

**‘Like a playground should be?’**

**Experiencing and producing bi subjectivities in  
bisexual space**

by

**Helen Talitha Bowes-Catton B.A. Hons, MSc.**

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# *Abstract*

Much recent work on bisexual subjectivities has taken a discourse analytic approach to exploring how bisexual identity is discursively produced as paradoxical, and why it is so difficult to articulate a culturally intelligible bisexual subjectivity. This thesis responds to such work by suggesting that a move towards a multi-modal methodological approach, with a focus on the features of the lifeworld, might enable participants to articulate accounts of bisexual subjectivity as experienced in material, spatial, embodied, temporal, and intersubjective, terms. Accordingly, the thesis asks the question ‘how are bisexual subjectivities experienced and produced in bisexual spaces?’

Fieldwork was conducted at a BiCon, UK bisexual convention, in 2008, and the data presented here is based on the results of two studies which used creative and visual methods (photography, mapping, and modelling) to elicit discourse about lived experiences of bisexual subjectivity in a bisexual space, and how these related to everyday life. A hermeneutic phenomenological approach was taken to the analysis of the data produced.

The study argues that the everyday bisexual subject, as constructed in dominant cultural discourses, can be theorised as a Trickster figure, characterised by excess and inauthenticity. BiCon, meanwhile, can be theorised as a heterotopic place-event, during which bisexuality is held constant as the default sexual identity within the space. This provides BiCon attendees with an opportunity to temporally resolve the paradox of bisexual subjectivity. For some participants, BiCon serves as a carnivalesque space where they can enjoy a brief respite from the contradictions of bisexuality. For others, BiCon is a place to gather resources for personal and social transformation.

# *Acknowledgements*

I began my PhD in late 2005. Tony Blair was still Prime Minister, Prince Charles had just married Camilla Parker-Bowles, the ban on fox-hunting had just come into force, and Doctor Who had just been revived. David Cameron had just become leader of the Conservative Party, no one yet knew what happened at the end of Harry Potter, and I'd never owned a phone with a colour screen, let alone a camera or internet access.

What I'm saying is, it's been a while. This means that I owe my thanks to a *lot* of people, so I hope you're sitting comfortably.

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# ***Introduction***

*Bisexuals are not real people, and they ruin women's lives.*

*It's so wrong, because you're not owning up to who you are. You lead a double life, so how can you be a real person?*

*Christopher Biggins, Pink News, 28<sup>th</sup> April 2014.*

## ***Prologue***

Early one morning last year, as I lay in bed scrolling blearily through my Facebook news feed, I came across the above headline and pull-quote from a Pink News interview with the entertainer Christopher Biggins. Biphobic news stories are, in themselves, hardly remarkable, but this one really caught my attention. On a bad day, Biggins' words would have set my blood boiling, and I'd have stomped angrily through my morning routine. Yet, on this particular sunny Spring morning, with birdsong outside my window, they made me laugh. More than that, they made me feel energised, powerful. Here I was, ruining people's lives willy-nilly, while simultaneously not even existing - and I wasn't even out of bed yet. What might I do if I put my mind to it? I got out of bed with uncharacteristic speed. Clearly, it was going to be a busy and productive day.

There's something about this quotation that really seems to me to sum up the contradictions of bisexuality. In Biggins' view (and as we will see, his is by no means an unorthodox position), to avow a bisexual identity is to be inherently inauthentic. It's a classic double-bind: say you're bisexual and you're lying; lie, and say you're straight or gay, and prove yourself just as untruthful as everyone already suspected.



From the early 2000s, as I gradually came to identify as bisexual, I gathered information about other people's experiences of bisexuality. In the face of what felt like a constant barrage of erasure and invalidation, I needed the voices of other bisexuals to reassure me that I wasn't alone. My search brought me first to US-published anthologies of bisexual autobiographies, to Sue George's landmark book *Women and Bisexuality* (the first of its kind in the UK), and then, fortuitously, to the cluster of bi activists, academics and others that has coalesced around BiCon, an annual get-together for UK bisexuals and their allies.

Naïvely, I expected going to my first bi event to be like climbing into a long bath after a hard day. *Ahhhh*, I would sigh, in relief. Here at last are people who move through the world as I do, who always feel out of place in gay bars, who feel simultaneously not-gay-enough and not-straight-enough. Finally, I am understood.

Well, it wasn't like that at all. My first bi events, in 2004, were utterly terrifying. Here were lots of people who were clearly very different to me in all kinds of ways. One of them had green hair, and I wasn't sure if they were male or female. Lots of them were dressed up; one was a mermaid, in nothing but body paint and a tail made of beautifully-knotted bondage rope. The mermaid was sitting on the lap of a wheelchair user with orange hair and facial piercings, who looked like a butch lesbian. Some people looked more 'like me' - in fact, there seemed to be quite a lot of bookish white brunettes with their hair dyed auburn. But even these people were full of surprises. As time went on, it became clear that a large number were into bizarre sexual practices I'd never heard of, and it seemed as if most of them were non-monogamous. I remember being stunned to hear one fairly conventional-looking woman say casually of her partner 'I'm always saying

to him, you should shag more people!’ to nods of recognition and sighs of ‘well, what can you do...’.

I was stunned. I felt out of place, like a fake, like I’d be discovered for the imposter I was. In short, it was just like my real life. But when I got home, lots of people had added me on social networking sites, so maybe I was okay after all? I wasn’t sure. I kept going back. Often, I ran away home in the middle of an event because it was all a bit too much. But frankly, I was in need of a community, and I was also in need of a dissertation project. My MSc dissertation had given me the excuse I’d needed to look for other bisexuals, and here I was.

## ***Background and rationale***

The starting point of this thesis was the question ‘What is it *like* to be bisexual?’ Most of what I’d read was American, but what was it like to be bi in the UK? I started my research by conducting a discourse analytic study of the bisexual activist literature of the 1980s and 1990s. It told me a lot about the political tensions of the movement at that time, caught between a radical politics of liberation and an assimilationist struggle for civil rights. But it didn’t tell me what I wanted to know. What was it *actually like* to be bisexual? What was it like to be another person waking up to a world that told them they were simultaneously non-existent, fraudulent, and immensely powerful? What was it like for other bi people to feel as out of place in gay spaces as they did in the straight spaces of everyday life? I wanted to know how it *felt* against the skin, in the belly, as well as what people could *say* about it.

Reading through studies of bisexual identity, I was struck by the ways in which the same findings appeared over and over. The main message of the literature seemed to be

that it was very difficult to articulate a coherent bisexual subjectivity because Western ways of thinking about sexuality are predicated on the idea of sexuality and gender as binary. This makes it hard to talk about being bisexual in a way that makes sense. For example, participants in these studies say that they don't like the label 'bisexual' because it suggests that their sexualities have two 'sides', and foregrounds the idea of gender. They insist that they experience their sexualities as whole, rather than divided, and that gender is only one of a range of factors influencing their attractions. And yet, it is not possible to talk about sexuality without mentioning gender, because sexuality is defined as having to do with the gender of the people we are attracted to.

Therefore, bisexual people's discourse about sexuality is, as one researcher put it, 'structurally fractured' (Ault, 1996). To say that you're bisexual, as I pointed out above, is to position yourself as inauthentic, because, in a conceptual system that sees sexuality as either/or, it's not possible to be both/and. To cite another notorious news headline, you must be either 'Straight, gay, or lying' (Carey, 2005). Bisexual people's attempts to articulate sexual subjectivities ended up reinforcing the same stereotypes that they were vehemently trying to disavow. No wonder it was so hard to find out what being bisexual was actually like.

In this piece of research, I have set out to try to find a way of enabling bisexual people to talk about what it is *like* to move through a gay/straight world as a bisexual subject. In order to try and avoid reproducing the kinds of fractured identity narrative that the extant literature was already full of, I used visual and creative research methods such as photography, mapping, and model-making, and tried to elicit rich descriptions of lived experiences of being bisexual. To do this, I drew on phenomenological ideas of being-in-the-world as experienced through space, embodiment, and temporality. I asked my

participants to focus on ‘moments of experience’, with the aim of getting an insight into *what it actually felt like to be them* at different times and in different places.

## ***Fieldwork***

This thesis, then, addresses the question ‘*how are bisexual subjectivities experienced and produced in bisexual spaces, in relation to everyday life?*’ It takes as its focus the biggest and longest-established UK bisexual event, BiCon, and examines participant accounts of their experiences of one particular event: BiCon 2008.

Pilot work was conducted at London BiFest in 2007 and 2008, and fieldwork took place between August and December 2008. Two studies were conducted, both of which made use of visual and creative data production methods. However, the visual materials themselves did not form the focus of analysis. Rather, I was interested in the ways in which photo-production, mapping, and modelling might allow participants to ‘say something different’ about bisexuality. I hoped that, by using these methods and focusing on eliciting rich, experiential accounts of spatialised bi subjectivities, I might be able to enable participants to ‘say something new’ about bisexual subjectivity, rather than just reproducing received discourses about bisexuality as a fractured and contradictory identity.

In one study, 11 participants took photographs of their experiences of BiCon 2008, and a week in their everyday lives. Semi-structured interviews were conducted, in which participants were asked to describe the moments of experience that had inspired their photographs. They were also asked to draw a sketch map of the BiCon venue, and to talk about how they had experienced the physical space of the event. Interviews were

recorded and transcribed, and then analysed using a hermeneutic phenomenological approach.

The second study took place at BiCon itself. Three 75-minute workshops, each with 6-10 participants, were conducted over three days of the event. During the workshops, participants were asked to make models, in Lego, Plasticine and other craft materials, that spoke to their embodied experiences of being at BiCon at that moment. Each participant then showed their model to the rest of the group, and spoke about it briefly. The discussion was recorded, and again, it was this which formed the basis of the data which were analysed.

### ***The structure of this thesis***

In Chapter 1, I explain in detail the theoretical, empirical and political context in which this research question was developed. First, I outline the development of ideas about sexuality in general, and bisexuality in particular, since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. I do this with reference to genealogical work on bisexuality, pointing out the different kinds of discursive work done by the concept of bisexuality in different eras, and arguing that bisexuality is both central to, and undermining of, our current understandings of sexuality. This paradoxical position is the cause of bisexual subjects' difficulties in articulating bisexuality as a sexual identity.

In the second part of Chapter 1, I discuss the ways in which bisexual activists and researchers have responded to bisexuality's paradoxical positioning by establishing spaces for bisexuality in both literary and literal terms. I then outline empirical and epistemological work on bisexual subjectivity, pointing out the ways in which this work documents bisexual people's attempts to resist being discursively positioned as

inauthentic and incoherent. Ultimately, however, a lack of discursive resources for the articulation of bisexual subjectivity means that individuals' identity talk must draw on and reproduce the very binary categories of gender and sexuality that they so vehemently repudiate. This leads me to argue for a more experiential approach to bisexual subjectivity. Drawing on process psychology, I suggest that such a subject must be understood as always in the process of becoming, rather than being, and must be understood as experienced and produced in relation to objects and spaces.

In the final section of the chapter, drawing on materialist and phenomenological critiques of discourse analysis, I argue for a new approach to bisexual subjectivity which takes into account space, time, and motion as constitutive of embodied bisexual subjectivity. Drawing on Hemmings' (2002) work on bisexual spaces, and critical social scientific theorisations of space as relational, I suggest that Foucault's concept of the heterotopia might provide a useful lens through which to view bisexual spaces. Such spaces, I argue, can be seen as heterotopic in that they are sites which are defined in terms of their differences from 'the everyday', in which alternative social orderings can be tried out. Ultimately, however, while they may appear marginal and utopic, they are part of society, and as such find themselves caught up in the same networks of power relations that characterise the spaces of 'the everyday'. I move on to suggest that we might theorise the everyday bisexual subject as analogous to the Trickster archetype found in myth and legend. The Trickster, like popular images of the bisexual, is characterised by hypersexuality and a genius for simultaneously maintaining and transgressing boundaries. By theorising bisexuality as a Trickster subjectivity, I argue, we can begin to account for bisexuality's paradoxical positioning, while also embodying the bisexual subject in the present tense, without losing sight of the ways in which

subjectivity is continually constituted and re-constituted in terms of time, space, and motion. There is a resonance, too, I argue, between the Trickster and the heterotopia: both are simultaneously inside and outside, central and marginal. Taken together, I suggest, they provide a theoretical framework which can be used to provide new insights into the ways in which bisexual subjectivities are experienced and produced in bisexual spaces.

In Chapter 2, I develop my theoretical approach to the topic further, drawing on phenomenological approaches to sociology and psychology. These, I argue, provide methodological ‘ways in’ to the study of spatialised bisexual subjectivities, which overcome some of the limitations of conventional discourse analysis by widening the analytic lens to include aspects of the lifeworld other than language, while also allowing for an analysis of participant accounts that attends to the ways in which they are situated within, and reproduce, power relations.

I then outline the development of my methodological and analytic approach to the fieldwork for this thesis, explaining my decision to employ creative and visual approaches to data production, and outlining the hermeneutic phenomenological analytic approach developed for this study, and the ethical implications of my use of visual methods, and my position as activist-researcher.

The three empirical chapters address my participants’ experience of BiCon 2008 in largely chronological terms. Chapter 3 deals with participants’ accounts of journeying to, and arriving at, BiCon 2008. In this chapter, I argue that these accounts demonstrate that participants oriented to BiCon as a heterotopic place-event, distinct from the everyday, where a different kind of bisexual subjectivity was made possible. In this context, participants’ journey narratives can be seen as accounts of dis-orienting from the rules

and constraints of the everyday, and re-orienting to those of what many participants described as the BiCon 'bubble'. The process of journeying to BiCon, and engaging in practices of arrival, can be seen as engendering a shifting from an experience of the self as body-object, continually 'rubbing up against' the constraints of the everyday world, to body-subject, able to move smoothly through space, 'untouched', as one participant put it 'by everyday life'. The intersubjectively-constituted 'BiCon bubble' was both discrete and portable, allowing participants to make forays outside the official space of the event and to engage in public performances of bisexuality and difference in ways that were not possible for most in their daily lives.

In Chapter 4, I explore participants' experience of BiCon space during the event itself. Participants, I argue, describe BiCon in utopian terms as an inherently safe, diverse and inclusive bisexual home where they can express 'all of themselves' without fear of censure, and experiment with new ideas, practices and presentations of self without consequences. However, these descriptions of BiCon as an idealised bisexual 'home' are not as inclusive as they appear to be at first sight. The 'open', 'inclusive' space of BiCon is often defined, in these accounts, against a hostile 'outside world' and an unreflexive 'person in the street' in ways that draw on pathologising discourses of working-class culture as threatening and defective. Ironically, in positioning 'the person in the street' in this way, participants deploy the same tropes of invalidation that bisexual politics has railed against, positioning these 'Others' as ignorant, unreflexive, threatened by difference and prone to visceral over-reactions.

Further, some participants found that they could not bring 'all of themselves' to BiCon. While some identities that were marginalised in the outside world were experienced as unmarked or less-marked at BiCon 2008, others, which were validated



and centralised in the outside world, were not as well-received at BiCon. Most importantly, some participants found that some of the multiple marginalisations they experienced in everyday life were compounded at BiCon. This was reflected, I argue, in the low attendance at BiCon of people of colour, people from working-class backgrounds, and people whose highest level of education was below degree level.

Chapter 5 is a mirror-image of Chapter 3, in that it addresses the relationship between BiCon and everyday life from the point of view of participants leaving BiCon and returning to everyday reality. In this chapter, I outline the ways in which some participants positioned BiCon as a space where they could return to a childish or youthful subjectivity characterised by present-time orientation, a temporary escape from adult responsibilities, and a renewed sense of possibility.

In the second half of the chapter, I discuss participants' accounts of the relationship between BiCon and their everyday lives. For some participants, I argue, BiCon could be seen as a Bakhtinian carnival where they could temporarily set aside the constraints of everyday adult life and indulge in consequence-free play and recreation (Bakhtin, 1984). However, these participants valued the separation of BiCon and everyday life, and were happy to pick up their everyday lives at the end of BiCon. Another group of participants sought to decrease the distance between BiCon and their everyday worlds, and positioned BiCon as a space akin to Bey's Temporary Autonomous Zone, where they could gather resources for personal and social transformation (Bey, 1990). Finally, I examine accounts of leaving BiCon, in which participants clearly position themselves as having returned from a heterotopic space where alternative ways of being were possible.

Chapter 6 provides a summary of the findings of the research, and a discussion of the implications and applications of the results, as well as a reflexive discussion of the research process.

# *Chapter 1: The bisexual paradox*

## *Introduction*

This thesis asks the question ‘how are bisexual subjectivities experienced and produced in bisexual spaces, in relation to everyday life?’

This thesis explores experiences of bisexual subjectivity at an August 2008 bisexual convention in the UK. In this first chapter, I set out the theoretical, empirical and political context in which this research question emerged, and in which BiCon 2008 took place, and explain why I chose to focus my research on this particular bisexual event.

To do this, I chart the development of ideas about sexuality in general, and bisexuality in particular, since the late nineteenth century. First, drawing on Angelides’ Foucauldian genealogy of bisexuality, and on my own previous work, I outline the development of bisexuality from early sexology, when was conceptualised either as a primitive ancestral state, and/or as a sort of psychic hermaphroditism (Angelides, 2001; Oosterhuis, 2000; Storr, 1999a), via the erasure of bisexuality from the sexual continuum in the 1950s and 1960s, and onwards through the eras of gay liberation and identity politics. In doing this, my concern is not simply to explain the development of bisexuality as an identity category, but also to show how, over time, various conceptualisations of bisexuality have done particular kinds of discursive work. By paying attention to the ways in which bisexuality was deployed to various discursive ends, and particularly to the paradoxes and double-binds it both generated and resolved, I hope to show how bisexuality, as it is popularly understood today, occupies a paradoxical position within sexual politics,

simultaneously marginalised and central, undermining and reinforcing, everywhere and nowhere, everyone and no-one.

In Part 2 of this chapter, I outline the emergence of bisexual activism and community in the UK during the 1980s and 1990s, and the development of academic and activist literature on bisexuality. This literature both emerged from, and contributed to, ideological discussions about the comparative merits of assimilationist and radical approaches to sexual minority politics, as expressed in the tensions between identity politics and queer theory. In Part 3, I review the epistemological and discursive academic work on bisexual subjectivity that emerged about five years either side of the turn of the century, and discuss what this reveals about bisexual people's struggles to articulate such subjectivities in the context of a society which sees bisexuality as inherently inauthentic.

In each of these eras I aim to show how empirical work on bisexual subjectivity is situated in relation to both wider theoretical and epistemological developments in qualitative sexuality research, and the wider political context of bi (and LGBT+) politics.

Since this thesis is concerned with the ways in which bisexuality is experienced and produced in a specific geographical and cultural context - that of bisexual organising in the UK - I focus mainly on literature that has been influential in UK bisexual academia and politics. This means that my review of the literature on bisexuality is largely, although not exclusively, limited to works published in English, in the Anglophone countries of the minority world<sup>1</sup>.

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1 The term 'minority world' refers to the countries popularly known as 'the First World', 'the West', the 'global North', MEDCs - 'more economically developed countries' or 'the overdeveloped world' - its counterpart being the 'majority world' which refers to the areas often described as 'The Third World', the 'global South', or LEDCs - 'less economically developed countries'. I use this term in preference to others because of the way it decentralises the richer areas of the world, and centres attention on the

Having explained how my reading of theoretical and empirical literature on bisexuality led me to view subjectivities as grounded in, and produced through, the embodied and spatialized practices of everyday life (Brown and Stenner, 2009; Dreier 2003; Wetherell 2008), I argue for an approach to bisexual subjectivity that places the embodied subject, and its movements through space and time, at the centre of analysis, and outline the development of my research question: 'How are bisexual subjectivities experienced and produced in bisexual spaces, in relation to everyday life?'

Drawing on recent work on the spatial in cultural geography and social anthropology, I move on to suggest that the concept of heterotopia may be a productive way of theorising BiCon 2008, and that the Jungian archetype of the Trickster provides a way of accounting for both the paradoxical nature of bisexual subjectivity and its political potential.

## ***Defining terms***

### ***Bisexuality***

In the minority world, popular understandings of sexuality start from the assumption that there are two discrete sexes (male/female, man/woman), and that an individual's sexuality is best understood in terms of the sex of the people they are attracted to. To be heterosexual is to be attracted to the 'opposite' sex, to be lesbian or gay is to be attracted to the 'same' sex (Bowes-Catton and Hayfield, 2015; Coleman, 1998; De Cecco and Shively, 1984; MacDonald, 1983/2000; Paul 1985/2000; Rodríguez-Rust 2000a).

In this hegemonic view of sexuality, there are two orthogonal categories, heterosexual and homosexual, to which all human beings can be ascribed. An individual's sexuality is seen as a core 'truth' about their nature, an essential part of who they are. Sexuality is thus understood as trans-historical and cross-cultural, found in all places and at all times. From this point of view it makes sense to declare that historical figures from Sappho to Shakespeare were 'really' gay, and to assume that human sexuality is much the same all over the world, whether it finds its expression in Accrington or Zimbabwe.

Bisexuality is, as Eadie and Eisner have pointed out, a broad conceptual category with no clear boundaries. To refer to bisexuality is, as Eadie (1993, p.141) puts it, to '[gesture] towards a range of sexual-political phenomena: self-identifying bisexual people; people experiencing both same-sex and opposite-sex desires or practices who choose positively to identify as lesbian, gay, or straight; people who have non-bisexual identities which struggle to contain outlawed bisexual feelings; people who desire both men and women, for whom the term 'bisexual' is anachronistic or culturally inappropriate'. Eisner (2013, p.29) has described bisexuality as both an identity in itself, and an umbrella term which incorporates a number of sub-identities (Figure 1.1).

Definitions of bisexuality abound, but perhaps the neatest and clearest contemporary definition of bisexuality is that used by the UK bi activism organisation The Bisexual Index, and recently adopted by the LGB rights organisation Stonewall: 'A bisexual is someone who is attracted to more than one gender.'



**Figure 1.1 The bisexual umbrella. Reproduced with permission from Eisner 2013, p.29**

Even stated as simply as this, bisexuality troubles the popular understandings of sexuality outlined above, because it challenges two fundamental and related tenets of contemporary minority world sexual politics: firstly, that sexuality is inherent, stable, and immutable, and secondly, that gender is a social category of primary importance (Eisner 2013; Yoshino 2000). Small wonder, then, that bisexuality has been a contested sexual category for as long as the term has existed.

### ***Identity and subjectivity***

Some of the research reviewed in this chapter addresses the topic of bisexual ‘identity’, while some addresses bisexual ‘subjectivity’. In some of the literature reviewed, these two terms are used interchangeably. In the critical social psychological work that has informed the development of this thesis, the meaning of each of these terms, and the boundaries between them, have been a topic of debate (see, for example, Wetherell, 2008). The approach taken in this thesis draws on critical psychologists informed by process philosophy, such as Brown and Stenner (2009) and Brown and Reavey (2011). In

this view, there is no essential division between humans and the material world of spaces and objects. Rather, life is a complex, dynamic meshwork of inter-related processes. These approaches theorise subjectivity as one aspect of the ongoing processual relationships between humans, objects and spaces, such that subjectivity is a state of 'becoming' rather than 'being'.

To theorise subjectivity in this way is to see the subject as grounded in these relationships, processes and practices, enmeshed in a range of mutually constitutive relationships as they move through space and time. As will become clear later in this chapter and in Chapter 2, such a theorisation of the subject fits well with the theoretical and substantive literatures I have drawn on here, such as queer and critical geographies and anthropologies (Hemmings, 2002; Ingold 2000, 2011; Massey, 2005) and phenomenological and social anthropological approaches to spaces, orientations and objects (see, for example, Pink 2012, Ahmed 2006).

### ***The structure of this chapter***

In Part 1 of this chapter, I outline how understandings of bisexuality have developed over the last one hundred and fifty years, and argue that bisexuality has taken on a paradoxical status - both central to, and deconstructive of, contemporary understandings of sexual identity.

Many qualitative and critical social scientific approaches to sexuality now approach the topic from a post-structuralist standpoint. Sexuality, like the rest of the social world, is seen as socially constructed: a concept with a history rather than an inherent quality of the self. That is to say that the ways in which sexuality (or any other feature of the social world) is understood are culturally and historically specific, and, further, that the ways in



which we think about and speak of sexuality actually *produce* it (Foucault 1976/1998; Caplan 1987; Coleman 1998; Eadie 1993; Angelides 2001).

A substantial body of literature documents the development of contemporary understandings of sexuality (see, for example, Foucault 1976; Coleman 1998; DeCecco 1981, Halperin 1993; McIntosh 1968). In this chapter, I focus on how bisexuality in particular has been understood during the last one hundred and fifty years. Drawing on Angelides' Foucauldian genealogy of the history of bisexuality, I show how, during each of the periods under consideration, the concept of bisexuality can be seen as doing a particular kind of discursive work.

In the first part of the chapter, I discuss the ways in which first- and second-wave sexology dealt with the challenge that bisexuality posed to the heterosexual/homosexual binary by relegating it to the past tense (as an evolutionary/developmental stage). I then move on to outline the rise of gay liberation and its deferral of bisexuality to a utopic future, before turning to the identity politics of the 1980s and beyond. In this latest context, I argue, bisexuality is simultaneously central and marginalised, impossible and necessary - a paradoxical subjectivity which cannot be articulated or performed in the present tense. This paradox, I argue, is discursively constructed with reference to both temporality and spatiality, with bisexuality being positioned as a passive 'middle ground', 'fence' or 'no-one's land' between straight and gay, in addition to its temporal displacement to the past or future.

In Part 2, I trace the rise of bisexual activism in the UK against this backdrop, paying particular attention to the emergence of bisexual spaces and literatures over the last three decades, and the ways in which these attempted to resist bisexual erasure in both

literal and discursive terms, by setting up bi spaces, and by building up a body of literature that gave voice to bisexual people.

In Part 3 of the chapter, I turn to the main substantive questions that this thesis seeks to address: in the context of erasure and displacement, how do bisexuals experience subjectivity, and how might such subjectivities be theorised? Furthermore, how might we theorise the relationship between bisexual subjectivity, and bisexual spaces such as BiCon?

Ultimately, I argue, discourse analytic research, while useful in helping us to trace the genealogy of the bisexual paradox and the ways in which this stymies expressions of bisexual subjectivity, tells us little about the lived experience of bisexual subjects. This leads me to argue, in Part 4, for an approach to the study of bisexual subjectivity that attends to bisexuality as an embodied subjectivity that is spatially, temporally and intersubjectively constituted and experienced. To do this, I draw on postmodern approaches to geography and social anthropology which view space as relationally constituted. These approaches lead me to theorise BiCon 2008 as a place-event, within which bisexual subjectivities are constituted in spatially and temporally-specific ways with reference to an imagined 'outside world'.

## ***Part 1. Neither land nor sea: bisexuality's paradoxical status***

'The earth was formed whole and continuous in the universe, without lines.  
The human mind arose in the universe needing lines, boundaries, distinctions.  
Here and not there. This and not that. Mine and not yours.

This is sea and this is land, and here is the line between them. See? It's very  
clear on the map. But the map is not the territory. The line on the map is not to be  
found at the edge of the sea. [...]There is no place where land ends and sea begins.

The places that are not-land, not-sea, are beautiful, functional, fecund.  
Humans do not treasure them. In fact, they barely see them because those spaces  
do not fit the lines in the mind. Humans keep busy dredging, filling, diking,  
draining the places between land and sea, trying to make them one or the other.'

(Meadows, 1991, p281; cited in Kaplan 1995)

### ***1.1 Lines in the mind: a brief discursive history of bisexuality***

As Angelides (2001, p.1) notes, bisexuality has, for well over a century, been  
'persistently refused the title of legitimate sexual identity', instead being 'discursively  
characterised within dominant discourses of sexuality as, among other things, a form of  
infantilism or immaturity, a transitional phase, a self-delusion or state of confusion, a  
personal and political cop-out, a panacea, a superficial fashion trend, a marketing tool,

even a lie and a catachresis'. In this section, I outline the various ways in which bisexuality has been understood from the 19th century onwards.

Drawing on and extending Angelides' (2001) Foucauldian genealogy of bisexuality, I argue that binary constructions of sexuality are founded upon, and maintained by, the creation and repudiation of a (theoretical) bisexual subject, which occupies a paradoxical space between the poles of the heterosexual/homosexual binary. I show how, from the early sexologists to the present, dominant discourses of and about bisexuality have been constructed and deployed to various ends by a range of expert commentators, and have been resisted, co-opted and transformed by bisexual academics and activists.

### ***Psychic hermaphrodites, primitive states- bisexuality in early sexology***

During the nineteenth century, understandings of sexual behaviour underwent a 'paradigm shift' (Coleman 1998), from a focus on deviant sexual practices to one on sexual *typification*. As a result of this shift, the homosexual and heterosexual were defined as different types of people, whose sexuality was an essential and enduring personal characteristic. As Foucault (1978, p.43) famously put it, 'The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species'.

Non-heterosexual desires and practices were at first explained in terms of the gender-variance of the desiring subject. Thus, a 'masculine' woman would be attracted to other women, and a 'feminine' man would be attracted to other men (Terry, 1999; Oosterhuis, 2000; Angelides, 2001, Rodríguez-Rust 2000a). People who desired both men and women were theorised by early sexologists like Ulrichs, as 'psychic hermaphrodites', who had both male and female characteristics (Oosterhuis, 2000; Storr, 1999). Krafft-Ebing, meanwhile, noting, like Ulrichs, the hermaphroditism of early-stage embryos, saw

bisexuality as an evolutionary stage, a primordial root from which other sexualities evolved (Angelides, 2001; Oosterhuis, 2000).

The theories of Sigmund Freud were enormously influential in shifting the theoretical terrain from biological to psychological aetiologies of non-heterosexualities (Fox 1995), positioning homosexuality as a sickness of the psyche rather than congenital abnormality. His work, like that of his contemporaries, initially theorised bisexuality as the root of all sexualities, and he believed that all humans were by nature bisexual, or had a bisexual disposition (Young-Bruehl, 2001). However he believed that, in the absence of psychological malfunction, most people would resolve or repress their same-sex attractions during the Oedipal phase and become heterosexual. Thus, while he theorised that everyone had bisexual potential, in 'normal' social and psychological development the expectation was that sexual attraction would become focused on the 'opposite' gender. Bisexuality, like homosexuality, was thus a failure of psychosexual development (Fairington, 2008).

Later, however, sexologists moved away from theorising sexual *behaviour* and towards describing sexual *identities*, and it was at this point that bisexuality began to emerge as a category of sexual identity in its own right. Havelock Ellis, for example, noted that:

'[t]here would thus seem to be a broad and simple grouping of all sexually functioning persons into three comprehensive divisions: the heterosexual, the bisexual, and the homosexual' (Ellis, (1905/1942, pp.261-262, quoted in Fox, 1995, p.50).

