexuality to young people (Stonewall, ND).
SRE/RSE	Sex and Relationship Education/ Relationship and Sex Education

## Chapter 1: Setting the scene for the thesis

### Introduction

Youth work is grounded in relationships (Jeffer & Smith, 1992; Smith, M.K., 2001a; Young, 2006; Coburn, 2011; Couch, 2018; Trelfa, 2018). These relationships require reciprocity between worker and young people through conversations which develop and build these relationships (Jeffer & Smith, 1992; Spence, Devaney & Noonan, 2006; Young, 2006; Batsleer, 2008; Pope, 2016; Cooper, 2018). Respectful relationships open up the possibility of transformative learning and development for young people (Sercombe, 2010a; Hughes, Cooper, Gormally & Rippingdale, 2014; Coburn & Gormally, 2017; Bright, Thompson, Hart & Hayden, 2018; Purcell, 2018).

The use of self, whilst having been discussed in a range of youth work literature (Jeffer & Smith, 1992; Fusco, 2012; Nicholls, 2012; Murphy & Ord, 2013; Sapin, 2013), is often not clearly defined (Blacker, 2010). Fook suggests that the use of self is 'about looking at one's own presence and perspectives and how these influence knowledge, actions, and practice. It includes looking at our own background, embodiment, personalities and perspectives and how that intermingles in the context of your work' (Fook, 2002, p44 cited in Wendt et al 2012). Fook here is emphasising that workers need to be aware of how their own background and experiences might impact on how they understand and relate to young people. Fook suggests that the personality and beliefs that the worker brings to her relationships with young people, as well as the social context of the young people, are all central to this use of self. Hence, to examine how lesbian, gay, bisexual and queer (LGBQ) women youth workers used their self, it was necessary to review a breadth of literature including literature which examined notions of the self, the youth work literature and literatures that examined ideas of LGBQ sexuality. Whilst this study took a socially constructed approach to notions of the self and sexuality, keeping a theme of poststructuralism and queer theory within the literature review and within the interviews enabled me to emphasise that a youth worker may have a range of identities (Wetherell, 2010) as identity is 'increasingly fluid [and] intersectional' (Hawkins, Huppatz & Matthews, 2016, p6).

This study examined why, when and how cisgendered LGBQ women youth workers used their self in their relationships with young people so focussing on two areas not previously examined in any depth. These are the use of self by youth workers and the challenges faced by LGBQ youth workers in their work. Stories were gathered from respondents regarding how they shared information

about their sexuality and other aspects of their selves that could encourage young people to share their own personal information as well as supporting the development of professional and authentic relationships (see Rogers & Allender, 1983).

This study sought to understand the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and queer (LGBQ) professionals regarding how they used their self within their work with young people. It also investigated the relevance, if any, of queer theory (Butler, 1990; Weeks, 2003; Slater, 2015) to issues of identity for these youth workers. The stories of women youth workers, who were based in the north of England, were gathered through in-depth semi-structured interviews with fifteen respondents. Research questions focussed on:

- (i) how LGBQ women youth work practitioners understood their journey to their current LGBQ sexuality;
- (ii) how their self impacted on how they named themselves and how they acted within their professional roles;
- (iii) how these women youth workers used their self, both in terms of their LGBQ identity and other aspects of their self, within their work with young people;
- (iv) the extent to which the idea of 'queer[y]ing' (Allen, 2010, p147; Slater, 2015, p10) their identity was useful in their professional settings.

The research took an interpretivist and feminist epistemological approach (drawing on Ramazanoglu, 1989; Hirschmarm, 1998; Hesse-Bibber, 2012). This was supported by a socially constructionist view of identity, or different identities, that were developed in different settings (leaning on Robson, 2002) drawing on intersectional approaches to identities. Semi-structured in-depth interviews enabled the youth workers to tell their own stories about how they viewed their (intersectional) self and how they used this self within a range of youth work settings, so seeking to understand how their use of self contributed to their youth work practice.

This introductory chapter sets the context for this study with five sections. First, the thinking and motivations for commencing on this research are presented. The second section discusses the parameters and limitations of the research including the geographical and professional focus of the research, the attention on LGBQ women youth workers and the method of data collection. The third section offers the context of the research presented in three themes: the character of current youth work in England (1.3.1), changes in LGBT focussed legislation (1.3.2) and the

experiences of LGB young people (1.3.3). The fourth section of the chapter (1.4) discusses the gaps in the youth work literature that this study contributes towards filling. These include applying intersectional theory to an understanding of how youth workers name their selves; understanding how LGBQ youth workers apply boundaries and ethics in their day-to-day work and bringing a focus to LGBQ issues within the youth work literature. The final section of this chapter (1.5) offers clarity regarding the structure of the thesis.

### 1.1 My motivations for the research

As a youth worker and lecturer of youth work I have developed expertise in a variety of skills, values and approaches over decades of experience, in a range of different contexts. A detailed discussion of my starting point and standpoint for this research is below (Ch.4).

Over the past fifteen years it has been important for me to be clear about my LGBQ sexuality with colleagues and students in HE (Higher Education) (following Wolfe, 2009). Being a positive role model and ensuring that students I teach have all knowingly met a person of LGBQ sexuality has been more important than being ambiguous about, or 'queer[y]ing' (Slater, 2015, p10), my LGBQ sexuality (a point agreed with by Wolfe, 2009, also writing in the context of HE teaching). When meeting new students I talk about 'my partner, she ...' or 'as a lesbian I ...'. This is done to ensure that students, who may not have not engaged outside of heteronormative ideas, hear and think about what it could be like to be the other (see Brah, 1999; Pihlaja & Thompson, 2017). I enter into conversations with students who often ask personal questions to do with my sexuality and lifestyle. I enter into these conversations to challenge ideas of normal (a term I encourage students to question), to 'usualise' (Schools Out, 2019) (or normalise) LGBQ sexuality and otherness and to ensure that students do not feel unfairly marked in their assignments if they debate lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) issues. There are advantages to this queering of identity as discussed in depth through this study; but this is not a path that I chose for myself either in this study or in my role as a youth work educator in HE. Being out suggests that I am outside of something (drawing on Stein & Plummer, 1994; Butler, 1991). What spheres of influence does this put me outside of? What circles does it put me inside of? What are the pros and cons of being outside? These are questions that have accompanied my journey within academia both prior to and during this research.

My interest in the topics examined commenced with conversations with 'Julie' (a youth worker). Julie had facilitated a group for LGBT young people in a local town but was not included in this

research as she had moved out of the area. When young people asked her if she was gay Julie would reply '*at the moment I am living with a man*'. The addition of '*at the moment*' in front of her reply ensured that LGBT young people were unclear about her sexual identity. This queering of identity enabled Julie to be potentially seen by these young people as a positive source of support rather than being dismissed as someone not able understand the challenges in their lives. Julie, who may be heterosexual, was an excellent youth worker; able to draw on stories and lessons learnt from others to support young people through challenging experiences. It was from this starting point of discussions with Julie that this research developed.

Prior to commencing this research I shared thinking and writing with two practitioners (one a lecturer of youth work, the other an experienced community worker, manager and consultant). These conversations were focused on autoethnographical approaches which sought to examine the relevance of queer theory to our understanding of ourselves and how our life-experiences and our paths towards our current LGBTQ sexuality might have impacted on the way that we worked in youth and community work settings. We noted the parallels in our stories which were possibly due to the similarity of our age and ethnicity. This autoethnographical work pushed me towards ensuring that this current research focussed on youth workers of different ages, ethnicities and social class as well as those working in different youth work settings.

Whilst much of this study draws on a socially constructed notion of the self, keeping some attention on ideas from queer theory has been important in emphasising the changing nature of things that in the moment seem fixed and constant. This was brought home to me through counselling when I was supported to see that even rocks change (I was a rock climber at that time). This point is emphasised by Robertson, talking of the Bridestone rocks in the Calder Valley, when she says that '*queer forms and changing bodies ... are not "set in stone" but are ... fluid structures shaped by water and erosion*' (Robertson, 2019). Even though I might feel that I fully understand my self, this self will still change over time. Even though a youth worker may think that they have clarity regarding their self and their boundaries in their work with a young person or group of young people, these boundaries need to change over time as the young person and the youth worker shift in relationship to each other.



## 1.2 Parameters of this study

This research was undertaken with youth workers in the north of England and examined only their contexts. Youth work is a broad profession and is viewed differently in different national and international contexts (Alldred, Cullen, Edwards, & Fusco, 2018). Recent legislation and policy developments have been different in England compared to Wales. The developments of youth work in Scotland and Northern Ireland have been even more distinct over the years (Davies, 2019). So despite drawing on youth work literature which is often, but not always, UK focussed, issues discussed in this study may not directly mirror the situation in other regions of England or other countries of the United Kingdom or in different European or international contexts.

The respondents in this study were cisgendered women who identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual and queer. The ideas and experiences of gay men, non-binary, transsexual or transgendered people and intersex people were not discussed within this study. This was not to dismiss these people, but to note that their experiences and issues are different to cisgendered lesbians, gay, bisexual and queer women (Clarke & Peel, 2007; Dhaenens, 2013) and so required separate research.

The research aimed to interview professionally qualified youth workers. Whilst the term professional may be seen to be controversial (Jones, 2018) the term is used, in this study, solely to denote a particular level of qualification in youth work which is often associated with a full time role. The pros and cons of professionalism and professionalisation for youth work were not explored in this study but can be found elsewhere (Banks, 2010; Sercombe, 2010a; Jones, 2018). Whilst the aim was to interview only professionally qualified women youth workers three of the first five respondents interviewed were not professionally qualified, a fact that came to my attention during, rather than before, the interview process had commenced. As these three practitioners were all graduates (of relevant subjects) and experienced youth workers it was decided to include their insightful material within the research but to be more careful to check the professional status of future respondents prior to interview.

The professional qualification that is endorsed by the National Youth Agency (NYA) in England is known as youth work. However, the NYA validated degree that is offered at most HE institutions in England is known as 'youth and community work' (QAA, 2017) or some mix of these words. The focus of this study was on youth work and all respondents had worked with young people in what could be seen as a professional youth work role; however, some respondents were working in

community work settings when interviewed. It could have been possible to extend the subjects discussed with respondents to a wider range of interesting topics: however, this would have diverted from the intended focus of this research.

The acronyms LGB (lesbian, gay and bisexual) and LGBQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual and queer) are used throughout this study. LGBT is used within the literature, and by practitioners, to denote lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans. All are contested terms as 'multiple and complex identities are not easily encapsulated in an acronym' (Formby, 2017, p24) but such terms were useful within the context of this research (drawing on Monro, 2015 and Formby, 2017). Despite using all four letters (LGBT), all too often discussion or practice (until recently) has focussed on lesbian and gay identifying people (Correa, 2006; Formby 2017). I have tried to ensure that the views of bisexual respondents were not marginalised (one respondent, of fifteen, identified as bisexual at the time of interviews) within this study as has been the case in other literatures regarding non-heteronormative people (Monro, 2015; Formby, 2017; Monro, Hines & Osborne, 2017; Bragg, Renold, Ringrose, & Jackson, 2018). Sometimes the letters Q or the symbol +, are added to this acronym. Q may mean questioning or queer. When working with young people around their sexuality, as many of the women respondents in this study did, the use of the term questioning can be important as during adolescence sexual identity may be a subject of continual questioning. The term queer is discussed below (Ch.3). The symbol + acknowledges that there may be other groups or identities that could to be included such as non-binary, gender queer, asexual or pansexual. This range of identities has expanded rapidly over the past years, especially amongst young people, (YouGov, 2015) but this is not a focus in this study. The acronym LGBT is used at times in this study when citing literature where trans issues were included, however in most places LGB or LGBQ were used: emphasising that some non-heterosexual women found gay or queer a better fit than lesbian or bisexual. Respondents often spoke about work with LGBT young people. In reporting findings, care was taken to keep the focus on LGBQ issues whilst being true to respondents wording within discussions.

This study, in seeking to investigate how youth workers used their self in their work, was limited to providing evidence from stories told by respondents about their practice and how they shared their self or allowed young people and colleagues to know about their sexuality, and other aspects of their lives, in their everyday work.

The parameters of this study with regard to it being focussed on the reported use of self, in youth work in the north of England with professionally qualified youth workers and with LGBTQ women have been clarified. The next section of this chapter briefly discusses the context of current youth work, the developments in LGBTQ focussed legislation and the experiences of LGBTQ young people in England.

## 1.3 The context of the research

### 1.3.1 Youth work

Youth work has been defined by the National Youth Association (NYA, nd) as ‘the science of enabling young people to believe in themselves and to prepare for life ... building resilience and character and giving young people the life skills to live, learn, work and interact successfully with other people’. Whilst some of the terminology of the NYA’s definition is contested (Trelfa, 2018), this definition is a useful starting point to set the scene as to the nature of youth work within this introductory chapter. Youth work in England has been seen to involve the voluntary engagement of young people (Jefferies & Smith, 2002; Taylor, 2009; Davies, 2015; Coburn & Gormally, 2019). Youth work focusses on informal education and fostering association with peers who engage with youth workers who are ‘friendly... and act with integrity’ (Smith, M.K., 1988 cited in Trelfa, 2018, pp356-357; Jefferies & Smith, 2008 cited in Jefferies, 2018, pp29-30). Youth work happens in a range of settings and institutional contexts (Cooper, 2018) but issues of inclusion and diversity are central to youth work practice (NYA, 2004; Young, 2006; Davies, 2010; Institute for Youth Work (IYW), 2013; Sapin, 2013). The development of youth work in England, in both the voluntary sector (including uniformed organisations) and the statutory sector, has led to the rather confusing situation of voluntary sector organisations with some paid workers and a statutory sector which, although it employed workers who were often qualified, was also reliant on volunteers. Whilst people (both volunteers and paid workers) with different qualifications deliver youth work (Cullen & Bradford, 2018) training for professionally qualified youth workers is validated nationally by the NYA.

Youth work in the north (and other areas) of England has been devastated by austerity cuts that have been implemented at local government level but imposed by the UK national government policy. When this research commenced ‘more than 2,000 youth workers ... [had] been axed and 350 youth centers closed’ in the UK between 2012 and 2014 (UNISON, 2014). There has been 73% cuts in local authority youth work spending in England between 2010/11 and 2019/20 (Full

Fact, 2019). Cuts to youth work in England have led to an increased focus, for youth workers, on supporting individual young people to fit into their place in society rather than empowering them to challenge the impact of society on themselves (Jones, 2013; Smith, M.K., 2013; Hughes, Cooper, Gormally, & Rippingdale, 2014; Bradford, 2015; de St Croix, 2016; Pope, 2016; Taylor, 2016). These cuts are challenging the very existence of the youth work profession (Fyfe & Moir, 2013; Smith, M.K., 2013; Jeffs, 2015b; Jones, 2018). These cuts have been the backdrop for the research with practitioners but not the focus. The impact of these cuts is discussed below (Ch.2 & Ch.9).

### 1.3.2 Changes in LGBT- focussed legislation

There have been significant and far reaching changes to LGBT focussed legislation over the past 30 years in England. Section 28 (an amendment to the 1986 Local Government Act) was on the statute books during the late 1980s and 1990s (years when some respondents within this study were involved in youth work and/or political action). Section 28 stated that a local authority 'shall not intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material with the intention of promoting homosexuality' (DfE, 1988). Section 28 was not repealed until 2003 (in England). This was only after much political action including the establishment of Stonewall (in 1988) and Outrage (in 1990) and Pride marches in various UK towns and cities (some of which I attended). Changes in legislation before the repeal of Section 28 included the decriminalisation of sex between two consenting adults in various parts of the UK, the reduction of the age of consent for homosexual men to 18 and a range of celebrities and public figures coming out as LGBT (all noted by Stonewall, 2016). Changes in LGBT-focussed legislation in England (and other parts of the UK) since the repeal of Section 28 have also been many and varied. These include the Civil Partnership Act 2004; the Gender Recognition Act, 2004 (reformed in 2018); the Equality Act, 2010; and the Same Sex Marriage Act, 2014 (all noted in Monro, 2010; Moore, 2015; Stonewall, 2016). Other important events include the development of anti-bullying policies in schools and hate crime reporting (Monro, 2010; Formby, 2013). Whilst some of these developments are discussed further (Ch.9), space does not allow a detailed analysis of these developments. More detailed discussions of developments and changes in LGBT-focussed legislation can be found in other sources (Monro, 2010; Formby, 2013; Stonewall, 2016).

### 1.3.3 The experiences of LGBT young people

The policy developments noted above have meant that the situation for LGBT people in the UK has been improving over recent years, and it stands in stark comparison to the illegality of

consensual adult same-sex relations in 68 countries worldwide (Yang, 2019). However, there is still extensive prejudice against non-heterosexual people in England (Eckstein, 2013; Moore, 2015; Stonewall, 2017; Marsh, Mohdin, & McIntyre, 2019; Postuvan, Podlogar, Sedivy, & De Leo, 2019).

Homophobic, biphobic and transphobic acts of individuals (Eckstein, 2013) are fuelled by institutional heteronormativity which is common in British schools (Fenwick, 2015). In Britain '45% [of LGB young people] ... are bullied at school' because they are LGB; and of these '45% never tell anyone' about this bullying; '52% [of LGBT young people] ... hear homophobic language frequently or often' but only '29% [of LGBT young people say that] ... teachers intervened if they were present during the bullying' (Stonewall, 2017a, p6). '53% [of LGBT young people] say there isn't an adult they can talk to at school about being LGBT ... 40% have skipped school because of bullying [and] ... 52% [say that] bullying impacts on their plans for education'; this number rises to 58% for trans young people (Stonewall, 2017a, p30). Separate statistics regarding the experiences of bisexual, nonbinary or trans young people are difficult to obtain (Barker et al, 2012; Monro, Hines, & Osborne, 2017). However there is evidence that bisexual young people face even more microaggressions than lesbian or gay young people (Barker et al, 2012; Feinstein & Dyer, 2017; Hatchel & Marx, 2018). Microaggressions are defined as 'brief and commonplace verbal, behavioural or environmental indignities that communicate hostile, derogatory slights and insults' (Postuvan et al, 2019, p3). Bisexual young people are victims of biphobia and transphobia as well as homophobia and may be victimised by lesbian and gay young people as well as heterosexual young people (Barker et al, 2015). Trans young people are also victims of transphobia as well as homophobia: they not only suffer from transphobic language from both peers and teachers but also experience the same abuse as LGB young people as it is often assumed by their peers that they are gay as well as trans (Hatchell & Marx, 2018).

Rates of mental ill-health, depression, self-harm and suicide are higher for LGBT young people than for other young people (D'Emilio, 1999; Rivers, 2000; Scourfield, Roen, & McDermott 2008; Formby, 2013, Stonewall, 2018a; Postuvan et al, 2019). This is not surprising given the microaggressions that LGBT young people face in school settings. Research undertaken with LGB school students found that '61% [of LGB young people] have self-harmed' compared with 79% of non-binary young people and 10% of all young people (Stonewall, 2017b, p31). 'Sexual minority youth have a two or three time's higher risk for suicidal behaviour' than their peers (Postuvan et al 2019,

p1): 20% of LGB young people have attempted suicide whilst 40% of trans young people have attempted suicide (Stonewall, 2017a). Trans and bisexual young people are even more likely to have challenges around their mental health (including drug and alcohol abuse and suicide attempts) than lesbian and gay young people (Barker et al, 2012; Feinstein & Dyer, 2017; Stonewall 2017a; Hatchel & Marx, 2018). It is important to note that none of these communities are homogeneous and BAME and/or disabled young people identifying as LGBT have more challenges to face in their lives than white and able bodied young people. This issue links to ideas of intersectionality (as discussed below (Ch.3) and in Barker et al, 2012; Feinstein & Dyar, 2017; Stonewall, 2017a).

On top of the pressures felt by all LGBT young people, schools have not taken LGBT bullying seriously (Formby, 2013, Stonewall, 2017a) and there has often been little information about LGBT matters in schools (Formby, 2013; Fenwick, 2015; Stonewall, 2017a; Formby & Woodiwiss, 2019). Most research evidences that, for LGBT young people, the situation in schools is improving (Moore, 2015; Stonewall, 2017a; Formby & Woodiwiss, 2019; Postuvan et al, 2019); however some sources suggest that LGBT people continue to be bullied due to their increased visibility (D'Augelli, 1996; Moore, 2015). Despite the increasingly supportive and less LGB-phobic environment experienced by these young people in schools their self-harm and poor mental health is not decreasing (Stonewall, 2017b).

This study did not focus on youth work with, or the experiences of, LGBT young people. However, the respondents of this research all survived this heteronormative educational system themselves and many spent a sizable proportion of their working hours doing targeted work with LGBT young people. Access to youth work provision for LGBT young people is important (Formby & Woodiwiss, 2019). It is reported that '75% of the young people [using such provision] had no one else that they saw as a supportive adult in their lives' (Lee, 2015, p130) and many felt 'alienated by mainstream education' (Fenwick, 2015, p75). Youth workers are perceived to be 'able to understand [LGBT young people] ... better' and have more space to support young people than teachers in school settings (Lee, 2015, p130). Targeted youth work allows LGBT young people space to meet other LGBT young people so that they can gain confidence and share and discuss their experiences. Weekly youth work sessions are 'important, trusted and appreciated' (Formby & Woodiwiss, 2019, p43) by young people as they provide safe environments in which they can 'explore' and celebrate their own identities (Fenwick, 2015, p77). Young people who use these

safe spaces may be strategically closeted (Orne, 2011) regarding their LGBT identities at school or even possibly at home. These safe spaces support young people in their wishes to be seen as out and proud rather than as victims: a theme repeated across the years (Trenchard & Warren, 1984; Formby & Woodiwiss, 2019).

This section has discussed the context of this study both within youth work and current LGBT policy developments. It has offered some information regarding the challenges faced by LGBT young people and noted the importance of youth work with LGBT young people. The next section offers clarity regarding the gaps that this study fills within the literature.

#### 1.4 The gaps in the literature

This section touches on the literatures which are discussed in more depth in the literature review chapters (2 & 3) and notes how the findings of this research add to these literatures.

The self can be examined from a range of different academic and theoretical perspectives including sociology, social psychology, anthropology and history (Wearing, 2011). This study draws mostly from sociological literature that focusses on the self, although some ideas regarding social identity from a psychological perspective were useful in examining the self that is used by youth workers.

As noted earlier the importance of understanding how the self is used within relationships with clients is documented in the literature of many professions including youth work (Smith, M.K., 2002; Young, 2006; Spence, 2007; Fusco, 2012; Murphy & Ord, 2013; Wood, Westwood & Thompson, 2015). The youth work literature emphasises that workers require an awareness of how their own life-experiences impact on their self (e.g. Batsleer, 2013; Sapin, 2013) and that this awareness can only be gained through careful and critical reflective practice (e.g. Davies, 2006; Trelfa 2018). However, the self that youth workers are required to use within their work is one of the 'least understood aspect[s] of youth work' (Fusco, 2012, p34). This research contributes to filling this gap by examining how these LGBQ workers developed an understanding of their current identities and how they used this self-awareness and their self within their work with young people.

Another gap that this study addresses concerns intersectionality (Crenshaw; 1992) which has not previously been brought to the youth work literature (Hatton and Monro, 2019). This study examined how intersections between sexuality, social class, religion, ethnicity and age impacted

on the way respondents viewed and understood their journeys to their current LGBTQ sexuality. The centrality of the self as a tool in youth work (Fusco, 2012) emphasises the importance of professionals understanding how the complexity of their own self regarding a range of intersecting categories impacts on how they respond to, and work with, young people.

Only small numbers of writers in the youth work literature have considered LGBTQ issues. Over the years Batsleer has discussed issues around LGB topics (for example: 1996b; 2002; 2012b & 2014). Kent-Baguley (1990) discussed the importance of youth workers working with LGBT young people. Moore and Prescott (2013) examined the impact of heteronormativity on young people's transitions to adulthood. Lee (2015) and Fenwick (2015) wrote about and LGBTQ-focused youth work in Manchester and Formby has reviewed youth work with LGBT young people in a range of settings (Formby & Donovan, 2016 and Formby & Woodiwiss, 2019). None of these sources focussed, to any extent, on why or how LGBTQ youth workers use their self or share information regarding their sexuality in their work. These are major themes within this study (Chs. 7 & 8). This study allowed an examination of the day-to-day lived experiences of LGBTQ professionals who are people not previously represented to any great extent in the literature as discussed below (Ch.6).

The importance of authenticity and honesty drawing on Carl Rogers' writings (1951-1980) is documented in the youth work literature (e.g. Smith, M.K., 1997; Spence, 2007; Murphy & Ord, 2013). Youth work literatures also note the importance of reciprocity within conversations and relationships between workers and young people (e.g. Jeffs & Smith, 2005 & 2014; Batsleer, 2008) and emphasise the importance starting 'where young people are' (Spence et al, 2007, p13; Fusco, 2012, p37; Davies, 2015, p100). The above themes (discussed in Ch.2) were examined with LGBTQ respondents in this study offering evidence as to how these women brought an awareness of their LGBTQ identity to their everyday work with young people. This study provides new evidence regarding respondents' application of youth work values to their day-to-day work sometimes in situations where they may have faced homophobia and biphobia from young people or colleagues. This focus on LGBTQ youth workers' use of self is an area not previously presented in youth work literature.

Much has been written about the nature and core values of youth work (e.g. Jeffs & Smith (Eds), 1987 & 2010; Deer Richardson & Wolfe (Eds), 2001; Young, 2006; Batsleer, 2008; Batsleer & Davies, 2010; Parkin & Buchroth (Eds) 2010; Nichols, 2012; Sapin, 2013; Davies, 2015). Other influential youth work scholarship includes a focus on ethics in youth work practice (Banks &



BASW, 2006; Ord, 2007; Roberts, 2009; Banks, 2010; Sercombe, 2010a & 2010b). However within this literature there has been little evidence regarding how youth workers operate on a day to day basis: Spence's research (Spence, 2007 & 2010; Spence Devanney, & Noonan, 2006; Spence & Devanney, 2013) being one of few exceptions until recently. The discussions in this study of how these LGBTQ respondents applied professional ethics (Chs. 2 & 7) offers new insights into the reality of day-to-day challenges when faced by ongoing homophobia and biphobia from young people or colleagues.

There has been a recent expansion in research undertaken regarding how youth workers interpret the core values of youth work in their relationships in practice (for example de St Croix, 2016; Coburn & Gormally, 2017 and Ord et al, 2018). The recently published source edited by Aldred, Cullen, Edwards, & Fusco, (2018) includes research focussing on how youth workers developed and used relationships in their practice with young people. Chapters in this publication most relevant to this study include Couch's (2018) investigation (with young refugees in Australia) regarding the nature of the relationship between youth worker and young person; Spier and Giles' (2018) focus on the ethics of youth work practice (again in an Australian context) and Morgan and McArdle's (2018) examination of how feminist youth workers in Northern Ireland used an asset-based approach to youth work in order to empower and support young women to transform their lives. None of these sources examined youth workers' understanding of their use of self in their work: the theme of this study.

This section has noted the gaps within the literature that this study goes some way to filling. These include a focus on the nature of the self that youth workers used within their work and bringing intersectionality theory into the youth work literature. Other gaps that this study fills include how these LGBTQ youth workers knew when and how to use their self in their work with young people as well as how they applied professional values and ethics in the heteronormative environments in which they often worked. The final section of this chapter sets out the structure of the thesis.

### 1.5 Structure of this thesis

This study commences with two chapters which set the context of this study in the background of relevant literature. Chapter two examines scholarship focussing on two different literatures. First: the self within UK and western thought, primarily from a sociological perspective. Second: the use of self within professional and youth work contexts including a brief historical overview of the topic. The second literature chapter (3) includes a short historical overview of the study of same-

sex sexuality and introduces some key ideas central to notions of sexuality, queer theory and intersectionality. These literature focussed chapters are followed by a discussion (Ch.4) of the methodology that guided this research with fifteen cisgendered LGBQ women youth workers.

Findings from the research are presented in chapters 5-9. Chapter 5 discusses the stories and scripts of how the respondents moved towards their current self-awareness of their own sexuality. Chapter 6 discusses the impact of their awareness of their LGBQ sexuality on how respondents named their self at that point in time. Chapter 7 and 8 present findings which are at the heart of the research. Chapter 7 discusses why respondents chose to share, or not share, information about their self, with young people and how they developed boundaries within their work with young people. Chapter 8 examines how respondents used their self within their professional relationships. The initial focus within chapter 8 is on how respondents shared their LGBQ identity with their colleagues. The focus then moves to how respondents shared information about their hobbies and interests as well as their LGBQ identity with young people. The final findings chapter (9) puts the data into the context of the changing LGB-focussed legislation environment in Britain and on the policy climate in youth work settings. The final chapter (10) summarises the findings of the research, reviews learning from the research and discusses how the findings of this research will be shared and extended.

It is important to note that when writing about disputed notions many writers use inverted commas to signify that concepts are contested (Clarke, Ellis, Peel & Riggs, 2010). This research examines many ideas that are contested so it seemed counterproductive to use inverted commas: so this convention was not followed. Italics are used to signal quotes from respondents, in contrast to quotes from the literature; both of which are put in inverted commas unless included as an indented long quotes, following the usual academic style. Quotations from my research diary are also put in italics.

This chapter has offered an introduction to the research. The next chapter offers insights into some of the literature focussed on the self and the use of self in youth work contexts.

## Ch. 2: The self and the use of self in a youth work context

### Introduction

The first chapter set the scene for this research, which seeks to examine the views of cisgendered women youth workers who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or queer (LGBQ) regarding how they use their self within their work with young people. This second chapter is the first of two chapters which review literature relevant to this study. This chapter introduces the central notion of this research: that of the use of self within the context of youth work.

The chapter has two sections. The first section examines ideas of the self within UK and western thought drawing particularly on Jenkins' (2014) four views of the self. These are the essential self; the socially constructed nature of the self; the reflexive self and the space for agency in the development of the self. The second section focusses on the use of self within professional and youth work contexts and is divided into three distinct subsections. The first subsection is a brief discussion of the use of self within a range of caring professions (2.1) and discusses the central role of self-awareness and reflection within professional training. The second subsection is an examination of the use of self within youth work from a historical perspective (2.2). This discussion draws on a wide range of literature, especially the writings of Batsleer (1996a, 2008, 2012b & 2018); Davies (1999 & 2019); Bradford (2004); Spence (2010) and Jones (2018). The final subsection focusses on how youth work practitioners use their self within relationships: as relationships between worker and young person are at the heart of youth work (2.3). Within this final subsection the debates of youth work are linked to the earlier discussions of the self.

### 2.1 The self

This section, focussing on the idea of the self, has two subsections. The first subsection is an examination, mostly from a sociological perspective, of what is meant by the self and identity. A clear understanding of the meaning of these contested terms is required in order to discuss how youth workers use their self within their work with young people. This discussion commences with a discussion focussed on the nature of the self and identity focussing on how (2.1.1) ideas of the self have developed over the years. The second subsection (2.1.2) drawing on Jenkins (2014) examines ideas regarding the essentialist and then socially constructed nature of the self; ideas about the reflexive self and if, or how, a person has agency in the development of their self.

This study draws primarily from sociological scholarship that focusses on the self although ideas regarding social identity (a psychological perspective) are alluded to. These terms are sometimes used interchangeably within this study (reflecting this focus on the sociological approach to the self and identity) as, in places, the idea of the self is best worded in terms of identity following the literature (e.g. Weeks, 2007; Iedema & Caldas-Coulthard, 2008; Lemke, 2008; Parekh, 2008; Jenkins, 2014). Concepts such as the self and identity are not simple ideas but may be taken for granted (Jenkins, 2014) or may cause confusion as they are used differently in academic language compared with everyday talk (Brah, 2007). The discussion here will assist in setting out ideas from both social constructionist and postmodern perspectives. Both perspectives have been useful in developing ideas and thoughts for this research.

### 2.1.1. Ideas of the self as developed through history

Space does not allow a detailed understanding as to how ideas of the self developed over the past 300 years. Suffice it to say that philosophers of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries (such as Descartes and Hobbes) were the originators of ideas of the self (cited in Gergen, 2000). Both Freud, from a psychological perspective, and Mead from a social anthropological perspective in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century advanced what came to be known as the 'dualistic tradition' (cited in Gergen, 2015, p154). This dualistic tradition continues to be influential in emphasising ideas of an 'interactive self' (Mead, 1934 cited in Holstein & Gubrium, 2000, p25) which is in constant development through relationships with others alongside the 'inner self' (Hochschild, 1983 cited in Holstein & Gubrium, 2000, p47) or 'settled self' (Parekh, 2008, p10). The inner or settled self is the awareness of the self as it is at any particular moment. It is important to note that this inner self continues to develop, as emphasised by postmodern writers (such as Butler, 1990; Lemke, 2008). Social constructionists (such as Gagnon & Simon, 1973; Weeks, 1995; Plummer, 2003) also emphasise that the self is always changing through the ongoing interactions with others. Goffman (1956) developed ideas of the interactive self stressing that the self is performed differently in different settings and at different times (see Goffman, 1956 & Branaman, 1997 for a full discussion). Goffman's focus on the impact of the context on how the self is performed was further developed by thinkers such as Simon and Gagnon (1969 & 1984), who were the first to question the idea of biological determinism (Jackson & Scott, 2010). This biological determinism is often known as essentialism within feminist and LGBT contexts: the idea that who we are is decided at birth and remains constant through life (Marinucci, 2010) as discussed below (2.1.2a).

### 2.1.2 The self and identity

This research draws on the ideas of the self from social constructionist and social interactionist approaches (as discussed by authors such as Plummer, 2003; Brah, 2007) as well as some ideas from postmodernism (such as Butler: 1990, 1991, 1993, 1999 & 2004). These approaches emphasise that ideas of the self develop from patterns of social interaction through childhood and adult life as a person relates to others in varied situations (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000). Social constructionism and social interactionism were not developed as theories to answer all questions, so incorporating them with other views is not problematic (Kearney, 1998 cited in Plummer, 2003). Drawing on the postmodern approach as well as social constructionism and interactionism within this study is helpful as it emphasises that the self, or one's identity, is not fixed. Postmodernism also emphasises the importance of challenging the binary nature of identity regarding issues of gender and sexuality (Sedgwick, 1991; Marinucci, 2010; Bragg, Renold, Ringrose & Jackson, 2018): a point of relevance to this study.

Jenkins (2014) suggests four themes which structure the discussion of the self within this subsection. Firstly, the idea of an essential self or a self that is socially constructed (this debate can be found in many sources including Gergen, 2000; Holstein & Gubrium, 2000; Fook, 2002; Wearing, 2011; Jenkins, 2014). The second theme is the extent to which the self changes with the context in which it operates (Weeks, 2007; Gauntlett, 2008). The third theme includes debates around the dichotomy of 'the inner reflective agent and external experiences' (Sands, 1996, p169 cited in Fook, 2002, p71) which is also discussed widely (e.g. Mead, 1934 cited in Smith, M.K., 1996; Goffman, 1959 cited in Branaman 1997; Rogers, 1961; Hochschild, 1983; Smith, M.K., 1996; Simon & Gagnon, 1999; Gergen, 2000; Holstein & Gubrium, 2000; Fook, 2002). Jenkins' final theme regarding the agency and independence of the self is also discussed widely (e.g. Butler, 2004; Gauntlett, 2008; Lemke, 2008; Jenkins, 2014; Gergen, 2015). These themes assist in making sense of the use of self as discussed below in 2.2.3 and within the findings of this study. Jenkins first two themes are discussed together (a).

#### *a) The socially constructed self and the importance of context*

The idea that the self is 'made of many fragments of historical ... social, and personal experiences' (Weeks, 2007, p43) is held by many social constructionists (for example Rutherford, 1990 cited in Kearney, 1998; Weeks, 2007; Iedema & Caldas-Coulthard, 2008; Katz-Wise & Keller, 2011; Ma'ayan, 2011; Wearing, 2011) and postmodernists (Butler, 1991, 1993, 1999 & 2004; Ganzer,

2007; Parekh, 2008). From a constructivist perspective the way a person views her own identity is limited by the pool of potential socially constructed identities 'defined by the culture and the time in which they live' (Savin Williams, 2005 cited in Katz-Wise & Keller, 2011, p34). The identities available to a person are many and varied (Weeks, 2007) and depend on a range of different issues such as social class, gender, ethnicity and sexuality (Butler, 2004; Hatton & Monro, 2019). A sense of self will depend on the individual's personal experiences and how each individual interprets their life story and understands their own experiences within the culture and time in which they live (Butler, 1993; Gergen, 2000; Ganzer, 2007; Weeks, 2007; Katz-Wise & Keller, 2011). How a person views her own self and how she expects others to see her depends on her everyday life as she makes decisions about what to wear, how to use her leisure time and what sort of relationships she seeks to develop (Gauntlett, 2008). However, to a large extent much of a person's identity can also be seen as ascribed (e.g. marital status, height and weight). These 'ascribed' (Fook, 2002, p71) or 'social identities' (Parekh, 2008, p16) impact on how the individual is perceived by others but will still vary according to the society or the community and context in which she is situated (Parekh, 2008).

Noting that each person has 'distinct centres of self-consciousness ... different bodies [and] ... biographical details' (Parekh, 2008, p9) does not suggest an essential self which was defined at, or even before, birth. It suggests rather that this self was and is shaped by the values and attitudes learnt from 'planned and unplanned influences' (Parekh, 2008, p10). These influences are used by the individual to interpret their own unique experiences and encounters through life (Butler, 1990 & 1993; Iedema, & Caldas-Coulthard, 2008; Lemke, 2008; Wearing, 2011). So an individual's hexis and habitus (Bourdieu, 1978 cited in Bucholtz, 1999) develop through habitually repeated performances (Butler, 1993) of embodied 'stances and gestures which have social meaning' (Ma'ayan, 2011, p205). This includes the way a person performs (e.g. walks, speaks, or eats) in certain ways which develop 'through implicit and explicit socialisation' (Ma'ayan, 2011, p205).

Both social constructionists and postmodernists emphasise that as a person's social identities are constructed over time so it is not possible to have a final or 'unitary sense of identity' (Parekh, 2008, p9). Rather, identities are fluid (Butler, 2004; Weeks, 2007; Gauntlett, 2008) and depend on the context in which a person is situated (Weeks, 2007). Identity changes through a person's life along with their experiences as people act differently in different contexts (Goffman, 1961 cited in Lemke, 2008; Butler, 1993 & 2004; Gergen, 2000; Ganzer, 2007; Weeks, 2007; Lemke, 2008;

Parekh, 2008). This does not suggest that identity is plural but rather that a person performs according to the audience (Goffman, 1956; Butler, 1993; Holstein & Gubrium, 2000; Gergen, 2000; Lemke, 2008) and how the situation is 'framed' (Branaman, 1997, p.xlvii). It is important to note that a person's different identities 'do not co-exist passively' (Parekh, 2008, p24) but rather that tensions caused by conflicting or different identities may lead to the development and change of identity over time. Although a person associates with different social organisations or institutions she is also identified by these social institutions 'to shape and control [her] ... identities' (Foucault, cited in Lemke, 2008 p 31). Notions such as gender, sexuality, or professionalism, all important for this study, can mean different things and lead a person to perform differently in different contexts regarding how they dress, how they relate to people, or how bold or confident they are (Lemke, 2008). Some performances come from internalised socialisation (Butler, 1993; Weeks, 2007; Lemke, 2008; Parekh, 2008) but in other situations a person may choose to challenge or 'escape' from (Lemke, 2008, p32) these internalised and learnt roles (as discussed below: 2.1.2c). There is not necessarily much cohesiveness to the identities that are performed by a person in different settings at various times (Ganzer, 2007; Weeks, 2007). However, as a person develops and seeks to understand their own identity they tend to bring coherence and logic to how they name themselves (Parekh, 2007; Lemke, 2008) with some 'aspects of ... identities ... persist[ing] for days or weeks ... and other aspects ... persist[ing] over months and years or decades' (Lemke, 2008, p26). This coherence and logic is assisted by, and impacts on, the groups of people they identify with (Taylor, 2011). So the rationalising of a plural identity (Brah, 2007) does not fix the self for the youth workers within this study but allows their identity to have potential to shift and change.

The need to develop a consistent self links to Jenkins' third point (2014): the importance of reflecting on one's 'values, attitudes to life [and] qualities of character ... [to] approve or disapprove of some of them' (Parekh, 2008, p10). This is the focus for the next subsection.

### *b) The reflexive self*

A 'reflexive social self' (Kearney, 1998, p823) enables a person through 'observation ... retrospection or introspection' (Jenkins, 2014, p57) to review themselves, their values and beliefs and 'provides a framework in which they view themselves and the world' (Parekh, 2008, p10). This reflexive self draws on the dualistic tradition noted above (2.1.1). The individual is in dialogue through reflexive 'inner' conversations between the 'I' and the 'me' of this dualistic view of the

self (Mead, 1934 cited in Smith, M.K., 1996): ‘the ‘I’ articulates thoughts and the ‘me’ hears them expressed’ (Burkitt, 1991, p39 cited in Smith, M.K., 1996). So a ‘connected’ (Jenkins, 2014, p23) or ‘settled’ (Parekh, 2008, p10) sense of self developed, for these youth workers, alongside pressures, demands and opportunities within the context in which they lived (Weeks, 2007) and worked. It is not easy to achieve this ‘settled’ sense of self (Parekh, 2008, p10), but making space to reflect on one’s place in the world (Parekh, 2008) can assist in understanding how it is necessary to act differently in different circumstances. This reflexivity is discussed in some depth within the youth work literature (see 2.2.3e). It is important to remember that the self is never a finished product (Parekh, 2008) but is continually developing and changing, as emphasised by the postmodernist approach (Butler, 2004; Lemke, 2008; Marinucci, 2010). Thus reflectivity can allow some sense of agency: the final aspect of the self to be discussed below.

### *c) Agency*

Much is written regarding the idea of agency. The discussion here is a synthesis of what can be found in more depth in other sources (such as: Kearney, 1998; Butler, 1990, 1993 & 2004; Burke, 2000; Gauntlett, 2008; Lemke, 2008; Gergen, 2015). The focus on the individual and ideas of agency are quite new in Western society (Gergen, 2000; Holstein & Gubrium, 2000). Humanists, such as Carl Rogers, were some of the earliest writers to note the importance of the conscious choice of their actions for an individual (Rogers, 1961 cited in Gergen, 2000). It seems that whilst agency is now seen as central to the way that a person acts in their day-to-day life, this agency is often seen as ‘neither deliberate nor reflexive’ (Jenkins, 2014, p79) and the extent of agency is impossible to know as motivations behind actions cannot be seen or known (Gergen, 2015).

As noted above (2.1.2a) a person’s agency is impacted on by their culture (Katz-Wise & Keller, 2011) and the context of the setting (Goffman, 1961 cited in Lemke, 2008; Butler, 1993 & 2004; Ganzer, 2007; Weeks, 2007; Lemke, 2008; Parekh, 2008). In any situation the roles (drawing on Simon & Gagnon, 1999) or choices that are available to a person (Lemke, 2008) are limited. Bourdieu’s notions of capital, habitus and field, as discussed in depth by many authors (for example Colley 2003; Maton, 2012; Thomson, 2012), supports this point. According to Bourdieu (1994 cited in Maton, 2012) a person’s habitus, or tendency to act according to the unspoken rules of their field (that is their culture, social class, ethnicity and the context in which they are situated), all impact on the space that a person has for agency. ‘Habitus is the link, not only between the past, the present and the future, but also between the social and the individual ...



structure and agency' (Maton, 2012, p53). A person's place in the field and her agency are closely connected (Bourdieu cited in Colley, 2003 and in Thomson, 2012) as agency and field act on each other in a complex manner. Different forms of capital (social, economic, cultural, and symbolic) impact on this field and different fields have different rules, 'shapes' (Thomson, 2012, p69). According to Bourdieu choice and 'agency are possible, although bounded, and ... [these choices] can bring transformation of habitus' (Colley, 2003, p253).

The language of Goffman is also useful in throwing light on the above discussions. The extent to which a person can manipulate social situations depends on her 'role, status and relationships' (Goffman, 1952 cited in Branaman, 1997, p.xlviii). As Goffman said: the 'self-as-performer is not merely a social product. The individual performer is the thinking, fantasising, dreaming, desiring human being' (Goffman, 1959, p253-4 cited in Branaman, 1997, p.xlviii). Goffman (1956) suggested that a person learns a role rather than choosing to act in a unique manner. However, different roles within a person's life may not be compatible; leading to tension and also space for 'a margin of freedom' (Goffman, 1961, p39). As noted above (2.1.2a) in some situations there may be a wider margin of freedom or more space for agency as a person seeks to challenge or 'escape' from her learnt roles (Lemke, 2008, p32). The pressure to behave in a certain manner is influenced by the audience viewing the performance (Goffman, 1956) and the social institutions with which the performer associates (Lemke, 2008). Goffman suggested that a person has a margin of freedom (or agency) to ignore or act outside these pressures in a conscious manner (also noted in Hochschild, 2012). A person's understanding of the choices available to her in any situation depends on her own life experiences and how she understands these experiences (Butler, 1993; Gergen, 2000; Ganzer, 2007; Weeks, 2007; Katz-Wise & Keller, 2011). This means that a person's ability to reflect on her experiences will impact on her sense of agency (Parekh, 2008): so linking to the above discussion of the reflexive self (2.1.2b).

This discussion (2.1) focussing on the self has examined some important and contentious discussions within the literature and emphasised a number of points that will be useful within this research. Firstly, that the self is socially constructed by interactions with society, communities and individuals through a person's life; so the self is never a finished product. Secondly, many aspects of this self are ascribed by society: some aspects of the self persisting over many years whilst other aspects come and go through brief episodes. Thirdly, whilst the self is seen as a whole: a person thinks, feels and acts differently according to the context of their situation. Finally, an

awareness of one's self and how one feels, thinks and acts will assist a person in developing some aspect of agency in situations: as Lemke (2008, p26) says 'we act in the moment to events but how we respond depends on our longer-term habitus and understandings'. The extent to which a person has agency within their professional role and with regard to their sexuality is discussed below (2.2.3d & 3.1.3).

The discussion now moves on from how the self is seen within the literature to the second theme within this chapter: that of the use of self within a youth work context.

## 2.2 The use of self within youth work and professional contexts

This section commences with a general discussion regarding the use of self in a range of caring professions (2.2.1). It then moves on to present broad ideas regarding how the self has been used within youth work over the years (2.2.2). This is followed by a more detailed discussion (2.2.3) regarding the use of self in relationships which are at the heart of youth work with a focus on four different themes: authenticity; reciprocity; flexible boundaries and reflective practice.

### 2.2.1 The use of self in caring professions

The use of self is an important theme for a range of caring professions as the way that the practitioner uses their self impacts on how the service is received by a client or service user (Wendt, Schiller, Cheers, Francis, & Lonne, 2001; Fook, 2002; Woolhouse, 2012). The idea of the use of self is discussed in the literature of many professions including youth work (Smith, M.K., 2002; Young, 2006; Spence, 2007; Fusco, 2012; Murphy & Ord, 2013; Wood, Westwood & Thompson, 2015), therapy (Lum, 2002; Rowan & Jacobs, 2002; Howard, 2005), teaching (Woolhouse, 2012), social work (Fook, 2002; Ganzer, 2007; Reupert, 2007) and health professions (Fook, 2002; Stronach, Corbin, McNamara, Stark & Warne, 2010; Kubiak & Sandberg, 2011; Liberman, 2013). However even though the use of self is assumed to be central within these professions there has been little research into how it operates (Lum, 2002; Reupert, 2007, Fusco, 2012).

Relationships are central in many occupations. Professionals use their self: 'their values, their empathy and their genuineness' (Kubiak & Sandberg, 2011, p654) as a 'therapeutic tool' (Reupert, 2007, p108): so bringing their 'warmth ... concern [and] acceptance' (Ganzer, 2007, p117) to relationships which happen in a real world context. Cultural and social aspects impact on these

relationships (Ganzer, 2007) just as they do on any relationship inside or outside of a work context.

The centrality of self-awareness for the professional regarding their own identity and experiences is a theme visited by many writers (e.g. Lum, 2002; Davies, 2006; Murphy & Ord, 2013; Wood et al, 2015). An awareness of one's own values and assumptions is essential in order understand how these values impact on or 'intermingle' (Fook, 2002, p44) amid the work with a client (Wendt, et al, 2001; Fook, 2002; Woolhouse, 2012).The importance of self-awareness, especially in regard to transference and counter transference is discussed, for example, in the social work literature (e.g. Ganzer, 2007). Transference is how a person may transfer emotions and understanding from one situation to another situation which is similar but not the same. Social workers or therapists are themselves present within the transference and countertransference that is an important part of the relationship. These relationships are 'co-created' between the client and the worker (Ganzer, 2007, p118). Each therapist brings specific skills to their relationships with their clients so enabling the client to 'participate in the co-construction of transference' (Hoffman, 1983 cited by Ganzer, 2007, p119). Within this process the 'feelings and behaviours' (Ganzer, 2007, p119) of the therapist and the client are equally important (Ganzer, 2007). So the use of self for the therapist is interactive and depends on the response of the client and respect for the client (Ganzer, 2007). The fact that the relationship is between two people brings some level of equality of status between the client and professional (Mitchell, 1988 cited by Ganzer, 2007). It is through the relationship between these two people that meanings and relationships are co-constructed (Mitchell, 1988 Ganzer, 2007; Yan Wong, 2005 cited in Reupert, 2007) for the client as they come to an understanding of themselves.

The self that the social worker, therapist or health worker uses is their everyday self. This includes how she feels as well as her 'passions and attitudes' (Lieberman, 2013, p24); 'her idiosyncrasies ... her height, her age, her sex, her ethnic origins, her temper, her energy, her prejudices' (Davies, 1994 cited in Reupert, 2007, p107); her 'warts, smells [and] attitudes'; her 'public self' including her clothes, the photographs on her office wall, her style and sense of humour (Reupert, 2007, p110-111). The self is used as an artist uses paint or a carpenter a hammer (Elliot, 2000 cited by Reupert, 2007). The challenge of developing different styles or learning different roles (drawing on Goffman, 1961) from those developed in their earlier years emphasises the importance for professionals of reflecting on how their own life experiences impact on their values and beliefs

(Parekh, 2008). Understanding how her reactions are impacted on by the context and the audience of the work (drawing on Goffman) (be they young people, colleagues or managers) is where professionals can develop some agency within their practice.

Critical reflection is required (Sherman, 2005 cited by Reupert, 2007) to ensure that this use of self is always as a positive tool and never for the self-gratification of the professional (Sheafor and Horejsi, 2003 cited in Reupert, 2007). The counselling literature emphasises that a therapist must have worked through their 'own personal issues' regardless of any 'discomfort' to be in touch with 'the self' and 'fully present' and aware of their own 'processes' and so that they can trust their own 'intuition' (Lum, 2002, p181- 183). In a nursing context reflection is seen as a useful tool 'in order to confront, understand and move towards resolving contradiction between one's vision and one's actual practice' (Johns, 2004, p3 cited in Hargreaves, 2010, p92). The focus of this reflection within the training of these professions has been on the practice, or work of, the individual practitioner (Moon, 1999) as well as on how the self is involved with, or impacts on, their practice.

The discussion now moves to a focus on the use of self within youth work. First taking a historical perspective (2.2.2) and then returning so some of the themes discussed above (2.2.1) but in a youth work context (2.2.3).

### 2.2.2 The use of self within the history of youth work

The following analysis draws on some critical themes in the history of youth work focussing on the development of the use of self within youth work practice (2.2.2a) with a focus on the development of youth work with girls and young people who identified as LGBT (2.2.2b). These themes include the divergent aims of youth workers seeking to empower young people and/or being used by policy makers as agents of social control (Davies, 1986; Hughes, Cooper, Gormally & Rippingdale, 2014; Bradford, 2015; Bright, 2015; Cullen & Bradford, 2018; Battle, 2019) and also attempts to match the identity of the youth worker with the identity of the young people in terms of gender or ethnicity (Batsleer, 2008; Watt, 2012). There is not space within this study to offer a full discussion regarding the development of youth work over the years. This can be found in other places (Davies, 1999; Young, 2006; Bright, Thompson, Hart, & Hayden, 2018; Jones, 2018; Davies, 2019).

### *a) The use of self in youth work through the years*

Youth work, a term first used by those working with young people in informal educational settings in the 1930s (Jeffs, 2018), has always been caught between the two divergent aims of acting as ‘agents of social control’ (Bradford, 2004, p246; Taylor, 2016, p89) or seeking to support and empower young people in their struggles and transitions to adulthood (Davies, 1999; Youdell and McGimpsey, 2015). Until the 20<sup>th</sup> century youth workers were mostly unpaid middle class volunteers working within religious-based organisations (Jones, 2018). Paid part time workers, some being full time teachers, were employed alongside volunteers working in these faith based and other secular organisations (Cooper, 2018; Jones, 2018) as educationally-focussed government funding for youth work grew (slowly) from the late 1940s. These workers, both paid and volunteers, often had close connections with the communities in which they worked and so had personal understanding of, and involvement with the issues that impacted on young people (Jeffs, 2015a): leaving them space to use this understanding, and their own (local) identity.

With regard to the use of self in a youth work context: the importance of ‘being friendly, accessible and responsive’ to young people (Jeffs & Smith, 2010a, p3) was noted as early as 1933 when Henrique suggested that ‘the success of the club depends on the personality and ingenuity of the leader’ (Henrique, 1933, p60 cited in Jeffs & Smith 2010a, p3). Brew (an influential and female, voice in youth work and its policy development through many decades in the 20<sup>th</sup> century) noted that youth workers should not be ‘too concerned about results’ (Brew, 1943, p12 cited in Smith, M.K., 2001a) but rather be focussed on the process of relationships between young people and youth workers (Smith, M.K., 2001a): again leaving space for the use of self within these relationships.

From the mid-1940s to the early 1980s youth work was largely focussed on leisure activities for young people (Davies, 1999), primarily with boys (Jeffs, 2018); despite Brew, in the 1950s noting the importance of youth work involving young women (cited in Smith, M.K., 2001a). Through these decades there was a strong focus on ‘association’ (Thomas, 2008, p44): encouraging young people to see themselves as part of a group or community (Smith, M.K., 2001c): maybe from the same community as the youth worker. Alongside the focus on working with young people in their peer groups there was also a focus on young people’s voluntary relationship with a youth worker (Jeffs & Smith, 2002; Taylor, 2009; Coburn, 2011; Thomas, 2011; Davies, 2015; Jones, 2018; Coburn & Gormally, 2019). The youth worker may have been the first adult in a young

person's life 'who was not an authority figure' (Ministry of Education, 1960 cited in Taylor et al, 2018, p86: probably written, or at least endorsed, by Brew). This focus on relaxed relationships in youth work settings emphasised the importance of the informality and what might be called process rather than product in today's language (drawing on Ord, 2007). The rapid development of training and a career structure for full time youth workers in the 1960s followed the publishing of the Albemarle report (Ministry of Education, 1960) (Davies, 1999; Smith & Doyle, 2002; Bradford, 2015). This led to the expansion of youth work as a way of developing and managing the increasing leisure activities for young people (Davies, 1999; Bradford & Cullen, 2014) where 'service', 'dedication', 'leadership' and 'character-building' remained the focus for youth workers (Ministry of Education, 1960 cited in Smith & Doyle, 2002). This training focussed on the 'personal development' of an 'authentic self' (Bradford, 2015, pp29-30) for the trainee as much as on their skills and knowledge.