### ***What bisexuality did: another look at early sexology***

According to the social constructionist account of the 'invention' of sexuality, rehearsed in brief above, the 'homosexual' was 'invented' before the 'heterosexual' and the 'bisexual' followed, as a combination of the two (Katz 1995, cited in Angelides 2001, p.213). However, Angelides argues that the notion of bisexuality as an evolutionary category was in fact central to the construction of both heterosexuality and homosexuality, and emerged concurrently with the homosexual/heterosexual dualism, rather than as an afterthought. Angelides points out that, whether or not it was explicitly defined as such, *'the notion of a dual sexuality, let us call it bisexuality, is without doubt a logical or axiomatic component of such a dualistic structure. Being either heterosexual or homosexual implies the conceptual possibility of being both heterosexual and homosexual'* (Angelides 2001, p.15). Whatever bisexuality's status, it must emerge as a conceptual category 'at precisely the same moment at which hetero- and homosexuality emerged as dualized identities.' (ibid, p. 15)

For Krafft-Ebing, Ellis and their contemporaries, argues Angelides, the possibility of bisexuality, even if implicit, was central to evolutionary sexual taxonomies, because it helped to explain differences of sex and sexuality (ibid, p.191). And yet, it was also profoundly destabilising of these same taxonomies, because it suggested the possibility of both/and, as well as either/or.

This discursive problem was dealt with by erasing bisexuality from the present tense, and locating it as characteristic of humans at an earlier stage of evolution, and/or of embryos at an early stage of gestation. In this way, bisexuality retained its explanatory potential, yet its potential to undermine the heterosexual/homosexual binary was erased.

For Freud's theory of psychosexual development, bisexuality posed a similar problem, undermining the binary opposition between the sexes that was central to the Oedipus complex. Hence, in Freudian psychoanalysis, as in sexology, bisexuality was displaced from the present tense, and constructed as a pre-cultural/acultural form of sexuality, defused at the Oedipal stage of psychosexual development (ibid, p.62)

### ***Second-wave sexology - from continua to categories***

From the 1940s onwards, 'second-wave' sexologists took a more accepting approach to human sexual diversity. The most influential of these was Alfred Kinsey who, with his colleagues, interviewed around 20,000 participants, asking them about their sexual behaviours (Eriksen & Steffen, 1999). The results of this work revealed, to scientific and public consternation, that same-sex sexual behaviour was much more widespread than had been previously imagined (Bullough, 1994). Based on the results of this research, Kinsey argued (as seen in the epigraph to this chapter) that the models of sexuality first put forward by the early sexologists in their third sex/inversion models did not capture the huge variance and diversity in human sexual behaviours, which needed to be understood as points on a continuum rather than as discrete categories (Kinsey et al., 1948, p.639).

Like many of his predecessors, Kinsey believed that all humans had bisexual potential. His famous scale of sexual behaviour ranged from 'exclusively heterosexual' (Kinsey 0) to 'exclusively homosexual' (Kinsey 6) with gradations of same/other sex attraction (Kinsey 1-5) in between (Kinsey et al., 1948, p.638). He theorised that an individual's position on the scale could change over time, reflecting his belief in sexual fluidity. While his work only briefly discussed bisexuality per se (Bullough, 1994; 2004), Kinsey clearly acknowledged the potential for individuals to be attracted to more than one gender, and

laid the ground for an understanding of sexual attraction and behaviour as nuanced and fluid. This interpretation was reinforced in the mid-twentieth century by the empirical findings of Ford and Beach's work in sociology and anthropology, and those of Hooker in psychology (Angelides, 2001, p.103).

From Kinsey onwards, affirmative research into non-heterosexual sexualities began to emerge (see, for example, Hooker, 1957, Hopkins, 1969, cited in Bullough, 1994). While these authors made important contributions to the eventual formal de-pathologisation of homosexuality, their theories often excluded bisexuality, or saw it as a 'stage' in the development of homosexual identity. As Fox (1996, p.20) notes, while homosexuality was now (at least to some extent) de-pathologised, the 'traditional psychiatric position that sexual relationships with both men and women are an indicator of immaturity and psychopathology' prevailed, and subsequent sexologists continued to see sexuality as mainly dichotomous. The sex surveys of the 1970s and 1980s, for example, either ignored bisexuality altogether, dismissed it as fraudulent, or made only passing references to its existence (see, for example, Cory and LeRoy 1963, Hite 1976/2000; Masters and Johnson, 1979; Schäfer, 1976).

### ***What bisexuality did next: explaining the disappearance of bisexuality from second-wave sexology***

As I explained above, Freud's work led to homosexuality being understood as a psychological phenomenon rather than a biological one: a failure of psychosexual development. It was a psychological neurosis, amenable to cure via psychoanalysis, rather than a congenital abnormality. And yet, this same development also *universalised* homosexuality: while 'normal' development would correct it, the potential for same-sex desire was inherent in every child born.



What happened next, according to Angelides, was an *epistemic crisis of (hetero)sexual identity*. The social scientific and clinical consensus on the universality of same-sex desire blurred the distinction between the heterosexual Us and the pathologised homosexual Them (Angelides 2001, p.103). This posed an intolerable threat to a mid-twentieth century minority world in need of ontological certainty - as Angelides himself puts it: 'In a climate of Cold War paranoia and homophobia, the Freudian idea that 'all human beings are capable of making a homosexual object-choice and have in fact made one in their unconscious' was anathema. The subversive threat of homosexuality, like communism, had to be extirpated from the social and individual body' (ibid, 2001, p.191).

Society, then, was deeply invested in monosexuality - the idea that a person could be heterosexual ('Us') or homosexual ('Them') but not both. Both straight and gay/lesbian people had a vested interest in maintaining the coherence of this dichotomy: straight people could thus avoid being tainted by homosexuality, and maintain their privileged position as sexually 'normal', while gay/lesbian people's arguments against discrimination depended on the existence of a discrete homosexual interest group. Bisexuality, as Yoshino (2000, p.355) notes:

'threatens all of these interests because it precludes both straights and gays from 'proving' that they are either straight or gay'. Straight people, for example 'can never definitively prove that they are straight in a world in which bisexuals exist, as the individual who adduces cross-sex desire could be either straight or bisexual, and there is no definitive way to arbitrate between those two possibilities.'

Bisexuality's destabilisation of the monosexual 'fence' is threatening to both monosexualities, and it is therefore in the interest of both straight and gay people to

repudiate the existence of bisexuality, leading to an 'epistemic contract' of bisexual erasure (Yoshino, 2000).

The 'fence' between heterosexuality and its pathologised Other, homosexuality, had been destabilised by the developments in post-Freudian psychoanalysis, and in empirical research into sexual behaviour, and was in urgent need of fortification (Angelides 2001, p.192). Where previous dichotomous constructions of sexuality had maintained their coherence by describing bisexuality (-as-hermaphroditism) as biologically inherent in our evolutionary forebears, or to a phase in early psychosexual development, this new epistemic crisis could not be resolved merely by consigning bisexuality to the annals of history. Bisexuality must now be erased from even the past tense (Angelides 2001; p.103). Sexuality was a matter of either/or, not both/and. Bisexuality did not exist, and could never have existed, and therefore anyone who claimed a bisexual identity must therefore be 'straight, gay, or lying', to quote a notorious news headline (Carey, 2005).

### ***Gay liberation and the rise of identity politics***

By the middle of the twentieth century, homosexuality had been firmly established as a pathological Other against which 'normal' (hetero)sexuality could be defined. Once they had been identified as a group, 'homosexuals' could be granted or denied rights and privileges (Weeks 1985, p.73), and in this way they became foci for the exchange of power relations. For much of the twentieth century, homosexuality was the focus of moral panics, censure and legislation aimed at neutralising the perceived threat of the 'depraved' homosexual to 'normal', 'natural' heterosexuality (Angelides 2001, p.103).

By the late twentieth century, popular understandings of sexuality as dichotomous were firmly entrenched, but homosexuality had been declassified as a psychological disorder (Riggs, 2015) and a new phalanx of gay-affirmative sexuality 'experts' was emerging. These theorists, activists and researchers had applied themselves to the task of expanding the 'charmed circle' (Rubin 1984) of acceptable sexuality to include non-heterosexual sexual practices and identities. In doing so, they jettisoned the term 'homosexual', with its pathological connotations, taking up the term 'gay' (Paul 1985/2000, p.15), in line with the politics of the emergent gay liberation movement of the 1960s and 1970s.

This movement, arising as a result of the changed social mores of the 1960s counterculture (Klesse 2013, p.2), posed a fundamental challenge to established ideas not just about sexuality, but about gender, patriarchy and capitalism. Bisexuality enjoyed a brief moment in the sun during this period, as it came to represent freedom from the constraints of categories of sexuality and gender. In the future, it was envisaged that fixed notions of sex, gender, and sexuality, destabilised by the gay liberation movement, would fall away, setting people free to love without limits in a 'polymorphous utopia' (Angelides 200, p.109, 124, Paul 1985/2000, p.16). This idea of a future bisexual utopia is a recurrent trope in bisexual activist literature, as we shall see.

During the course of the 1970s, however, these grand revolutionary ambitions became tempered with pragmatism, and a political shift occurred- away from an idealistic agenda of generalised sexual and gender liberation for all, and towards a more pragmatic politics, which focused on achieving short and medium-term political goals for particular interest groups (Paul 1985/2000). At this point, gay identity became more differentiated, with 'gay' ceasing to be an umbrella term, and applying only to men, while 'lesbian' and

'bisexual' were taken up, among other terms, by other groups (Paul 1985/2000, p.16).

The era of identity politics had begun.

### ***Now you see me, now you don't - essentialism, identity politics, and bisexual erasure***

The project of the assimilationist, civil-rights-based lesbian and gay movements of the 1980s and 1990s was to expand the 'charmed circle' of acceptable sexuality (Rubin 1984/2012) to include both heterosexuality and homosexuality as authentic sexual identities.

In contrast with the aims of the gay liberation movement, which had sought sexual freedom for all who *chose* it, by the end of the 1970s, sexuality was positioned as a matter of identity- an essential, inherent, component of the self, akin to ethnicity (Epstein, 1996; Spivak, 1990). This quasi-ethnic view of sexuality represented the successful mobilisation of the discursive resources that had been deployed so successfully in the struggle for Black civil rights in the US (Epstein and Warner, 1996; Yoshino, 2000). Minoritizing, essentialist discourses of sexuality offered leverage to help LGBT+ people to mobilise and claim rights by positioning non-heterosexuals as minority groups, 'different' through no fault of their own, and therefore deserving of acknowledgement and protection (Sinfield, 1996).

Sinfield argues that this 'ethnicity-and-rights'/'identity politics' model of sexual identity is politically effective in two ways. First, it allows minorities to make claims for spaces in which to express themselves, and secondly, it allows them to lobby the state for rights and concessions (Sinfield, 1996, p.275).

In taking up these essentialising discourses, activists drew on powerful cultural tropes about the difference between nature and nurture, and the relative worth of involuntary and chosen difference (Klesse, 2005). Within these discourses, differences which could be positioned as 'natural' or 'innate', and therefore involuntary, had a legitimacy that 'cultural' or 'chosen' differences lacked. Since the legitimacy of gay and lesbian claims to equality was grounded in the claim that sexuality was inborn and therefore 'couldn't be helped', choice in matters of sexuality was now positioned as inauthentic and depraved (Angelides, 2001).

Bisexuality's marginalised status was reinforced and intensified by the AIDS crisis of the 1980s. The advent of AIDS, initially seen as a 'gay plague' (Fee and Parry 2008), led to increasing homophobia from the general population, and a corresponding 'tightening of the boundaries of the queer nation' (Eadie 1993, p.143). Bisexuals were seen as carriers of the disease between the gay and straight populations (Chu et al, 1992), resulting in an intensification of biphobia (Rodriguez-Rust, 2000a).

In addition to providing activists with a powerful political lever, this minoritizing, ethnicity-and-rights model of sexuality also neutralised the threat that the gay liberation movement had posed to the status quo: if gayness was an inherent characteristic of a particular minority group, then it wasn't 'catching', and the sex/gender system remained intact.

The border between heterosexuality and homosexuality was thus maintained by the 'law of the excluded middle' (Hansen and Evans 1985), in which heterosexuality is positioned as the 'default' sexuality, and anyone who engages in even one homosexual act is classified as homosexual, with any subsequent heterosexual behaviour being considered 'counterfeit' (Rodríguez-Rust 2000, p.8; Ochs 1996, p.219).

In short, the line between sea and land was now not only clearly demarcated, but reinforced with a fence.

## ***1.2 The bisexual paradox***

As we have seen, the notion of bisexuality had always been problematic for binary conceptualisations of sexuality. The 'middle ground' of bisexuality was essential to the coherence of the straight/gay dichotomy, yet simultaneously undermined it, exposing its precariousness and making the boundary between straight and gay unclear. This epistemological problem was discursively resolved via the temporal displacement of bisexuality, which was positioned in first-wave sexology as a primordial state, and by the gay liberation movement as a portent of a polymorphous utopian future.

The new identity politics, like its predecessors, was also reliant on bisexuality to maintain its coherence. But with a new political agenda - that of establishing homosexuality as innate, and therefore morally equivalent to heterosexuality - came a new role for the (hypothetical) bisexual subject- this time as the transgressive 'Other' against which 'respectable' homosexuality and heterosexuality could be defined (Eadie , 1993, p.141; Yoshino, 2000).

This resulted in the emergence of a number of stereotypes about bisexuals. In a gay/straight world, bisexuals were discursively positioned as indecisive, in transition, promiscuous, lying, 'trying to be trendy', oversexed, irresponsible, spreaders of disease (Bowes-Catton and Hayfield 2015; Klesse, 2013). The emergence and cultural currency of these stereotypes, and whether or not they should be refuted or embraced, is a matter of continual discussion in bisexual literature from this period onwards, (see, for example

Angelides 2001, p.1, Klesse, 2005, 2013; Ochs, 1996, pp. 217-8; Off Pink Collective 1988, Rust, 2000c). These discussions echo the tensions that dogged the early gay liberation movements - between a minoritizing politics of assimilation on the one hand, and a radical desire to destabilise all categories of gender and sexuality as part of a more generalised politics of liberation, on the other (Bowes-Catton 2007, Eisner 2013, Klesse 2013).

In Part 3 of this chapter, I outline what social scientific literature can tell us about what it is like to identify as bisexual in such a hostile context. First, however, in Part 2, I examine the ways in which bisexuals in the UK responded to this paradox by establishing both discursive and literal spaces for bisexuality.

## ***Part 2: Making bisexual spaces - Activism, literature and community in the UK***

### ***Introduction***

The hardening of attitudes towards bisexuality in the lesbian and gay movement meant that, by the early 1980s, many bisexuals found themselves displaced from the now-flourishing spaces and communities they had helped to build (Off Pink Collective 1988, p.15; Lano, 1996).

Unsurprisingly, bisexuals responded to their exclusion from such spaces by establishing literal and discursive spaces of their own (Klesse 2013, p.2, Eadie 1993, p.143). In this section of the chapter, I trace the emergence of UK bisexual activism and community in the 1980s and 1990s, and the literatures that developed alongside it.

### ***2.1 The rise of UK bisexual activism and community during the 1980s and 1990s***

The organised bi movement in the UK began to emerge at the beginning of the 1980s, from a combination of the trade union movement, the women's movement, the anti-sexist men's movement, and the lesbian and gay movement (George 1993; Lano 1996; Bisexual Index, 2015).



## ***Making community spaces***

The first bisexual group, in London, was established in 1981, and was followed in 1984 by the London Bisexual Women's Group and the Edinburgh Bisexual Group (George 1993). By 1988, these had been followed by a bisexual and married gays group in London, a group for bisexuals in the NALGO trade union, and two groups in Manchester- one mixed, one women-only. In addition to these groups a magazine, *Bi Monthly* was in circulation via alternative bookshops from January 1984 (Lano 1996), and both the London and Edinburgh bi groups ran bisexual telephone support lines (Off Pink Collective 1988).

Initially, these groups were primarily concerned with offering 'social networking, discussion, and emotional support' (George, 1993, p.190). Rose (1996) contrasts the embryonic state of UK bi politics with the much more developed US BiNet USA, a national coalition of activists. However, beginning in 1984, conferences on the politics of bisexuality were organised by local bi groups in London and Edinburgh, and these provided a forum for political discussion as well as socialising. They attracted people who did not attend the regional support groups, as well as those who did. The first of these led to the production of three manifestos, as well as the formation of a network for bisexuals whose primary identification was as lesbian or gay (Lano 1996, Off Pink Collective 1988). As attendance at the conferences grew, and as they seeded local and regional networks, they began to take place around the country, and to be known by the name 'BiCon'. Until the early 1990s, BiCons were non-residential, taking place in a variety of community venues. Since then, however, BiCons have invariably taken place on university campuses, making use of student accommodation onsite or nearby. They generally attract around

250 people, and take place over a three or four day 'long weekend' in the summer months.

### ***Making discursive space - bi activist publications***

While one focus of bisexual activism was to produce and maintain literal bisexual spaces in the form of support groups, conferences and other events where bisexual identities could be validated, another was to establish a theoretical and empirical space for bisexuality, as well as to collect autobiographical accounts of bisexuality (see, for example, Off Pink Collective 1988). The late 1980s and early 1990s saw an explosion in the number of theoretical, empirical and activist publications on bisexual identity and experience (Rust 2000), and it is to the discussion of this literature that I now turn.

A workshop at an early bi conference, in 1985, led to the formation of the Off Pink Collective, and the publication of the UK bi community's first book, *Bisexual Lives*, an anthology of personal stories and political essays about bisexuality. In common with the US anthologies of this era (see, for example, Hutchins and Kaa'humanu, 1991) bisexuals' experiences of prejudice and social exclusion within lesbian and gay communities are a key theme of the book.

By the 1990s, bisexuals had successfully become a constituency within the lesbian and gay movement on both sides of the Atlantic (Rust 2000, p.544-7) successfully prevailing upon many existing lesbian and gay ('LG')- focused organisations to add 'B' to their acronyms and mission statements. The effect, if any, that this had on the practices and priorities of such organisations is a point that continues to be debated among bisexual activists (Barker et al 2012; Rust, 2000g; Klesse 2013) Nevertheless, 'putting the B in

LGBT' was a significant step in shifting the discursive terrain of sexual minority politics to explicitly include bisexual people. Lip-service or not, bi activists were now more able to hold these organisations to account and ask for their interests to be represented.

In the US, a national bisexual network was established, as were a series of national newsletters and an international directory of bisexual groups (Rodríguez-Rust 2000h). In the UK, meanwhile, the bi organising that had begun in the 1980s had gathered pace and grown, as Rose, Stevens et al (1996, p.1) commented, 'if not to complete maturity, then at least to late adolescence'. BiCon had continued to flourish and a number of regional support groups were now established as well as two telephone helplines. (Rose, Stevens et al 1996, p.319) *Bi Monthly* and its successor *BiFrost* were defunct by 1994, but were replaced in (1995) by *Bi Community News*, which is still in production today (Bi History Project, 2014).

The Off-Pink Collective's *Bisexual Lives* was followed, in 1993, by *Women and Bisexuality*, by the journalist and writer Sue George. Like *Bisexual Lives*, a key aim of the book was to allow the voices and stories of bisexual people to be heard by a general audience (George 2002). George's book presents and discusses the results of an open-ended survey of 139 bisexual women, in which participants gave details of their lives, politics and sexual histories (George 1993).

The second Off Pink Collective publication, *Bisexual Horizons: Politics, Histories, Lives* emerged in 1996 (Rose, Stevens et al/ Off Pink Collective 1996). This edited collection differs from its predecessor in ways that demonstrate the burgeoning confidence, resources and credibility of the organised UK bisexual community: unlike the slim, self-published *Bisexual Lives*, it is a full-length book, published by a well-known alternative press (Lawrence and Wishart).

In both the UK and US, bisexual activism and academia have always been closely and productively related (Off Pink Collective 1988, 1996; Rust 1992; Rodríguez-Rust 2000c; Tucker, 1995). Many of the UK-based academics who later became prominent in the field of bisexual studies, such as Merl Storr, Ann Kaloski Naylor and Clare Hemmings, were active in the early UK bi movement. As Rodríguez-Rust (2000c, p.548) observes, many bi activists are well versed in academic theories of bisexuality, and academics frequently write for activist publications. In the UK, as my previous work (Bowes-Catton 2007, p.59) shows, there has been a particularly close relationship between the political agendas of the bisexual movement and the research agendas of activism. This continues today, as organisations such as BiUK, the national organisation for bisexual research and activism, actively seek to prioritise activist agendas, and promote engagement between bisexual activists, event attendees, practitioners and policy-makers (Anderlini-D’Onofrio, 2011; Barker et al., 2012).

### ***International perspectives***

With the advent of the Internet, and the establishment of international bisexual conferences, which took place in Amsterdam (1991), New York (1994) and Berlin (1996), bisexual activists in the UK were increasingly able to engage with international developments, particularly those in the US, where a much wider range of literature was beginning to emerge (Rust 2000h).

As in the UK, anthologies of personal stories formed a key strand of this literature (Cross 2000). *Bi Any Other Name: Bisexual people speak out* (Hutchins and Ka’ahumanu 1991), an anthology of over 70 personal stories, poems, and essays was a particularly influential example. Other examples in this vein included Geller’s collection *Bisexuality: a*

*reader and sourcebook* (1990) and the Bisexual Anthology Collective's *Plural Desires: writing bisexual women's realities* (1995).

Many of the books on bisexuality that were published at this time were more specialised than their predecessors - another indication of the growing market for books by and for bisexuals (Rodríguez-Rust, 2000). For example, books appeared for particular audiences such as feminists (see for example, Weise, 1992) and clinicians/social workers (see, for example, Firestein, 1996), as well as books which focused on particular historical periods (Cantarella 1992). However, perhaps the most influential of the American publications in the UK (which was certainly more widely available here than the Off Pink Collective's publications, George, 2002) was Garber's *Vice Versa* (1995), an imposing tome by a professor of English at Harvard, which undertook a comprehensive discussion of bisexuality from a cultural studies perspective.

Meanwhile, previous strands of academic and clinical work on bisexuality continued. Rodríguez-Rust gives a detailed overview of the US-based literature of this period in the comprehensive reader *Bisexuality in the United States: A Social Science Reader*. Many studies set out to develop typologies of bisexuality and to examine the relationship between bisexuality and gender roles (Rodríguez-Rust 2000d) and bisexuality and trans identities/histories (Rodríguez-Rust 2000d). The middle of the decade also saw an explosion in bi-affirmative therapeutic literature (Rust 2000d).

The literature from this period that is of most direct concern to this thesis, however, is that which concerns bisexual subjectivity. Most of this work originated from North America, and, like the genealogical approaches outlined above, took a discourse analytic approach to understanding bisexuality, although this work was much more micro in scale

and focus, looking at the subject positions taken up by individual bisexuals rather than the ways in which whole societies or institutions constructed bisexuality.

### ***Summary of Part 2: Time, space, and the bisexual subject***

So far in this chapter, I have drawn on genealogies and epistemologies of bisexuality to show that bisexuality occupies a paradoxical position within contemporary minority world understandings of sexuality. This paradoxical position is discursively constructed with reference to both temporality and spatiality. Spatially, bisexuality is the ‘no-one’s land’, the ‘middle ground’, the ‘fence’: a passive void between straight and gay (Hemmings, 2002). Temporally, its destabilising effect on binary constructions of gender and sexuality mean that it must be either consigned to the past (Angelides, 2001), to a utopian future (Hemmings, 2002) or erased all together (Yoshino, 2000). So far, I have discussed the effects of this temporal and spatial displacement at the level of community politics, describing the ways in which the early UK bisexual movement sought to resist bisexual erasure in both literal and discursive terms, by setting up bi spaces, and by building up a body of literature that gave voice to bisexual people.

In the next section of this chapter, I turn to the main substantive questions that this thesis seeks to address- in the context of erasure and displacement, how do bisexuals experience subjectivity, and how might such subjectivities be theorised? Furthermore, how might we theorise the relationship between bisexual subjectivity and bisexual spaces such as BiCon?

## ***Part 3: Now you see me, now you don't - empirical work on bisexual subjectivity***

### ***Introduction***

As I showed in Part 1, above, lesbian and gay identity politics had positioned bisexuality as both impossible and necessary. Claims to equality, respectability and legitimacy rested on the articulation of homosexuality and heterosexuality as stable, quasi-ethnic monosexual identities, and on the repudiation of an inauthentic bisexual Other, which must now be continually conjured up in order for its non-existence to be demonstrated.

The paradoxical nature of a 'both/and' sexuality in an 'either/or' world is, unsurprisingly, a key theme in theoretical, empirical and activist literature on bisexuality from this point on (Hemmings, 2002; Shokeid, 2002; Yoshino, 2000, 2006). In the UK, these questions have largely been addressed from a theoretical perspective, most notably by the cluster of academics that formed (via BiCon) in the 1990s under the name Bi Academic Intervention, and included Merl Storr, Clare Hemmings, Jo Eadie and Ann Kaloski. These writers contest passive constructions of bisexuality as an empty middle ground between heterosexuality and homosexuality, and recast it as a vantage point, a place from which to theorise bisexually (Bi Academic Intervention, 1997; Hemmings, 1997; Kaloski-Naylor, 1997).

Hemmings (1999, p.197) pithily describes the discursive quandary of the bisexual subject:

'To maintain a sense of my (privileged) outsider position, I must invest heavily in reproducing those binarisms, particularly as having 'nothing to do with me'. So I

rail against the dualisms that I claim are 'keeping me down', preventing an adequate theory of my own marvellous fluidity from emerging triumphant. But of course, these 'dreadful binaries' are scarcely somewhere 'out there', they inform and produce my identity as much as anyone else's. The conversations I have with myself, the operation of binaries within my psyche, the way I see the world, etc., all reconstruct what I claim to deconstruct'.

To take up a bisexual subject position, then, is to reject binaries at the same time as reifying them, and to reject boundaried notions of sexual identity while pragmatically embracing them (Bower et al 2002, p.47). It is to be 'everyone' and 'no-one' (Hayfield, 2011), 'everywhere' and 'nowhere' (Petford, 2003), to be both 'fractured' (Ault, 1996) and whole (Bowes-Catton, 2007).

The rise of bisexual activism and the consequent bisexual 'literature explosion' of the 1980s and 1990s coincided with the 'turn to discourse' in the humanities and social sciences (Wood and Kroger, 1998). Therefore, the ways in which bisexuals responded to and resisted this paradoxical positioning have been well-documented by discourse analysts. In Part 2, I drew on some of this work to show how bisexual academics and activists in the UK and North America had responded to bisexual erasure by conceiving an emergent bisexual community and literature which sought to establish discursive and literal space for bisexuality.

Another area of discursive work on bisexuality, however, takes as its focus the articulation of individual bisexual subjectivities, rather than the macro-level genealogical approach taken by Angelides. Focusing particularly on bisexual women, these studies have shown how a lack of discursive resources stymies articulations of bisexual subjectivity (Ault 1996; Berenson 2002; Bowes-Catton and Hayfield 2015; Bower et al



2002; Gurevich et al 2007). They have also outlined ways in which their participants deploy a range of discursive techniques to bring bisexuality into focus. The discourse analytic studies summarised below outline how individual bisexuals negotiated the tensions between the assimilationist agendas of the mainstream LGBT movement, and the radical potential of queer theory.

### ***3.1 Discursive studies of bisexual subjectivity***

The discursive studies of bisexual identity that began to emerge around the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century focus on the problems of articulating a coherent bisexual subject position in a gay/straight world.

#### ***Resolving the paradox: Constructing an essential bisexual subject.***

One way of responding to the paradoxical position of bisexuality, and making it culturally intelligible, was to attempt to incorporate bisexuality into identity politics by adding a 'third term' to the homosexual/heterosexual binary. This would establish a bisexuality as a legitimate minority sexuality, and enable bisexuals to make the same claims to authenticity, legitimacy and rights as their lesbian and gay counterparts.

In discursive terms, this was achieved by appropriating an effective discursive strategy - that of essentialism - from the lesbian and gay movement, and deploying it in the service of bisexuality (Bowes-Catton 2005, 2007). Drawing on discourses of social constructionism, bisexuals and their allies built up a critique of the binary model of sexuality as invented, recent and divisive, and bisexuality as ahistorical, natural and unified (see, for example, Bowes-Catton 2005, 2007; Ault 1996; Berenson 2002; Bower et al 2002).

In this set of discourses, participants position their bisexuality as innate, yet constrained and divided by socially constructed identity categories. Identifying as bisexual offers individuals liberation from these artificial constraints, and a return to 'wholeness', a balance between the two 'sides' of the binary. In effect, this was a reversal and repudiation of the discursive strategies employed by first-wave sexologists in their own attempt to resolve the bisexual paradox by consigning bisexuality to ancient history.

Resisting constructions of bisexuality as a primordial or transitional state, and bisexuals as therefore immature, untrustworthy, or confused, this set of discourses maintained the historicity of bisexuality, but also reinstated it in the present as a coherent and enduring minority sexuality.

This discursive move resolved the bisexual paradox, and enabled the construction of a bisexual subject, which could now 'emerge...from its cloak of invisibility' and come 'trembling into the light- look, I'm here, and I too am what I am' (Cross, 1999, p.13).

Homosexuality	Bisexuality	Heterosexuality
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**Figure 1.2** The discursive production of bisexuality as a second minority sexuality in 'bisexual identity' discourses

### ***Holding the paradox***

An alternative strategy was to construct a continuum narrative of sexuality, with a large inclusive bisexual centre. In another reversal of a dominant discursive strategy in which 'one drop of lavender' (MacDonald, 1983/2000) is enough to render a person

homosexual, this continuum narrative enables the category of bisexuality to expand from the 'minority' space claimed by the first set of discourses, and encompass almost the whole of the sexual spectrum, 'relegat[ing] homo- and heterosexuality to the miniscule margins'- thus making bisexualities appear normative and positioning hetero- / homosexualities as extreme (Berenson 2002, p.18). As Berenson notes, this is an impressive move which manages to centralise and normalise bisexuality while shrinking heterosexuality to the dimensions of a minority sexuality.

Homosexuality	BISEXUALITY	Heterosexuality
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Fig. 1.3 The discursive production of bisexuality in 'continuum' discourses of bisexuality

By expanding bisexuality to take up so much of the sexual continuum, this strategy also allows bisexuals to position themselves as 'outside of dominant ways of being' without creating a normative, rule-bound model of bisexual identity (Berenson 2002, p.18). Indeed, Berenson notes that her participants actively refused a clear model of bisexual identity, articulating bisexuality not merely as 'the inclusion of both men and women in the realm of their possible attractions, but in terms of a refusal to exclude...defining bisexuality as the rejection of barriers, tight spaces and dualisms' (2002, pp.13-16). This enables the articulation of a range of sexual subjectivities, thereby maintaining the radical potential of bisexuality to destabilise dichotomies of sex and gender (Berenson 2002, p.19; Bowes-Catton 2007; Bower et al 2002, p.34), while allowing for a pragmatic adoption of the label 'bisexual' in order to further political ends.

By 'deliberately appearing under the sign while at the same time permanently retaining the lack of clarity about what precisely the sign signifies' (Bower et al 2002,

p.34), participants in these studies embrace a form of sexual politics that 'is always attentive to the collapse of categories within which it operates' (Eadie 1993, p.142). In other words, 'their preoccupation is not with the defence of sexual borders but rather with sustaining the viability of a multiplicity of identity possibilities without completely erasing bisexual 'difference' (Bower et al 2002, p. 34).

I would describe this as an attempt to hold the paradox of bisexuality, to find a balance between the political utility of assimilationist identity politics and the revolutionary potential of the gay liberation movement and its ideological descendant, the queer movement - to claim the 'territory between sea and land' for bisexuality, in the sense of establishing a bisexual interest group, but also to maintain this territory as a zone of fluidity and indeterminacy that continues to trouble binary categories of gender and sexuality.

### ***'Structurally fractured identities'***

But what does all this mean for the individual bisexual subject? As I have written elsewhere (Bowes-Catton et al, 2011), these studies repeatedly demonstrate that bisexual people frequently vehemently reject the notion that sexuality can be reduced to 'bogus' and 'constructed' binary categories. They often expressing deep ambivalence about the term 'bisexuality' itself because of the way it reinforces this binary view (Bower et al, 2002), and argue strongly that they experience their identities as coherent and unified, rather than divided (Ault, 1999; Barker et al, 2008; Bower et al, 2002; Bowes-Catton, 2007; Hemmings, 2002).

And yet, these same studies also demonstrate how very difficult it is for bi people to talk about their sexuality without making reference to the polarities of gay/straight and male/female. While bi people's identity talk often involves the explicit repudiation of

these categories, the constraints of discourse mean that it is almost impossible to describe one's sexual subjectivity without making reference to them. Therefore, binary discourses of sexuality and gender inevitably creep back into bisexual people's identity talk (Barker et al, 2008), and 'reconstruct[ing] what [bisexuals] claim to deconstruct' (Hemmings 1999, p197). This results in the articulation of 'structurally fractured identities' (Ault 1996, pp.173-174) which, of course, only serve to confirm the stereotypes of bisexuality outlined above.

### ***The limits of conventional discourse analysis.***

The approaches to bisexual subjectivity outlined above share a common root in poststructuralist approaches to discourse analysis. Bisexual epistemologies such as Angelides' work take a genealogical approach to how the category of bisexuality has developed over time, (see, for example, Eadie, 1993; Bi Academic Intervention, 1997) while empirical discursive studies examine individual articulations of bisexual identity and/or the way that these are deployed within particular bi community contexts (see, for example, Ault, 1996; Berenson, 2002; Bowes-Catton, 2007; Hemmings, 2002).

As noted above, discourse analysis as a methodological approach emerged at about the same time as the bisexual politics that it has often studied. However, by the late 1990s, discourse analysis was subject to criticism for its over-reliance on language and relative neglect of the extra-discursive. By positioning discourse as the primary source of meaning-making, critics argued, this body of work neglected key modalities of experience such as materiality, spatiality, and embodiment (Brown, 2001; Burkitt, 1999; Cromby, 2004, 2007; Hepburn 2003; Wetherell, 2012).

We can see these shortcomings of discourse analysis very clearly in discursive studies of bisexuality. These studies make it clear that, since dominant constructions of sexuality

are predicated on the understanding that sexuality and gender are binary, and that a person's sexuality can be defined in terms of the gender of their romantic or sexual object-choice, it is very difficult to articulate a coherent and culturally intelligible bisexual identity. For example, participants in these studies frequently express ambivalence about the label 'bisexual' because it suggests that their sexualities have two 'sides', and foregrounds the idea of gender. They insist that they experience their sexualities as whole, rather than divided, and that gender is only one of a range of factors influencing their attractions. However, since it is not possible to talk about sexuality without making reference to gender, bisexual people's discourses of identity become, as one researcher put it, 'structurally fractured' (Ault, 1996). To take up a bisexual subject position is to position oneself as inauthentic because, in a conceptual system that sees sexuality as either/or, there is no room for one which is not only both/and, but which rejects the centrality of gender of object-choice to sexual orientation. This results in what Yoshino (2000) terms an 'epistemic contract of bisexual erasure' (Yoshino, 2000), such that anyone claiming a bisexual identity is culturally located as either (to cite a notorious news headline) 'straight, gay, or lying' (Carey, 2005). Bisexual people's attempts to articulate sexual subjectivities therefore ended up reinforcing the same stereotypes that they were vehemently trying to disavow, and such subjectivities needed to be constantly re-stated and defended, in the context of a society that was constantly re-erasing them (Bower et al 2002, Yoshino 2000).

This literature, then, reveals the discursive processes which render bisexuality culturally unintelligible. These insights are valuable, but as I planned and undertook my own discursive work in this area (Bowes-Catton 2005, 2007), it became clear that discourse analytic studies of bisexual subjectivity were no longer revealing anything new

about the topic. New studies merely seemed to repeat the findings of their predecessors (see, for example, Ault, 1996; Berenson, 2002; Bower et al, 2002). My own work, while making a contribution to the literature on British bisexual identities and politics, ultimately had little new to say about the tensions and contradictions of bisexuality in general. As a purely discursive study, it could tell me little about what I really wanted to know: what was it like to be bisexual? I came to believe, therefore, that I needed to develop a theoretical and methodological approach to the investigation of bisexual subjectivities that would allow participants to express their lived experiences of bisexual subjectivity in embodied, material, temporal and spatial terms. My development of this position will be outlined in Part 4 of this chapter, and further discussed in Chapter 2. Before moving on, however, I briefly turn to another area of the literature on bisexuality - that on bisexuality and mental distress - in order to further contextualise the present study.

### ***3.2 The impact of erasure and biphobia – bisexuality and mental distress.***

As the discursive literature shows, and as Daumer (1999, p.159) notes, 'occupying the 'ambiguous' bisexual position 'creates painful contradictions, incoherences and impracticalities in the lives of those who adopt it'. There was, I knew, abundant empirical evidence that experiences of marginalisation had profound effects on bisexual people's mental health - a range of studies and meta-analyses consistently demonstrate that bisexual people have far worse mental health outcomes than any other common sexual identity group. Bisexuality, both internationally (Jorm et al, 2012; San Francisco Human Rights Commission) and in the UK specifically (King and McKeown, 2003) is associated

with depression, anxiety, self-harm and suicidality (Barker et al, 2012; Rankin et al 2015). These outcomes have been linked to biphobia and bisexual erasure (Richards and Barker, 2013).

The UK Mind report on the mental health and wellbeing of LGB people in England and Wales (King and McKeown, 2003) found that bisexual men and women were less at ease about their sexuality than lesbian and gay people, and less likely to be out to family, friends and colleagues. Bisexual men, in particular, were found to experience more psychological distress than gay men, and were also more likely to cite their sexuality as the reason for harming themselves.

There was also evidence that there were high levels of mental distress within the organised UK bi community that was to be the focus of my research. A survey carried out by myself and colleagues at BiCon 2004 had found that 36% of attendees had either single (24%) or multiple (12%) mental or physical health impairments that interfered with their day-to-day lives. 25% of people had had a diagnosis of mental health issues from a professional, with the highest proportions reporting depression (16%), anxiety (8%), and self-harm (8%) (Barker et al, 2008).

### ***3.3 'But, what's it like?' - Developing a research question***

It seemed to me that academics and practitioners knew a great deal about the *results* of bisexual marginalisation (in terms of poor mental health outcomes), and the *grounds* for that marginalisation (the discursive mechanisms of bisexual erasure). A yawning chasm, however, gaped between these two literatures. What was missing, for me, was a focus on the actual lived *experience* of being bisexual. While the anthologies of autobiographical essays of the 1980s and 1990s had provided me with numerous accounts of bisexual identity and experience in a broader sense (see, for example, Off



Pink Collective 1988, 1996; Hutchins and Ka’ahumanu 1991), these descriptions focused on narratives of bisexuality - on what people *said* about their bisexuality. What I wanted to know was what did bisexual subjectivity *feel like*? I wanted to know *what it was like* to move through the world as a 'structurally fractured' subject (Ault 1996), to be the transgressive body (Eisner 2013, p.113) at the nexus of this complex mesh of power relations, to experience the impossibility of performing bisexuality at any given moment (Eisner 2013, p.116). I wanted to know about moments of experience: What was it like to be bisexual in a gay pub on a Friday night? At the bus stop on the way to work? In a bisexual space like BiCon?

Taking the view that subjectivities were grounded in, and produced through, the embodied and spatialized practices of everyday life as part of a complex meshwork of inter-related and inter-dependent processes (Brown and Stenner, 2009, Dreier 2003) (as outlined above), I initially set out to explore participants’ experiences of the paradoxes of bisexual subjectivity in the spaces of their everyday lives, comparing these with experiences of bisexual space. The spaces of everyday life, I knew, had as little topographical space for bisexuality as they did conceptual space. What would it be like, then, I wondered to move through these spaces as a bisexual subject, and then experience a specific bisexual space such as BiCon?

### ***3.4 Why BiCon?***

BiCon was, and remains, the biggest and longest-established bisexual event in the UK. While attendance at local bisexual groups varies dramatically, BiCon reliably draws around 250-300 participants from all over the country as well as abroad. Taking place over a long weekend each summer, the event also has the longest duration of any UK bi event, offering plenty of opportunities for data collection across the event, as well as the

possibility of comparing multiple experiences of the same space. As such, it was a natural focal point for my research on bisexual space.

2008's event was chosen as the focus of fieldwork, mainly for pragmatic reasons. Because of the long gaps between events, it was impractical to gather data over several years. However, as will be seen in Chapters 3, 4, and 5, participants' accounts of BiCon 2008 were characterised by much discussion of BiCon in general, with participants making reference to previous BiCons they had attended.

As the project developed, I realised that I had structured the fieldwork in such a way that BiCon and the everyday were clearly positioned in opposition to one another, such that the data on the everyday could only be understood in relation to BiCon, rather than on its own terms<sup>2</sup>. For this reason, the thesis focuses on how bisexual subjectivities experienced and produced in at BiCon. Where the everyday appears, it is the everyday-as-viewed-in-relation-to-BiCon, rather than on its own terms, and I use phrases like 'everyday life', 'mundane', and 'the outside world' in the common-sense ways that my participants do, rather than in the more specialist social scientific ways that readers may be used to.

In Part 4, I outline the development of my theoretical approach to this project.

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<sup>2</sup> I discuss this issue further in Chapter 6.

## ***Part 4: Theorising bisexual subjects and spaces***

### ***Introduction***

The production of knowledge is always situated in time, place and culture (Haraway, 1991), and the work presented here is of course no exception to this rule. Work on this thesis began in Summer 2005, with fieldwork being conducted in 2008. The research is therefore designed and grounded in methods, theories and concerns that were current in 2005-2008.

At that time, many researchers who had played important roles in the emergence of discourse analysis (DA) were engaging with critics of their work who had pointed out DA's over-reliance on language and neglect of the extra-discursive: that is, the role of material, embodied, spatial and temporal modalities in human meaning-making (Burkitt, 1999; Nightingale and Cromby, 1999; Stam, 1998). Phenomenological<sup>3</sup> approaches to psychology and sociology were proposed as one remedy for this (Burr, 1999; Butt, 1999; Harré, 1999; Ferguson, 2006; Langridge, 2007), since, it was argued, these approaches might help researchers get closer to understanding lived experience, rather than just talk *about* experience (Cromby and Nightingale, 1999; Reavey, 2011c). In short, I was far from the only researcher asking 'But what's it *like*?'

Below, I outline how I came to theorise bisexual subjectivities as constituted in terms of spatiality, embodiment, time and motion, and (in Chapter 2), how this theorisation informed my approach to fieldwork.

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<sup>3</sup> These approaches will be discussed in Chapter 2.

## ***4.1 Theorising bisexual spaces***

### ***Spatial epistemologies***

As will already be obvious to the reader, one of the most striking features of discourse about bisexuality is an abundance of spatial metaphors and analogies. In the popular discourse described in Section 1.1, bisexuality is ‘between’ gay and straight, consisting of two ‘sides’. It is ‘neither here nor there’, so that bisexuals are accused of ‘sitting on the fence’, ‘going both ways’. Correspondingly, as I outlined in Section 1.2, a key aim of bisexual activist movements has been to establish literal and literary spaces for bisexuality. In Section 1.3, I reviewed discourse analytic literature which examined how bisexuals themselves have responded to and resisted constructions of sexuality that leave no space for bisexuality, by discursively establishing such spaces.

At the time when the fieldwork for this thesis was being planned, in 2005-07, there was little available empirical research that attended to bisexual spatialities<sup>4</sup>, although epistemological work that addressed bisexuality from a spatial perspective was abundant. Perhaps the most obvious of these spatialised theorisations is that which addresses bisexuality’s liminal, or borderland status. A number of bisexual theorists have drawn on work on liminality and hybridity in queer theory (see, for example, Burrill, 2002; Whitney, 2002) and on the liminality and hybridity of mixed-race subjectivities (Sikorski, 2002), to position the bisexual subject as defined by movement.

Resisting constructions of bisexuality as a passive ‘middle ground’ between gay and straight, bisexual epistemologies instead recast bisexuality as a vantage point from which

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4 One notable exception to this was, of course, Hemmings’ landmark 2002 volume, *Bisexual Spaces* (discussed below).

to theorise bisexually (Bi Academic Intervention 1997, Hemmings 1998) – that is, to ‘examine and deconstruct the bi-polar framework of gender and sexuality’ (Däumer, 1992).

The most useful of these theorisations, to my mind, are those which account for bisexuality, and bisexual subjects, in terms of both space and motion. Whitney (2002, p.123), for example, describes bisexuality as a revolving door, while Eadie describes it as ‘shaky ground’ (1993, p.149). Such theorisations capture both the constraining effect of the binary poles of sexuality and gender in relation to which bisexuality is constituted (in Whitney’s example, the inside and outside of a building, in Eadie’s, the ground and what lies beneath), as well as attending to the ways in which the productive tension between these polarities engenders movement (the revolution of the door, the shaking of the ground).

To refer to motion, of course, is to invoke temporality: as we move through space, we are always moving, too, through time. For Garber (1995, p.87), and Bower et al (2002, p.28), one reason why it is so difficult to articulate or perform a coherent bisexual subjectivity in the present tense is that ‘authentic’ performances of identity as verified by their consistency over time, while bisexuality is characterised by fluidity. Since, as Eisner (2013, p.126) notes, bisexuality cannot be fully expressed in any given moment (short, at least, of conspicuously engaging in three-way public displays of affection with two people of different genders), it is doomed to appear inauthentic. Bisexuality, suggests Garber, ‘is not an ‘identity’ (or a figure, or a trope), but a narrative, a story’ (Garber, 1995, p.87).

Garber suggests that we might theorise (bi) sexuality as a Möbius strip;

‘a topological space that can be visualized by pasting together the ends of a rectangular strip after having first given one of the ends a half-twist. It thus has

only one side, not two, and, if split down the middle, remains in one piece. Thus we have not a "third" but one space that incorporates the concepts of "two," "one," and "three" (two apparent "sides," illusionistically; one continuous surface, and a third dimension in space).’ (Garber, 1995, p.30)

Such a conceptualisation, Garber argues, ‘ma[kes] the question of two-versus-one, or inside/outside, essentially moot’ (ibid). Garber’s Möbius strip is a model of sexuality in general, rather than bisexuality in particular, but satisfyingly allows for a visual and kinaesthetic move beyond the ‘structurally fractured’ articulations of bisexual subjectivity that discourse analytic studies consistently document. Such studies, as we have seen in section 3.1, are replete with accounts of bisexuals insisting that they experience their sexuality in terms of wholeness rather than fragmentation, yet being unable to articulate it in non-binary terms.

Similarly, Hemmings ‘s (1993, 1997) conceptualisation of the bisexual as ‘double agent’ demonstrates how the bisexual subject can be understood as being constituted by its movement between the poles of the binary - or, as we might imagine, its endless circuits around Garber’s Möbius strip.<sup>5</sup>

In these theorisations, bisexuality is simultaneously constrained (by polarities) and fluid (in its current-like movement between them). Marginal, liminal and central all at once, these theorisations allow us to hold the paradox of bisexuality, and to conceive of the bisexual subject as constituted by perpetual motion.

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<sup>5</sup> (Satisfyingly, a subject constituted by constant movement around a circuit such as this would indeed flicker rapidly in and out of focus, as I described in Section 1. AC/DC, indeed...)

### ***The turn to the spatial***

Space, then, has been a central concept in epistemological work on bisexuality. Over the last 30 years, it has also become a central issue for the social sciences more broadly (Hetherington 1997, p.20, Murdoch, 2006). Significant amounts of this new work on the spatial has been done by critical and feminist geographers (Massey, 1984; Rose, 1993) and anthropologists (Ingold, 2011; Ingold and Lee-Vergunst, 2008; Pink, 2012), drawing on previous theorisations of space by French cultural theorists (Foucault 1977, 1980; Lefebvre, 1991) and classical social anthropology (Durkheim, 1971; Douglas, 1984).

Hetherington outlines three key theoretical claims of this new cultural geography. First, moving beyond a traditional Euclidean approach to space-as-physical-landscape, outside the realm of 'the social' (Hetherington 1997, p.ix), these new approaches instead see space and place as both socially produced, and socially productive- arising in response to a particular set of socio-historical conditions, and in turn contributing to those conditions. (For example, in his analysis of the importance of the Palais Royal in eighteenth-century Paris, Hetherington (1997) argues that the gardens, arcades and coffee shops of the Palais Royal both emerged from, and contributed to, the social conditions of the French Revolution.)

A second tenet of this body of theory is that space and place, situated as they are within the social world, are therefore also situated within power relations (the coffee houses of the Palais Royal, for example, were places where those outside the French establishment could mingle and exchange views with those within it). And yet, of course, this freedom of exchange was not entirely without limits- only those who could pay for admission could enter (Hetherington 1997, p.14).

Thirdly, these theorists argue that spatial relations are multiple and contested- places mean different things for different people (Hetherington 1997, p.20). Sex workers, intellectuals and revolutionaries (assuming that their identities were orthogonal, of course) would have approached, consumed and experienced the spaces of the Palais Royal differently from one another.

Another characteristic of this approach has been a move away from researching and theorising about the dominant spaces of capitalist society, and towards a focus on its margins, and particularly 'the marginal use of space by those who have, in various ways, been located on the fringes of society' (Hetherington 1997, p.4). This shift to the valorisation of marginal identities, voices and practices has been a key theme of work in the humanities and social sciences over the last fifty years, and geography in particular since the early 1990s (Murdoch, 2006) and is reflected, for example, in the emergence of queer geographies and anthropologies such as those by Bell and Valentine (1995), feminist geographies (Rose, 1993) and black geographies (McKittrick, 2011).

Two related areas of this work are of particular relevance to this thesis, and will be briefly reviewed below. They are those which theorise spaces as *place-events* produced through social practices, and work on geographies of sexuality.

### ***Geographies of sexuality***

One result of the social scientific shift in focus from the centre to the margins has been the emergence of geographies of sexual minority spaces (see, for example, Bell and Valentine 1985; Binnie 1997; Browne et al, 2007). This work has emphasised the ways in which 'sexuality - its regulation, norms, institutions, pleasures and desires - cannot be understood without understanding the spaces through which it is constituted, practised, and lived' (Browne et al, 2007, p.4). Much of the earliest work on sexual geographies



concentrated on the development of 'gaybourhoods' - urban areas dominated by businesses and services aimed at gay men - which came to be residential centres, as well as commercial hubs (*ibid*; Bell and Binnie, 2000). Work on lesbian spaces, meanwhile, focused on the ways in which women were marginalised within male-dominated commercial scenes, and the ways in which they created lesbian spaces (Valentine 1993; 1995). Later work argued that sexual geographies' focus on territorialisation and visibility in urban 'gaybourhoods' erased women's use of these spaces, and called for more attention to the domestic and occupational sphere, as well as to non-'gaybourhood' public spaces (see, for example, Johnston and Valentine, 1995; Podmore, 2001; Peace, 2002).

### ***Bisexual (S)paces***

Surprisingly, given the prominence of spatialized theorisations of bisexuality in the epistemologies discussed above, little empirical or theoretical attention has been paid to bisexual spaces (Hemmings, 1997). One notable exception is Clare Hemmings' landmark book *Bisexual Spaces* (2002), in which she argues (similarly to Angelides, 2001) that bisexuality 'informs the development or specific manifestation of sexual subjectivity, identity or community, whether or not bisexuality is visible or named as such'. The majority of Hemmings' book focuses not on bisexual spaces *per se*, but on the ways in which bisexuality is produced in the lesbian spaces of Northampton, Massachusetts, (popularly known as 'Lesbianville USA'), in relation to 'transsexuality', and at the 1990 National Bisexual Conference (NBC).

Through an analysis of the archives of the 1990 NBC, which took place in San Francisco, Hemmings outlines how the NBC was envisioned and enacted as the moment of birth of a nationwide bisexual network, bringing together bisexuals from across the US.

As I discussed in Part 1, dominant cultural understandings of sexuality and gender as dichotomous leave no conceptual space for bisexuality, and this lack of discursive space results in a lack of literal spaces in which bisexual subjectivities can be performed and validated. It is unsurprising, then, that from the earliest planning stages of the event, the 1990 NBC was produced as a moment of bisexual homecoming (2002, p.169). This bisexual 'home' was envisaged not simply as a geographical location, but as 'a site of meaning within which one both recognises oneself [as a bisexual subject] and is recognised in return' (2002, p.171). In other words, we might describe the NBC as a place-event where the paradox of bisexual subjectivity could be temporarily resolved.

These attempts to create a sense of homecoming were premised not on the (temporary) topographical space occupied by the conference, but on the diversity and inclusiveness of the bisexual community itself. This diversity was positioned as both the movement's defining characteristic, and its greatest strength. A discourse of 'unity through diversity' was a defining trope of the conference, with emphasis on the ways in which 'what we share is more important than what divides us' (p.172).

By positioning difference at the core of bi identity, the conference created a space 'without constituents' (p.172), which discursively produced bisexuality as a panacea for all ills, with the power to undermine all binary oppositions, not just those of sexuality and gender, and to heal classed, cultural and racial divisions.

Thus, in temporal terms, the national bisexual movement that was to be birthed at the NBC was positioned as 'represent[ing] and mov[ing] towards an ideal bisexual future' (p.179), where identity labels and social divisions would be no more. This 'future utopic grammar' of bisexuality, argues Hemmings 'constructs a bisexual home of possibility that can only be sketched, never built, an architect's fantastic blueprints that defy the laws of

structure and gravity'. In presenting bisexuality as the route to a fantastical, Escher-like utopian future, the conference successfully deflected the question of how a concrete bisexual 'home' space might be achieved in the here and now, and what its borders and constituents might be (p.171). As a result of this deferral, the imagined bi space of the conference was positioned as 'enigmatic and joyfully inclusive, as a space with no actual place' (p.173).

This discourse of 'unity in diversity' however, Hemmings argues, ironically works to obscure and deny actual difference. By uniting bisexuals under the banner of an identity which 'always already equals inclusion and equality', an artificial heterogeneity is constructed in a space which is, in fact, predominantly white and middle-class (p.189).

This emphasis on borderlessness also raises problems for claims of a separate bisexual identity and community, Hemmings points out- for, if bisexuality is defined as the inclusive middle of the sexual spectrum, and a route towards a generalised liberation from all social divisions, then what is a 'bisexual space'? (p.173).

### ***Place-events***

A key characteristic of work emerging since the 'spatial turn' in the social sciences, is an understanding of spaces as socially produced (Murdoch, 2006). In this view, spaces are not reducible to their topography, but must be understood with reference to a number of other modalities through which they are constituted. For these theorists, spaces are *spatio-temporal events* (Massey, 2005) or *place-events* (Pink, 2012), which 'are not simply localities, but rather, the intensities of everyday social relationships, materialities, sensory experiences, practices, representations, discourses and more' (Pink, 2012, p.38). To understand space, we must attend not just to space itself, nor even just the relationship between space and time, but also its material, discursive and sensorial dimensions.

## ***Heterotopias***

Another result of cultural geography's focus on spatiality and marginalisation is the emergence of a body of work that seeks to apply Foucault's (1986, 1989) adaptation of the medical concept of heterotopia, to some types of social spaces. The concept comes from the medical use of the term *heterotopic* to refer to something out of place, missing, or additional within the body, such as a dislocation, amputation or tumour (Hetherington 1997, p.42). While *utopias* are idealised sites which exist only in the cultural imagination as 'sites with no real place', which 'present society in a perfected form, or else society turned upside down' (Foucault, 1976, p.24), *heterotopias* do exist as actual sites within the social world. They are Places of Otherness - sites within the social world, yet 'constituted in relation to other sites by their difference' (Hetherington, 1997, p.13). For example, the concept of heterotopia has been applied to the study of gated communities (Hook and Vdroljak, 2002), libraries (Lees, 1997), museums and the spaces of community mental health care (McGrath and Reavey, 2013).

A heterotopia, literally a 'place of otherness', is a space of 'alternate ordering', where, as Hetherington puts it, 'a bit of the social world [is organised] in a way different to that which surrounds [it]' (Hetherington 1997, p.vii). Such spaces serve as examples of alternative ways of ordering the social world, yet they are not outside the social world, but within it (ibid, p.viii; Johnson, 2012).

While Foucault (1976, p.24) describes such sites as 'something like counter-sites (...) in which the real sites, all the real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted', it would be an oversimplification, to see heterotopias simply as counter-hegemonic marginal spaces constituted in binary opposition to the centre- rather, they are margins 'in the sense of the unbounded and

blurred space-between rather than the easily identified space at the edge[...] spaces of traffic[...] that contain both the central and the 'marginal' in ways that unsettle social and spatial relations' (1997, p.27). Their unbounded, blurred nature means that heterotopias tend to be sites of uncomfortable juxtapositions of the socially central with the socially marginal (1997). A palace-cum-shopping-and-entertainment-complex such as the Palais Royal in eighteenth century Paris, for example, could be simultaneously 'a site of pleasure, consumption and civility [but also] politics and resistance' (1997, p.14), frequented by fashionable elites, sex workers, political radicals and establishment figures.

What is particularly important about these uncomfortable juxtapositions, for Hetherington, is that they blur the boundaries between the culturally central and the culturally marginal- interwoven and overlapping, such that the centre is at the margins, and the margins in the centre. These 'badlands of modernity' are 'somewhat uncertain zones that challenge our sense of security and perceptions of space as something ordered and fixed' (1997, p.18).

### ***Bisexual spaces as heterotopic place-events***

Can we, then, understand the 1990 NBC, as studied by Hemmings as a heterotopic place-event? Clearly, the constitution of the NBC as bisexual 'home' relies on positioning the NBC against the rest of the world, and in particular against the gay and lesbian districts of San Francisco, between which the conference took place. Clearly, too, an alternate ordering of the world was in play here- in keeping with the sense of bisexual 'home' that was being invoked, the conference was envisaged as a space where 'all participants could see themselves represented and catered to'. Accordingly, a great deal of effort was put into making the space as accessible as possible (for example, asking attendees not to wear perfume in order to accommodate those with chemical sensitivities) (Hemmings 2002, p.170). Furthermore, while positioning itself as outside the

world through the use of a 'future utopic grammar' that positioned it as a site of bisexual 'homecoming' and as the birth of a national bisexual movement, the conference, Hemmings attests, was a site where dominant social relations were, in fact, reproduced through the centring of white, middle class concerns and the deferral of issues of race and social class to a utopian bisexual future.

Re-framing the 1990 NBC as a heterotopic place-event is useful, in my view, because such a re-framing allows us to account for both the utopic aspirations of the event, and the ways in which it was inevitably constituted in relation to the wider society within which it took place. Such a theorisation resonates with the discursive constructions of bisexual subjects as simultaneously marginal and central that I discussed in 3.1, above, and invites us to consider how bisexual subjects might move into, through, and out of such a space. What experiences and juxtapositions might such a space make possible? How might paradoxical bi subjectivities be experienced and produced here, in relation to the spaces of the everyday?

In later chapters, I discuss the extent to which BiCon might be conceptualised as a heterotopic place-event, and what this means for its constituents, both during the event, and in their everyday lives. Below, I turn to consider how we might theorise the paradoxical bisexual subject.

## ***4.2 Theorising bisexual subjectivities***

In the introduction to this chapter, following Brown and Stenner (2009) and Brown and Reavey (2011), I took up a theorisation of subjectivity that sees subjects as always in the process of becoming, rather than being, and as grounded in a complex meshwork of relations, processes and practices between humans, objects and spaces. Such a theorisation, I argued in Part 3, would allow for an understanding of bisexual

subjectivities that attended to time, space and motion, and might allow us to move towards conceptualising bisexuality as ‘a narrative’ (Garber, 1995). The visual metaphor of the Möbius strip might allow us to move beyond the apparent ‘paradox’ of bisexuality and to attend productively to lived experiences of bi subjectivity as spatially, temporally and materially experienced and produced. In 4.1 and 4.2, I reviewed some conceptualisations of sexual spaces, suggesting that the concept of the heterotopia may be a productive lens through which to view bisexual spaces as productive of subjectivities that are at once marginal and central. Below, I suggest that the archetype of the Trickster may be useful in articulating the paradoxical nature of bisexual subjectivity in everyday life (which was discussed in sections 1.1 and 3.1). First, however, in order to frame my argument, I return to a discussion of the stereotypes and cultural tropes of bisexuality, which I outlined in 1.2

### ***Exploring invalidations***

In Section 1.2, above, I referred to the emergence of a number of stereotypes and popular cultural tropes about bisexuality since the 1970s. These, I argued, result from bisexuality’s paradoxical positioning as both enabling and undermining the gay/straight dichotomy. In Section 3.1, I discussed how these stereotypes are both repudiated and reproduced in individual bisexuals’ ‘structurally fractured’ identity talk (Ault, 1996). In this section, I step back from the issue of individual subjectivity to explore these tropes further, paying particular attention to the ways in which they invalidate bisexuality.

The tendency of marginalised groups to be complicit, or even active, in the marginalisation of others is often remarked upon in work on progressive and social justice topics (Serano 2013). Serano argues that one way of improving the inclusivity of feminist and queer movements is to identify common techniques of invalidation, and try to

recognise them when they come into play. By identifying these 'invalidations' - common ways in which marginalised groups and individuals are discredited - she argues, we can learn to recognise, and avoid reproducing, the processes of de-legitimization.

In Table 1.1, below, I have adapted some of the invalidations listed by Serano, to show how these help to explain the pervasiveness of stereotypes about bisexuality. As the table shows, these stereotypes function to position bisexual individuals as mentally incompetent, inauthentic, hypersexual, and/or sick.

The table also contains a summary of Eisner's (2013) analysis of what these tropes and stereotypes reveal about the subversive potential of bisexuality and the threats it poses to social order. For Eisner, the pervasiveness of these cultural tropes, and the ways in which they invalidate bisexuality, reveals 'the political weight that society places on bisexuality' (p.49). Eisner argues that, instead of focusing their energies on de-bunking these 'myths' about bisexuality, bi activists and academics should focus on developing ways of deploying them for political ends. ). Instead of bemoaning the way in which 'dreadful binaries' keep us from fully articulating our 'marvellous fluidity' (Hemmings 1997, p.197), bisexuals should 'embrace the inauthenticity, impurity and hybridity that comes along with bisexuality [...] continu[ing] to pollute and invade society and its binary categories' (Eisner, 2013, p.316).