#### *b) The development of youth work with girls and with LGBT young people*

Youth work projects, for many decades, had been dominated by young men (Spence, 2010; Davies & Taylor, 2013). Girls, if they did attend, were on the margins (Carpenter & Young, 1986; Spence, 2010; Batsleer, 2018). This marginalisation of young women was challenged, sometimes by part time women youth workers working under male managers (Spence, 2010). The development of youth work with girls through the 1970s was a grassroots movement (Spence, 2010), supported by the Girls Work Unit of the National Association of Youth Clubs (NAYC) (Olliver, 2008; Batsleer, 2018). A feminist approach to working with girls was developed which allowed space to question heteronormativity (Spence, 2010; Batsleer, 2012b) and the idea that girls and boys 'are made different by their socialisation' (Busche, 2013, p46). The importance of ensuring that youth work was welcoming of young people from a range of backgrounds and identities, including young women and BAME young people, was an issue noted by the Fairbairn-Milson Report (of 1969, cited in Taylor et al, 2018) and a central theme of the Thompson report (DfE, 1982;) as discussed in the literature (Bradford, 2004; Spence, 2010; Davies & Taylor, 2013).

The early 1980s saw a shift at the grassroots level, from 'open access, leisure based youth provision ... [to] educational based group work processes' (Thomas, 2011, p22) and targeted project based work. This shift, to a more educational approach to youth work, was supported by the Thompson Report (DfE, 1982). Political awareness and the challenging of sexism and racism became part of the youth work agenda (Young, 2006; Thomas, 2011) and there were increasingly

discussions of the need to match the youth worker's identity with the identity of the young people they were working with. It was thought by some that only women youth workers could engage with young women (Spivak, 1988 cited in Cullen, 2013; Batsleer, 2008) and only BAME workers could engage BAME young people (Watt, 2012) so taking a 'strategic essentialist' (Cullen, 2013, p31) approach to the work. Managers (pushed by the Thompson report of 1982), as well as grassroots workers, assumed that youth workers from BAME backgrounds would be best placed to empower young people from similar ethnic backgrounds: thus challenging the racism that was prevalent within society as well as within youth work settings (Watt, 2012). Similarly, it was assumed (building on the earlier second-wave of feminism) that women youth workers would be best able to challenge a male dominated view of the world and so enable young women to challenge limitations put on their perceptions of their current and future roles in society (Batsleer, 1996b, 2008 & 2012a). This growth in youth work with young women and BAME young people led also to strategic developments in the training of women and BAME youth workers (Robertson, 2008).

In the 1990s the radical girls' work of the late 1970s and 1980s gave way to a focus on working with young women through childcare and beauty issues so reverting to a reinforcement of the very same heteronormative values that had previously been questioned (Cullen, 2013). This backward step was possibly due to an anti-feminist move within main-stream youth work (Olliver, 2008) which was still male-dominated at the full time level (Robertson, 2008; Spence, 2010). Mixed gender youth provision, at this time, (and probably currently) did not necessarily challenge sexism as, in youth clubs: girls were often still sitting on the side-lines watching boys dominate activities (Batsleer, 1996a & 2018). (It is worth noting here that since the 1980s youth work has changed from being a male dominated profession to be increasingly female dominated profession along with teaching and many other caring professions: Robertson, 2008).

Youth work with LGBT young people grew in some cities during the 1970s and 1980s, for example London and Manchester (Wilton, 1995; Batsleer, 2012b; Lee, 2015; McNamara, 2018), alongside the girls' work developments and was often delivered by white lesbian women youth workers (Batsleer, 1996b). This allowed some 'counter-hegemonic spaces [to develop] ... in a variety of covert ways' (Batsleer, 2012b, p346). The youth work with LGBT young people that had developed during these decades was 'devastated' (Wilton, 1995, p197) by Section 28 of the Local Authority Act (1988) which outlawed any local authority sponsored work which was seen to be promoting

homosexuality as ‘pretend family relationships’ (Section 28, 1988 cited in Schools Out, 2014). Section 28 continued to ‘scar’ (Fenwick, 2015, p70) youth work with LGBT young people long after it was repealed in 2003 (discussed in more depth below: 9.1).

This brief examination of the theme of the use of self and the development of girls work and work with LGBT young people within the history of youth work has emphasised some of the myriad pressures on the profession. Over the years these have included the ongoing tension between youth work being used to control young people or being a tool for the empowerment of young people. Another theme noted was whether youth work should be delivered by workers who share common issues or identities with young people.

Policy developments in the past twenty or more years, have swung recently in favour of more targeted work with particular groups of young people: young people who are risk. This is either at risk themselves, with the focus on safeguarding since Every Child Matters (ECM) in 2003 (DfE, 2003), or at risk of making trouble for others through their involvement in crime or lack of participation in education or work. Recent austerity cuts have continued this move from feminist youth work to working with at risk young men (Batsleer, 2012b; Cullen & Bradford, 2018). However, despite the challenges in diverse areas of work noted above, many youth work educators (e.g. Ord, 2007; de St Croix, 2019; Ghassempoory & Chivers, 2019; Hancock, 2019; Sheridan, 2019), the youth work literature (e.g. Batsleer, 2008; Blacker, 2010; Jeffs & Smith, 2010a; Fusco, 2012; Nichols, 2012; Sapin, 2013; IDYW, 2014; Wylie, 2015; Bright et al, 2018; Jeffs, 2018) and many youth workers still hold on to the foundational value of relationships with young people being central to their work as demonstrated by respondents’ views within this study. An examination of the nature of this relationships follows.

### 2.2.3 The use of self and relationships in a youth work context

Few authors talk explicitly about how youth workers might use their self within their work. Sapin (2013, p68) notes that ‘sharing information about their own lives is an individual matter’ as the disclosure of personal information may not be of interest to young people. Fusco (2012, p37) notes that the use of self involves ‘listening, questioning, communicating, reflecting, acknowledging, accepting, empathy and self-awareness’. Fusco here is emphasising what other writers (Murphy & Ord, 2013; Sapin, 2013) suggest: the importance of youth workers of knowing themselves and understanding how their own experiences impact on their self and on the way that they are able to engage with and develop relationships with young people.



There is some literature which provides evidence as to how youth workers go about sharing their own identity with the young people. Spence has provided evidence through research that she published over the years (Spence, Devanney & Noonan, 2006; Spence, 2007; Spence & Devanney, 2013). Young (2006) provided data from her research with youth workers and young people and Blacker (2010) gives testimony from ethnographic research but other evidence is rare. Murphy and Ord (2005) wrote about the challenges involved in self-disclosure. However no research has looked at how LGBTQ youth workers use or share aspects of their lives in their relationships with young people: hence the importance of this study for all youth workers, not only for LGBTQ youth workers, as the nature of relationships within youth work are 'ambiguous' (Blacker, 2010, p28) and not clearly defined.

The discussion here examines five different aspects of these professional relationships, making links to some of the themes discussed above (2.2.1). First (2.2.3a), the significance of authenticity within relationships (drawing on Rogers, 1961); second (2.2.3b), the importance of reciprocity in conversations to build and develop these relationships (drawing on Jeffs & Smith, 2005 & 2014; Young, 2006); third (2.2.3c), the challenge of setting of appropriate but flexible boundaries in these relationships (drawing on Murphy & Ord, 2013; Spire & Giles, 2018); fourth (2.2.3d) the nature or extent of agency for youth workers within their professional relationships (drawing on Kubiak & Sandberg, 2011) and finally (2.2.3e), the role of reflexivity and critical reflective practice (drawing on Blacker, 2010; Sapin, 2013) in ensuring that the worker understands their own self and how this self impacts on the young people that they work with.

#### *a) Authentic relationships*

Youth work educators and the youth work literature suggest that relationships that youth workers aim to develop with young people are often built on openness, honesty and genuineness (drawing on Rogers' person-centred approach, 1961) (as evidenced by Blacker, 2010; Smith, H., 2010; Young, 2010; Spence & Devanney, 2013; de St Croix, 2016). The development of 'close and voluntary personal relationships' (Bradford & Cullen 2014, p2) that are 'non-hierarchical' (Blacker, 2010, p235) may allow youth workers to become influential in the lives of young people: as observed by Blacker (2010) and Spence and Devanney (2013). A complete separation of their own personal lives from their professional role is not appropriate as youth workers need to use issues from their own lives to assist in building these authentic relationships with young people.

This requirement for youth workers to use their self and personal life in their work reflects the literature which suggests that the professionalism of youth workers 'of necessity involves communicating something personal' (Sapin, 2007, p14) and bringing 'our own experiences to bear on our practice' (Blacker, 2010, p23). To develop an authentic relationship with a young person youth workers must make some aspects of 'the self known to the other' (Murphy & Ord, 2013, p333) so that when 'asked questions about ourselves ... we offer something of ourselves in order to build a professional youth work relationship' (as observed by Smith, H., 2010, pp35-6). This reflects the literature discussed above (2.2.1) referring to other professionals.

This discussion regarding authenticity in relationships between youth workers and young people links with Goffman's (1956) ideas of the interactive self: how the self is performed depends on the situation and the audience. The authentic self that a LGBTQ youth worker uses when talking to a young person who is questioning their sexuality would take a different focus or be a different performance, compared with the self used when addressing a large school assembly or talking to colleagues who may be homophobic, biphobic or transphobic. The audience impacts on the performance, not to make it less authentic but because the performer is aware of the context in which they are performing. However the amount of agency that any person has to perform different roles to those that they have previously learnt (drawing on Simon & Gagnon, 1999) will depend on their ability to observe their own practice (or performance) in a retrospective manner (as noted by Jenkins, 2014 and discussed above: 2.1.2). The agency that each person has to consciously or unconsciously change their performance depends on the criticality brought to this reflective process. The practitioner must become 'critically alert to the range of internal and external forces that influence' their responses to young people (Trelfa, 2018, p358). These internal forces are the already learnt roles (drawing on Simon & Gagnon, 1999) and the culture and context in which she has grown and in which she lives (as discussed above: 2.1.2a). The external forces are her relationships with the audience (young people, colleagues and others) as well as her attempts to hold onto the ethics and values of her profession and professional learning.

Authentic relationships with youth workers can be a means to young people's development and learning (Ord, 2007) but they are built slowly (if time is allowed by management and funders), through 'meaningful dialogue' (Spence et al, 2006, p72) and reciprocal conversations. The theme for the next subsection.

### *b) Reciprocity in conversations between young people and youth workers*

Reciprocal conversations are discussed by many youth work writers (e.g. Jeffs & Smith, 2005 & 2014; Young, 2006; Batsleer, 2008). Conversations touching on topics which 'become more risky' (Spence et al, 2006, p76) or 'shift from everyday surface conversation[s] to deeper and more meaningful educative conversations ... [can] develop deeper relationships with young people' (Cooper & Gretschel, 2018, p613). Conversations that move from the mundane to serious topics can aid the personal development and self-awareness of young people so 'knowing how to pitch a conversation ... between light and chatty ... and intensity is the art of youth work' (as observed by Spence et al, 2006, p74). As Smith observed in her own practice:

each conversation is like a small piece of theatre and within it we acquire a role. ...  
The role that we have determines the nature of that conversation. ... We will be asked questions about ourselves and we need to know where our boundaries are but we need to offer something of ourselves in order to build a professional youth work relationship.  
(Smith, H., 2010, pp35-36)

These conversations, researched by a range of authors (e.g.: Spence et al, 2006; Young, 2006, Smith, H., 2010, Spence & Devanney, 2013; de St Croix, 2016; Cooper & Gretschel, 2018) are not just casual chats between professionals and young people but are, rather, reciprocal conversations (Young, 2006; Ord, 2007; Batsleer, 2008; Collander-Brown, 2010; Sapin, 2013) through which the youth worker shares information about themselves and listens respectfully to young people, so developing an understanding of young people's perspectives.

For youth workers to develop such reciprocal relationships, which are rare for young people (Batsleer, 2013), they must dispense with the more usual authoritative roles that are often expected between a professional and a young person (Ord, 2009) and take an adult to adult approach (drawing on transactional analysis: Berne, 1968). Space or agency within these relationships depends on the professionals' awareness of how, or if, they are communicating on equal terms with young people (Davies, 2015). This again requires careful reflection in and on practice (drawing on Schön, 1991 and discussed below: 2.2.3e) in terms of where youth workers place their boundaries within these relationships as noted in the following discussion.

### c) Flexible boundaries

The boundaries between youth worker and young people are often 'blurred' (Spence et al, 2006, p73) or unclear and may move over time (Murphy & Ord, 2013). The NYA's ethical and professional statements suggests boundaries between the personal and professional spaces are balanced by a 'caring and supportive relationship with young people with appropriate professional distance' (NYA, 2001, p6). Similarly the IYW (2003) advises that relationships between worker and young person 'remain within professional boundaries'. Both these statements leave the worker (and possibly their line-manager) to decide how to interpret professional distance or boundaries.

Deciding on when, how or what to share about one's own life is challenging and of particular importance within this study. Youth workers, if they are to build these reciprocal and authentic relationships, need to be aware of how they present themselves on a daily basis in terms of image and dress: as these 'simple' aspects impact on relationships with young people (Jefferis & Smith, 1999, p6). 'Material disclosures ... [as well as their] personal style, character traits ... [and] status' (Murphy & Ord, 2013, p333) will set the basis for relationships. Disclosures and sharing of information about the self should be intentional and carefully thought through (Murphy & Ord, 2013), although not necessarily planned. It is important for youth workers that boundaries are always appropriate but not static (Murphy & Ord, 2013). What is not relevant to disclose to a young person on a first meeting may well be a useful topic for discussion having worked with a young person over a number of months or years. Different 'spheres of disclosure' (Murphy & Ord, 2013, p336) may assist youth workers to ponder on what they might disclose to young people in their work (see Murphy & Ord's 'four categories of disclosure' below)

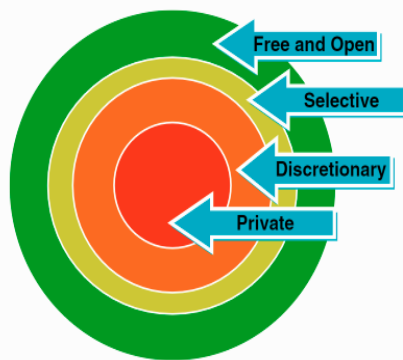


Figure 1. Four categories of disclosure.

Figure 1: Murphy & Ord, 2013, p336

The 'selective' sphere (Murphy & Ord, 2013, p336) includes information about hobbies and interests which may not be contentious but may be useful in developing areas of shared knowledge with young people and in marking the worker as an expert in this area of knowledge. The 'discretionary' sphere (Murphy & Ord, 2013, p336) includes the worker's reactions and responses to their own life experiences. Murphy and Ord suggest that sharing these reflections can be powerful in building rapport with young people, but care must be taken to ensure that sharing is only about issues where 'internal work' has been done (Whitaker, 1989, p193 cited in Crosby, 2001, p54) and workers are sure that disclosure is for the benefit of the young person, not the worker.

Careful and critical reflection (as noted above: 2.2.1 and discussed below: 2.2.3e) is needed to get a good balance within the 'messiness' and challenge of everyday practice (Spire & Giles, 2018, p334) when moving between these spheres. Workers will only be able to set appropriate boundaries if they are clear that their understanding of young people's experiences are impacted on by their own life experiences (Kubiak & Sandberg, 2011; Wood et al, 2015) and their own cultural, social and economic position (Katz-wise & Keller, 2011). Critical awareness is required if youth workers are to have agency (as discussed below: 2.2.1d) in how they respond to young people and to stand outside of roles that they had previously learnt (drawing on Simon & Gagnon, 1999). This again requires careful and ongoing reflexivity and reflection in and on practice (drawing on Schön, 1991): the final theme to be discussed within this section (2.2.3e).

#### *d) Agency*

Kubiak and Sandberg's (2011) discussion regarding the agency that social workers have is of particular relevance to this study. They suggest that a social worker (so in the context of this study a youth worker), from whatever social background, will be 'reproducing the normative practice that are recognisably those of' their profession (Kubiak & Sandberg, 2011, p654). However, each practitioner brings a unique and 'subjective interpretation' to this practice (Billett, 2008 cited in Kubiak & Sandberg, 2011, p654). Each person will act differently in the moment influenced by their own unique abilities, experiences and personality. So the practitioner's 'own agency plays a part in the reworking of practice as they interpret or reconstruct [this] practice' within the context of the setting (Kubiak & Sandberg, 2011, p654). Whilst the agency of the practitioner is impacted on by their cultural and life experiences, a worker does have 'personal' agency to decide how to act within the parameters of their 'social' agency (Kubiak & Sandberg, 2011, p653).

Different writers name the space that professional youth workers, or others, may have to define or redefine their self in different ways. Goffman's 'margin of freedom' (Goffman, 1961, p31) or 'elbow room' (p89) suggests a limited, but important, amount of agency for practitioners to develop their own roles within different contexts. The extent for elbow room depends on the setting or institution in which the youth worker is working. More formal settings may allow less elbow room but the context and the institutions in which professionals work will expect professionals to have some agency (Bowler, 2010). In some settings there may be space to choose from a set of scripts which are 'fluid' (Gagnon & Simon, 1973 cited in Jackson & Scott, 1990, p815), so allowing the worker to interpret and negotiate their role. Internal dialogue and reflection (as discussed above: 2.1.2b & below 2.2.3e) will assist in this 'interactive [reworking of] ... cultural scenarios' which are contested (Gagnon & Simon, 1973 cited in Jackson & Scott, 1990, p815). The manner in which narratives of the past are reviewed in the light of the present allows 'for agency and change' (Jackson & Scott, 1990, p816). This emphasises that people have agency in the ongoing process of identity development as their awareness of their self 'changes through different contexts and across different discourses' (Brah, 2007, p143). Finding space for this agency requires the revisiting of 'available discursive positions' (Jackson & Scott, 1990, p820) as the self is 'not given but has to be actively created' like a piece of art (Foucault, 2000 cited in Gauntlett, 2008, p141). For LGBTQ youth workers, as interviewed in this study, being on the outside of a heteronormative society may allow more space for agency and the creation their own way of life rather than being governed by the social laws of a heteronormative society (leaning on Foucault, 2000 cited in Gauntlett, 2008; Butler, 2004). Parekh's comment below is useful in summarising this discussion. He says that we have agency as we:

debate and decide whether to define ourselves, and seek to become, this or that kind of person. We are not determined by our background and are able to reflect on it critically and sometimes even break with it. [But] We should not ... ignore the limits of this choice. (Parekh, 2008, p11.)

The self and individuality that a youth worker brings to their relationship with young people is moulded by their upbringing and experiences (Parekh, 2008; Sapin, 2013; Wood et al, 2015), their political ideology and their social class as noted above (2.1.2a). Youth workers, like other people, understand themselves and others through the 'haze of their own social interactions' (Wood et al, 2015, p36): as they make judgements and develop stereotypes which will affect how they

interact with young people (Blacker, 2010). Awareness of their own prejudices (Crosby, 2001; Blacker, 2010; Sapin, 2013; Wood et al, 2015) and attention to their own language, dialect, words and vocabulary (Batsleer, 2008) is required by youth workers if they are to develop appropriate professional relationships with young people (Crosby, 2001; Batsleer, 2008; Blacker, 2010; Sapin, 2013; Spence & Devanney, 2013; Wood et al, 2015). Youth workers must themselves be aware of the 'significance of [their own] class, gender, race, sexuality, disability and faith in shaping their [own] choices and opportunities' (IDYW, 2014) if they are to assist young people to understand the impact of these issues in young people's lives. Working with young people to facilitate such self-awareness needs to be preceded by a youth worker undertaking this task for themselves (Crosby, 2001; Young, 2010; Sapin, 2013). This is not an easy task and, according to Spence and Devanney's research (2013, p106) 'it involves checking out the position that you are coming from and the position other people are coming from. It involves being aware of strengths and limitations of your own "situatedness"'. Spence and Devanney here are emphasising that a youth worker must be aware of how their intersecting identities impact on their understanding of their whole self and the young people and colleagues around them: this awareness can only be reached through careful and ongoing reflexive and reflective practice: the final theme to be discussed within this subsection.

#### *e) Reflexivity and reflection in practice*

Whilst there has been much research regarding the role of reflective practice in social work training there has been little similar research in a youth work context (Emslie, 2009). Those who have undertaken some focussed research regarding the role of reflective practice include Trelfa and Richmond (2008), Emslie (2009) and Trelfa (2018). Ord has written extensively about the importance of reflective practice (2009, 2012 & 2016). Others who have noted the importance of reflective practice in other research and writing include Blacker (2001), Spence et al (2006), Young (2006) Pugh (2010), Spence (2010), Spence and Devaney (2013) and Spire and Giles (2018).

Reflecting on how the self is used and how conversations change in relation to the young people, their needs and interests and the context of the work being done by practitioners, is required to develop relationships that can be transformational for young people's learning and development (Ord, 2007; Fusco, 2012; Cooper & Gretschel, 2018). Reflection on and in practice (drawing on Schön, 1991) is emphasised by the fact that building relationships with young people is often a 'disciplined improvisation' (Davies, 2010b, p6) where 'the contact seems almost to be accidental'

(Spence et al, 2006, p73) rather than planned. Reflecting on judgments made in these unplanned and unpredictable situations requires, possibly, more care and reflection than for professionals working in more structured or formal settings such as teachers, therapists and health professionals (Murphy & Ord, 2005; Fusco, 2012). Reflective practice for youth workers is not just about learning from their own practice but also about understanding how their varied experiences impact on their own self (Dewey, 1916 cited in Ord, 2009; Burke, 1999; Parekh, 2008; Sapin, 2013; Spence & Devanney, 2013). Such reflexivity may enable a youth worker to 'connect with personally significant material' (Emslie, 2009, p422) thus enabling them to understand how their own experiences impact on 'how and why they think, feel and do certain things at particular times' (Emslie, 2009, p422). This allows the practitioner to understand how and what they have learnt 'from the world about themselves' (Blacker, 2001, p86) and can encourage a critical approach to their own judgments (Burke, 1999; Davies, 2006). This criticality can then develop into confidence in their own judgements and wisdom (Jefferis & Smith, 1999). Such a growth in confidence may enable a worker to have a 'holistic [and] adaptive posture toward the world' (Kolb, 1984, p32 cited in Ord, 2012, p60) so weaving their own learning into the relationships with young people through the 'constant reorganising' and revisiting of the understanding of their experiences (Dewey, 1916 cited in Ord, 2012, p62). In this way youth work practitioners can develop a 'sense of self as a practitioner' (Trelfa & Richmond, 2008, p126).

The use of self requires a youth worker to understand how their own 'presence and perspectives' impact on their understanding of young people and on their youth work practice (Fook, 2002, p44). For a youth worker to become a good practitioner they need to bring an awareness of their 'personal characteristics, worlds and histories' into their practice (Wendt et al, 2011, p196) whatever, or despite, the political context of the work. Developing relationships and building rapport with service users is a complex task and requires the 'emotional engagement' of the practitioner with their practice (Boud, 2010, p34). This self-awareness is required to stay 'in touch with one's own feelings and attitudes' (Crosby, 2001, p57) and to develop an attentiveness as to how these factors may influence relationships with young people (Nicholls, 2012).

## Conclusion

The chapter started with a discussion of the self. It emphasised the importance of a social constructed and interactionist approach to the self within this study but also noted the usefulness of some postmodernist ideas of the self. The discussion emphasised that the self is not static but



is continually developing and changing with different aspects of the self being deployed or used in different settings. This suggests that it can be useful to note each person's range of selves or identities that are deployed, usually appropriately, in different settings. This is important in this study as the respondents used, or drew on, different aspects of their own selves at different times within their work setting and shared different aspects of their selves with me within the research process. The discussion noted that reflexivity and agency are important aspects of the self. The brief examination of the history of youth work noted that the use of self has long been a controversial issue within youth work, but the assumption that professionals should and do use their self within the context of their work is assumed and discussed in the literature of youth work and a range of other professions. The discussion focussing on five core issues that link to the use of self (authenticity, reciprocity, flexible boundaries, agency and the importance of critical reflection and reflexivity) allowed some of the core youth work literature to be referred to. The chapter noted that whilst being central to many professions how youth workers or other professionals use this self within their work has rarely been the focus of research. There has not been any research as to how LGBTQ identifying professionals use their self within their profession. This study seeks to address this gap.

The next chapter reviews literature focussing on issues of sexuality and explores the idea of queer and current thinking around this label.

## Ch. 3. Reviewing the literature focussing on LGBTQ identities

The previous chapter (2) reviewed the literature regarding ideas of the self and how the self is viewed and used in youth work settings. This chapter presents some of the literature examining issues around sexuality, LGBTQ identities, queer theory and intersectional theory: a vast literature. So the discussion will offer an introduction to some of these literatures whilst signposting the reader to other sources that debate these ideas in more depth.

### Introduction and limitations of review

People have been writing explicitly about sexuality and homosexuality for the past one hundred years and more (Carpenter, 1912; McIntosh, 1968; Foucault, 1981 cited in Ramazanoglu, 1993; Plummer, 1981; Weeks, 1987, 1995 & 2003; Seidman, 2003). Over the past thirty or forty years the literature on this topic has expanded and developed (Monro, 2010 & 2018; Plummer, 2018). It was not possible to review the breadth of this literature here, hence the aim of this chapter is to identify some of the key strands and ideas, many of which are contested (Clarke, Ellis, Peel & Riggs, 2010), that have been developed around homosexuality and bisexuality and are significant for this study. In identifying these key strands it is important to examine some of the seminal articles that have set ideas in motion as well as looking in detail at more recent literature that has examined the development of these themes over the years. The main focus will be on literature from the UK but themes from other European countries and from United States will be included in places as there is a cross-fertilisation of ideas within the academy and in the world of LGBTQ activism.

This chapter commences with a comment as to why the term sexual identity is used within this study (3.1.1). The discussion then moves to a short historical overview of the study of sexuality within the academy (3.1.2) and an introduction to some key ideas and concepts central to notions of sexuality (3.1.3-3.1.6). Queer theory is an important source of ideas and challenge within this study, so examining the definitions, roots, and key themes of queer theory as discussed by some of the key writers forms the next part of this literature review (3.3.2). This chapter closes with a focus on intersectionality (3.3.3) which assists in ensuring that this study is put into a wider context of the study of a range of identities.

### 3.1. Key themes within the study of homosexuality and bisexuality

This section commences with a brief discussion of terminology used in this study (3.1.1). It then presents a historical review of the study of homosexuality and bisexuality (3.1.2). This is followed by a focus on performance and agency (3.1.3), heteronormativity (3.1.4) and ideas linked to homophobia and biphobia (3.1.5). It closes with a short discussion of the process of coming out as LGBTQ (3.1.6).

#### 3.1.1 Definition of key terminology

Throughout this study the term sexual identity is used rather than sexual orientation. Many writers in the field use the term sexual identity (e.g. Plummer, 1981, 1992 & 1995; Weeks, 1986 & 1987; Shapiro, Rios & Stewart, 2010). The term sexual orientation is not used in this study as it may suggest an essentialist approach to sexuality where sexual orientation was established at birth or at a young age due to 'biological factors such as physiology and hormones' (Monro, 2015, p34). This essentialised view of sexuality suggests that sexuality is stable throughout life (Plummer, 1981; Marinucci, 2010; Ryle, 2012) and tends to be emphasised in the UK and in other western countries in comparison to a more diverse view of sexuality in non-western cultures (Blackwood, 2000). Although this study draws on a socially constructed and, in places, a postmodern or queer approach to sexuality this does not imply that individuals had a choice over their sexual identity as might be implied by the term sexual preference. Hence through this study the term sexual identity is used. A brief discussion of acronyms (LGB and LGBTQ) used in the study was introduced above (Ch.1) so not repeated here.

#### 3.1.2 Some history regarding the study of homosexuality and bisexuality

Same-sex relationships were discussed in academic circles from the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century in Europe and the USA (Jennes, 1992; Plummer, 1992; Richardson, 1997; Weeks, 2003; Clarke et al, 2010) but there is clear evidence of homosexual and bisexual behaviours, long before this, in a range of different cultures (McIntosh, 1968; D'Emilio, 1999). The development of non-heterosexual identities in the 19<sup>th</sup> and the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century homosexuality was studied by sexologists (such as Hirschfield, 1897 cited in Clarke et al, 2010 and Carpenter, 1912). They often linked ideas of sexuality and gender together (Carpenter, 1912; Weeks, 2003; Clarke et al, 2010; Monro, 2015) and also challenged the notion of a binary division regarding gender and sexuality (Carpenter, 1912; Richardson, 2015). Early studies of same-sex sexualities also developed elsewhere (e.g. in anthropology). Mead concluded, from her anthropological studies in the 1920s and 1930s, that

heterosexuality was not the normal way of behaving in many societies thus questioning the essentialist perspective on sexuality which was prevalent in her day (as discussed in Weeks, 1987 & 2003; Patton, 2010).

Same-sex relationships amongst women were not debated in academia as early as male same-sex relationships. In Britain male same-sex lifestyles were noted from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century: probably due to the increasing opportunities to move outside their local communities the industrial revolution brought (D'Emilio, 1999; Rubin, 1999). Women, being bound to family and home more than men, had less opportunity to mix with people outside of these restricted circles. As a result, same-sex lifestyles amongst women were only noted in the late 19<sup>th</sup> (Jennes, 1992) or early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Weeks, 1995). In the UK there has been less legislation regarding female, compared with male, same-sex relations (Monro, 2015). Books such as Hall's (1928) *Well of Loneliness* were important in bringing the possibility of non-heterosexual relationships to the educated upper classes of women (Simmons, 1979).

The idea that homosexuality or bisexuality should be seen as a 'sexual deviation' (Weeks, 2003, p76) rather than an evil or an illness was developed by Havelock Ellis, a physician writing extensively on homosexuality at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> into 20<sup>th</sup> century (McIntosh, 1981; Weeks, 2003). Ellis in the UK and Ulrichs in Germany spoke out for the decriminalisation of homosexuality in their writing and campaigning (as noted in Seidman, 2003 and Patton, 2010). Sigmund Freud, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, also questioned the idea of seeing homosexuals (or bisexuals as he viewed them) as criminals (Weeks, 2003; Johansson, 2007; Patton, 2010; Ryle, 2012). Kinsey, writing in the late 1940s and 1950s, believed that, although people may be born with a tendency to be homosexual, there was no one cause of homosexuality (as noted in McIntosh, 1981; Weeks, 2003).

From the 1960s social constructionist perspectives began to dominate views of gender and sexuality (Richardson, 2015). Sex was seen as biological, and so essentialist, whilst gender was about the 'social meanings and values attached' (Richardson, 2015, p5) to physiology. The 1960s, known as a time of sexual liberation, saw the development of second-wave feminism which focussed on equal rights for heterosexual women rather than same-sex relationships (Richardson, 1997; Millet, MacKinnon & Mead, 2016). This was in contrast to developments for gay men during the 1960s when, in the UK, sexual acts between two consenting male adults in private were decriminalised in 1967 (Cant, 2009). The visibility of lesbianism in the UK increased during the late

1970s and 1980s (D'Augelli, 1996; Zimmerman, 2007; Dhaenens, 2013) alongside the development of radical separatist and lesbian feminism (Rudy, 2001). From these movements came the idea of a 'lesbian continuum' (Rich, 1980b, p648) which emphasised that lesbian identity was different to homosexual male experiences and was not primarily about genital sexual experiences but was focussed on the sharing of social relationships 'between and among women' (Rich, 1980b, p648). Definitions of lesbianism were further developed by Ferguson who suggested a 'socio-political definition' of the term with a focus on the importance of 'a community of self-identified lesbians' (Ferguson, 1981, p166). Such a community could only exist in societies where the notion of non-heterosexual relationships for women was seen as possible (Ferguson, 1981): thus emphasising the socially constructed nature of women's sexuality. Women from these radical and feminist lesbian communities also supported the growth of youth work with LGBT young people (Cullen, 2013) as discussed above (2.2.2b).

This socially constructed approach to sexuality was also being debated within other academic circles. For example, Simon and Gagnon wrote about the importance of sexual scripts related to people's sexual behaviours (Gagnon & Simon, 1974; Simon & Gagnon 1984). Plummer developed these ideas through his detailed discussions of sexual identity (Plummer, 1981, 1992 & 1995) and Weeks, writing from the 1970s, emphasised the fluidity and lack of finality of these identities (e.g. Weeks, 1995). Foucault, writing from the 1970s, documented the historical development of the study of sexuality (e.g. Foucault, 1978 cited in Ramazanoglu, 1993) and is seen as one of the founders of ideas that came to be known as queer theory; although queer theory was not so named until the 1990s. Foucault suggested that power and discourse were related to how people perceived and used their sexual identity in their lives and relationships (Gauntlett, 2008): thus bringing together ideas from a range of different academic backgrounds such as sociology, anthropology, social history and post structuralism (as noted in Engel, 2008). These debates within academia, alongside the HIV and AIDS epidemics of the 1980s also brought sexuality studies into the limelight (Jagose, 1996).

Having introduced some ideas from the history of the study of sexuality, this literature review now moves to discuss the meaning of some contested terms to be used throughout this study: performativity, agency, heteronormativity, homophobia and biphobia.

### 3.1.3 Performativity and agency

The idea of performativity, developed from a social constructionist perspective, was discussed by Butler through much of her writing (e.g. Butler, 1990, 1995, 1999 & 2004). This performativity was about unconscious performances that were the products of ideas and repeated acts. Performativity was seen as a 'repetition and ritual' (Butler, 1990, p.xv) despite or because of the pressure to act otherwise due to taboos or prohibitions within society (Butler, 1993). Performativity was not as conscious as dressing up or putting on particular clothes (Jagose, 1996) nor is it owned by the individual (Allen, 2010). However, as people may have chosen to subvert their performance or perform despite the prohibitions, there was still seen to be agency in this performativity (Butler, 1993 & 2004).

How much agency or choice people have over their own internalised discourses is a matter of much debate (Callis, 2009) and was noted above (2.1.2). Butler (2004) suggested that developing agency was challenging as we are all impacted by society's norms. This did not, however, mean that people were unable to have agency within their lives: as Butler (2004, p3) noted: 'I am at once constituted by norms and dependant on them' but also want to live outside of them. The social and sexual scripts which govern our lives have to be interpreted and negotiated through an ongoing process of 'fluid improvisation' (Gagnon & Simon, 1973 cited in Jackson & Scott, 2010, p815). These improvisations and interpretations are impacted on by a person's 'multi-layered and contradictory ... [identities as they] both act in and co-author ... [their] own life story' (Prins, 2006, p281). It seems that each person was constrained by the social norms of their society (Butler, 2004) as agency was limited by the social world in which a person lived (Alcoff, 1988), but it is impossible to know the extent of these constraints and limitations (Hey, 2006).

### 3.1.4 Heteronormativity

Terms such as heteronormativity or compulsory heterosexuality (Rich, 1980b) were used to acknowledge that it is often assumed that everyone is heterosexual (Robertson, 2014). Heteronormativity is 'the way that heterosexuality is viewed as the normal, natural way of being' (Ryle, 2012, p177). The words normal and natural have particular meanings in this definition. Normal suggests that there is also something that is not normal or abnormal: thus focusing on a binary division with regard to both sexuality and gender (Sedgwick, 1994; Stein & Plummer, 1994; St Pierre, 2000; Butler, 2004; Monro, 2005; McPhail, 2008; Richardson, 2015). The term natural suggests that heterosexuality is viewed as the natural way of being compared with others that are

unnatural (Richardson, 1997; Seidman, 2003; Butler, 2004; Ryle, 2012). Heteronormativity, as well as marginalising the existence of people who defined themselves as LGB (Butler, 2004), also assumes that the gendered roles, often seen as normal within our society, are inevitable and fixed and so essentialised (Abbot, Wallace & Tyler, 2005). The difference between this essentialist view, as compared to the socially constructed and queer views, of gender and sexuality is discussed below (3.2.1). It is important to note here that the notion of heteronormativity suggests a focus on gender as well as sexuality. Heterosexual male gendered ways of being were seen as the norm within most Western societies (Weeks, 2003). All other behaviour or values were measured against these heterosexual and male ways of being as ideas of male sexuality were at the centre of society: 'you breathe it in all the time' (Dyer, 1985 cited in Weeks, 2003, p37). So it is not possible to discuss issues of sexuality without also touching on issues of gender (Butler, 1991, 1993 and 2004; Weeks, 2003 & 2007; Robertson, 2013). It seems that, despite the gains from feminism, gay liberation and the changes in legislation and attitudes within society over the past decades, the patterns of heterosexual male privilege have not yet been broken (D'Emilio, 1999; Weeks, 2003; Cant, 2009; Richardson & Monro, 2012). It was, and is agreed, in the literature that heteronormativity has an insidious effect on all within society, not just on those of who identify as LGB or queer (Sedgwick, 1990; Byrne, 2013; Fenwick, 2013). It is worth emphasising that Rich's idea of a 'lesbian continuum' (Rich, 1980b, p27) was useful in noting that same-sex identities were not only to do with same-sex desire and intimacy but were also linked to a political and feminist perspective. However, the naming of this as a lesbian continuum did marginalise women who identified as straight but were women-orientated politically and those who identified as bisexual rather than lesbian (Monro, 2015).

There is not space within this study to examine all the effects of heteronormativity which are discussed in other literatures (e.g. Patterson 1995; Hawthorne 2003; Byrne, 2013; Dhaenens, 2013; Formby, 2013; Fenwick, 2015). The discussion now moves to focus on homophobia and biphobia.

### 3.1.5 Homophobia and biphobia

Heteronormativity or institutionalised homophobia (Richardson & Monro, 2012), whilst acting at societal level, also effects the attitudes held and developed within communities, families and individuals resulting in individual homophobia and biphobia. Homophobia and biphobia 'operate through silences and absences' (Epstein & Johnson, 1994, p198) as well as through more proactive

physical and verbal abuse. Homophobia has been defined as the 'active and explicit attacks on lesbians and gays' (Epstein & Johnson, 1994, p197); 'the dread of being in close quarters with homosexuals' (Weinberg, 1973 cited in Plummer 1981, p63) and the 'fear and/or dislike of homosexual people and homosexuality' (Stonewall, n.d.). Biphobia is defined as 'any portrayal or discourse deficiency denigrating or criticising men or women on the sole ground of their belonging to ... [a bisexual] identification (Welzer-Lang, 2008, p82 cited in Monro, 2015, p23). Bisexual people have an additional 'burden ... as compared to lesbian and gay men' (Monro, 2015, p24) as they may experience homophobia as well as biphobia due the 'rigid [and] discrete categories' (Monro, 2015, p26) of sexuality which developed during the 1960s and 1970s. Bisexual people may be marginalised by lesbian and gay people and the term queer is not always seen to include bisexual people (Monro, 2015). There is an important and ongoing debate as to whether homophobia and biphobia are attitudes that need to be challenged or a sickness to be treated (Plummer, 1981). Scales to measure homophobia or biphobia may reveal that LGBQ people themselves score just as highly as the perpetrators of homophobic (Kitzinger, 1987 cited in Clarke et al, 2010) and biphobic actions.

Homophobia and biphobia have been pervasive and negative influences ever since the ideas of homosexuality and bisexuality were made explicit within our society (Weeks, 1987; Jagose, 1996; Clarke et al, 2010). At the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> century religious leaders saw homosexuality as a threat to procreation, which was viewed as the sole purpose of sexual activity within a family setting (Plummer, 1992). This threat to the family, and so possibly to the whole of society, was still seen as significant enough by Thatcher's Conservative Government to implement the controversial Section 28 of the Local Government Act of 1988 which named 'homosexuality as a pretended family relationship' (DfE, 1988 cited in Plummer 1992, p20). Although repealed in 2003 (Stonewall, n.d.) the shadow of Section 28 still hangs over people working in youth work and school settings (Formby, 2013).

The above definitions of homophobia and biphobia focus on the individual perpetrator's attitude or behaviour. Even though the focus is usually on the individual it is important to remember that attitudes such as homophobia and biphobia are learnt from media and wider society as well as from families and peers (Thompson & BASW, 2012) and so result from the 'learnt rules of sexual behaviour' (Gagnon & Simon, 1973 cited in Moore & Rosenthal 2006, p51) so structural, as well as individual, homophobia and biphobia need to be challenged.



### 3.1.6 Coming out and being out as LGBTQ

There is not space within this study to examine the coming out literature in any depth but it seems useful to note that many discussions of coming out make links to Cass's (1979, cited in Cass, 1996) six stage model of identity formation. Cass's model or pathway commenced with 'identity confusion' (Cass, 1996, p 243): the idea that a homosexual label may be too distant from their own behaviour, desires and attitudes. It then moves through 'identity comparison ... [and] identity tolerance ... "I probably am" [LGB] ... identity acceptance ... identity pride ... [to] identity synthesis' (Cass, 1996, p240-244). Cass did not view coming out as an easy pathway and suggested there may be struggles as well as positive realisations through this coming out pathway. Cass's model has been critiqued as being a male-focussed identity formation model that over-emphasised the importance of sexual activity and ignored the importance of community in LGBTQ identity formation (Schneider, 2001). More recent literature suggests that these coming-out stages may have changed since there has been more visibility of LGBT issues (Casey, 2002; Russell, Clarke & Clary, 2009; Morgan, 2013). The coming-out literature has also been critiqued as being overly focussed on psychological models and not sufficiently taking into account sociological perspectives on being out (Orne, 2011). Orne, in contrast to Cass, suggests that deciding to come out or not is a strategic decision with advantages and disadvantages for either decision. Orne emphasises that taking control of the situation allowed gay young men to become 'strategic actors [within their own lives] capable of making complex decisions and balancing several competing interests' (Orne, 2011, p685). Orne, along with other writers (Trotter, 2001; Weeks, Heaphy, & Donovan, 2001; Casey, 2002; Valentine, Skelton & Butler, 2003; Almack, 2007; Devlin, 2015), emphasises that coming out is a process, often a difficult process, which is managed for 'different audiences ... in different ways' (Orne, 2011, p690). Orne's model suggests usefully four different strategies with regard to disclosure of LGBTQ sexuality: 'direct disclosure, clues, concealment and speculation' (Orne, 2011, p689).

It is clear that the nature and context of the organisation in which LGBTQ people are working impacts on their decision to be closet or out regarding their sexual identity. The culture of an organisation is central when employees are making the decision to be out or closeted (Ward and Winstanley, 2005). Organisations that have clear and supportive policies for LGBTQ employees make it safer and easier for employees to share their LGBTQ identity with colleagues (Ward and Winstanley, 2005; Colgan, Creegan, McKearney & Wright, 2007; Colgan, Creegan, McKearney & Wright, 2008; Stonewall, 2018c ) although it seems that lesbian women often choose to work in

career pathways and in organisations that are LGBQ friendly (Colgan et al, 2008). In organisations that have outward facing contact with the public, such as the police or fire service, employees have more issues to consider (Colgan et al, 2008). The fact that teachers often do not feel safe in terms of how the parents or pupils might respond if they were open about their LGBQ identity (Colgan et al, 2007) is of particular relevance to this research. Employees usually only choose to be out to some of their colleagues or within the ‘pockets of safety’ (Colgan et al, 2008, p40). Deciding who to tell will depend on the closeness of relationships with these colleagues (Ward and Winstanley, 2005). It is important to note that there are often more challenges for LGBQ employees who are BAME or disabled as they may choose not to face a range of challenges in their workplace (Colgan et al, 2008).

There seems to be consensus in the literature that the average age at which young women became aware of their same-sex sexual attraction was between ten and eleven and that LGBQ sexual activity usually commences between the ages of fourteen and sixteen (D’Augelli, 1996; Diamond & Savin-Williams, 2000; Neill & Meehan, 2017). However, some sources note that these averages hide a wide variety of ages for individuals (Schneider, 2001) and the age at which young people are coming out is getting younger (Lee, 2015). It is accepted that there is less homophobia and biphobia than in past years (Valentine et al, 2003) and more acceptance of same-sex relationships (Monro, 2015; Moore, 2015; Formby, 2017), especially amongst young people (Scourfield, Roen & McDermott, 2008; Rusell et al, 2009). However, coming out for a young person who is also negotiating the usual challenging transitions from adolescence to adulthood is still ‘difficult and risky’ (Valentine et al, 2003, p480).

There is growing evidence of the importance of not overstating the difficulty of coming out (Dhaenens, 2013; Formby, 2015; Postuvan, Podlogar, Sedivy & De Leo, 2019) as many young people negotiate this process developing ‘resilience’ and life affirming results (Formby, 2015, p627). In supporting young people to be confident about their LGBT sexuality it is suggested that a focus on the structural model of oppression is useful (Formby, 2013): so noting that institutions within society, rather than the individual, need to adapt to minimise this oppression. However, in many settings the medical model of sexuality is used. This can lead to LGBT young people being seen as the problem and so being offered counselling or other one-to-one support rather than being championed in their challenging of the oppressive system (Dhaenens, 2013; Formby, 2013).

The above discussions focusing on the historical development of ideas around sexuality and the debates of the ideas around performativity, agency, heteronormativity, homophobia and biphobia and coming out now make way for an examination of queer theory and its relevance within this study.

### 3.2. Queer theory

This discussion on queer theory introduces some key ideas of the concept touching on the development of queer theory by activists and within academia (3.2.1) and discussing the usefulness and relevance of queer theory for this study (3.2.2).

#### 3.2.1 Ideas of queer as developed by activists and academics

The term queer was provocative and challenging for many LGB identifying women (Richardson, 2007; Jagose, 1996) but can also be seen as an umbrella term to name all those who are not heterosexual (Monro, 2015). Queer was used as a slang term from the 1910s and was a common insult in America during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century (Jagose, 1996). Queer became an accepted term amongst HIV activists and some academics in the late 1980s (Monro, 2005 & 2015; Marinucci, 2010). Some people use the term queer as a 'transgressive' label (Monro, 2015, p43) to set themselves apart from LGBT communities, as they may have felt marginalised by people identifying as LGBT (Warner, 1999). For these people the usefulness of a queer label is that it is shocking as 'queers are twisted and disgusting, beautiful and glamorous, extreme and alive' (Calame & Philips 1996, p233 cited in Meem, Gibson & Alexander 2010, p184). Amongst lesbian activists there was often little acceptance of queer theory; some seeing it as undermining of women and lesbian solidarity (as discussed in Lorde, 1984; Jagose, 1996).

Queer theory, introduced into the academy by Teresa de Lauretis in 1990 (as noted in Halperin, 2003), was a development of the ideas of Foucault (first published in 1970s) and Derrida (writing in the 1970s) by writers such as Butler (1993, 1999 & 2004), Sedgwick (1991 & 1994) and Osborne & Segal (1993). Their ideas were welcomed by some (Jagose, 1996) and criticised by others (Segal, 1999; Plummer, 2003). Queer theory, along with a social constructionist view, may be seen in contrast to the essentialist view of sexuality: that non-heterosexual identity is due to 'biological factors such as physiology and hormones' (Monro, 2015, p34) and so set before birth. Some social constructionist would suggest that sexuality is fairly stable throughout life (Abbot et al, 2005). Queer theory, whilst can be seen as part of the social constructed view of sexuality accentuates the fluidity of gender and sexuality categories, neither of which are static. Queer theory also

emphasises that gender and sexuality are linked in complex ways (Clarke & Peel, 2007; Richardson, 2015) and so suggests the ‘suspension of identity as something fixed, coherent and natural’ (Jagose, 1996, p98).

A range of different definitions, listed by different authors (e.g. Jagose, 1996; Clarke & Peel, 2007; Gauntlet, 2008; Ryle, 2012; Monro, 2015), highlight the diverse aspects of queer theory. Queer theory has been used widely by poststructuralists seeking to deconstruct language in order to examine hidden or assumed meanings of text and ideas (Agger, 1991; Monro, 2005). Their attempts to ‘think otherwise’ (Butler, 2004, p29) and to examine how binary divisions operated in the real world (St Pierre, 2000) were designed to disturb ideas of ‘gender and sexual categories’ (Quinn & Sinfield, 2006, p146). Sedgwick, a poststructuralist and one of the initial proponents of the ideas of queer theory within the academy (Humphrey, 1999; Monro, 2005), suggested that the term queer meant ‘something different ... simply same-sex sexual object choice’ (Sedgwick, 1994, p9). This seems to be a straightforward and clear definition but there was nothing straightforward or clear about anything to do with queer theory as it ‘defies description and means different things in different settings’ (Jagose, 1996, p97).

There is not space in this study to examine all the ideas of queer theory. These debates can be found in other sources (e.g. Butler, 1993; Jagose, 1996; Stein & Plummer, 1996; Monro, 2005 & 2015; Callis, 2009). The next section will discuss the usefulness of queer theory for this study.

### 3.2.2 The usefulness of queer theory

Queer theory, although a ‘slippery’ (Jagose, 1996, p97) and ‘contested’ notion (St Pierre 2000, p478), used differently by different authors (Clarke & Peel, 2007), is useful within this research as it assists in challenging the binary divisions suggested by the terms homosexuality and heterosexuality or by the use of the acronym LGB. The term queer challenges the notion that identities are fixed and so may constrict and prevent development (Weeks, 2007). Many authors suggested that queer theory was not just about sexuality but was also about gender and touched on many other aspects of our lives (e.g. Butler, 1990 & 2004; Sedgwick, 1994; Jagose, 1996; Callis, 2009). This emphasised the importance of looking to make theory queer rather than having a theory about queers (Warner, 1993; Stein & Plummer, 1994) and so bringing the ideas of queer theory into many other academic debates and not keeping it within narrow discussion around sexuality.

Sedgwick (1991), along with others (as noted in McPhail, 2008), suggested that the debate regarding the universal importance of sexuality is much more significant than the debate as to the role of nature or nurture in developing sexuality. Sedgwick was clear that sexual identity was 'not a hard-wired biological given but, rather a social fact deeply embedded in cultural and linguistic forms of many decades' (Sedgwick, 1991, p41). Sedgwick emphasised that how ideas of sexuality were viewed and discussed within their societies and communities impacted on a person's identity and their view of their own LGBQ identity. The inclusion of a queer approach in this study mirrors this emphasis that how these respondents viewed their own LGBQ identity was impacted on by their experiences as they performed and lived these identities.

The use of the term questioning alongside queer when using the acronym LGBTQ+ is helpful when working with young people as within the context of this study (as noted above: Ch.1). The fluidity which required this questioning label for young people emphasises that sexual identity, along with other aspects of the self, was something which was being worked towards (Jefferies & Smith, 1999). For adults, when Q stands for queer, fluidity is also central. However, this is not a transitional phase that might lead back to heterosexuality but rather the fluidity of LGBQ identity which social constructionists (Stein & Plummer, 1996; Weeks, 1995; Jackson & Scott, 2010; Mehrotra, 2010; Katz-Wise & Keller, 2011; Jenkins, 2014) and queer theorists (Jagose, 1996; Butler, 1993; Butler, 1999; Fook, 2002; Callis, 2009; Richardson, 2010; Ryle, 2012; Dhaenens, 2013) debated and debate.

This section has introduced some of the challenging ideas of queer theory that have been useful within this study. The discussion now moves on to the notion of intersectionality.

### 3.3. Intersectionality

This discussion commences with an examination of ideas regarding intersectionality and an analysis of the meaning of the term and how the ideas of intersectionality were useful within this study. A discussion regarding relevant links between queer theory and intersectionality closes the section.

Intersectionality, a term introduced by Crenshaw in 1989, has gained popularity over the past twenty years (Marfelt, 2016). Intersectional theory was developed as a way of examining how BAME women were marginalised and 'disappeared ... [and has] its roots in social-justice movements' (Carastathis, 2016, p5). Noticing difference within feminism has been a long, though

not a comfortable, tradition (McCall, 2005; Taylor, 2011). Sojourner Truth, as early as 1851, noted her invisibility as a woman due to her ethnicity (cited in Ryle, 2012; Brah, 2013). The domination by Western white middle class women within the feminist movement was debated by BAME feminists during the 1970s and 80s (e.g. Lorde, 1984; Brah & Phoenix, 2004; Ryle, 2012; Aitken, 2017). The tendency towards invisibility of certain complex identities is an important element of intersectionality (Weston, 2011).

An intersectional approach within this study allowed a feminist questioning to be overt and offered tools to understand the multiple forces that operated on individuals and communities or groups (drawing on Butler, 2004; McCall, 2005). Intersectional theory dismisses the idea of multiple oppressions being seen to be added or even multiplied together. Instead an intersectional approach seeks to understand the complexity of multiple disadvantages or advantages (Warner & Shields, 2013). It also questions the idea of a hierarchy of oppression where racism or social class may be seen as the most important oppressions (Monro 2005; das Nair & Butler, 2012; Warner & Shields, 2013). Taking an intersectional approach allowed an examination of how categories of identity were interwoven (Byrne, 2013) and might 'mutually strengthen or weaken each other' (Winker & Degele, 2011, p51). Intersectionality can be imagined as a 'crossroads ... an axis of difference ... [or] a dynamic process' (Monro, 2010, p997) regarding different elements of identity.

This study focused on the voice of the individual rather than systems which produced or maintained structures of inequality (Dhamoon, 2011) through hegemonic processes (Prins, 2006). This emphasised the agency of the individual respondents who were subjects within these processes through their 'own thinking and acting' (Prins, 2006, p280). Intersectionality stresses that respondents' stories are shaped by their ethnicity, social class and age but not determined by them (Prins, 2006). Whilst intersectionality seeks to clarify that 'systems of inequality' (Warner & Shields, 2013, p804) overlap and reinforce each other through the interaction of dimensions such as social class, ethnicity and gender (Crenshaw, 1989 cited in Winker & Degele, 2011) this was not the focus of this study.