**Table 1.1**

Stereotype	Technique of invalidation (developed from Serano 2013, pp.270-280)	Political Implications (Eisner, 2013, pp.44-48)
Bisexuality doesn't exist/ Everyone is bisexual really	<p>An individual avowing a bisexual identity is either</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Mentally incompetent</b> (mistaken/confused/immature/lacking in self-awareness)</li> <li>• Inauthentic (lying)</li> </ul> <p>and/or</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Hypersexual</b> 'making a fuss' about their sexuality (if everyone's bisexual, why go on about it?)</li> </ul>	<p>These contradictory tropes both serve to erase bisexuality. Most obviously, this erasure can be achieved by insisting on bisexuality's non-existence. However, the same effect is achieved by positioning bisexuality as ubiquitous- to answer an avowal of bisexual identity with the words 'we're all bisexual really' can be an effective silencing technique.</p> <p>Eisner argues that the erasure of bisexuality demonstrates the threat it poses to social order:</p> <p>'Simply put, if society gets so hysterical around a certain idea that it tries to eradicate its existence in any way possible, it affirms that this idea is perceived as threatening' (Eisner 2013, p.44)</p>
Bisexuals are confused, indecisive, or just going through a phase		<p>'Bisexuality can be thought of as a destabilizing agent of social change. [...] The indecision, that is, fluidity associated with bisexuality [...] is a refusal and deconstruction of any socially dictated boundaries at all.' (2013, p.44)</p>
Bisexuals are slutty, promiscuous, or inherently unfaithful	<p>An individual avowing a bisexual identity is either</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Mentally incompetent</b> (lacking in self-control)</li> <li>• <b>Hypersexual</b> (insatiable)</li> </ul> <p>and/or</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Inauthentic</b> (deceitful)</li> </ul>	<p>Bisexuality brings into question hegemonic ideas about oppressive structures such as monogamy, cissexism, patriarchy and heterosexism (p.45).</p> <p>The bisexual 'traitor' is betraying the 'trust' of the dominant order by challenging these ideas (p.46).</p>
Bisexuals are carriers or vectors of HIV or other STIs	<p>An individual avowing a bisexual identity is either</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Inauthentic</b> (untrustworthy, deceitful)</li> <li>• <b>Hypersexual</b> ('promiscuity leads to infection')</li> </ul> <p>and/or</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Sick</b> (infected with STIs)</li> </ul>	<p>'We can envision bisexuality as the carrier of queerness into the straight population, having the potential to infect- that is, disrupt and queer up-heteronormative structures' (p.47)</p>
Bisexuals are actually gay or actually straight	<p>An individual avowing a bisexual identity is either</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Mentally incompetent</b> (mistaken/confused/immature/lacking in self-awareness)</li> </ul> <p>and/or</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Inauthentic</b> (lying about their 'true' sexuality)</li> </ul>	<p>There is a social presumption that 'bisexual woman are actually straight, while bisexual men are actually gay'. This 'projects society's own phallocentrism onto the idea of bisexuality'. (p.47)</p>
Bisexuals can choose to be gay or straight.	<p>An individual avowing a bisexual identity is</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Inauthentic</b> (they need to 'make their minds up')</li> </ul>	<p>'The idea that bisexuals can choose their sexuality stems from a standpoint that sees choice as negative or as a mark of illegitimacy. [...] Bisexuality can offer an alternative politics of inauthenticity, the unnatural, the illegitimate, and the chosen: the rejection of nature, natural categories, human exploitation of nature, and the politics of the natural' (p.48)</p>

## ***The bisexual as Trickster***

If bisexuality is, as Garber attests, ‘not an identity [...] but a narrative’, then I suggest that we might understand the protagonist of such a narrative as a version of the Trickster archetype found in myths and legends throughout the world. In recent years, following Jung’s (1954/1981) seminal work on archetypes including the Trickster, a number of scholars have produced analyses of the role of Trickster figures in indigenous cultures, and in contemporary popular culture (see, for example, Hyde, 2007; Bassil-Morozow, 2014). These works outline common characteristics of Trickster figures, and the role they play as agents of both stability and chaos, creation and destruction.

Below, I outline these characteristics, pointing out the commonalities between these and the stereotypes and potentialities of bisexuality outlined in Table 1.1

### ***Characteristics of the Trickster***

Trickster figures such as Coyote in Native American myths, Eshu in the Yoruba tradition, Loki in the Norse pantheon, Hermes in Greek mythology, and the Wolf in Little Red Riding Hood, are described with remarkable consistency as being characterised by mental incompetency, inauthenticity, and hypersexuality - the very techniques of invalidation that I have argued are a common feature of stereotypes about bisexuals.

In *‘Trickster makes this world’*, Lewis Hyde (2008) describes Trickster as both a crosser and creator of boundaries;

Every group has its edge, its sense of in and out, and trickster is always there, at the gates of the city and at the gates of life, making sure there is commerce. *He also attends the internal boundaries by which groups articulate their social life.* We constantly distinguish- right and wrong, sacred and profane, clean and dirty, male

and female, young and old, living and dead- and *in every case, trickster will cross the boundary and confuse the distinction*' (Hyde, 2008, p.7, emphasis added)

Like the 'switch-hitting', 'fence-sitting' bisexual, then, the Trickster finds himself<sup>6</sup> unable to be contained by binary categories. Trickster is to be found at the threshold of things. He is also, in many cases, the *creator* of the boundaries which he then crosses. For example, in some myths, it is Trickster who creates the boundary between heaven and earth, which only he is then able to cross. Thus, he becomes the messenger of the gods (ibid, pp.7-8). Bisexuality, too, as we have seen, can be theorised as both challenging and creating/ upholding binary categories of sexuality (Angelides, 2001).

Another key feature of the Trickster, which is also attributed to bisexuals, is his carnality and greed. Trickster figures are driven by their bodily appetites- not just for sex, but also for food. Trickster figures are always insatiably hungry and lustful, and are frequently depicted with huge bellies or penises (ibid, p. 37).

Trickster's huge appetite and disregard for boundaries make him untrustworthy, and disinclined to keep his side of the bargain. Hyde explains that 'behind Trickster's tricks lies the desire to eat and not be eaten, to satisfy appetite without being its object' (ibid, p.37). In other words, the Trickster, like the bisexual, wants to have 'the best of both worlds', to 'have his cake and eat it'.

Trickster figures are also characterised by inauthenticity and deceit. In many myths, Trickster lacks a 'way of being' of his own, and is therefore forced to imitate the ways of others - appearing as the wolf in sheep's clothing, for example. Like the bisexual, he is

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<sup>6</sup> I have used the pronoun 'he' to refer to the Trickster, because almost all Trickster figures are male. Hyde suggests that this may be in order to emphasise the non-procreative nature of Trickster's lust.

hidden in plain sight, not what he appears to be, and his success at passing for what he is not undermines the authenticity of others.

My contention here is that, in theorising bisexuality as a Trickster subjectivity, we are able to account for the paradoxical, fluid-yet-constrained, everywhere-yet-nowhere, impossible-yet-necessary nature of bisexual subjectivity. By theorising bisexuality in this way, we are able to hold onto its fluidity, while insisting on its coherence. We are able to account for the ways in which bisexuality appears at both the margins and the centre, troubling hegemonies of sexuality and gender, while also upholding them, and for the continual resistance that it faces for this Trickster-esque ability to 'cross the boundary and confuse the distinction' (Hyde, 2008).

Importantly, we are also able to embody the bisexual subject, to make visible that which cannot be performed, and to bring into the present tense that which is perennially relegated to the past or deferred to the future, without losing sight of the ways in which subjectivity is continually constituted and re-constituted in terms of time, space, and motion.

### ***Tricksters and heterotopias***

As Hyde notes, the Trickster is often to be found on the threshold of things - 'at the gates of the city and at the gates of life, making sure there is commerce' (Hyde, 2008, p7), but he is also found in the middle - hidden in plain sight, meddling in the affairs of others, amusing himself by bringing chaos and confusion to carefully-orchestrated order (Hyde, 2008; Bassil-Morozow, 2014). In myths and legends, the Trickster is frequently encountered in liminal spaces such as the woods, and festive spaces such the marketplace at Carnival time. McLelland (2011), drawing on earlier work produced as part of the preparation of this thesis (Bowes-Catton, 2010), has argued that bisexual spaces

such as BiCon can be understood as analogous to the festive spaces which appear in Shakespearean plays:

Unlike those of heterosexuals and many homosexuals, bisexual 'spaces' as such are almost always temporary, existing for a specific purpose and for a specific timeframe, often in spaces borrowed from other groups. BiCon is just such a space, existing for one summer weekend in a different space each year, a space which at other times is a university campus.

These features of bisexual spaces are directly relevant to Shakespeare's work in two ways. Over and above the inherent creation and recreation of an imaginary and transient space during any theatrical performance, Shakespeare often creates specific, impossible spaces within his work that characters travel to and where normal rules do not apply. Illyria, Verona, The Forest of Arden, Caliban's island and the Bohemian Coast, as well as others, would fall into this category. Some of these, like the university campus for BiCon, are borrowed from everyday life and re-created and reinvented for his purposes.' (McLelland, 2011, p.357)

Such spaces, I would argue, are often heterotopic in nature - they are outside of 'the everyday' in spatial and/or temporal terms, and they are places where the rules and conventions of the everyday are suspended, and new ways of social ordering are tried out. There is a resonance, then, between the Trickster archetype and the festive, heterotopic space of BiCon. Taken together, they provide a theoretical framework which, I will argue, can be used to provide new insights into the ways in which bisexual subjectivities are experienced and produced in bisexual spaces.

## ***Chapter summary***

I began this chapter by outlining the genealogy of bisexuality and explaining how it came to occupy its current, paradoxical position between the poles of the gay/straight binary. In Part 2, I discussed the ways in which bisexual activists in the UK had responded to this positioning by establishing community spaces and literatures. I moved on to examine empirical work on bisexual subjectivity, arguing for approaches to bisexuality which took into account space, time and motion, and explaining how I came to develop my research question, “how are bisexual subjectivities experienced and produced in bisexual spaces, in relation to everyday life?” In Part 4, I outlined the theoretical approaches to space and subjectivity which inform this thesis, suggesting that BiCon might be theorised as a festive and/or heterotopic space, while the archetype of the Trickster can be used to theorise the paradoxical, fluid-yet-constrained, everywhere-yet-nowhere, authentically-inauthentic position of bisexual subjects in a gay/straight world.

In Chapter 2, I explain the development of my methodological approach to the study of bisexual subjectivities and space at BiCon 2008.

# *Chapter 2: Methodology*

## *Introduction*

In Chapter 1, I outlined the development of my research question, ‘how are bisexual subjectivities experienced and produced in bisexual spaces, in relation to everyday life?, situating this in relation to literatures on the development of bisexual politics and community in Britain and North America, and to discursive studies of bisexual epistemology and subjectivity. Drawing on materialist and phenomenological critiques of discourse analysis, I argued for a new approach to bisexual subjectivity which took into account space, time, and motion as constitutive of embodied bisexual subjectivity. Such an approach, I contended, might be developed by theorising bisexuality as a Trickster subjectivity, and bisexual spaces such as BiCon as heterotopic in nature. By framing the study of bisexual subjectivity in these terms, I argued, we might move towards an understanding of the ways in which bisexual subjectivities are experienced and produced in the present tense.

In Part 1 of this chapter, I develop my theoretical approach to the topic further, drawing on phenomenological approaches to sociology and psychology which, I argue, provide methodological ‘ways in’ to the study of spatialised bisexual subjectivities, which overcome some of the limitations of conventional discourse analysis by widening the analytic lens to include aspects of the lifeworld other than language, while also allowing for an analysis of participant accounts that attends to the ways in which they are situated within, and reproduce, power relations.

Moving on from this, I outline the development of my methodological and analytic approach to the fieldwork for this thesis. First, in section 1.2, I explain my decision to

employ creative and visual approaches to data production. I discuss the development of visual social research methodologies in general, before going on to outline in more detail the uses of visual artefact production as a tool for eliciting accounts of lived experience. In the following section, I discuss how some social scientists have developed the use of what I term 'creative' methods- painting, drawing, and modelling, and discuss my development and application of Gauntlett's Lego-modelling technique in Study 2

In the final sections of the chapter I discuss the ethical implications of this research project, with particular regard to the ethical issues specific to visual research, and to the complex research relationships resulting from my own position in the bi community as researcher and community member, activist and academic. Finally, I outline the analytic approach developed for this study.

First, however, I provide an overview of the fieldwork.

## ***Fieldwork overview***

In this section, I provide a brief overview of the fieldwork that was conducted for this thesis. The development and execution of my methodological and analytical approach are discussed in detail in the remainder of the chapter.

The focal point of the fieldwork for this thesis was BiCon 2008, which took place on 28<sup>th</sup>-31<sup>st</sup> August 2008. Data production<sup>1</sup> was undertaken both at the event itself, and in

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<sup>1</sup> I use the term 'data-production' rather than 'data-collection', to remind myself and the reader that, as with many types of research, the data which forms the basis of my analysis was not discovered, but rather, socially produced. I will discuss the ethical and empirical implications of this aspect of data collection in section 3.



post-event interviews with participants, which took place between September and December 2008. A number of pilot studies were also conducted at bi events during 2007 and 2008.

Fieldwork comprised two studies: In the first, which for the sake of clarity I shall refer to as ‘the photo study’<sup>2</sup>, a volunteer sample of 11 BiCon attendees were asked to take photographs, and keep notes about, key moments in their experiences of the event. Following the event, I conducted individual interviews with participants<sup>3</sup> between September and December that year. During these interviews, which were recorded on MP3, participants were asked to draw sketch maps<sup>4</sup> of the BiCon space as they remembered it, and to explain which spaces had been the most significant to them. They were then invited to review the photographs they had taken, sorting them into groups or categories. We then talked through the photographs, and I asked participants to describe the moments at which the photographs were taken. After reviewing the photographs, I asked a few more questions about the participant’s experience of BiCon in general, and their experience of taking the photographs, before offering them the chance to make any other comments. Interviews lasted between 90 minutes and four hours, with the number of photographs discussed ranging from 12 to 80.

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<sup>2</sup> See Appendix 2 for copies of key documents relating to this study.

<sup>3</sup> Following Klesse (2013), I prefer the term ‘interview partners’ to ‘participants’ or ‘interviewees’, because, like the term ‘data-production’, it stresses the collaborative and situated nature of knowledge production. Such a term seems particularly appropriate in research where the researcher is a member of the group under study. However, there are times when the term ‘interview partner’ makes for awkward sentence- construction, and for this reason I use the terms ‘participant’ and ‘interview partner’ interchangeably.

<sup>4</sup> See appendix 3 for examples of these maps.

For the second study, which I shall refer to as ‘the modelling study’<sup>5</sup>, I ran three 90-minute workshops on the Friday, Saturday and Sunday of the event itself. During these workshops, participants were asked to make models in Plasticine, Lego, and assorted other craft materials, illustrating their embodied experiences of BiCon. Each participant then explained what their model showed. In some of the sessions, there was time for participants to amend or rework their models to show how they would ideally like to be experiencing the event. The workshops were recorded on MP3, and the artefacts made were photographed.

Despite my use of photography, drawing and modelling in the process of data production, I did not conduct analysis of the visual artefacts produced during fieldwork. As I will explain below, I theorised that using visual artefact production as part of the fieldwork process might facilitate participants to give a more experiential, material account of bisexual subjectivity than conventional discourse analytic studies had succeeded in eliciting (see Chapter 2). Therefore, it was the recordings of the workshops and interviews, rather than the visual artefacts produced, which formed the focus of my analysis, and on the basis of which I have drawn conclusions.

The fieldwork yielded over twenty-four hours of audio recordings, which were transcribed during 2009 and 2010. About half each were undertaken by myself and a professional transcriber<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> See Appendix 4 for documentation relating to this study.

<sup>6</sup> I would like to thank the Psychology Department of the Open University for a 2010 grant which funded this transcription.

The transcripts were analysed using an adapted form of hermeneutic phenomenological analysis (Langdridge, 2007). This will be described, in detail, later in the chapter.

## ***Part 1: Developing a methodological approach to bisexual subjectivity***

### ***1.1 The development of visual research methods***

The last three decades have seen a gradual shift in ontological and epistemological emphasis in the social sciences and humanities. Frith et al (2005, p.188) describe this as a 'shift from 'scientific observation' to visual meaning-making'. While, in my view, this is overstating the case (there is, after all, plenty of scientific observation still going on in the social sciences), there has certainly been, as Reavey puts it, 'a growing emphasis on the importance of culture and cultural practices in making sense of human experience.' (Reavey, 2011b, p.xxvi; see also Evans and Hall 1999; Rose, 2012; Sturken and Cartwright 2001, for overviews of these developments).

One of the first manifestations of this shift was the 'turn to discourse' (Gillies et al 2005, p.187), in which the role of language in producing the social world came under scrutiny. As I outlined in Chapter 1, however, by the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, qualitative research in the social sciences in general, and discourse analytic work in particular, was being criticised for its over-reliance on language and failure to acknowledge the multiplicity of non-linguistic material and sensorial modalities through which subjectivities are experienced and constituted (Nightingale and Cromby 1999, Brown 2001, Iedema 2003, Frith et al 2005, Reavey 2010, 20011b; Burkitt, 1999; Bordo, 1998; Cromby, 2004b, 2007; Brown, 2001; Hepburn, 2003). By relying on the spoken or written word as a source of data (a *mono-modal* approach), it was argued, researchers were able to analyse discourse *about* experience, but failed to capture the 'rich texture' of lived experience itself (Reavey and Johnson, 2008; Reavey, 2011b).

These criticisms drove a new turn in qualitative social psychological research. The 'turn to experience' (Brown et al 2009), a shift towards an understanding of human experience as embodied, material and spatial, rather than mediated solely through discourse, has led to attempts to extend qualitative social scientific methodologies beyond discursive reductionism (the traditional 'mono-modal' analysis of talk and text) (Iedema, 2003), and to develop 'multi-modal' methodologies (Bigwood 1998; Brown et al, 2008; Langdridge 2003; Marshall 1999; Reavey, 2011b; Williams and Bendelow 1998), which seek to attend to the fact that, as Reavey (2011b, p. xxvii) notes 'We are so much more than we say we are, as we inhabit a world saturated with images, sounds, and smells, that enter our conscious and unconscious experience in a variety of ways'.

These approaches to research sought to take into account a range of non-linguistic aspects of lived experience such as the spatial, haptic, and olfactory. The best-established and most developed of these approaches are those which, recognise the increasing centrality of the visual to human experience (as well as to the cultural construction of social life in 'ocularcentric' (post)modern contemporary Western societies (Banks 2001:7, Rose 2007:2 Reavey 2011b:xxvii ), Many social scientists have thus sought to incorporate a visual dimension into social research. For example, many researchers have made use of photo-elicitation (the use of existing images, such as family photographs, see for example, Rose 2007; Majumdar, 2011) and/or photo-production<sup>7</sup> (the use of photographs

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<sup>7</sup>A range of terms are used to describe methods of data production which involve asking participants to take photographs and using these as the starting point for interviews. Radley et al (2003), for example, use the term 'photo-elicitation', and Taylor and McVittie categorise photos produced for research purposes as 'enduring visual products', while Pauwels (2010) refers to them as 'researcher-instigated visuals'. Some researchers use the term 'photo-elicitation' to refer to both photographs that have been produced by participants for the purpose of the research, and to pre-existing photographs. Like Reavey (2011b), DelBusso (2011) and Majumdar (2011), I prefer to distinguish between the two, referring to 'photo-production' methods to denote the production of images specifically for a piece of research, and to 'photo-elicitation' when I am referring to the use of pre-existing visual materials.

produced by participants as part of the fieldwork process- see, for example, Del Busso, 2009; Gillies et al, 2005; Radley, 2009;), as well as the production of other artefacts such as paintings, maps, and drawings (see, for example, Gillies et al, 2005; McGrath and Reavey, 2015).

By the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a substantial visual research literature was established across the social sciences (Banks 2001, p.2, Rose 2007, p.xiv), and this has continued to burgeon since, now encompassing work in social anthropology (Banks 2001, Pink et al 2004), sociology (Barndt, 1997; Brown, 2001), geography (Rose, 2007), cultural and media studies (Gauntlett, 2007), and psychology (Middleton and Brown, 2005; Radley and Taylor, 2003; Reavey and Johnson 2008; Reavey, 2011a ). A survey of the whole field lies well beyond the scope of this thesis, and its topography is in any case well-documented elsewhere (see, for example, Pink, 2007; Reavey 2011a; Rose 2011). Below, I explain my interest in one particular aspect of this field - that of visual artefact production.

## ***1.2 Why use visual artefact production?***

Pauwel's (2010) typology of visual social research methods distinguishes between two types of visual artefacts: those which are pre-existing (such as family photograph albums, magazines or films) and those which are produced for the purpose of the research project in question. This second type of visual artefacts, which Pauwels terms 'researcher-instigated visuals', may include those which are produced by participants themselves, and those which are produced by the researcher.

The fieldwork for this thesis used three types of participant-produced visual artefacts: photographs, sketch-maps and models. Here, I outline my rationale for using participant-produced visual artefacts (PPVAs) in general, before moving on to discuss each type of artefact in turn.

My main reason for making use of participant-produced visual artefacts (PPVAs) in this research was the fact that I believed they might allow participants to 'say something different' about bisexual subjectivity. As I argued in Chapter 1, in order to further develop social scientific understandings of bisexual subjectivity, it was necessary to move beyond traditional interview-based methods of research, and to develop theories and methods that would allow for the investigation of spatialised, embodied experiences of bisexuality. In this research, I set out to explore how, and to what extent, visual artefact production (VAP) could be used as a tool for eliciting a different kind of discourse about bisexuality. Specifically, I hoped to develop a data production method which would allow participants to reflect on their temporal, embodied, spatialized and intersubjective experiences of BiCon 2008, rather than just reiterating the 'structurally fractured' (Ault, 1996) accounts of bisexual identity discussed in Chapter 1. I wanted to elicit rich descriptions of *moments of subjective experience*, rather than narrative accounts of identity. Like many social scientists working within the context of the 'turn to experience' (Burkitt, 1999), I was drawn to the phenomenological tradition of research for its attention to *existentials*: aspects of the lifeworld such as temporality, spatiality, and embodiment (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Below, I outline how I developed a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to the analysis of my data.

### ***Phenomenological approaches***

Rather than referring to a specific method, the term 'phenomenology' applies to a Husserlian (Willis 2004, Langdridge, 2007) philosophical orientation towards the world which rejects the objectivism of positivist science, and focuses on the lived experience of 'being-in-the-world' as a route to knowledge, rather than the identification of 'facts' or 'truths' or causal relationships (Willis 2004:2, Lydall et al 2005:2, Langdridge, 2007).

This approach has been taken up and applied to social research in a range of ways (Willis, 2004), but two main strands of work can be identified. The first, which has its roots in Heidegger's development of Husserl's work, and is the most closely connected to Husserl's thought, is known variously as Husserlian, or descriptive, or transcendental phenomenology. Researchers in this tradition of phenomenological research strive to position themselves outside the experience under study, and to attain a 'God's-eye view' on the world-as-object, (Langdrige, 2007, p.15).

In contrast, the existential philosophers who took up Husserl's call to attend to experience stressed that this experience needed to be understood, not from a 'God's-eye-view', but in the context of the embodied experience of the experiencing individual- the world *as lived* (Ahmed, 2006). This application of phenomenology to social research is known as interpretive phenomenology (Langdrige, 2007; Larkin et al, 2006).

In this tradition of social research, subjectivities are theorised as grounded in, and produced through, the social practices of embodied actors in a material world (Del Busso 2009). Given my interest in developing a methodology which would allow me to capture rich data about bisexual experiences of subjectivity at BiCon 2008 (outlined in Chapter 1), a phenomenological approach seemed to offer fruitful possibilities for moving beyond discourse reductionism and attending to time, space, embodiment and motion as productive of bisexual subjectivities, via participant descriptions of moments of experience.

However, I was looking for an approach which would allow me to do more than just present participant descriptions at face value. One of the great strengths of the post-structuralist approach to discourse analysis that I had previously undertaken, I believed, was its ability to orient the researcher towards the ways in which discourses were



located, in complex and multiple ways, within power relations, and productive of those same relations (Bowes-Catton, 2005, 2007). I was looking for an analytic approach which would allow me to attend not just to the features of my participants' lived experience and to produce a descriptive account of their being-in-the-world (a *hermeneutics of description*, Langdridge, 2007), but also to critically interpret these accounts in terms of their situatedness within networks of power relations (a *hermeneutics of suspicion*). In short, an interpretative phenomenological approach was called for.

Two theoretical sources were key to the development of my analytical perspective for these studies. One was work on hermeneutic phenomenology (Van Manen, 1990; Langdridge, 2007; Sherwood, Dahlberg et al, Rapport, Lydall et al), and the other was Sara Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology* (2006). Both of these bodies of work were invaluable in helping me to develop an analytical framework for this research, as I shall explain below.

### ***Hermeneutic phenomenology***

Many phenomenological approaches take a descriptive approach to social phenomena. In these approaches, it is considered possible to identify unified meanings of social phenomena (or 'essences') by attending closely to the ways in which they are described. In contrast, interpretative approaches to phenomenology contend that meanings are not universal, but individual. As their name suggests, they take an interpretive, rather than descriptive, approach to data analysis, in order to develop understandings of the meanings of their participants' experiences (Langdridge, 2007).

Within this wider family of interpretative approaches to phenomenology, hermeneutic approaches to phenomenology have their philosophical roots in the work of Husserl, Heidegger, and, especially, Ricoeur and Gadamer (Langdridge 2007, Langdridge and Butt, 2004).

## ***Key analytic concepts in hermeneutic phenomenology.***

### ***Noema and noesis***

The aim of interpretive phenomenological approaches to research is to get as close as possible to an understanding of participants' lives experiences, making them visible in the participants own terms (Langdridge, 2007). The emphasis of data production, is therefore on encouraging people to provide as much concrete information as possible about their experiences, in order to understand *what* is being experienced (*noema*).

In conducting hermeneutic phenomenological analysis, participants' descriptions of their experiences are considered to be the most important source of knowledge about the topic under study, as they are in other forms of interpretive phenomenology. However, as their name suggests, where hermeneutic approaches differ from others is in the application of a critical lens (or hermeneutic) to these descriptions, rather than taking them at face value. In this project, the hermeneutic applied is that of the lifeworld- that is, a phenomenological approach which theorises lived experience as grounded in embodied being-in-the-world (Langdridge 2007:16). The structures of the lifeworld (such as embodiment, spatiality, and temporality) are used as heuristic devices to interrogate the data, in order to understand *how* the participant is experiencing the world (*noesis*). By combining an existential phenomenological analysis (or a hermeneutic of description or empathy) with a hermeneutic of suspicion, Langdridge argues, researchers are able to 'capture the phenomenological meaning of the text while recognizing the variability and ambiguity of language use' (Langdridge 2003, Langdridge and Butt 2007, p.39).

### ***Epoché***

Another characteristic of this approach is reflexivity about the role of the interviewer in the co-construction of the knowledge produced during the research process. In

common with other existentialist approaches to phenomenological research, hermeneutic phenomenology rejects Husserl's assertion that it is possible for the phenomenologist to achieve a 'God's-eye-view' of an experience - what Ricoeur termed 'a view from nowhere' (1991, p.324). Since all experience is necessarily grounded in our embodied being-in-the-world, it is necessary for the researcher to become aware of their 'natural attitude' - that is, their own beliefs and assumptions about the research question, and try to set this aside during the process of the analysis, in order to focus on the world as described by the participant (Langdridge, 2007). This process of trying to acknowledge, and then (as far as possible) to set aside, one's own beliefs, attitudes and biases is known as epoché, or bracketing (Langdridge, 2007).

Of course, it is not possible to truly bracket off all of one's own beliefs and attitudes. Rather, epoché involves recognising that we ourselves are embodied, experiencing beings, and that we cannot entirely remove ourselves and our own ideas and experiences from the equation when we are studying the social world. Inevitably, what emerges from research what Gadamer (1979) referred to as 'a fusion of horizons' - or, as Lydall et al (2005, p.1) put it 'an amalgam of the life-world of both author and interpreter' (Lydall et al 2005:1).

### ***The phenomenological reduction***

Having set aside the natural attitude as best they can, researchers in this tradition conduct what is known as a phenomenological reduction (Langdridge 2007) - that is, to repeatedly read through the transcript of an interview (for example), trying to treat all detail with equal value and avoid creating hierarchies of meaning. The researcher must constantly check their understanding of the data with the data itself, to avoid imposing their own experience.

Having completed this process for a transcript, the next stage is to apply the hermeneutic of suspicion, and begin to interpret findings in terms of lifeworld structures, and order them thematically (Langdridge, 2007).

### ***Hermeneutic phenomenology and bisexual subjectivity***

Importantly for this research, hermeneutic approaches to phenomenology offer an opportunity to bring together two perspectives on lived experience which, as Langdridge and Butt (2004) note, have often been seen as incompatible with one another- embodiment and language. As Langdridge (2007, p.43) observes;

‘[Ricoeur’s] work provides a theoretical position that recognises the embodied being-in-the-world of human beings that is beyond and pre-exists language, and an interpretative understanding of human nature through language’

I say ‘importantly to this research’ because, while I have been critical (in Chapter 1) of what discourse analysis can tell us about lived experiences of subjectivity, I nevertheless remain a discourse analyst at heart, seeing language as both social practice and as key to meaning-making. As Lydall et al observe, language remains central to our understanding of lived experience, since: ‘While life is lived and experienced in the present moment, the study of the lived experience can only occur retrospectively through the use of memory and language’ (Lydall et al 2005, p.1).

My aim in using visual artefact production in this research was not to get ‘beyond discourse’ as such, but rather to try to elicit rich, embodied, experiential *discursive accounts* of subjectivity. These accounts, while not standing in for the experiences themselves, would, I hoped, provide an insight into the ways in which participants drew

on their experiences in their practices of discursive meaning-making. (Lydall et al 2005, p.1)

Further, having traced, in my previous work, the relationship between discourses of bisexual identity in the activist literature of the 1980s and 1990s, and wider developments in the LGBT politics of the time (Bowes-Catton 2005, 2007), I also wanted to develop an analytic approach which allowed for a hermeneutics of suspicion as well as one of description, so that I could attend critically the ways in which participants' accounts were embedded within, and productive of, power relations. Therefore, a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to analysis seemed an obvious choice for this project. I recount my analytical procedure in detail in Part 4. First, however, I return to the issue of fieldwork design. Below, I outline my reasons for concluding that, for this project, the kind of rich, experiential data that would facilitate a hermeneutic phenomenological analysis could best be collected using visual artefact production.

### ***Designing a photo-production study***

The first reason for selecting photo-production<sup>8</sup> for Study 1 was as a potential method for allowing participants to 'say something new' about bisexual subjectivity. As I outlined in Chapter 1, discourse analytic research on bisexuality shows that participants' articulations of bi subjectivity are stymied by the lack of discursive resources discursive resources to articulate a 'both/and' identity in an 'either/or' world (Shokeid, 2002).

Meanwhile, the research literature on visual methods suggest that photos can enable researchers to get to data that would be hard to obtain using other methods (Frith 2005,

p.189-90) by facilitating participants in explaining aspects of experience that are not always readily available to verbal description (Reavey and Johnson, 2008, pp.296-300 ; Gillies et al 2005; Radley, 2003).

Of course, one problem here is that while photographs often provoke a different kind of narrative from that that would be found in a traditional semi-structured interview, photo-narration has its own conventions, such as a tendency to narrate events in a linear, chronological order (Brookfield et al, 2008; Rose, 2010)

For this reason, in setting up the study I tried to disrupt these conventions, using prompt sheets and reflexive writing to encourage participants to focus on moments of experience rather than 'telling the story' of their BiCon. I provided participants with a pack of individual 'photo-memo prompt sheets' (strenuously avoiding the term 'photo diary' (See Appendix 2), and asked them to take notes on why they had taken each photo, focusing on moments of spatialised, embodied, sensory experience.

### ***Photo production as facilitating access to participants' lifeworlds.***

A key claim made about photo production is that it enables participants to 'show' us their worlds rather than simply tell us about them (Frith 2005, p.189). Photos, it is argued, provide the researcher with a direct point of entry into the participant's point of view (Radley and Taylor 2003, p. 79), and therefore allow us to get closer to an understanding of *what an experience is like* rather than *what participants say about it*. In phenomenological terms, photo-production can allow researchers greater access to aspects of participants' lifeworlds - the embodied, spatial and temporal context of lived experience - which are not easily accessed using conventional interview methods. (Del Busso, 2011; Radley,2003). While this is a seductive point, it is important to remember that photographs show us how/what a camera sees, not how humans do, and that what we can know about a participants' experience is always mediated by the participant.

## ***Temporality***

Using photographs as a method of VAP is most interesting, in my view, as a way of working exploring temporal aspects of experience, because of its potential to capture moments of experience which can be visited later. (Gillies et al 2005; Hodgetts et al, 2007).

Firstly, forming the intention to photograph a moment of experience involves reflection- mentally stepping back from the experience itself, creating a break in *duration* (Merleau-Ponty, 1962) during which you encode a great deal of information that will later provide you with a short-cut back into that moment. Radley and Taylor (2003) argue that using photographs as the basis for discussion during an interview can allow participants to re-visit particular moments of lived experience. This is not just in the sense of prompting the recall of past moments and events, but also in eliciting accounts of 'why and how a picture was taken, why it was taken in a particular way, what it represents about the person's thoughts and feelings at the time, as well as what they retrospectively think and feel looking at the photograph in the present' (Gillies et al 2005, p.189). The ability of photographs to act as memory triggers in this way is particularly useful when interviewing participants some time after the events they have photographed (Frith 2005, Reavey and Johnson, 2008; Radley and Taylor, 2003).

In this study, it was hoped that participants would be able to select moments of their experiences of BiCon and everyday life to photograph, and that during the interview, the visual aide-memoire of the photograph would provide participants with a shortcut back to that moment of experience, enabling the elicitation of rich, experiential data.

Somewhat paradoxically, in taking a photo and in looking at it, photos also offer the opportunity to visibilise the everyday (Frith, 2005), make the familiar strange, '[giving]

research participants a means to reflect on aspects of their lives that they may /usually give little thought to' (Rose, 2007, p.238) .

Obviously, a potential pitfall of this approach is that of merely replacing the conventions of one type of conversation (answering questions in an unstructured interview) with another form, likely to be even more familiar to most participants- that of narrating a set of holiday photographs in a linear, start-to-finish mode, based on events/actions/locations rather than on moments of experience. Again, it was hoped that my prompt sheets (see Appendix 2) would go at least some way towards disrupting these narratives, and allow participants to focus on moments of experience.

### ***Materiality and spatiality***

As 'precise records of material reality' (Collier, 1967), photographs, it can be argued, can help to bring the material and spatial into research, including those spaces and moments which may not be accessible to the researcher (Frith, 2005). Rooke (2007), for example, used participant-produced 'photoscapes' to explore lesbian experiences of the city, while Radley and Taylor's participants used photography to explore their experiences of a hospital ward (Radley and Taylor, 2003). Taking a photograph, however, goes beyond merely recording the details of a setting- as Radley and Taylor note, 'the act of photography is a spatial engagement in itself', and the photograph produced is not merely 'a copy of the object concerned, but rather 'a visible fragment of particular engagements with the setting' (Radley and Taylor 2003, p.79)

Similarly, it is often argued that the use of photographs can allow for a 'turning on of the environment' (Radley, 2003, p.131), allowing participants and researchers to attend to material and spatial aspects of lived experience. Such 'spatial engagements' may, it is argued, facilitate the examination of details of experience or practice that might



otherwise be missing from verbal accounts because they are taken for granted. In this way, photo-production may allow the participant to see a familiar environment through fresh eyes. For example, in a study of children's work practices, Bolton et al (2001, p.517) 'found that they noticed aspects of their working practices and environments in the children's photographs that their participants did not think to mention in interviews or written diary accounts since they were 'too entangled in their own experiences of work to see the need for verbal explanation' (Gillies et al 2005, p. 190).

This aspect was particularly salient in the latter part of Study 1, where participants were asked to attend to their experience of the spaces and places of their everyday lives. Again, the photo-memo prompt sheets were key resources here for prompting participants to identify and reflect upon their experiences of subjectivity in spatialised terms, and it was hoped that these would enable participants to step back from their everyday environments and 'see the strange in the familiar' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995).

To encourage participants to reflect on the spatialised nature of their experiences of BiCon 2008, I conducted a form of participatory mapping. This technique, which has been used extensively in geographical and community development research (see, for example, Rambaldi et al, 2006; Soker et al, 2006; Wright and Fawcett, 2003.)

I asked each participant to draw me a sketch map of the BiCon space at the start of their interview, and comment on the spaces in which 'their' BiCon had taken place. I stressed that I was not interested in seeing whether participants could reproduce an accurate plan of the physical venue, but in understanding which spaces had been important to each individual (See Appendix 3).

### ***Embodiment-***

Del Busso (2011) argues that photographs can generate rich description of concrete experiences because of their ability to act as memory triggers (Gillies et al, 2005). By allowing participants to remember details of the sensuous, emotional, spatial and relational aspects of an experience, photographs, argues Del Busso, 'can prompt detailed description in relation to being-in the-material-world of places, objects and others, emphasising being as motion-through-space' (Del Busso 2011, p.46).

### ***Using creative methods in social research.***

In this section of the chapter I want to consider what I term 'creative' methods of research- methods which involve the hands-on creation of artefacts. Photo-production methods are, of course, also 'creative' methods of research, in that they involve the participant in a creative process of artefact production, and creative methods are also 'visual' in that they produce visual products such as drawings and models. However, I use the term 'creative' here to emphasise the more 'hands-on'/embodied nature of these art/craft-related methods. As well as being more 'hands-on', these methods also tend to be more immediate, in that the artefacts produced are usually created over a short period of time in the interview or discussion situation itself, rather than being produced in advance, as is common with video and photographic methodologies (see, for example, Gauntlett, 1997, 2007; Holliday, 2004, Gillies et al, 2005).

One way in which these creative methodologies have been applied is through the production of drawings, paintings and collages as part of the research process. For example, Gauntlett's (2005) Drawing Celebrity study involved asking teenagers to draw, and then write about, celebrities they aspired to emulate, while Gillies et al (2005)

painted pictures of their embodied experiences of ageing, and pilot studies for this project (Bowes-Catton et al, 2011) used collage to investigate bisexual identity.

These methods are seen as having great potential for allowing participants to articulate their experiences and understandings in new ways, and are seen as particularly useful for studying things that are difficult to articulate verbally, such as embodied experiences (Gillies et al, 2005) and identity (Gauntlett, 2007). Given the difficulties in articulating bisexual subjectivity outlined in Chapter 1, I thought that creative approaches to data production might help participants to articulate more about their experiences of being bisexual at BiCon.

However, as these methods remove one set of constraints on participants' self-expression, they add another (Bowes-Catton et al, 2011). Asking research participants to take part in these 'artistic' forms of creativity can result in participants feeling constrained by concerns about artistic merit. Perhaps this is why there is little social scientific literature using drawing or painting. It is notable that Gauntlett's drawing study participants were schoolchildren, who are accustomed to producing drawings as part of the curriculum. Bagnoli, too, comments on the relative willingness of teenager participants to take part in drawing studies, compared to their adult counterparts (2009), while Gillies et al's (2005) study involved a group of participant/researchers who were personally and professionally interested in exploring the use of painting as a research tool.

In an attempt to reduce anticipated problems of participants feeling intimidated by the 'artiness' of the creative process, I provided participants in a pilot workshop for Study 2 with collage materials, in the hope that providing some ready-to-use shapes, textures and images would reduce the sense that participants were expected to produce an original piece of artwork 'from scratch'.

While this produced some very good data on embodied experiences of bisexual space (Bowes-Catton et al, 2011), I found that the magazines and catalogues I had provided as collage material were too loaded with meaning (Rose, 2007, pp.10-11), and resulted in many collages that drew on the visual discourses of gender and sexuality provided by these media, resulting in visual re-articulations of binary categories of sexuality and gender, and the difficulty of finding 'space' for bisexuality among these.

Furthermore, some participants commented that they had found it difficult to engage with the 'artiness' of the creative process:

I think it's probably fine for artistic people but I find it very hard to express myself artistically. (Pilot workshop participant)

In developing a creative methodology for this study, then, a key concern was to minimise the impression that participants were required to produce 'something arty'. I therefore selected methods of artefact production that I hoped would avoid participants feeling constrained by concerns about artistic merit. Below, I outline how I came to develop a modelling approach based on Gauntlett's application of the Lego 'Serious Play' methodology to identity research.

### ***Developing a creative methodology for Study 2: adapting Gauntlett's use of Lego***

A key influence on the development of the methodology for Study 2 was David Gauntlett's application of the Lego Serious Play consultancy tool to social research, which seemed to offer the potential for overcoming these problems. In *Creative Explorations* (2007), Gauntlett outlines how asking participants to produce metaphorical models, in Lego, of their identities, allowed participants to articulate complex and contradictory sets of ideas in a holistic manner (ibid: 183).

Gauntlett's work is far from uncontentious, and Buckingham (2009) provides a well-developed critique of what he terms Gauntlett's 'naïve empiricism' and tendency to present participants' visual artefacts as authentic reflections of their inner states. In doing so, Gauntlett appears to take the data produced in his modelling workshops at face value. This is not the approach that I have taken here- as I have made clear above, I have adopted a critical hermeneutic phenomenological approach, in which empathetic descriptivism is balanced by critical analysis. However, the processual nature of Gauntlett's approach seemed a promising way of allowing participants to move beyond the 'structurally fractured' articulations of bisexual identity that dominate existing literature on the subject. It also seemed a promising way of overcoming participants' potential discomfort with 'arty' methods of artefact production - it included pre-structured pieces, but these lacked the cultural resonances of the magazine and catalogue clippings used in the collage study, so that participants could ascribe their own meanings to them.

Secondly, the nature of Lego pieces means that they can be positioned and repositioned multiple times during the process of 'thinking and feeling through' experience, without these iterations resulting in the sense of having 'got it wrong' that might accompany re-drawing a picture.

In addition to Lego pieces, Plasticine (modelling clay) was also made available to participants. This element was introduced because it was suggested that the angularity and sharp edges of Lego pieces might inhibit the expression of some types of bodily experience, and that some people might prefer to work with the soft malleability of Plasticine (Reavey, 2008, personal communication). The free-form nature of modelling with Plasticine, however, was seen as potentially problematic in that it might be too 'arty'

for participants, so other craft materials such as lollipop sticks and foam shapes were also used to add structural elements.

Gauntlett's workshops, modelled on the Lego Serious Play consultancy process, lasted for four hours. However, workshops for this study needed to be much shorter, as they had to fit in with the 75 minute BiCon workshop session slots. Participants were given about the same amount of time (around twenty minutes) to complete their models as Gauntlett's participants, but the time spent on introducing the method was much shorter- about twenty minutes as opposed to two hours. Perhaps this was due to the different focus of the workshop- Gauntlett's concern was with models as metaphors of identity, and much of his long introduction time was spent introducing the idea of *metaphorical* modelling. My focus, meanwhile, was on producing models to represent experiences. and I found that participants seemed to grasp the idea of making artefacts that expressed something about experience very readily. I deliberately avoided using the idea of metaphor because I wanted to encourage participants to think and feel through their experiences with their bodies, rather than stepping back from their lived experiences to construct metaphors with their minds. Nevertheless, the resulting models were definitely metaphorical in emphasis, with people using objects to represent different aspects of their experiences. Perhaps this is because people are more used to using similes and metaphors to describe experiences (such as, 'it's like wading through treacle'), than identities, or because people already understand creativity as a way of expressing their experiences of the world, so that making visual expressions of experience is less of a cognitive leap than modelling identities.

Another difference between these workshops and those conducted by Gauntlett was that both spoken and written data were collected. Like Gauntlett, I asked participants to provide written descriptions of their models at the end of the sessions, but in Gauntlett's

study these were the sole data collected, whereas my study the main sources of data were the voice recordings of discussions during the session. Unlike Gauntlett, I was not particularly interested in analysing the models themselves, but in what the process of making them might allow participants to express about their experiences of bisexual subjectivities.

### ***The status of visual artefacts in this research***

Pauwel's (2010) typology divides the analytical focus of studies using visual methods into four categories;

- the content of the visual product itself - what it depicts, or how a particular subject is depicted;
- the actual process of artefact production;
- participants' verbal feedback on visual stimuli;
- practices of displaying and disseminating visual representations

Studies that take the content of the visual material itself as their focus often theorise photographs in documentary terms - that is, as 'precise records of material reality' which 'encode an enormous amount of information in a single representation' (Grady 2004, cited in Rose 2011; Collins 1967, cited in Rose 2011) which serve as 'mirrors of our relationships with the world' (Pink 2012) and make people 'bear witness' to 'real, flesh and blood life' (Holliday and Becker, cited in Rose 2011). In these studies, the photos themselves are the data for study.

In this project, however, the status of the visual products can best be described in terms of the third of these categories. The artefacts are produced as a means to an end

(Knowles and Sweetman, 2004), for what they can do rather than for their content. The focus of the analysis is on the discourse that the artefacts enable participants to produce, rather than on the artefacts themselves.

This is not to say that the contents of the photographs and models, the processes of their production and the particular social conventions of workshop delivery and photography at BiCon are of no analytical interest whatsoever, and indeed I comment on these aspects in passing throughout the thesis. However, my main methodological interest here is in exploring to what extent the process of reflecting on moments of experience through the production of visual artefacts during BiCon expands the discursive possibilities of talk about bisexuality, allowing participants to *say something new* (Rose 2012, p.305) on the subject.

In this way, the study remains resolutely focused on the analysis of *discourse about lived experience*, rather than the analysis of visual materials. While I designed my data production procedures in ways that I hoped would encourage participants to attend to and comment upon lived experience, I am not claiming that my methods 'capture' lived experience - rather, I hope that they allow participants to produce new kinds of discourse *about* lived experience.



## ***Part 2: Study Design***

The data presented in this thesis is drawn from two studies using visual artefact production, fieldwork for which was carried out in the second half of 2008.

In the first study, 11 participants took photographs of their experience of BiCon in August 2008, and of a week in their everyday lives during September. Semi-structured interviews, lasting between 90 minutes and four hours, were carried out between September and December.

In the second study, three 75 minute workshops were carried out during BiCon 2008, with a total of 30 participants. The workshops formed part of the official programme of the event, and during the sessions, participants were given access to a range of modelling and craft materials, and invited to produce a visual artefact that spoke to their experience of the event. Each participant then explained their artefact to the group.

**Figure 2: A quick-reference guide to the studies:**

	<b>Method</b>	<b>Participants and recruitment</b>	<b>Timescale</b>	<b>Subsidiary research questions:</b>
Study 1- 'The photo study'	Photo-production, individual interview	11 participants, recruited through UK bi community online networks.	The photography stage of the project took place at BiCon, 28-31 August 2008, and during September 2008.  Individual interviews took place between September and early December of 2008.	Are there differences in the way that bisexual subjectivity is experienced at BiCon, and in everyday life?  How is bi subjectivity performed in different spaces, e.g. through dress?  How do participants experience embodied subjectivities at BiCon?
Study 2- 'the modelling study'	Modelling workshop, including group discussion.	26 participants, recruited at BiCon through the workshop programme.	Three 75 minute workshops took place during BiCon 2008.	What is it like to be at BiCon in this body, at this moment in time?

## ***2.1 Why these two studies?***

In designing my data production procedure, I was concerned to get as close as possible to my participants' lived experiences of BiCon 2008. My main interest was in the use of modelling- as I outlined above, I thought that the hands-on, experiential process of making a tangible visual artefact had great potential to help participants to circumvent received narratives of bisexual identity, and say something about their embodied, spatially located *experiences* of bi subjectivity.

However, I also chose to include a photo-production study, for several reasons:

First and most pragmatically, there was a significant risk attached to focusing my whole data collection process on three workshops at an annual event. I had no control over when in the programme of events the workshops would be placed. Participants might not attend, if the workshops were scheduled against a popular alternative, or first thing in the morning after a late night at the Ball. By including a photo-production study, I could extend the data production process throughout and beyond the event itself.

Secondly, although I had carried out pilot studies, my modelling approach was innovative and I was concerned that the workshops may not produce the kind of data I was anticipating. It made sense to include a second study using a 'safer' methodological approach, to avoid having to wait a whole year for a second opportunity to collect data at and around BiCon.

Thirdly, as I prepared for fieldwork, I came to understand embodiment and spatiality as mutually constitutive (Ahmed, 2006; Pink, 2012). The focus of the modelling workshops was on participants' embodied experiences of the BiCon space at a particular moment in time - on what it actually felt like for the participant to be at BiCon on the day that the

workshop took place. This focus, and the nature of the planned workshop, meant that participants would be sitting relatively still in one area of the BiCon space, reflecting on their embodied experiences of that day so far. While I expected this to provide rich data about that moment, I also wanted to expand the temporal focus of the fieldwork to encompass - and indeed, go beyond - the weekend event.

A photo-production study, I reasoned, would complement the modelling study by expanding the temporal frame of my research. By asking participants to reflect on and record their experiences during and after the weekend, a study of this type would allow me to extend my analysis to consider the role of temporality and motion in constituting bisexual subjectivities. It would also allow me to explore the ways in which the spaces were constituted and experienced through movement, which I was increasingly coming to understand as a vital component of the constitution of lived subjectivities (Del Busso, 2011; Young, 2005).

In the next section, I outline my data production procedure, and discuss the rationale for, and procedure of each study in greater detail. Since recruitment for the photo-production study began some weeks before that for the modelling studies, I describe this study first.

## ***2.2 Study 1: Photo- production and participant mapping***

### ***2.2.1 Participant recruitment and characteristics***

Invitations to take part in the study were placed on UK bi community email lists and blogs, and in the national newsletter *Bi Community News* during late June and early July 2008. Online, I advertised in my personal blog (gaining 2 participants, of whom one took part in the final study), the blogs of BiCon and Bi Community News and the email lists Bi

Research Group and UK Bi Activism. I also emailed people who had taken part in pilot workshops for the study and requested to be contacted about future research. Many participants will have seen my call for participants in more than one place. Seventeen people initially volunteered to take part in the study, of whom eleven were interviewed. Two participants were unable to attend BiCon at short notice and so dropped out of the study. Two participants who had no plans to attend BiCon volunteered to take part in the 'everyday life' section of the study, but subsequently dropped out of contact. One participant took photographs at BiCon but dropped out of the study at a later date. One participant initially volunteered to take part but then dropped out of contact. .

Participants were asked to fill in a short demographic questionnaire (see Appendix 2), at the start of the interview. This was based on the survey of attendees circulated at BiCon 2008 by the Bi Research Group<sup>9</sup>, in order to facilitate comparisons between the demographic characteristics of the sample and those of attendees at the event. The table below sets out the demographic characteristics of participants in the photo-study, compared to those of BiCon 2008 attendees (according to the survey).

**Table 2.1**

		Photography study	BiCon 2008 attendee survey
<i>N</i>		11	105
Gender	Mostly or only female	72% (N=8)	67% (N=70)
	Mostly or only male	18% (N=2)	27% (N=28)
	Genderqueer	9% (N=1)	0.95% (N=1)
	Androgynous	0	0.95% (N=1)
	No gender	0	2% (N=2)

<sup>9</sup> This group is now known as BiUK.

	Prefer not to say	0	3
Age	13-19	0	1% (N=1)
	20-29	27% (N=3)	35% (N=37)
	30-39	63% (N=7)	36% (N=38)
	40-49	9% (N=1)	21% (N=22)
	50-59	0	3% (N=3)
	60-69	0	1% (N=1)
Ethnicity	White or White British	91% (N=10)	99% (N=103)
Highest educational level	HND, first degree or higher	100% (N=11)	67% (N=72)
	'A' levels or lower	0	30% (N=31)
Income	Above UK average for 2008		26.6% (N=28)
	Below UK average		62% (N=65)
	Unwaged		11.4% (N=12)
Social Class identity	Middle class	63% (N=7)	
	Working class	18% (N=2)	
	Between working and middle class	18% (N=2)	
I have one or more impairments that affects my day to day life	Yes	63% (N=7)	52% (N=55)
	No	39% (N=4)	47% (N=49)
Have you ever identified as bisexual?	Yes	100% (N=11)	89% (N=93)
Do you	Yes	82% (N=9)	85% (N=89)

currently identify as bisexual?			
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As Table 2.1 shows, women were over-represented at BiCon 2008, and in the sample for Study 1, comprising 67% of attendees. In both groups, most participants were in their 20s or 30s, with people over 40 being under-represented in the photo-study sample compared to the event as a whole. 99% of the survey sample identified as White or White British, compared to 82% of the photo-study sample (with one participant identifying as Black British), and 92% nationally (Barker et al, 2008). Seven (63%) participants identified as middle class, two (18%) as working class, one as working/lower middle class, and one as 'somewhere between working and middle class'. Seven (63%) of participants identified as having an impairment that affected their day to day lives.

All participants had identified as bisexual at some point in their lives and nine (82%) listed bisexuality among their current sexual identities, among other identities such as 'queer', 'kinky', 'BDSM' and 'poly'.

## ***2.2.2 Materials and Procedure***

### ***Photography procedure***

Participants were invited to take photographs of their experiences of BiCon and of a week in their everyday lives, and to make notes on the photographs they had taken to aid recall. In order to avoid prompting the production of a photo-diary with a linear narrative, I emphasised my interest in capturing *moments* of experience, and gave participants 'photo-memo prompt sheets' (see Appendix 2) to take notes on. These invited them to reflect on what had prompted them to take the picture, and what they noticed through

their senses, about the spaces they found themselves in, their emotions, and any references to bisexuality, at the time of taking the photographs.

The study information sheet expressed a preference for images taken with digital cameras or mobile phones. This was partly for reasons of practicality - digital photographs could easily be transferred and reproduced electronically, and multiple copies made. But it was also because I wanted participants to be able to use the process of photographing their experiences as a reflexive tool, to be able to review and rework their photographs in the moment. I hoped that this would help to avoid a 'diary' style narrative of events and allow for more reflection during the process of photography, so that participants were not merely recording events, but using their photography as a reflexive tool in their engagements with the spaces under study. As Radley and Taylor note, the act of photography involves momentarily separating oneself from one's surroundings, 'turn[ing] on one's setting, objectify[ing] a relationship that one has so far been living out' (Radley and Taylor 2003, p.82). Rather than simply inviting participants to step out of moments of experience in order to record them, I wanted them to be able to step in *and* out of these moments, to be able to look at the photographic record they had made and engage in a process of creative reflection, considering whether it captured their experience, and being able to modify it in the moment.

Nevertheless, the participant briefing sheet made it clear that cameras with film could also be used. All participants were offered such a disposable camera, and two participants took this option.

For the BiCon phase of the study, participants were asked to take photos of their experiences of BiCon throughout the weekend, around the theme 'what is it like to be bi at BiCon?' They were encouraged to 'take any pictures that help you get across what it's like to be you at BiCon, [...] particularly [...] how you feel in your body, and what you do

with your body, during the weekend.' For the 'everyday' phase of the study, the instructions were similar. Participants were asked to take photographs for a week, around the theme 'what it feels like to be bi in everyday life', and encouraged to photograph moments of their experience of different spaces in everyday life (Appendix ii).

### ***Status of photographs within the research***

Various writers on the subject of visual methods have outlined methodologies for the analysis of visual materials produced during the research process (see, for example, Banks 2001; Gauntlett, 2007; Reavey and Johnson, 2008; Radley and Taylor, 2003; Gillies et al, 2005). In this study, however, photographs were used as aids to memory and prompts for discussion, rather than as objects for analysis in themselves (Bagnoli, 2009). While the contents of the photos are of interest, I follow Radley and Taylor in 'attempt[ing] to understand what has been made visible and why' (2003, p.79) rather than being interested in the meanings of images alone. Ultimately, therefore, this study relies on the analysis of discourse - photographs are used as a tool to elicit a different kind of discourse than that which is routinely produced in qualitative research interviews, but is discourse nevertheless.

### ***2.2.3 Interview procedure***

After BiCon, participants were contacted by email and asked to upload their photographs to a private photo printing account, and interviews were arranged for Autumn 2008. The first interview took place in early October 2008, and the last in early December the same year. All but three interviews took place in participants' homes- one



took place in a holiday cottage, another at the participant's place of work, and a third at my own home. Interviews ranged in length from one and a half to four hours.

Wherever possible, digital copies of the photographs taken were obtained prior to interview and printed, so that participants would have the opportunity to physically handle and sort the photographs during the interview, rather than referring to them on the screen of a camera or computer. These were given to the participants at the beginning of the interview, in a jumbled order, and participants were asked to sort them into those representing experiences of BiCon, and those representing everyday life. This was another method to try and avoid a 'diary' style narrative of events- however, with one exception, participants arranged, and discussed, their photographs in chronological order, in accordance with conventions of photo-narration (Mitchell, 2005)

Participants had been asked to take their BiCon photos first, and their 'everyday life' photos second, and most had done this. In all cases, however, the photographs taken at BiCon were discussed first. This was because I anticipated that participants might find it easier to articulate their experiences of BiCon than of everyday life, as BiCon is a more definite, bounded space, and is the kind of event that people are used to photographing and narrating (Rose, 2007), while 'everyday life', as Rooke (2007) found, is more nebulous and difficult to capture. Therefore, discussing BiCon first seemed logical, in that it set up an implicit contrast with 'everyday life', which could be drawn upon later in the interview. However, as I have already mentioned, and will discuss further in Chapter 6, an unintended effect of this procedure was that participant accounts of the 'everyday' were strongly positioned in relation to BiCon. This led, as I have outlined, to a post-fieldwork re-focusing of the research question so that the focus of the research was on BiCon, with the spaces of everyday life considered in relation to BiCon rather than on their own account.

### ***2.2.4 Participatory mapping***

After sorting the photos, participants were asked to draw a sketch-map of the spaces they remembered most strongly from the BiCon venue. This was intended to help participants to recall a space they had inhabited some weeks or months previously, and to prompt accounts that focused on the experience of that space (Bagnoli, 2009; Emmel, 2008, Shokeid et al, 2006). It was stressed that the sketch-map need not bear any relation to an accurate map of the venue, but rather was a way of getting participants to think about, and think themselves back into, BiCon as a space.

After drawing the map, participants were asked to talk about the spaces they had included on the map, and to identify any spaces they had excluded. This usually prompted a fairly prolonged discussion of the participant's engagement with the BiCon venue, which was then referenced later in the interview as they discussed their photographs.

Having discussed the map, participants were first invited to show me their photographs of BiCon, and then of everyday life, using their notes to prompt their memories. I used prompts such as 'Thinking back to the moment when you took that photograph, what can you remember about how you were feeling in your body?' to try and encourage participants to re-locate themselves in the moment of taking the photo, disrupting narrative accounts and keeping the focus on moments of experience.

In the next section, I discuss the use of creative methods in social research before going on to outline my use of Lego modelling as a data elicitation technique in Study 2.

## ***2.3 Study 2: Using modelling workshops to investigate experiences of BiCon***

The aim of Study 2, then, was to use modelling techniques to investigate embodied experiences of BiCon 2008 as a bisexual space. Data collection was conducted during

three seventy-five minute workshops which took place as part of the workshop programme of BiCon 2008.

### ***2.3.1 Sample demographics and recruitment***

The workshops were open to all participants at BiCon and were advertised in the event programme with the following text:

#### **Experiencing Bi Identity with Lego/Plasticine** Helen Bowes-Catton

What is it actually like to be bisexual, at BiCon? How similar and different are people's experiences of bi-ness, and of being at BiCon? In this workshop, we'll be using Plasticine and Lego to explore experiences of bisexual identity, and BiCon, in fun and thought-provoking ways. This workshop is part of a research project I'm carrying out, and the discussions we have will be recorded, though your participation will remain completely anonymous and confidential - please do come and talk to me if you have any questions/concerns about this. This is being run twice – you don't need to attend both.

Workshops took place on all three days of BiCon, and were limited to ten participants in order to allow everyone to have the opportunity to talk about their models at length. Twenty six participants took part in the workshops, of whom 24 identified as mostly or only female. Other demographics were not collected.

### ***2.3.2 Materials***

Participants were given a range of materials such as Lego, Plasticine, lollipop sticks, glue, tissue paper, and a variety of craft supplies. I directed the workshop according to the schedule in Appendix 5. Each participant was given a prompt sheet to remind them of the focus of the workshop on embodied experiences of space, some information about the study, and a consent form (see Appendix 5 for these documents).

### ***2.3.3 Workshop procedure.***

At the beginning of the workshop, the purpose of the workshop was introduced, and participants were taken through a warm-up/ice-breaker exercise in which (following Gauntlett 2007, p.137) they were asked to make a small creature out of any of the available modelling materials. They were then asked to alter the creature to show what kind of day they'd had so far. Participants then took turns to introduce themselves to the group, showing their models and saying a little about how their day had been going.

In the main section of the workshop, participants were invited to reflect for a moment on how they were feeling in their bodies, and in the spaces of BiCon, before being asked spend twenty minutes making models showing 'how it feels to be you, at BiCon, today'. Participants were given prompt sheets suggesting that they reflect on their experiences of movement, their senses, emotions, their bodies, and anything about bisexuality that seemed salient. Participants were encouraged to start modelling straight away, and to use the process of modelling as a way of thinking through and connecting with their embodied experiences (ibid, p.138).

After about twenty minutes, participants were asked to show their models to the group, and talk about what the model showed about their experience of BiCon. If sufficient time remained, participants were then asked to alter their models, or make a second model, showing how they would *like* to be feeling at BiCon that day. This was an

adaptation of Gauntlett's two-stage modelling process, in which he asked participants to reflect on, then change or add to their original models (ibid, p.239), and which he felt proved particularly useful (Gauntlett, personal communication, May 2007). In pilot workshops, this had produced interesting results, exposing tensions and absences in the original models.