McCall names both 'anticategorical' (McCall, 2005, p1780) and 'intracategorical' (McCall, 2005, p1773) approaches within her three-fold continuum of intersectional approaches: these different approaches are not mutually exclusive. McCall identifies one end of this continuum as the 'intercategorical approach' where categories are used carefully and 'strategically' (McCall, 2005,

p1773) to examine how different categories impact on and relate to each other. Research using this approach is usually undertaken with large quantitative samples (McCall, 2005) and so is not useful in this study. The other end of the continuum is identified by McCall as the 'anticategorical approach' (McCall, 2005, p1780) which problematises the very categories themselves, as such categories (such as social class, ethnicity and age within this study) tend to squeeze people into inappropriate boxes or spaces. This anticategorical intersectional approach sits easily alongside queer theory, as noted below. McCall names the middle of the continuum an 'intracategorical approach ... [where the] boundary making process itself' (McCall, 2005, p1773) is examined; thus making the challenge of using these categories explicit (Wright, 2016a). This intracategorical approach allowed an examination of the privileges and oppressions (Warner & Shields, 2013) impacting on the respondents of this study in terms of the interweaving (Alsop et al, 2002 cited in Richardson, 2007; Byrne, 2013) of their sexuality, social class, ethnicity and age. Both the anticategorical and intracategorical intersectional approaches stem from the questioning of the usefulness of categorical labels for BAME women when these labels are often imposed on them by white women (McCall, 2005). The intracategorical intersectional approach examines the 'complexity and multiplicity' (Taylor, 2011, p43) of categorical identity, whilst an anticategorical intersectional approach questions the categories themselves. Both approaches were useful within this study: so allowing identities, which could become 'transparent' (Weston, 2011, p31) or easily ignored, to be seen with clarity.

Using an intracategorical intersectional approach allowed an examination of how 'different oppressions work with and through each other' (Engel, 2008, p271) understanding that each person's experience of the array of issues effecting them is unique. Everyone has a range of identities which intersect within their own lives. For any one individual these multiple identities (Weeks, 1995) are experienced holistically (McCall, 2005; Warner & Shields, 2013) as each individual is faced with a range of oppressions and privileges (Warner & Shields, 2013) in a unique manner (Ryle, 2012) as no identity is only oppressed or privileged (Warner & Shields, 2013; Corlett & Mavin, 2014). So the white middle class women within this study may have privilege within their lives from their social class and ethnicity; this coincides with and is intersected by the possible oppression that is linked with their LGBTQ sexuality (see Crenshaw, 1989 cited in Winker & Degele, 2011; Weston, 2011). The BAME women within this study may face oppression due to their ethnicity and their sexuality but may also benefit from privileges linked to their education or any middle class experiences. These intersecting cross-roads may not be comfortable or safe

spaces (Weston, 2011) and the complexity and variety of intersections for these women may have undermined the simplicity of single-issue identities which could assist in developing solidarity (Taylor, 2011) between individuals and within communities. An intersectional approach encourages an analysis of how social structures operate in an 'interlocking and simultaneous' manner (Ryle, 20012, p55). Just as in other social categories, it was vital that people who defined themselves as LGBTQ were not seen as a homogenous community (Allen, 2010). Women who identified as LGBTQ were from all walks of life: diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds, different social classes and had different abilities and perspectives. Noting diversity within LGBTQ communities challenged, rather than reinforced, a binary view of issues and identities (Rahman, 2010).

An anticategorical intersectional approach, with its 'vagueness and open-endedness' (Davies, 2008, p68) sat well alongside postmodernist and queer discourse in its focus on varied and fluid identities (Warner & Shields, 2013; Yekani, Michaelis & Dietze, 2011; Rahman, 2010). It is surprising to note that intersectionality is not discussed clearly through the writing of queer theorists (Taylor, 2011; Yekani et al, 2011). This lack of focus on intersectionality is a loss to research that examines issues of queer identity since an intersectional approach can support and add clarity to the application of a queer perspective (drawing on Butler, 1993 cited in Yekani et al, 2011). This study, by using ideas from both intersectionality and queer theory, goes some way to reversing this trend. Intersectionality can be seen as theory, method and an approach to challenging injustices (Warner & Shield, 2013; McCall, 2005). The challenges and benefits of using an intersectional approach will be discussed further in Ch.4 of this study.

## Conclusion

This chapter has acknowledged a breadth of literature and introduced some important terms and ideas that were central to the findings of this study. The study set out to hear and understand the views of cisgendered women youth workers who identified as LGBTQ regarding how they used their self within their work with young people. Research questions of relevance to the literature reviewed in this chapter included what these youth work practitioners understood regarding their LGBTQ identity, how they named their own sexual identity and to what extent some of the ideas of queer theory may have been useful within their professional settings.

The historical perspective to the study of sexuality and queer theory within academia highlights the socially constructed nature of sexuality. The study of sexuality, homosexuality and bisexuality



developed from pathologising accounts of sexual deviance, often from an essentialist perspective, to being seen as something that is learnt from a person's experiences and their place within their own society. The discussion in this chapter then moved to towards socially constructed views of sexuality and social interactionism (Plummer, 1981; Simon & Gagnon, 1984; Weeks, 1995). Understanding some of the challenges that heteronormativity, homophobia and biphobia brought to the respondents in this study was useful. This discussion led into the fuller examination of queer theory and the challenge of bringing an appropriate understanding of queer theory to this study. One of the useful themes from queer theory that was noted above is that all theory or all aspects of life need to be seen from lesbian, gay, bisexual or queer perspectives as sexuality is part of the whole experiences of all in society and not just of interest to those of us who identify as LGBTQ. The final focus of this chapter was on intersectionality. This is important as an intersectional approach can add a greater understanding to the reality of the lives of the respondents within this study.

The next chapter (4) discusses and presents the methodology and methods used to gather and analyse the data of this study.

## Chapter 4: Methodology

Following the focus on the literature in previous chapters this methodological chapter discusses the theoretical stance for the research and offers details regarding the methods used. The research, taking an interpretivist and feminist approach to knowledge, gathered stories from fifteen LGBTQ women youth workers regarding how they use their self within the context of their everyday work. Stories about their practice were explored with respondents through semi-structured interviews. The rich data gathered from these interviews was transcribed and examined using a template approach to thematic analysis in order to gather an understanding of the experience and practice of these respondents.

### Introduction

The chapter commences with a discussion regarding the ontological, epistemological and theoretical approaches used in this study. The next section (4.2) focusses on the feminist approach to this research. Section 4.3 examines issues of validity and reliability within the study followed by a discussion of the ethical approach taken. Section 4.4 discusses the methods used including purposive sampling, semi-structured interviews and the details of the planning and preparation for the interviewing process. The chapter closes with a discussion of the template approach to thematic analysis used within this study (4.5) and some reflections regarding the methodology used in the research (4.6).

The diagram below (following Bryman, 2012) shows the connections discussed in this chapter.

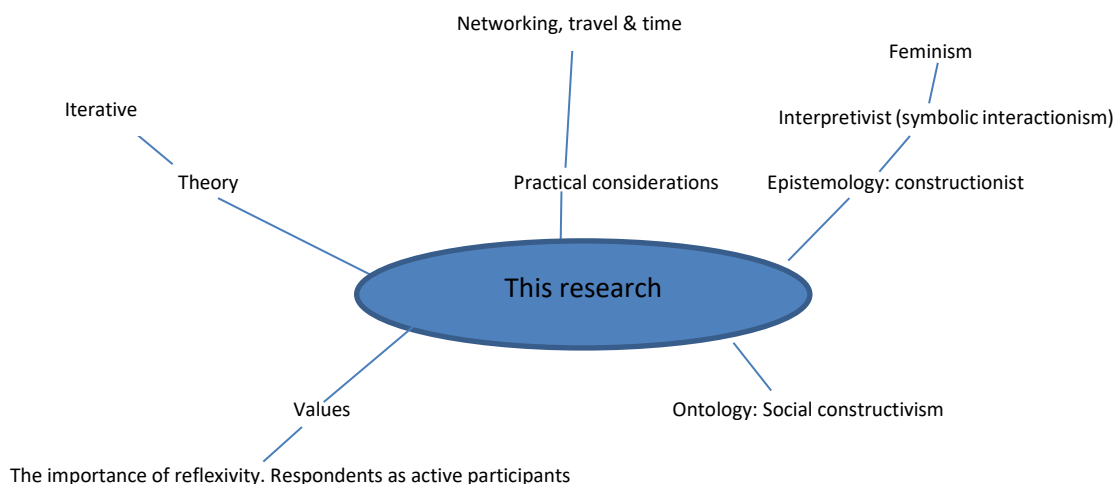


Figure 2. Methodology of research (developed from Bryman, 2012, fig 2.3, p39)

#### 4.1 Ontological, epistemological and theoretical approaches to the research

Ontology is about 'the study of being' (Crotty, 2003, p10) or how things are understood in the social world (Mason, 2002 cited in Thomas, 2008). Epistemology is about the nature of knowledge that is appropriate or acceptable within any area of research (Crotty, 2003; Bryman, 2012). A positivist or empiricist approach to knowledge would assume that there was an objective truth to be examined and understood (Stanley, 1997; Crotty, 2003; Bryman, 2012). This is a usual approach for scientific research where there are scientific laws which can be examined to be proved or disproved. However, within social science research it can be argued there is no such objective truth (Crotty, 2003; Bryman, 2012). Rather, there are a range of views and perspectives to be examined.

In this study the aim was to understand why people acted in certain ways. Knowledge in this study, taking a constructionist epistemological approach, was constructed between the researcher and respondents as we talked about their experiences. This research started from the ontological position that the nature of identity is socially constructed by and through the social context (drawing on Crotty, 2003) in which the youth workers developed and worked. The truth, or truths, within this study were constructed through dialogue and social interactions as well as being set in time and place within the wider cultural and political context in which respondents operated (drawing on Hammersley, 2008). This approach to the research follows from the literature reviewed in previous chapters. The discussions of the self drew to a large extent on the ideas of social constructionist theories (e.g. Goffman, 1956; Gagnon & Simon, 1973; Parekh, 2008). The discussions regarding the nature of youth work also emphasised that relationships between youth worker and young people are socially constructed. The nature of these relationships depends on the context of the work and the individuals and/or groups of young people involved. The discussions regarding the nature of sexuality also drew largely on social constructionist perspectives (e.g. Plummer, 1981; Weeks, 1987, 1995 & 2003; Richardson, 2015) although the postmodern approach of queer theory was also noted within these discussions (e.g. Butler, 1993, 1999 & 2004; Jagose, 1996; Warner, 1999; St Pierre, 2000).

Following from these epistemological and ontological positions an interpretivist, symbolic interactionist and feminist approach to methodology was utilised. This approach is sometimes set against other theoretical approaches including interpretivism, feminism and critical enquiry (or critical research, including Marxist and post-structural research) (Crotty, 2003). Space does not

allow a discussion of these different approaches which are presented at length elsewhere (e.g. Crotty, 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Bryman, 2012; Gannon & Davies, 2012; Hesse-Biber, 2012).

Interpretivism, the approach taken in this research, suggests an examination of different interpretations of the complex social world in which the research took place: an approach often associated with qualitative research as opposed to quantitative research (Crotty, 2003; Bryman, 2016). This approach can be further divided into approaches such as symbolic interactionism (used in this study), phenomenology and hermeneutics (Crotty, 2003). Symbolic interactionism (first discussed by Mead: 1863-1931) suggests that 'social interactions [take] ... place in terms of the meanings actors attach to action and things' as our interpretation of ourselves is impacted by others' perceptions of us (Bryman, 2016, p697). This is considered a useful approach for feminist research (Oleson, 2005; Clarke, 2012). Phenomenology suggests that the researcher commences the research with no prescribed theoretical assumption and develops theory from the grounded research: an inductive approach to theory (Bryman, 2016). However, this research had a theoretical starting point. I was already rooted in the core values of the youth work profession in which I had been working for decades. I was also starting from an assumption that the queering of identity might be a useful tool. I did not set out to prove these ideas but rather to explore respondents' attitudes to them. Hence this research took an iterative, rather than an inductive or deductive approach to theory, moving back and forth between the theories and the data. A hermeneutic approach, not appropriate for this research, would look at the meanings given to a text by different actors in the research (Bryman, 2016).

Critical enquiry, another approach that could have been followed, aims to 'design a pedagogy of resistance within communities of difference ... overturning oppression and achieving social justice' (Lincoln and Denzin, 2003, p625-6 cited in Gannon & Davies, 2012, p68). This critical approach to research can include Marxist or postmodern/poststructuralist approaches to research (Crotty, 2003). Feminists often have sympathy with these positions (Gannon & Davies, 2012). A Marxist approach to critical inquiry would start from the perspective of seeing interaction in terms of conflict and oppression (Crotty, 2003; Bryman, 2016). Whilst, within this research, there was an element of seeking to understand how the concept of gender might have led to these women finding themselves oppressed within some situations, this was not a major focus of this research. A post-structural approach to the research would have taken a focus on the language that respondents used within the interviews in its aim to deconstruct the meanings of

terms used and to understand the power discourses within the discussions (Gannon & Davies, 2012). At one stage during the exploration of the listening approach (Mauthner & Doucet, 1998; Gilligan, Spencer, Weinberg & Bertsch, 2003) it did seem that the analysis of the data might be taking me down this route. However, it did not feel that deconstructing the language used within the retelling of stories of practice would be useful (as discussed below: 4.5.1). There was, through the research process, an element of keeping a postmodern view of sexuality and gender in mind. This was not intended to take the research down this poststructuralist approach but rather to challenge the possibility of falling into the trap of seeing gender and sexuality in a binaried manner.

In this research the blurring of paradigms and the drawing on different aspects of these theoretical approaches using a 'bricolage' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p4; Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p197; Abes, 2009, p142) of appropriate methods was used. This study took an interpretivist feminist epistemological approach drawing on a range of authors (e.g. Ramazanoglu, 1989; Hirschmarm, 1998 & Hesse-Biber, 2012). This approach supported the social constructionist view of different identities being developed in different settings (drawing on Robson, 2002) by professional LGBQ youth workers. It was important to acknowledge my starting point (as discussed in detail below) as a feminist and lesbian. The clarity of my position assisted in acknowledging assumptions made by myself, as the researcher, when I shared a starting point with respondents regarding personal experiences and my LGBQ sexuality prior to the collection of data. It was important not to overstate this shared starting point. I had more in common with some respondents than others and it was impossible to know the benefits or drawbacks of these shared or diverse positions. The socially constructed and interpretivist ontological methodology was supported by my interpretivist and feminist epistemological approach as discussed above. My feminist approach is examined below.

## 4.2 Taking a feminist approach to this research

This section offers a broad discussion of feminist approaches to research, commencing with links between feminist approaches to research and youth work methods (4.2.1). A more focussed discussion of feminist perspectives (4.2.2) and methodologies (4.2.3) is followed by a discussion of feminist standpoint theory (4.2.4) and details of my own standpoint (4.2.5) within this research.

#### 4.2.1 Approaches to youth work, feminist research and reflexivity

This section notes links between the skills used within youth work and a feminist approach to research followed by a discussion focusing on the importance of reflection and reflexivity in both youth work and feminist research.

There are interesting similarities in the skills and values of feminist research compared with youth work. These include youth workers using conversations to build respectful and democratic relationships (McAlister-Brew, 1943 cited in Jeffs & Smith, 2001a; Smith, M.K., 2001b; Young, 2006; Thomas, 2011; Davies, 2015) and reflective and reflexive practice (Huncileby, 1998; Elliot, 2005; Hesse-Biber & Piatelli, 2012; Batsleer, 2013; Spence & Devaney 2013; Trelfa, 2018). Transferring these skills and values to the research setting was interesting but they were not new skills that needed to be learnt.

In youth work, 'reflective conversations' (Young, 2010, p93) assist in the building of rapport between young people and the worker. This sits alongside the research literature that notes the importance of building trusting relationships between researcher and respondent (Elliot, 2005) and the importance of finding each respondent's interest or motive for telling her story (Plummer, 1995). These ideas emphasised, for this study, the importance of empathetic conversations and constructive dialogue between the researcher and respondents. In the relationships between a youth worker and young people, as well as between researcher and respondent, there is a need for openness, honesty, critical debates and dialogue. Sources in both literatures cite Freire (Spence, 2010; Young, 2010; Gill, 2014a) as an inspiration regarding how to ensure that the youth worker or researcher is 'working with ... [rather than] working on' (Young, 2010, p97) the young people or respondents. This sat well with my own approach to both youth work and research as Freire's ideas (1972) had long been a source of inspiration and challenge for me. My commitment to critical dialogue assisted the conduct of this research project by ensuring that I examined, with respondents, their stories and experiences (Gill, 2014a): seeing the interview as a site for the construction of knowledge rather than a pipeline for the transmission of knowledge (Elliot, 2005).

Reflexivity in research is the examination and critical reflection on 'the nature of research' (Elliot, 2005, p153): a notion introduced into the mainstream by feminist researchers (Elliot, 2005). A critical and systematic approach to reflexivity during all stages of the research (Hesse-Biber & Piatelli, 2012) is expected of a feminist researcher to 'illuminate how difficult experiences have shaped the researcher's, as well as participants', lives' (Charmaz, 2012, p478). Reflexive practice

built on a range of ideas and values that I have practiced and taught as a youth work professional and lecturer within Higher Education. As a youth worker it was important that I developed habits of reflective practice to ensure professional and developing approaches to my practice. Within HE I focus on enabling students to become critical reflective practitioners as they move from education to professional practice. The connections between the research topic, the researcher and the respondents meant that without careful attention to reflexivity and reflection this research may have become biased and unreliable (see Gunaratnam, 2003). Maintaining a reflective approach within the research process assisted in ensuring that I critically interrogated my understanding of respondents' experiences (drawing on Wylie, 2012) and that I was aware of my impact on the research process (drawing on Bryman, 2012 & Letherby, 2015). Reflexivity opened possible new questions and dialogues at different stages of the research and commenced prior to entering the field through reading (drawing on Hesse-Biber & Piatelli, 2012). Reflexivity assisted in deconstructing categories and ensuring my awareness that LGBTQ women were not one homogenous community (drawing on Almack, 2008 & Formby, 2017). Within the writing process a reflexive approach assisted in the production of 'accountable knowledge' that mirrored the stories heard by the researcher (Letherby, 2014, p51). Hesse-Biber and Piatelli (2012, p 567) say that 'reflective listening and engaging in dialogical relationships with ... participants ... can bring the blind field into view and radically change the way that we know and what we know'. This suggests that reflecting on the processes of the research assisted with awareness of my own social and personal identity so that the impact of my self on the work was examined and understood. Such a reflexive approach allowed an examination of 'the space between self and other' (Fine, 1994 cited in Sikes, 2005, p90). For example, after interviewing Carla (11.4.16) I noted in my diary: *'I am sure that my middle class and white self impacted on the interview'*. However, it was never possible to know how much of an impact my identity had on any interview. A reflexive approach also enabled me to be aware of how the research impacted on my understanding of my own social identity (drawing on McDonald, 2013). For example, I became aware of how my own '*binary views*' of sexuality (interview with Carla: 1.2.16 from diary) or stereotypes linked to ethnicity (interview with Carla: 30.4.16) and social class (interview with Helena: 10.10.16) which were challenged by the views and ideas of respondents. Bowler (2010, p44) sums up the interwoven nature of in-depth interviews between researcher and respondent saying that the '*way we listen to others and hear and interpret other's stories is intricately interwoven with the way we tell our own stories*' and how we explain central features and aspects of our own development'.

This discussion of the importance of reflexivity within this study does not imply that a critical reflective approach was easy. Taking time to engage in this reflexive approach throughout all aspects of the research process was challenging but essential. For example, I was reminded time and again within these reflections of the impact of my middle class and white self on the research process. It was uncomfortable, but important to be reminded of the impact of my self on the process. Reflections reminded me of assumptions made about respondents prior to meeting them: an uncomfortable but important realisation. My reflections brought to my attention the struggles to find a smooth and informal introduction to the interviews but the process gradually became easier.

The discussion now moves to a more focussed examination of feminist research perspectives.

#### 4.2.2 Feminist perspectives

This analysis of feminist perspectives on research commences with a brief overview of a range of approaches to feminism, including my own feminist perspective. My feminist standpoint (discussed in detail below) drew on socialist and liberal feminist approaches. However, it must be noted that a range of feminist approaches have informed feminist research. This range of feminisms have been written about in depth in many places (e.g. Tong, 1989; Bryson, 1992; Jones, 1997). An outline of some of the most important strands will be alluded to here to set the scene for a more in-depth discussion regarding feminist standpoints to research below (4.2.4). Liberal feminists, such as Friedan (1963, cited in Bryson, 1992) held that 'the possibilities of freedom and fulfilment outside of the home' should be available to all women (Bryson, 1992, p161); believing that equality legislation could bring about this freedom. Marxist feminists (for example Mitchell, 1966 cited in Bryson 1992) understood that the means of production was the cause of inequality and once capitalism was overthrown women would also be liberated. Radical feminists, such as Firestone (1971, cited in Bindel, 2012 & Hines, 2015), focused on the need for a feminist revolution as they viewed patriarchy to be more dangerous than capitalism. Socialist feminists, for example Jagger (1983, cited in Tong, 1998) and Hartman (1979 cited in Bryson, 1992; Hines, 2015), noted that patriarchy and capitalism were equally the roots of oppression. The range of feminist approaches noted above were all dominated by white feminists. It was not until the 1980s that voices of black feminists were heard (Reed, 2015). Black women, such as hooks (1981) and Lorde (1984), critiqued feminism as a white perspective which ignored issues of importance to BAME women. Postmodern feminists (e.g. Butler, 1990) broke down the distinction between



gender and sex (where sex had been seen as biological and gender socially constructed) noting that both sex and gender are socially constructed. Critics note that postmodern feminism can lead to the loss of feminist solidarity (Hines, 2015) and may also ignore structural reasons for inequality (Walby, 1997 cited in Hines, 2015).

#### 4.4.3 Feminist methodologies

This subsection describes feminist research methodologies and touches on themes from feminist research of relevance in this study.

As with the varied approaches to feminism discussed above, there are a range of approaches to feminist research. These have been discussed in depth by others (e.g. Ramazanoglu, 1989; Hirschman, 1998; Hesse-Biber, 2012; Madhok & Evans, 2014; Letherby, 2015) and will not be repeated here. However, an understanding of the purpose of different research approaches assists in putting feminist perspectives to research in to context within a breadth of mainstream research methods. Prior to second-wave feminism in the 1960s 'men's standpoint [to research] was represented as universal' (Smith, D.E., 1987, p19). Positivist research, once seen as the only way to conduct 'scientific ... [or] critical' research (Code, 2014, p9) sets out to 'predict and understand' (Gannon & Davies, 2012, p66). The publishing of Hartsock's *Feminist Standpoint* in 1983 was a turning point within feminist research (as noted by Hekman, 1997 cited in St Pierre, 2000). Feminist researchers followed other movements, such as those challenging racism and capitalism, in critiquing the long-held scientific and objective approach to research (Harding, 2012).

Stanley (1999) offered a threefold perspectives of feminist research from deductive (deducing theory from research) to the inductive research (seeking to prove or disprove previously expressed theories). The middle ground of this continuum proved most relevant for this study: an iterative approach which moved back and forth from theory to research (as noted above: 4.1). The theory and ideas of social constructionists as well as the extensive writing around youth work practice (discussed in Ch.2) assisted in making sense of the respondents' ideas and experiences and in the developing of a template for analysis (4.5).

#### *Themes from feminist research of importance within this study*

Whilst feminist research methods are varied (Letherby, 2014) and there are as many different approaches to feminist research as there are feminisms, there are some themes that are common

amongst feminist researchers which are relevant to this study. The following discussion focusses on four such themes. First, that knowledge is situated and contextualised; second, that feminist research is real world research; third, that feminist research sets out to be empowering; finally, that feminist research must be transparent in its methods.

First, knowledge is 'situated ... [and] contextualised' (Stanley, 1997, p214) hence it was necessary to state clearly my starting point and standpoint as discussed below (4.2.5) as this impacted on how my findings were viewed and analysed (drawing on Stanley, 1997). Second, this feminist research was undertaken in the 'real world' (Smith, D.E., 1987, p89) focussing on the real life experiences of these women youth workers. Respondents were interviewed in their work (or occasionally home) settings. This meant that the real world impacted on the gathering of data to some extent. For example, after the interview with Helena (10.10.16) I noted that: *'I was very respectful ... of interruptions [from her phone]. I think that this helped to keep the relationship reciprocal'*. Prior to the interview with Carla (30.4.16) I noted that *'my dress - smart or very informal - might impact on each interview'*. Third, as with other feminist research, this research sought to empower the respondents (drawing on Hesse-Biber, 2012). Within this research I allowed the voice of the respondents to be heard by 'not transforming the subjects [of the research] into objects of study' (Smith, D.E., 1987, p105). At times this meant allowing the dialogue in interviews to wander from my agenda to give respondents space to share information of importance to them. Fourth, despite the break with the scientific or positivist approach to research, I, as a feminist researcher, strived to produce 'accountable feminist knowledge ... [so that there was] transparency ... [around the] analytical procedures' (Stanley, 1997, p215-216) and clarity around the interpretations that led to conclusions (Stanley, 1997; Code, 2014). Clarity in the process of analysis (discussed below: 4.5) and a reflexive approach to this research (discussed above) enabled any knowledge developed through the study to be accountable due to the transparency of my processes. Examining how these four themes impacted on the research process of this study emphasises the usefulness of understanding and reviewing feminist approaches to research.

The discussion now moves to present themes from different feminist standpoints (following Harding, 2012) which emphasise the range of experiences of women within society and in this study.

#### 4.4.4 Feminist standpoint theory

This section firstly offers some relevant themes from feminist standpoint approaches to research including the idea of experience, and issues around insider or outsider research. It then presents my starting point for the research and discusses some events in my life that brought me to the place of undertaking this research, touching on how these experiences impacted on my research and methodology.

The approach taken within this study drew on both liberal and socialist feminist standpoints (as discussed above) and emphasises the importance of the starting point or standpoint of myself as the researcher. Feminist standpoint theory has been written and argued about by many writers (e.g. Harding, 1986; Smith, D.E., 1987; Ramazanoglu, 1989; Hartsock, 1998; Hirschmarm, 1998; Huncileby, 1998; Kenney, 1998; Adams & Philips, 2006; Harding, 2012). Two issues from this literature of relevance to this study are discussed below: the nature of experience and the advantages and disadvantages of research being undertaken by an insider in the research process.

There has been a long and ongoing debate within feminist circles regarding the importance of experience (Hartsock, 1998; Hirschmarm, 1998; Huncileby, 1998; Lather, 2001; Adams & Philips, 2006; Harding, 2012; Hesse-Biber, 2012; Madhok & Evans, 2014). This debate focussed on whether it was only those with first-hand involvement who had the authority to comment on an issue or whether feminists without such involvement were able to give 'voice' (Wylie, 2012, p548) to these experiences. This links to the danger of ascribing simple or binary categories to women (Gunaratnam, 2003) and the idea that experiences may give insights but may also limit ones' understanding of how the world or society operates (Gannon & Davies, 2012). Keeping sight of a poststructuralist perspective on experience and holding this point in mind through 'radical reflexivity' assisted me to hear the 'situated voices' (Gunaratnam, 2003, p7) and avoid any simple or binary division with regard to gender, sexuality, social class or other social relations (drawing on Gunaratnam, 2003).

The second thought-provoking and linked debate was whether research should be done by an insider or an outsider. The literature (Plummer, 1981; Brah, 1999; Gunaratnam, 2003; Almack 2008; Allen, 2010) suggests that the advantages of being perceived as an insider when undertaking research can also have a negative impact. When undertaking this research my social position impacted on my 'knowledge production. ... [My] 'beingness' ... [and my] everyday interactions' (Gunaratnam, 2003, p30). It was vital that I understood and reflected on how my

own standpoint and life experiences impacted on the research (drawing on Almack, 2008): how my age, my white and middle class lesbian identities, my standing within academia, my experiences as a youth worker and other aspects of my social, professional and political identities affected not only on my understanding of what I heard and saw but also, what and how stories were recounted to me by respondents. 'The quality of the interaction and relationships' (Gill, 2014b, p91) between myself and respondents inevitably influenced the quality of the data gathered regarding what was shared or not shared by respondents (drawing on Almack, 2008). The ongoing requirement to notice difference and the range of experiences of women from different backgrounds (Stanley & Wise, 1983 cited in Mauthner & Doucet, 1998; Ramazanoglu, 1989; Reay, 2012) formed one of the reflective backdrops of this study. Within my research diary these issues were noted many times, although (as noted above) it was never possible to know how much my own self impacted on what respondents shared.

Having presented some debates from the feminist research literature of relevance to this study and having set out some of the arguments from the feminist standpoint literature I will now share some important experiences and learning that I brought to this study.

#### 4.2.5 My story, position and standpoint

In this research, understanding how my own theoretical position and biography shaped what I 'choose to study and ... [my] approach to studying it' (Hesse-Biber & Piatelli, 2012, p560) was essential.

##### Why would anyone be 'Proud to be Gay'?

I grew up in Leeds in a middle class family, going to a Methodist Church at least twice most Sundays, with all that was learnt or obscured from my experiences because of, or despite, this background. I did not knowingly meet any one who identified as LGBTQ until my mid-twenties and I assumed, in my teenage years, that being straight or gay was a personal issue that had nothing to do with anyone else. I was taught by my mother that homosexuality was an illness. My mother (born in 1916) thought that one should feel sorry for homosexual people and ask for God's mercy on them. The heteronormative self that I assumed in my childhood and adolescence was challenged by my experiences later in life. I was not aware of the possibility that I might develop a lesbian identity until my late twenties, due possibly to my religious upbringing which can be an important factor (see Plummer, 1981).

### Rubbing shoulders with feminists (and lesbians) in the 1980s

On graduating in social policy, at the age of 21, I went to work for a few years (though the Church Missionary Society) with women living in one of the shanty towns of Nairobi, Kenya. These women, though illiterate and destitute, were a source of education for me and this is where I first learnt the importance of seeing the world from a feminist perspective. This is also when I first read Freire's (1972) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. In 1982, when I was 24, I moved to the East End of London. It was there that I began to meet people who were proud to be gay. As a youth worker I found professional support with women colleagues as part of the 'Women Working with Girls' network (discussed by Spence, 2010) and gradually discovered, maybe not surprisingly, that I had many lesbian friends and colleagues. I thought that this homosexuality might rub off onto me. I felt faced with the choice of changing my circle of friends or going with the flow and being at risk of catching homosexuality. This did happen and I had my first relationship with a lesbian woman: Frances. I use the above judgmental terminology, whilst being conscious that homosexuality is not catching. However, beginning to understand lesbian identity opened the possibilities of changing how I viewed my own sexuality. Understanding the impact of heteronormativity on my life enabled me to see other possible identities that I might perform (drawing on Butler, 1993). In 1990 I moved to Scotland to specialise in Outdoor Education. The people that I networked with professionally in Scotland were much less understanding or tolerant of LGBQ issues than had been the case in London. This understanding of the importance of place and history (Rich, 1980a; Zimmerman, 1984; Plummer, 1995; Fook, 2002; Weeks, 2003; Butler, 2004, Jackson & Scott, 2010) in regard to how I viewed my self was a useful lesson that has been an important theme within this research.

### Developing a lesbian identity?

So was I a lesbian? I had come to terms with being out to a few people that I had relationship with a lesbian woman. Did that mean that I was a lesbian or was I bisexual? How would I know? For me there was a gradual moving towards seeing, and naming, myself as a lesbian woman (drawing on Cass, 1996; Casey, 2002). I moved back to West Yorkshire in 1991 (with Frances) and worked in youth and community work settings within outdoor education where I was careful, when working with young people in my own neighbourhood, to be unclear about my LGBQ sexuality and where I lived. I heard of lesbian youth workers who had their car tyres slashed and of lesbians in my local community who had suffered verbal and sometimes physical abuse. I was annoyed with a youth worker who told some young women that we took climbing that I lived in their village

as I felt that my safety had been compromised. I was happier to discuss my LGBTQ sexuality with older women that I worked with who were interested or who asked appropriate questions. There was a time when, taking a group of women climbing, we were faced with some interesting questions on the way back in the minibus. Frances and I (we did work together as the outdoors and community work were shared professional areas of interest and skill) were asked if our husbands minded that we were rock climbers. We looked at each other and then (I don't remember who spoke first: it was probably Frances as I was driving) admitted or revealed or spoke about the fact (these different words show a level of self-judgment on our relationship) that there were no husbands and that we were in fact partners. This was twelve years before civil partnerships were available.

Frances died in a canoe accident in 1992. I have been lucky to find another woman partner (civil partner but not looking to be married) with whom I have two children. In 2004 I moved into academia where I teach mainly youth and community work students. I learnt many lessons about identity and reflexivity through the difficult and challenging years of bereavement from the woman that I had assumed was going to be my life-long partner and also through the early years of parenthood. Some of these are laid out briefly below.

#### [My standpoint and learning and its impact on this research study](#)

Through counselling and reflection on the changes that had taken place within my life I learnt that change is an on-going part of our identities as 'even the rocks change' (B. Vernelle, personal communication, 1980). This metaphor was of particular use to me as a rock-climber. I learnt that my experiences as a bereaved lesbian woman were not peculiar but were shared with older and straight men and women. Attending a bereavement support group with heterosexual and mostly elderly people when I was a lesbian of only 32 years of age proved to be supportive and offered me empathy from people who I would not have expected it from. Reading about the bereavement of a heterosexual elderly man (Lewis, C.S., 1966) and identifying with the lessons that he had learnt despite the difference in age and circumstances between us, I learnt that binary division between straight and gay, between men and women, between old and young need to be continually challenged. I learnt that parenting, especially as an older parent, changes a person in more ways than I had expected. Parenting meant that priorities changed and I no longer wanted, or could experience, freedoms of mountaineering and adventuring in the same care-free manner.

Being a parent in my 40s and 50s took more time and energy than I had expected and led to interdependence on my partner rather than my previous independence.

The starting points for this research related to my experiences in academia were discussed in Ch.1 and will not be repeated here. Suffice it to say that my own life experiences have brought me to my current position of self-awareness and knowledge. These experiences and knowledge gained on my journey have impacted on this study: both in choosing to undertake it in the first place and in the conducting and writing of the research. The next section of this chapter presents discusses the importance of validity, reliability and ethics in this study.

### 4.3 Validity, reliability and ethics within this research

Ensuring that this research used valid, reliable and ethical methods was essential if the findings were to be useful in shedding light on the research question: how youth workers use their self in their work with young people. The following discussions will address these points.

#### 4.3.1 Validity

Validity is 'the ability of research to reflect on external reality or to measure the concepts of interest' (Elliot, 2005, p22). The terminology of validity came to qualitative research from a quantitative, scientific and positivist approach to research (Ramazanoglu, 1989) and was not useful for this qualitative research (drawing on Elliot, 2005). In this study truths were subjective: stories were told from the perspective of each individual: emotions and feelings were paramount. Ideas regarding the plausibility of shared stories, rather than the truthfulness were appropriate (drawing on Riessman, 1993; Hale, Snow-Gerono, & Morales, 2008).

Internal validity in quantitative or positivist research is seen as producing valid understanding of the issue being researched (Elliot, 2005). 'The process through which ... [I made] claims for the trustworthiness' (Riessman, 1993, p65) of the data took the place of this internal validity. If this study had been undertaken in other parts of the UK findings could have been different. In terms of time: 30, years ago the situation for youth workers who were LGBTQ, in the closet or not within their work setting, would have been very different.

External validity within this study, as within most qualitative studies, depended on how far one can generalise from the research (Eliot, 2005) and the 'integrity of the conclusions generated' (Bryman, 2012, p46). This research did not set out to produce generalisable findings but to be

tentative and to keep findings within the context of the study (drawing on Bryman, 2012; Frank, 2012). The transferability (Hale et al, 2007) or relevance of findings for other practitioners seemed a more appropriate view to this aspect of validity for this study. Elliot (2005) suggests that the generalisability of the findings can be left to the reader to make judgements on as long as processes are transparent. This emphasised the importance of taking a focussed, careful and transparent approach (Yardley, 2000 cited in Bryman, 2012; Letherby 2015) to all stages of the research as discussed below with regard to reliability.

#### 4.3.2 Reliability

Reliability is about asking questions such as: are the results of the study repeatable? Are concepts and measures consistent? Can research be replicated by others? (see Bryman, 2016). However, these questions had little relevance for this research. The impact of the researcher on respondents, the 'interviewer effect' (Denscombe, 2010, p180), and the context in which the questions were asked, were bound to impact on the sharing of stories. The impact of my self: my age, my ethnicity, my style, what the respondent knew about me, my attitude to the respondent and the context in which she worked were all part of this research process. This mirrored the way that the youth workers' self impacted on the young people with whom they worked: the very focus of this research. I paid attention to being genuine and open, learning to listen rather than share or preach (Denscombe, 2010), I sought to 'take care not to reveal ... surprise ... with facial gestures' (Denscombe, 2010, p184). Although reflexivity and awareness of my own 'biases, beliefs and social locations' (Harding, 1992 cited in Almack, 2008) was important, this awareness itself did not remove possible bias from this insider research. Being explicit about my own positionality and beliefs within this research (as discussed above) was essential to ensure credibility for this research and findings. Through a critical reflective approach to the interview process (as discussed above) I worked towards being aware (drawing on Elliot, 2000) of and minimising, though not removing (as this is not possible: Almack, 2008; Denscombe, 2010), the interviewer effect.

The lack of reliability of this research process (drawing on Elliot, 2000) meant that rigorous and transparent approaches to both methods and analysis were vital (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006) as I set out to present the 'multiple and conflicting experiences' of respondents (McDonald, 2013, p131). This study was carried out with care regarding both research process and analysis (drawing on Bryman, 2012). 'Appropriate' methods for this research were applied with 'integrity' (BERA, 2018, p4). In-depth interviews were appropriate methods to gather the required data. Reflexivity



supported the research during all stages of the research process. Ensuring that I was careful, respectful and applied appropriate boundaries and confidentiality within the research process and as the data was analysed and written up was essential to the integrity needed for this research. It was important to remember, during the analysis of the data, that the information and stories recounted by respondents were only 'partial truths' (Hammersley, 2008, p91; Charmaz, 2012, p476). If interviewed on different days when respondents had felt more positive or more frustrated with their work and situation they may have shared different information or told the same story with a different emphasis. A different perspective could have been heard if the stories had been told by other actors within the stories. An awareness of all these factors impinging on what story was told, how it was told and what feelings, ideas, themes were emphasised was held in mind through the research process.

So the reliability and validity of this research depended on the careful, reflective and transparent approach taken when conducting, analysing and writing up the research. The focus now moves to the ethical approach taken within the research process.

#### 4.3.3 Ethics

This study followed the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2018) guidelines. First and foremost, the aim of this research was to 'extend knowledge and understanding' (BERA, 2018, p3) in this area of study from my own and the respondents' perspectives. The following discussion examines how BERA's ethical approach was implemented with regard to relationships, boundaries between researcher and respondents and the notion of doing no harm to respondents.

##### *Ethics within the relationship*

Ethics, in this study, was about the 'relationship between the researcher and the research subjects or participants' (Elliot, 2005, p134). This ethical approach started with an understanding of my personal position, which was close to the issues being discussed with respondents. Being clear about my own story and standpoint enabled me to understand and represent the stories of others ethically (drawing on Defrancisco, Kuderer, & Chatham-Carpenter 2007). The insider/outsider dilemma has been discussed above. This links to the suggestion of BERA that all educational research should be undertaken with 'respect for the' respondent (BERA, 2018, p5). My own visibility as an out lesbian within HE and my confidence to speak out around LGBTQ issues in national and regional youth work networks offered some evidence of the importance that I viewed LGBTQ issues in youth work, so offering some evidence of my respect for these

practitioners and respondents. By seeking to hear carefully their stories from practice and to view them as co-contributors within the research process rather than objects to be studied, again evidenced my respect for them as practitioners.

#### *Boundaries between respondents and myself*

Boundaries between myself and respondents were blurred and 'permeable' (Almack, 2008) as many were known to me prior to this research. Therefore an 'ethics in context' (Goodson & Gill, 2011, p30) approach was taken within the interviews. This meant acting appropriately according to the context of each interview. Some respondents were long-standing friends or acquaintances, some had been students on the course on which I teach and some were unknown to me prior to undertaking the research. I treated each person slightly differently but with a respectful manner. It was not possible to measure how much relationships that already existed impacted either positively or negatively on the interview and research process. For example: Amy, although a graduate, was still working with me in some teaching situations. It was not possible to know to what extent, if any, this assisted with the *'easy and relaxed manner of the interviews'* with her (research diary, January 2016). Most interviews felt relaxed and there seemed little correlation with regard to whether I knew people prior to the interview as I noted in my research diary in a number of places (interviews with Pat, Nell & Beth - not previously known to me - and interviews with Issie & Jane who I had known previously as students). It was maybe more surprising that, despite the fact that had I known Marie many years previously in a range of different roles, the interviews with her seemed (October 2016) *'hesitant ... [with] no sense of relationship between her and me'*. Maybe the relaxed, or not, nature of the interview was more to do with the situation and attitude of the respondent than what I brought, or did not bring, to the relationship.

#### *Doing no harm*

I have, taking a reflective and careful approach to the research, aimed to do 'no harm to participants ... [or to their] self-esteem' (Bryman, 2012, p135). I ensured that copies of audio or written transcripts were kept secure (as suggested in BERA, 2018; Bryman, 2012) in locked cupboards and password restricted files in my offices, both at University and home. I ensured that confidentiality of respondents was and is honoured by the use of pseudonyms (see Bryman, 2012). Audio recordings were transcribed by an experienced transcriber with secure sharing of files. She only had access to respondents' first names and was aware of the importance of confidentiality. These procedures were all within the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)

guidance (Information Commissioner's Office, 2018) despite this legislation being introduced after the data was gathered and transcribed. The purpose and aims of the research were carefully conveyed to respondents prior to their agreement to participate within the study. Full and informed consent was gained from respondents prior to interviews (see appendix 1). In giving consent for the research the participant also consented to the relationship with me, as the interviewer, as it was through this relationship that information and stories were developed and told (drawing on Frank 2002). Locations in which respondents worked were not identified. This was particularly important given the small world that is LGBT youth work.

Recruiting respondents for research on sensitive subjects, such as sexuality, can be problematic (Lee, 1993). My standing within the profession and region and the use of a snowball approach to sampling meant that sufficient respondents were recruited. The possibility of 'potential [negative] impact of the research on those involved' (Elliot, 2005, p134) was considered. Respondents would have been signposted to possible sources of support if this did arise (see ethical approval: appendix 2). Through the research process respondents were 'prompted to reflect on areas of their lives that they ... [may not have] explicitly thought about before' (Elliot, 2005, p136). Many respondents noted this was an interesting process. This was assisted by respondents engaging with the research and seeing it as a worthwhile piece of research or benefitting from the opportunity to talk at length about their experiences (drawing on Elliot, 2005). The interview with Rosie, the final respondent interviewed, proved to be difficult. During the first interview she became upset during discussions regarding her reactions when not feeling welcomed in LGBTQ settings. I gave her space to recover and offered to suspend the interview (following BERA, 2018) but she stated that she was happy to continue. I considered, but felt it inappropriate, to offer her sources of support as she was an experienced practitioner and knew of those sources of support. Rosie postponed the date we had arranged for a second interview. This second interview never took place as Rosie did not respond to my two reminders to reorganise a date. I was respectful of her decision to take no further part in the research but decided to include data from her first interview as it was powerful and she had given me permission to do so.

The focus on validity, reliability and ethics within this study were all grounded in the reflective and reflexive approach to the research. The small scale nature of the research and the fact that I was an insider within the research process meant that great care was required to ensure the findings presented were valid, reliable and ethically collected and presented. The above

discussions have emphasised that findings and conclusions from this research will be presented in a careful and tentative manner, noting that the respondents were not selected to be representative of other LGBTQ women youth workers.

This section draws to a conclusion the preparatory discussion before embarking on the details of the methods used within the study. The reading and thinking that were necessary prior to deciding on methods to be used in this study were extensive as suggested by the above discussion.

## 4.4 Methods

This next section focusses on the detail of methods used in this study including sampling (4.4.1) and the choice of semi-structured interviews (4.4.2) to gather data. The section will end with details of the interviews (4.4.3) including the pilot interviews, preparation prior to undertaking the interviews, details regarding the numbers of interviews undertaken and their length and a discussion of the interview process itself.

### 4.4.1 Sampling

To gather the data needed for this study it was important to hear stories and gain a depth of understanding from a small number of respondents. A small sample was sufficient, as this research sought to examine respondent's 'perceptions and feelings' (drawing on Crouch & McKenzie, 2008, p485) rather than to generalise about their experiences or try to establish objective facts (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006). Keeping the focus only on women youth workers who identified as LGBTQ limited the sample size needed (as discussed in Ch.3).

The use of 'generic purposive sampling' (Bryman, 2012, p148) allowed for participants to be recruited according to the purpose of this study as 'typical cases' (Bryman, 2012, p422). Purposive sampling also assisted in recruiting respondents who differed from each other in terms of certain key characteristics such as age, social class, ethnicity and the setting in which they worked to 'maximise the likelihood of accessing variation' within the study (drawing on Bryman, 2012, p422). Purposive sampling also enabled the choice of respondents who were more likely to challenge my ideas and assumptions in that they were younger, or of BAME or working class background (drawing on Brannen, 2012, p16). Sequential or snowball sampling (Colley & Guéry, 2014; Hayfield & Huxley, 2015) allowed the adding of respondents to the sample as the research progressed. This was important as the sample size needed was not known until the data was examined

(Charmaz, 2012) as saturation of the data (when no new insights were being gleaned from increasing the sample size: Bryman, 2012) was required.

#### 4.4.2 Semi-structured interviews

The choice to use interviews as the means to collect appropriate stories from respondents was made for pragmatic reasons. Questionnaires would not have examined issues in sufficient depth. Focus groups, to enable respondents to hear each other's views and to share ideas with each other, could have added a depth of discussion to the research (Denscombe, 2010). However, the practicalities of organising focus groups with respondents across a wide geographical area and youth work hours (including evenings and weekends) for a project that was focussed on my interests and not their professional or personal interests excluded this method of data collection. An observational or ethnographic approach to this research could have been used to examine more fully how youth workers used their self rather than relying on respondents' stories and responses to interview questions. Given the time constraints and the challenge of observing youth workers in a range of work settings this was not thought to be a research method that was realistic in this real world setting. It would have required a lot of time and would have been problematic to plan as often the use of self happens in small unexpected conversations that would be difficult to observe without impacting to a great extent on what happened in those small and often intimate conversations. It was important to hear stories from a breadth of respondents and settings, hence a case study approach to data gathering would have been inappropriate.

The use of intensive interviews, often seen as a feminist method (Bryman, 2012; Hesse-Biber, 2012), to gain insights into the views and experiences of the women youth workers seemed appropriate. Interviews were a good method of collecting non-factual information such as 'opinions, emotions and experiences' particularly as the information to be collected was of a sensitive nature (Denscombe, 2010, p173). The intensive interviews allowed a probing of the meanings behind the information shared thus allowing insights from respondents to be understood by myself. A choice was made to use semi-structured interviews. Structured interviews would not have allowed the flexibility required (drawing on Bryman, 2012) to make it clear that silences and awkward moments were important in the recounting of personal stories. Unstructured interviews would have been better suited to a 'life history study' (Bryman, 2012, p213) rather than examining the complex and possibly sensitive issues of this research.

#### 4.4.3 The interview process

This section commences with a discussion of the pilot interviews. It then moves to the preparation prior to undertaking the interviews. Details regarding the numbers and length of interviews are presented. This section concludes with an examination of the interview process itself.

The collection of data was assisted by conducting pilot interviews with one respondent who was well known to me so that if mistakes or errors had been made, the interview could have been revisited. These pilot interviews enabled some revision of the interview guide (see appendices 5 & 6 for the initial and final interview guides) and a development of my confidence in the approach to the interview process: all elements suggested by Bryman (2012). These initial interviews with Amy assisted in developing the interviews as '*a co-operative endeavour*' (research diary: 19.12.15). It also allowed me the opportunity to reflect on the interview process and so remind myself that I needed to '*allow enough silences and space for the story to breathe*' (my research diary 19.12.15): drawing on Frank (2010) and Squire (2013).

Careful preparation for the interviews was undertaken prior to meeting each respondent. Respondents were sent the consent form (appendix 1) which was signed prior to commencing the first interview. They were also sent a respondent information sheet (appendix 4). Background information about their work setting was researched and practical details of the interviews checked: such as the venue and audio-recording of discussions. Informal introductory conversations at the start of each interview aimed to set the respondent at ease and to develop some initial rapport. After the interviews with the first few respondents it felt that some sharing of information about my self was best done at the end of the interview to be respectful of information shared by respondents and to minimise the impact on what was shared: as noted in research diary (11.4.16).

Interviews were conducted with fifteen cisgendered women youth workers between December 2015 and March 2017. It had been planned to interview only professionally qualified women youth workers as noted in the introductory chapter. It was felt that the responses from the three respondents who were experienced practitioners but not yet professionally qualified were useful and so were included within the data that was analysed. More care was taken later within the data collection to ensure that future respondents were professionally qualified. Each respondent, except the first and last, was interviewed twice; each interview focussing on different themes with respondents. Amy attended 3 interviews and Rosie just one: as noted above. Interviews lasted

between one and a half and two hours. It seemed useful to divide the interviews into two visits (not three as had been my initial idea) to allow for some data to be reviewed with respondents at a second meeting whilst keeping the respondents engaged with (Elliot, 2005), and committed to, the research process. Reflections on the suitability and ordering of the questions between interviews with each respondent assisted in maximising the usefulness of the data collected as the research progressed. The challenge of minimising the impact of the interviewer on the respondent within these interviews required a reflective approach before, during and after the interviews, as discussed above. At one stage within the data collection, when I was nervous about not having enough respondents, interviews were undertaken with a respondent who was a family worker not a youth worker. These interviews were not used in the data analysis.

Interview guides (appendices 5 & 6), used flexibly and differently for each respondent, were designed to ensure that questions posed to respondents were clear and simple. Respondents were given time to think and reflect on their response to questions and they were invited to clarify meanings within these discussions (drawing on Bryman, 2012). Interviews were audio-recorded, with permission from respondents. This allowed a focus on the structuring and flow of the conversation, allowing flexibility within the semi-structured interview as discussed above. This flexibility enabled the words or terminology of respondents to be used when probing meanings, so developing a link between the respondent's ideas and the interview process (drawing on Tomlinson, 2013). Flexibility within the interview process allowed a wandering around topics to follow the respondents' ideas rather than following a strict order of questions in interviews. The relationship between myself and each respondent was left on a positive note at the end of the interviews. This point was made clear in my research diary (20.4.16) in notes regarding interviews with Beth (with whom I did not have a previous relationship): *'it felt as though we left ... respectful of each other and knowing more about each other. This being reciprocal felt important as we may well meet again: youth work LGBT circles are small'*.

The transcribing of interviews allowed for a careful reading and rereading of the interview texts. A transcript of the first interview with each respondent was reviewed prior to the second interview; thus allowing the probing or clarifying of issues discussed at the first interview. I noted in my research diary that initially this process had *'felt clumsy'* but had always been *'useful'* (20.4.16).

The above discussion concerning intensive semi-structured interviews and the details of the interviews themselves has offered clarity as to how the rich data for this study was gathered. The next section of this chapter focusses on the analysis of the data.

#### 4.5 Analysis of findings using a thematic approach

This section commences with a discussion of my struggles to discover an appropriate and practical method to analyse the gathered data (4.5.1). It then moves on to discuss the template approach to thematic analysis used to analyse the data (4.5.2). A consideration of the challenges of holding values from narrative research whilst using this thematic approach are noted within these discussions.

The aim of this study was to hear stories from youth workers about their everyday experiences and relationships with young people and how they used their self in these relationships. The analysis of the data aimed to put these ‘familiar ... [ideas in a different and] strange’ context (Goodson, 1992 cited in Drake & Heath, 2011, p21). Discussing their experiences and stories in this unusual academic research setting of a formal, even if semi-structured interview, was new for most respondents. A thematic approach was used to analyse the stories and experiences of respondents. As the information and stories shared were varied more interviews than had been planned were needed to achieve data saturation (see 4.4.1 above). In all fifteen respondents were interviewed to gain this data saturation.

##### 4.5.1 Deciding on a thematic approach using template analysis: a long journey!

A narrative approach to the analysis of the data had seemed appropriate (drawing on Riessman, 1993; Drake & Heath, 2011; Squire, 2013) as the research was focussing on stories that youth workers told. Two different narrative approaches to data analysis were attempted but neither seemed to assist in understanding and drawing out conclusions. In attempting to apply a dialogical narrative approach (Riessman, 1993; Frank, 2012) the focus seemed to move from the stories about respondents’ work with young people to the structure or method of the telling of the stories. This did not seem useful. I then turned to the ‘listening approach’ (Mauthner & Doucet, 1998; Gilligan et al, 2003). This method also proved to be problematic as, in attempting to analyse the stories, more and more data from the suggested four different listenings of the interviews was being created leading to greater confusion rather than more clarity.



A flexible thematic method of data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was eventually used following discussion with colleagues. The thematic analysis matched the approach to the research in seeking 'to unpick or unravel the surface of reality' (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p81) and to examine the social context in which the themes were presented. However it felt important, through this thematic analysis, to hold on to some of the key values of narrative research: this was possible using King's template approach (King, 2012) to thematic analysis.

There were four values from narrative research that seemed important in this research. First, the idea that stories of youth work practice recounted by respondents were only one version of the story that could have been told (Hammersley, 2008; Byrne, 2015). In this research the story being analysed was that told to this researcher by these respondents in a particular time and place (drawing on Byrne, 2015). Second, the importance of seeing the holistic nature of the stories (Squire et al, 2013) recounted by each respondent and finding the common themes and divergences between this array of stories (Sikes & Gale, 2006) as discussed below (Ch.5). Third, the importance of not finishing the story of the respondent (Bhaktin, 1981 cited in Frank, 2012) but understanding that their life and professional stories would continue to develop and flourish after the research had been completed. Finally, the importance of offering some useful themes rather than coming to firm conclusions (Crouch & McKenzie, 2008) regarding the nature of the stories of practice recounted within the research as discussed above (4.3.1). On undertaking the data analysis these values were revisited to ensure that the thematic analysis allowed these ideas to remain central in the analysis. These values will be discussed within the analysis of the data in the next few chapters of this study.

#### 4.5.2 Using a template approach to thematic analysis

A template method of thematic analysis (King, 2012) seemed appropriate as data was gathered from a relatively small number of interviews. Stories from a smaller number of respondents might have allowed a closer examination of the themes using a narrative approach to data analysis rather than the cross-case interpretation that was better offered by this template approach (King, 2012; Brooks, McCluskey, Turley & King, 2015). Larger studies may more usefully have used a matrix or framework method of analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1984 cited in King & Horrocks, 2010; Bryman, 2012). The template approach had the advantage of allowing an examination of, and comparison between, cases to be noted; especially with regard to the intersectional issues which were examined with the cross-category links (King, 2012).

A reading of template analysis (King & Horrocks, 2010; King, 2012; Brooks et al, 2015) encouraged a clustering (King, 2012) of themes together, producing a template for analysis of five themes with a number of subthemes (appendices 7 & 8). There was no differentiation in terms of descriptive codes compared with interpretative codes as no theme was entirely descriptive or entirely interpretative (drawing on King, 2012). Some themes arose from the focus and direction of the research (drawing on King, 2012) whilst others came from a reading of the literature: an iterative approach (Frank, 2012; Bryman, 2012; Wright 2016a). In this research the literature clearly informed the interview questions. This was not phenomenological or grounded research (Bryman, 2012) where themes would arise only from a 'bottom up' (King, 2012) examination of the data. Rather this was an iterative process using the data, the literature and the researcher's own interests to identify the main themes. This was useful as some elements of relevant theory had been tentatively noted prior to data collection. The research built on these theories: moving back and forward between theories (such as taking a queer theory or a social constructionist approach to sexuality) and the evidence from the research to develop relevant themes in the analysis. This iterative approach generated concepts and themes rather than new theories (Bryman, 2012). Such an iterative approach to data analysis is suggested as a useful starting point for developing a 'template' for the analysis (King, 2012).

In the active search for themes (drawing on Braun & Clarke, 2006) initially two of the respondents' transcripts were examined. Themes were noted that were 'recurrent and distinctive features of participants' accounts, characterising particular perceptions and/or experiences' (drawing on King & Horrocks, 2010, p150). Seventeen themes were initially identified. These two respondents, purposefully chosen after interviewing five respondents, were divergent cases. It was important to identify possible themes at this early stage to ensure that the data being gathered was useful. At this point the themes were narrowed down from seventeen to twelve. On examination of another five respondents' transcripts the list of themes stretched again to twenty. Clearly this was too many: a common problem for novice researchers (King, 2012).

Eventually five main themes were identified and other themes were bunched as subthemes (following King, 2012) by examining the data more carefully. An open ended and real world approach to the subthemes (King, 2012) allowed any number of subthemes to be linked to a theme. The five main themes were: i) sharing information about the self; ii) early experiences of being LGBTQ; iii) who are you/what is your identity? iv) essentialist, social constructionist or queer;

v) values used in own youth work; and finally f) change. This process was messy and subthemes often overlapped (as suggested in King, 2012). The number of subthemes arose from the data rather than being planned or prescribed. The thickest data had more subthemes (drawing on Brooks et al, 2015) and no attempt was made to balance the number of subthemes as might be done if using a matrix or framework approach to analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1984 cited in King & Horrocks, 2010; Bryman, 2012). Some themes (the theme of change for example) had only two subthemes whilst other subthemes (such as youth work values) had seven subthemes (see rough template: appendix 7).

During the coding process clarity around the meaning of the different themes was important. The template model of analysis allowed for coded sections (often known as chunks) of data or stories to be of any size (Brooks et al, 2015). In practice some coded sections were small but important ideas noted by respondents. Other coded sections were a page or more of text within the transcript of the interview. This enabled me to hold onto the second value from narrative research (as noted above) to see the data holistically (Riessman, 2008) by focussing on longer stories to throw light on important topics. Through this chunking, or coding of the transcript, the template was used as a tool for analysis. Sometimes returning to listen to the audio recording of the interview assisted with this process and reminded me to view the respondent as 'co-author' in the research (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009, p193) although the development and use of the template was only my work.

The template developed for the analysis did not start as a linear list but rather as a mind map (appendix 7) as King (2012) suggests. A more linear list of themes may have suggested a silo of unconnected themes. In practice the themes and subthemes identified were not isolated issues but rather interlocking and intersecting. The template was, after the identification of the themes and subthemes, written as a list, following King (2012) (appendix 7b) to assist with clarity through the analytical process. This list continued to be developed (appendices 7c & 8). In presenting an analysis of the data the links between these themes are discussed. The order within the current list of themes does, to some extent, reflect the order of interest or importance of the themes to myself and the way these themes may be presented, both within this thesis and to future audiences (as suggested by King, 2012).

## 4.6 Reflection on methods

As a novice researcher the research process was a learning experience. This brief discussion offers some insights into lessons learnt.

In places more care could have been taken to have included a wider range of topics for discussion with respondents. A clearer focus on biphobia, as well as homophobia, could have been useful. A fuller focus on boundaries for youth workers when using social media, where it was probably even more important that personal information was not shared (as noted by Sapin, 2013), could have been useful. These omissions reflected my lack of focus on these issues rather than any lack of interest amongst respondents. Research around the role of social media within youth work generally is a gap in current research (apart from research carried out by Melvin, 2019) so examining how and where boundaries are set by youth workers when engaging with young people through social media could be an area of possible future research.

It had been the aim of the research to only interview professionally qualified youth workers (as noted in Ch.1). However, due to a lack of focus, three of the first five interviewees were graduates with several years of experience as full time (or nearly full time) youth workers but they were not professionally qualified. The data collected from these experienced practitioners (all working to some extent in settings targeted at LGBT young people) who were not professionally qualified was rich data and it was felt that this data was useful in the research. The focus of the research was not impacted on by this error however a more flexible approach to interviewing practitioners with different levels of qualifications may be useful in any future research.

## Conclusion

This study started from the ontological position that the nature of identity is socially constructed. Stories were examined from the perspective of the respondents as recounted within the interviews. If stories had been heard from different participants or on different days an alternative, but just as valid story, could have been told. Taking an interpretivist and feminist approach again emphasised the importance of the timing and context of the stories told by these fifteen respondents. It also emphasised the impact of myself, as the researcher, on how stories were told and on what stories were told by respondents.

The synthesis between my values and skills developed through decades as a practitioner of, and lecturer in, youth work and those required for this feminist standpoint research process was

discussed. The semi-structured interviews were conducted in the style of dialogue rather than formal interviews in order to build respectful and democratic relationships. Reflexive and reflective practice was brought to all stages of the research process including the preparations, the data collection, the analysis and drawing of conclusions. This allowed a critical approach to the research so minimising my impact on the research whilst developing a continued awareness that my standpoint and starting point was an important part of the research process. Other feminist research values were important within different elements of the research process. The data was collected in and about 'real world' (Smith, D.E., 1987, p89) situations. I was hopeful that respondents would be empowered by the research process and I was aware of the importance of openness and transparency through the different elements of research process: the sampling, data collection, analysis and dissemination of the themes and insights gained from the research.

The findings from this qualitative research are only valid for the respondents of the study and wider generalisations will be tentative. The validity of the research can be judged by the transparency and openness of the research processes as noted above. The reliability of the research again depends on this transparency as the research could not be replicated by other researchers due to the weight of the interviewer effect on the processes as noted above. Care was taken to follow the guidance of BERA (2018) and GDPR with regard to ethics within the research process.

Purposive and sequential sampling enabled fifteen LGBTQ women youth workers, of different ages, social class, ethnicities and youth work settings to be interviewed. Semi-structured audio-recorded interviews (of 60 or 90 minutes) were undertaken with each respondent; most being interviewed twice. Transcriptions of the interviews allowed an ongoing revisiting of the interviews thus enabling an exhaustive focus to identify the important themes and subthemes for the template approach to thematic analysis. This approach was decided on after several false starts using narrative approaches to analysis. However, the flexible nature of the template approach allowed some of the key values of narrative research to be sustained through the analysis of the data.

The template for analysis was not a neat and ordered structure but rather a messy process that went through several inventions and re-inventions before ending up as an organised and ordered list of themes that assisted in the analysis and dissemination of findings. This template was crucial in putting together the findings chapters that form the rest of this thesis. Themes identified on

the template include the stories and scripts of becoming and how the respondents moved towards their current self-awareness of their own sexuality (Ch.5) and the impact of respondents' awareness of their LGBTQ sexuality on how they name their self at this point in time (Ch.6). Why respondents chose to share or not share information about their self with young people and how they knew when and where to set boundaries in regard to sharing information about their self forms the third theme (Ch.7). How these youth workers used their self within their professional relationships with young people is the next theme (Ch.8) with the theme of change being the final findings chapter (9). Quotations from respondents are presented in italics throughout these chapters to ensure that they are easily distinguished from any quotations from the literature.

## Chapter 5: Stories of becoming

This chapter is the first of five chapters which move on from the literature and methodology chapters to a discussion of the findings from the research. This chapter discusses the stories of how the respondents moved towards their current self-awareness of their own sexuality.

### Introduction

The chapter commences by introducing each of the 15 respondents with a brief thumbnail sketch. The chapter then presents five identified themes within the stories of the respondents, as they grew up and moved into adulthood with a developing awareness of their LGBTQ sexuality. These stories are sometimes offered in a narrative manner (in this and following chapters) with long extracts from respondents' stories. This approach allows some of the values of narrative research to be reflected in the presentation of the findings (as discussed above: 4.5.1). These themes commence with a focus on the gradual awareness of respondents' LGBTQ sexuality and how they viewed or managed stigma (drawing on Almack, 2007) as they were growing up. Section 5.2 moves to their sharing about their LGBTQ sexuality with their family and friends, emphasising coming out as an ongoing process (reflecting the literature: Casey, 2002; Valentine et al, 2003; Trotter, 2005; Almack, 2007; Orne, 2011; Devlin, 2015). A discussion regarding some of their experiences within school is the focus of the next theme (5.3), with attention on issues around their experiences within their school settings. The next theme (5.4) discussed is about these youth workers' own style and how seeing gender as fluid rather than binaried (drawing on Monroe, 2005) was useful for some. The final section (5.5) focusses on the importance of friendships and relationships with boys and men in their formative and teenage years..

### The fifteen respondents:

A brief thumbnail sketch of each respondent, at the time of the interviews, is offered here so that the reader can put into some context the comments offered by respondents both within this chapter and later findings chapters.

#### *Amy*

Amy, 26, is of white British and working class heritage, brought up by her mother, (who was a teenage parent) and step father, not knowing who her father was until she was 14. Although Amy had only graduated as a professionally qualified youth and community worker in 2015 (six months prior to the interviews for this study) she had worked as a youth leader within youth work settings

since she was 16. Her youth work experience was mainly within mainstream (i.e. not LGBT) youth work settings although she was involved with some targeted work with LGBT young people in her 3<sup>rd</sup> and final year University degree placement.

#### *Beth*

Beth, 24, of white working class heritage was aware of her privilege as a graduate and white British woman. She was bullied during her school years due to her gay appearance long before she was aware of her own homosexuality. She had 5 years' youth and community work experience, mostly with LGBT young people. She also worked, in a different role, with mainstream young people, mostly young men, who were at risk of CSE. She was undertaking professional studies when interviewed.

#### *Carla*

Carla, 25, is of African-Caribbean dual heritage with a white middle class mother and '*working class*' African-Caribbean father. Carla grew up with her mother in a working class neighbourhood and saw herself as '*between*' working and middle class. She has a degree in drama and was an experienced youth worker, working in an LGBT focussed voluntary sector organisation.

#### *Ellie*

Ellie, 33, of white British heritage, named herself as middle class but was very clear that her parents had strong working class roots, both leaving school as teenagers but graduating in their 30s. She described her upbringing as '*liberal catholic*' but was not religious. Ellie had been working in youth work since her teenage years. Her degree in combined studies, did not qualify her as a professional youth worker. However her long years of reflective practice, her level 3 qualification in youth work and her hunger for theoretical understanding and support from people who taught youth work ensured her professional approach to her work and management role in an LGBT focused organisation.

#### *Fern*

Fern, 27, is a white bisexual feminist of working class and Irish heritage. She grew up in a small nuclear family with one sibling, a sister. Her father died before she came out as bisexual when she was 14. Fern had been a youth worker for 10 years and worked in two different half time roles. One role was within a supportive LGBT focussed organisation and the other: a generic youth work setting where she felt unsupported in discussing her sexuality.



### Gaby

Gaby, was 23 and a recent graduate of youth and community work. She named herself as working class and is of dual heritage with a working class Afro-Caribbean father and a dual heritage mother. Her experience of youth work was limited to her placements whilst a student. These were in a youth club setting for one year and a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) for two years.

### Helena

Helena, of white British heritage, was 68. She grew up in a white, working class mill town leaving school at 15. To *'avoid going to work in a mill and the other option of marriage'* Helena joined the air force where she was excluded from the *'middle class lesbian cliques'* and severely challenged by the *'witch hunts'* aimed at rooting out homosexuals. She qualified as a youth and community worker as a mature graduate. Helena still saw herself as working class and had many decades of experience working with LGBT-identifying young people.

### Issie

Issie, of white British heritage, was 33 and saw herself as middle class. Her paternal grandfather had been influential in the Royal Ulster Constabulary; her father a Protestant from Northern Ireland with nationalist politics. Her mother, of working class Catholic heritage, was very active in the *'Troops Out'* of Ireland movement. Issie's parents separated and when growing up she did not live in a nuclear family but *'in a household [with her mother] that included adults with a range of sexual preferences'*. Issie qualified as a professional youth worker at postgraduate level and was working with groups of young people who did not predominantly identify as LGBT.

### Jane

Jane, 38, is of white British working class heritage but *'is now providing a middle class family for my kids'*. Her father left school at 14 due to his family situation and Jane knew poverty during her own childhood. Jane attended a church based youth club as a teenager and graduated in theology and applied social science, undertaking a postgraduate qualification in youth and community work at the age of 25. With 10 years' experience in secular and generic youth work settings she was working as a manager in a voluntary community work setting.

### Liz

Liz, 57, is of white British middle class heritage. Liz, who is professionally qualified, has been working as a youth worker for 34 years. She had a wide range of mainstream youth and

community work experience in different towns and cities with young people from many different backgrounds. She was promoted to a management role but took a step back to face to face youth work when the local authority where she was employed were reorganising and making cuts to youth work provision. When interviewed she worked half time mostly with young people from Asian heritage.

#### *Marie*

Marie, 55, of white British heritage, was a manager within a local authority youth service. Marie, whose father was in the British forces, lived in Germany until she was 15. Although her father had worked his way up in the army he had working class roots but Marie was aware that due to her own education and employment she had *'become middle class'*. She had worked as a professionally qualified youth and community worker for over 35 years. Her 3 children were now adults.

#### *Patricia*

Patricia, 51, is of white Irish working class heritage. Patricia *'still feels working-class'* despite her university education. She still lived in the town in which she grew up with her working class partner who she has been with for 27 years. Patricia has worked in a range of different roles within the same local authority youth service for 20 years but had recently taken a step down from management to return to face to face youth work as the local authority had reorganised and reduced their youth work force. Over the past years she had gradually increased her own role with LGBT young people and this took eighty-five percent of her time.

#### *Nell*

Nell, 31, is white British. She was born into poverty but adopted by a middle class family who then *'kicked me out'* at the age of 16 when they viewed her as a bad influence on their son due to her questioning her gender. Despite homelessness and years of struggle Nell graduated as a youth and community worker at the age of 21. Her 10 years of, mostly main-stream, youth and community work experience had been varied as she had moved from job to job and also done some world-wide travelling.

#### *Rosie*

Rosie, 51, is dual heritage (Afro-Caribbean/white) and of working class heritage. Attending a Catholic school and being raised by her single white mother, for whom she was the carer, meant

that Rosie had many challenges around her own identity when growing up. She attended a youth club from age of 16 *'on my night off'* from caring. She qualified as a professional youth and community worker at the age of 23 despite the fact that *'study was ... a luxury in my family'*. Rosie had worked in a range of youth and community work roles in the past 30 years. She was another casualty of austerity cuts, having decided to leave youth work and move into a community education role about 5 years before the interview where a small proportion of her time was around LGBT issues.

### *Sabidah*

Sabidah, 52, of South Asian and Muslim heritage, has working class roots. She was aware that *'having a big house and good salary'* meant that she was now middle class. Sabidah left school at 16 but worked her way through to a postgraduate qualification in youth work. She had been working in youth work for twenty years, in the city in which she grew up. She worked with young people from a range of backgrounds, both in terms of sexuality and ethnicity.

These brief biographies highlight the varied backgrounds and identities that these youth workers used to name themselves using simple categories (offered in the interviews). These categories will be problematised in discussions within all of the findings chapters.

### *5.1 A growing awareness of LGBQ sexuality*

This section discusses the growing self-awareness of respondents' LGBQ sexuality as they were growing up. Within this section there is a breadth of stories ranging from respondents who had support from family and friends in their coming out experiences to those who were very nervous of the coming out process or lost family and friends during this process. This variety of coming out stories spanned a breadth of feelings and responses from respondents. There was Gaby's *'disgust'* with herself because she was *'a wierdo'*. There were the more typical responses: for example, Ellie's story where she gradually came to an awareness of her LGBQ sexuality and was able to negotiate her way around how to tell her friends and parents of her LGBQ sexuality. Nell's experience was less typical: her experiences of naming and coming to terms with her LGBQ sexuality was impacted on by the questioning of her gender when a teenager and being made homeless by her foster parents. Stories which evidence the range of experiences will be offered in a narrative manner.

Many respondents had known that they were *'different'* (Patricia at 4; Ellie at 10), *'a weirdo'* (Gaby) or that they *'fancied girls'* (Amy and Helena) or *'wanted to hold her hand'* (Nell at 10):

mostly when they were between eight and eleven years old. This reflects findings in other research (Bridget and Lucille, 1996; Diamond & Savin-Williams, 2000; D'Augelli, 2002) although it was noted in the literature that this average age covered wide discrepancies (Schneider, 2001). A few respondents (Amy, Sabidah and Patricia) talked about the fact that they '*always knew*' that they fancied girls but did not put a name or label to these early feelings. Amy was clear that she knew that she was attracted to girls before coming into contact with other LGBTQ people. This reflects other research which suggests that many women who come out as LGBTQ in their teen years '*have always known*' of their same-sex attractions (Schneider, 2001, p75). Some respondents were very particular about their style when they were small and '*refused to wear a ... dress*' (Jane at the age of two). This demonstrated their determination to challenge the heteronormativity and gender binarism which usually impacts on young people (following Rich, 1999 as discussed in chapter 3). This awareness of difference and the expectations on girls to conform to particular stereotypes (Bragg et al, 2018) might have been to do with divergence from expected gendered norms rather than necessarily linked to same-sex attraction. It is important to note here that heterosexual adults also often recount memories of difference from their childhood and teenage years (Savin-Williams, 2006).

Their awareness of how they were different was not always matched by an understanding of what a LGBTQ label might mean. Most respondents became cognisant of the reality that LGBTQ labels brought for them between the ages of ten and fourteen, reflecting findings in other research (D'Augelli et al, 1998; Diamond & Savin-Williams, 2000; Postuvan et al, 2019). This cognisance developed in different ways for these women. Some came to a realisation through telling someone that they had a girlfriend (Beth at 15) and noting people's reaction to this, or a woman making a pass at them (Amy at 16) or having '*sex with a woman and [thinking] ... that was fun*' (Sabidah).

Ellie's coming out story was quite typical of other respondents' experiences and is recounted at some length below.

*'When I was little I was a tomboy, or at least that's what people called me, so I suppose that's what I was. I didn't really have a ... sense of what that meant, or perhaps ... my brain wasn't developed enough to make sense of what that might mean. ... I really loved my teacher and really loved my babysitter and things. ... is that just what little girls do, that they just have those attachments, or was it kind of the*

*earlyness of realising that I might be a lesbian? By the time I was about twelve I was really kind of sure there was something different, and I would write stuff down. I'd write stories where there was like two girls that would fall in love, but I had a disassociation with that. ... I'm writing that but that isn't me. ... [At this time in films and TV] mostly you just saw lesbians in prisons and ... [that] was one way of being a lesbian ... so that can't be me then. Or... things went wrong. Somebody would die or they're a lesbian because they'd been in a domestic abuse situation, ... neither of those sort of resonated with me, so I thought, well this isn't me. So then I suppose teenage years were just kind of knowing something, starting to work it out a bit more, and thinking, and having some crushes on friends and stuff. A friend of mine ... wrote 'GAY' on networked computers [when I was 15 at school] in pink letters ... she just did it to be stupid, but I said 'oh actually I am'. It just sort of fell out, and that was kind of it then, the cat was out of the bag'.*

So Ellie's growing awareness of difference or possible LGBTQ desires was not assisted by the images of lesbian women that she saw on TV and film as these images did not fit with her own experience. It was almost by chance that the label gay was offered by a friend and was accepted by Ellie both to herself and openly to her friend. This links to literature which notes that coming out can lead to positive support and solidarity rather than the more usually assumed negative challenges (Cass, 1979; Schneider, 2001; Orne, 2011) as discussed in 3.1.6.

Gaby's discussion of her self-awareness and how she dealt with ideas of homosexuality was quite different to other respondents and offers evidence of 'confusion, turmoil and vacillation', reflecting the literature (Schneider, 2001, p76). Gaby talked about her shock and fear at thinking that she was attracted to women. She hid behind an idea that maybe it was '*normal*' for a young woman of fifteen or sixteen to be attracted to women teachers. She did not know how to deal with this attraction so '*just pretended [to herself] it wasn't happening*'. Gaby thought that if she could only find a boyfriend she would be cured as '*it was instilled in me from early that to be gay is wrong*'. When a relationship with a boy, at the age of 16, did not feel right she decided that, even though she probably was '*gay*' she would '*pretend that everything'll be alright, no one will ever know*'. Gaby went back to hiding, maybe from herself, or vacillating and ended up very depressed and leaving sixth form college despite being able academically. Existing research shows that a pattern of depression is common amongst LGBTQ young people (D'Augelli, 2002; Formby,

2013; Stonewall, 2017; The national LGBT&T partnership, 2017). In an interview Gaby recounted how she *'wrote a letter to'* herself when she was sixteen, saying that she would *'come out ... when eighteen ... I prepared myself'*. Subsequently, when she was eighteen, she did introduce her girlfriend to her parents. Gaby seemed the least confident respondent in terms of not wanting to be seen by colleagues and young people as LGBTQ. Gaby's hiding from her own growing realisation of her gay sexuality can be seen as the *'the defensive management of stigma ... [and the] resisting [of] stigmatised identities ... [and] undesired difference ... [or] covering'* (Goffman, 1968 cited in Almack, 2007) which is used to prevent the stigma looming too large for the person (Almack, 2007). Noting that this *'covering'* or internalised homophobia as powerful was something that Helena talked about in relation to the young people that she worked with. The literature shows that this internalised homophobia is still an ongoing issue in 21<sup>st</sup> Century (Formby, 2013; Robertson, 2013; Postuvan et al, 2019) despite changes in attitudes and legislation.

As noted above, the data shows divergences of experiences. Gaby's experiences were in stark contrast to Issie who was brought up in an *'immediate community ... [which] included a lot of gay people ... It never ... crossed my mind that it was not okay [to be gay], that ... was my starting point: I was starting from a point of complete acceptance'*. For the first years of her life Issie lived:

*in a shared house full of all sorts of different adults, it wasn't just a nuclear family ... there was lots of different adults who had lots of different sorts of relationships ... A guy called 'Mike' was openly gay; his partner 'Kevin' was always round at our house ... Two [lesbian] women ... lived with us [until I was two] ... And then 'Jen' ... she was gay and then [she] randomly [appeared] with a man and is not gay anymore [but] extremely straight.*

Moving on from the stories of their own experiences of childhood and adolescence, some respondents noted that their own experiences may be different from the LGBT young people they work with who seemed more aware of what LGBT labels mean and apparently more likely to be out with their friends and families at an earlier age. As Amy said: *'they're coming out as trans at [pause], at sort of fourteen, fifteen, if not younger, and the media probably has a big role in that'*. There is evidence that the age at which young people name themselves as LGBT is getting younger (Morgan, 2013). There is more information available to young people about LGBT identities (Casey, 2002; Morgan, 2013; Postuvan et al, 2019) and more awareness of their own agency in

how they name themselves around their, sometimes changing, sexual or gendered identities (Morgan, 2012).

The next section moves on to discuss the breadth of experiences of these women in coming out as LGBTQ to their family and friends.

### *5.2 Sharing of experiences with family and peers*

Most respondents reported coming out to their peers around the age of sixteen before coming out to their parents at seventeen or eighteen: as reflected in other research (Diamond & Savin-Williams, 2000; D'Augelli, 2002; Almack, 2007). Other research suggests that teenagers come out to their parents and friends around the age of sixteen as this is when the 'benefits of coming out' might outweigh the costs (Almack, 2007). A few had come out to youth workers in the first instance (Amy, Fern and Rosie): where the benefits, from a supportive and caring adult, would be almost guaranteed. Some respondents waited until they had left home before telling their parents that they were gay (Ellie, Jane, Marie and Rosie) as this meant they had more space for their own personal life and were not in danger of being made homeless. Waiting for the transition to living independently from parents reflects other research (Valentine et al, 2003). By the age of eighteen most respondents were confident that telling their parents would assist them to develop as a LGBTQ person and so, as Gaby put it, '*be able to breathe*'. This discussion emphasises the link between coming out as LGBTQ and developing self-esteem and self-confidence as noted in other literature (Schneider, 2001).

Many respondents told their mother before their father about their lesbian, gay or bisexual identity. This is noted in other research as common. Young people, expecting their mother to be 'positive and caring' (Valentine et al, 2003, p487) will often tell mothers, before their fathers, of their LGBTQ sexuality. Respondents reported that in some instances, mothers were not as supportive as fathers. Patricia's mother '*kicked me out*'; Gaby's mother didn't talk to her '*for about a week*'; Sabidah's' mother did not talk to her for '*about two years*'. For some respondents the very challenging reaction from their mother might have been linked with the mothers' feelings of loss and the assumption that having a lesbian daughter would mean that there would never be grandchildren (noted by Jane, Marie and Sabidah). Such feelings of loss were also noted by other researchers (Valentine et al, 2003). Valentine et al (2003) found in their research that parents and siblings might well not understand LGBT issues when confronted with these facts by the young person. This issue was also reflected in these respondents' experiences.

Some writers suggest that fathers were more likely to voice disgust or distaste than mothers (Valentine et al, 2003). This was not corroborated by these respondents in this research. Beth's father asked her if she was happy and when she replied 'yes' he simply said: *'well that's alright then'*. Gaby's father was also more supportive than her mother. Beth's and Gaby's experiences is at odds with other literature which suggests that mothers, as the main care giver within the family, are likely to be more supportive than fathers (Valentine and Butler, 2003; Valentine et al, 2013; Postuvan et al, 2019).

Many respondents noted the importance of the on-going process of coming out (as discussed in Ch.3). On naming their LGBTQ sexuality to family, parents were often shocked or hostile to start with but gradually became more supportive or accepting. Coming out to parents was 'a continuous dialogue between family members' as noted in the literature (Valentine et al, 2003, p487). Some respondents talked about their parents being more accepting than they had expected. Ellie, echoing the response of many other respondents' parents, said her *'parents blamed each other "what did we do wrong?" ... [but] got more used to it over the years'*. Ellie went on to explain that the coming out to her parents was *'not a defining moment ... [as it was] more important what happens the weeks, the months, the years after... making it present in their lives ... it's the best way for them to get over their ... prejudices'*.

Respondents who reported the most acceptance from parents when coming out to them often grew up in families or households where there were other LGBTQ identifying members. For Carla this was a maternal aunt; for Jane this was two paternal uncles; for Issie this was LGBTQ members of her extended household. Liz's mother was an actor and had had close friends who were gay; Sabidah's siblings were supportive of her when she came out to them and one of her brothers later identified as gay; Fern noted that her mother identified as LGBTQ sometime after Fern outed herself as bisexual. This seems to be in contrast to the suggestion in the literature that young women with LGBTQ role models in the family may find coming out and accepting the expected path of family to be difficult (Valentine et al, 2003).

Only two of the fifteen respondents were asked to leave or were thrown out of their parents' house when they told their parents about their LGBTQ sexuality. Homelessness due to coming out to parents is noted within the literature (D'Augelli, 2002; Valentine and Butler, 2003; Tierney and Ward, 2017) but there is no evidence as to its prevalence. For Patricia having to leave her home was not as devastating as it could have been as she was able to move in with her Nan, who was



accepting of Patricia's LGBTQ sexuality. Nell's experience, as a young person who had been adopted, was much more challenging than the experiences of other respondents. In places Nell's own words are quoted within this story that is paraphrased here at some length.

Nell came out to friends at the age of fifteen because she *'couldn't cope with the isolation ... [she had] been holding it in for two years ... not knowing what was going on, nobody knew me for who I was'*. Some friends were accepting of her LGBT sexuality but others, including her *'best friend at school ... walked away and didn't want to know me'*. She told one friend, who attended a different school, by letter saying that she had the *'same tendencies as Anna from Big brother ... I couldn't actually use the word lesbian'*. The friend responded positively saying *"pink's really fit" ... exchange of nods ... that means that I can talk to you [although] ... our relationship did change'*. Nell also had a close male friend who was accepting as *'he knew that I needed a safe space to talk ... he was one of my best friends at school'*. When Nell was sixteen her parents *'thought something was wrong ... "you need to tell us what is wrong" ... "I'm gay" ... "no you're not" ... I couldn't talk to them ... [as they were] not supporting ... "it's not normal" ... they were exploring [their own views of LGBTQ sexuality] ... on me, I was feeling very vulnerable. ... [The] roles were reversed ... as they didn't understand what I was talking about. I wanted my parents there for me ... [I had] no choice but to tell them ... I just felt invisible ... [as I was living] two different lives ... [which was] so isolating.... I was struggling so much ... I told them to protect them [from having to live different lives] ... my brother was being bullied and suffering ... We had a bit of a scuffle. ... They threw me out of the house'*. A few months later her parents allowed her to return home but then *'kicked me out again at seventeen. ... [I had] lots of challenging experiences and was lucky to come out of that time alive'*. The challenging experiences from which Nell was lucky to escape went from sofa surfing at friends' homes; to *'sleeping on park benches'*, to going home with people who had picked her up in gay clubs. Nell recounted that she was not able to go to University despite having done well at college as her parents *'weren't going to give me [the] ... proof'* that she was estranged from them to enable her to claim financial support. So Nell was *'stopped from going to higher education. ... Isolated from the majority of my friends ... wasn't able to see my sibling ... from having [had] a really close relationship with him. ... I wouldn't have survived without support from tutors at college'*. Her college tutors allowed her to attend college for another year until she had sufficient evidence of being estranged from her parents for twelve months thus enabling her to access appropriate funding for university. College tutors also ensured that she had somewhere safe to live. There was *'no guidance ... on the scene at sixteen ... no support ... [until she joined]*

*the LGBT community [at university] who took the place of my family. ... I was very involved in LGBT politics [at university] and that took a lot of energy - fighting for other people ... I formed my ... identity through that ... as no gender identity ... could define me. ... [It was a] very complicated time ... [but made me a] stronger feminist'.*

Some of Nell's experiences were reflected in the literature as LGBT young people may find themselves rejected and homeless in coming out to parents (Tierney, & Ward, 2017), as noted above. The fact that some 'families have little understanding of lesbian and gay lifestyles, and are themselves in need of support when they learn of their son's or daughter's sexuality' (Valentine et al, 2003, p487) may have linked to Nell's situation. Her parents were so dismissive of Nell's needs that she was not able to signpost them to any appropriate support.

Jane and Nell were the only respondents who talked about going out on the gay scene when young. Jane told how she had gone to her nearest city centre gay scene on the bus on her own when she was when only sixteen years old. It '*wasn't a really safe place ... [I] had to lie about where I was going. ... I put myself in some really risky situations'*. In retrospect she realised that she was lucky to have got away with this adventure without any harm coming to her at all. Nell's experiences were probably even riskier, as recounted above. Young people finding that the gay scene was not a safe space is discussed within other research (Valentine, Skelton & Butler, 2002; Scourfield et al, 2008). Being out in gay spaces leads to the increased possibility of LGBT young people being victims of 'homophobic violence' (Herek & Berril, 1992 and Valentine, 1993 both cited in Valentine et al, 2002, p13) or entering into 'emotionally or physically abusive relationships' (Valentine, 1993, p12). Carla, in this research, also talked about her experience of the gay scene in her home town when she was an adult and how she did not find this space to be safe for herself as a BAME woman (discussed below: Ch.6).

The above breadth of comments, although not always echoing points made within the literature, does emphasise that coming out is a long and often difficult process (Casey, 2002; Valentine et al, 2003; Trotter, 2005; Almack, 2007; Orne, 2011; Devlin, 2015). Stories from respondents recounted here have largely echoed the literature in suggesting again the varied experiences of young women coming out to family regarding their sexuality, although the very negative reactions from fathers (suggested by Valentine et al, 2003) was often not encountered. The next section moves on to discuss the respondents' experiences in school.

### 5.3 Experiences at school

Whilst memories of school and early social life might not be accurate as *'people get stuck in their own versions of their histories'* (Ellie), it is probable that these fifteen women's experiences were not typical of most young LGB people's experience of school in past decades. Most respondents reported largely positive experiences from their school days, thus setting them apart from the average LGB young person who often has a very troubled experience through their teenage years as noted in 1.3.3 and the literature (Stonewall, 2017).

Only three respondents (Beth, Fern and Nell, all of white British heritage) found themselves bullied at school for being LGB. This is in contrast with the current situation where 45% of LGB young people are being bullied at school nationally (Stonewall, 2017a). Four respondents seemed to be able to literally fight their own corner (Sabidah, of Asian heritage; Issie and Patricia of white British heritage and Rosie, dual heritage). Others were able to put on a confident and popular façade (Carla and Gaby who are both of dual heritage, and Marie who is white British). Some just did not get bullied (Jane and Liz, both white British). This reflects findings in the literature that some LGB young people learnt to fight back when faced with homophobia or biphobia: so *'gaining strength through adversity'* (Scourfield et al, 2008, p332). Of the respondents that said that they got into fights, some talked about fighting for the reputation of their siblings (Issie and Sabidah) or their vulnerable friends (Sabidah). Two respondents talked about being verbally *'ribbed'* (Ellie) or called names *'not that it bothered me ... but I didn't want to add fuel to their fire'* (Amy). Women who became youth workers were maybe more confident in themselves as young people and so may be more likely than the average LGBQ identifying teenager to stand up for themselves. Ellie put this experience clearly: *'I don't think that I was particularly susceptible to bullying ... [as I] managed general social spaces [confidently] ... and moved around between different social groups'*. Interestingly several of the respondents found space for an alternative image within music. This included Fern and Beth who had both been bullied at school.

This section has recounted some of the experiences of these respondents within school and elsewhere as they became more aware of their LGBQ sexuality and emphasises that these women did not seem to be typical of other teenagers, as most seemed to be able to cope without being intimidated by peers through these important transitional years. The following section presents findings from respondents regarding their memory of their childhood in terms of being labelled as a tomboy or dressing in a non-feminine manner.

#### 5.4 What is my style?

Most (eleven of fifteen) respondents said that they were labelled as a tomboy when they were growing up. Four of these eleven were also quite femme in their appearance. Only Gaby noted that she did not like the tomboy label. Interestingly other research suggests that accepting a tomboy label was not necessarily linked to LGB sexuality formation (Schneider, 2001; Wright, 2016). Of the four respondents that did not talk of being labelled as tomboys, Helena described herself as butch when she was growing up and Nell said that she was *'androgynous'*. Many of the twelve respondents who did not identify as femme spoke about wearing boys' or men's style of clothes in preference to dresses or girls' clothes. Jane noted that there was a *'fine balance between gender neutral [clothes] and not drawing attention to yourself'*. She pointed out that the *'90s grunge [style of dress] ... big boots, ripped jeans, t-shirts ... made it easier [for her] ... to find a style'*.

Fern and Beth, who had been bullied at school, as noted above, both moved into goth music and culture where there was more space for *'gender fluidity and ... gender variance'* (Fern) and where they were more *'likely to meet lesbians'* (Beth) than in other teenage groups. This point is reflected in the literature which suggests that *'lesbianism and goth fashion'* are sometimes connected (Scourfield et al, 2008, p334).

Many respondents mentioned having shaved heads (Nell) or short hair. Jane and Helena talked of having short hair at the age of eleven but for Patricia this was not until she was sixteen, as her mother would not let her get it cut sooner. Some talked about not wanting to join in with girls' friendship groups as they preferred to play football (Carla, Gaby, Nell and Patricia) or hang out with boys rather than girls (Liz, Jane, Ellie and Marie). Gaby was told that *'you're not normal ... [because she was not] playing with girls'* but other respondents did not note any negative impact from their friendships with boys.

It seems that these women did not fit into the stereotypical and heteronormative gender binary division so often expected of boys and girls (discussed in Ch.3). Most were happy to be seen as girls but some refused to wear dresses. Many wanted to have short hair and play outdoor games such as football: usually associated with boys. Whether this need or desire to be something other than the stereotypical girl was due to an early awareness of an essentialised LGBQ sexuality is impossible to know and probably pointless to consider (following Sedgwick, 1991). It does however seem to agree with other research, viewing gender as *'more finely grained than ... the*

binary system' (Monro, 2005, p37). This assists in understanding the experiences of these women. In their childhood and adolescence these respondents could not be pigeon-holed into a simple binary-gendered space. This reflects other research findings. Monro (2005, p37) concluded from her research that gender is 'formed via the interplay of different characteristics associated with gender and sexuality'. It seems that young women growing up in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, where sexual and gender-fluid spaces are more often named (Yougov, 2019), might have more space to be fluid with their gender identity (Monro, 2005) than those respondents who were growing up in the mid or late 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The above discussion suggests that most of the respondents, despite many having grown up in the more binaried times of the mid-twentieth century, came to a fairly easy acceptance of their LGBTQ sexuality. They were not too troubled by labels (that might have been seen as negative) or wanting to join in games with boys or wear what was seen as boys' clothes. The next section moves on to explore the use, or not, of a bisexual label by respondents and the importance of their friendships with boys and men.

### 5.5 Bisexuality and friendships with men or boys

Three respondents had identified as bisexual at some point in their life (Liz, Carla and Fern). Fern (the only respondent identifying as bisexual at the time of the research) was positive about her bisexuality from the age of 14 when she told a youth worker that she liked girls. On being given a booklet entitled '*I think I'm a lesbian, now what?*' Fern was very clear that lesbian was not the label that fitted her feelings or sexual identity. As a consequence, Fern decided to do her own research at the local library, so demonstrating '*great confidence ... [and] asking the librarian to order some books*' about bisexuality despite her young age. Liz identified as bisexual from the age of sixteen until she was in a settled relationship with a woman at the age of thirty when she began to name herself lesbian. Carla identified as bisexual from the age of about twelve until she was fifteen but was not openly out as bisexual or gay until the age of seventeen. Since then Carla has identified as gay or queer rather than bisexual. Two other respondents had had relationships with boys or men but did not identify as bisexual. Issie, who in her teen years had flirtations with both girls and boys only had relationships with women since she was about seventeen and was very clear, even passionate, that she never saw herself as bisexual. Rosie had had a short sexual relationship with a man with whom she then had a child. She worked at staying in this relationship because she wanted her child to have a father as she felt that she had suffered for having grown

up in poverty with a single mother. She was still close friends with this man but had not had an intimate relationship with any man since.

This reluctance to name oneself as bisexual may link to the biphobia often found within lesbian or gay communities (Monro, 2015). Interestingly, Fern felt that she faced *'less oppression as a bisexual woman'* than women identifying as homosexual. This is a perception that is at odds with the literature which suggests that bisexual women are likely to suffer more oppression as they face both homophobia and biphobia (Monro, 2015) as discussed above (3.1.5).

Eight respondents talked about having had close friendships with boys in their younger days, often to hide their sexuality from their peers or parents (Amy, Beth, Gaby, Issie, Liz, Nell, Sabidah and Rosie). For some, these close male friends might have been gay or bisexual themselves (as in the cases of Amy and Beth) or just accepting that the respondent did not want to have a physical relationship with them (for Nell). These friendships were often important and ensured that respondents were safe from some hostility as they were not so likely to be labelled as gay and therefore not so vulnerable to bullying. Issie pointed out that her experiences in her teens reflected this. She recounted that her interest *'in boys as well as girls [meant that] ... people couldn't put me into a box'*. Gaby said that she *'made up crushes on male teachers'* when in fact it was women teachers that she fancied. Liz talked about having a series of relationships with men when she was quite young so that she *'never had time to think'* about her sexuality, although as noted above she did identify as bisexual from being sixteen to her mid-thirties. Other respondents noted that they had never had any interest, pretend or otherwise, with boys (Jane and Marie). The usefulness of finding support from male friends is noted in other research (Bragg et al, 2018) where young women had *'respectful male friends ... or boy true friends ... who supported ... [them] in their non-conformity'* (Bragg et al, 2018, p425).

The discussion regarding bisexuality might confirm the suggestion within the literature of biphobia within lesbian and gay communities (following Monro, 2015). Despite having had sexual attractions or relationships with men these respondents were mostly not comfortable with naming themselves as bisexual.

## Conclusion

The variety of coming out stories shared by respondents suggests a breadth of different approaches to managing their transitions from young person to an out and proud LGBTQ adult.

Coming out was, for all respondents, an on ongoing process of 'self-definition and self-clarification' (see Rich, 1980a, p.xx) not a one-off disclosure. This corroborates other research (Rich, 1980a; Weeks et al 2001; D'Augelli, 2002; Valentine et al, 2003; Almack, 2007) which viewed coming out as this 'ongoing process' (Rich, 1980a, p.xx) through which people have to negotiate the 'heterosexual assumptions' (Weeks et al 2001, p80) of those around. Being able to prevent homophobia or biphobia becoming a negative issue in their lives depended on the context in which the stigma which was thrown at them (Goffman, 1968 cited in Almack, 2007), sometimes by physically fighting back (following Scourfield, et al, 2008). Whilst most of these respondents seemed to have thrived through this coming out process it cannot be assumed that these youth workers were typical of LGBTQ young women as they found their place within the wider community at whatever age they started this coming out process.

It was also evident from the data that respondents had very different experiences in terms of being accepted by family, peers and friends and this did not appear to be linked to issues of ethnicity, social class or age. There was some commonality around the age of their awareness of their LGBTQ sexuality or difference (between eight and eleven years for most), which reflects findings from other research (Bridget and Lucille, 1996; D'Augelli et al, 1998; Diamond & Savin-Williams, 2000; Schneider, 2001; D'Augelli, 2002), although there were a few respondents who seemed to have some awareness of their own difference at a much earlier age. Most respondents came out to their peers around the age of sixteen; reflecting the age noted in the literature (Diamond & Savin-Williams, 2000). Coming out to peers first was safer than coming out to family and those with whom they had closer relationships (reflecting Orne, 2011). The naming of their LGBTQ sexuality was probably important in developing their own agency and self-confidence as such naming can recreate 'the past and validates the present' (see Rich, 1980a, p.xx). Most respondents came out to parents when they were ready to leave home or had already left home (often eighteen), again reflecting other research (Valentine et al, 2003). A few respondents decided to make their LGBTQ sexuality known to their parents earlier; possibly a 'dangerous decision' (see Orne, 2011, p696). Nell had felt very isolated and in need of support from her parents. She may have felt that naming her feelings to others could 'validate' (see Rich, 1988, p.xx) her own LGBTQ sexuality. Unfortunately, this 'explosive knowledge' (Orne, 2011, p693) when shared with Nell's parents led to unforeseen and negative consequences for Nell (following Orne, 2011) when she was asked to leave the family home: something that is common for many LGBT young people when they first come out to their parents (Tierney and Ward, 2017). Amongst these

respondents being rejected in this way by family was only experienced by two of the fifteen respondents, although some went for years without their parents (usually mothers) talking to them. This emphasises again that these women youth workers were not representative of the wider LGBTQ population in their experiences through their teenage years.

Most respondents managed their school years without being the victim of bullying, unlike the 45% of LGB young people who are currently bullied at school (Stonewall, 2017). For some respondents this involved them in standing out, either verbally or being willing to fight, to support their peers or siblings who might have been bullied due to sexuality or other issues. Most (thirteen of the fifteen) respondents were called butch or tom boys (a term not necessarily linked to LGBTQ sexuality: Schneider, 2001). All, apart from Gaby, seemed to have been comfortable with these labels and most (including Gaby) spoke positively about having short hair, dressing in non-feminine clothes and being involved in sports and hobbies that were usually seen as male interests such as football. Understanding their gender identity as a space on a continuum of gendered identities offers a better fit than the more usual binaried division of gender (drawing on Monro, 2005).

Many respondents (eight) talked about having important relationships with boys or young men as they were growing up. For some this was because they were attracted to boys as well as girls even though most did not name themselves as bisexual. For others this was to provide a safe space, sometimes to hide their LGBTQ sexuality from others, or just to find some solidarity as discussed in other research (Bragg et al, 2018).

This chapter, focussing on stories of becoming in the respondents' younger days now moves on to chapter 6 which focusses on their adult lives and how ideas of intersectionality may be useful in understanding how they named their selves.



## Ch. 6: Being and the acceptance or rejection of identities and labels

This chapter follows from first findings chapter (5) which discussed how the respondents moved towards and shared their awareness of their LGBTQ sexuality with family and friends. This chapter discusses the impact of respondents' awareness of this LGBTQ sexuality on how they named themselves. It examines to what extent respondents' LGBTQ sexuality was about seeing themselves in political solidarity with women in a male dominated world (Zita, 1981) and 'centrally involved with a community of self-identified' LGBTQ women (Ferguson, 1981, p166).

### Introduction

The chapter starts by examining how respondents understood sexual identities in terms of essentialism or social constructionism and how they viewed their own journeys to their current identities in terms of these ideas. The findings link to a range of literature including Plummer (1981); Abbot et al (2005) and Weeks (2007). The discussion touches on the narratives of self that were 'socially available' (Stephens, 2011, p67) to these respondents. Section 6.2, which is at the heart of this chapter, examines how respondents named or identified themselves in terms of a range of possible labels such as queer, lesbian, gay, bisexual and feminist. It appears that the acceptance or rejection of certain labels may be usefully understood in terms of the intersectionality between the issues of sexuality, ethnicity, religion, social class and age (drawing on Crenshaw, 1991).

### 6.1. Essentialism or social constructionism

There was an interesting continuum of respondents' views to sexuality being seen from an essentialist, social constructed or from a queer approach. Four respondents (Helena, Amy, Patricia and Marie) were clear that they were born gay but three of these (Helena being the exception) suggested that other LGBTQ people talked about having had a choice in their sexuality. As Amy put it: *'I think that for some people it is fluid'*.

Helena was firm regarding her essentialist view of sexuality when she said: *'I believe[s] that we construct our identity ... [but] our sexual orientation is predetermined. I wouldn't have chosen at 11 to start fancying girls and I wouldn't have chosen ... all the shit that I've been through, I tried 2 years to make myself straight. I couldn't'*. Helena, mirroring some literature (Bailey, 2003) was very clear about a difference between sexual identity (that of choosing to identify as being homosexual, lesbian, gay or queer to yourself and may be to others) and sexual orientation, (who

one is sexually attracted to). In terms of her sexual orientation Helena said that she was an *'essentialist'*. This is where sexual orientation is established at birth or at a very young age and is seen as being stable throughout life, as suggested by other research (Plummer, 1981; Abbot et al, 2005; Ryle, 2012). However, in terms of LGBTQ identity Helena said that her awareness of who she was and how she identified had developed through her life time. When Helena was in the air force there was a time when she set out to try to become a heterosexual person. There were other times in her life where she identified as a lesbian separatist (Ryle, 2012) and a feminist. These lesbian and feminist labels were no longer useful for Helena, who grew up as a *'butch working class woman'* with no narratives or images to follow and who felt betrayed over the years by too many middle class feminists who dismissed her early struggles.

Many of the respondents were ambivalent regarding the choice of essentialism or social constructionism in terms of how a person names their sexuality. Ellie, in comparison to Helena, noted that the heterosexism of mainstream society *'has, for a long time, made the LGBT community push for more fixed identities ... a "phase" and "you'll grow out of it"... really pushed us to absolutes'*: hence the idea that people were born LGBTQ. Most respondents suggested that the essentialist label, or being born LGBTQ, suited some LGBTQ people whilst other LGBTQ people saw sexuality as being socially constructed. Jane voiced this in a manner that represented what many other respondents said:

*There's a line of continuum and everybody's experience...falls on this continuum ... some people who are LGB ... are born that way ... I put myself in that category but ... other people [may see themselves as] heterosexual and may "become" bisexual or "become" gay. I don't think it's one or the other.*

Carla, like many of the respondents, saw sexuality as a social construct - *'something you realise. ... [We are] born pansexual ... born with the possibility of being attracted to anyone... and socialised quite young'* regarding the limitations of sexual choice. This seems to resonate with the ideas of Plummer (1981) who put forward that LGBTQ sexuality may be established in childhood. Plummer suggested that for some people these scripts are *'rigid and restrictive'* whilst for others they are *'are flexible and open to challenge and change'* (Plummer, 1981, p94). Plummer's ideas also seemed to resonate with Issie's words when she said that she *'leans towards the socially constructed side of things ...[but] believes ... that some people can be born with a really strong predisposition one way or the other ... they are that way; it is in them'*. Similar ideas were discussed

by Kinsey in the late 1940s. He said that many men had a tendency towards homosexuality rather than being either completely homosexual or heterosexual (Kinsey, Pomeroy & Martin, 1948 cited in McIntosh, 1968). Issie and Fern both voiced the idea that if they had grown up in a different society, or at a different time, they may have chosen not to identify as lesbian (Issie) or bisexual (Fern). Fern and Beth both pointed out that *'awareness of sexuality ... [can have] a lot to do with your upbringing'* (Beth) as *'whether you embrace your identity or not depends on cultural factors'* (Fern). Most respondents were very clear that gender and sexuality are socially constructed; but this left Sabidah, for example, in a quandary regarding people who identify as trans and feel that they are *'born into the wrong body'*: a point that Sabidah, now working alongside some transgendered young people and adults, did not want to dismiss. This view is supported by some literature (Monro, 2005) suggesting that whilst many LGBT people would see their self as being socially constructed some would hold to the idea of some element of essentialism. Ellie explained her views with links to theory (as she often did in the interviews) citing an academic who talked about the idea of:

*"second nature", where you have something that happened so early on in your sense of identity that you feel that it is just you, but it might be something that's socially constructed... it feels, it's your second nature ...I would say [that sexuality] ... is probably a biological predisposition with social triggers.*

Some respondents did not find the choice between essentialism and social constructionism useful. Beth spoke passionately about this with regard to her work with young people and Ellie agreed saying that when working with young people *'the essentialist social constructionist debate doesn't matter'*. This lack of interest regarding the source or cause of sexuality is supported by academic writers who suggest that it is not important to look at why people might be LGBTQ (Savin-Williams, 2005 cited in Robertson, 2013) as *'the real problem does not lie in whether homosexuality is inborn or learnt'* (Sedgwick, 1990 cited in Weeks, 1995, p7). Sedgwick (1991) was adamant that debates regarding the relevance of sexuality and queer theory to all in society (not just to queer communities) are much more important than the debate between essentialist and social constructionist views of sexuality as noted above (3.2.2).

This section, focussing on respondents' views regarding essentialism and social constructionism, shows that most of the respondents were not interested in the causes of their LGBTQ sexuality. This seems to be in line with the literature, as noted above, but does not always fit with the

experiences of some LGBT people, who may be aware of their difference from an early age: something that is possibly noted more frequently by people who are questioning their gender. The discussion now moves to examine how different labels are accepted or rejected by respondents and how this may be linked to issues of social class, ethnicity and age: intersectional approaches to identity.

## 6.2. Narratives and intersectionality

The narratives and stories that impacted on these fifteen women were widely different. These respondents grew up and were socialised in different places and in different times, so different narratives were 'socially available' (Stephens, 2011, p67). The following discussion begins with remembered stories (6.2.1). It then examines the way that intersectionality is useful in understanding how these youth workers named themselves in their everyday lives (6.2.2). The narratives available to respondents included the images that they saw around them; both the real life stories of their relatives, friends and strangers; but also the literature or media that impacted on them as they sought to make sense of their identities within their heteronormative world (as noted in Frank, 2012). In telling, and so constructing, their life-stories these respondents looked for clues and developed their own 'scripts' (a term used by Simon & Gagnon, 1984 cited in Jackson & Scott, 2010, p815) through their interaction with these available narratives. Each respondent reacted with and in the context in which she grew; thus developing a unique journey. Having some understanding of what narratives were available to these respondents in their childhood sheds some light on their later experiences when naming their self.

### 6.2.1 Remembered stories

While some aspects of these stories represent the storied features of reality those aspects that are remembered will depend, to some extent on individual differences in motivation. ... These stories represent a distillation of the interaction of a person and experience.

King and Noelle, 2004, p293.

As King and Noelle noted (above) the stories that are remembered may not reflect the full reality of the stories that were available to these youth workers from their memories of their childhood. Those that are recounted here represent stories or influences that came quickly to respondents' minds during interviews. Respondents noted a range of reactions to LGBTQ labels as they were growing up. For example: Beth told her parents and her friends that she had a '*girl friend*' when she was 16 years old but did not name herself as lesbian until she was 18 and so more able to

understand these labels. Amy recounted that when she was called gay, even '*as an insult* [she thought] ... *that's probably what I am then*'. Carla, although being attracted to girls at the age of 12 and understanding what the term of lesbian meant, found the '*bisexual*' label more comfortable for her between the ages of 12 and 15. She did move to naming herself as lesbian after the age of 15.

Some respondents (Helena: 68 years of age and Amy: 25) did not see images of LGBTQ characters on the TV or films when they were growing up, but other respondents talked about the importance of such LGBTQ characters in books, films and on the TV. Sabidah (52 years of age) remembers '*clocking ...two women and they looked like right butch lesbians*' on black and white television when she was only 10 years old; long before her realisation that she was a lesbian. Fern and Nell remembered watching *Bad Girls*, which portrayed strong women characters in prison. For Fern this was when she was 10 and before she was aware of her own sexuality. For Fern (who was 27), LGBTQ characters in programmes such as *Sugar Rush*; *Coronation Street* and *East Enders* were important although she pointed out that none depicted bisexual characters. Other respondents talked about the lesbian kiss on *Brookside* in 1994 as being '*life changing*' (Jane, who was 38). For Nell (31) it was Anna from *Big Brother* that was her '*saving grace*'. Several respondents talked about *The Word* (shown on Chanel 4 from 1990 – 1995). Jane remembered watching *The Word* in her bedroom every Friday night '*with the volume turned down low*' so that her parents would not hear but she would not miss any possible references to gay and lesbian issues. Respondents talked about the influence of George, a tomboy in Enid Blyton's *Famous five*. Marie (55) and Patricia (51) talked about the positive influence of music by out and proud gay artists such as the *Communards* in the developing awareness of their own sexuality. Despite the fact that these, mostly older, respondents were not able to access many positive images of LGBTQ people the few that they did notice seemed to have had a powerful and positive influence in their lives.

The narratives and influences of stories and characters who have same-sex attractions was much easier for many of the younger respondents to access, growing up with many more LGBTQ characters represented in the media than in the 1960s (see Johansson, 2007). For Issie there were also LGBTQ people in her non-nuclear 'family' so the idea of LGBTQ sexuality had been 'usualised' within her childhood and teenage communities. The term 'usualised' (see The Classroom, n.d.) was preferred by some respondents to the more usual term 'normalised'. The fact that Gaby

talked about the very positive influence of the social networking site *Tumblr* (which she learnt about through a *YouTube* video) may reflect the fact that she was the youngest of all 15 respondents. Gaby talked about taking risks in meeting LGBTQ people who lived close to her through *Tumblr*. She was still friends with some of these people five or more years later. *Tumblr*, according to several respondents, seems to be well known nowadays by LGBT young people as a good place to meet LGBT people and learn about LGBT language and issues.