At the end of the workshop, participants were asked to fill in feedback forms, briefly explaining what their model showed about their BiCon experience, and asking for their comments on the workshop.

#### ***2.3.4 Data collection***

The main way of collecting data was by recording the session using digital voice recorders. The main purpose of the recordings was to capture participants' discussions of their finished models. However, as Gauntlett (2007:4) notes, the observation of the process of production of visual artefacts is often the source of the most valuable data, so for this reason the voice recorders were left on for most of the session in order to also capture incidental conversation during the modelling process. Models were also photographed at various points during the workshop, and participants also filled in session evaluation sheets describing their models, at the end of the session.

#### ***2.3.5 Use of findings***

The modelling study did not produce as much data as I had anticipated. Participants' descriptions of their models were useful in capturing their descriptions of BiCon 2008 'from the inside', and were helpful in identifying the ways in which BiCon was positioned against the public spaces of 'the outside world' (see Chapter 4). However, because of the short time available for workshops, the way in which the workshops were structured, and

the lack of privacy available in the room where workshops were conducted (many people used the room as a shortcut through the venue space, meaning that sessions were frequently interrupted), the study did not yield the kind of rich descriptive data that I had imagined it would. In addition, the photo-study workshop generated the bulk of the 24 hours of recorded speech which were transcribed, and so this data naturally features more in the analysis than the data from the modelling study. These issues will, of course, be discussed further in Chapter 6.

### ***Part 3. Ethical and reflexivity considerations***

All social research has an ethical dimension, but several particular ethical issues are raised by these studies. These are interrelated, but are generally associated with three overlapping issues: first, my use of visual and creative methods, especially photography, in these studies; secondly, the sensitivity of researching a marginalised sexual community, and thirdly, my own positioning as a member of the community being researched.

In this section of the chapter, I account for the ways in which I anticipated and addressed these ethical issues when planning and conducting my fieldwork. In Chapter 6, I discuss these issues further, looking back on the outcomes of the research and reflecting on how I would improve future projects.

#### ***3.1 Ongoing informed consent***

The British Sociological Association's Visual Sociology Group's Code of ethics notes that, in some research contexts 'it may be necessary for the obtaining of consent to be regarded, not as a once-and-for-all-prior event, but as a process, subject to renegotiation over time' (BSA Visual Sociology Group, 2006). Ensuring that those taking part in research

are consenting fully at all times is particularly important where visual data are used, since, As the BSA VSG Code (point 21) notes, visual data, like other kinds of data, can change its status over time. This is perhaps particularly true of photography, which was used in both studies: by participants in Study 1, and as a means of record-keeping by the researcher, in Study 2. A photograph which was innocuous and everyday when taken could become extremely sensitive as a participant's circumstances change (Mitchell et al, 2005). This is perhaps particularly true in a sensitive area of research such as sexuality, and even more so in the case of a stigmatised sexuality, where being 'outed' can still have significant implications for participants' wellbeing, livelihoods and even personal safety. Accounts of the impact of negative stereotypes about bisexuality on individuals are well-documented, for example in *The Bisexuality Report* which cites several examples of bi individuals facing violence, harassment and career disadvantage as a result of coming out or being 'outed' (Barker et al, 2012, p.24-5).

By way of a (fictional) example, a photograph of a student participant in a revealing costume, taken at BiCon 2008, which they were initially happy to have in the public domain, may become a liability or embarrassment by 2015 when they are trying to establish a career working with children.

For these reasons, it was important to me that participants were clear that their consent to participate in the project is an ongoing process, and that they have the right to withdraw consent at any time. The consent forms for each study<sup>10</sup> therefore made it clear that a participant may withdraw, or repeal permission to use all or part of their data, at

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<sup>10</sup> See appendixes 2 and 4

any point during the study and in the pre-publication period, or may withdraw permission for the use of their previously published data or images in further publications<sup>11</sup>.

In order to ensure that consent was truly informed, all research participants were offered access to full transcripts of the interviews conducted (anonymised, in the case of the modelling study), and to the photographs taken of their models in Study 2, and were invited to offer comments on these. The consent forms for all studies made it clear that participants would be allowed to withdraw any statements or images they no longer wished to be included in the research. While this was a risky strategy in terms of the outcomes of the research, I felt that it was ethically necessary in order to safeguard participants' interests, especially given the constraints on anonymity that the community setting of the research presented (see below).

I have also been extremely cautious in my use of participant photographs (BSA VSG point 46). During fieldwork, I told participants that I would not use any photographs which I believed made people identifiable, and I encouraged participants not to take photographs in which they or others would be identifiable (see participant briefing documents in Appendix 4). Understandably, however, many did, and I have taken this into account when selecting the images to be presented in subsequent publications and in this thesis. A related issue was the sensitivity of taking photographs at an event where not everyone was happy to be photographed. Fortunately, the well-established photography policy of BiCon, to which all participants had to agree as part of the Code of Conduct (see Appendix 1), established some clear ground rules about obtaining consent from everyone featured in a photograph, including those facing away from the camera.

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<sup>11</sup> To date (June 2015), no data has been withdrawn.



### ***3.2: Anonymity and confidentiality***

The relatively small size of the organised bisexual community in the UK, from which participants for both studies were drawn, is a reason for particular diligence in safeguarding the anonymity of participants. Although interview transcripts were anonymised as a matter of course, including biographical details such as an individual's home town, ethnicity or occupation could render them readily identifiable. Therefore, it has been necessary to present data in such a way as to adequately protect the privacy of participants, such as by changing or omitting geographical and biographical information, and by avoiding publishing too many extracts or photographs from any one participant (BSA VSG, point 46).

As will be discussed further in Chapters 4 and 6, the necessity of protecting participants' anonymity has shaped the writing of the empirical chapters of this thesis. Rather than presenting the photography study analysis thematically, I might have chosen to present a detailed analyses of two or three whole interviews. This would have enabled me to comment in-depth on the ways in which individual participants described their experiences of BiCon 2008 as they moved towards, through, and out of the place-event of the convention. However, to present data in this way would have compromised participant anonymity to an unacceptable degree, particularly given the visual component of the research. One can imagine, for example, a reader thinking 'that looks like Mary's shoe' on the basis of one photograph, but 'I'm sure that participant must be Mary, I recognise that shoe and that carpet, and in this extract she mentions her five children' on the basis of several pieces of evidence gathered together in a longer account. By splitting the accounts up as I have done, and attending carefully to issues of anonymity when selecting photographs and transcripts to use, I believe that I have minimised these risks as far as possible.

However, a corollary of this decision has been the silencing of some voices which are already marginalised within the community, because, for example, it was not possible to fully attend to issues of intersectionality without making the identities of some participants obvious. This means, for example, that I have omitted several revealing data extracts where participants juxtapose several aspects of their identities. As this thesis developed, themes of intersectionality and inclusion became increasingly important, yet some of the most revealing data was unusable because, for example, as Table 1.1 (above) shows, to be a Black or Asian person on the UK bi scene renders one highly visible. Where accounts that referenced ethnicity also mentioned other features that were unusual among community members (such as being, for example, working class, or having a visible disability), I have made very selective use of extracts in order to safeguard participant anonymity.

However, even given these safeguards, it was also necessary to make participants aware of the limits of confidentiality, for example by telling them that it may be difficult to fully disguise their identity (BSA VSG, point 46). For example, I have had periodic discussions with one participant in particular about the ways in which their demographic characteristics make them highly identifiable. We have spoken at length about how to strike the balance between making their voice heard, and maintaining their anonymity. Another participant, however, was keen to have their real name used in the research. In that case, I declined their request on the grounds that this would make obvious the identities of other people (such as family members) mentioned in their data, even if these were anonymised.

As part of the feedback/validation process, participants were offered the opportunity to examine the ways they are represented in the research, and were encouraged to request additional measures to protect their anonymity, should they feel this to be

necessary. To date, no one has made such a request, with the exception of two interviews where adjustments to the data were made during the conversation. In one interview, a participant asked me to turn off the voice recorder so that they could tell me something 'off the record', in another, a participant was happy for their information to be recorded, but wanted the information excluded from the analysis.

During the process of transcription, a particular ethical issue arose when it became clear that, due to the nature of some of the transcripts of the research, and the unique community status/ biographies of some participants, one of the supervisors of this research, who is also a community member, would be unable to read the anonymised transcripts of the research without becoming aware of the identities of participants. This was negotiated by my contacting the participants in question and obtaining explicit permission for the transcripts to be shared with my supervisor.

### ***3.3 Research relationships and reflexivity***

My own membership of the small UK bisexual community is another factor that must be taken into account when considering the ethical implications of this project. I have often felt that I needed to walk a careful ethical tightrope between my responsibilities as an activist, as a researcher, and as someone with personal relationships and connections within the community.

I have been a regular attendee at bi community events since 2004, and this means that, by the time fieldwork was conducted in 2008, most of the people who volunteered to take part were people already known to me. In the seven years since the end of fieldwork, I have continued to meet participants at social and community events, and to interact with them on social media. This has necessitated a careful and reflexive approach to research relationships. For example, it has been necessary for me to be very clear with

myself about what information about someone I know from my personal interactions with them and their networks, and what I know about them from our photo-study interview. For example, I would occasionally hear gossip about someone I knew slightly, and had interviewed, and I would realise that I was privy to contextual information about their circumstances that my interlocutor was not. By contrast, sometimes I would learn something about someone post-hoc, that changed the way I thought about their interview transcript. Another situation that occasionally arose would be that I would run into someone I had not seen for some years, and be aware that, because I had spent so many hours listening to their recorded voice and puzzling over the meanings of their words, I would have a false sense of intimacy with that person, as well as a potentially-alarming verbatim recollection of a single conversation we had had some years ago. In each of these cases, the only solution I could see was to be aware and reflexive about these constantly-shifting dynamics, to behave as ethically as I could, and to keep a note of the ways in which my relationships with participants shifted and changed over time.

Another aspect of my research relationships to consider is the fact that, over the last decade, I have, to a small degree, helped to shape the UK bi community, as it has, to a larger degree, shaped me. I was a founder member of BiUK, the national organisation for bisexual research and activism, and a co-author of a piece of research that has been widely read both within and outside the bi community and has influenced public and voluntary sector policy on bisexuality (Barker et al, 2012). My work in the UK bi community has shaped my career, and has influenced the development of the community, too.

For example, during the course of this project I have taken part in many of the activist-researcher networks and conferences that take place around the UK bi community, such as BiReCon (which I co-organised in 2012, and where I gave a keynote

address at in 2014) and various activist and academic email lists. My political views on some of the topics that have provoked passionate online debates (such as, for example, the importance of securing venues with good physical access for wheelchair users, and improving the inclusivity of BiCon for parents and people of colour), are well known. For instance, at the time that I was conducting fieldwork, the issue of BiCon's lack of child-friendliness was a particularly live one, and I wondered how much the fact that I was known to be close to some of the people prominent in that debate influenced the ways in which participants spoke to me on these issues.

On the whole, I have, throughout this research, taken the position adopted by many ethnographers and other community-based researchers (see, for example, Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995; Hodgetts et al, 2011), that membership of - and/or a commitment to - the marginalised group under study is an asset rather than a problem, since one is able to comprehend the worldview both of the group and of the dominant culture. It is vital, nonetheless, to be aware of the potential tensions and conflicts that such a position may bring, and I will discuss these further in Chapter 6.

## ***Part 4: Developing a method of analysis***

As discussed in Part 1, above, I decided that a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to the analysis of my fieldwork data would allow me to attend empathically to the rich descriptiveness of my participants' accounts of their experiences, while also 'stepping back' to examine these accounts more critically. Below, I outline my analytical procedure.

### ***4.1 Transcription***

My fieldwork yielded approximately 24 hours of recorded material. I undertook about half of the transcription myself, using Audacity software, with the remainder being conducted by a professional transcriber. The analytic procedure outlined below does not require a particularly fine-grained level of transcription, since its initial focus is on the overall meaning of a text, rather than on the ways in which specific discursive techniques are deployed within it. For this reason, a simple verbatim transcription which indicated only the most significant pauses and hesitations, was adequate for my purposes.

#### ***4.2 Designing a hermeneutic phenomenological approach***

Using a hermeneutic<sup>12</sup> phenomenological approach involves, first of all, recognising that the researcher plays an important role in what Langdridge (2007, p.213) calls the ‘co-construction of meaning’, throughout the research process. Sometimes referred to as *epoché* or ‘bracketing’ (see Section 1.2, above), this means reflecting on one’s own positioning and beliefs vis a vis the phenomenon under study, as well as on research relationships with participants, and considering how these inform the ways in which the data is interpreted (Lydall et al., 2005).

Unlike the developers of some other forms of phenomenological analysis, hermeneutic phenomenologists have generally been reluctant to define clear methodological procedures, for fear of pre-structuring categories. Instead, they have stressed the importance of engaging creatively with analysis. However, some general principles are set out by Van Manen, and discussed further by Lydall et al (2005) and Langdridge (2007).

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<sup>12</sup> Sometimes called an interpretative phenomenological approach- not to be confused with Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA).

To summarise, the intention in this kind of analysis is to move iteratively in a *hermeneutic circle*, moving between segments of the transcript and the transcript as a whole; between hermeneutics of description and suspicion; and between the viewpoints of the researcher and the participant (with the latter being foregrounded, and the former being ‘bracketed off’ as far as possible, Langdridge, 2007; Van Manen, 1990).

In the initial stages of analysis, *horizontalisation* is attempted, that is the researcher focuses on the participant’s experience and worldview, and tries to avoid imposing their own categories and interpretations on the data (Lydall et al, 2005). When identifying features of a transcript, the analyst moves back and forth between a particular segment or theme and the whole transcript, trying to identify part-whole relationships, and to distinguish between those which are peripheral and essential (Lydall et al, 2005).

In later stages of analysis, the researcher attempts to ‘stand back’ from the data and apply a critical hermeneutic, such as attending explicitly to the themes of the lifeworld (temporality, spatiality, embodiment, etc.). In the analytic procedure that I have adapted and developed here, I have applied two hermeneutics at different stages of analysis. Initially, I have looked at the how the data relates to the themes of the lifeworld. In later stages, I have applied a Foucauldian understanding of power relations, drawn from my previous work on post-structuralist discourse analysis (Bowes-Catton, 2007), to examine the ways in which participants orient to, engage with, and/or resist, dominant discourses of bisexuality and other salient discourses.

Table 4.1, overleaf, contains a detailed overview of my analytic procedure.

**Table 4.1 Analytic procedure**

Principle of hermeneutic phenomenology	How I applied this in the analysis
<b>For each transcript (individual interviews and workshops):</b>	
<p><b>Epoché/bracketing, stage 1:</b> Recognise the role of the researcher in the co-construction of meaning (Langdridge 2003, 2007, p.123)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wrote/ added to account of my relationship with/involvement in the bi community before/during/since fieldwork (Lydall et al 2005, p.9-10)</li> <li>• Made notes about my relationship with/responses to the participant/s, before/ during the interview and since (Lydall et al 2005, p.2)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Horizontalisation, stage 1-</b> Focus on the participants' experience and worldview, avoid imposing my own categories</p> <p>Look at one whole interview for its global meaning rather than dividing into parts. (Lydall et al 2005, p.2)</p> <p>Using whole segments of interview in later analysis- one whole photo-description as analytic unit.</p> <p><b>Looking for part-whole relationships, stage 1</b> (Langdridge 2007) between the segments/ features and the whole transcript</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listened to tapes while checking transcription accuracy, making descriptive notes.</li> <li>• Imported transcriptions into MAXQDA. Went through each transcript assigning descriptive codes; identifying sections of the interview dealing with different topics (e.g. the building, the timetable), coding these up for cross-referencing, and pulling out themes.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Applying critical heuristics, stage 1</b></p> <p>i) Lifeworld themes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Went through the transcript again, identifying the features of the lifeworld. (Langdridge 2007, p.19) Added lifeworld themes to codes for each transcript in MAXQDA. Started to make analytic notes and note emerging themes.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Epoché/bracketing, stage 2.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Annotated transcript with notes/codes about my own involvement in the interview, and how I can see from the transcript that I helped to shape the meaning.</li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Did a reflexive piece of writing about my own role in each interview, and how my interpretations relate to my own experiences and biases.</li> </ul>
<b>Horizontalisation/part-whole relationships, stage 2.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Produced a table of themes, evidenced with quotes from interviews</li> <li>• Looked for connections between themes, identified sub-themes. Tried to 'distinguish between those themes that are essential, and those that are supplementary to the essence of the phenomenon' (Lydall et al 2005, p.2)</li> </ul>
<b>Applying critical heuristics, stage 2</b> ii) Power relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Considered the way in which power relationships operated within this transcript, e.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ How does the participant define 'us' and 'them'?</li> <li>○ How does the participant experience inclusion/exclusion?</li> <li>○ How are dominant discourses engaged with and/or resisted?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Looking at relationships between transcripts:</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I compared the lists of themes from each interview, identifying similarities and differences- allowing for individual idiosyncrasies but also acknowledge shared meaning-making.</li> <li>• After many iterations, I compiled a master list of themes, draw out those occurring most often and that are well-evidenced.</li> <li>• Writing and rewriting as an important feature of the analysis and should occur concurrently as they facilitate both the necessary reflection and the iterative process through which 'a coherent image of the whole can emerge'. Aim for thick description (Lydall et al 2005:2)</li> </ul>	

## ***Chapter Summary***

In this chapter, I have set out my reasoning for using creative and visual methods in this research, arguing that these approaches fit well with my hermeneutic phenomenological analytic approach, and the focus of my research question on getting to descriptions of

bisexual subjectivities as spatially experienced and produced. I have outlined the design of my two studies - one using photo-production, one using modelling workshops - and I have discussed the ethical implications of this research, in terms of the methods used, the community setting, and my own research relationships. Finally, I have described how I went about the process of transcription and analysis.

Chapters 3, 4, and 5 form the empirical component of this thesis, and in these chapters I outline the results of my fieldwork. I follow my participants' lead in taking a chronological approach to the data. Chapter 3 therefore discusses experiences of arriving at BiCon, Chapter 4 discusses experiences of the event itself, and Chapter 5 discusses leaving. In Chapter 6, I present my conclusions, and discuss their relationship to the empirical and theoretical literature on bisexuality discussed in Chapter 1, before moving on to evaluate my methodology and consider the implications and applications of this research.

# ***Chapter 3: Getting away to a 'magical place' - arriving at BiCon 2008***

## ***An introduction to the empirical chapters.***

This thesis sets out to answer the research question 'how are bisexual subjectivities experienced and produced in bisexual spaces, in relation to everyday life?', and chapters 3, 4, and 5 represent its empirical component. Here, I provide an overview of their relationship to one another, and to the rest of the thesis.

### ***The story so far***

As I outlined in Chapter 1, binary conceptualisations of gender and sexuality lead firstly to the cultural unintelligibility of bisexual subjectivity, and secondly to a lack of literal spaces in which these subjectivities can be performed or read.

Where they exist, bisexual spaces tend to be temporary and fleeting, taking place in borrowed venues. Like bisexuality itself, continuously called into being only to be erased again, these temporary places 'between sea and land' appear and then disappear again.

I argued that, in order to learn more about how bisexual subjectivities are experienced and produced in these temporary spaces, it was necessary to develop an analytic approach that moved beyond the linguistic focus of traditional discourse analysis, and attended empathically to participant accounts of the spatial, material, temporal and

embodied aspects of lived experience, while maintaining a critical focus on the ways in which these accounts were situated within, and productive of, complex networks of power relations. In Chapter 2, I suggested that a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to bisexual subjectivity would facilitate this dual focus via an examination of bisexual lifeworlds. I also argued that such an approach might be usefully combined with visual and creative approaches to social research methods, and outlined my fieldwork design.

### ***Study design***

To recap, two studies were conducted during and after BiCon 2008. As readers will recall, the aim of each of these studies was to elicit rich descriptions of embodied, spatialised, material and temporal experiences of bisexual subjectivity.

The first used photo-production interviews with 11 participants, who were asked to take photographs of key 'moments of experience' at BiCon, and for a week in their everyday lives. Participants were then interviewed between September and December 2008. At the start of the interview, they were asked to produce a sketch map of the BiCon space. This was used as an aide-memoire and prompt for discussion. We then reviewed and discussed the photographs they had taken of BiCon, and of their everyday lives.

Data production for the second study took place during the BiCon weekend itself. Three 75-minute workshops were held, during which a total of 30 participants were asked to make a model, (using Lego and/or Plasticine, and/or a range of other modelling and craft materials) which spoke to their current experience of the event.

As I designed my fieldwork, I envisaged that the photo-production and mapping study would enable a comparison of the ways in which my interview-partners experienced

bisexual subjectivity in the festive space of BiCon 2008, and in the spaces of their everyday lives. This data, I imagined, would have a more spatial and less embodied focus, and would likely be more narrative in its approach than the data emerging from the modelling study, which I thought would provide rich descriptive data of experiences of bisexual subjectivity almost as they were experienced. The modelling study would, I thought, therefore provide less information about space, but more about embodiment.

However, due to some unanticipated aspects of research design and execution which will be discussed at length in Chapter 6, my methods did not produce quite the types of data I had anticipated. Firstly, it became clear that the both the photo-production process and the interview itself had structured the production of data, such that participants' experiences of bisexual subjectivity in everyday life were generally constructed in relation to BiCon. Secondly, the data from the modelling study were less revealing than had been hoped, and played a lesser role in the development of the empirical chapters of this thesis than I initially envisaged. The analysis presented here therefore relies primarily on data from the photo-production study, and to a lesser extent on data from the modelling study (which comes in most in Chapter 4). Although analysis of the two studies was conducted separately, I have used examples from each study side-by-side in my chapters here, rather than presenting the results separately.

### ***The chapters***

The participant accounts of BiCon 2008 from the photo-production study, which form the bulk of the data analysed for this thesis, were strongly chronological in focus. Most participants had taken the bulk of their photos at the beginning and end of the event<sup>1</sup>,

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<sup>1</sup> Reasons for this will be discussed in Chapter 6.

and this resulted in accounts which had a clear narrative arc, framed in terms of arriving at and leaving BiCon. In presenting the data here, I have followed this same chronological arc.

Chapter 3, therefore, deals with participant accounts of travelling to BiCon 2008, arriving at the event and settling in. In this chapter, I argue that participants' descriptions of BiCon as 'a separate world' from the everyday, reached by a symbolic journey, support a theorisation of BiCon 2008 as a heterotopic place-event where the paradox of bisexual subjectivity can, for a short while, be resolved. However, I also note the utopianism of my interview-partners' descriptions of BiCon as an idealised bisexual 'home': a theme that will be developed later.

In Chapter 4, I focus on participants' accounts of their experiences of BiCon itself. In the first part of the chapter, I continue my discussion of the ways in which participants construct BiCon 2008 as a 'home' space in which they can be recognised and validated as bisexual subjects. Participants describe being able to bring 'all of themselves' to BiCon, contrasting these unified BiCon selves with the more fragmented versions of selves they project in their everyday lives. However, as the chapter develops, I begin to apply a critical lens to these utopian constructions of BiCon, asking who is excluded and included from these ideas of BiCon as an inclusive bisexual home.

In Chapter 5, I look at the relationship between BiCon and 'everyday life' from the point of view of participants who are leaving BiCon to return home. I begin by discussing one participant's description of BiCon as a 'playground', comparing this to the idea of BiCon as 'home' which I explored in Chapter 4. Returning to the archetype of the Trickster from Chapter 1, I discuss how some participants describe BiCon as a place-event akin to a Bakhtinian carnival, an opportunity to 'let off steam' in order to withstand the paradoxes

of bisexual subjectivity for another year. For other participants, I argue, BiCon is more akin to the anarchist concept of the Temporary Autonomous Zone, a space where resources for personal and social transformation can be gathered.

## ***Setting the scene: About BiCon 2008***

Before turning to my data, an outline of the topography and temporality of BiCon 2008 seems in order, as well as a brief summary of the typical demographic composition of this and similar events.

### ***Venue***

BiCon 2008 took place in the conferencing facilities of the Oadby campus of the University of Leicester in the Midlands of England on 28<sup>th</sup>-31<sup>st</sup> August 2008. 250 people attended, of whom around 50 were day guests and 200 had tickets for the whole weekend, which included on-site accommodation<sup>2</sup>. As Figure 3.1 (overleaf) shows, the student village featured a central bar/conferencing space ('Gilbert Murray Conference Suite'), which acted as the event hub. Most weekend attendees were accommodated in the two halls of residence closest to the conferencing venue: Gilbert Murray (adjacent to the conference suite, and linked by a walkway), and Bowder Court (behind the main building, and across a car park). There was also accommodation at The Coppice, across Manor Road, which was reserved for attendees with additional needs such as level access or quiet accommodation. Another conference was also taking place on the Oadby site that weekend: this was the Terry Wogan Fan Club, whose events and attendees were accommodated on another part of the site<sup>3</sup>.

As can be seen from the map, the physical geography of the Oadby student village, framed by three main roads, created a clearly demarcated space. Within this space, BiCon

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<sup>2</sup> BiCon 2008 team- personal communication.

<sup>3</sup> BiCon 2008 team- personal communication.



2008 took place within another clearly defined area, with the conference venue as a central hub surrounded by three accommodation satellites (Figure 3.2).

Zooming further out (Figures 3.3, 3.4 and 3.5), the campus can be seen within its own immediate context, an affluent residential area to the east of the city centre. To the north is a golf course, to the east, a recreation ground, to the south, an Asda superstore, and to the west, the University Botanic Gardens.

Figure 3.1 Oadby student village in 2008

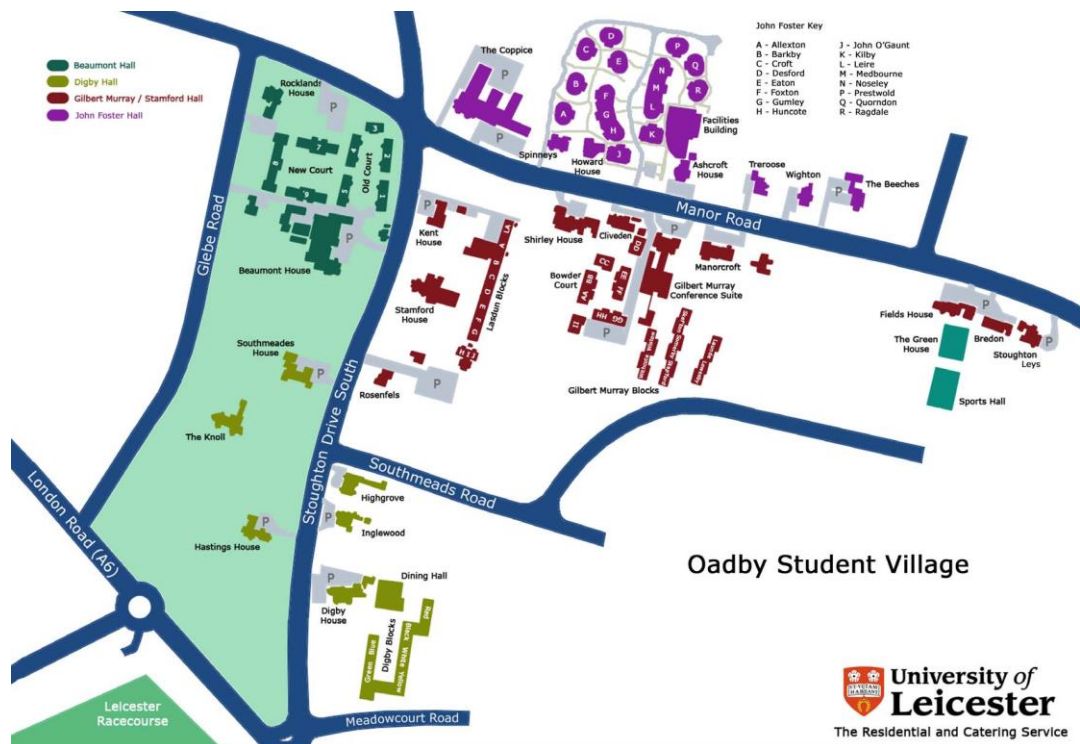
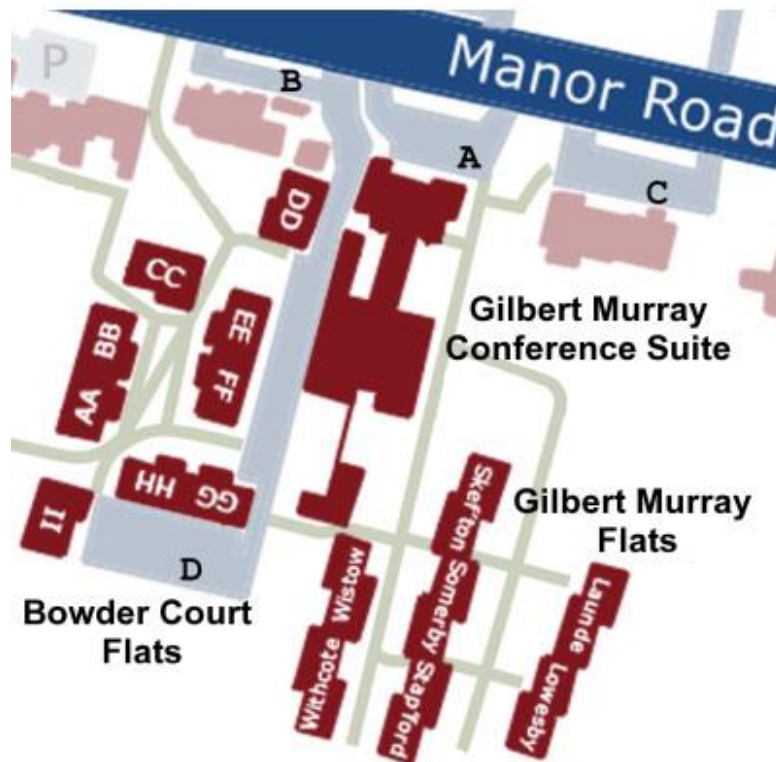
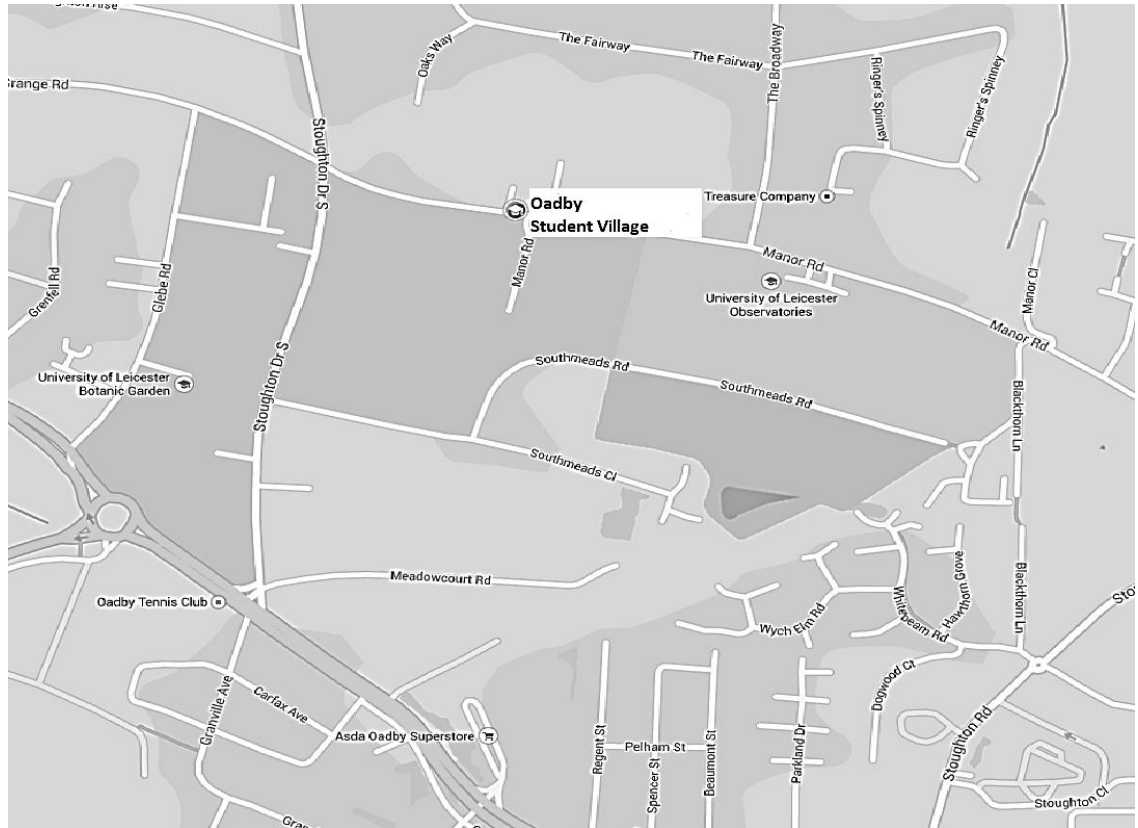


Figure 3.2 The BiCon 2008 venue and accommodation



**Figure 3.4 Oadby**



**Figure 3.5 East Leicester**



## ***Timetable***

BiCon 2008 ran from Thursday 28 to Monday 31 August. BiCon typically has a clear temporal 'arc', with full-weekend participants arriving during Thursday and Friday and leaving on Sunday and Monday. While some weekend attendees arrived after the close of the working week on Friday evening, many were present for a day conference on bisexual research and activism (BiReCon 2008) which took place on Thursday, or arrived that evening in anticipation of the official opening plenary on Friday morning. This plenary marked the start of the BiCon session timetable (Appendix 1.3), which ran between Friday lunchtime and Sunday afternoon. As the timetable shows, several streams of optional workshops and other sessions took place during the daytime, on topics ranging from SM<sup>4</sup> for beginners to a teddy bears' picnic. There was also some opportunity to organise impromptu sessions, meet-ups and lunches around particular interests. After the day's formal sessions were over, many participants withdrew to the accommodation to eat and to change clothes for the evening. Evening activities, which began at around 8pm, were focused on the bar and disco area, and were often followed by informal private parties in the halls of residence, often lasting well into the early hours of the next day.