This section, which has focussed particularly on the narratives that were available to respondents, links to the intersection of issues of age, the context in which the respondents were growing up as adolescents and their awareness of their sexuality. Whilst there is not a strict correlation between age and respondent's awareness of stories or ideas of homosexuality, bisexuality and queerness around them, there does seem to be some link between these for many respondents: as suggested in other research (Russell et al, 2009). The next section moves on to focus on the intersections of a range of identities.

### 6.2.2 Intersectionality

This section examines in more detail how interweavings of oppression and privilege are experienced by different individuals within their own historical context and settings (leaning on Brah and Phoenix, 2004). The discussion commences with a focus on respondents' understanding and use of the term queer. It then moves on to examine how these respondents named themselves regarding terms such as lesbian, gay, bisexual and feminist. Links between how respondents named themselves and issues such as feminism, social class, ethnicity, and religion, will be explored. The acceptance or rejection of certain identities may be usefully understood in terms of intersectional theory.

An intersectional approach focussing on hearing the voice of the individual (Dhamoon, 2011) allowed an exploration of how these professionals identified themselves. Examining issues highlighted by these respondents was pertinent as 'intersectionality challenges normative identity politics' (Inckle, 2011, p256), which might otherwise fragment the holistic experiences of these women. The cases offered below examine these youth workers' understanding and naming of their self. Their stories are helpful as 'stories ... do a better job than geometric models' (Weston, 2011, p16). Drawing on concepts from intersectional theory allows the reviewing of 'mutually constructed nature of social divisions' (Taylor, 2011, p38) and an examination of how categories coincide and intersect in everyday lives (Weston, 2011; Crenshaw, 1989 cited in Winker and

Degele, 2011). The brief biographies (presented in Ch.5) highlight the ways that sexuality, religion, ethnicity, social class and age intersect within the varied backgrounds of these youth workers using simple categories. These categories will be problematised in the following discussions but seeing starkly different categories or interdependencies can assist in the clarification of the intersections (Yekani et al, 2011).

Many respondents offered their own understanding of intersectionality. Beth noted that *'we do not live single issue lives'*. Fern saw her *'own intersectionality in terms of social class, ethnicity, sexuality, religion and ability ... and recognising my privilege [in some areas] ... and not'* in other areas: as discussed above (Ch.3.3). Helena said that *'it is important to take on board class, disability, race. They are all parts of who we are. ... The more that I understood myself the more I realised how important this is. You can't ignore the class bit. You can't ignore the female bit. You can't ignore the sexuality bit'*. Helena added that she had read about intersectionality but authors she had read (probably in the 1980s) had not included a focus on sexuality in debates about intersectionality.

The following discussion, taking an intracategorical intersectional approach to the findings (as discussed above: Ch. 3.3), examines issues of sexuality in relation to age, social class, ethnicity and religion. It starts by examining what the respondents understood by the term queer. After taking an overview of different respondents' reactions to the label queer, focussing first on links to the age of respondents (6.2.2a.i) the discussion moves to a focus on possible links between the views of respondents of the term queer and their ethnicity (6.2.2a.ii). Within this section Carla's understanding and use of the idea of queer is examined. The discussion will then broaden 6.2.2(a.iii) to include how other respondents viewed and used the term queer within their personal and professional lives.

#### 6.2.2 a) What queer meant for respondents

The term queer has been used for some time both in the academy (since 1990: Halperin, 2003) and by activists involved in the early days of the HIV epidemic (in 1980: Monro, 2005; Marinucci, 2010). Queer theory, a contested notion (St Pierre, 2000), is useful within this research as it challenges the binary divisions suggested by the terms homosexual, heterosexual and heteronormative and the LGB acronym. While queer theory shares some conceptual ground with the anticategorical intersectional approach (McCall, 2005: as noted in Ch.3) the discussions below

also suggest that an intracategorical intersectional approach, examining how issues of age and sexuality intersect, may be useful.

#### i) The notion of queer for younger respondents

Some of the younger respondents: Issie, Nell and Beth (in their 30s) and Carla (in her 20s); seemed to understand the political rather than just the sexual nature of the term queer (reflecting Jagose, 1996) thus emphasising the intracategorical intersections of age and sexuality. For Beth *'queer is a political act, it's a ... political identity'*. Issie, as a white, femme, middle class, lesbian woman in a committed monogamous relationship, recognised that she may not be seen as *'queer enough'* by some people's definition. Issie noted that being queer is *'nothing to do with sexuality, it's to do with lifestyle and politics'*. This links to Warner's comment that people identifying as queer may not be involved in LGBT sexual practices but may use the term to *'mess up ... desexualised' spaces* (Warner, 1993, p.xxvi).

Nell, who identified as queer in her early 20s when she was questioning her gender, said that the term queer allowed a *'neutralising [of language] ... allows more of a possibility for a queerer space to exist ... creating an openness ... a safety in the space ... an element of challenge ... creates space for other misconceptions to be challenged and therefore to be safer'*. For Nell the queer spaces that she inhabited as an undergraduate student allowed her to examine issues of gender and sexuality in safety without fear of bullying or attack. For Nell *'queer stretches'* the LGBT acronym so that more people feel comfortable *'under the umbrella. ... [Queer is] not negative ... [but suggests] ... asexual. ... [Queer] widens the community out ... providing a safe space for lesbian and gay young people ... [and] black workers'*. This need for spaces to be safe for LGBT young people is discussed within the youth work literature (Hanbury, Lee and Batsleer, 2010; Fenwick, 2015; Youth Work Ireland, 2017).

#### ii) Queer and ethnicity

An examination of intracategorical intersections between sexuality and ethnicity might be useful in understanding what respondents understood by the term queer. Helena, along with four other women of white British heritage (Helena, 68; Marie, 55; Patricia, 51; Jane, 38; Amy, 25), found the term queer abusive, or were reminded of hearing it as a term of abuse in previous times so did not like or use the term queer. This dislike links to the fact that for some people queer is too painful an insult to be reclaimed (reflecting Jagose, 1996; Monro, 2005). Helena's dislike of the term queer also resonated with Ellie's comment that *'queer ignores gender and disappears*



women' (linking to ideas discussed by Hawthorne, 2003). Ellie noted that heterosexual and cisgendered people find the term queer confusing and said that in the LGBT youth project where she works the staff team (of about twenty-five people) are split fifty/fifty in their views of the term. So for Helena and Ellie, queer undermined the solidarity of lesbian sexuality and so political activism may be weakened; thus preventing rather than supporting change as suggested by some writers (Lorde, 1984 and noted above:3.2.1). For others, such as Sabidah, the negative connotation linked to the term queer is what made it powerful (as suggested in Reed, 1993 cited in Jagose, 1996; Sedgwick, 1994: as discussed above:3.2.2). Sabidah saw queer as being '*nonconforming in terms of sexuality and gender*', and Sabidah, reflecting the literature, aimed to 'claim the words as our own before they are thrown at us' (Butler, 2004, p229) as insults. Sabidah saw queer as a label that is worth reclaiming so that '*everybody can get under the umbrella ... which is all embracing*' as noted by some writers (Jagose, 1996; Monro, 2005).

Interestingly Carla and Sabidah (both BAME) were the only respondents who said that they were content to use a queer label for themselves. Sabidah said that '*queer is my favourite label*'. She also said that she liked the term butch: '*people call me butch ... and I don't care*'. Sabidah was also not bothered when mistaken for a man. So it appears that Sabidah, reflecting the literature, was happy to play with the 'the open mess of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances' that the term queer brings to LGBTQ sexuality (Sedgwick, 1994, p8). The acceptance of a queer label by Sabidah and Carla evidenced the importance of fluidity for them with regard to the intersections of ethnicity and sexuality, thus linking again to the anticategorical intersectional approach (McCall, 2005: as discussed above Ch.3.3). Carla had positively identified as queer at some points in her life. As a BAME woman she had found the lesbian and gay labels very constricting, as suggested in the quote below:

*Queer is more accepting ... more fluid. ... Queer doesn't assist other people to understand what you talking about. So I do like to have uncertainty because I don't feel like identity is really that static. I do feel that it is changeable, so to have something that is clearly defined hinders that changing. ... Queer means that there's potential for change. ... Whereas 'lesbian': if you change a bit you're no longer a lesbian.... There's a certain hairstyle and a certain cut ... or brand of jeans ... that was very defined as ... the lesbian look ... [with] quite spikey hair.*

This stereotypical lesbian look and pressure to conform to expected body images (Scourfield et al, 2008) is discussed at length within the literature (as noted by Formby, 2017). In this research this meant that, for Carla, finding an identity that felt comfortable was challenging *as 'identity is never really static ... I like going back and forth'*. Queer, in Carla's opinion, allowed her this space for change. Carla talked about a time when she *'moved away from the mainstream gay spaces [she always preferred the label gay to lesbian] to more kind of alternative, smaller queer' nights ... with different music ... [and] left politics'*. It seems that for Carla these spaces were *'at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant'* (Halperin, 1995, p62 cited in Marinucci, 2010) and *'at odds with straight culture'* (Warner, 1999, p38). For Carla the queer spaces were *'non-race, [and more] anti-racist, anti-sexist [in their] practice. ... I didn't feel that I had to look a certain way ... or dress a certain way, ... more accepting ... more fluid ... a bit more celebrating everyone'*. Thus linking to Sedgwick's ideas that people *'of colour ... [may use the leverage] of queer ... [to find] a new kind of justice'* (Sedgwick, 1993, p9 cited in Jagose, 1996, p99). In her movement *'back and forth'* between different identities (lesbian, gay and queer), Carla, reflecting other research, accepted that queer seemed to *'create alternative spaces for imagining alternatives to binary division'* (Monro, 2005, p32) when the binary, between lesbian and straight, seemed to exclude her own sexuality. However, Carla acknowledged, reflecting the literature (Jagose, 1996), that there is nothing straightforward or clear about anything to do with queer theory. People, Carla said, *'know what gay means ... [whereas queer] doesn't assist other people to understand what you're talking about'*. Carla seemed to like the fact that queer was confusing or unclear. This lack of understanding of what queer means was what discouraged others, such as Gaby (also BAME) from using the term. This lack of clarity regarding the meaning of the term queer is a positive point for some queer theorists who aimed to deconstruct language to make meanings unclear (Zimmerman, 1984; Atkinson, 2002; Gauntlett, 2008), or at least to examine hidden or assumed meanings (Agger, 1991; Sedgwick, 1994). Carla pointed out that *'the box for gay'*, whilst not being as restrictive as the *'box for lesbian'* was still not sufficiently versatile unlike the term queer which allowed her to *'make my own spaces ... like queer communities ... [where] black and brown people ... exist'*. Carla, along with other BAME people who identified as queer in her local area, were building a community for people who *'are brought together for our racial identity and our LGBT identity. ... the race comes first ... [as] our racialised identities bring us together ... [and] it's not a big deal that people are quite different'*. The socially constructed view of LGB identities as being *'relatively stable'* (see Abbott et al, 2005, p205) throughout life seemed to sit comfortably with

most respondents of white British heritage, as discussed above (Ch.6.1). However, in comparison, the queer approach to sexuality, which suggests that sexuality is not stable (see Butler, 1990; Jagose, 1996), seemed better suited to Carla's wish for '*space [and] back and forth movement*' between identities. This space allowed her to develop a 'narrative identity' (see Fook, 2002, p75) which has some coherence even though viewing her LGBTQ sexuality as being 'fluid' (see Fook, 2002, p75). These narrative identities, according to the literature, may be partially 'driven ... [by] ascribed' or given identities (e.g. marital status and ethnicity) as suggested by Reupert (2007, p107) and partially by life experiences 'driven by the cultural forces that play on us' (Fook, 2002, p75).

### iii) An overview of the usefulness of queer for respondents

The findings within this subsection focusing on queer theory suggests that the understanding that these youth workers had of queer theory allowed some of them (especially Carla, Sabidah, Nell and Beth) to question binary divisions which could otherwise reinforce rather than challenge dominant views and ideologies (see Gramsci, 1986 cited in Ledwith, 1997; McPhail, 2008). The notion of 'queering the discourse' (Shildrick, 1997, p191) could be useful for these respondents in order to challenge terminology and ideas which may constrict them as they explored and used their self in different settings. This may have allowed them to 'imagine otherwise' (see Gibson-Graham, 1999 cited in Slater, 2015, p10) or to have explored other ways of doing and being in an anticategorical intersectional manner.

The preference that respondents gave for how they identified themselves led to interesting insights. It became apparent that different categories carried baggage and people chose to associate with, or felt more comfortable with certain categories, depending on their personal experiences and their socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. Developing an understanding of the impact that the world has (ideas suggested by Wood et al, 2015) in terms of acceptance of different identities seemed useful. This discussion, taking an intracategorical intersectional approach, will now move from a focus on the usefulness of notions of queer for these women to examine some of the other identities that respondents used for themselves. This discussion starts with the terms lesbian, gay and bisexual (6.2.2b) before moving to a broader discussion of respondents' reactions to feminism (6.2.2c), social class (6.2.2d) and ethnicity (6.2.2e).

### 6.2.2 b) Lesbian, gay or bisexual?

Many of the older respondents of white British heritage (Beth, 24; Ellie, 38; Helena, 68; Issie, 33; Liz, 57 and Marie, 55) noted a preference for the term lesbian, or dyke, rather than gay. They felt that these terms emphasised their female gender as well as their homosexuality, a point that was important for many of them. Marie pointed out that women's roles as being '*powerful and strong*' as well as '*nurturers and providers through history*' needed to be seen. Beth noted that she was happy with any of these labels but noted that for her

*the word lesbian ... [is a] political thing. ... [It] might make some people feel uncomfortable ... but we've been made to feel uncomfortable for far too long. ... "Gay" is overused ... and doesn't cover all the different identities. ... [Gay] ignores a large part of our community ... I like to use "lesbian" ... as well as "feminist", as well as "queer". ... It's a political thing for me. ... Saying "gay" is too soft and easy for me and people can accept that too easily. I want to challenge people.*

Helena saw her lesbian label as part of her essential identity that she was born with, as discussed above (Ch.6.1). For Issie a lesbian label linked to her wish to emphasise her female gender 'so *lesbian covers that*': linking to the importance of lesbian solidarity and feminism that she learnt from her mother and wished to celebrate.

Some respondents preferred the term gay to the term lesbian. The younger respondents seemed to have a passionate dislike of the term lesbian (Carla, 25; Gaby, 23; Amy, 25; Jane, 38) '*because of being called 'lezzer' when growing up*' (Jane); because '*lesbian is more prescriptive than gay*' (Carla) or '*lesbian sounds like a disease or ... sounds like there's something wrong. ... It's just not a good word for me*' (Gaby). Issie (33), who said that she used both terms for herself but preferred gay to lesbian as it has '*less restrictive connotations. ... Being lesbian also describes your social class and gender and presentation*'. Issie went on to say that she was aware that '*labels are powerful*'. She was happy to be called a '*femme lesbian ... or a dyke but – don't call me butch*'. This link between age and the use of LGBT labels links to other research which noted that younger people are increasingly using a range of different labels rather than just the traditional LGBT (Rusell et al, 2009). However, it was not just the younger women who preferred the term gay to lesbian: Patricia (51) of working class heritage noted that she did not like '*lesbian*' as she '*heard it as a negative label ... [which left her with a] bad taste. ... I tried the lesbian label for a while but it didn't feel good*'. Sabidah disliked the term '*lesbian*' as she feels this is a label was put on her '*by*

*white people. ... who then told me what I should wear, whether to shave my legs or not'* and the like. Nell was less adamant about not using the term lesbian as she was keen to be seen as a woman but she said that she preferred to give it a French edge: '*lesbienne*' emphasising that it is a positive or '*good*' label. However, Nell went on to explain that for her the word

*dyke ... is stronger ... [with] more ability to surprise. ... [Dyke] can be anyone, anything; me with short hair, with long hair; me in a suit, me in drag ... less prescribed and more like I can own it ... it's just a nick name ... my preferred term is dyke. Butch dyke, femme dyke ... more northern, more rugged ... A little bit of a scribble, a little bit of a question ... nice to reclaim ... covers femme or butch.*

There were only two respondents (Carla and Fern) who had named themselves as bisexual and only Fern named herself as bisexual at the time of the interviews. As Fern said: '*people assume that I'm a lesbian. ... Bisexual [is] all-encompassing [in terms] of sexual identity ... someone's history ... someone's present and someone's future. ... I wouldn't move to change that label I give myself*'. The lack of respondents identifying as bisexual may have reflected the marginalisation and erasure of the term bisexual as suggested in other research (Monro, 2015) and discussed above (Ch.5.5).

It seems, from this discussion, that the experiences of respondents as they were growing up impacted on their use of, or dislike for, certain labels. Both an anticategorical intersectional approach, which problematises or questions the usefulness of the naming of different categories (McCall, 2005), and an intracategorical intersectional approach which examines the interwoven (Byrne, 2013) and complex (Taylor, 2011) nature of categorical identity (as discussed above: Ch.3.3) seem useful in understanding why some respondents talked about not liking certain labels. Words that resonated with them as insults were to be avoided whilst words that hold importance in terms of their own identity were used. The likelihood of certain words or labels being seen as insults seems to be linked to the age or ethnicity of the respondent and also maybe to their social class (an intracategorical intersectional approach) and may also link to their experiences of previous oppression (drawing on Formby, 2017). Patricia and Gaby's views seem to link to an anticategorical intersectional approach: Patricia pointed out that she had found labels to be useful when she was younger, but in her fifties these labels seemed no longer helpful; Gaby said that she does not '*want to be*' labelled at all. Fern was always clear about her bisexual,

rather than lesbian, identity from an early age. So respondents' individual life experiences and the identities, impacted on the labels that they preferred to use for themselves.

#### 6.2.2 c) Does the term feminist fit?

The focus of discussion now moves to respondents' use or rejection of the term feminist. What respondents understood or meant by the term feminist was not explored and it must be noted that the term feminist has a wide range of interpretations for different people (as discussed above: 4.2). Most respondents, even those who did not identify as feminists, noted that being a woman was important to them. However, five of the fifteen respondents did note that their gender was not central to their LGBTQ sexuality. Jane (38) observed that if she was growing up now she might *'choose to be non-binary'* and Amy (25) noted that for her gender is not important or *'relevant ... to the young people that [she] works with'*. Nine of the fifteen respondents said that being a feminist was important for them. Ellie talked about the usefulness of reclaiming feminism despite its sometimes negative connotations. Six of the fifteen respondents, all from working class backgrounds, were ambivalent or antagonistic about the feminist label. As Jane (38) said: *'I am drawn to strong women but wouldn't use ... [the term feminist due to the] negative connotations of ... "man hater"'*. Patricia (51) and Helena (68), both of working class heritage, had named themselves as feminist at some points in their life but had since rejected this label. Helena recounted how in the feminist *'women's liberation groups'* of the 1970s that she attended, the mostly middle class women were not interested in her experiences as a working class lesbian. This rejection by middle class women was pivotal for Helena, who said with passion: *'feminism is too loaded. ... Feminism came out of middle class white heterosexual women'*. Sabidah also rejected a feminist label saying *'I hate the word feminist'*. This was possibly because of how she was treated by white women (mostly middle class lesbians) at her local *'women's centre'* where BAME women were excluded rather than respected.

The only respondents from a working class background who did name themselves as feminists were Carla and Rosie (both BAME women), Nell (white British who had questioned her gender in her earlier years) and Fern (white British who identified as bisexual). These women saw feminism as a source of power and solidarity which emphasised their identification as women. Fern talked about doing her youth work *'through a feminist lens'*. Nell put into words what others seemed to suggest when she said that for her *'feminism is far more reaching than just gender ... [it is about] equal respect ..., part of living your life'*. For these women who did not fit comfortably into a

feminist label, more usually used by women of middle class social background, it seems that the term feminist gave them a sense of belonging and solidarity with other women.

From this discussion of feminist labels, an intracategorical intersectional approach may assist in understanding how these women understand their own intersections of ethnicity and social class and might shed light on their use of the term feminist. The four BAME women were split two and two with regard to accepting or rejecting feminism. The age of the respondents also did not seem to be important in their rejection or acceptance of a feminist label. Whilst being aware that these 15 women cannot be representative of other women with regard to feminism, it is worth noting that all the women who rejected a feminist label were of working class heritage and all but Sabidah still identified as working class. In contrast only two of the nine accepting of a feminist label had working class influence in their lives when growing up. So maybe hooks' (1994) suggestion that the feminism of middle class white women did not take account of experiences of women of other backgrounds is important in the rejection of a feminist label by these women of working class heritage. From this focus on the acceptance or not of a feminist label the discussion now moves the intersections of sexuality and social class of respondents.

#### 6.2.2 d) Social class

Most of the respondents noted the importance of their social class regarding how they understood their self. Carla talked about being unclear about which social class she belonged to and saw herself *'in the area in-between working and middle class'*. Carla's awareness of her mother's social class and the museums and art galleries that her mother took her to when she was growing up probably gave her middle class *'cultural capital'* as worded by Carla. This was despite the fact that she grew up amongst other young people of working class heritage and still lived in a working class area. Helena noted that intersections of working class and lesbian sexuality were a *'dual burden'* for her; as it was for many of young women of working class heritage who identified as LGBT that she worked with over the years. Issie was aware that her middle class status and her parents' political values may have given her privilege, in respect to being out as lesbian, that were not necessarily open to people from working class or BAME backgrounds: *'my ease with my sexuality probably is a bit of a class thing ... that platform to start my life off with complete confidence that being whoever I was, was alright'*. Issie and Liz (both of middle class backgrounds) noted the importance of acknowledging this privilege when working with young

people of working class backgrounds in order to build authentic relationships with these young people.

The above discussion of intersections between sexuality and social class highlights the fact that no one is only privileged or only disadvantaged by the intersections of their identities (see Warner & Shields, 2013; Corlett & Mavin, 2014). Having examined how issues of social class impact on the identities that these women accepted or rejected the focus now moves to ethnicity and religion.

#### 6.2.2e) Ethnicity and religion

The issue of ethnicity impacted on the experiences of sexuality (as noted in Rivers & Ward, 2012; Corlett & Mavin, 2014) for all respondents. However, the women of white heritage seemed to be less aware of how their ethnicity impacted on their experiences of sexual identities than the BAME women. This links to the Subaltern (drawing on Said, 1994) or non-hegemonic idea that because they are white in a majority white population these respondents did not have to undertake the 'emotional labour of facing social inequalities' linked to racism (Monro, 2005, p59) and so did not need to interrogate issues of ethnicity in the same way that BAME women did. This might have been true for these respondents both in terms of their own experiences as white women and also in their understanding of how racism may impact on BAME people within LGBTQ communities. This is seen in the strength of feeling in Carla's comment (as a BAME woman):

*It upsets me that I can't go on a night out [on the local gay scene]. ... There's nothing about those spaces that make anyone that's not white feel safe. ... You see the odd black person ... but not in groups ... The majority of black people that I see there are toilet attendants ... not black people accessing venues.*

The literature endorses that the gay scene might not be a 'comfortable' space (Weston, 2011, p16) for black people, who are often made 'invisible' (Weston, 2011, p32) so pointing out the racism within LGBTQ communities (Rivers & Ward, 2012; Monro, 2015; Formby, 2017). The intracategorical intersectional approach may also illuminate Sabidah's dislike of the term 'lesbian', as discussed above (6.2.2b). However, the respondents of white British heritage were keen to emphasise their lesbian sexuality. For Helena this meant seeing her lesbianism as part of her core identity that she was born with. For Issie, lesbian sexuality linked to her wish to emphasise her female gender 'so lesbian covers that'; linking to the feminism she learnt from her mother, as noted above (6.2.2b).



Religion seemed not to be important for most respondents although a few mentioned a religious influence in their upbringing. Sabidah was one of the few respondents who talked about the positivity of religion and also the only respondent not from the dominant Christian background in this research. She saw religion as important, seeing herself as a *'Muslim black lesbian youth worker'*. Sabidah pointed out that the increasing Islamophobia encouraged her to name herself first and foremost as *'Muslim'*. Previously she had been happy to name herself as *'black'*. Sabidah's experience demonstrates the point made by Rahman (2010) who suggests that LGBTQ identifying Muslims challenge both their stereotyped religious identity and their LGBTQ sexuality. Rahman says *'they occupy an intersectional social location between political and social cultures'* (Rahman, 2010, p945, *his italics*) which therefore brings into focus another intersecting issue of oppression within their lives. Ellie, another respondent who talked about the importance of religion, noted that her Catholic background was important for her. Her parents were Catholics and she had attended Catholic primary and middle schools. Ellie, whilst no longer seeing herself as religious, pointed out that she started her youth work as a volunteer *'in my late teens in Christian settings, Catholic settings. ... I'm still very socially a Catholic... a lot of the good things that I learnt as a child about community came from growing up in a Catholic community, quite a close-knit community'*. So it seems that religion was a positive influence on a few of these respondents. However, most respondents did not discuss any positive or negative influences of religion on their identities.

This subsection emphasises that although ethnicity impacted on all respondents it is at the forefront of the experiences of the BAME women within this study. Whilst there is not a straightforward link between ethnicity and religion for most respondents, Sabidah, as the only respondent of Muslim heritage, became aware of how Islamophobia impacted on how she named herself. The religious awareness of Ellie did not impact her in this manner.

## Conclusion

As shown above, social class, religion, ethnicity and age all interacted with issues of sexuality in the lives of these respondents. It became clear through the research that the availability of particular stories or narratives (drawing on Stephens, 2011) depended on which community, or communities, a person had grown up in. The intracategorical and anticategorical intersectional approaches to the respondents' stories illuminates what is suggested by the literature, that *'connections between categories are both transparent and troubled'* (Taylor, 2011, p43). Taking

an intersectional approach was useful in understanding how these youth workers named themselves in their everyday professional and personal lives as they worked with young people from diverse backgrounds. The intersectional approach allowed an examination of how 'different oppressions work with and through each other' (Engel, 2008, p271).

The messiness of real life and the difficulty of probing these women's lived experiences made it a challenging process to understand how categories, rooted in each other, intersected and impacted on each other. It was not possible, or useful, to disentangle the impact that different issues had on the intersections of identity for any one person. However, unravelling the categories to some extent, as with the findings above, allowed a valuable and important discussion regarding equality and diversity in relation to youth workers' identities.

In the context of this research, taking both an intracategorical and an anticategorical intersectional approach was useful in understanding why these women have opposing understandings and feelings about terms such as feminism, lesbian, gay and queer. The categories of sexuality, age, social class, ethnicity and religion are not 'separate dimensions' (Corlett & Mavin, 2014, p260) but rather each of these categories operated in 'complex and complicated' (Taylor, 2011, p38) ways in the lives of these women and brought to each of them an alternative understanding of what these concepts meant. It also became clear, reflecting other research, that 'the fact that identities are bound up together does not mean that they always come into play together' (Weston, 2011, p30). In some spaces one issue took dominance over another. For example, in some situations Sabidah's religion was foremost, whilst in other situations her age or ethnicity might have been pivotal. For Issie there were some situations where her middle class and white privilege were foremost and others where her gender or sexuality might have been more pertinent in her work. Identities, for these women, were continually shifting as the social context shifted. This mirrors other research which suggests that 'fluid' identities were 'temporarily stabilised' when being analysed (Corlett & Mavin, 2014, pp263-4).

For the respondents of this study notions of queer were useful tools for those who were marginalised by, or within LGB, communities (reflecting Warner, 1999). The idea of 'queering the discourse' (Shildrick, 1997, p191) was useful, particularly for those who were BAME, in order to question identities and ideas which might constrict them as they explored who they were in different settings. Carla's discussions about her moving between queer and gay identities and how she was part of a developing queer and BAME community was in stark contrast with the

dislike that many white respondents had for the notion of queer. Most of the white respondents did not seem to feel hemmed in by other labels in the same way that Carla and, to a lesser extent, Sabidah felt hemmed in. For these BAME women queering their identities, spaces and discourses allowed them to 'imagine otherwise' (Slater, 2015, p10) and explore other ways of doing and being in an anticategorical intersectional manner. This link between queer theory and an anticategorical intersectional approach has not been discussed to any extent within previous literature.

This chapter has examined how these cisgendered women youth workers from different social, ethnic and religious backgrounds and of different ages identified and named themselves. The next two chapters (7 and 8) will examine the data that is at the heart of this research. Chapter 7 discusses why respondents thought it important to share their self within their work with young people in terms of their understanding of their own sexuality as well as other issues about their backgrounds and interests. Chapter 8 discusses how youth workers shared information about themselves with their colleagues and with the young people with who they worked.

## Chapter 7: Relationships, boundaries and ethics in professional practice

The next 2 chapters, moving on from the previous chapter which examined how these respondents named themselves with regard to their current identities, focus on the findings that are central to this research. That is regarding why and how these fifteen LGBTQ women consciously or unconsciously shared information about themselves with young people, or with colleagues with whom they worked. This chapter focusses on why youth workers thought that it was important to share information about their selves with young people and how they developed appropriate boundaries in their professional roles. It shares some territory with Chapter 8 which focusses on how respondents consciously or unconsciously shared information about themselves with their colleagues and with the young people with who they worked.

### Introduction

The chapter focusses on why respondents chose to share information about their self (particularly with regard to their LGBTQ sexuality) with young people; how they knew when and where to set boundaries in regard to sharing information about their self and why and when some respondents chose not to share information about their sexuality with young people. This material covers ground not previously discussed in any depth within the youth work literature as ‘the subtleties of self-disclosure have not received much attention’ (Murphy and Ord, 2013, p332) although research published in 2018 (Couch, 2018; Bright et al 2018; Spier and Giles, 2018) has shed some light on some aspects discussed within these following chapters.

This chapter discusses the centrality of relationships for youth workers, drawing the findings from respondents and the literature. A focus on professional boundaries opens section 7.2, which then moves on to examine how these respondents decided where to place their own boundaries and when to share information about their selves. This is one of topics within this study which introduces ideas and findings not previously researched in the youth work literature (see Murphy and Ord, 2013). The discussion then moves to focus on why youth workers shared issues about their LGBTQ sexuality and their personal life with young people (7.3). The final section (7.4) of this chapter focusses on why and when some respondents thought that it was important not to share personal information with young people.

### 7.1 Building relationships with young people and the conscious use of self

The fact that relationships are at the heart of youth work was discussed in chapter 2 and at length in the youth work literature (e.g. Young, 2006; Batsleer, 2008; Sapin, 2013; de St Croix, 2016 and

Jeffer, 2018). Whilst the 'ability to build and sustain effective and valuable relationships with young people is at the heart of youth work practice' (Blacker, 2010, p16) the detail regarding how these relationships are built is often assumed rather than spelt out in the literature. Youth workers may consciously use issues from their own lives to assist in building these authentic relationships (drawing on Rogers, 1961) with young people. This conscious use of the self is something that youth workers need to be aware of and think about in every aspect of their work with young people. When youth workers are building relationships with young people they must draw on their own experiences, as their personal life cannot be completely separated from their professional role. This is reflected the literature which suggests that the professionalism of youth workers 'of necessity involves communicating something personal' (Sapin, 2007, p14) and bringing 'our own experiences to bear on our practice' (Blacker, 2010, p23). These relationships, which are the means to young people's development and learning (Ord, 2007) are built slowly (if time is allowed by management and funders) and through conversation as discussed by many writers (e.g. Young, 2006, Batsleer, 2008 and Jeffer and Smith, 2014) but the nature of relationships within youth work is 'ambiguous' (Blacker, 2010, p28).

Each conversation is like a small piece of theatre and within it we acquire a role. ...

The role that we have determines that nature of the conversation. ... We will be asked questions about ourselves and we need to know where our boundaries are but we need to offer something of ourselves in order to build a professional youth work relationship.

(Smith, H. 2010, pp35-36).

It is clear from the quote above, and from other youth work the literature, that reciprocal and honest relationships need to be a two-way process (Young, 2006; Ord, 2007; Collander-Brown, 2010; Sapin, 2013) whatever the setting or context of the relationship. The youth work literature, in discussing how relationships should be reciprocal, notes that youth workers must respect the skills and interests of the young people (as discussed at length by Young, 2006, for example). However, this literature provides little evidence as to how workers go about sharing their own LGBQ sexuality with the young people: hence the importance of this discussion for all youth workers, not only for LGBQ youth workers.

The importance of sharing some personal information with young people was discussed in depth by nearly all respondents. Issie illustrated her reason for sharing information about her self by saying: '*giving a bit [of information] back builds a better relationship*' and can assist in relationship

building. Jane pointed out what many other respondents suggested by saying: *'you can't build a relationship with young people unless you are willing to give things about yourself'*.

All respondents noted the importance of relationships in the way that they work with young people; many spoke at length about the nature of their relationships with young people and the centrality of these relationships in their work. For example, Liz noted that *'youth work is really about relationships ... and knowing yourself and using yourself appropriately and being aware of what reactions people are having ... being present in that relationship'*. This quote from Liz echoes the literature regarding the importance of building the relationship between youth workers and young people and its central position as a tool within the work with young people (e.g. Young, 2006; Jeffs and Smith, 2010b; Fuss, 2012; Nichols, 2012; Jones, 2013; IDYW, 2014; Wylie, 2015). Emotional commitment (see Couch, 2018) to relationships with young people and 'passion' for the work (de St Croix, 2016, p55) was seen as essential by most respondents. Liz said clearly what other respondents suggested: *'you have to work at these relationships – they might not come easy'*. This echoes the literature which suggests that building appropriate relationships requires a lot of energy (Collander-Brown, 2010; Spence and Devaney, 2013), but it was the relationships with young people that most respondents saw as their motivation for working as a youth worker. The fact that relationships required a lot of energy was underlined by Issie who said that she was willing to *'drag energy out of the bottom of my soles'* for face to face work, although she had to *'slog through'* other parts of her youth work role. Jane summarised the central role of relationships between workers and young people within youth work saying:

*when you build a relationship with a young person who is really difficult to build a relationship with: that is one of the best things ... about youth work. So a young person who is not trusting of adults or doesn't instantly take to you but ... you take the time, you develop and build that relationship with them.*

A recurring theme within the youth work literature and from respondents was that relationships with young people must start where young people are (noted by many sources: e.g. Spence, 2007; Sapin, 2013 and Davies, 2015) and with their needs and interests and not with the needs or agenda of the youth workers (Sercombe, 2010; Nicolls, 2012). Jane's words echo the sentiment of all of the respondents when she said *'the young person must be at the heart of what I'm doing, of this relationship. It's not about me ... it's about the young people and their best interests'*.

Relationships within youth work are often, although not always, built on the voluntary engagement of the young people within the activities in which they chose to engage according to the literature (Smith, M.K., 1999; Merton 2007 cited in Bradford & Cullen, 2014; Blacker, 2010; Bradford & Cullen, 2014; Davies, 2015; Wylie, 2015, Cooper, 2018; Trelfa, 2018). Amy's comment highlights some of the tensions around the focus on young people choosing to engage in the relationship with the workers when she said that the '*voluntary relationship*' can assist in developing a '*good relationship*'. However, Amy went on to say that whilst this '*good relationship*' could sometimes be developed in settings that young people have to attend such as a PRU, it was more difficult than in settings that young people attend from their own choice. Amy noted that when young people are required to work with youth workers '*they are less likely to engage if they don't want to be there. ... Some days they won't do anything ... they'll sit in a corner. They're just there for their [financial] benefits*'.

The analysis above focussed on the importance and varied nature of relationships between youth workers and young people. Respondents were clear that these relationships were a central tool within youth work and must always be beneficial for the young people and never be about meeting the needs of the worker. These relationships took time and energy to develop but were what youth workers found most motivating about their role. These relationships were most valuable if young people choose to engage with the youth worker through voluntary participation. The focus now moves from the centrality of relationships within youth work to examine the ethics of youth work practice and how respondents decided where to set their boundaries in the sharing of personal information about their selves with young people: an essential issue when considering the reciprocal nature of relationships for youth workers.

## 7.2 How workers knew when to share information about their self

This section as to how youth workers knew when it was appropriate to share personal information with young people commences with a discussion regarding the nature of professional boundaries in youth work and an examination of how professional or personal boundaries were set by these fifteen youth workers. The second subsection moves on to discuss how youth workers used their gut instincts or their experiences to decide what and when to share information about their selves.

### 7.2.1 Boundaries

The importance of ethics within youth work relationships is at the forefront of the youth work literature (e.g. NYA, 2001; Ord, 2009; Banks 2010; IYW 2011) and was at the forefront of practitioners' minds during this research. Amy put this clearly when she suggested that relationships between a youth worker and young people were based on *'mutual respect ... I'm not their friend ... somewhere between being a friend and being a teacher'*. This follows the literature which suggests that 'the youth work relationship can feel like a friendship with lots of the elements of friendships' (Sercombe, 2010, p80) but youth workers need to be clear regarding appropriate and professional boundaries in their relationships with young people (NYA, 2001). What is considered professional behaviour for youth workers is set out by the National Youth Agency (2001) (the body that validates professional youth work qualifications) and was also revisited and revised when The Institute for Youth Work (IYW, 2011) was established. Whilst these codes of ethics can support youth workers in developing appropriate professional relationships (see Sercombe, 2010b) some sources point out that there is no professional body to ensure that these ethics are adhered to, unlike counselling, social work or teaching (Banks, 2010; McCulloch & Tett, 2010). The statements of these two professional bodies suggests more clarity regarding ethics than seems to exist in practice. The NYA and IYW focus on what is considered appropriate behaviour and where youth workers should draw boundaries between themselves and their personal life and their work with young people, offering simple guidance when these are complex situations. Sercombe (2010a), on agreeing with this point, suggests that boundaries cannot be fixed by any code of ethics. Other literature suggests that boundaries must be flexible, thought about repeatedly (Newcastle City Council, 2004 cited by Murphy and Ord, 2013; Sapin, 2013) and change as the context of the relationship changes (Sercombe, 2010a). Sapin says that in order for youth workers to remain aware of their role they have to set 'their boundaries "at the edge of the [young person's] playing field"' (Sapin, 2013, p70) rather than being too involved centrally in the lives of young people as if they were their friend. Hence, the informal nature of youth work and the focus within youth work on the use of relationships to work with young people means that what is considered appropriate behaviour within some situations may be considered inappropriate in other situations or by some managers and employers.

Knowing how much personal information to share and where boundaries should be set in relationships between the youth workers and young people was not easy for respondents as discussed below (7.3). This point is reflected by Murphy and Ord who, agreeing with Spence



(2007), say that 'tight boundaries ... with a minimum of self-disclosure will ... undermine the youth work relationship and also its integrity' (Murphy and Ord, 2013, p327) as some self-disclosure is important as noted above (Ch.7.1). The complete separation between what is personal and what is professional, as suggested by the NYA (2001) in their publication *Ethical Conduct in Youth Work*, 'can become problematic' (Murphy and Ord, 2013, p327) as such a distinct separation is neither realistic nor desirable according to most respondents.

There was one boundary that all respondents were very clear about: that of sexual or personal close friendships even with ex-members of a youth group. This is also noted by the NYA (2001), the IYW, (2011 or 2013) and the National Occupational Standards (LLUK, 2008) as well as in the wider youth work literature (Roberts, 2009; Sercombe, 2010a & b; Murphy & Ord, 2013; Sapin, 2013). Many respondents mentioned situations when young people had been attracted to them in a possibly unhealthy manner. The youth workers drew on their colleagues to assist with these challenging situations. Amy and Issie, for example, both emphasised the need be careful about boundaries if a young person got too emotionally attached.

Most respondents were clear that they would not talk about the details of their personal sex life with young people in any situations. As Beth said '*that is where I draw the line*'. Carla, along with a few other respondents, suggested that the LGBT young people that she works with were respectful and did not ask personal questions about her sex life. However, straight and cisgendered young people, according to Carla, were more likely to ask for '*curiosity ... or to get a laugh out of it ... I'm not open to those questions from them*'. Issie similarly said that she was happy to '*just share the facts – I have a partner, I've been with her for 4 years, we do live together. Her name is Becca ... that is enough. But not to share or address things to do with [personal] sexual behaviour*'.

Apart from this one area discussed above awareness of where to have boundaries regarding what was shared or not shared with young people was not an easy issue for these youth workers. Many respondents noted the importance of being flexible with boundaries. Carla noted that it was '*essential to be aware of [your] ... own boundaries but [this] will depend on the group and how well they know you*'. Issie suggested that boundaries changed according to the '*age, the focus of the work and the relationship*' a worker has with a particular group. Beth noted the importance of the setting in which she was working in relation to her boundaries. This was important for Beth who had jobs with two different organisations. One working with individual young men who had

been referred to her employer due to their vulnerability with regard to CSE, the other working with groups of young people attending LGBT focussed youth provision. Liz expressed what many other respondents suggested when she said that *'how much I share depends on how well I know the young people and if it starts useful conversations'*. Issie, repeating the point made in the literature, as discussed above (Ch.7.1) said *'so giving a bit back builds a better relationship ... I'm not their mate and I'm never going to be their mate so there is a line there'*. Jane, agreeing with this, pointed out that:

*Sometimes you get it wrong ... maybe [you] don't give enough of yourself and a young person disengages and it's difficult to build that relationship then. Sometimes you might give too much of yourself. ... I have seen youth workers give too much of themselves too early and it harms that relationship development.*

There was no clarity offered by respondents as to where boundaries should be or how a youth worker might know where a boundary should be with any group or individual. Ellie pointed out that she *'can't always be an open book'*, so she needed to make a *'judgment call'* as to what to share based on *'what young people need ... not what you need within the situation'*. Respondents reflected the literature which says that if workers can operate with respect (Crosby, 2001) and a level of detachment (Sapin, 2013) they will be more able to make these judgments appropriately. Patricia pointed out that despite, or maybe because, of how long she had worked with some young people stated: they *'don't ask me personal questions'*. It may have been easier for workers who were more distant in age (Patricia is in her early 50s) from the young people that they worked with to draw these boundaries.

The above discussion focussing on how or where boundaries were set underlines the fact that there is no one way to deal with how or where boundaries are drawn. This leaves youth workers having to take responsibility for their own ethical practice with regard to this aspect (following Sercombe 2010a), which is the focus for the next subsection.

### 7.2.2 Instinct or experience?

Knowing when to share information or stories regarding their own LGBQ sexuality or other personal issues was initially difficult to explore with respondents. Many were *'not sure'* (Beth) how they knew when it might be appropriate to share aspects of their self and their LGBQ sexuality. Some shared Jane's terminology: *'it's about your gut ... When you work with young*

*people you develop good instincts'*. Issie also talked about this *'gut instinct'* but said that when working with a new group she would think about *'what sort of relationships I want to build with them'* and this assisted her in knowing how much of her self and personal issues to share with young people at an early stage in the relationship. It seemed that self-awareness was essential in knowing how to use the self when working with, and not on, young people as noted in the literature (Ord, 2007; LLUK, 2008; Nicholls 2012) and discussed above (2.2.3e). As Collander-Brown (2010, p43) points out: *'awareness is the beginning of being with ... being with is all about hunches and not knowing'*. After further discussion, however, Jane seemed to suggest that sharing information about her self with young people was also to do with practice and experience rather than just gut instinct. She pointed out what some other respondents also suggested:

*You do learn to read situations ... you have to read body language and make assessments constantly about whether to take a conversation down that route. Are they going to disengage if you do that? Do you play it a bit more safe? How do you push them? ... Constantly weighing up ... one to one or group dynamics ... the balance of what does a young person need right now and where am I in my development of a relationship with them? At what point do I give more? Sometimes it's not up to you because a young person will ask you right out.*

The challenge for these youth workers who used relationships within their work, was that each relationship, as the literature emphasises, was unique (Collander-Brown, 2010; Spier and Giles, 2018; Trelfa, 2018). A careful and reflexive practice was required to develop self-knowledge (see Pugh, 2010; Smith, H. 2010; Trelfa, 2018) and confidence in following their *'hunches'* (Collander-Brown, 2010, p43) or their *'intuition'* (Fuss, 2012, p39) to build *'professional wisdom'* (Spier and Giles, 2018, p332) as to when and what of their personal self was appropriate to share. Jane emphasised that she had to decide *'where you are in that relationship'* as all relationships with young people are different and each relationship *'grows at a different speed'*. There had to be *'a certain amount of rapport and trust'* before sharing much personal information. Jane pointed out that if there was sufficient rapport and trust, then sharing your own personal experiences and LGBTQ sexuality could *'enhance that relationship building'*. Jane explained that care was needed regarding what to share about yourself and you had to be *'led by the young person so as not to lecture'* them. These comments reflect the literature which suggests that the experience of the practitioner must be brought to the relationship (Blacker, 2010; Davies, 2010). The idea that

building relationships was not a simple matter and needed to be practised was repeated frequently by respondents who pointed out that experience and years of practice brought the self-confidence and discipline which was required to be yourself and to use the self appropriately. This mirrors the comparison that Davies (2010) offers between youth work and jazz when he says that a jazz player has to practice to be able to improvise when performing with 'feeling and flair' (Davies, 2010, p6) in each unique situation. This might also be what Bourdieu described as 'the feel for the game ... [or the] practical mastery and knowledge' (as cited in Maton, 2012, p53). The sharing of issues about the self was not something that could be planned as a session outline may be planned or an activity might be planned. Rather this sharing of the self for these youth workers, whether it came from a gut instinct or experience, was about 'being responsive' (Davies, 2010, p5) to what was going on around them in the youth work setting.

This section has focused on the nature of boundaries between the professional and personal for youth workers as noted by the governing bodies including the NYA and the IYW. The challenge of calculating what the statements from these governing bodies meant in practice and how they should be translated into the everyday conversations and relationships that respondents had with young people was discussed. Respondents often felt that they were using their intuition (or gut feelings) in situations. However, when exploring the topic in more depth it seemed that boundaries were in fact built on professional expertise and assisted by careful reflective practice to ensure that the relationship with each young person or group of young people was treated in the careful and unique manner it deserved. It seemed that, for these respondents, boundaries with young people had to be flexible and so able to change with the different circumstances of each and every relationship, whilst staying professional and focussing on the needs of the young person and never on the needs of the worker. The exceptions to this flexibility were never being emotionally involved with any young person and never discussing details of personal sexual relationships with young people. How this 'practicing' (Young, 2006, p76) and responsiveness to individual young people were done in their everyday work will be examined further in Ch. 8. The focus now moves to why most respondents thought it was important (7.3) or not (7.4) to share information with young people regarding their own LGBTQ sexuality and other personal information.

### 7.3 Why be out as LGBTQ with young people?

Most respondents were clear that in many situations they would tell, or let young people know, about their LGBTQ sexuality. Five themes were mentioned by respondents as to why they felt that it was important to share information about their LGBTQ sexuality with young people. These themes included to be always honest (7.3.1); to be a role model (7.3.2); to share power with young people (7.3.3); to challenge prejudice and encourage pride rather than shame (7.3.4) and to develop safe spaces for LGB young people (7.3.5). How respondents actually let young people know about their LGBTQ sexuality will be discussed in Chapter 8.

#### 7.3.1 To be always honest

Most respondents talked about the importance of being honest with young people, so agreeing with the literature: honesty (Young, 2006; Ord, 2007) and trust (Smith, H. 2010) are required to develop a mutually respectful relationship (Young, 2006; Ord, 2007; Blacker, 2010; Collander-Brown, 2010; Spence and Devanney, 2013). Ten, of fifteen, respondents were very clear that they would be honest and open with young people about their own sexuality in most situations. As Nell put it: *'there's a benefit to being upfront rather than people feeling that you have deceived them'*. For Helena there was never any question of *'being fuzzy or unclear about [her own] sexuality [as it would] not be useful ... congruent or honest'*. It is important to note here that Helena always worked with young people who were attending, or who had been referred to, LGBT focussed provision. This emphasis on honesty with young people reflects Banks' (2010) discussion regarding the importance of being respectful and honest and following a Kantian ethical approach (Kant, 1785, cited in Banks, 2010) when working with young people. Three respondents noted that at times they would not be open with a young person if asked about their sexuality: either by *'skirting the issue'* (Fern) or not denying or confirming (Jane and Liz through much of her career) so as to leave the question open. Jane and Liz seem to have been taking a utilitarian approach, to ethics in this aspect of her practice, based on the consequences and outcome of the scenario (reflecting the literature: Banks, 2010). In any particular situation they thought about what would be most useful for the young person or people. Jane only agreed with full honesty in the context of working with young people who she knew identified as LGBT or who were questioning their own sexuality or gender. With other young people Jane's *'stock answer became it doesn't matter if I'm gay or not because, say if there was 20 people in this room then statistics tell us that 4 people in this room are gay'*. This reaction will be discussed more fully below (Ch7.4). Gaby, a newly qualified youth worker who had mostly worked in a PRU whilst a student on placement, was the

only respondent who said that she would *'have lied to young people'* about her sexuality unless it had been near the end of the placement. Gaby did not feel that she was safe being out with young people about her LGBQ sexuality. The literature seems to support these breadth of approaches: 'being honest and open does not [necessarily] require disclosure about personal histories or circumstances' (Sapin, 2013, p68). Nell noted that when she had been working in detached youth work settings she might decide not to be clear about her LGBQ sexuality as she did not always feel safe. However, in most of her work situations Nell was clear about her sexuality often because young people had guessed due to her *'androgynous'* appearance (discussed below: 8.3.1).

From the data discussed above it seems that ethics in practice is more difficult than ethics in theory, but this provides youth workers with even more reason to think about their ethical approach (Banks, 2010) before they are in the heat of 'the moment' (Trelfa, 2018, p366) with young people. The ability to reflect in practice (rather than on practice: Schön, 1991) whilst 'on the wing' (Davies, 2006, p75) and to react quickly to young people's experience comes only with practice and repetition. It is clear that various respondents defended their honesty, or lack of complete honesty, using a range of different points. It is also clear that always being honest (Kantian ethics as cited in Banks, 2010) or always acting to bring about the greatest good (Utilitarian ethics as cited in Banks, 2010) may be at odds with each other. This emphasises the importance of 'reflection ... and the ability to manage competing demands' (Spence & Devanney, 2013, p84) when deciding how honest and open to be and what to share with young people.

The discussion now moves to the second subtheme of this section: how being open about themselves and their sexuality enabled them to be a role model or possibility model for young people regarding why respondents felt it was important to be clear about their sexuality with young people.

### 7.3.2 To be a role model or possibility model

Allowing young people to see positive LGBT role models is welcomed by LGBT young people (Formby, 2013). Youth workers are expected, according to the literature, to be a 'role model ... practicing what they preach' (Young, 2006, pp75-76). All respondents talked about the need for heterosexual and LGBQ youth workers to be this positive role model (as reflected in Batsleer, 1996). Six respondents were clear that there was more pressure on youth workers from minority communities (such as LGBQ or BAME) to be that positive role model due the lack of other positive adult role models for young people from these communities. Liz, however, noted that that it may

be just as challenging for white, straight, male youth workers who set out to be a positive and non-macho male role model as for youth workers who identify as LGBTQ. For some of the respondents being the positive role model was not necessarily about their LGBTQ sexuality nor about always being good at things. For Gaby and Patricia, it was about sharing that they had not done well at school but discussing that this had not prevented them from making a success of their lives. For Amy it was about showing that being poor at spelling was not necessarily a problem. For Beth it was about showing that you did not always need to be good at everything. For Ellie and Patricia, it was about showing that you did not have to dress in what was considered, by your peers, to be stylish. Jane summed up what other respondents suggested saying: *'when I'm in my work mode ... I don't smoke ... I don't swear ... I try not to be grumpy ... but rather be a positive role model'*. So for these youth workers showing that they had made a success of their lives was as important as issues to do with their LGBTQ sexuality. This offers, as the literature suggests, youth workers the opportunity to use 'incidents or aspects of their lives to provide a new perspective of how lives can be turned around or changed' (Sapin, 2013, p68).

A positive role model can offer a template for young people but this may put a big burden on the youth workers 'who are expected to draw on their own complex identities in the course of their work' (Batsleer, 2008, p88). A number of respondents, agreeing with Batsleer's point, talked about the pressure on them to be seen as positive influences rather than real or authentic people. Some respondents noted that, whilst being clear that their lives were not perfect, they would not talk to young people about certain issues that they were not proud of or open about. Amy said that she would not discuss, with young people, her very troubled relationship with her birth father or let young people know when she was upset about issues in her family. Carla noted that she would not share issues to do with body size as *'I am not sorted about that yet'* nor would she talk to young people about possibly *'abusive relationships'* that she had been in although she would tell *'young people that [same-sex] relationships can be hard sometimes'*: but without going into details. Fern said that she would not talk with young people about the issues of *'misogyny'* in her life. Gaby said that she might generalise about her teenage years by saying that *'we got up to no good'* but would not talk to young people about the illegal things that *'I got up to in the park'*: a park very close to the PRU where she worked. Gaby was clearly aware of the importance of the positive influence and example that she was trying to bring to these young people.

Ellie and Sabidah did not like the terminology of 'role models': agreeing with the literature which suggested that role models are 'doomed to disappoint' (Batsleer, 2008, p88). Being a role model implied, for Ellie, being at a distance and being put 'on a pedestal'. Ellie talked instead of a 'possibility model' (also cited in Devlin, 2015; Batsleer, 2018). Ellie suggested that holding up a range of different possibilities to young people, the youth worker being just one of these 'possibility models', may ensure that the worker is not put on this pedestal. Ellie went on to talk about how she had held up a range of possibility models when talking in a school assembly:

*I was in a Catholic school and I talked about experiences of growing up Catholic ... because I know how ... that pattern of silence and shame works in that culture. So it's important to be the one that disrupts the status quo ... and say "this is possible. Catholics can be gay, Muslims can be trans, there are many ways of being. Just because you haven't encountered it yet, it might be true and it might be true for you".*

This idea of possibility models links to a discussion in the LGBT literature which suggests that it is important to be aware that one's own coming out stories may not reflect much of the full reality (King and Noelle, 2004) of experiences when coming out. Rather these coming out stories reflect what has been learnt since coming out: as 'flash bulb memories' (Rossi, 2010, p1175). However, it seems that sharing one's own stories and allowing and supporting young people to have the space to share their own coming out stories can be important, as this can allow young people space to test out their ideas about their own LGBTQ sexuality (Bacon, 1998) as they 'recreate the past and validate the present' within the safety of their own community (Rich, 1980, p.xx).

The above discussion of role models pointed out that respondents were clear that all youth workers were seen by young people as role models; they also talked about the importance of showing young people that they were real people who made mistakes and had weaknesses. The discussion also pointed out the pressure being a role model brought and two respondents offered the more useful idea of possibility, rather than role, models. The discussion now moves to the third focus in this subsection: how being open about their own self impacted on the balance power within relationships.