Each night's entertainment had a particular focus. While the main entertainment hub was in the bar and dance-floor area, there were also opportunities to gather in other, quieter, spaces such as the closed canteen, where some attendees played board games. For many participants, the focal point of the BiCon timetable was the themed Ball on Saturday night. BiCon balls are often themed, with the theme being announced several

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<sup>4</sup> Sado-masochism, more commonly abbreviated to BDSM (bondage, domination, and sado-masochism)

months in advance of the event, and it is common to see attendees discussing costume ideas on social media in the weeks and months leading up to the Ball. In 2008 the ball theme was a circus theme: ‘the Circus of the Bizarre’.

Having outlined the backdrop against which this study takes place, I now turn to my participants’ accounts of arrival at BiCon. In this first section of the chapter, I show how participants in my two studies discursively constructed BiCon as a heterotopic space, an ‘elsewhere’, clearly set apart from everyday life in both temporal and spatial terms.<sup>5</sup>

As we shall see, ‘arriving’ at BiCon entailed, for most participants, a symbolic journey away from the constraints of ‘the everyday’ and towards a ‘magical’ space of both recognition and possibility.

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<sup>5</sup> The set-up of Study 1, which asked participants to take photographs of their experience of BiCon 2008 and then of a week in their ‘everyday lives’, clearly structured the data in a way that supports my argument for BiCon as a space that is distinct from everyday life. This is a limitation of the study which will be discussed further in Chapter 6. Nevertheless, participants in Study 2, who were asked to consider their experiences ‘in the moment’ of a BiCon workshop, also clearly positioned BiCon as a space outside of, yet related to, everyday life.

# Chapter 3:

## *Part 1: Transported: BiCon as 'elsewhere'*

### *1.1 'A special point in the year'*

For most participants in Study 1, the BiCon weekend was a highly significant annual event, which they positioned as clearly distinct from their everyday lives. In this excerpt, for example, Kathryn talks about her experience of attending a meeting of her local bi group, and compares this to BiCon:

#### **Extract 3.1**

Kathryn : This is a bit more tentative than BiCon, it's very much a gathering in the outside world rather than having our own space, erm, it's not like it's a huge amount of bi space in my life but I know it's huge compared with what a lot of people have. It is a bit like BiCon. It's more everyday, it's more, you know, BiCon's a holiday, it's a festival, it's really hard work sometimes it's not, it's a special point in the year, and this is just a bit of everyday life that happens to have coalesced around being bi.

Kathryn's<sup>6</sup> account contrasts BiCon and the bi group meeting in both spatial and temporal terms. The bi group meeting is described as taking place 'in the outside world', as 'a bit of everyday life', while BiCon is 'a holiday, [...] a festival [...] a special point in the year'.

Similarly, for Clare, BiCon is clearly positioned as outside the everyday.

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6 Other participants' descriptions of the difference between BiCon and everyday life make contrasts in intersubjective and embodied terms, and these will be explored in Chapter 4.

### Extract 3.2

Helen: What does BiCon mean to you?

Clare: Rare and infrequent holiday! Erm, it's, in both cases it's been something that I did by myself. A lot of my other holidays or trips to places have been done with other people, with partners or family [...] it's somewhere I'm comfortable going on my own [...] It's an opportunity to party.

These participants position BiCon as in dialectic relationship with everyday life in a way that recalls Bakhtin's carnival or Lefébvre's *la fête*. The carnivalesque 'holiday' of BiCon stands in contrast to the constraints of the 'civilised' everyday (Bakhtin, 1984; Danow, 2004; Lefébvre, 2008)<sup>7</sup>. This contrast is underlined by the ways in which, despite my efforts to structure interviews in such a way as to frustrate participants' impulse to narrativise their experiences<sup>8</sup>, most participants' accounts follow a conventional linear narrative arc, in which the central drama is framed by accounts of the experience of travelling to, arriving at and leaving the BiCon space.

Narratives of transportation to a place outside 'the world' are a common framing in social scientific accounts of the experience of spectacular subcultural spaces, and are seen, for example, in work by Rooke (2007, 2009) and Hodkinson (2002). Movement through liminal spaces such as trains and stations is central to these narratives of arrival and departure in ways that are reminiscent of Saturnalian literary forms such as

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<sup>7</sup> See Chapter 5 for further discussion of BiCon as carnival.

<sup>8</sup> These attempts to steer participants away from narrative were far from perfectly designed, as will be discussed in Chapter 6.

Shakespeare's festive comedies, in which characters move between poles of restraint and release (Barber, 1959/2011). Travel and arrival narratives are key to these literary forms, and characters often undertake symbolic journeys through liminal spaces such as forests, in order to reach a place where the rules and conventions of everyday life are suspended. McLelland (2011), for example, points out the occurrence of such symbolic journeys in the Shakespeare plays *As You Like It*, *The Tempest*, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and these are compared to participant accounts of BiCon in an early paper from the present research (Bowes-Catton, 2010).

Below, I show how applying a queer phenomenological perspective to these framings reveals the ways in which these participants describe their journeys to BiCon in terms of a process of disconnection from the everyday, disorientation en route, or on arrival, and eventual re-orientation to the heterotopic space of BiCon.

## ***1.2 Orientation and the bisexual body-subject***

Ahmed's (2006) phenomenological exploration of the constitution of queer subjectivities in space begins with an exploration of queer life experience through the concepts of orientation and intentionality. In phenomenology, Ahmed notes, the consciousness of an embodied subject is theorised as always *intentional* - that is, directed 'towards' an object (2006, p.2). These intentional relationships with objects and spaces result, Ahmed argues, in orientation. For example, when we move house we are at first disoriented in a new and unfamiliar space. As we unpack and begin to settle into the daily rhythms of life, we become oriented - we are able to find our way to the toilet in the dark, for example - and we become less aware of the distinction between our bodies and the space they inhabit. For example, as I stand writing this thesis in the familiar space of my



home, my consciousness is most obviously directed towards the screen and keyboard. But I'm also positioned in relationship to other objects in the room, and other rooms in the house. The books I'm referring to are within arm's reach, while my tired body feels the pull of the bed behind me. I glance at my coffee cup and I'm instantly reminded of the location of the kettle a floor below, and my disinclination to trek through the house to it. My 'at-home-ness' in this space, Ahmed argues, is a result of [my] having 'become part of a space where [I have] expanded my body, saturating the space with bodily matter: home as overflowing and flowing over.' (2006, p.11)

So, for Ahmed, bodies can be understood as extending into the space around them by their orientation towards the objects that surround them. Before such bodily extensions occur, however, or when they fail to take place, we experience *disorientation*: we encounter the world differently, and have to attempt to resituate ourselves in relation to it. Bodies, spaces and objects are mutually constitutive: particular objects are 'within reach' or 'out of reach' for different bodies in different spaces.

To take a very literal example, the objects in my room are adjusted to 'fit' me - the desk adjusted to my standing height, the bed base lifted to allow for storage. Phenomenologically, we can say that my room is a space into which my body has extended itself, so that I move through the space with ease, sitting on the bed or tapping on the desk without being conscious of the effort of doing so. It is as if the objects I reach for rise to meet me - they extend the actions of my body. My small daughter, however, for whom this space was not intended, moves through it with far less ease than I do, and her orientation towards its objects differs from mine - the bed may be ascended, with some effort, via its metal frame, but the desk with its intriguing clutter remains a tantalising and unreachable prospect. In contrast, the under-bed storage, which to me is

irritating and difficult to reach, is to my daughter a rich, accessible trove of treasure-boxes. Each of us, then, has become oriented differently within the space, the objects within it extending, or disturbing, our bodily action in different ways (Ahmed 2006:162).

In moments of disorientation, we experience ourselves as body-objects rather than body-subjects. Reaching under the bed for a dropped sock, I'm momentarily out of alignment with my space. I can't reach my arm far enough under the bed to get the sock, but I'm too big to crawl beneath it. The metal bedframe pushes uncomfortably against my flesh, and I feel ungainly, fat, hemmed in, acutely aware of the boundary between my body and the bedframe. In this moment of frustration, my body becomes apparent to me as an object - an object that doesn't fit, in this space, in this way. I'm aware of the short-yet-impassable distance between the edge of the sock and my reaching fingers. The sock itself, usually barely-noticed as it comes easily into reach, takes on a new existence as the object of my frustration and discomfort. *That bloody sock!* It's a relief to give up on the sock and stand up - the room is mine again, and my habitual unconsciousness of the boundary between my body and my possessions returns as I reach easily for the keyboard, or sit comfortably on my bed. I move smoothly through the space once again, a body-subject rather than a body-object (Merleau-Ponty 1962). Maybe I'll ask my daughter to get the sock later.

These moments are revealing, in that they make us aware of the ways in which some spaces 'fit' us, extending our bodily capabilities, and some do not. The lack of 'fit' between bisexual subjects and the spaces of everyday life will be a recurring theme of this thesis. We will see, time and time again, how participants describe experiencing the 'everyday world' as constrictive, abrading, difficult to navigate. The 'excessive' bisexual body-object, always out of place, always out of time, continually chafes against the world.

In contrast, most participant accounts of BiCon are related from the viewpoint of a bisexual body-subject, for once in the right place at the right time, for once moving smoothly through a space in which they fit.

In this first part of the chapter, I examine the ways in which two participants' accounts of their journeys to BiCon 2008 exemplify this shift from body-object to body-subject, via a process of dis-orientation and reorientation, and a move from bodily constriction to bodily expansion.

### ***1.3 Dis/orientation and expansion: two journeys to BiCon.***

#### **Extract 3.3: Eddie on the train**<sup>9</sup>

Eddie: Cool. Right. That [photo] was [taken] on the train [...] And I took that picture because, erm, I was starting to feel excited and BiCon-y. And I'd just tripped over a bloke on the way to the buffet and he said 'Sorry mate' and there was this pause and he did that double-take thing, and I thought [delighted tone] 'you've got my gender wrong!' and then he went 'oh sorry' and I was like 'yep!'

And, and that was just a really nice entrée for the weekend. So I was feeling a bit bubbly and a bit, and a bit um, disconnected 'cos it, I like train, just those, little, liminal space things. And also cos you can't stand up straight in them and so I was sort of falling over in the corridors.

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<sup>9</sup> In the interests of protecting the anonymity of my participants, I have not included the photograph described here because it is a self-portrait- an approach I have taken throughout this thesis. I have not included photographs in which participants or other individuals are identifiable, unless they are in public spaces.

And, um, and the woman at the buffet was very nice and sort of friendly. And I was thinking 'yes, I will be in BiCon in a bit and I can- not assume- but there will not be this sort of like 'is this person flirting with me', I'll be thinking like 'yes, they, they may well be flirting with me', I don't have to make any assumption about them, being mistaken, and therefore they're probably not flirting with me.

Um, so yeah, it felt like, it was kind of an exciting space and I was on the way somewhere cool. And [my friend] was working on her presentation for the academic thing too, so it felt like we had kind of colonised that bit of train and turned it into a kind of little Hogwarts Express going to Leicester.

In the extract above, Eddie describes their<sup>10</sup> experience of the train as one where they are both knocked off balance, and re-orient themselves to the new possibilities ahead. They describe experiencing the train as an 'exciting', 'liminal' space where they feel 'a bit bubbly and a bit[...]disconnected'. This disconnection/disorientation has two aspects- first, the sense of being physically off-balance due to the motion of the train ('...I was sort of falling over in the corridors'), and secondly, the ways in which their interactions with fellow passengers act as prompts for disconnection from the everyday and re-orientation towards the imagined space of BiCon.

First, being mis-gendered by the man they bump into serves as 'a really nice entrée' for a weekend in a space where a variety of expressions of gender are explicitly welcome (BiCon Code of Conduct 2008, see Appendix 1.1). In mis-gendering Eddie, the man on the train unknowingly validates their genderqueer subjectivity- a validation whose continuance at BiCon Eddie happily anticipates. Secondly, the friendliness of the buffet

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10 This participant's gender pronoun is 'they'.

car staff member prompts Eddie to consciously set aside their usual working assumptions about the non-flirtatious nature of friendly interactions, and to remind themselves that in BiCon space, someone who's being friendly 'may well be flirting with me'.

Travelling with a friend who's working on a presentation for an academic workshop, Eddie feels that they have jointly 'colonised that bit of the train and turned it into a kind of little Hogwarts Express'. Eddie's use of the term 'Hogwarts Express' here is telling. In the Harry Potter universe, the Hogwarts Express is the train which carries pupils of Hogwarts School from the mundane reality of King's Cross station to the secret, magical world of witchcraft and wizardry, which is at once distant from, and adjacent to, the everyday world. Once aboard the train, passengers shed their everyday clothes and don robes, emerging at the end of their journey into the magical space of 'the wizarding world' (Rowling, 1997). For pupils at Hogwarts, as for Eddie and their friend, the train acts as a space for disconnection from the everyday world and re-orientation towards another world, full of queer possibilities.

This sense of a transformative journey to a magical space is also present in Singular's description of her train journey to BiCon. When asked to draw a sketch map of BiCon, she includes the train in her drawing, and describes it as one of the places in which she felt most relaxed. Like Eddie, Singular describes the train as a route to a 'magical place' - 'a somewhat separate world':

#### **Extract 3.4: Singular on the train**

Singular: I like this photo...erm, cos I like the, the speeding train going by- I don't know how I managed to take a picture of myself like that, and it's a bit dark but I really like the movement, sort of erm. I wrote at the time but I didn't finish one, but I

just got [*reads from notes*] ‘trains bring me’, oh- ‘they speed me to long-distance kisses’ just the whole thing of going to this magical place. [...] ‘Romance and luxury, I can speed through the country untouched by my everyday life’, erm this reminded me ‘BiCon a somewhat separate world’- oh yeah, sometimes it can feel a bit sort of separate and I’m somewhat untouched by everything else around and I’m sort of speeding through it all in my nice sort of air-conditioned carriage.

Singular’s description of the train/BiCon as a space where she remains present in the world, yet ‘untouched’ by it thanks to her ‘air-conditioned carriage’, echoes phenomenological accounts of bodily ease in the world as marked by a lack of abrasion between self and world (Ahmed 2006). This theme is also present in her account of waiting for the train to Leicester earlier that day [Extract 3.5/ Photo 3.3]:

#### **Extract 3.5: Singular at the station**

Singular: Yeah, well the first two, oh the first three are erm [a central London] station. Erm, erm, yeah, I’m a bit nervous about missing the train, but also, erm, I really liked the plaque ‘beyond the throb of the engines is the throbbing heart of all’. This is the same train station that I go to erm, (*gestures*) erm, my partner’s, one, and then, yeah so it gives always a lovely sort of feeling of, this is my station where I get away to bi loveliness

H: aww

S: and yeah, I just thought, that just was part of BiCon, being there. And also just the space, and the nice airiness, the freedom, it kind of just reinforced being free, being able to be self-determined. So yeah, that's why I took these three.

H: So freeness and o- Can you put yourself back in the moment of being in the station and tell me about how it actually felt?

S: Oh, exciting.

H: Exciting?

S: Yeah, really exciting, and like this was a real holiday, it didn't feel at all like it was going to be three days, it was like, yeah, just fantastic, feeling excited and really longing to, to get there.

H: Yeah. And -that kind of openness, is that about the station, or about...?

S: Well I'm usually reasonably open, I'm, I said before I'm out at work, which is great, and I try not to sort of like squash bits of meself nowadays, though I know I did very much in the past, but erm I just think I could just re-emphasise, I could just sort of breathe out and there was just all this space and I didn't have to squash meself in or double life there or and it just felt freeing and liberating.



**Photo 3. 1**

In this extract, Singular locates herself in relation to three points of reference: the station itself, her everyday life, and the 'bi loveliness' to which the station serves as a departure point for visits to her female partner, and on this occasion, for a trip to BiCon. Singular locates this 'bi loveliness' as something to 'get away to', placing it firmly outside the confines of her everyday life. Clearly, the spaces of everyday life 'touch' Singular- rather than 'speeding through...untouched in my nice sort of air-conditioned carriage', her 'everyday life' is a space where she has to make an effort not to 'squash bits of meself'. In contrast, the station, as her departure point to 'bi loveliness', is somewhere that she feels able to 'just sort of breathe out'- to expand bodily into the ample space, to move from 'squashed in' body-object to 'liberated' body-subject, at ease in the world (Ahmed 2006).



## ***1.4 Re-orientation- from the outside to the inside***

Most participant accounts contained either an account of a symbolic journey to BiCon, or a similar description of their experience of arriving at the event itself. In these accounts, ‘the world’ and its demands are left behind, and the participant achieves ‘present-ness’ as a bisexual body-subject via a set of overlapping spatialized, embodied, and intersubjective practices. Specifically, participants describe gaining entry to the event and settling into their rooms, changing clothes and ‘shifting headspace’ to produce a ‘BiCon self’, and making connections with others.

### ***1.4.1 Gaining entry, making connections***

Participants often described experiencing BiCon as a ‘bubble’, which, once entered, became portable and protective, shielding them from ‘the world’ and allowing them to be recognised and validated as bisexual subjects. I will discuss the implications of this spatial metaphor further in Part 2 of this chapter, but in this section I want to draw attention to some of the ways in which participants described experiencing this ‘bubble’ from the outside, and the strategies they employed in order to pass through its invisible walls.

The BiCon reception desk<sup>11</sup> is the official entry point to the place-event of the convention, and unsurprisingly features heavily in the arrival accounts of many participants, for whom it is a key site of orientation<sup>12</sup>. On the most practical level, the 2008 reception desk was where participants received the information and resources required to orient themselves temporally and spatially: their room keys, ID badge, venue

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<sup>11</sup> For a diagram of the venue, see Appendix 1, page 13.

<sup>12</sup> Reception would continue to be a key site of orientation for participants during the weekend, and will be discussed further in Part 2 of the present chapter.

map, and a copy of the schedule for the weekend. The reception desk also served as a point of behavioural and cultural orientation, being the place where participants were required to read and sign the event's Code of Conduct (see Appendix 1.1), and where the event's 'Community Info Zones' were located. These were a series of posters giving details of the various identities and subcultures that participants were likely to encounter in the space, and how to engage with them. For many participants, the reception area was also an anticipated site for making connections with other attendees. Describing her sketch map of the venue (see Appendix 3), Clare said:

### **Extract 3.6**

Clare: Ok, well I started out with [drawing] the foyer at the bottom, which made sense because it's where I came in, erm, and my impression erm, is all connected, the reason that was important it's connected to the beginning of BiCon, arriving, trying to work out what was going on, 'cos it was only my second time at BiCon [...] Erm, the previous time I remember arriving very late but meeting a large bunch of people I already knew in the foyer, so that was really easy. But this time it was just a big pile of people all bouncing about and I didn't see anybody I knew right away. Erm, so it was, I mean, there was lots of information there and smiley people, so that was good. But, erm, so it was welcoming but it was really quite confusing as well, erm, it was very busy. Erm, at the time I arrived there was, there was still issues about what was happening with room keys, so the people who would otherwise have been chilled out and giving information were a bit harried and trying to deal with crises.

The reception area, then, is a place where Clare is engaged in 'arriving, trying to work out what was going on'. However, Clare's attempts to orient herself are frustrated. In the past, 'meeting a large bunch of people I already knew in the foyer' made her entry to the event 'really easy'. This time, however, faced with and a lack of familiar faces and 'harried' desk volunteers, Clare experiences reception as a confusing mass of people which she's on the outside of 'just a big pile of people all bouncing about'. Clare has anticipated feeling 'inside' BiCon in this space. Instead, she experiences herself as held at a distance - outside the wall of the 'bubble' - by the lack of opportunity to connect with others.

Arriving at the event from a job interview, Briar Rose has a clear 'entry strategy' for BiCon, which is specifically focused on leaving her everyday life behind. Her plan is to check in at the reception desk, meet up with her partner and metamour<sup>13</sup>, get changed and then attend a particular workshop in order to start meeting other attendees. Her arrival strategy is frustrated, however, at every turn.

First, a welcome but unexpected phone-call offering her the job she has just been interviewed for prevents her from attending the workshop:

### **Extract 3.7**

Briar-Rose: I was actually quite disoriented, because I- having, I'd set myself out that I would go to the interview and I would come back and I would do this workshop- this one- and I would then be at BiCon. I would then shift headspace, and I would be there. And then I, then the outside world intruded, but it was really good. And it was

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<sup>13</sup> A term in common use among polyamorous and other openly non-monogamous people to denote the relationship between people who share a common partner. For example, someone might say 'I usually get on well with my metamours'.

such an emotional thing as well, being, getting the job offer, that I couldn't shift back into 'now I'm here'. [...] And I really wasn't all there, the whole day.

[...] Yeah. I- the other thing on Friday is, because I'd not been in the workshops, I didn't feel like I was really engaging with people. So I had some conversations with people I'd met the previous year, which was great. But I felt very much there was this horde of people, and none of whom I was really able to just wander up to and talk to. [...] And that, it was a very much, there's just all these people here, and they are a crowd, they are not people. Which I put down a lot to having not been in the workshops, cos you start actually talking to people and relating to them as individuals.

The intrusion of the phone-call, the emotional impact of the job offer, and the necessity of missing the workshop have the combined effect of making it difficult for Briar-Rose to make the psychological shift into the BiCon 'bubble'. As a result, she struggles to feel temporally or spatially present ('I couldn't shift back into 'now I'm here').

Like Clare, Briar-Rose also describes individual intersubjective connections as key to her sense of present-ness at BiCon. Having not had the chance to attend workshops and connect with individuals, she feels unable to 'just wander up and talk to' anyone in the 'horde' of people there. Briar-Rose goes on to describe this experience using a picture taken at a music festival (Photo 3.2):



**Photo 3. 2**

**Extract 3.8**

Briar-Rose: But this, this is very much a photograph that's been taken from the outside looking in [...]

Helen: Hmm. So when you talk about outside looking in, that's how you were, that links to BiCon?

B-R: Erm, it linked to how I was on the Friday afternoon- total disorientation, and very much, almost seeing the world as a picture, not being engaged with it. I kept

trying to shift my headspace, and it would work while I was briefly engaged in conversation, and then I would just snap straight out of it and become outside looking in again [...] And I found almost all of BiCon quite disorienting for that reason, that I never (pause) I never felt like I was there for the entire thing. There were points when I felt wholly there, but there were a lot of points when I realised I wasn't again.

So far, I have focused my analysis on participants' descriptions of journeying to, and entering, the physical location of BiCon 2008. I hope I have shown how attending to moments of disorientation and practices of reorientation can be helpful both in demonstrating that participants experience BiCon as a heterotopic space - outside of, but close to, everyday life (Hetherington 1997) - and in foregrounding some of the spatialized and intersubjective practices by which 'present-ness' at BiCon is achieved (Ahmed 2006, p.50).

Below, I explicate another set of arrival practices which helped participants to feel as if they had 'arrived' in the space: the unpacking and arranging of personal possessions.

### ***1.4.2 Settling in: bedrooms***

As I described above, becoming present as a body-subject in a given space entails placing particular objects 'within reach', such that they extend bodily action in particular ways. An oriented subject moves smoothly through a space they 'fit' in, such that their embodied-ness recedes from their perception.

Kathryn, as we shall see below, experienced her arrival at BiCon as complex and protracted, but took a photograph of her messy room to indicate that she had finally achieved present-ness, describing it as 'a dead box of space [...] that I filled up with me'. For Eddie, meanwhile, producing 'an organised nice space' was central to their arrival

strategy, and they attribute this failure to 'organise anything' to their 'overall sense of dislocation':

### **Extract 3.9**

'That [Photo 3.2] was meant to be [a photo of] my room, but it's mainly just the desk. And that was my inability to create a- an organised nice space. Whenever I go to BiCon, or any conference or anything, I always think like 'no, I'm gonna', you know, 'I'm gonna sort everything out, it'll be lovely'. And I go into the room and it's always like, ni-nice little student room, and it feels, it feels pleasant and as though I can have a nice little weekend there. And then within about two hours it's just totally covered in random crap. And, um, chocolate wrappers, and I never put all the stuff- I put the stuff in drawers to start with and I get confused about which drawer's got my clean socks in it and which drawer hasn't got my clean socks and um. [...] I always think this contributes to my overall sense of dislocation at BiCon because I can't organise anything, erm.'

### **Photo 3. 3**



Drawing on Ahmed's (2006) work on orientation, I have argued that becoming present at BiCon 2008 was mediated for these participants not only by physically arriving at the venue and passing through the gatekeepers at reception, but also by making connections with others, and by arranging their possessions. Taken together, what participants are describing here are their spatialized attempts to place a range of things (objects, but also other people) 'within reach'. By doing this, they strive to achieve a sense of 'present-ness' at BiCon as bisexual body-subjects, to resolve the flickering paradox of bisexual subjectivity and to succeed in appearing - we might say materialising - in the present tense, as bisexual subjects.

Thus far, my argument that BiCon constitutes a heterotopic space has been largely based on participant accounts of BiCon as located 'outside the world'. However, as Hetherington (1997), following Foucault (1986), argues, heterotopic spaces are more than just 'elsewhere': they are spaces in which utopian desires for a differently-ordered world can be explored and expressed. In the next section of the chapter, I develop this argument further with reference to non-Euclidean understandings of spaces as place-events.



## ***Part Two: Understanding BiCon as a place-event.***

In Chapter One, I described how critical geographers such as Massey, Ingold and Cresswell have argued that spaces are constituted through practice. Rather than existing as bounded localities, independent of human activity, places are ‘intensities of everyday social relationships, materialities, sensory experiences, practices, representations, discourses and more’ (Pink 2012, p.38). These ‘spatio-temporal events’ (Massey 2005, p.130), or ‘place-events’ (Pink 2012, p.38), are produced, then, through the movement of people and objects, and provide ‘templates’ for practices (Pink 2012, p.25), giving rise in turn to subjectivities (Pink 2012, p.64).

In Part One of this chapter, I have drawn on participant accounts of the process of arrival at BiCon 2008 - journeying to the site of the event, passing through the gate, settling into rooms, and connecting with others - to argue that these can be seen as disorientation/reorientation narratives, which provide support for a theorisation of BiCon as a heterotopic space. As discussed in Part One, participants’ experiences of being ‘at BiCon’ did not necessarily take place within the physical boundaries of the 2008 event. Singular (Extract 3.3) felt that ‘BiCon space’ began at a train station in London, while Eddie (Extract 3.4) described how they and a friend had ‘colonised that bit of train and turned it into a kind of little Hogwarts Express going to Leicester’. Conversely, Briar Rose, Clare and Eddie (Extracts 3.6-3.9) also experienced moments of dislocation, of feeling as if they hadn’t quite ‘arrived’ at BiCon, despite being physically present on site.

In this section of the chapter, I develop my analysis further, first by applying the idea of the ‘place-event’ (Pink 2012, p.38) to the understanding of BiCon 2008.

## 2.1 '*BiCon happening*'

One of the most striking features of Kathryn's account of BiCon 2008 is the distinction she makes between places and moments where BiCon is 'happening' or 'not happening'. During our interview, struck by this, I encouraged Kathryn to point out instances of 'BiCon happening'. Kathryn's description of these moments inspired me to look at other participants' descriptions of moments that were in some way 'particularly BiCon', and I discuss some of these here.

As will be seen below, these moments occurred both within the bounds of the official BiCon site, and outside it. One characteristic of these 'BiCon moments' was that they were *shared experiences* taking place in groups, and in communal areas of the BiCon site such as the grassy area, bar, or dance floor, or in public spaces in the vicinity of the campus such as the local supermarket or the university botanical gardens. Another characteristic of some of these shared moments was that, whether they took place on or off-campus, '*BiCon-ness*' was often most clearly felt when it was juxtaposed with '*the outside world*'. However, unlike the accounts in Part One of the outside world intruding upon individuals' attempts to enter the BiCon space, these accounts are characterised by participants clearly positioning themselves as

- *within* BiCon space,
- *sharing* an experience with others, and, sometimes
- *experiencing* a shared encounter with '*the outside world*' that serves to reinforce the heterotopic nature of the BiCon space.