### 7.3.3 To share power with young people

Lukes (2002) suggested that there were three different dimensions to power. The first dimension is the power to win: an argument or a fight. This dimension may relate to working with young



people with challenging behaviour: an aspect of youth work not relevant to this research. The second dimension is the power to manage the agenda. This seems to be more important in most youth work settings than Lukes' first dimension. The third dimension is maybe the most important dimension for youth workers: to influence the 'desires, beliefs and judgments ... [of others. This] dimension of power ... is usually hidden from direct observation' (Hayward and Lukes, 2008, p6).

The youth work literature talks about the importance of young people having power in their relationships with youth workers (Spence et al, 2006; Young, 2006; Davies, 2010; Sapin, 2013; Stanton, 2016) and suggests that it is vital for youth workers to develop 'mutuality in relationships' (Spence and Devanney, 2013, p84). This sharing of power within the relationship with young people was reflected in Amy's comment: *'even them calling me "Amy" as opposed to "Miss" ... [shows] mutual respect. They share things about their lives, I share appropriate things about my life and they feel a little bit more equal'*. This seems to fit with Lukes' second dimension of power: influencing the agenda. Issie, like many of the respondents, was aware young people having some *'power in [their] relationships [with her] is crucial and important'* but noted that *'I don't actually believe that you can ever have a completely equal power relationship with a young person because when it really comes down to it I am the adult'*. Here Issie seems to be talking initially about both Lukes' second and third dimension of power: that of influencing the agenda as well as influencing the beliefs and judgments of the young people or youth worker. Amy's comment below highlights the point made above (Ch.7.1) and by many respondents. *'There's a degree of respect that's gained ... from allowing ... [young people] to know a little bit about you. They feel as though they know you as a person as opposed to just a youth worker.* This seems to focus on the ability of the young person to influence the agenda of the work: Lukes' second dimension.

Most of the detailed comments from respondents about power in relationships with young people were about them, as the worker, struggling to have some power in setting the agenda within the relationship. This is something that is not mentioned within the youth work literature but seemed an important point for some respondents. Liz suggested that the youth worker will not be able to build a relationship if they *'lose the power'*. Liz also noted that being out with young people enabled her to *'regain power'* in her relationships with young people. Jane suggested that as young people do have power, even in building-based settings, the worker needs to *'tread lightly around challenging them initially ... [until you] get a little bit of power back'* as the relationship

with them develops. Jane went on to describe the relationship with a troubled young person: Cath.

*When I met her, let me tell you she had 100% of the power, I had no power ... she had absolutely all the power and I was working to try and get a bit of the power back by putting boundaries ... in place, by starting to develop that relationship.*

From these discussions it was clear that young people did have some power over the agenda in the relationship with a youth worker (Lukes' second dimension), but it was also necessary for the youth worker to have some influence in their relationships with young people (Lukes' third dimension of power). This idea that youth workers need to have power, and often have to struggle to build this power within their relationships with young people, is a point of particular interest as it is not previously noted within the youth work literature; nor are Lukes' different dimensions of power discussed within the youth work literature. The discussion now moves to the fourth subtheme: the importance of being proud, rather than ashamed, of their LGBTQ sexuality.

#### 7.3.4 To challenge prejudice and encourage pride

All respondent talked about their central role of 'contributing towards the promotion of social justice' (NYA, 2001, p6) and 'challenging any discriminatory or oppressive behaviour' (IYW, 2013). This reflected the core values of youth work that are noted in the literature (e.g. NYA, 2001; LLUK, 2008; IDYW, 2009; IYW, 2013; Sapin, 2013; Davies, 2015; Batsleer, 2018; Sallah, Ogunnusi & Kennedy, 2018).

Ellie discussed how she addressed young people within the school LGBT awareness sessions that her organisation was invited to deliver. She encouraged heterosexual young people to understand their commonality with LGBT young people, rather than seeing LGBT people as the 'other' (see Brah, 1999, p1). Thus in an assembly or whole class setting, in Ellie's words:

*I would say ... 'has anyone ever had a secret? ... What's the good things about it, what's the difficult things about it? So you can all understand a little bit what it means sometimes when somebody knows that they're gay or trans'. So that way you're never pointing at people ... nor are you trying to make it a ... mystique thing, because ... everyone has gone through changes ... So there's lots of parallels in everyone's lives ... And it's just about building those commonalities and then helping people work out*

*that if that's true for LGBT people, what they can do in their setting to make that a better and easier situation.*

Ellie pointed out that enabling young people, whether they were identifying as LGBT or heterosexual, to discuss LGBT issues could open an important space and support heterosexual young people towards being less judgemental about any LGBT issues generally.

Most respondents talked about the importance of being proud of being gay: a point noted in the literature as discussed above (1.3.3 & 3.1.6). Ellie's comments below note the importance of this:

*If you're going out there and you're talking about LGBT stuff if then you happen to be LGBT and you're not saying it, or you're not actually thinking about how you can use that usefully then all you do is compound the shame, because why would you not say? You must be ashamed. ... Openness is the contrast to shame.*

Encouraging an openness to discussions around LGBT issues, building understanding and commonality amongst all young people and building pride, not shame, with young LGBT people were important elements of these workers' roles. This links into the next focus which moves to a focus on the importance of being clear about personal LGBQ sexuality in order to develop safe spaces for the young people.

### 7.3.5 To develop a safe space for young people

Keeping young people safe is seen as fundamental to the role of a youth worker according to the literature (NYA, 2001; LLUK, 2008; Jeffs and Smith, 2010b; IYW, 2011; Batsleer, 2012). This safety, for LGBT young people, means knowing that they are in a physically and emotionally safe space so that they can be themselves (Jeffs and Smith, 2010b; Mason, 2015). This is an important point for youth workers who are working with LGBT-identifying young people as '75% of young people' attending LGBT focussed youth work provision 'had no one else ... they saw as a supportive adult in their lives' (Lee, 2015, p130) and youth workers were perceived as being 'able to understand' them better than other adults (Lee, 2015, p130). It is important that these spaces are safe over a length of time as this acceptance and trust takes time to develop (Jeffs and Smith, 2010b; Davies, 2016) as discussed above (7.2.1).

Thirteen of the fifteen respondents noted that being open and clear about their own LGBQ sexuality was supportive for LGBT-identifying young people. Amy suggested that her being out as gay with young people who are '*struggling with their sexuality*' can be useful for them. This is a

point echoed in the literature which suggests that LGBT young people knowing and forming positive relationships with youth workers who are clear about their LGBT sexuality is supportive and important (Batsleer, 1996b & 2012; Formby, 2013). Nell said that for LGBT young people that she works with: *'my identity validates your identity'* and Beth talked about the importance for LGBT-identifying young people who she worked of *'being proud of what they'* were. Helena repeated more than once that from the extensive research that she had undertaken with young people who were LGB *'that it is the internalised homophobia that is dangerous'*. Five respondents (Carla, Fern, Liz, Helena and Paula) agreed that the continued lack of visibility of LGBT issues around school buildings or *'within the curriculum'* (as noted in Formby, 2013, p1) meant that issues around LGBQ sexuality were rarely discussed in school settings. This made the discussion of such issues even more important in youth work settings.

Beth and Helena, both working with LGBT- identifying young people, talked about the importance of young people feeling safe in the space which was being created for them. Helena linked this to the importance of always saying clearly to young people that she was a lesbian so that the young people could trust her and understand her motivation for the research and work that she was doing. Beth noted that the LGBT young people that she worked with *'need someone to listen to them ... a safe space for them to talk ... and be themselves'*. Issie, not working specifically with LGBT-identifying young people, was aware that some young people in the group might well identify as LGBT or might be questioning their sexual identity or gender. Issie noted that it was important to leave open the idea for young people who might notice that being *'ambiguous about my sexuality ... might not be a relevant topic [to the task in hand] but it was always relevant for some young people in this group'*. This awareness of the need for safe spaces for LGBT-questioning young people is something that a youth worker, not so aware of issues of LGBQ sexuality or gender identity, might not have at the forefront of their awareness when working with groups of young people. Keeping these spaces safe for marginalised young people is not an easy task with the increasing focus on outcomes and targets for youth workers (as noted in Batsleer, 2012b) is discussed more fully below (Ch.9).

In this discussion focussed on safety respondents identified two themes: the importance of spaces where LGBT young people can be themselves and the importance of appropriate support from LGBT-identifying adults. Some respondents also noted that LGBQ youth workers also needed to feel safe (as discussed above: 7.3.1).

This section (7.3) with five subthemes has focussed on why youth workers use their self in their work with young people has drawn on the findings from respondents and has been supported by some literature. It discussed that most respondents felt it important to be honest with youth people regarding who they were and their LGBQ sexuality. The challenges of being a role model or a possibility model were discussed, as was the importance of using ones' LGBQ sexuality to share power with young people in relationships that were built, often over long periods of time with young people. How being open about their self was important in the challenging of prejudice, both with all young people not just LGBT young people was discussed. This led into the final subtheme: that of being open about their self in order to create and develop safe spaces for LGBT young people to be their self. The discussion has pointed out that being open about their own self allowed respondents to be active and positive influences in the lives of young people. The discussion now moves to when respondents felt that it was **not** appropriate to be out about their sexuality with some young people that they worked with.

#### 7.4 Why not be out about their LGBQ sexuality?

Some respondents noted that deciding not to share information about themselves, especially regarding their LGBQ sexuality, with young people was an important and positive choice. There were three themes within these discussions. Firstly: not sharing as an individual choice; second: not sharing about issues of LGBQ sexuality as a team approach to working with young people; finally: that issues to do with LGBQ sexuality were not relevant to the context of the work with particular young people at this time. These three themes are discussed below.

##### 7.4.1 Individual choice of the youth worker

Thirteen of the fifteen respondents were happy to share some personal information with young people as discussed above (7.3.1). However, two respondents, Gaby and Fern, were clear that they did not want to, or felt it unnecessary, to share much personal information about their lives with young people.

Fern seemed content that the LGBT young people she worked with did not know that she identified as bisexual and was married to a woman. Whilst her colleagues at the LGBT organisation where she worked half time, were clear about her bisexuality she stated that she was '*not concerned about being out as a bisexual woman*' around the LGBT young people within this organisation. Fern was clear that she would ensure that young people knew that there were other options regarding sexual identity rather than just straight or gay/lesbian but '*without saying this*

*is personal experience of mine*'. Fern did point out that many of the young people were *'identifying beyond the LGBT ... acronyms. ... Young people might identify as gender fluid ... identifying as pansexual or omnisexual'* so maybe she felt that being open about her bisexuality was not important for these young people. Explaining Fern's thinking using a longer quote from her seems useful here.

*My work with young people is very boundaried ... working in an LGBT space: people make assumptions of you, but I don't share a lot of myself. ... [I might] talk [with young people] about ... a TV programme ... we'll talk about that ..., but I won't share experience, you know, about family or friends or partner or whatever. ... I feel that that's oversharing from a professional boundary position. ... Other people might think it's ... important to share ... that you're married to another woman and stuff like that. ... I'm not closeted ... I don't hide my feminism.... But I don't share things that I think aren't appropriate to share. ... For me young people don't need to know ... much about my life ... it's more about them, and you can relate with young people without having to confide ... personal details. You need to find some commonality but it doesn't mean that you need to tell them your whole life.*

Fern remembered learning through her youth work degree *'that there are other ways to have conversations without putting yourself in it'*. Fern did, however, point out that she might talk to young people about her body piercings: especially if the young person is thinking about having piercings.

Gaby's discomfort with sharing personal information came from a different position to that of Fern. Gaby was nervous about young people finding out about her LGBTQ sexuality as she believed this would undermine her role at the PRU where she had been a student on placement. It was possible that this was due to the fact that Gaby had relatively recently come out to her parents and family about her sexuality. This is supported by the discussion within the literature that said that being open or coming out is a lifelong process (Casey, 2002) and not something that happened quickly as *'coming out never stops'* (Devlin, 2015, p176). Maybe Gaby had not arrived at a place where she had sufficient confidence to question the homophobia and biphobia of the young people who she was working with in this challenging setting. Gaby was a BAME woman who could pass as straight and so maybe had not the same pressures on her as other workers, as discussed below (8.3.1). For Gaby her boundaries and the fact that she could pass as straight

allowed her, as the worker, a safe space (as discussed in Batsleer, 2008). As Gaby said: *'I never came out to the kids [at the PRU] ... no point as ... [none of the other workers] challenged homophobia or sexism: I wouldn't dare'*. Gaby went on to say: *'I hated being [in the sex education class] ... I felt on edge all the time'* so she asked not to be in that class. She pointed out that the young people she worked with said that same-sex marriage was *'disgusting and appalling. So I never spoke to them about it'*. Young people would share their relationship problems with Gaby but *'I just told them I was not going to discuss'* my personal life with them. This might have been a powerful opportunity missed by Gaby, but maybe it was not appropriate for her to be out as gay given the very challenging setting in which she worked where other members of staff were not questioning homophobia, biphobia or sexism amongst the young people. Only Gaby was able to make this judgement.

The fact that Fern and Gaby seemed to share less about their selves than other respondents suggests that deciding how much of one's own life to share and when to share it is a personal matter. This is supported by the literature which suggests that *'sharing information about [her own life was] ... an individual matter ... [as she believed that] being honest and open does not require disclosure about personal histories or circumstances'* (Sapin, 2013, p68) as noted above (7.3.1). Other respondents were, however, more likely to be *'very open about their experience and use their interpretations of their lives as a regular method of practice'* (Sapin, 2013, p68) than Fern and Gaby.

#### 7.4.2 As part of a team strategy

Jane and Nell both suggested taking a team strategy to avoid putting LGBT workers in the firing line regarding challenging homophobia or biphobia. They suggested that being unclear about their own LGBTQ sexuality may put more of an onus on the straight youth workers to also challenge heteronormative prejudices. Jane, when a manager of a large youth centre was more likely to *'tell young people it doesn't matter if I'm gay or not'* when challenging their homophobia. Jane also encouraged her:

*'straight colleagues to do the same ... keep young people guessing ... say "I find that offensive". ... "Well are you gay?" "It doesn't matter if I'm gay" ... I really wanted my straight colleagues to say it because more often than not my colleagues would say "no I'm not gay!". To try and get that power to say "it doesn't matter whether I'm gay as what matters is people in this room may be, and you may have offended them*

*and it's not right". ... [So] de-heterosexualising the environment for both workers and young people and freeing for me as a gay worker'.*

Jane and Nell both suggested taking this approach as a member of a staff team: an idea noted in Batsleer (1996a). Such a team-based approach to challenging homophobia and biphobia links with the idea from queer theory that being unclear about LGBTQ sexuality can be useful as it may prevent LGBT people from being trapped by the norms of straight society (see Butler, 1991) and so forced into the position of always being the youth worker to challenge homophobia, biphobia or transphobia. Interestingly Liz, along with her male Muslim colleague, supported by their heterosexual manager, had also taken a similar queering approach to their sexuality and marital status with young people during detached youth work sessions. This was because as Liz felt '*vulnerable ... and not strong enough to be out*'. Liz reported that this queering led to many interesting conversations with young people and allowed space for discussions and questions that would not have otherwise happened. It also encouraged attendance from some young people who were LGBT. However it became very difficult for her colleague who was about to get married and wanted to share this with young people. Liz reported that being unclear about her lesbian sexuality with young people over a length of time had left her feeling that she was '*not being completely honest*' with young people.

It seemed that building a whole team approach to being unclear about workers' sexuality would be difficult and if some workers in the team were not able to carry this through (maybe most difficult for heterosexual workers) it could become another trap and challenge for the LGBTQ youth workers. The organisational context in which respondents worked impacted greatly on their decisions regarding if they should be out with colleagues about their LGBTQ sexuality. The discussion now moves to the third theme and subsection: focussing on the idea that youth workers might be closet or not clear about their LGBTQ sexuality within some young people because it was not of relevance to their work.

#### 7.4.3 LGBTQ sexuality is not relevant to the work

All respondents were clear that when sharing stories or issues from their own lives with young people this was to develop professional and appropriate relationships and not friendships, as noted within the literature (Ord, 2007; Blacker, 2010; Sapin, 2013; de St Croix, 2016). The focus always had to be on the needs and interests of the young people (Batsleer, 2008; IDYW, 2010;



Bradford and Cullen, 2014; Davies: 2015) as youth workers are 'not there to meet their own' needs (Ord, 2007, p54). Ellie spoke about ensuring that *'you are not being self-indulgent ... weighing up what's the benefit of people knowing this'*. Nell explained that she was aware, when working with eight to eleven year olds, that the important factor was to get young people focussed on issues of relevance to them. When working with this age group Nell would not generally share information about her LGBTQ sexuality as a focus needed to be clearly kept on the interests and lives of the young people in order to maintain their engagement in the work that she was doing with them. This was in contrast to when Nell worked with older teenagers who had more ability to engage for longer around issues and challenges that she brought to them within the context of her work.

The literature (e.g. NYA, 2001; Spence et al 2006; Banks, 2010) suggests that ensuring that the focus is always on the needs and interests of the young people is even more important when working alongside young people who are 'vulnerable' (NYA, 2001, p8). Beth, in agreement with this noted that when she was working with young men who were at risk of CSE the focus needed to be solely on the young men and their feelings so it was *'not useful for me to be out in those sort of situations'*. Jane emphasised this same point when she talked about *'never confirming or denying'* her lesbian sexuality when working with a vulnerable young woman who was throwing homophobic insults at her. Jane also noted that she did not out herself when working with a *'volatile young man'* who didn't give much of himself away but they did discuss Jane's *'tastes in football and cars'*. Similarly, Issie emphasised that when working with care leavers she would *'wait until ... [she] had a positive relationship with them'* before considering being out with them.

Some respondents noted that issues to do with LGBTQ sexuality may be a distraction or even a barrier in some youth work contexts. Ellie talked about how it was *'difficult to be out'* when doing girls-only work as she wanted to challenge stereotypes and allow young women and other professionals to see feminists without the possible stereotype that all feminists might be lesbians. Ellie said that in some contexts *'I might censor myself a bit more'*. Ellie's story is presented below in some detail as it makes this important point clear.

*We did a young women's residential about body image and we had a few different young women's groups there and we had a young lesbian and bisexual women's group, and then we had three [groups] that weren't [LGBT]. And I was coordinating*

*the whole residential and there was a worker with the young lesbian and bisexual women's group and there was a young Muslim group there. ... Some of the girls in the lesbian and bisexual group were holding hands, were hugging, were sitting on each other's laps ... There was like a total outcry from the Muslim young women's group. And it was tricky to handle ... because, you know, what is and isn't deemed appropriate for any gender to be doing in those spaces varies ... from group to group and worker to worker .... But when I dealt with it, I dealt with it as a separate person. ... I tried to mediate between the groups and say 'there's no reason to freak out, these girls are holding hands with each other, they're not going to hold hands with you'. But also 'don't be getting too out of control. I don't want you necking in workshops. We're here to learn ... it's not about getting off with each other'. I tried to do that balancing stuff. But definitely ... didn't come out on that whole weekend. Partly ... because I don't think it would've been useful, but also with the other workers there because we were sharing dorms with the workers. I didn't want them to feel weird. Which again might be me self-censoring because I'm anticipating there'll be homophobia from them. ...I wish I'd thought about it more before that residential, because I'd not really anticipated how some of that stuff would play out. But generally speaking with girls' work stuff I think that it is ... consistently in the back of my mind ... don't be too 'out'. ... Don't lose the crowd. If you're talking about feminism stuff if then you come out and there could be a lot of really good stuff that can be gleaned around feminism. Not that they're opposites, and obviously there's lots of stuff that is, that overlaps, but I think it's a really, because of the relationships between men and women and how a lot of that plays out when we talk about feminism sometimes I feel it actually isn't my place to say about some things.*

In contrast to Ellie's story above, Amy recounted that in a number of different settings she had been told by colleagues not to share information about her LGBTQ sexuality. Amy pointed out that she often ignored this advice as she found that other staff were sharing their personal issues about home and family life. It seemed to Amy that colleagues were unnecessarily nervous of the impact of her sharing information about her gay sexuality with the young people due to their lack of familiarity in talking to young people about LGBT issues. Amy was confident that this fear was unfounded and linked to colleagues' ignorance or homophobia. When she did tell young people that she was gay, it did not seem to have the negative impact that her colleagues expected. When

challenging young people about their language which was possibly unconsciously homophobic, she might say *“Well I’m gay” and they went “oh right” and continued with what they were doing without the homophobic comments’.*

It seems that these workers were aware of the pressure, not from themselves but from colleagues, to fit into the heteronormative values of society reflecting the literature (Richardson, 1997; Seidman, 2003; Butler, 2004; Ryle, 2012 and discussed above: 3.1.4) and were aware that, in some but not all situations, accepting that being out of step with these heteronormative values could put them in a difficult situation and required a careful and reflective approach to their use of self.

It is clear from the above discussions that there are many situations in which respondents stated that sharing information about their self and their LGBTQ sexuality with young people was not appropriate. Some respondents started from the assumption that it was rarely, if ever, relevant to share such information. For others, choosing to consciously be unclear about issues to do with LGBTQ sexuality was part of a whole team approach, a small team approach to challenge young people’s assumptions about youth workers identities. In some situations, it is clear that the self of the youth workers as a tool is not central to the work with a young person, this is most likely to be true when working with young people who are vulnerable for reasons other than their sexual preferences.

## Conclusion

This chapter focussed on why respondents chose to share or not share information about their self with young people. It commenced with a discussion regarding the centrality of relationships for respondents in their work. Respondents’ willingness to develop reciprocal relationships, despite the energy this required, was evident (reflecting the literature: Collander-Brown, 2010; Spence and Devanney, 2013). This was only possible if they shared information about their own selves through conversations (Young, 2006; Batsleer, 2008; Smith, H. 2010; Jeffs and Smith, 2014) starting with young people’s interests (Spence, 2007; Sapin, 2013; Davies, 2015).

Respondents noted that professional boundaries were not easy to draw in these relationships. Reflection, both in the moment of practice and later in a more critical manner on practice (Schön, 1991) through ‘gaze’ (Trelfa, 2018, p364) was needed to ensure that respondents developed flexible and appropriate boundaries (Murphy and Ord, 2013; Sapin, 2013) as their relationships

with young people continued to change and develop. The unpredictability and the complex nature of relationships in youth work meant that sometimes, on reflection, respondents noted that their sharing of some information may have been too speedy. One boundary that respondents talked about as being inflexible was that of not discussing their own sex life with young people nor developing any sort of sexual attraction between themselves and young people that they worked with.

Section 7.3 and 7.4 presented data from respondents as to why they chose to be clear or not with young people regarding their personal life. Most respondents were clear that they were honest with young people if asked about their sexuality. Honesty for most respondents brought benefits to their ongoing relationships with young people: as reflected in the literature (Young, 2006; Ord, 2007). Other reasons for workers noting that they would be honest with young people regarding their own LGBTQ sexuality was that there were often few possibility models of LGBTQ women either in youth work or other settings in the lives of young people. The term possibility model was preferred by some respondents to the more commonly used role model: a preference also noted in the literature (Devlin, 2015; Batsleer, 2018). All respondents noted that relationships with young people needed to be reciprocal: so reflecting the literature (e.g. Jeffs & Smith, 2004 & 2014; Young, 2006; Batsleer, 2008 as discussed above 2.2.3b). Some respondents also noted that within the relationships that they developed with young people they often had to struggle to gain some influence and power: linking to Lukes' third dimension of power: to influence the 'desires, beliefs and judgements' (Hayward & Lukes, 2008, p6) of these young people.

Being transparent about their own LGBTQ sexuality enabled respondents to be clear, with both heterosexual and LGBT young people, that they were themselves proud, so not ashamed, of their LGBTQ sexuality. This reflects discussions within the literature over the decades (Trenchard and Warren, 1984; Formby, 2013 & 2015; Postuvan et al, 2019). This provided vulnerable young people with space to consider the benefits of being out and proud regarding their minority identities and provided them with safe spaces in their lives. Safe spaces were needed in which young people could explore their own sexual identity with the confidence of supportive adults around them and safe spaces where they could be seen and accepted just as young people with no need to justify any extra needs to be accepted and supported: as reflected in Davies (2015).

Some respondents felt that it was not useful to share personal information with the young people that they worked with thus emphasising the agency that youth workers have in their style of

building relationships (as suggested in the literature Sapin, 2013). Both Jane and Nell spoke of wishing that they could work within staff teams where all youth workers would be unclear about their LGBQ sexuality. This could have enabled a sharing of the challenging of heteronormative assumptions within these staff teams rather than the burden falling on those workers who may at times be themselves vulnerable and so possibly unable to challenge homophobia, biphobia or transphobia. Knowing if it was relevant or useful for young people to know about their personal lives or their LGBQ sexuality was the final theme of this chapter: an important theme discussed within the youth work literature (NYA, 2001; Spence et al, 2006; Banks, 2010).

The discussion of findings now moves on from how youth workers decided when or what to share about their own self in their youth work roles to a more focussed discussion regarding how respondents went about this sharing of information within their day-to-day work.

## Chapter 8: How youth workers shared personal information

### Introduction

The previous chapter (Ch.7) focussed on why youth workers decided to share personal information about their self and their LGBQ sexuality with young people. This chapter examines how these fifteen cisgendered women youth workers consciously used their self or shared information about their self and their LGBQ sexuality within their professional relationships with young people. Despite the fact that there are extensive discussions within the youth work literature as to how youth workers might develop relationships with young people (e.g. Jeffs & Smith, 2005; Young, 2006; Blacker, 2010; Sercombe, 2010a; Smith, H., 2010; Fusco, 2012; Murphy & Ord, 2013) only a few sources (Blacker, 2010; Smith, H. 2010; Murphy & Ord, 2013) discuss what might be appropriate sharing by youth workers with young people. However, even these discussions do not provide evidence regarding how youth workers use their self or share personal information within their day-to-day work. Until recently the only author who had examined how youth workers shared information about themselves with young people was Spence (Spence, et al 2006; Spence, 2007 & 2010; Spence & Devanney, 2013). The recently published handbook on youth work practice does provide some new evidence as to how youth workers work with young people (Couch, 2018; Bright et al 2018; Spier and Giles, 2018). However, even within this new edited book (Aldred et al, 2018) there is no discussion regarding the sharing of issues around sexuality. This study, whilst making links to appropriate literature, has focused on these themes: how youth workers share personal information about their self but with this additional emphasis on the issue of LGBQ sexuality.

The chapter commences with a spotlight on working in team settings and with colleagues in partner agencies, specifically addressing the importance and the challenge of sharing personal information with these colleagues (8.1). The discussion then moves to examine how youth workers share information about their selves with young people, with attention on the usefulness of sharing information regarding age, style, dress, hobbies and interests (8.2). The focus then moves to the leaking of information about LGBQ sexuality (8.3.1) and how youth workers knew when to share information about their sexuality with young people (8.3.2). The final sections discuss how respondents went about this sharing (8.4) and how they dealt with the accidental meeting of young people outside the work place (8.5).

## 8.1 Being out in team settings with colleagues and with partner agencies

This section commences with a brief discussion regarding the importance of team working within youth work contexts; the focus then moves to how respondents were able to be open, or not, regarding their sexuality with their colleagues and managers. This is followed by discussions of the particular challenges faced by respondents and unsupportive situations that respondents recounted.

It is often assumed that youth workers work alongside supportive colleagues and supportive partner agencies (Young; 2006; Batsleer, 2008; LLUK, 2008; Coburn, 2011; Sercombe, 2010a; Sapin, 2013) as they seek to develop relationships with young people. Support in youth work settings is used here to mean that workers ‘provide learning opportunities for colleagues’ (LLUK, 2008, p13) and that they feel confident in discussing their challenges as well as their celebrations of practice with peers (Batsleer, 2008). Working with supportive colleagues is useful in the ‘process of location of self’ (Sapin, 2013, p67) and can assist workers to develop confidence regarding how they work and how they portray their self within their work setting (Batsleer, 2008).

Seven respondents talked generally about the importance of team working. Ellie spoke of people within her LGBT focussed organisation being ‘*critical of one another in a supportive and loving way ... [where a critical approach to practice with young people] is nurtured and challenged ... so that you’re continually kept on your toes and you don’t get too settled in your work*’. Ellie’s words mirror ideas in the literature which suggest that discussions with colleagues can support careful reflection and so improve practice in difficult situations (Sercombe, 2010a). Issie talked about the ease of working with colleagues who knew where her boundaries were in terms of what information she would be willing to share with young people regarding her home life and LGBQ sexuality. This suggests that Batsleer is correct in saying that ‘sensitivity is developed in teams of workers who discuss and debate issues’ (Batsleer, 2008, p89).

In terms of sharing information with colleagues, fourteen (of the fifteen) respondents said that they were open about their LGBQ sexuality with their managers and colleagues. This is in contrast to only one quarter of all workers being out to their colleagues (Stonewall, 2008c). Liz spoke about her ‘*new gay boss ... [who was supportive in her] decision to be out with young people*’. Interestingly Gaby, the only respondent who had not wanted to be out as gay to her colleagues, was ‘*relieved*’ to discover that most of her colleagues did know that she was gay. This meant that

she no longer had to be careful how she chatted with her colleagues about her partner and social life.

Working in more than one setting or role brought into focus the importance of context in terms of team support. Beth noted that when she was working in her role within a Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) project she did not make her LGBTQ sexuality clear with colleagues, as she thought that she *'may not be taken as seriously'* by these professionals. Beth felt that they would see her LGBTQ sexuality as an impediment to her support for young people who are at risk of CSE. This is supported by other research which suggests that colleagues may be critical of the impact of a professional's LGBTQ identity on service users (Ward & Winstanley, 2005). This was in clear contrast with Beth's openness regarding her LGBTQ sexuality, both with colleagues and young people, when working in her role within a LGBT focussed youth work project. Fern also reported very different experiences in her two half time roles. She found supportive colleagues in the LGBT youth work agency but in the other mainstream youth work agency she felt very isolated. There she was the only LGBT-identifying member of staff and felt unable to even *'share stories of my marriage [with colleagues] as it was such a small event and very particular: not much in common with other people and their weddings'*.

The range of youth and community work contexts that respondents worked in highlighted the challenges of finding support from colleagues and sharing personal information with colleagues. A lack of support from colleagues was noted by Patricia who, despite decades of experience, had chosen to down-grade from a management role to work at grassroots level with young people. Patricia noted that teamwork was essential when working with young people with very challenging behaviour but that there was now no space for team building or team working. This was problematic for her and other full time colleagues who had to work with volunteers who often did not abide by professional youth work values. Patricia pointed out that there had never been any LGBT-awareness training in her local authority youth service. Patricia also noted, with sadness and tears, that when the Youth service was reorganised into cross-professional locality-based teams, her new manager, who was not from a youth work background, continually talked about *'BLT'* despite Patricia's repetition of the initials LGBT. Patricia said that she had *'stepped back'* into the era of non-acceptance of LGBT issues in their *'straight world'*. This lack of sharing of core values made the *'need to be accountable to ... colleagues'* (as noted by the NYA, 2001, p4) very difficult for practitioners.



Rosie's story regarding support from colleagues offers a very different perspective and provides a challenge to people who aim to be supportive of LGBTQ workers. When Rosie had worked in a care setting, some decades previously, she was not out as lesbian with colleagues in this *'very straight white environment even though young people were from very diverse backgrounds. ... staff were homophobic ... sexist ... racist'*. Rosie then landed *'the job of my dreams'* in a youth work project using the outdoors with young people where she knew there were many LGBTQ staff. Rosie, who presented as femme, was told when first offered the job that it was *'great to have a straight woman on the team'*. She was surprised as she had not been asked about her LGBTQ sexuality at interview and she was clear at this point that she was a *'dyke [but] I was ... [instructed to be] the pretend straight person in the team... to the outside world'* as the project did not want to be seen as an all-LGBTQ staff team. This point is supported by other research which indicates that being seen as overly gay friendly may not be good for business (Colgan et al, 2007). As Rosie says: *'I got the short straw ... I would have been very comfortably out ... but I was actually more in [there] than anywhere else [I had worked]. ... A lot of young people would assume that I was straight and other staff were lesbian. ... It was the organisation's choice ... not mine'*. For Rosie, despite the fact that she was *'very comfortable'* in this setting she was not able to develop *'as a youth worker'* due to having to pretend to outsiders and many young people that she was straight. Rosie's femme image, which led to her often being seen as heterosexual rather than gay, is discussed in more depth below (8.3.1).

Despite the fact that most respondents wanted to be open about their home life and LGBTQ sexuality with colleagues (a point supported by other literature: Colgan et al, 2007), some respondents had not found support over the years from colleagues or managers around issues to do with their LGBTQ sexuality. This lack of support and understanding of LGBT issues by colleagues and managers was a recurrent theme for Helena who had worked in LGBT youth work for many decades. Helena identified three *'very stressful'* times in her life that had been caused by the homophobia of work colleagues, managers or people that she worked closely with in other agencies. The first of these *'very stressful times'* was when Helena worked for a local authority youth service in the north of England in the early 1990s, when Section 28 of the 1988 local government Act (DfE, 1988) was new on the statute books. Her supervisor, on finding out that she was running a youth group for lesbian young people, asked her if as *'a lesbian ... [she should] be working with young lesbians?'* He insisted that she attended weekly supervision with him about her work. Helena decided that she could not work under this manager's supervision saying: *'we*

*had to stop the youth group we were running ... because I was not going to work under those circumstances, ... having to go ... for supervision, being supervised by a homophobic ... youth officer, I couldn't do it so I just withdrew*'. Helena's second 'very stressful' incident in youth work was when a member of staff from another voluntary, not-for-profit agency, accused her publicly of not providing professional support to a young woman who eventually committed suicide. This was a young woman that Helena worked closely with. Helena believed that the other agency (who had also worked with the young woman) had given the young woman very poor advice: *'to come out to her family'*. This incident impacted on the funding that Helena's LGBT youth group received from the local authority. The third incident is too recent and too painful to be shared publicly. These experiences of repeatedly being knocked down and undermined by colleagues and partner agencies was a heavy pain that Helena had carried into her retirement.

Marie, like Helena, a youth worker with years of experiences, reported that she had *'always been out'* with her youth work colleagues about her lesbian identity (she had worked within the same Local Authority for eighteen years). However since the reorganisation of the Youth service into locality based inter-professional teams Marie was, for half of her work time, based in a police station. Marie noted that most of her police colleagues were not aware of her lesbian identity, not because she did not trust them as individuals but because she did not trust the institution of the police. Marie was particularly unhappy about discussing her LGBQ sexuality with the senior police officer. This was sometimes problematic for Marie, for example, when she returned from an extended sick leave due to the death of her ex-partner and mother of her three children. Thus, at this difficult time, Marie was unable to share with her colleagues the stresses that she was facing in her personal life. Marie talked about the fact that her own history included being on *'picket lines and on marches. So I've ... found it quite difficult being [based] in the police station'*. For Marie the disconnect regarding her own values and the values of her colleagues at the police station was very testing; a point also discussed in other research (Colgan et al 2007).

Amy, a younger and more recently qualified youth worker, had also encountered a lack of support from some colleagues. Amy noted that in two different settings where she worked she was told not to be out as LGBQ with the young people (as discussed above:7.4.3) as it was thought that this would have been a barrier to her developing useful relationships with the young people and their parents. Amy disagreed with this guidance and consequently ignored it. She recounted a situation where homophobic comments were being made by young people: *'I just said "well I'm*

*gay” and ... [the young people] went “oh right” and continued what they were doing without the homophobic comments’.* This demonstrated that sometimes colleagues and managers were unjustifiably fearful of young people’s reaction to LGBQ issues. Amy also reported how one colleague did not believe that she was gay. This colleague was older, and a part time youth worker, who might not have had the more open attitude to LGBT people that has begun to exist in British society (see National Centre for Social Research (NCSR), 2017). He stated his surprise and disbelief regarding Amy’s LGBQ sexuality when Amy challenged his assumption that a young woman, that Amy knew to be a young lesbian, should go and find a boyfriend.

It is clear from these findings that different women youth workers had a range of experiences of support, or not, from their colleagues and this impacted on their own self-esteem and confidence within their work and setting, as affirmed by the literature (Sapin, 2013). These findings reflect the importance of being out to colleagues before being out to young people about issues to do with their LGBQ sexuality (see Batsleer, 1996a). It would be good to think that the lack of support from colleagues that Helena had encountered was a thing of the past in youth work settings but the more recent challenging experience reported by Amy, Fern and Patricia suggests otherwise. In some settings where youth workers are working in cross-professional teams, it seems that support from colleagues for LGBQ workers is now a rarer commodity than in the past: a worrying trend. This goes against the suggested change in attitudes towards homosexuality noted in the literature (Rotheram-Borus and Langabeer, 2001 cited in NCSR, 2017) and the developing LGBQ friendly legislation.

This section has provided evidence that supportive team working was experienced by some of these youth workers but many more had experienced challenges and difficulties with regard to a lack of support or understanding from close colleagues and managers over the years. Some of these challenges were linked to the changes within youth work which will be explored in Ch.9.

## 8.2 How youth workers share personal information with young people

The importance within youth work of building relationships that start with young people’s interests is essential advice given by many writers (e.g. Spence, 2007; Davies, 2015). However, the complex nature of how this is done is not discussed in detail as Spence (2007) states and as noted above (Ch.8/Introduction). This section (8.2) considers the aspects of their personal lives that respondents felt important to share with young people, apart from information about their LGBQ sexuality. This discussion commences with how respondents talked with young people about their

own age. It then moves to focus on the sharing of style and dress: which was done through actions more often than through discussions with young people. The final focus is on the sharing of information about hobbies, interests and political views. These aspects all seemed to be useful tools for youth workers to challenge young people's acceptance of society's norms (Davies, 1986 & 2006; Spence, 2010; Batsleer, 2012; Cullen, 2013b; Taylor, 2016; Batsleer, 2018) as well as wider political issues (Cullen, 2013b; Sapin, 2013; Cooper, 2018).

One of the older and one of the younger respondents talked about using their age in conversations with young people. Gaby (in her early 20s) reported that as she was by far the youngest member of staff at the PRU thus bringing *'a bit of youth'* into the staff team which enabled her to share common interests in music or local social venues. For Liz the fact that she was older than many young people expected was useful in her youth work relationships: some young people called her *'mum'*. Young people seeing youth workers as a second mum is a point discussed in the literature (Sercombe, 2010a). Sercombe goes on to point out that it never seems to be suggested that a second father would be an appropriate relationship with a male youth worker.

Five respondents, often those who were younger, talked about the fact that their own style of dress and music might be familiar to, and comfortable for, young people. Beth suggested that her *'style of hair, clothes ... attitudes ... are very relatable to young people ... [and that her dressing] like a scraggy student'* was often a conversation starter with young people. Fern noted that when she was more *'gothy'* some young people would relate to her taste in music and clothes but she was also aware that other young people may have been alienated by this Goth image. She reported that she was careful not to wear t-shirts with bands' names on them, as she felt this was more likely to alienate young people than to be a topic for conversation. Both Liz and Issie, two of the femme respondents, talked about choosing to sometimes *'glam up for celebration events'* (Issie). This was something that they both noted their colleagues did not usually do. Both Liz and Issie also mentioned the fact that their long hair was often a *'useful conversation starter'* (Liz). Ellie noted that her lack of *'mainstream style ... [and] cycling clothes'* might be less comfortable for young people but could enable her to challenge mainstream consumer culture. These comments seem to fit with Murphy and Ord's *'free and open layer'* (See figure 1: Ch.2.) where *'aspects of our personal style, [and] character traits'* (Murphy and Ord, 2013, p333) are important as youth workers' style and dress often reflects the *'language codes of the young people'* (Sercombe, 2010b, p77). This level of sharing is often done unconsciously or *'with little need for*

concern ... through everyday interactions': an important starting point for engaging young people (Murphy and Ord, 2013, p336).

Twelve of the fifteen respondents spoke about the importance of letting young people know about their hobbies (as suggested in the literature: Foreman, 1990; Spence, 2007; Sercombe, 201b; Murphy & Ord, 2013; Sapin, 2013). When sharing interest in hobbies with young people it is important to leave space for the young people to be seen as the expert (see Murphy and Ord, 2013). Amy, Gaby and Ellie shared their interest in art; Beth: her commitment to a healthy lifestyle through her healthy eating and cycling. Carla suggested that sharing her sports and outdoor interests could '*be really powerful*' for young people. A number of respondents mentioned their interests in sports or other things that might be seen as challenging the feminine stereotype. Gaby and Jane mentioned being open about their interests and skills in football; Nell talked about being a '*female canoeist ... [and enjoying] tinkering with her van*'. The literature suggests that this can be seen as the 'selective' sphere (Murphy and Ord, 2013, p336) of self disclosure: the sharing of information which may not be contentious. Respondents suggested that these interests were often used as an opening into conversations about the limitations put on women due to heteronormative stereotypes. Talking about interests and hobbies was seen as part of being a positive role model (as discussed above:7.3.2) and this seemed to be accepted by respondents. However some respondents were very clear that they would not talk about negative aspects of their lives for example their use of alcohol or nicotine, or challenging relationships with people that were still unresolved. This again reflects the point made in the literature that care must be taken to ensure that sharing is only about issues where 'internal work' has been done (Crosby, 2001, p55 cited in Murphy & Ord, 2013, p339) and workers are sure that disclosure is for the benefit of the young person, not the worker (Crosby, 2001; Lum, 2002; Murphy & Ord, 2013).

Nearly all respondents noted the importance of being clear with young people regarding their own political views. Fern, along with the eight other respondents who named themselves as feminists (as discussed in 6.2.2c), was '*clear about ... [her] feminist approach*', despite feminism being seen as '*a dirty word with young people*' as Liz suggested. Beth noted that young people knew about her passion for '*equality issues and politics*'. Issie noted that she talked about her views on politics, feminism and inequality with young people but did not talk about her '*family's links to terrorism*' in Northern Ireland. Issie felt that such conversations might have been counterproductive given that terrorism was an ongoing issue in the UK at that time. Amy noted

that she would keep her party politics to herself, however no one else commented on being discrete about their party politics.

These youth workers set out to share different aspects of their lives despite the fact that their relationships with young people had to be professional. Personal disclosures were seen as a tool for transforming their relationships with young people. This, according to the literature, allowed 'space within which options, alternatives and different ways to be' (Sercombe 2010b, p82) could be developed with young people through verbal and non-verbal communication. The discussion within this section, focussing on the information youth workers shared about their lives, again emphasises the personal approach that is needed by youth workers as ethical statements of the IYW (2013) and NYA (2001) provide little guidance for workers, as noted by Sercombe (2010a) and as discussed above (7.2.1).

### 8.3 Being out with young people about their LGBTQ sexuality

This section examines how these respondents shared information regarding their LGBTQ sexuality. This is a focus not previously researched or discussed within the youth work literature (although fitting into Murphy and Ord's 'discretionary sphere': 2013, p336). As Spence (2007, p15) says: it is 'in this difficult area of relationships, love and friendship that the language of youth work is most underdeveloped'.

#### 8.3.1 Having a choice about being out?

This sub-section commences with a focus on stories regarding how respondents were able to pass, or not, as being heterosexual and how, in some situations, they found that their LGBTQ sexuality was leaked unintentionally.

Four of the fifteen respondents (Ellie, Issie, Liz and Rosie) noted that, if they chose, they could pass as heterosexual: this was often linked to their long hair style or dress (as also noted in Rotheram-Borus & Langabeer, 2001 cited in NCSR, 2017). Issie, with shoulder length curly hair, stated: '*there is an assumption ... that I'm straight*'. Rosie, with long hair, said that her '*femme image*' meant that people would '*assume that [I] ... was straight*'. Ellie spoke of using her femme image and long hair to challenge the stereotypical image young people have of lesbians: saying to young people: '*does ... [it] mean I have to cut my hair if I'm a lesbian?*' Issie and Liz both used the fact that they were not identified as '*looking like a lesbian*' (Liz) as a way of taking more control regarding when and with whom to share information about their home life and LGBTQ sexuality.

Rosie, of dual heritage, on the other hand, reported with passion that being misidentified as straight often made her *'angry'* as she was forced to *'live in that straight and white box'*. Rosie spoke of the time when she was asked to play the role of a straight worker at the outdoor project (as discussed above: Ch.8.1): if she had *'looked like a proper dyke'* and shaved her hair she might not have been pushed into this box. Being often mistaken as *'white and straight'* made her exclaim *'no I'm not actually. I'm black and I'm a dyke'*. The anger that Rosie showed regarding being mistaken as straight may link to the lower self-esteem that LGBTQ people who pass as heterosexual may feel (as noted in Rotheram-Borus and Langabeer, 2001 cited in NCSR, 2017). Being able to pass as heterosexual was seen by some as having a choice regarding whether to be out as LGBTQ, but it also brought with it challenges so was not always a positive position to be in. Interestingly, the one respondent who was bisexual did not talk about being able to pass as heterosexual: although research suggests that this may often be the case for bisexual people (Monro, 2015).

This ability to choose to pass as straight was in contrast to seven respondents who noted they had no choice about being out as they felt it was obvious to most young people that they were LGBTQ, (a further four respondents did not clearly discuss this issue). Amy noted what was probably true for a number of the respondents: it is *'quite obvious without me saying it cos of how I look ... I can't hide it as I look gay'*. For some of the respondents their short hair style did seem to be a flag of their LGBTQ sexuality. As Helena said: *'I had a DA hair cut when eleven'* and she had always kept her hair short since. Nell said that she *'had a shaved head and an ear stretcher'* when interviewed for one youth work job so there was no chance that young people or colleagues would mistake her for a straight woman.

Some youth work literature suggests that the way that the self was presented or the way that a person dressed *'can be seen as self-disclosure'* (Murphy and Ord, 2013, p333) or *'the process of making the self-known to others'* (Johnson and Paine 2006, cited in Murphy and Ord, 2013, p333) as noted above (8.2). It seems that most respondents were happy to *'perform ... [their] stylised'* LGBTQ sexuality (Butler, 1991, pp13-14) as part of the process of constructing and presenting their selves with and to young people (see Murphy and Ord, 2013). A *'series of choices ... regarding their image and style played a vital role'* (Murphy and Ord, 2013, p333) in how most respondents shared information about their LGBTQ sexuality with their colleagues, and more importantly with young people. In the decision to present, or be of a certain style, with regard to dress or hair, youth workers were, sometimes unthinkingly, offering the young people information about their

personal selves that leaked information regarding their LGBQ sexuality. Whilst these women did not see it as a choice to be out as LGBQ, it was their style and how they performed their LGBQ sexuality that ensured this leaking of this LGBQ sexuality. This point will be examined further below (8.4.1).

The next section of the findings moves on to focus on how these youth workers went about sharing their selves with young people.

### 8.3.2 When to share information about LGBQ sexuality with young people?

Respondents spoke at length regarding how, when and what information they shared about their LGBQ sexuality with young people. In responding to young people's, sometimes difficult, questions regarding their LGBQ sexuality it was clear that, as the literature suggests, there were 'both advantages and disadvantages to appropriate self-disclosure' (Batsleer, 1996a, p69). Most respondents talked about judging whether sharing such information with young people would '*assist a young person*' (Amy) or '*be supportive*' (Helena). This point is echoed in the literature which emphasises that youth workers must focus on the needs of the young people that they work with and not their own needs or interests (Sercombe, 2010a & b; Nicholls, 2012). Sabidah talked about the '*pressure*' to get this decision right and to know when to draw on, what the literature calls, her own '*complex identities*' (Batsleer 2008, p88). Nell, echoing the ideas of many other respondents, explained the importance of turning conversations around so the talk '*become more about*' the young people rather than focussed on their self as the worker. Ensuring that sharing was always in the interest of the young person at the appropriate time and in the best place was a difficult judgement to make for any youth worker. It involved being aware of their own strengths and limitations of their own '*situatedness*' (see Batsleer, 2013, p106). This was not always easy to judge in the heat of conversations with young people as is evidenced by the following research contributions from Jane.

Jane noted the challenge of '*not always getting it right*' regarding when to tell a young person that she was gay. She discussed her attempts to show her understanding of, and her solidarity with, a young man who a school had asked her to talk to regarding his struggles with his gay identity. Jane told this young man very early in their conversations that she was herself gay. Consequently his '*parents then complained that she was brainwashing him*'. On reflection Jane had thought that being out so early on in this relationship was her mistake: a mistake that she has worked hard not to repeat with other young people. The long quote from Jane below is used to



show the difficulty of knowing when and how much of the self to disclose or share, the consequences of getting this wrong and the importance of reflecting carefully on one's own practice, so learning from any mistakes. This quote reveals the details of this incident recounted in Jane's own words and so discloses Jane's struggles regarding whether she was inappropriate in the sharing of her own LGBTQ sexuality with this young man. This had been a difficult decision Jane had to make on the spot in front of a distraught young person. She had no space to take time out to reflect on possible courses of action or to seek guidance.

*A young man was referred to me, he was 16 and just left school, he'd come into the ... centre and he'd basically come in for some support because his parents had found out he was gay and he was being made homeless .... I was around, I was available, so I was called out to this young man and ... I disclosed a lot more about myself to that young man on the first time that I met him because of his situation and how vulnerable he was, he was in tears, he was sobbing, he was heartbroken. ... I disclosed that I was gay. I said things like 'it's absolutely ok to be gay'; which of course it is. He was concerned that his family would never speak to him again, his friends would never speak to him again. I talked a lot about my experience of coming out so things that I would normally very rarely share with young people other than ... LGBT people that ... I'd worked with over a long period. What then happened was: we found him some temporary accommodation; I contacted his parents to confirm that they wouldn't have him back in the home and then a couple of days later my manager received a complaint from this lad's father because 'somebody had told him it was okay to be gay and that they were gay'. It's the only time I've ever had to answer for my actions [to a manager] ... around a young person: the first time there's ever been a complaint. But my manager literally said "well why did you say that? Your boundaries?" ... I had to hold my hands up and said "you know what, I probably got this wrong with this young person. ... I think it was right to reassure the young person that it is okay to be gay but actually I probably gave too much of myself at a time when a young person was quite vulnerable and obviously had issues with his family" ... But thinking about it now if I'd not disclosed as much about myself as I did at that point then there wouldn't have been that comeback. So I did get it quite wrong there but I absolutely learned from it.*

It can be seen from this extract that knowing when it is an appropriate time to share such sensitive personal information is a difficult judgement to make. Maybe the most important thing in the above story was the fact that Jane, after reflection, decided that she had inappropriately disclosed her gay identity too early within this relationship. This self-disclosure had prevented Jane from working with this young person she was trying to support as he was no longer allowed, by his parents, to meet her. Jane had reflected on this and had subsequently been more careful not to disclose her sexuality so early on in relationships with young people.

Ellie emphasised that planning was often required in the sharing of LGBTQ sexuality. She reported that deciding what she was going to say or how she was going to present herself could be a long process, happening over a number of weeks. Ellie's words are presented below regarding how she decided what to share in a particular situation. She said of her preparations for an assembly, or whole class presentations, as an LGBT worker in school settings:

*So I was in a Catholic school and I talked about experiences of growing up Catholic. ... Your judgment starts at the ... first conversation with the school. You listen to the type of language ... get a sense of how formal the school is ... demography of school, class mix ... ethnic mix. What's brought this [invitation] about? ... What does the art look like? ... What do the toilets look like? ... Gendered colour scheme toilets? ... The culture of the space ... how gender-regulated is it? ... What's the dress code for teachers and pupils? ... Build that picture before you start the workshop ... use your initiative and use your intuition ... to work out how you pitch something to get the best outcome ... it flows from the questions that people ask.*

In the above situation Ellie first took into account the religious background of the school, whilst being aware that not all the young people would be Catholics. Ellie participated in and reflected on conversations with school staff. This was to note the sort of language ('formal, informal, permissive or censored') that was used within the school with regard to LGBTQ sexuality, sexual experiences, gender and ethnicity. Ellie used her observational skills regarding the dress code within the school, both for pupils and teachers. She noticed the sort of images, posters and art work that was displayed on the walls of corridors, class rooms and staff rooms. She noticed family photographs, or the lack of such photographs, on the desks of the member of staff that she was talking to. Ellie described how she probed the request to deliver the session. 'Why was it requested? Who raised the issue: a member

*of staff or a young person or group of young people? Who supported the request: requests maybe from junior members of staff with little support from senior staff members?’ This planning process may not have taken long but was all done prior to the session.*

Ellie’s probing into the planning process demonstrates that deciding how much to share and when to share was a complex task. The preparation needed experience and judgment as discussed in the literature (Collander-Brown, 2010; Fuss, 2012; Spence & Devanney, 2013) and above (7.2.2). Nell agreeing with Ellie when deciding how or when to be out said it was about:

*a constant evolving dynamic assessment of whether or not to come out and is it worth the effort... I don’t think that there is a hard and fast formula. It depends on the workers, it depends on the young people, it depends on their ages, it depends on the relationships that I’ve built, it depends on their behaviour ... if they are engaging with me ... if they trust me.*

Nell and Jane both noted that deciding when and how to be out with young people was linked to the length of the relationship with young people. This point is made within the literature which talks about relationships not being ‘static’ (Fuss, 2012, p38) but being complex and changing through time (Sapin, 2013). It is clear from both the comments of respondents and the literature that boundaries (as discussed above: 7.2.1) and what is appropriate to share need to change according to the context of the relationship between the youth worker and the young people.

These two sections focussing on what personal information was shared and how the sharing of their LGBTQ sexuality revealed the complexity and importance of being one’s self in youth work settings. This links to discussions in the literature (e.g. Ord, 2007; Blacker, 2010; Smith, H., 2010; Thomas, 2016 as noted above in Ch.2 & Ch.7.1) about the importance of youth workers building relationships with, and getting to know, young people. These relationships will be enhanced by workers sharing something of their personal self with young people as noted by Spence who asserts that youth workers must use their ‘whole person ... [as] the personal cannot be entirely separated from the professional. Their professionalism of necessity involves communicating something personal’ (Spence, 2007, p14). These findings are of importance as there was previously very little research as to how youth workers decided when it was appropriate to share aspects of their self within the youth work relationship.

The discussion now moves on to examine how, in practice, youth workers shared their LGBTQ sexuality in their day-to-day encounters with young people.

#### 8.4 How to share information about interests, home life and LGBTQ sexuality?

As documented above, how youth workers might go about sharing information about themselves is noted in the youth work literature (Smith, M.K., 2002; Young, 2006; Spence, 2007; Fusco, 2012; Murphy & Ord, 2013; Wood, Westwood & Thompson, 2015) but there is little research to support these discussions. The focus in the above mentioned sources is not on sharing the personal information that these youth workers were discussing in these research interviews as mentioned above (2.2.1 & 2.2.3). All respondents had different ideas as to how they went about sharing information about their personal and home lives. The following themes of the use of conversation and humour to share information about their interests, home life and LGBTQ sexuality (similar themes to those discussed within the social work literature: Reupert, 2007) give a taste of their ideas.

##### 8.4.1 The use of conversation

The use of conversation as an important tool in youth work is discussed above (2.2.3b) and in the literature (e.g. Jeffs and Smith, 1999 & 2005; Spence et al, 2006; Young, 2006; Batsleer, 2008 & 2013). Many respondents talked about the way they used conversation as a tool for disclosing personal information about themselves. They were able to drop the information into conversations casually '*rather than having a big coming out*' as Amy put it: reflecting Orne's (2011, p687) 'clues' as a process of 'strategic outness' (Orne, 2011, p689). This allowed conversations around LGBTQ sexuality to '*just happen*' (Amy) so that the agenda was more likely to be owned by both the youth worker and the young people (reflecting Jeffs & Smith, 2005). Amy talked about '*just dropping ... [words] into conversations. ... I'll just slip it in there and let them think about it [and] think about their own views*'. Issie said that she would talk '*about life ... and not make any sort of point*': thus linking her personal sharing to the context of the discussion with young people. Sabidah, like Amy, emphasised that the dropping of information about your sexuality into a conversation was usually not planned as '*these conversations just happen*' (Sabidah). For example, Sabidah had an important conversation with some Eastern European young men who were using terms such as '*gay boy*' and '*pufter boy*' as insults. Sabidah challenged their use of homophobic language and they were surprised to hear from her that not only was she gay but that she was '*proud*' of being gay. One Hungarian young man asked her: "*Will you be my lesbian friend?*" and

... [Sabidah] went *“Too right. Will you be my Hungarian friend?”* The next day Sabidah discovered from another worker that the brother of this young man was *‘trans but not out to his family’*. Sabidah was clear that her ‘direct disclosure’ (Orne, 2011, p689) *‘when those kids were insulting the other lad’* had enabled them to think about this information which was important for them. Ellie, in comparison to the unplanned discussions of Sabidah and Amy, found a useful style when talking in non-LGBT but formal settings such as school or class assemblies. She used words such as *‘when I was growing up as a lesbian’* or she let the young people know that she worked in LGBT settings: *‘so that they would assume I was lesbian’*: reflecting again Orne’s ‘clues’ (Orne, 2011, p689).

Some of the respondents talked about the importance of getting to know young people before sharing information about themselves. Gaby, talking about her work in a PRU, said: *‘I told kids that I’d had a tough time at school so that they knew that I understood them but I didn’t tell them that I was gay as it would have been too hard’*. Gaby noted that she needed to keep the relationship that she had with young people positive in order to work with them usefully in the PRU: reflecting Orne’s ‘concealment’ (Orne, 2011, p689). Issie took a slightly different approach (reflecting Orne’s (2011, p689) ‘speculation’) saying that *‘I’ve wanted to get to know them first without the filter [of them knowing about her LGBQ sexuality] ... that could very well influence their response to me’*. Issie added that when she had taken time to build relationships with young people before being out with regard to her LGBQ sexuality the relationships did not change when she came out as long as *‘good relationships’* were built in advance.

These relationships of trust and respect were built, according to the literature, through the ‘giving [of] space’ (Spence et al, 2006, p71) and getting to know young people ‘through contact and communication in different circumstances’ (Spence et al, 2006, p73) so that conversations could become ‘risky’ (Spence et al, 2006, p76). Jane discussed this taking of risks in her relationship with Cath, a young woman who had shunned and destroyed relationships with many professionals prior to Jane working with her. Jane said (as noted above:7.3.3) that at first she kept conversations away from her own personal issues: reflecting Orne’s (2011, p689) ‘speculation’ as a strategic approach to outness. Jane went on to be clear about her LGBQ sexuality: reflecting Orne’s ‘direct disclosure’ (Orne, 2011, p689) saying:

*I did start to share about my childhood ... eventually did talk to her about my sexuality in terms of challenging some of the homophobia that she was throwing at me ...*

*Coming out to her did really help to build that relationship with her as she thought that she did know everything about me.*

So these respondents took different approaches at different times regarding their 'strategic outness' (Orne, 2011, p687): sometimes using 'direct disclosure, clues, concealment [and sometimes] speculation' (Orne, 2011, p689) with young people regarding their LGBTQ sexuality. There is evidence that many respondents seemed able to select the most appropriate of these four different approaches to being out with young people.

To be able to take risks within relationships youth workers must be confident in their own self-knowledge (Davies, 2006) and their own journey (Young, 2010) if they are to assist and support young people in their self-development and self-confidence. The importance of self-knowledge emphasises again the requirement for youth workers to be committed to 'critical reflection' (Young, 2010, p99): a point that is discussed in depth within the youth work literature as noted above (2.2.3e & 4.2.1).

Some respondents suggested that it was easier to build relationships with young people once they were clear with young people about their own LGBTQ sexuality. Nell, talked about the time when she was very androgynous looking so her LGBTQ sexuality was obvious or leaked (as discussed above: 8.3.1) to many of the young people that she worked with in a PRU. Nell noted that in this situation, in order to work with and support young people, she was not able to ignore the questions about her LGBTQ sexuality:

*It's difficult to be seen as a person rather than just a sexuality. ... "What are you a lemon or a fucking dyke?" If I don't answer I'm evading, therefore permitting heteronormativity ... Do I just ignore you? Which silences you but just holds it for another day.*

Hence Nell decided that she had to discuss with these young people at least some issues to do with her LGBTQ sexuality in order to be seen as a person and so be able to do her job. For Liz, there was a different issue as she had spent many years not revealing her lesbian sexuality with young people when doing detached and area based youth work for a Local Authority. After deciding that she should be open about her sexuality, she said that she found that '*once [she was] out, we didn't have to discuss it again*'. For Liz this was important as she had discovered that being unclear about her sexuality had been a barrier in her relationship with young people as it '*gives them potential*

*negative power in their relationships with you as they may out you*’ in situations where this might not be appropriate. This is similar, although not as direct, to the issues noted by Nell. These points links with the breadth of literature noted above regarding the importance of reciprocal (Young, 2006; Murphy & Ord, 2013), trusting (Collander-Brown, 2010; Davies, 2010) and honest (NYA, 2001; Smith, M. K., 2001; Batsleer, 2008; IYW, 2013; Murphy & Ord, 2013; Sapin, 2013) relationships between youth workers and young people. Without some reciprocity in the sharing of personal information young people may not be able trust youth workers with their own personal issues. Nicolls’ (2012) idea is also useful here: that youth workers have to ‘look young people in the eye not in the back .... [So] their inner life is blended with that of the young people that they work with’ (Nicholls, 2012, p235). This blending of their lives with the young people is what enables a space of trust to be created within the youth work relationship.

Some respondents noted that they may share information about their LGBTQ sexuality with young people by talking about their home life. Issie said that *‘because it was the allotment project ... I’d talk about what I cook with my partner’* whilst naming her. Patricia said that she would just talk about her partner, her children or her pets: putting their names into *‘the flow of conversations’*, so outing herself as gay. Interestingly, after years of not being clear with young people about her LGBTQ sexuality, Liz found that talking openly about her female partner was unproblematic: she *‘just told them I was moving-in with my girlfriend’*. Liz went on to say that this made things easier for her *‘as some groups want to know about you when they first meet you – how old you are, if you are married’*. Being clear about her LGBTQ sexuality meant that she could share this information casually without having to be careful about the words that she used. Nell pointed out that other professionals that she worked with *‘used gendered pronouns [about their home life] so this left no space for me not to’*. Issie sometimes wanted to get to know young people before letting them know that she was a lesbian but if she found herself talking about her home life she *‘would never say “he”* when talking about her partner. Gaby, on the other hand, was very surprised to hear that her colleagues at the PRU knew that she had a female partner as she thought that she had been careful not to let this slip. Gaby, on discovering that colleagues knew that she was gay, was relieved as this meant that she no longer had to be careful when talking about her social life.

The need for flexibility in relationships and boundaries that is reflected in the discussions above with respondents is discussed in some literature. Davies and Merton (2009) suggest that youth

workers need to use their own judgments regarding where they are in their relationship with any particular young person or group of young people. Batsleer (2008, p104) talks about the continual need for 'renegotiation and change' within these relationships. So it is clear, both from respondents' comments and from this literature, that there can be no blue print for the relationships that workers build with young people.

The above data suggests that conversations between worker and young person were central to all respondents and an important tool when discussing the conscious use of self within the relationship. The topics of these conversations must feel familiar to, or be owned by, the young person and might be either be planned or unplanned. The focus now moves on to how youth workers used humour in their work with young people.

#### 8.4.2 The use of humour

Fusco (2012, p37) says that humour, along with 'emotions, compassion, humility [and] acceptance' are all part of the self that youth workers have to bring to the relationships that they build with young people. Nearly all respondents talked about the importance of using humour as mirrored in the literature (Sercombe, 2010b; Fusco, 2012; Sapin, 2013). Jane said that she used humour about things that she observed around her as a '*hook to start off conversations*' when doing detached youth work. Jane went on to explain:

*I'd kind of make a bit of a joke out of what was happening [on the street or in the area], to try and get a laugh ... if you get a laugh from somebody they might say something back about that situation. ... You know for example if there's a game of football happening and you'd maybe say ... 'oh it's like the world cup final this isn't it?' ... Just ... [laughing] a little bit out of what was happening around.*

Other respondents talked about allowing themselves to be laughed at. Ellie said that if young people '*see workers being silly they know that they can be silly*': thus emphasising the importance of encouraging young people to have fun as suggested by the literature (Sercombe, 2010b; Sapin, 2013). Liz talked about sometimes letting her LGBTQ sexuality come out through '*banter*': "*you don't look like a lesbian*". "*What does a lesbian look like?*" ... *The guys want to know what we do for sex but I just laugh that off*'. Liz noted that '*banter*' and being '*outrageous*' are useful tools in building relationships. Fern talked about humour opening '*up avenues for you to talk to people*'. Nell noted that when she was challenging prejudices and homophobia (as discussed above: 8.4.1)



she tried to make young people think about what words meant by challenging them *'in a playful way which keeps ... [the young people] engaged in that conversation'*. This links, again to the literature which emphasises the importance of starting with young people's issues and interests (e.g. Spence, 2007; Davies, 2015; Sapin, 2015) as discussed above (Ch7.1). Patricia agreed that humour was *'essential'* in building relationships with young people. Patricia pointed out, sadly, that she was now in some situations where even her sense of humour had failed as she felt too scared of the young people that she works with, as there is no team work or back up to deal with the challenges that these young people bring. This will be discussed in more depth in Chapter 9.

This discussion offers evidence as to how these youth workers went about disclosing information regarding their selves. This is new evidence on a theme not previously discussed within the youth work literature. There was previously little evidence, according to Murphy and Ord (2013), as to how youth workers disclosed personal information. This discussion concludes the focus on how respondents talked openly and clearly about how they went about sharing information regarding their self with young people through conversations, often conversations that drop information about home life into the mix with young people. The discussion now moves on to focus on unplanned meetings young people outside of their work setting.

### 8.5 Meeting young people by chance when not in a work setting

Several respondents spoke about how they responded if they met young people that they worked with outside of their work setting. Amy talked about ensuring that she was *'out'* to any young person who might see her in her home area, possibly with her partner or child so as not to be caught by surprise in a difficult situation. Patricia, who lived quite close to where she worked, was aware that *'young people know where I live and had heard about this house with two women ... and no man'*. Amy also spoke about how she dealt with situations a bit further from her home. She said that she would put out her cigarette, stop arguing with her partner and put on a smile if she met a young person in *'town'*. Others talked about how they would deal with meeting a young person they worked with, in a gay venue. Fern suggested that she would say *'hello and move on'*; Issie said that she would leave a venue if a young person came in. The challenge of not having relationships, or not meeting young people, outside of the youth work setting is a point ignored in most youth work literature, although Sercombe (2010a) discusses this point at length. He notes that within small cultural communities such as LGBT communities or when a worker lives and works within the same geographical community the crossing of *'boundaries'* (Sercombe, 2010a,

p13) can be difficult to avoid: just as respondents reported. Keeping the personal separate from the professional, as noted by NYA (2001) and the IYW (2013) seemed to be generally adhered to when it came to these youth workers' engagements in their own social life outside of work settings but this was much more difficult for workers who lived close to their work.

## Conclusion

This chapter has examined how these fifteen cisgendered women youth workers consciously used their self within their professional relationships with young people. The chapter started with a discussion (8.1) focussing on the challenges of sharing information about their LGBQ sexuality with colleagues. The literature emphasises the importance of supportive staff teams, when developing relationships with young people (Young; 2006; Batsleer, 2008; LLUK, 2008; Coburn, 2011; Sercombe, 2010b; Sapin, 2013). Whilst many respondents did have positive experiences of working with supportive colleagues there was evidence of some challenges encountered by respondents in terms of not being supported by colleagues or not feeling they could trust their colleagues with sensitive and personal information about their own LBGQ sexuality. Evidence of these sort of challenges had not previously been offered within the youth work literature despite the focus within the literature on the need for supportive relationships within staff teams and networks.

Section 8.2 focussed on what personal information youth workers shared with young people in terms of their age, their style and dress, their hobbies and interests and their political views. This discussion drew on Sercombe's (2010a and 2010b) discussions of appropriate sharing between youth worker and young people and how style and dress are aspects of self disclosure as noted by Murphy and Ord (2013). This sharing of personal information, whilst seen as important by some writers (Batsleer, 2008; Blacker, 2010; Sercombe 2010a; Smith, H., 2010), seems to be done almost despite the ethical statements of the NYA and the IYW. The NYA (2001, p4) talk about 'appropriate professional distance' and the IYW (2013) of 'remaining within professional boundaries'. These statements do not give a sense of the challenge that these respondents had of knowing where or how to draw appropriate boundaries. The findings, rather, emphasise the importance for youth workers of taking a personal (Sercombe, 2010a) and developing (Fuss, 2012; Sapin, 2013) approach to their boundaries with young people as they 'renegotiate' their relationships with young people over time (Batsleer, 2008, p104).

Section 8.3 commenced with a discussion regarding how some youth workers may choose to be closet regarding their LGBTQ sexuality whilst others have no choice as their appearance or clothing 'may act as a sign of [their] sexual preference' (Stockton, 2002, p289). Whilst being able to remain in the closet may give some workers space for agency regarding sharing about their LGBTQ sexuality (Batsleer, 1996), there may also be challenges for other professionals assuming that a worker is heterosexual, as emphasised by Rosie's challenging experiences in one, otherwise supportive, setting. Section 8.3 went on to discuss the pressure on workers in making good decisions regarding when to be out about their LGBTQ sexuality with young people and ensuring that any sharing was always done with the interests of the young person in mind, as noted in the literature (Sercombe, 2010a and Nicholls 2012). The challenges facing Jane and Ellie with regard to the planned or unplanned sharing of information about their LGBTQ sexuality were discussed at length and it was noted that whether to be out or not depended often on the nature and length of the relationship that respondents had with young people. These different strategies of outness seemed to reflect Orne's four different suggested approaches: 'direct disclosure, clues, concealment and speculation' (Orne, 2011, p689). This emphasised again the importance of an ongoing and developing (Batsleer, 2008; Fuss, 2012; Sapin, 2013) approach to the nature and place of boundaries within youth work relationships rather than the static and clear approach as suggested by the NYA (2001) and the IYW (2013) in their ethical and professional statements.

Section 8.4 noted a range of tools that youth workers developed. It started with evidence from respondents regarding their sharing of their selves with young people through conversations: a tool that is named (but not always explained) by a range of youth work literature (e.g. Jeffs and Smith, 1999 & 2005; Spence et al, 2006; Young, 2006; Batsleer, 2008 & 2013; Smith, H., 2010; Jeffs, 2015a; Cooper & Gretschel, 2018). Some respondents talked about the need to get to know young people before they shared information about their LGBTQ sexuality. Others noted that being clear with young people about their LGBTQ sexuality left space for conversations about other topics. This again emphasises the personal approach (Sercombe, 2010a) that was needed by these women in working out how and when to share personal information. These respondents provided evidence that 'knowing how to pitch a conversation ... between light and chatty and intensity and depth' (following Spence et al, 2006, p74), is 'the art of youth work' (Young, 2000, p6) that they have developed. The development of this art allowed respondents to examine 'risky' (Spence et al, 2006, p76) topics and so move, within these conversations, 'from the mundane to the serious' (Spence et al, 2006, p76). Section 8.4 went on to discuss the role of humour as a tool for youth

workers and how humour can be used to share personal information as suggested in the literature (Sercombe, 2010b; Fusco, 2012; Sapin, 2013).

The chapter ended with a brief discussion regarding respondents' reactions if they met young people that they worked with outside of their work setting. This may be an issue for LGBTQ youth workers, whether they live close to their work setting or not. The nature of their LGBTQ cultural communities means that this crossing between professional and home communities is more likely than for heterosexual youth workers as noted by Sercombe (2010a) but is not discussed by other youth work writers.

This chapter has offered in-depth evidence to add to the paucity of discussions within the youth work literature, on how the practice of sharing of personal information has been approached in the day-to-day work experience of these respondents. This focus on how youth workers shared information about their LGBTQ identity is an area not previously explored. The next and final findings chapter (Ch. 9) from this research will bring the focus of change to this research. This includes the changing nature of youth work in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and also on changes in LGBTQ-focussed legislation and social attitudes to LGBTQ issues.

## Ch.9: Change: in LGB-focussed legislation and in youth work settings

This chapter follows on from previous chapters which examined how respondents shared information regarding their self with young people. This final findings chapter focusses on change within LGB legislation and in youth work.

### Introduction

The first part of the chapter (9.1) discusses how changes in LGB-focussed legislation had impacted on respondents and LGB young people. The discussion commences with a focus on the long-term impact of Section 28 legislation (DfE, 1988) (9.1.1). Attention then moves to the impact of wider changes to LGB-focussed legislation over the past fifteen years (9.1.2). A brief discussion of the role of the media in changing attitudes to and amongst LGB young people follows (9.2). The third section of this chapter (9.3) examines respondents' perceptions and understandings of the impact of change in youth work over the past decades. This discussion includes the trend to move from open access youth work to more targeted work (see Wylie, 2015; Davies, 2019) and concludes with an examination of the impact of national 'austerity cuts' under the Coalition Government and then the Conservative led Government since 2010.

### 9.1 LGB-focussed legislation changes

It is important to reiterate here that whilst respondents often spoke about their work with LGBT young people and LGBT-focussed legislation this research did not investigate issues focussing on trans identities. In reporting findings, care has been taken to keep the focus on LGBQ issues whilst being true to respondents wording within discussions.

#### 9.1.1 Section 28 of the 1986 Local Government Act

Much consternation within LGBQ communities (Godfrey, 2018) was caused by Section 28 (an amendment to the Local Government Act, 1986) which was introduced in May 1988. Protests against the legislation included the infamous abseil by lesbian women in to the House of Lords and marches against the legislation all over the country (Godfrey, 2018). Section 28 aimed to ban LGBQ literature from public and school libraries and prevent the promotion of LGBQ issues within local authority managed educational settings. Section 28 stated that a local authority 'shall not intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material with the intention of promoting homosexuality ... [or] promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship' (DfE, 1988, Section 28). In fact, because local

authorities did not control the curriculum in schools (these were individually controlled by School Governors), Section 28 had no legal force over what was taught (Tatchell, 1988 cited in Schools Out 2014; Formby, 2013) but it did bring about 'self-censorship' within schools (Tatchell, 1988 cited in Schools Out 2014, p8).

LGBQ-identifying (and other) youth workers were nervous about the impact on the work they were doing when Section 28 was first introduced (Formby, 2013). Working with young people who identified as LGBT or being open about their own LGBQ sexuality might have been seen as promoting the 'acceptability of homosexuality' (DfE, 1988, Section 28). This legislation impacted greatly on respondents who were working in youth work at this time. Patricia pointed out that *'one of my first youth work sessions was helping to run a girls' night which was really interesting. It got shut down actually when Clause 28 came out'*. It maybe that this girls' night (delivered by the local authority youth service) was shut due the leaders' sexuality as much girls work provision at that time was run by lesbian youth workers (Batsleer, 1996b).

Despite the fact that Section 28 was repealed in England in 2003 (13 years prior to this research), it still cast a shadow over some settings: probably more in schools (as attested to in Formby, 2013) than in youth work settings. Patricia, who was often invited into schools to support LGBT young people, reported that LGBQ teachers were still, in 2016, largely *'invisible'* within schools. She noted that some LGBQ school teachers were not allowed, by senior school managers, to have photographs of their partner in their office. Patricia suggested that this was *'due to hangover from Clause 28 ... so there is no opportunity for there to be a positive role model'* within the school. This is supported by other research: noting that LGBT young people and teachers were invisible in schools due to policies of omission rather than intent (Epstein and Johnson, 1994) and that all these years later this is still the case (Formby, 2013; Stonewall, 2017). Patricia reported on conversations with teachers that she worked with who identified as LGBQ:

*Teachers are not allowed to be out ... they've had to ... hide it and they're struggling with that. ... It must be difficult to be in a job where you've got to hide who you are. ... [The teacher] said it was about "safeguarding" ... she sometimes teaches dance and ... has to go into the changing rooms. If it came out about her sexuality ... she felt ... it could be used against her by the young people or the parents. ... That's quite a scary position to be in ... are you assuming that people are thinking you're a predator then because you're not straight?*

Patricia, here, seems to be referring to a supposed link between LGBT and child abuse in the minds of some (Weeks, 2011; Otto, 2016) a point not be debated here due to lack of space.

Eight other respondents agreed with Patricia that there was still a *'hangover from Clause 28'* (Nell). Helena, who had worked from the 1980s to the 2010s within the voluntary youth work sector, felt that the repeal of Section 28 did not *'bring a dramatic change ... in mainstream'* youth work settings. Helena said that youth workers (as well as teachers) remained nervous as to what they were allowed, or not allowed, to say about LGBTQ relationships. Marie, who had worked in local authority youth work settings during the Section 28 era, agreed with Helena. Marie suggested that the damage done in the 1980s *'left a sort of imprint'* within youth work settings. Liz, who was also a youth worker in the statutory sector in the 1980s and 1990s, testified that Section 28 was probably one of the influences that encouraged her to be closet for many years about her lesbian sexuality in youth work settings. Beth, a younger respondent, also had strong views about Section 28. She had not been a youth worker under this legislation but had been active as an undergraduate student within the same-sex marriage campaigns. Beth thought that *'the prejudice from Clause 28 spills over in to mainstream youth work'*. Beth spoke with passion about the importance of young people knowing how and why LGBTQ-focussed legislation had changed. Beth reported that she told young people *'the privilege that you've got now [compared to] the nineteen-eighties with Section 28 ... you've only got that privilege because people before you have stood and fought and argued and been involved and been political'*. Nell, whilst also not a youth worker in the 1980s and 1990s, felt very strongly about the impact of Section 28 on LGBTQ people generally. Nell pointed out that whilst very few people were ever questioned, never mind prosecuted, under Section 28:

*the fear of it singlehandedly ... put LGBT rights back ... years. ... The ripple effect of Section 28, the number of suicides, the number of attacks, the number of homophobic assaults on the streets, the number of hate crimes, I think beyond doubt it's made a huge impact on our community and I think we know that there's still people in parliament that would happily bring it back.*

Two other respondents (Beth and Rosie) were also afraid that something along the lines of Section 28 might reappear. So it was no wonder that respondents noted that Section 28 still had some impact on working openly around LGBTQ issues with young people. Fern agreed that there was still *'some apprehension'* due to *'bigotry or ignorance of Section 28'* amongst teachers and youth

workers regarding LGBQ work. However, in recent years with positive changes in legislation, she had noted a *'shift: ... it's changed with a new generation of teachers'* and youth workers: so making work around LGBQ issues easier. Carla thought there was no longer any impact in youth work settings from Section 28 as the legislation was repealed *'too long ago now'* to have any current impact. Carla, working in the voluntary sector, pointed out that *'prejudice, rather than policy impacts on ... discussions'* within her youth work. Only Ellie noted that there is now less heteronormative assumptions within school and youth work settings and she also noted that the 2010 Equality Act had an important influence on both Ofsted reports and what went on in schools.

Tatchell (2014 cited in Schools Out, 2014), an LGBT activist, noted three different arenas in which schools need to act for the repeal of Section 28 to be effective. Tatchell said that schools need to: first, stamp out the bullying of LGBT pupils, especially in the playground. Second, schools need to promote understanding amongst all school students regarding LGBT issues. Third, he notes that schools should ensure that issues of relevance to LGBT young people are discussed in Sex and Relationship Education (SRE) classes. Respondents seemed to agree with Tatchell (2014 cited in Schools Out, 2014) when he points out that most schools have not yet acted on these issues. These three elements are covered under the 2010 Equalities Act and the proposed new Relationship and Sex Education (RSE) curriculum (Kibirige, 2017), so hopefully progress will be made in the future in these areas within school settings.

From the above discussion it is clear that there was a range of opinions regarding the ongoing impact of Section 28 on youth work with young people. These varied responses may be due to the range of different settings that respondents worked in or due to their memories, or lack of memories, of working within schools or youth work settings in the 1980s and early 1990s. The discussion now moves to a wider focus on LGB-focussed legislation changes.

### 9.1.2 Other LGB-focussed changes to legislation

Since the repeal of Section 28 in 2003 there have been other significant changes to legislation impacting on the lives of LGBQ people (as noted above:1.3.2). These changes include the recognition of homophobia as a hate crime in 2003, the Gender Recognition Act (2004); the Equality Act (2010), the Civil Partnership Act (2010) and the Same Sex Marriage Act (2014). Respondents observed that it was now *'much more acceptable'* (Marie) to be out and *'some LGBT people feel more secure in coming out'* (Sabidah) since these recent developments. Liz pointed out that since she had married her partner it was easier for people to understand her when she



said “‘I’ve got a wife’” rather than talking about having ‘a civil partner’. Several respondents noted that it was useful, when working with mainstream or heterosexual young people, to use changes in legislation as a tool to start discussions. Fern said that same-sex marriage made it clearer that the values and aspirations of LGBTQ people were not so different to those of heterosexual people. So ‘it usualises homosexuality’ and emphasises that LGBTQ people are not ‘strange ... [but want what other people] are familiar with’ (Fern). The LGBTQ-focussed voluntary sector organisation where Fern worked ‘use all that legislation and legal changes to inform the work that we do with young people ... and to start conversations’. Ellie pointed out that using hate crime legislation as a discussion starter with mainstream young people was useful as it named the ‘behaviour of the perpetrator ... [rather than] victim blaming’. This last point importantly puts the focus of the discussion on the inappropriate behaviour of people who bully or isolate LGBTQ young people so is a way of championing the identity of LGBTQ young people. This celebrates their diversity (Gilchrist, 1992 cited in Twelvetrees, 2008) rather than problematising or ‘othering’ (Pihlaja and Thompson, 2017) their sexuality and identity.

Changes in LGBTQ-focussed legislation had not impacted much on all respondents’ practice. Fern reported that the registration forms used by the mainstream youth work organisation that she worked for, did not ask young people about their sexuality. Fern had tried to challenge this practice but was ‘a lone voice’. She was frustrated that the registration forms had not changed. Respondents suggested that ‘attitudes have not caught up with the legislation’ (Ellie) and that changes in legislation are ‘a bit of a cloak really ... [as] tolerance is just a tick box’ (Marie). Changes in legislation, Rosie said, are ‘a good thing ... It might be tokenistic ... but at least it’s the government talking about it’. Rosie noted that legislation changes had ‘allowed me to get married ... and make me feel stronger ... and more visible’ as a lesbian woman. However, she pointed out, citing statistics that she was clearly familiar with, that ‘52% of [LGBT] young people last year were bullied ... in secondary schools so there’s a long way to go’. Research backs up these comments (e.g. Stonewall, 2017a) as discussed above (Ch.1.3).

All six respondents who talked about the increase, or possible decrease, in homophobia were unsure if there was less homophobia in 2016 than there had been 10 or 20 years earlier: before these changes in legislation. Helena said that in her opinion ‘homophobia did not decrease in the years that I ran the [LGBT young person’s] project despite changes in legislation’. There was no focused discussion regarding biphobia. Liz pointed out that, despite the fact that there were now

more visible LGBT celebrities for young people: *'at school [young] people are still getting bullied and hassled and I'm not sure whether [anti-LGBT bullying has] ... gone down'*. Patricia suggested that legislation changes are *'not as important to [young people] ... as being accepted, by their families and by school, for who they are. Homophobia hasn't decreased in school settings so LGBT young people still don't want to attend school'*. Some respondents suggested that *'homophobia [had] not changed. The legislation is useful but all that LGBT young people want is to be able to go to school without being bullied and to see positive LGBT images in school – this is still not happening'* (Patricia). Stonewall's (2017a) statistics support this point as they found that 45% LGBT young people are still facing such bullying. Stonewall (2017a), however, do report that anti-LGBT bullying in schools has decreased since 2012 but that hate crime towards all LGBT people (not just young people) has increased by 78 percent since 2013' (Stonewall, 2017b). This may be partially due to the increased visibility of LGBT people, so making them more vulnerable to such hate crimes (Marsh et al, 2019). The three points noted from Tatchell above (9.1.1) have not yet come to pass according to these respondents.

From the evidence offered by respondents it seems that some issues, as a result of these legislation changes, may depend on geographical location: reflecting other research (Richardson and Monro, 2012; Bragg et al, 2018). Liz pointed out that whether homophobia had decreased or increased *'depends on where you live and how much money you've got'*. Several respondents who worked in towns rather than cities noted that school teachers, especially PE teachers, were still prevented from undertaking LGBQ work or being out within their school setting (e.g. not allowed to display their family photographs in their office) due to *'safeguarding issues'* (Patricia) or being *'scared of the subject'* (Issie). This may be a hang-over from Section 28 or part of the *'backlash'* (Carla's word but suggested by a number of respondents). Three respondents reported that since the election of President Trump in November 2016 and the Brexit vote of June 2017 there seemed to have been *'more hatred'* (Patricia) and *'less tolerance ... fed by the media'* (Marie) (also noted in Marsh et al, 2019). A point made by Fern might be a useful conclusion to this section: Fern noted that the many other changes in legislation *'that pertain to under twenty-fives are really quite harsh ... such as the eradication of ... maintenance for education; ... young people not being able to access housing benefit on their own ... the living wage which does not apply ... to under-twenty-fives'*. So although there had been some positive changes in on LGBQ- focussed legislation much other legislation had impacted negatively on all young people.

The above discussion evidences a range of opinions regarding the impact of changes in legislation on the reality of young people's lives and how respondents worked with young people (whatever their sexuality). Many respondents felt that changes in attitudes were yet to catch up with legislation changes and that often the reality of life for LGBTQ young people may now be even more challenging due to changes in legislation that have impacted negatively on all young people as well as on-going homophobia and biphobia.

## 9.2 The role of media in changing attitudes regarding LGBTQ identities

It was clear from the comments of respondents that the media might have played a more important role in changing views and attitudes to LGBTQ issues than the changes to legislation. This point is endorsed by other research which suggests that over the past twenty years there have been more positive images of LGBT people in the media than previously (Postuvan et al, 2019). Respondents noted the important role of the media in 'turning the tide ... with good lesbian characters' on television (Nell). Jane's words are useful here and so are reported at some length below. She suggested that the extent to which the media portray LGBTQ issues shows:

*that gay relationships are equally legitimate relationships. ... Me and my partner have got children. ... Growing up I just thought that my sexuality means that I will never have children and that's something that young people used to say to me quite a lot, and was part of the reason why some young women [found it difficult] ... to identify or to accept ... themselves because they felt like it meant they couldn't be parents whereas I think that there has been a big change around understanding parenting and being gay. Attitudes have changed hugely. ... The equality legislation has driven change but I think the media has played a massive role in it as well. ... You would struggle to find a mainstream soap opera or something aimed at young people ... that doesn't have some LGBT reference in it or main character or storyline, or in the world of music as well, artists who identify and who are out. ... The social media now as well ... that's what's helped to change people's attitudes ... LGBT people are so much more visible than they've ever been.*

In addition to the increased visibility of LGBTQ people in traditional media it seems that social networking sites were becoming useful and important for young people who were seeking information around LGBT issues. Fern noted that 'young people are finding ... information out on their own ... through YouTube, through Tumblr, ... they're coming to us already pretty switched on

*... starting up these conversations about... equality and about social movements ... privilege and oppression'. Ellie also talked about how social networking sites were changing how LGBT young people name themselves: 'they're the Tumblr generation. ...young people talk about Tumblr and they say there's some really weird places on Tumblr you wouldn't want to go, but then there's all this great stuff'. Ellie added that 'Facebook in the USA has put out fifty-seven ... different gender categories that you can click on ... so there's this massive explosion of terminology' that is available to young people. These changes are reflected in the literature (e.g. Postuvan et al, 2019; Yougov, 2019).*

From the data collected it was clear that the media, including soap operas on television and other programmes and films, were and are helpful in changing how LGBQ people are viewed both by mainstream British society and by LGB young people themselves. There had been an increase in the availability of social networking sites for LGB young people to explore; on these sites they could hear the voices and views of other LGB young people. It seemed that this increase in accessibility for LGB young people of such information had removed many of the challenges to finding information regarding diverse sexual (and gendered) identities that were faced by previous LGBQ generations, including these respondents. Social networking has, of course, brought many new challenges and dangers to LGBT young people: but this was not the focus of this research.

This discussion now moves from changes in legislation and the increased accessibility to LGBQ images in a range of media to the challenging changes that have taken place within youth work over the past decades for these respondents.

### 9.3 Change and youth work

Changes in policy, direction and emphasis have been an ongoing theme within youth work (Banks, 1994; Jeffs, 2015b; Davies, 2019). However, the changes that some respondents spoke about reflected a much faster rate of change and a more significant demise of government-funded youth work than had happened previously: as noted in the literature (Jeffs, 2015b; Davies, 2019). In discussions with respondents it was not always clear when specific changes had happened, nor was it clear if changes were due to policy developments, austerity cuts or if they were changes over a longer period of time with the increasing managerial focus on youth work as with other public services that had commenced with the New Labour government (see Bradford and Cullen, 2014; Taylor et al, 2018). The debate within the youth work literature since the mid-1990s

focussing on the impact of these neo-liberal approaches to the management and evaluation of youth work is not a new debate within the profession but rather a continuing debate within youth work circles regarding the core values and the focus of youth work since state funding became important in the 1940s (e.g. Jeffs and Smith, 1999; Bradford, 2007; Davies, 2010; Smith, M.K., 2013; Cullen and Bradford, 2018; Jeffs, 2018). This debate was examined above (2.2.2). Whilst these changes were not explored with all respondents there were many comments from respondents who had worked in youth work over a long period of time. Eight respondents had between five and nineteen years' experience of youth work (Beth, Fern, Ellie, Carla, Issie, Nell and Jane and Rosie) with another five respondents (Sabidah, Helena, Liz, Marie, and Patricia) having had more than twenty years' experience in the field. The discussion below will focus on the memories and ideas of these thirteen experienced women. The first section (9.3.1) focusses on respondents memories of practice from past years past the second section (9.3.2) focusses on the impact of austerity cuts on youth work practice since 2010.

### 9. 3.1 Memories of challenge and change in youth work from past years

Several respondents talked about their own experience of being a young person within youth work provision. Three respondents (Fern, Patricia and Rosie) reported that their first coming-out conversations were with youth workers. Patricia pointed out that it was the non-judgmental and accepting approach of youth workers that enabled her to feel '*valued as a human*' since she had been thrown out of her parents' home due to her LGBQ sexuality. These three respondents not only attended youth work provision but became volunteers and then moved through part-time youth work and professional qualifications into full time roles. These respondents' attitudes to the importance of being open and supportive of LGBT young people in their work was probably linked to their personal history and support gained from youth workers. However, this supportive approach to young people became more difficult with the increasing target-driven agenda in youth work as reflected in the literature (Davies & Merton, 2009, Spence, 2007; Bradford & Cullen, 2014).

Youth work policy in the statutory sector under Thatcher's Conservative government (1979-1990) offered, as Helena recalled, only a '*tokenistic approach*' to working with BAME communities and with girls and young women. The overt and covert homophobia that Helena encountered in trying to set up specialist work with young women during these years led to her manager suggesting that, as a lesbian youth worker, she should not be working with young women: '*because I was*

*seen as having a vested interest'*. Helena's wish to use her own experiences and self as a positive tool were questioned by this manager. This was before Section 28 (DoE, 1988) was enacted. Helena noted that at this time there were *'equal opps policies [but they were] ... meaningless ... with no legal clout'*. Helena's commitment to using her lesbian sexuality as tool in her work led to her moving into the voluntary sector and then setting up her own youth work provision, despite the challenges of insecure funding over the years. Helena worked with LGBT young people for many decades and was involved in this work when few youth workers saw this as an important or appropriate area of youth work.

Two respondents (Sabidah and Jane) discussed the challenge of involvement in targeted work with young people who were not in employment, education or training (NEET). Jane noted that despite the clear focus on employability within her work in the *Connexions Service* she still had space to build relationships and use her self and her LGBQ sexuality as a positive tool as she engaged with young people. Jane noted how, despite the focus on the *'reporting of outcomes'* within this work (a move often linked to the increasingly neo-liberal approach that began under New Labour; as discussed in Bradford and Cullen, 2014; Bartlett and Muirhead, 2018; Davies, 2019), she was still able to use these outcomes as tools *'to continue to build relationships with young people ... who were difficult to engage with'*. Jane reported that she was able, with support from her manager, to undertake *'some great work with young men ... [which was] probably quite progressive ... [as it was looking at] ideas of masculinity'* with NEET young men. Jane was confident that her ability to draw on her own butch identity as an LGBQ worker, so challenging heteronormative ideas of masculinity, was useful. In this work it was essential that Jane was able to build relationships, and use her self and her LGBQ sexuality with the young people in order to have some influence in their lives. Jane remarked that building these sorts of relationships *'took a lot of time and you might not know the outcome ever or possibly not until years later'*. Hence, noticing outcomes in what was considered a timely manner *'was not always easy'*.

The above discussion has noted some of the varied challenges of using their self in their youth work in past years. The discussion now moves to challenges of more recent years.

### 9. 3.2 The impact of austerity cuts on youth work since 2010

The following discussion focusses on the challenges faced by respondents as a consequence of austerity cuts since 2010 (9.3.2a) and then notes how respondents managed to hold on to some of their core values despite these challenges (9.3.2b).

#### 9.3.2a) *The challenges of austerity cuts*

One of the outcomes of austerity cuts under the Coalition (2010- 2015) and then the Conservative Governments (2015 - present) has been the decreasing focus on informal education within youth work (Wylie, 2015; Davies 2019) with ‘an overwhelming shift to targeted early intervention programmes’ (Davies & Taylor, 2013, p178) as youth workers take on caseloads of one-to-one work. These cuts have been amplified by the uncertainty of youth work’s place within local and central government. Marie recounted how the youth work within her Local Authority had been moved from one department to another. Youth work had been ‘*part of “community education” ... then moved to “sport” ... then to “youth and family” ... then “early health”*’. These moves at local government level were reflected in the movements of youth work at Central Government level: moving from the Department for Education, where it had been located since the UK Government had taken an official interest in the delivery of youth work (Smith, M.K., 2013) to the Cabinet Office in 2013 (as noted in Wylie, 2015) and to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) in 2016 (as noted in Jones, 2018; Davies, 2019).

Most of the eight experienced respondents who were working in Local Authority-funded youth work spoke about the impact of austerity cuts. There had been 40% cuts in local authority youth work spending between 2012 and 2016 (Taylor et al, 2018; Davies, 2019). Three themes were identified in the data collected from respondents regarding the impact of austerity cuts on their work. These included first the lack of training, space for reflection or support from managers (9.3.2ai); second, the challenging nature of partnership working (9.3.2a ii); and finally the lack of time to build appropriate relationships with young people whilst staff were worn down by ongoing austerity (9.3.2a iii). These three themes are discussed below.

#### i) *Lack of training, space for reflection or support from management*

Working intensively with troubled young people requires not only commitment but space for training, reflection on practice, as well as understanding and management support. All of these were reported by respondents to be in short supply since austerity cuts had eaten into youth service budgets (as discussed in Davies, 2019). Patricia was, since cuts to the youth service in her

local authority, managed at neighbourhood and inter-service level by a manager who had no youth work background. This manager continually confused the acronym BLT and LGBT, leading Patricia to feel *'like I had to educate my managers and my colleagues'* rather than being supported by managers with a depth of understanding regarding the aims and values of youth work needed for this challenging work. As Patricia said: *'there used to be space for reflective supervision ... to question yourself and think ... am I making an impact here? ... I don't think anyone has that time now to really think and question'*. This lack of space, time and encouragement for reflective practice was noted by six of these eight respondents who worked in local authority settings.

ii) Partnership working: the gains and challenges

Partnership working with agencies that may not share youth work values has always been an important part of youth work (Coburn & Wallace, 2011) both at management and grass roots levels. For Marie the partnership that had been *'forced on'* her was with the police. This close partnership, whilst keeping Marie and the services that she managed at the fore-front of much local provision, also caused many challenges. One challenge was that *'the Police don't always understand that building relationships takes time. ... A "no tolerance" [approach] regarding [the possession of] dope isn't useful if trying to build relationships with young people'*. Marie noted that the emphasis, at management level within the partnership between the police and the youth service, was *'always on law enforcement rather than understanding why young people get involved in anti-social behaviour'*. Marie went on to note that *'if I was trying to engage in detached youth work and young people knew that I was based in a police station they are not going to trust me'*. This last point linked to Marie's more personal theme: the pressure on her as an individual sitting alongside people who did not share her values or approach to community and youth work issues and who she did not feel comfortable talking to about her lesbian sexuality. Patricia also, speaking of some of challenges in partnership work, kept returning through the interviews to a focus on one particular piece of work. This work was in partnership with a volunteer-led project working with young people with anti-social behaviour. Patricia, as a youth worker with over 20 years of professional experience, found it difficult to confront the lack of values of this volunteer-led project. She reported that the leaders of this project had prevented Patricia's colleague (a gay volunteer) from *'putting up posters celebrating gay history month. They said that "we don't have a straight corner ... We don't want to have that rammed in our faces"'*. Patricia, despite her many years of experience as an LGBTQ worker found this reaction impossible to question as there was little trust or communication between her and the leaders of the project.



It is clear from respondents' comments recounted above that partnership working was challenging (as noted in the literature: Coburn & Wallace, 2011) and was often painful for respondents who were unable to develop the appropriate trust and shared values necessary for such partnership work to flourish (reflecting the literature: Community Places, 2014). The discussion now moves to focus on how youth workers felt worn out by the continued and ongoing austerity cuts.

iii) [The lack of space or time to build relationships with young people and staff worn down by ongoing austerity cuts](#)

The eight experienced respondents who were working within local authority-based youth work when interviewed all noted that there was now less time to build the long-term relationships that *'really make a difference to young people'* (Marie). The irony seemed to be that youth workers had increasingly been expected to work with a case-load approach focussing on working with young people with difficult and long term needs. However, as Marie and others pointed out, *'there are not enough resources to do the intensive key-working that is needed to engage these young people'*. Marie also pointed out that *'when money is made available for detached youth work ... the funding is short term and comes to an end when relationships with young people are only just developing'*. It was in these relationships that there was possible space for a youth worker to use their self with young people. Short term work with young people made this focus on the use of self within relationships much more difficult as noted in the literature (Wylie, 2015; Davies, 2019). Sabidah talked about the impact of many reorganisations in her local authority in attempts to hold on to grass-roots youth workers. Sabidah suggested that *'change is always disruptive'*, but in a service which values relationships it took Sabidah *'6 months to re-build relationships and trust with her [new] staff team'* after such a reorganisation.

Seven of the eleven experienced respondents who had worked in local authority settings over the years talked about changes in the quality of youth work since the start of austerity cuts in 2010. Patricia spoke with passion about the impact of cuts taking *'such a toll'* in her work. She pointed out that in the past there had been money available to work appropriately with difficult and challenging young people with the possibility of making an impact on their lives: *'it was expensive ... but it was just life changing'. All that's gone'* with austerity cuts. Patricia went on to explain, again what other respondents also suggested, that this intensive and so expensive work needed to take place over years not months: as noted by Jane above (9.3.1). Having space to work with young people over years enabled workers to build relationships, using their own self as a tool with

young people. Patricia talked about various young people that she had worked with in the past in ways that had allowed her to get to know and understand their situations. The young woman, always late for school, who had an alcoholic mother and no clock to wake herself up in the morning: Patricia supplied an alarm clock. The young man who was falling asleep due to getting up at 3am to work with a local farmer; other professionals assumed this was due to him playing games on the internet: Patricia supported him to go on to study agriculture at College. Building these relationships, according to Patricia, involved workers sharing some of their own selves before *'being allowed into the secrets of the young people's lives. ... It doesn't happen overnight it takes time ... and commitment'*. The time for these in-depth relationships was no longer available to practitioners due to austerity cuts, according to Patricia and other respondents.

The five experienced respondents who worked full time in local authority settings when interviewed (Patricia, Sabidah, Marie, Liz and Issie) all talked, many at length, of the challenges of working under the pressure of austerity cuts. These cuts have impacted on local authority youth provision throughout England (Jefferies, 2015b; IDYW, 2017; Taylor et al, 2018; Davies, 2019). Respondents had to find their own way of surviving these pressures but were not always successful. Patricia emphasised that she tried *'to bring humour and a sense of calm and - what my motto is "to be the adult that I needed as a child"'*. However, there were now some situations where Patricia felt she lacked both the financial and emotional resources to be this *'calm supportive adult'* in her work. Through these times of austerity when cuts were followed by reorganisation and more cuts in local authority youth work (IDYW, 2017; Davies, 2019) the toll on the confidence and emotional energy of these respondents was clearly visible in the emotions displayed by respondents.

This discussion of the challenges faced by respondents regarding cuts in youth work provision due to austerity cuts now moves to some positive themes that respondents talked about with regard to their practice. These themes are the continued passion for face to face work despite the impact of austerity cuts and that these workers can still make space to hold onto the core values of their profession.

### *9.3.2b) Holding onto some positives despite the impact of austerity cuts*

Youth workers in the statutory sector have been hardest hit by austerity cuts since 2010 (Wylie, 2015; Jefferies, 2015b; Davies, 2019). Respondents working in the not-for-profit or voluntary youth work sector reported fewer challenges in terms of being able to work within the core values of

youth work, and being allowed time to build appropriately open and professional relationships with young people, as discussed in the literature (Wylie, 2015; Jeffs, 2015b; Bright et al, 2018). However, all respondents, whatever sector of youth work they were in, talked about their passion for face to face youth work and how they were able to hold onto some of the core values of youth work despite the onslaught of cuts. Their feelings are presented below.

Many respondents spoke passionately about their involvement in face to face youth work, reflecting the literature (Fusco, 2012). Patricia had been a full time youth worker since the 1990s and in 2013 she was promoted to *'locality manager ... working with volunteers to help run youth provision'*. Patricia, however reported that she took a *'downward step when offered a management role'* recently as she wanted to stay in face to face youth work:

*I've gone back to working with young people and I'm fine with that ... that's what I came ...here to do. ... I'd rather take the pay cut and go back to working with young people ... I'd like to finish my days doing that.*

Liz, like Patricia, had decided to step down from middle management, taking a pay cut so that she could avoid the need to *'gear myself up and go ... into battle'* as a manager. Liz preferred the challenges of doing face to face work with young people despite the tensions brought about by the austerity cuts to the youth service that she worked in. This was a move that did not seem to be resented by Patricia and Liz as they noted that it was the face to face element of youth work that enthused them still despite having worked within youth work for over 20 years. Sabidah, although a manager, made an effort to stay involved in some face to face youth work: *'especially the LGBQ focussed youth work'*. This was because as Sabidah reported: the face to work *'keeps me alive ... it's what keeps me going'*: fighting for access for all young people to appropriate services. Marie, a senior manager in a small local authority youth service, said that she was *'no longer doing face to face work ... except on summer play schemes ... and some borough wide events'*. Marie described her role as *'like walking a bit of a tightrope'*, managing the neighbourhood teams from within the police station and also managing what was left of the youth service. The face to face work *'is a passion at the moment ... going back to youth work and going back to detached work'*. Hence Marie's attempts to develop detached youth work, even if it was being delivered by staff that she managed rather than by herself. It was clear that keeping their involvement in face to face work with young people was important for respondents despite the austerity cuts.

The struggle to hold on to some of the core values of youth work, especially the space for building positive and ongoing relationships with young people, was highlighted by respondents. The struggles of respondents to keep a focus on developing and building relationships with young people, and so their ability to use their self is reflected within the literature. This literature suggests that relationships are still prized by youth workers (Ord, 2007; Jones 2013) although this is increasingly difficult now that youth work has been 'diverted to targeted and a managed focus' (Bradford & Cullen, 2014, p2). Respondents talked about the spaces where they were able to hold on to core youth work values and where they were able to develop their role as informal educators. Doing detached work allowed Liz the space to start 'where young people are at' (Spence et al, 2007, p13) and '*go with the flow with conversations. ... Last week we stopped and we were talking to this lad and his sister [about how sexism impacts on them within their family and Eastern European communities] ... it was a good conversation*'. Patricia spoke about making space, in the part of her role which is LGBT focussed, allowing her to invent her own role with schools. Consequently she was able to '*support young people who are LGBT or are questioning because there was nobody else doing it and I recognised a need and a gap so I just thought that's what I'm doing and I've made it my mission to make it work.*' Sabidah was also passionate about her role as an informal educator. Despite the fact that she was a manager Sabidah saw her role as one of '*political education ... taking time to listen and to support ... young people*'. This comment was made with regard to Sabidah's work with trans young people. Sabidah said that other work with white young men who may be racist or homophobic was made easier by the fact that she was '*local and grew up in an area of the city ... that was not smart ... [so giving her] credibility*'. This last point made by Sabidah emphasises again the power that using one's own self can bring to the development of relationships between youth worker and young people.

Respondents who did not work in targeted work with LGBT young people mentioned assumptions from colleagues and that they would take on responsibility for working with LGBT young people. Jane talked about '*falling into the LGBT focussed work as it was assumed that I could do this. ... I got no training and very little support from management*'. So, for many respondents, managers also assumed that LGBQ youth workers would be able to use their own sexuality and build useful relationships with LGBT-identifying young people but took no account of the support that LGBQ youth workers may need to enable them to feel safe about being so visible in school or other settings (a point noted in Batsleer, 2012).

The evidence provided by respondents regarding change within youth work settings and the impact of the ongoing change within youth work over the past decades, was not a focus of discussion with all respondents. However these discussions offer some insights into how challenges to the core values of youth work have impacted on these respondents and also provides evidence of their commitment to and enjoyment of face to face work with young people. Whilst others have undertaken more focussed research around these topics (for example Davies & Merton, 2009; Jeffs, 2015b) many of these respondents had worked in youth work for several decades and provided heartfelt anecdotal evidence regarding the impact of change and their resilience and commitment to the core values of youth work practice.

## Conclusion

The first part of the chapter focussed on the impact of LGB-focussed changes in legislation on these respondents as they went about their day-to-day work with young people. The range of different views regarding the on-going impact of Section 28 was discussed. The majority of respondents, (especially those who had worked under Section 28) thought that this legislation still held a shadow over LGBQ teachers and youth workers, even if it was only the memory of how damaging this legislation had been at the time. Respondents noted that changes to legislation were important and did allow them to be more positive when raising LGBQ issues in mainstream settings. However Fern's conclusion that the negative impact of wider legislation impacting on young people off-set the positive impact of the LGB-focussed legislation changes is sobering.

Tatchell's discussion (cited in Schools Out, 2014) regarding the three issues that are yet to be addressed if the repeal of Section 28 is to be meaningful emphasises that despite the many important changes in legislation since 2003 (when Section 28 was repealed) much work is still to be done, if schools and youth workers are to offer appropriate support to LGBT young people. These three elements were the stamping out of bullying of LGBT young people in schools; the development of understanding of the issues that impact on LGBT young people and the inclusion of LGBT-related issues within SRE classes. As discussed above, it will be interesting to note over the coming years how much of an impact the 2010 Equalities Act and the new curriculum being introduced for Relationship and Sex Education (RSE) has on how LGBQ youth workers and school teachers feel they can be comfortably out and appropriately supported within their work settings.

Respondents noted that changes in how the media portray issues around LGBTQ since their own adolescence has ensured that there are now many more positive images of LGBTQ for young people to access (see Postuvan et al, 2019). This is true for both the traditional mediums of television (including soap operas) and films as well social networking sites: whether this is *Tumblr* as respondents were talking about, or any new social networking sites that might develop in the future. The World Wide Web has opened up access for young people to a breadth of information that was not available when most of these fifteen respondents were adolescents.

Change has always been a theme within youth work (Banks, 1994; Jeffs, 2015b; Davies, 2019). However, the current changes faced by youth work have not incremental changes due to changing life experiences of young people or gradual changes in policy. These changes have been, rather, 'an extraordinary rupture from the past' (Jeffs, 2015b, p12) where governmental policy is no longer focussed on the provision of youth work funded by either local or central government. Austerity cuts impacted much more on respondents working within the statutory sector compared with those working in the voluntary sector. This 'rupture' from past policy has been compounded by the 'uncoupling of youth work from the Department for Education' (Jeffs, 2015b p12). However, many respondents noted their ongoing commitment to the core values of youth work (as discussed in Ch.2). These values included informal learning, the importance of celebrating diversity whilst challenging injustice and oppression as well as young people having a key role in deciding the nature and direction of their involvement with youth workers.

Chapter 9 is the final chapter examining data from these fifteen cisgendered LGBTQ women youth workers. This thesis now moves to the concluding chapter which sums up some of the key findings and discusses the usefulness of the research to youth work educators and policy makers.

## Ch. 10: Conclusions

### Introduction

This study, in examining the experiences of LGBQ women youth workers and how they have used their self in their work, has offered many insights into the day-to-day experiences of the respondents. If youth workers are to build transformative relationships with young people the use of self must be central to their practice. The findings from this research have been, and will be, shared with appropriate audiences to encourage youth workers from all backgrounds and communities to reflect more carefully on how they go about using their self in their relationships with young people. Whilst the research has focused on the experiences of fifteen cisgendered LGBQ professional women youth workers the findings could be useful for other youth workers whatever their sexuality or gender.

This chapter, moving on from the previous five findings chapters, draws conclusions from the research. It starts by revisiting the research questions and the context of the study (10.1). Findings of the research are then summarised (10.2) divided into four sections that echo the five findings chapters. Findings from chapters 7 and 8 are discussed together as both focus on relationships, boundaries and ethics in practice. This section concludes by clarifying the new knowledge contributed by this research (10.2.5). Recommendations from the research for youth work educators and managers (10.3) and reflections on my learning from the research process (10.4) are then presented. The final section offers plans for the dissemination of these findings and for future research (10.5). To emphasise my ownership of the conclusions and findings the first person will be used within this chapter more than in previous chapters.

### 10.1 The context of the research

This study allowed me to research the views and experiences of fifteen cisgendered LGBQ women youth workers in the north of England to examine how they used their self within their work with young people. In doing this, I also considered the relevance of queer theory for these practitioners. The research questions included:

- (i) how LGBQ women youth work practitioners understood their journey to their current LGBQ sexuality;
- (ii) how their self impacted on how they named themselves and how they acted within their professional roles;

- (iii) how these women youth workers used their self, both in terms of their LGBQ identity and other aspects of their self, within their work with young people;
- (iv) the extent to which the idea of queering their identity was useful in their professional settings.

Starting from a feminist standpoint and taking a socially constructionist view of identity, I gathered rich data from fifteen youth workers. Stories shared through in-depth semi-structured interviews enabled me to understand how their use of self contributed to their professional practice. These stories focused on a wide range of issues including how these women viewed their LGBQ sexuality in relation to other aspects of their self and background; how they knew when to share information about their interests and their self with young people; how they used this self and shared information about their self with young people in youth work settings and how they developed appropriate professional boundaries in their work with young people.

This research was undertaken at a time of change. The prevalence of LGBQ and transgender issues, in terms of legislation and visibility in the media, have changed and developed since 2013 when I commenced the research. There has also been remarkable changes in and how young people named themselves in terms of sexuality and gender with 28% of young people in 2019 not seeing themselves as completely heterosexual and 16% of young people identifying as bisexual compared with only 25% in 2015 (Yougov, 2019). This has also been a time of change within youth work (although youth work has always been undergoing change: Jeffs, 2015b) when the very existence of the profession has been under threat (Jones, 2018; Jeffs, Coburn, Scott-McKinley & Drowley, 2019). This change was not the intended focus of the study but some respondents talked at length about the challenges they encountered and how these changes impacted on their practice. I have analysed these stories in the findings of this study.

A thematic analysis, taking a template approach (King & Horrocks, 2010), was used to analyse the data. In places within the study the words or stories of respondents have been reported at length in a style more usually associated with narrative research. This enabled me to hold on to three important values from narrative research whilst applying this thematic approach to the analysis. The first of these values was to emphasise that stories recounted by respondents were one of many possible versions of that story: had that story been told at a different time or by a different actor then a different version or that story would have been told. Second, the need to hear the whole story from respondents so that common and divergent themes within and between these



stories could be identified. Finally, the importance of remembering that the lives of each respondent would continue to develop and change after the research was completed so stories told were only the stories of that time and context.

These values from narrative research, whilst important within the analysis of the data, also emphasised the limitations of the research. The themes identified in this study were themes from this research, with these respondents, undertaken by myself. Interviews with different respondents or undertaken by a different researcher (or even undertaken by myself at a different time) could have uncovered different themes. Whilst these limitations on the reliability of this research are common for much qualitative research (Denscombe, 2010; Bryman, 2012) it is essential to keep these limitations in mind whilst drawing general conclusions and in disseminating findings to interested audiences.

## 10.2. Key findings and contribution to new knowledge

This section recaps the main findings of this study, in subsections reflecting the findings chapters. In summarising these findings, ideas not previously included within the youth work literature have been highlighted and new academic knowledge is emphasised.

### 10.2.1: Stories of becoming

Respondents presented a wide range of experiences in remembering and sharing stories of their adolescence and their coming out as LGBTQ but all saw coming out as a process (so agreeing with other literature: Rich, 1980a; Weeks et al 2001; Valentine et al, 2003; Almack, 2007). Some had challenging times in their transition from adolescence to adulthood as they travelled their own journey to confidence in their LGBTQ sexuality. Cass's (1996) six stages of identity formation, with the suggested challenges and realisations to be encountered on this path, seemed to match the experiences of some respondents. However, this staged approach to coming out seemed less useful for other respondents. The idea of 'necessary and sufficient conditions' (Schneider, 2001, p78) that enabled these women to acknowledge their LGBTQ sexuality were sometimes a more useful model. A few respondents had encountered homophobia that put their lives, their homes or their jobs at risk: so substantiating the literature that suggests the sharing of 'explosive knowledge' (Orne, 2011, p693) regarding LGBTQ sexuality can result in catastrophe (Orne, 2011). Some were impacted by the homophobia and biphobia that was around them and viewed their own sexuality negatively for many years (so agreeing with Almack, 2007). Others were assisted in

their confident, and maybe more rapid, moves towards and into their LGBTQ sexuality through 'continuous dialogue' (Valentine et al, 2003, p487) with supportive friends and family members, as suggested in the literature (Valentine et al, 2003).

There was a range of experiences in terms of the age at which respondents became aware of and shared their knowledge about their LGBTQ sexuality with those around them. Some respondents remembered a growing awareness of their difference from peers between the ages of eight and eleven: so corroborating other literature (Bridget & Lucille, 1996; Diamond & Savin-Williams, 2000; Schneider, 2001; D'Augelli, 2002). However, it is important to note that heterosexual adults also often recount memories of difference from their childhood and teenage years (Savin-Williams, 2006). Many respondents told their peers about their LGBTQ sexuality around the age of sixteen, reflecting again other literature (Bridget & Lucille, 1996; Diamond & Savin-Williams, 2000; Schneider, 2001; D'Augelli, 2002). Others kept this information from their parents until the benefits of disclosure outweighed the costs (as suggested in Almack, 2007) in their late teen years once they had left or were about to leave home: again substantiating other literature (Valentine et al, 2003; Almack, 2007).

There was a range of experiences amongst these respondents with regard to possible stigma associated with LGBTQ sexuality during their school years (reflecting Almack, 2007). However, the experiences of these respondents were not typical of LGB young people. Only three respondents recounted that they were victimised by bullying at school compared with 45% of all LGB young people (Stonewall, 2017). Four of the fifteen reported actively fighting for themselves or for friends who were victims of bullying; others remembered being able to ignore verbal insults. The fact that, as they were growing up, many of these respondents did not follow the typical experiences of LGB young people emphasises the importance of youth workers' awareness that their own experiences and coming out to themselves, their friends and families may not reflect the experiences of young people that they work with. The fact that people who develop the confidence to work with young people in youth work settings may not have experiences typical of other young people is important knowledge for all youth workers, not only LGBTQ workers. This point is suggested by Murphy & Ord (2013) but not referred to in other youth work literatures. This research, with its focus on the experiences of LGBTQ youth workers, has brought new evidence to the academy.

### 10.2.2 Being: the acceptance or rejection of identities and labels

The findings with regard to how respondents named themselves or understood their identity linked to intersections between sexuality and other identities such as social class, religion, ethnicity and age. Taking both an anticategorical and an intracategorical intersectional approach (drawing on McCall, 2005) to the respondents' stories was useful. The anticategorical intersectional approach emphasised the value of questioning how and why categorical labels were used. It underlined the fact that LGBTQ people do not belong to one homogenous community, thus corroborating other literature (e.g. Formby, 2017). Having and using an understanding of queer theory in their lives seemed more useful for the BAME respondents than the white respondents in this study, so linking to Warner's (1999) suggestion that queer theory is often useful for those marginalised within the LGBTQ communities. The examination of how these women named themselves, using an intracategorical approach, made it clear, as in other literature (McCall, 2005; Prins, 2006; Monro, 2010; Taylor, 2011; Winker & Degele, 2011; Byrne, 2013; Warner & Shields, 2013), that categories of sexuality, social class, religion, ethnicity and age worked together in complex ways rather than being 'separate dimensions' (Corlett & Mavin, 2014, p260) in the lives of these women. As concluded from this research (Hatton & Monro, 2019, p116) 'the uniqueness of the intersections of categories for these individuals and the varied life experiences encountered, ensure that these intersectional approaches challenge, rather than emphasise, stereotypes'. This underlined the usefulness for all youth workers, not just LGBTQ workers, of taking an intersectional approach to understanding diversity to avoid any possibility of 'seeing or reinforcing stereotypes in their work with young people' (Hatton & Monro, 2019, p116). Intersectional theories, whilst discussed widely in other places (e.g. McCall, 2005; Monro, 2010; Winker & Degele, 2011; Byrne, 2013; Warner & Shields, 2013) have not been discussed to any extent in youth work literatures, so here again this study provides new knowledge for youth work audiences.

### 10.2.3 Relationships, boundaries and ethics in professional practice

Respondents, reflecting the literature (e.g. Jeffs & Smith, 2004 & 2014; Young, 2006; Batsleer, 2008), spoke of the importance of reciprocity in their relationships with young people. Some also spoke passionately about the necessity of gaining some influence on the 'desires, beliefs and judgements' (Hayward & Lukes, 2008, p6) of some young people. This link to Lukes' (2002) third dimension of power: to influence the 'desires, beliefs and judgments' of others (Hayward & Lukes,

2008, p6). Lukes' model seems useful for youth workers but was not previously cited in the youth work literature.

Two respondents suggested taking a team approach to challenging homophobia, biphobia or transphobia from young people. This would involve youth workers queering or being unclear about, their sexuality so that all in the team, regardless of their sexuality, would have the same responsibility to challenge these issues. Putting pressure on workers from minority communities to be role models and so be pushed into taking a lead in challenging oppression was thought, by many of these respondents, to be inappropriate. This idea of a whole team approach to challenging homophobia or biphobia is endorsed by Batsleer (1996a & 2014) and Cullen (personal communication, F.Cullen July 1, 2015) but not noted in other youth work literature. Again this study is emphasising important ideas that have not been examined in any depth within most of the youth work literature.

Respondents noted the importance of support from colleagues and partner agencies: something that was in short supply due, possibly, to the impact of austerity cuts on how youth work was funded and delivered. Whilst the impact of austerity cuts on face to face youth work is discussed in other places (e.g. UNISON, 2014; Jeffs, 2015b; Jones, 2018; Taylor et al, 2018; Davies, 2019; Bright & Pugh, 2019) the impact on team working, networking or partnerships working has not previously been noted. Most respondents reported positive experiences of working in supportive staff teams (as noted as important in the youth work literature: Young; 2006; Batsleer, 2008; LLUK, 2008; Coburn, 2011; Sercombe, 2010b; Sapin, 2013). However, some respondents told troubling stories regarding colleagues that they could not trust with sensitive information about their self: so collaborating the literature which suggests that there can be challenges within organisations which are mostly LGBTQ-friendly (Colgan et al, 2008). These 'pockets of hostility' (Colgan et al, 2008, p40) included respondents working in partnership with other agencies whose values were different (e.g. the police) or agencies that lacked professional ethics and training (e.g. some voluntary-sector agencies). These troubling accounts are important as such information has not previously been offered within the literature.

All respondents stated that reciprocal relationships with young people were at the heart of their practice, so confirming the literature (e.g. Young, 2006; Batsleer, 2008; Jeffs & Smith, 2010a; Fusco, 2012; Nichols, 2012; de St Croix, 2016). Many respondents noted that their face to face work with young people, despite requiring a lot of energy, motivated them and was the reason

for their continuing involvement in youth work. This supports previous research (Collander-Brown, 2010; Spence & Devaney, 2013). Most respondents spoke about the importance of reciprocity in relationships between themselves and young people (reflecting the youth work literature: e.g. Young, 2006; Ord, 2007; Collander-Brown, 2010; Sapin, 2013). These women, agreeing with previous literature (Spence et al, 2006; Spence, 2007; Murphy & Ord, 2013), realised that the sharing of information about themselves, their hobbies and interests and some details of their own lives (the 'selective level' of self-disclosure: Murphy & Ord, 2013, p336) was essential if young people were to trust them with their interests, issues and worries within the youth work relationships.

All respondents, when talking about what information to share with young people, were clear that self-disclosure always had to be in the interest of the young people and not to benefit themselves, so substantiating previous literature (e.g. NYA, 2001; Spence et al, 2006; Banks, 2010; Murphy & Ord, 2013). Respondents also corroborated the youth work literature (Roberts, 2009; Sercombe, 2010a & b; Murphy & Ord, 2013; Sapin, 2013) in being clear that they would never discuss their personal sex life with young people. Many also noted the importance of clarity of boundaries and support from colleagues if there was any suspicion that a young person had developed an attraction with any youth worker, including themselves.

Murphy and Ord's model of self disclosure (see figure1/Ch.2) seemed to match with the experiences of these respondents but it was clear that not all felt in a position to share aspects from the 'discretionary area' (Murphy & Ord, 2013, p337). Two of the fifteen respondents preferred not to share things from this area with young people. These two respondents had a different style in their relationship building with young people compared with the majority of respondents (so agreeing with Sapin, 2013). Evidence from this research suggests that LGBQ youth workers should not be pressured to disclose their sexuality, even if disclosure may be useful for young people. Such an idea seems to contrast with the suggestion that hiding difference, such as LGBQ sexuality, may be 'failing the educational mission of youth work' (Murphy & Ord, 2013, p338). Here again this study offers insights that bring attention to issues of importance not previously discussed in any depth within the youth work literature.

When discussing if or how they shared information regarding their LGBQ sexuality with young people seven of the fifteen respondents reported not having a choice about being out. Young people had guessed their LGBQ sexuality from the way that they presented themselves through

their style of dress, haircut or other performances (reflecting Butler, 1991 and Stockton, 2002). This sharing of 'free and open' information (Murphy & Ord, 2013, p336) whilst, maybe being seen as unproblematic (as suggested by Murphy & Ord, 2013), prevented these seven respondents of being in the closet regarding their LGBTQ sexuality. This leaking of their sexuality, whether done consciously or unconsciously, meant that respondents needed to talk about their sexuality with young people before they could develop conversations on other topics and so build the required professional relationships. Other respondents were able to make the choice of building relationships before disclosing their LGBTQ sexuality with young people. These findings offer a critique of Murphy and Ord's model (2013, p336) as this leaking of identity cuts across and conflates some areas of the model. What is 'free and open' for some practitioners becomes 'discretionary' or 'private' for others so demonstrating the potential vulnerability of some respondents. However it may well be that there could be a similar potential leaking of identity for professionals from other minority groups (e.g. practitioners from disadvantaged backgrounds or practitioners who may have experienced mental health issues, CSE or drug and alcohol misuse). This is something that could be explored in further research. This idea of problematic leaking of identity through style that is a barrier, rather than an asset, in the building of relationships is noted by Murphy and Ord but not discussed in any depth in other youth work literature. The focus in this research on this issue for LGBTQ youth workers has brought new evidence to light.

The sharing of 'selective' information (Murphy & Ord, 2013, p337) such as hobbies and political views was an area that respondents were mostly confident to use as a tool for building relationships with young people and many were aware that boundaries needed to change as relationships with young people developed. Respondents realised that they needed to develop their own ethical approach to ensure that boundaries were appropriate (reflecting Sercombe 2010a & b). Such a personal ethical approach needed to be founded on their experience and supported by critical reflective practice. This is in contrast to relying on the, somewhat naïve, guidance from the NYA (2001) and IYW (2013) with regard to the separation of professional and personal lives. Being flexible and gradually moving their boundaries with regard to what they would share with young people was an important point noted by most respondents. This emphasises the need for flexible and developing boundaries within relationships. Although noted in some youth work literature (Batsleer, 2008; Sercombe, 2012a & b; Murphy & Ord, 2013), the need for boundaries that develop over time is an area which is skirted over, or not mentioned, in other sources that discuss the importance of boundaries in relationships in youth work (NYA,

2001; Ord, 2007; Roberts, 2009; Blacker, 2010; IYW, 2013; Sapin, 2013; Wood et al, 2015). Whilst discussed to some extent within the youth work literature the attention given to the importance of flexible boundaries in this research brings a new focus to this discussion.

The use of conversation was an essential tool for respondents in building relationships with young people as suggested in the youth work literature (e.g. Jeffs & Smith, 1999; Spence et al, 2006; Smith, H. 2010; Batsleer, 2013; Jeffs, 2015a; Cooper & Gretschel, 2018). Being able to move conversations from the mundane to more challenging topics, as had been evidenced from previous research (Spence et al, 2003), was noted by respondents. The use of humour was also recounted as an important tool in getting young people engaged within conversations and activities, so substantiating other literature (Sercombe, 2010a; Fusco, 2012; Sapin, 2013). Whilst agreeing with previous research, this chapter offered new evidence as to how these tools of conversation and humour were deployed by these LGBQ youth workers in their day-to-day working lives.

#### 10.2.4 Change: in LGB-focussed legislation and in youth work settings

Respondents were positive that the vast changes that have taken place in legislation regarding LGB issues over the past decades had allowed more freedom to raise LGB issues in their work, so confirming other literature (Postuvan et al, 2019). However, the fact that the wider legislation agenda has impacted negatively on young people, as pointed out by Fern, put the gains in LGB-focussed legislation changes into perspective. Some respondents felt that Section 28 still affected the space that youth workers had to celebrate LGBQ sexuality, so corroborating the literature (Roberts, 2009; Batsleer, 2012b & 2013; Sapin, 2013; Fenwick, 2015). It may be that the current protests against the new RSE curriculum being brought into schools in 2020 and the 'surge' (Marsh et al, 2019) in homophobic attacks on LGBQ people in public spaces is a reminder of challenges when working under Section 28 in times past. However, it does appear that the vast changes in how LGBT people are seen and portrayed in public life (Coleman-Fountain, 2014; Postuvan et al, 2019) and in the media (including the internet) means that the problem of unearthing information about LGBQ issues faced by these respondents in their teen years is now in the past.

The changes in youth work funding and provision over the past decade have had a devastating impact on the services delivered to young people by respondents. It seemed that these changes have probably ended local authority-funded universally delivered open access youth work. This has been 'an extraordinary rupture' (Jeffs, 2015b, p12) from the policy developments of the latter

years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This new landscape for youth work in England corroborates other literature (Jeffer, 2015b; Bright & Pugh, 2019; Jeffer et al, 2019). Whether youth work is ever repositioned within the Department for Education nationally or whether it remains in the DCMS may not, in the end, impact on the core values that were still held on to by these youth workers.

#### 10.2.5 Overview of new academic knowledge

Some of the core findings, noted above, emphasise or offer additional evidence for issues that have been alluded to, if only briefly, within the youth work literature. These include four main areas. First that youth workers' experiences of their own teen years often do not reflect the resilience, or lack of resilience, that many young people may find in similar situations. Second, the suggestion of taking a whole team approach to youth workers being clear about their LGBTQ sexuality, which was previously only mentioned by Batsleer (1996a; 2004). This emphasises the importance of individuals from minority communities not being expected to take the lead on challenging oppression, a point again only noted by Batsleer within the recent youth work literature. Third, the importance of flexibility and the development of professional boundaries, a point only noted previously by Murphy and Ord (2013). This links to the idea that identity of professionals is leaked unconsciously; another point not examined to any extent within the youth work literature. Finally, that taking an intersectional and a queer approach to their identity was useful for these respondents. A queer approach allowed some respondents space to question and challenge the heteronormative ideologies which may have otherwise constricted them into spaces that were not useful. Alongside this queer approach the intersectional approach shed light on how respondents named themselves in their everyday lives and allowed an examination of how 'different oppressions work with and through each other' (Engel, 2008, p271).

In three areas of the findings the study has offered new knowledge and new evidence. First, and most importantly: that of the everyday experiences of LGBTQ youth workers in their professional lives with regard to their use of self in their relationships with young people. The second area is the usefulness of queer theory and intersectional approaches when examining how women, especially of BAME backgrounds, name and present their selves. The third area of new evidence is the lack of space or understanding and time for support or critical and developmental discussions with colleagues or partner agencies caused by the impact of austerity cuts on youth work professionals.



The discussion now moves on to emphasise the contributions of this research to youth work education, policy and practice.

### 10.3. Recommendations for youth work education, policy and practice

This section emphasises five areas identified by this research that could be usefully noted by youth work educators and managers. First, that resilience of professionals may not reflect the resilience of young people that they work with. Second, the usefulness of both queer and intersectional approaches in understanding how and why a range of different identities are interwoven for all, regardless of background and LGBQ sexuality. Third, the importance of LGBQ professionals not necessarily being expected to take a lead in challenging issues of homophobia, biphobia and transphobia. Fourth, the importance of youth workers having space and being supported to take a critical approach to reflective practice as they develop flexibility within their boundaries in professional practice. Finally, the importance for LGBQ professionals of having supportive colleagues within staff teams and partner agencies.

#### Recommendation 1:

Whilst the discussions regarding how respondents remembered their childhood, teenage years and their coming out experiences was useful and interesting it is important to emphasise that there is no evidence that women remembering that they were different in their childhood and teen years are more likely to be LGBT than cisgendered heterosexuals (see Savin-Williams, 2006). Too much emphasis on such memories could distort possible research regarding the development and awareness of young people's experiences regarding their LGBQ sexuality. As noted above, the experiences of these respondents was not typical of the experiences of LGBQ young people generally. Many respondents seemed to have a resilience to homophobia, biphobia and other heteronormative assumptions that set them apart from the experiences of most LGBQ young people. This is probably true of other experiences for youth workers and their development of resilience to challenges faced in their own adolescence. It is vital for youth work educators to support trainees in developing an awareness of the impact of their own experiences on their development. However, it is also important that youth workers remember that their own experiences are unique and young people going through similar struggles will not necessarily develop similar perspectives or resiliencies. Sharing stories with young people about their own life stories can be counter-productive for youth workers (as noted in Murphy & Ord, 2013) if it

minimises the issues that might be troubling for a young person or may be of little relevance to young people: an idea that could be emphasised by youth work educators.

#### Recommendation 2:

The findings of this study underline the usefulness of developing an understanding of intersectional approaches to identity for youth workers. This research has highlighted that queer identities may be more useful to people of BAME backgrounds than of white British heritage, as BAME people can be marginalised by labels such as lesbian or feminist. It has also underlined the care needed to protect youth workers of minority communities (whether from LGBQ communities or minority ethnic communities) from being expected to act as role models: a point that could be noted by managers as well as educators of youth workers and other caring professionals.

#### Recommendation 3:

The idea suggested by two respondents regarding taking a whole team approach to challenging homophobia, biphobia and transphobia could usefully be taken on board by team managers and youth work educators. Such an approach requires all staff within a team to be unclear (or queerying) about their sexuality so that those who do identify as LGBQ or trans are not pressured into taking a lead role in challenging such prejudicial views. This idea is noted by Batsleer (1996a) but could be further encouraged by educators and managers. Ensuring that organisations in which youth workers are employed are supportive of LGBQ identifying employees is essential if their mental health is to be supported.

#### Recommendation 4:

The research has noted that youth workers need to undertake careful and critical reflection as they develop professional boundaries in their work with young people. If workers are to develop reciprocal and authentic relationships these boundaries have to be continually reviewed as relationships with young people necessarily change over time. Whilst this is noted in previous literature (e.g. Sercombe, 2010a; Murphy & Ord, 2013) the simplicity that is suggested by the NYA (2001) and IYW (2013) with regard to the division between personal and professional issues needs to be reviewed and reflected on by managers and youth work educators alike. The requirement for careful critical reflection also links to the problematic leaking of identity that can become a barrier in developing relationships with young people. Whilst the unconscious leaking of identity (as discussed in 8.3.1 & 8.4.1) is inevitable, an awareness that this is likely to happen could be

usefully noted by youth work educators and managers especially in their support of inexperienced practitioners.

#### Recommendation 5:

The research uncovered a number of stories of professionals who felt isolated by colleagues or partner agencies in their work and in their attempts to hold on to the professional values of youth work. This accentuates the importance for youth work managers of ensuring that workers are able to develop their practice with young people in supportive staff teams where there is space to discuss (with confidence and criticality) their practice, values in practice and challenges to practice. Supportive colleagues within organisations that value LGBTQ employees (and from a range of other minority identities) can ensure commitment from professionals who may otherwise feel ostracised by a heteronormative culture within the organisation: as suggested by other research (Colgan et al, 2008). This research suggests that these spaces have been gradually undermined by the stresses and challenges brought about by austerity cuts. Space for supportive and critical debates within staff teams can scaffold a development of professional understanding and may ensure clarity regarding appropriate methods to achieve the aims of the work. Ensuring that organisations employing youth workers meet the social justice requirement of the ethical principles of the NYA (2001) should be seen as essential. This point is of relevance to issues around sexuality but also to a wider range of issues to do with ethics and core values of professional practice impacting on all youth workers.

The discussion now moves to reflect on the limitations of the research and my learning through the research process.

#### 10.4. Reflection on methods

This research enabled me to hear and understand the voices of youth work practitioners regarding an important aspect of their practice. This has been a challenging, but enjoyable process. My own identity as a feminist and lesbian, with years of experience in both face to face youth work and in educating youth workers in a range of settings enabled me to access appropriate respondents for this research. Whilst not overstating the importance of this insider role in the research process, it was rewarding to know that youth workers were willing and interested to participate in this research. It was also rewarding to note the interest in the research amongst other youth and community work educators and amongst colleagues teaching in other areas within HE.

Reflexivity within the research process was essential to ensure validity and reliability of findings, especially as an insider in the research topic. It was necessary to put my own views aside to attempt to minimise my impact on the research process, whilst being aware that removing my impact on the data gathered was impossible. I was not seeking to gather any sort of objective truths regarding the research questions. The stories that were collected were shared because of, rather than despite, the relationship that developed between the respondents and myself. If this research had been carried out by other researchers, or by interviewing different respondents, different themes may have arisen, as noted above. Being able to hear the views of respondents whilst not sharing my own views was a relatively new experience for me. Listening to the recordings of early interviews enabled me to develop strategies to appropriately disclose some aspects of my own identity during, or at the end of, interviews. It was necessary to share some information about my self prior to undertaking the interviews, both through the process of inviting respondents to participate (see appendix 3) and on first meeting them. In later interviews the sharing of a little more information about my self at the end of interviews meant that my views probably had less impact on the stories and data shared whilst also enabling me to respectfully share some information about my self with respondents. This was vital as LGBTQ circles in youth and community work are small and it was important that respondents felt that we had parted on equal terms without an impression that I had mined their data and then retreated into academia. I promised to share the final data with respondents but as this has been a long time coming something was needed immediately after the interview to hold the relationship in a respectful manner. The something shared was always small pieces of information about myself, my role in youth work education or my previous roles as a youth and community worker.

Reliability for the findings required clarity and transparency regarding the collection and analysis of the data. This clarity and transparency ensured that future audiences could understand how the data was organised and interrogated (as noted in Ch.4). This would be true if the audience was reading this thesis, other publications produced from this research or the audience of presentations about the research. This clarity and transparency is offered within this thesis.

The PhD journey has been long and at times challenging. I had set out on the PhD journey with plans to use a narrative approach to data analysis (see Ch.4). Letting go of these plans and using a template approach to thematic analysis proved to be beneficial and enabled a better use of time and energy than the intended narrative approach. The struggles to find this appropriate approach

was difficult at the time but enabled a depth of learning about a range of possible methods for data analysis. Future research might usefully be undertaken with fewer respondents to enable a narrative approach to be used. Additionally I have proved that despite, or maybe because of, my age (and so decades of experience in a range of relevant activities) I have been able to persevere through the difficulties and challenges of undertaking this research project.

The in-depth and semi-structured interviews allowed me to collect rich data due to the willingness of respondents to share their detailed stories with myself as the researcher. This generosity of time from respondents did not seem to be affected by any previous relationships, or lack of relationship, with me. People who had been more or less complete strangers were as generous with their time and stories as were people who I knew well (as students and/or supervisors of students that I had taught or people that I had canoed with many years previously).

#### 10.5. Plans for dissemination of findings and areas for future research

Dissemination of findings has already started with presentations at a range of academic conferences (see appendix 9) and a published paper (Hatton & Monro, 2019). This paper, written by Jean Hatton with support from Prof Monro in the editing of the paper, included findings from the research. Further sharing of findings at appropriate conferences and in appropriate publications are planned (see appendix 9).

This research examined the experiences of cisgendered women youth workers who were (mostly) professionally qualified and working in the North of England. Future research on similar topics could be undertaken with youth workers from other regions of England or other countries of the UK to examine possible geographical differences. Similar research with youth workers who identify as non-binary or trans, with male youth workers who are gay or bisexual or with youth workers who were not professionally qualified could also be usefully undertaken. Future research could cover a wider range of topics including more focus on issues around bisexuality as well as boundaries within the use of social media in youth work settings. Future research could also take a more flexible approach to interviewing practitioners with different levels of qualifications (both points noted in Ch.4.6).

As there has been so little research with youth workers who identify as LGBTQ+ there is potential for many other areas of related research. Ethnographic research could be undertaken with youth workers to observe and examine how and where boundaries are set in their work and if, or how,

these boundaries move over time. A research project examining the extent to which youth workers from minority communities are, or should be, encouraged to be role or possibility models in youth work settings could be usefully undertaken. Also an investigation to consider if LGBTQ youth workers challenge heteronormativity more than heterosexual youth workers in their relationships with young people could be interesting. It is hoped that this study will encourage other researchers and other youth workers to delve into these areas to provide more evidence and clarity regarding the topics noted above.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1 Consent form



#### CONSENT FORM

#### **An exploration of how lesbian, bisexual and queer women youth workers queer their identity in their work with young people.**

It is important that you read, understand and sign the consent form. Your contribution to this research is entirely voluntary and you are not obliged in any way to participate, if you require any further details please contact your researcher.

I have been fully informed of the nature and aims of this research

I consent to taking part in it

I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the research at any time during the interview process, without giving any reason.

I understand that once all the interviews have been completed and I have confirmed my agreement to the transcripts the data cannot be withdrawn

I give permission for my words to be quoted (by use of pseudonym)

I understand that the information collected will be kept in secure conditions for a period of five years at the University of Huddersfield

I understand that no person other than the researcher/s and facilitator/s will have access to the information provided.

I understand that my identity will be protected by the use of pseudonym in the report and that no written information that could lead to my being identified will be included in any report.

If you are satisfied that you understand the information and are happy to take part in this project please put a tick in the box aligned to each sentence and print and sign below.

Signature of Participant: <hr/>	Signature of Researcher: <hr/>
Print: <hr/>	Print: <hr/>
Date: <hr/>	Date: <hr/>

(one copy to be retained by Participant / one copy to be retained by Researcher)



Dear Jean,

Dr Dawn Leeming, Deputy Chair of SREP, has asked me to contact you with regard to your SREP application as detailed above.

The reviewers of your application found this to be a well thought through application and I can confirm that your application has received full ethical approval subject to the following:

- Please amend the Consent Form in order to inform the participants at what stage they will no longer be able to withdraw their data.

There is no requirement to submit your revised Consent Form to SREP on the condition that your Main Supervisor checks that this amendment has been undertaken (additionally, it was suggested that you might also consider including the same detail with regard to withdrawal of data on your Information Sheet).

With best wishes for the success of your research project.

Regards,

Kirsty  
(on behalf of Dr Dawn Leeming, Deputy Chair of SREP)

**Kirsty Thomson**

Research Administrator

: 01484 471156

: [K.Thomson@hud.ac.uk](mailto:K.Thomson@hud.ac.uk)

: [www.hud.ac.uk](http://www.hud.ac.uk)

School of Human and Health Sciences Research Office (HHRG/01)  
University of Huddersfield | Queensgate | Huddersfield | HD1 3DH

An exploration of how lesbian, bisexual and queer women youth workers view  
'the use self' in their work.

**University of Huddersfield**  
**School of Education and Professional Development**

Dear

Thank you for your interest in my doctoral research: an exploration of how lesbian, bisexual and queer women youth workers view 'the use of self' in their work.

Please read the attached information sheet and the consent form that I will ask you to sign before we commence the interviews. If you would like to have a conversation over the phone or face to face before you decide on your participation in this research do let me know.

Please confirm some possible dates and venues that could be convenient for you to meet me at. If you would prefer to attend a meeting here at the University of Huddersfield please let me know.

Thanks in anticipation

Jean Hatton

Dept. of Education and Community Studies

SEPD

University of Huddersfield

Tel: 01484 478235

Email: [j.hatton@hud.ac.uk](mailto:j.hatton@hud.ac.uk)

## Appendix 4. Respondent information sheet.

An exploration of how lesbian, bisexual and queer women youth workers queer their identity in their work with young people.

Jean Hatton, University of Huddersfield, SHHS and SEPD, Queensgate, HD1 3DH

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### **PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET**

You are being invited to take part in this doctoral study about queer identity and youth work. Before you decide to take part it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with me if you wish. Please do not hesitate to ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

#### **What is the study about?**

The purpose of this study is to gather data that will be used as part of my doctoral research project. The aims of the research are:

- To investigate the 'use of self' within a professional youth and community work context for women who identify as lesbian, bisexual or queer.
- To investigate the relevance, if any, of queer theory to issues of identity for professional women youth workers who identify as lesbian, bisexual or queer.

#### **Why I have been approached?**

You have been asked to participate because I believe that you are a professionally qualified youth and community worker who identifies as lesbian, bisexual or queer. I also think that you will have some interesting stories and ideas that will assist with the research

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

It is your decision whether or not you take part. If you decide to take part you will be asked to sign a consent form, but you will be free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. A decision to withdraw at any time, or a decision not to take part, will not effect you in any way either professionally or personally.

#### **What will I need to do?**

If you agree to take part in the research I will come to a venue that is convenient for you to interview you on a number of occasions. I expect the interviews to take about 1 ½ - 2 hours and I expect to interview you 2 times. I will audio-record the interviews so that the data can be transcribed and analysed to support my research. The interview will be an informal interview – a discussion - where I hope to learn more about how you view the 'use of self' in your work with young people. Once all the interviews have been completed and you have confirmed your agreement to the transcripts the data cannot be withdrawn.

#### **Will my identity be disclosed?**

All information disclosed within the interview will be kept confidential, except where legal obligations would necessitate disclosure by the researchers to appropriate personnel.

#### **What will happen to the information?**

All information collected during this research will be kept secure and any identifying material, such as names will be removed in order to ensure anonymity. The research will form the basis of my doctoral studies. It is anticipated that the research may, at some point, be published in a journal or report. However, should this happen, your anonymity will be ensured, although it may be necessary to use your words in the presentation of the findings and your permission for this is included in the consent form.

#### **Who can I contact for further information?**

If you require any further information about the research, please contact me on:

E- mail: [j.hatton@hud.ac.uk](mailto:j.hatton@hud.ac.uk)

Telephone: 01484 478235

Thanks for your interest and support  
Jean Hatton

## Appendix 5 Initial interview schedule

### *Interview 1: Life history and work history*

**1. Tell me a little about yourself and your journey as a professional youth and community worker?**

Name, age, degree level studies? Professional qualification; How long have you worked in the youth and community work profession? What age did you start to work in the profession?

What is your role in your current or recent jobs?

When you were appointed to this post did your managers know that you were LBQ?

Do you do any work that is targeted at LGBTQ young people? If so what proportion of your work is this? Is this your choice or is that the role that you were appointed to?

**2. Tell me a little about your journey towards your current sexual identity? Tell me about your coming out/being out story and how this impacts on your work as a youth worker**

Are you an essentialist or a constructionist or do you view the sexual identity in some other way?

Is your identity- with regard to sexuality & other aspects - something that is changing or constant?

**Tell me some stories**

**3. What do you find challenging and what do you enjoy about your current youth work?**

**Tell me some stories**

**4. How do you name yourself? What labels do you use with regard to Social Class; gender, ethnicity, religion, age, ability, etc.?**

Do you view yourself as a feminist? Does this impact on your LB or Q identity?

**Tell me some stories!**

**5. What do you know about legislation e.g.: civil partnership/same-sex marriage homophobia being seen as a 'hate crime'/ Section 28 and the legality of homosexuality.**

How do you think this legislation has impacted on you and your views of yourself or your role within informal education?

**Tell me some stories.**

**6. Is there anything else on this topic that you would like to tell me about?**

**7. Would you like me to email you the transcript if it is available before we next meet or would you rather that I brought or posted you a hard copy?**

### *Interview 2: 'Queering' the discourse? Use examples/ tell me some stories*

**1. What do you understand by the term queer?**

Is it a term or label that you use of yourself/of others? Do you hear other people using this term?

Do you know any people who are not LGBT who use the term queer about themselves? What do you think of this?

**2. Do you view sexuality as a private issue that is beyond the boundaries of engagement with young people? Do others?**

With regard to your work setting: do you **'queer'** or are you **clear** about identity?

With young people?

Is this different when working with young people who are LGBT or straight young people? If so how?

With colleagues and managers? Why/why not?

Does this lead to advantages or disadvantages in your work setting? Tell me some stories.

For you what are the advantages and disadvantages about being clear or queer about your sexual identity with young people in your work setting? Give me some examples/tell me some stories

**3. Do you see yourself as being a role model for young people?**

If so which young people and how does this impact on your work/identity/ thinking about your identity?

Do all youth workers have to act as role models? How is this different for you? Are you comfortable with this?

Stories/give me some examples

4. **Are you in a stronger or in a more vulnerable place** to do this challenging than other colleagues who may not be LBQ? Why/why not? Tell me some stories.

5. What **policies and procedures** at your place of work, if any, may impact on how you share your identity (not just in terms of sexuality) with young people?

Have you come across any **institutional heteronormativity** or homophobia within your work setting?

If so what and how has it impacted on you and your practice? Tell me some stories!

6. **Is there anything else** on this topic that you would like to tell me about?

*Interview 3: The use of self in a youth work setting. Use examples/ tell me some stories*

1. How do young people see you? Strong? Impulsive? Political? Gay? BME? Middle class? Etc. a friend? What are the pros and cons of these images in your work with young people? What other images might be useful or might you or they use?

2. How do you 'use yourself' within a youth work context? Give me some examples/stories
  - a) To do with attitudes such as humour, optimism, resilience, image, dress, personal style and character traits?
  - b) To do with the given things such as height, gender, age, ethnicity?
  - c) To do with your sexuality?
  - d) To do with your skills, knowledge and values with young people?
  - e) To do with your interests and abilities? Climber, musician, artist, football fan, cyclist, sports person etc.
  - f) Are you self-conscious about the extent to which you do use 'yourself' or is this just something that you take for granted or see as part and parcel of being a youth worker? Give me some examples, tell me some stories
  - g) Does reflective practice or reflectivity assist you in the 'use of self'?
  - h) If so how?
  - i) How are you changed by your work with young people? Give me some examples/stories
  
3. Is there contradiction between being authentic & being non-judgmental with yp?
  - a) Are you able to show your true emotions when working with young people or do you view your work as 'emotional labour' where you leave your true emotions at the door?
  - b) Do you wear a mask to hide your true emotions? If so why? How does this impact on the authentic relationship that you are supposed to have with young people?
  
4. Are you able to reflect on if or how, your own personal journey and experiences impact on the young people with whom you work? If so how?
  - a) How do you maintain your self-awareness around these matters?
  - b) Do you have the space to reflect on how your values and experiences impact on you and how you work with young people?

c) How have you worked through your personal issues? How do you get support to work through your personal issues?

d) How do you ensure that personal issues don't impact on young people?

5. How would you describe the relationships that you have with young people?

a) How do you decide where your boundaries are?

b) How do you share your personal issues with young people? Is this something that you think about or plan in advance?

c) Does the particular situation you are in at that moment impact on this? If so how?

Tell me some stories!

d) How do you ensure that you have 'risky conversations' with young people?

e) How does the image of jazz relate to the way that you work with young people? Do you look young people in the eye or in the back?

f) Do your relationships with young people differ according to the individual(s) that you are working with?

6. Do you have space to work with the traditional 'core values' of youth work?

a) The 'voluntary relationship'? How much of your work is target driven and how much is open access or young people choosing to attend? How does this impact on your relationships with young people?

b) Unconditional positive regard for young people? How? Or why not?

c) Do you have an agenda for the relationships that you build? If so where does it come from?

d) Who has the power in your work setting? Are you able to share power with young people in these relationships? Where is the power balance and how does it move within these relationships? Is it a democratic relationship which is co-created and mutually respectful?

e) How do you ensure that young people learn through their relationship with you?

f) How are your self-perceptions influenced by the perceptions of you/colleagues etc.?

7. Is there anything else on this topic that you would like to tell me about?



## Appendix 6 Final interview schedule

### *Interview 1: Life history and work history*

**1. Tell me a little about yourself and your journey as a professional youth and community worker?**

Name, age, degree level studies? Professional qualification; How long have you worked in the youth and community work profession? What age did you start to work in the profession?

What is your role in your current or recent jobs?

When you were appointed to this post did your managers know that you were LBQ?

Do you do any work that is targeted at LGBTQ young people? If so what proportion of your work is this? Is this your choice or is that the role that you were appointed to?

**2. Tell me a little about your journey towards your current sexual identity? Tell me about your coming out/being out story and how this impacts on your work as a youth worker**

Are you an essentialist or a constructionist or do you view the sexual identity in some other way?

Is your identity- with regard to sexuality & other aspects - something that is changing or constant?

**Tell me some stories**

**3. What do you find challenging and what do you enjoy about your current youth work?**

**Tell me some stories**

**4. How do you name yourself? What labels do you use with regard to Social Class; gender, ethnicity, religion, age, ability, etc.?**

Do you view yourself as a feminist? Does this impact on your LB or Q identity?

**Tell me some stories!**

**5. What do you know about legislation** e.g.: civil partnership/same-sex marriage; homophobia being seen as a 'hate crime'/ Section 28 and the legality of homosexuality.

How do you think this legislation has impacted on you and your views of yourself or your role within informal education?

**Tell me some stories.**

**6. Is there anything else on this topic that you would like to tell me about?**

**7. Would you like me to email you the transcript if it is available before we next meet or would you rather that I brought or posted you a hard copy?**

### *Interview 2: Queering the discourse/the use of self in youth work settings*

Use examples/ tell me some stories

**1. What do you understand by the term queer?** Is it a term or label that you find useful? Do you apply it to yourself at all?

Do you as a youth worker deploy '**queer**' identities or are you unclear about your sexuality?

Is this different when working with young people who are LGBT or straight young people?

With colleagues and managers?

**Tell me some stories.**

**2. How do you name yourself?** What **labels** (not just sexuality) in different work settings? Last time we talked about Social Class; gender, ethnicity, religion, age, ability, etc.?. This time I want to hear about style and dress/ hobbies/talents/ skills/ attitudes (humour/optimism) /height/age  
Do you view yourself as a feminist? Does this impact on your LB or Q identity?

**Tell me stories**

**3. Do you see yourself as being a role model for young people?**

If so which young people & how this impacts on your work/identity

Do all youth workers have to act as role models? How is this different for you?

**Tell me some stories**

4. Are you able to **reflect** on how, your own personal journey and experiences may impact on the young people with whom you work?
5. How are **you changed by your work** with young people? Give me some examples/stories
6. How does heteronormativity or homophobia impact on your work at policy or practical level? Tell me some stories!
7. Is there contradiction between being **authentic & also being non-judgmental** with yp?
8. **Is there anything else** on this topic that you would like to tell me about?

1/10/16  
②

Overview themes/issues (Z) social class  
ethnicity  
age

(5) length + breadth of yw exp. "prog qualified"

(A) Show info about self  
What shared with who?  
how decided - why?  
D

(B) Early <sup>experiences of</sup> gay LBD  
coming out stories  
relat with friends/family  
school experiences  
"tomboy" / clothes that

meta narratives

(C) Who are you?  
what is "your self" (C)  
feminism / imp of gender  
style, interests/hobbies  
dubs/hair  
How does gay LBD impact on other aspects

(D) Quoer / E/SC  
Essentialist vs social constructionist  
"labels"?  
what does "queer" mean for you  
for yw  
importance

(E) Youth with values in adult  
"role modelling"  
relationships / honest / open / honest / honest  
authenticity  
non-judgmental

(F) Change - LGBT legislation  
custody cuts

learning from / changed by  
JP / yw

support from colleagues  
negative / negative practice

## Appendix 7 b Partially organised template (1)

### 1.10.16 **Template for analysis** (drawing on Nigel King's 'template analysis')

**Overarching themes** that needs to be placed on top of, or as an integrative themes (King and Horrocks, 2010) over the main themes:

#### 1. Ethnicity/age/social class /length and breadth of experiences as a youth worker

King suggests that in some research there are some themes that sit in opposition or as overarching the other themes. These 'intersectional' issues seem to be those themes.

**Main themes and subthemes for template:**

#### 1. Sharing of information about the 'self'

This was the main focus for the research; it is at the heart of the research so put at the top

- i. What shared and with who and when?
- ii. How things are shared/not shared, body language, non-verbal communication & leaking
- iii. How decide what to share and where boundaries are?
- iv. Do your hobbies interests impact on your work with yp? Do you talk about/use these in your work?

#### 2. Early awareness and experiences of 'being' LBG

This is very different from above but the person's background and their understanding of their own personal journey to their 'current self' is an important story that needs to be part of the picture and narrative of the respondents

- i. Awareness of own sexuality
- ii. Sharing of this awareness with family and peers
- iii. Experiences at school - being bullied, getting into fights
- iv. Being labelled as a 'tom boy'; femme and own preferred style regarding image, hair and clothes
- v. Closeting
- vi. Male partners; involvement in the scene

#### 3. Labels accepted or rejected

This was two or three themes that been 'clumped' together. Discussions regarding whether respondents see the 'self' - with regard to sexuality - as being socially constructed or essentialist have brought out a range of interesting views. This does have some link with how people see the term or label 'queer'. Some respondents feel very strongly about the 'feminist' label - both positively and negatively. The focus on style seems important in regard to how youth workers present their 'self' to the young people that they work with. The focus on interests and hobbies may not be sizeable within the data but again how youth workers use their interests in music or other aspects can be very useful in building the all-important relationships within youth work.

- i. Essentialism vs. social constructionism - for self/others
- ii. What does queer mean for you? - for young people?
- iii. How do labels re lesbian/queer/ bi/ impact on you?
- iv. Feminist? - relationship with that label?
- v. Importance of gender

Performance,  
agency or +  
propaganda  
in yt + cw self?

Being: <sup>1</sup> ~~being~~ <sup>2</sup> ~~being~~ <sup>3</sup> ~~being~~ <sup>4</sup> ~~being~~ <sup>5</sup> ~~being~~ <sup>6</sup> ~~being~~ <sup>7</sup> ~~being~~ <sup>8</sup> ~~being~~ <sup>9</sup> ~~being~~ <sup>10</sup> ~~being~~ <sup>11</sup> ~~being~~ <sup>12</sup> ~~being~~ <sup>13</sup> ~~being~~ <sup>14</sup> ~~being~~ <sup>15</sup> ~~being~~ <sup>16</sup> ~~being~~ <sup>17</sup> ~~being~~ <sup>18</sup> ~~being~~ <sup>19</sup> ~~being~~ <sup>20</sup> ~~being~~ <sup>21</sup> ~~being~~ <sup>22</sup> ~~being~~ <sup>23</sup> ~~being~~ <sup>24</sup> ~~being~~ <sup>25</sup> ~~being~~ <sup>26</sup> ~~being~~ <sup>27</sup> ~~being~~ <sup>28</sup> ~~being~~ <sup>29</sup> ~~being~~ <sup>30</sup> ~~being~~ <sup>31</sup> ~~being~~ <sup>32</sup> ~~being~~ <sup>33</sup> ~~being~~ <sup>34</sup> ~~being~~ <sup>35</sup> ~~being~~ <sup>36</sup> ~~being~~ <sup>37</sup> ~~being~~ <sup>38</sup> ~~being~~ <sup>39</sup> ~~being~~ <sup>40</sup> ~~being~~ <sup>41</sup> ~~being~~ <sup>42</sup> 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### Youth work values in action

*This section may reflect the researcher's over-optimism regarding what youth workers are doing with young people in the early 21st century but these elements were discussed by respondents without fishing for them. Important to offer a critical discussion of these values- when and why 'learnt'; how used with young people*

- i. Relationships - honest, open, trusting
- ii. Authenticity
- iii. Non-judgmental
- iv. 'Role modelling'
- v. Rejection of youth work values

*The 3 sub-themes below were originally 3 separate themes. I think that they can be subthemes of this section.*

- vi. Learning from young people/how changed by youth work/young people?
- vii. Support from colleagues
- viii. Reflective/reflexive practice

### Change

*Whilst this theme seems to be of a different nature to many of the other themes, the subthemes were questions asked in interviews that were felt to be important to the researcher.*

- i. LGBT legislation - how does this impact on young people/your work with young people?
- ii. Austerity cuts - how impacted on your work with young people?

*The impact of  
change in  
+ CW self*

## Appendix 7 c Partially organised template (2)

### A. Ethnicity/age/social class /length and breadth of experiences as a youth worker

#### Main themes and subthemes for template:

##### 1. Sharing of information about the 'self'

- i. What shared and with who and when?
- ii. How things are shared/not shared, body language, non-verbal communication & leaking
- iii. How decide what to share and where boundaries are?
- iv. Do your hobbies interests impact on your work with yp? Do you talk about/use these in your work?

*ii/iii same*

##### 2. Early awareness and experiences of 'being' LBQ

- i. Awareness of own sexuality
- ii. Sharing of this awareness with family and peers
- iii. Experiences at school - being bullied, getting into fights
- iv. Being labelled as a 'tom boy'; femme and own preferred style regarding image, hair and clothes
- v. Closeting
- vi. Male partners; involvement in the scene

*(vii) where heard / learnt about LGBT - meta narratives  
(viii) how being LBQ impacts on rest of life  
with early experiences on the self*

##### 3. Labels accepted or rejected

- i. Essentialism vs. social constructionism - for self/others
- ii. What does queer mean for you? - for young people?
- iii. How do labels re lesbian/queer/ bi/ impact on you?
- iv. Feminist? - relationship with that label?
- v. Importance of gender

##### 4. Youth work values in action

- i. Relationships - honest, open, trusting / yp grateful to me
- ii. Authenticity
- iii. Non-judgmental
- iv. 'Role modelling'
- v. Rejection of youth work values
- vi. Learning from young people/how changed by youth work/young people?
- vii. Support from colleagues
- viii. Reflective/reflexive practice

##### 5. Changes

- i. LGBT legislation - how does this impact on young people/your work with young people?
- ii. Austerity cuts - how impacted on your work with young people?

*iii LGBT + media*

*(ix) what sort of things  
(x) background of yp work with  
(xi) knowing what young people want  
(xii) energy needed young people  
(xiii) AOP / humour  
(xiv) focus on yp*

### 1.10.16 **Template for analysis** (drawing on King, 2012)

**Overarching themes** that needs to be placed on top of, or as an integrative themes (King and Horrocks, 2010) over the main themes:

A. Ethnicity/age & length and breadth of experiences as a youth worker /social class /

*King suggests that in some research there are some themes that sit in opposition or as overarching the other themes. These 'intersectional' issues seem to be those themes.*

**Main themes and subthemes for template:**

1. Sharing of information about the 'self'

*This was the main focus for the research; it is at the heart of the research so put at the top*

- i. What shared and with who and when?
- ii. How things shared or not shared, body language, non-verbal communication & leaking
- iii. How decide what to share and where boundaries are?
- iv. Do your hobbies interests impact on your work with yp? Do you talk about/use these in your work?

2. Early awareness and experiences of 'being' LBG

*This is very different from above but the person's background and their understanding of their own personal journey to their 'current self' is an important story that needs to be part of the picture and narrative of the respondents*

- i. Awareness of own sexuality
- ii. Sharing of this awareness with family and peers
- iii. Experiences at school - being bullied, getting into fights
- iv. Being labelled as a 'tom boy'; femme; own preferred style regarding image, hair and clothes
- v. Closeting
- vi. Male partners; involvement in the scene
- vii. Where heard about LGBT:

3. Labels accepted or rejected

*This was two or three themes that been 'clumped' together. Discussions regarding whether respondents see the 'self' – with regard to sexuality - as being socially constructed or essentialist have brought out a range of interesting views. This does have some link with how people see the term or label 'queer'. Some respondents feel very strongly about the 'feminist' label – both positively and negatively. The focus on style seems important in regard to how youth workers present their 'self' to the young people that they work with. The focus on interests and hobbies may not be sizeable within the data but again how youth workers use their interests in music or other aspects can be very useful in building the all-important relationships within youth work.*

- i. Essentialism vs. social constructionism - for self/others
- ii. What does queer mean for you? - for young people?
- iii. How do labels re lesbian/queer/ bi/ impact on you?
- iv. Feminist? - relationship with that label?
- v. Importance of gender
- vi. Other early influences on the 'self'

#### 4. Youth work values in action:

*This section may reflect the researcher's over-optimism regarding what youth workers are doing with young people in the early 21st century but these elements were discussed by respondents without fishing for them.*

- i. Relationships - honest, open, trusting /yp gravitate to me
- ii. Authenticity
- iii. Non-judgmental
- iv. 'Role modelling'
- v. Rejection of youth work values
- vi. Learning from young people/how changed by youth work/young people?
- vii. Support from colleagues
- viii. Reflective/reflexive practice
- ix. Youth work role
- x. Background of yp working with
- xi. Impact of own sexuality in yw setting

#### 5. Change:

*Whilst this theme seems to be of a different nature to many of the other themes, the subthemes were questions asked in interviews that were felt to be important to the researcher.*

- i. LGBT legislation - how does this impact on young people/your work with young people?
- ii. Austerity cuts - how impacted on your work with young people?



## Appendix 9 The sharing of findings

### *Publications and conference presentations*

Hatton, J., Williams, F. & Ann Chapman (2012, September) *Queering Inside out: insights from youth and community work teaching*. BERA Annual conference. University of Manchester.

Hatton, J. (2016, April) *Sexuality, gender and the use of self: how to analyse the data? The struggles (for survival) of a doctoral student*. SEPD Research conference, University of Huddersfield.

Hatton, J. (2017, April). *Sexuality, intersectionality and the understanding of ourselves: the use of 'self' in professional youth work contexts*. SEPD Research conference, University of Huddersfield

Hatton, J. (2017, September). *Intersectionality and the 'journeys' of LGBQ women youth workers*, BERA Annual Conference 2017. University of Sussex, Brighton.

Hatton, J. (2018, May). *How do cisgendered LGB women youth workers use their 'self' as they work with young people?* SEPD Research conference, University of Huddersfield

Hatton, J., & Monro, S. (2019). Insights from an intersectional view of the self for non-heterosexual female youth workers. *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal*, 38(1), 107-120

Hatton, J. (2019, January). *The use of self: findings from research with LGBQ women youth workers*. Voices from practice – learning from facilitation. University of Brighton

Hatton, J. (2019, April). *How do cisgendered LGB women youth workers share their LGB identity in youth work settings?* SEPD Research conference, University of Huddersfield

Hatton, J. (2019, July) *How cisgendered LGB women youth workers share their identity in youth work settings*. Critical Pedagogy and Professional Practice in Youth and Community Work Education. Bishop Grosseteste University, Lincoln.

### *Plans for future publications and presentations*

A journal article focussing on the importance of flexible and changing boundaries, whilst noting the importance of the context of practice for youth workers.

Possible presentations at The University of Huddersfield's SEPD research conference, BERA's youth studies and informal education Special Interest Group or PALYCW conferences regarding a range of findings including:

- the importance of flexibility with regard to boundaries;
- the limitations of drawing on one's own experiences when working with young people;
- the centrality of support within professional teams and partnerships for youth workers;
- the pros and cons of the leaking of LGBQ identities for youth workers.