For example, here is an excerpt from Kathryn's description of an unexpected fire alarm on Friday night:

### **Extract 3.10**

Kathryn: This is when the fire alarm went off [...] so [my friends] brought their food outside and we were on the grass, [...] I was kind of hanging out when they were eating and I've got my knitting there [...] so this is hanging out during a fire alarm. [...]

H: Yes, is that a picture of BiCon happening?

K: Yes, BiCon happening is eating in a group, outside, during the fire alarm is very much BiCon happening. But it's quite, you get that kind of spirit of: yeah we're going to make BiCon happen even though the fire alarm's going off and everyone's fed up, it hasn't stopped but it's getting a bit chilly now and... [...] Because you sort of pull together, there were a lot of fire alarms in Worcester I remember? We got there and everyone was in was in the car park, and [friend] was only wearing a towel because she had been in the shower. [...] [We were] trying to find clothes and blankets and things to wrap her up in because she was freezing. [...] there's something about the kind of "us against the world"-ness that the adversity adds to BiCon, although it would be really nice to have BiCon without the adversity.

In this extract, Kathryn describes this, (and a fire alarm at a previous BiCon) as uniting the attendees in a shared experience of adversity ('us against the world-ness') where they 'pull together' to 'make BiCon happen'.

A striking feature of this account of 'BiCon happening' is the sense of a shared orientation towards 'the world', which is defined against the 'us' of BiCon attendees. 'The world', embodied in the mundanities of fire regulations, makes itself felt inside the BiCon space, but for Kathryn, there is 'something about the kind of 'us against the world'-ness that the adversity adds to BiCon'. It is as 'the world' threatens to disrupt BiCon that the 'happening-ness' of BiCon is most keenly felt.

Another site of 'the world's' intrusion into the event was BiCon's reception desk. This area, which had been a key site of re-orientation for participants as they arrived at the event, continued to be a focal point for participants once they had gained entry. Reception was the central information hub of the event, where updates and notices were posted, and where attendees could contact the organising team, or seek first aid or counselling. Safer sex supplies and information about the local area, such as the location of takeaways and other amenities, could also be found here. Reception, then, was clearly a place where BiCon was 'happening', such that participants could, as Kathryn put it, drop by in passing to 'see what the BiCon is':

### **Extract 3.11**

Kathryn: I don't do desk<sup>14</sup> but I hang out and I try and be useful and sometimes I'm just hanging out, and kind of go there, see what the BiCon is, what's happening.

**As well as serving as an information hub during the event, the reception area continued to serve, of course, as an interface between the event and the outside world.**

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<sup>14</sup> To 'do desk' is to take a turn as a volunteer on the reception desk, answering queries and acting as a contact point for the organising team, counselling and first aid teams.

### Extract 3.12

Matt: And you can see- this is almost the only place where the outside world intrudes very much into BiCon. Cos there are food leaflets, takeaway stuff (H: oh yeah, yeah) which say 'you can go outside this space, or call outside this space to get food-y sort of stuff' A map of the city, which is a long way away- although it's not physically a long way away, it is a long way away. And, like the little map of the locality including 'here's the route to the Asda'.

H: right right. Yep

M: And apart from that there isn't much intrusion of the outside world. There are things like- there's evidence- the pizza boxes have come from outside. But they sort of appear.

H: Yeah, so it's like a-a buffer zone, sort of thing?

M: It is like a buffer zone- but yeah, and. But yeah, but as- yeah, it's you could call it a buffer, zone, but it's (pauses, blows air through lips). Yeah, it's a point of intrusion from the outside world, basic- it's- this is the stuff we've let in. And it was only at the very end on Sunday, I think, that there's any other intrusion-y sort of stuff into the venue space, because there were people who started turning up looking for their accommodation for their resit exams, and they got directed and everything. Outside that, there was the, the people doing some singing-y stuff in one of the nearby buildings which intruded a bit on the wider space including some of the accommodation at some points. But yeah, no, that's the outside world within the venue, those bits of paper.

Here, Matt describes reception as ‘a point of intrusion from the outside world’, evidenced in the detritus of takeaways that have been delivered to the site. However, for most of the weekend, in Matt’s account, this commerce with the outside world happens on BiCon’s terms- ‘this is the stuff we’ve let in’. Matt refers to desk volunteers directing students resitting exams to the accommodation office, and to the presence of another event on campus, but positions these as minor incursions into the BiCon space, such that ‘those bits of paper’ are the extent to which ‘the outside world’ intrudes into the venue.

In Matt’s account, then, ‘BiCon happening’ is again keenly felt at an interface with ‘the outside world’. As with Kathryn’s account of the fire alarm, BiCon is positioned against ‘the outside world’ as a discrete space: Matt is careful, in his description, to position the intrusions into this space by ‘the outside world’ as minimal - the pizza boxes ‘have come from outside. But they sort of *appear*’, without agents - the students seeking accommodation only arrive ‘at the very end on Sunday’, and the singing group only intrudes ‘a bit’, and only ‘on the wider space’.

Another notable feature of Matt’s account is the way he positions ‘the outside world’, specifically ‘the city’ of Leicester as distant, while acknowledging its physical proximity - ‘a long way away - although it’s not physically a long way away, it is a long way away’.

In these accounts, then, the outside world is positioned as potentially intruding into BiCon, and being jointly, and successfully, resisted by attendees. These moments of intrusion and resistance appear in participant accounts as particularly ‘BiCon’ moments. Below, I turn to another set of examples of moments where BiCon is seen as particularly ‘happening’ - those of group forays off-campus and into the very ‘outside world’ which

feels so distant from BiCon despite its physical proximity, and whose incursion into the BiCon space is being so keenly resisted.

## ***2.2 The portable 'bubble'***

Several participants describe a sense of the BiCon space as an intersubjectively-constituted 'portable bubble', within which groups of attendees could make forays into 'the outside world' without feeling as if they had 'left BiCon space'.

In Extract 3.13, below, for example, Kathryn describes a section of her sketch map of the venue, recalling how she and a friend 'took the BiCon space' with them on a trip to the supermarket.

### **Extract 3.13**

Helen: What does that say?

Kathryn: Asda and the pharmacy.

K: Because that was the only place that I went out of the space, and I took the BiCon space and..

H: You took it with you?

K: Sort of, I went, I went with [friend] and we were being very BiCon and we got asked if we worked in a nursery because we were wearing brightly coloured clothes and had name badges and...

H: That's cool, what do you mean being very BiCon?

K: We were talking about stuff and not just doing everyday getting on with people, we were having actual conversations with content and meaning.

H: With each other or...?

K: With each other, I don't exactly know how, but we were being very BiCon it wasn't like, it was, just because together we looked like we, we probably looked like we worked in a nursery even in our regular clothes but it felt like we had this bubble of BiCon around us and talking was different but, being together was different and we were going to get food for the teddy bears' picnic so we were thinking about it, finding food for a large group of people and being, making BiCon-ness happen and what would you do if x or y or z happened during the picnic and I feel more, I would feel very, much more shy in a new place if I hadn't been in BiCon space but I'd also, I'd probably doing my hiding thing very much more, if I wasn't, but I did feel we had a bubble of BiCon.

In this extract, rather than being positioned 'against' the world, their shared orientation towards BiCon allows them to move through the world in a protected 'bubble' (similar to the way that Singular, in Extract 3.4 '[sped] through the country untouched by [her] everyday life[...] in [her] nice sort of air-conditioned carriage'.) This 'bubble of BiCon' makes Kathryn feel less shy than she usually would in an unfamiliar space, less inclined to '[do] my hiding thing'. Although they are outside the physical space of the event, Kathryn and her friend continue to orient towards it as they shop for the picnic and plan how to '[make] BiCon-ness happen' there.

### ***2.3 BiCon as 'hard to leave'***



Participant accounts of leaving BiCon in a group are overwhelmingly positive. In these accounts, participants position themselves as having made a positive decision to leave the venue for a particular purpose such as to shop or to visit local attractions. Accounts of forays involving only one or two people tended<sup>15</sup> to be motivated by circumstances such as a family obligation or emergency, and these accounts feature negative descriptions of experiences of dislocation and estrangement, both from BiCon itself, and from the outside world.

### **Extract 3.14**

Adam: I've had BiCons where I've dipped in and out before and it was extremely weird.[...]

H: What is it that's been jarring the times that you have dipped in and out?

A: Erm, BiCon sometimes has felt very different to the rest of the world, erm (.) and particularly different than the very straight world I guess. And it becomes normal, one place or the other [...] At BiCon, even after a couple of days it feels like very compressed time, like someone's taken a week and squidged it up, so it feels like after a day I feel I've been there for some time, and that's the normality of what that place is like. So then it's a bit of a jar to, part way through, swap into a what seems then a very weird world, whereas the BiCon felt like the very weird world when I first went, but now [...] you know, it just seems, yes, alien.

Erm, I've been pulled out of BiCon [to accompany people to Accident and Emergency] for medical things before, and I know other friends I have as well,

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<sup>15</sup> With the exception of Kathryn's account of her trip to ASDA in Extract 3.13 (above).

where I've ended up at, you know, sort of [a major metropolitan hospital] at two in the morning with somebody, [...] and again that was just an extremely, it was almost like you're just dropped into Afghanistan or somewhere, it did feel like a completely different dress code and way of being, yeah, I felt very cut off.

In this excerpt, Adam describes temporarily leaving a previous BiCon to take someone to hospital in a medical emergency. Adam's description of becoming accustomed to the norms of 'one place or the other' demonstrates that he is clearly positioning these spaces as orthogonal to one another. Another interesting feature of this excerpt is Adam's use of the passive voice. By describing himself as having 'been pulled out of BiCon' and 'dropped in' to the 'alien' world of the hospital as if into 'Afghanistan or somewhere', positions the transition as sudden, jarring, and reluctantly undertaken.

In extract 3.12, above, we saw how Matt attended to BiCon as a heterotopic space by describing BiCon as physically close to 'the real world', but experientially distant from it ('It's not physically a long way away, but it is a long way away'). In Adam's account, the idea of BiCon as temporally distinct from 'the world' has a similar function in that it positions BiCon as not only 'elsewhere', but also 'elsewhen'. Time at BiCon is, for Adam, 'compressed', so that 'a couple of days' in the space can feel like 'someone's taken a week and squidged it up'. This 'compressed' temporality intensifies, Adam's orientation towards the 'dress code and way of being' of BiCon, making forays into 'the world' doubly jarring- as indicated by Adam's use of the word 'alien' and his arresting comparison of an unexpected trip to A&E to 'being dropped into Afghanistan'.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> We have already seen Singular describe time at BiCon as feeling longer than it really is, in Extract 3.5.

Adam makes use of the language of physical forces ('pulled', 'dropped') to describe the sudden, jarring nature of his unwilling excursions from BiCon<sup>17</sup>. Matt, meanwhile, describes making a decision *not* to leave BiCon in similarly striking terms:

Matt: Just before the start of the first session on the Sunday, just before we had to go in to [a workshop], I got a call from my sister that my mother who'd been seriously ill all year was very seriously ill and was being moved to a hospice etcetera, etcetera, and I didn't want to leave, and I didn't leave. That was the day of the live action space invaders [workshop], and it was a day of the particularly interesting one [on] gendered speech, you know having the three women, three or four women who talked and the three or four men listened, and we talked about that and then the men talked and the women listened and we talked about that.

H: Oh cool.

M: Yeah, very good. And very interesting [...] I didn't want to leave, it would have been difficult to leave, it would have been expensive to leave, I could have done it, I could have done it and I didn't want to. [...]

H: That's quite some gravitational pull!

M: It is.

Reading or listening to Matt's account, one has a sense of him as caught between two opposing physical forces: from outside the 'BiCon bubble', the pull of a family emergency, and, from within, the pull of people and events within the bubble. It is as if BiCon 'wins'

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<sup>17</sup> Elsewhere in our conversation, he describes leaving BiCon to attend a religious rite of passage in similar terms.

this tug-of-war by exerting, as I remark at the end of the excerpt, a stronger ‘gravitational pull’ on Matt. We might speculate that, having become re-oriented to BiCon, having become a subject of this space, Matt has moved beyond its event horizon, such that its pull is greater than even that of his mother’s death-bed.

### ***Summary: theorising BiCon as a heterotopic place-event***

In this chapter, I have described how participants in Study 1 consistently described BiCon and ‘the everyday world’ as separate spheres. This separation was described not just in terms of physical distance, but also in descriptions of the everyday world as a place where participants felt ‘squashed’ or constrained, and BiCon as an open, airy space where they experienced less friction between themselves and the world. This, I argued, was indicative of a move from experiencing oneself as a body-object, to moving smoothly through space as a body-subject.

However, in order to become reoriented as bisexual body-subjects at BiCon 2008, participants needed to undergo a process of detaching from the outside world and re-orienting themselves within BiCon. This process of re-orientation could be traced, I argued, by attending to the embodied and spatialized practices of arrival which participants described engaging in.

As we have seen, participants describe experiencing the place-event of BiCon (‘BiCon happening’) most keenly in the event’s communal spaces, and at moments, such as the Friday night fire alarm, when the event is disrupted by some kind of adversity which necessitates the intrusion of the outside world into the event and lends participants a sense of ‘us against the world’. Participants feel as if BiCon is ‘happening elsewhere’ at

moments when they are isolated, either spatially or socially, and at these moments we might say that they feel part of 'the world' against which BiCon is constituted, rather than a BiCon subject.

BiCon is also a space with its own temporal character. A 'magical space' within which attendees can, for once, ground their bisexuality in the present tense, it is also a space where time is 'compressed' and moves differently to time in the 'real world'.

As I have shown, then, participants' descriptions of their experiences at BiCon 2008 support a theorisation of this event as a heterotopic place event. By theorising BiCon 2008 as a place-event (Pink, 2012) rather than as a literal space, we can begin to account for the ways in which the space is produced intersubjectively, through the movements and practices of its constituents. By seeing these practices as constitutive both of the space and of the subjectivities of those within it, we can begin to understand the spatio-temporality of BiCon 2008, and the subjectivities it made possible- as I will show in later chapters.

We can also begin to see that participants construct the place-event of BiCon in rather utopic terms as a kind of bisexual 'home' (Hemmings, 2002). In Chapter Four, I explore this utopic construction of BiCon further and more critically, by examining participant accounts of experiencing inclusion and exclusion at BiCon 2008.

# *Chapter Four: Being there- inside BiCon 2008*

## *Introduction*

As I discussed in Chapter 1, Western binary thinking about gender and sexuality relegates bisexual subjectivity either to a primitive past or to a utopian future, such that to stake a claim to bisexuality in the present tense is to position oneself as confused, greedy, or inauthentic. And yet, in order to maintain the coherence of this same binary framework, bisexuality must be continually called up in order to be dismissed. The bisexual subject, who must be everywhere and nowhere, everyone and no-one, is the embodiment of the Trickster archetype, with no time, space, or place of their own.

In the light of this marginalisation, it is perhaps not surprising that, as I described in Chapter 3, many of the participants in my studies described BiCon as a key moment in their yearly calendar. The place-event of the convention, I argued, provides a heterotopic space in which the paradox of bisexual subjectivity can, for a limited time, be resolved, and bisexuals can experience moving smoothly through space as present-tense bisexual subjects.

While the accounts in Chapter 3 were drawn from the photo-elicitation interviews conducted in Study 1, this chapter also includes data collected in Study 2: the modelling workshops that took place at BiCon 2008. As explained in Chapter 2, these workshops focused on eliciting participant descriptions of their lived experiences of embodiment in

bi space. It was hoped that a combination of the embodied process of modelling their experiences, carried out close in time to those experiences and within the same spatial context, would lead to the production of rich, experiential data which would allow for glimpses of lived experiences of bi subjectivities at BiCon.

I ended Chapter 3 with the observation that participants' descriptions of BiCon as a space were rather utopic in nature. In Part 1 of this chapter, I examine this further, discussing the ways in which many participants described BiCon 2008 as a place to which they could bring 'all of themselves', and (in Part 2) where they could 'talk about anything', and engage in bodily displays without censure or harassment. And yet, standing back a little from these accounts, it becomes clear that, as Hemmings (2002) argued with reference to the 1990 National Bisexual Conference, utopic descriptions of BiCon as a diverse and welcoming bisexual home, function to obscure dynamics of exclusion. In particular, I argue that participants' construction of an inclusive, reflexive (middle class) BiCon 'us' is implicitly constituted against a (working class) 'person in the pub' who is positioned as lacking in reflexivity and subcultural knowledge.

## ***Part 1: 'Being all of me'***

### ***1.1 'We don't feel like anything' - bisexuality as 'default'***

One of the key findings of the modelling workshops that I conducted at BiCon 2008 was that participants experienced their bisexuality as less salient at BiCon than in their everyday lives. As my discussion of participants' experiences of arriving at BiCon shows (Chapter 3), participants in the photo-production study described BiCon and 'the outside world' as distinct spheres of experience. While the photo-production study was structured in such a way as to produce the two spheres as discrete, the modelling workshops, which took place during BiCon itself, were focused on participants' present-tense experiences of BiCon. The structure of the modelling study therefore invited less comparison between BiCon and 'the outside world' than the photo-production study. Nevertheless, many workshop participants made explicit contrasts between the ways in which they experienced their bisexuality at BiCon, and in their day-to-day life. Below, I present, and subsequently discuss, three brief extracts from the workshops.

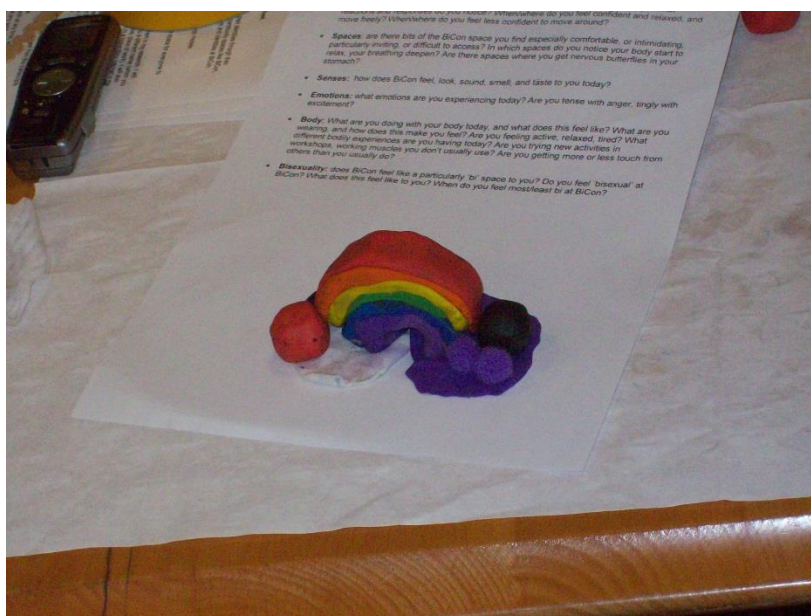
#### **Extract 4.1/Photo 4.1**





Erm, well. When I'm not in- not at BiCon, you feel like um, you feel like, kind of like you are bisexual. And you're kinda like, separated from everyone else because they think you're weird or something. And they've got the bi colours on the little people. Erm there's kind of like a few bi people I know but it's kind of a thing of everyone else just thinks you're strange and stuff. But when I'm at BiCon there's loads of different people. And, but we don't care, we just get on and feel like normal and stuff. And we don't feel like anything' [Workshop 1]

**Extract 4.2/ Photo 4.2:**

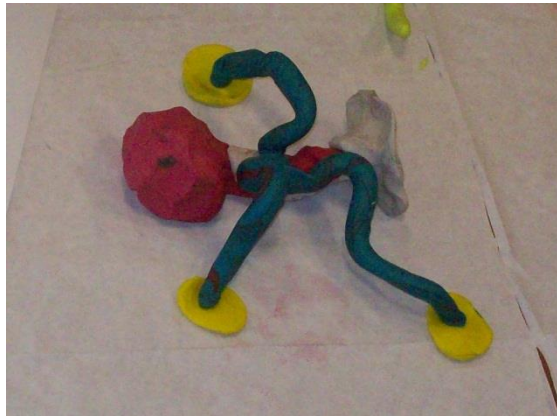


Yeah this is, the rainbow represents me, obviously, this side is my normal life, I've made it white and a bit bland, and this side represents BiCon because it's purple.

This red blob is, I suppose issues around sexuality that I encounter every day, I don't actually think it's that much, it should be a bit smaller but I suppose just generally you notice your sexuality more when you're out of the bi community so that's why that's there, and then when I come to BiCon it's not even there because I

don't notice it, it's not a problem. [...] you feel a bit more defensive about being bi, or I do, when I'm out of BiCon, I feel like I've got to be cagey about it' [Workshop 2]

**Extract 4.3/Photo 4.3:**



OK umm. Mine is also not very bi. In fact it's not bi at all. Because when I'm here I don't actually feel bi. I feel more bi when I'm not here. When I'm here it's not a big deal at all, I'm just me. [Workshop 1]

As the extracts above show, these participants positioned 'the outside world' as a place where they experienced their bisexuality as a marked identity, separating them from others, and making people 'thin[k] you're strange and stuff' (Extract 4.1). We have already seen, in Chapter 3 how some of the photo-production participants described moving from the 'squashed', 'constricted' spaces of the outside world to the 'airy' space of BiCon where they could 'breathe out' (Extracts 3.4, 3.5). Similarly, in these extracts, there is a sense that bisexuality is something that 'sticks out' in everyday life, protrudes, makes itself intrusively apparent: 'I feel more bi when I'm not here' / 'I suppose just

generally you notice your sexuality more when you're out of the bi community' and needs to be 'kept in' - 'when I'm out of BiCon, I feel like I've got to be cagey about it'. (Extract 4.2)

On the 'island' of BiCon, however, bisexuality is transformed from a marked identity to an unmarked one ('we don't feel like anything', Extract 4.1). While 'issues around sexuality' are encountered 'every day' in 'normal life', at BiCon, these are 'not even there', and bisexuality is therefore experienced as less salient at BiCon 2008 than in the outside world. With no need to 'be cagey' (Extract 4.2) about their bisexuality, participants describe themselves as no longer thinking about it very much.

Bisexuality, then, as the default sexuality of the imagined BiCon subject, is positioned in these accounts as a shared characteristic that unites 'loads of different' bisexual people (extract 4.1). Among all these evocations of islands and rainbows, however, we can see emerging here the same kind of discourse of 'unity in diversity' that Hemmings (2002) identified in her study of the 1990 NBC. In that context, Hemmings argued that discursive attempts to position bisexuality as inherently inclusive actually served to obscure and deflect issues of social, political and individual difference, and imposed an artificial sense of heterogeneity on what was a predominantly white, middle-class space. As this chapter develops, I will argue that a similar dynamic was in evidence at BiCon 2008.

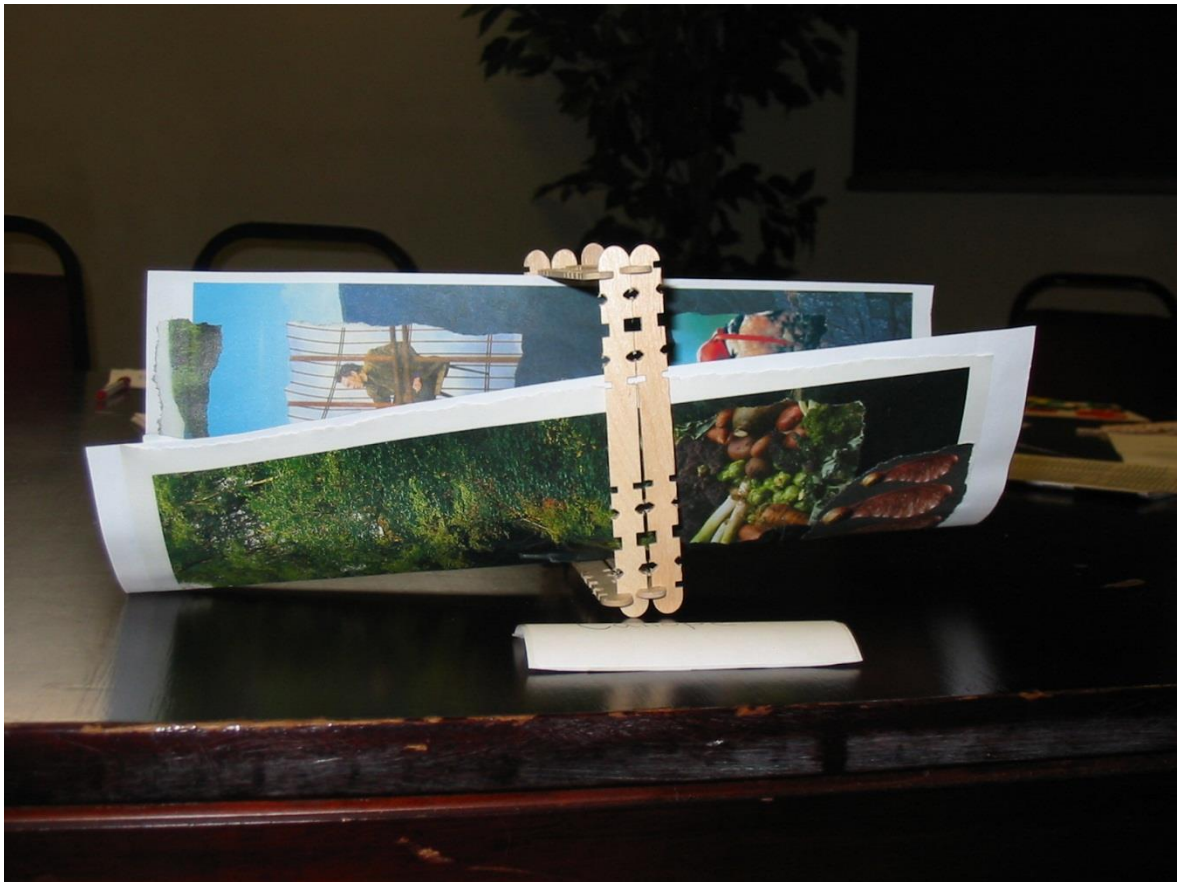
### ***1.2 'I can just breathe deep' - from body-object to body-subject***

Whatever discursive work it might be doing, this experience of 'not feeling like anything' (Extract 4.1) is described, in striking terms, by a number of participants, as an embodied and spatialized dissolution of the boundary between self and world.

Meanwhile, in contrast, to move through the spaces of daily life as a bisexual subject is described by many participants in terms of ‘separation’ from the world, expressed as embodied confinement or ‘squashing’. We have already seen this in Chapter 3, in Singular’s account of not having to ‘squash [herself] in’ to ‘airy and open’ bi space. In Chapter 3, I examined these spatialized accounts of journeys to and through bi space in terms of what they can tell us about BiCon 2008 as a place-event. In this chapter, I return to this theme of bodily expansion in order to examine what it can tell us about experiences of inclusion and exclusion at BiCon.

In the example below, taken from pilot work for the present study, a participant vividly describes her first experience of being at a bisexual event as one of being in an airy place where she could relax bodily, breathe out and ‘just *be* bisexual’:

**Extract 4.5/ Photo 4.4**



Um, well I did a two-sided collage sculpture and um, I guess this side, um, I picked out a lot of pictures of water and sky and birds and sort of this expanse of feeling which I was just feeling when I was out on the deck [laughs], and just thinking to myself, my God, I have this whole afternoon to be *myself*, and I can just *be* bisexual, and it just felt *so amazing* and I'd never felt that before and it was just like, wow, I didn't know that I could feel this relaxed in my body, and I actually do, because I go around on my bike with my muscles and my body very contracted all the time, and it just felt like these *spaces* opening up within my muscles, and just like, air, and opening up the spaces, yeah, it just was an incred- (outbreath/sigh) yhaaaaaa, it feels *good*, you know. So I wanted to express that.

To move through the everyday world as a bisexual subject is described vividly by this participant and others, as we have seen, as an experience of tenseness, constriction,

squashing or friction. In keeping with cultural understandings of bisexuality as excessive, the bisexual subject takes up ‘too much space’, and thus finds themselves in constant friction against the world, and acutely aware of the boundaries between self and world. Such descriptions of confinement/jarring are common to both phenomenological and epistemological accounts of experiences of marginalisation: for example, the queer ‘closet’ in the writings of Sedgwick (1990), and the images of confinement common in feminist writings (e.g. Rose 1993: 144). They also occur, of course, in tales of the Trickster. Like the bisexual subject, the Trickster is characterised by excess, by being perennially out of place, and by the constant crossing and re-crossing of the boundaries that are supposed to keep the world in order (Hyde, 2007).

However, in contrast, participants’ descriptions of their embodied experiences of bisexual space, are characterised by a sense of interpenetration between self and world (‘these *spaces* opening up within my muscles’, in Extract 4.5), an overcoming of Cartesian dualistic splits between mind and body, self and world, such that they experience themselves as body-subjects rather than body-objects (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2002, see also Bowes-Catton et al., 2011).

Perhaps, then, BiCon can be seen as a space where bisexuals can, for a time, set aside their paradoxical, Trickster-esque subjectivities, and ‘fit in’? Below, I outline how participants construct BiCon as a space where they are able to be their authentic selves more fully than in everyday life. As we will see, this sense of authenticity and expansion does not just apply to bisexuality, but also to other interests and identities.

### ***1.3 ‘I can let all those closet doors open’- being ‘all of me’***



For many participants in both studies, BiCon was a space where they could not only relax into bisexual subjectivity, but could also express other marginalised identities and make reference to unorthodox practices, without being asked to explain or account for their difference from social norms. In these accounts, participants construct not just bisexuality, but a range of other minority identities as unmarked, as Extract 4.6 shows:

**Extract 4.6/ Photo 4.5**



I don't have a sense of 'I'M IN BI MODE NOW' but I'm just in me-mode and I can let all those closet doors open. So I can be bi and poly and Pagan and into BDSM and whatever and like it's just I can just be me. I can just breathe and that's what the tree is. It's that breathing deep down to the bottom. Where I don't get to do that during the normal days [Workshop 1]

As with Singular's experience of the journey to BiCon (Chapter 3), and the workshop participant in Extract 4.5 (above), this participant experiences BiCon as a space where she can relax and open up ('I can let all those closet doors open'), and 'breath[e] deep down to the bottom'.

For this participant, the 'closet doors' that are closed 'during the normal days' are her unorthodox sexual and religious practices and identities ('bi and poly and Pagan and into BDSM and whatever'). Other participants, as we will see, also positioned BiCon as a space in which 'closet doors' could open, and marginalised identities, practices and experiences could be understood without explanation. In these accounts, BiCon was constructed as a somewhat utopic space characterised by

- i) Attendees who are well-informed about a range of unorthodox or marginalized identities and practices, such that explanation is not necessary.
- ii) An explicit ethos of respect for diversity, so that even attendees who are not aware of a particular issue are likely to respond respectfully and appropriately
- iii) The presence of a supportive group of friends on whom individuals can call for emotional and practical support.

For Clare, a participant in the photo-production study, for instance, BiCon 2008 provided a space in which she could talk about her recent breakup without having to account for her non-monogamy:

**Extract 4.7:**

H: Can you say a bit more about like, why BiCon is a place where you don't have to explain [relationship] stuff? And what you don't have to explain?



C: Erm, well, very specifically, I knew that I had a bunch of friends there, who [...] knew all the details, [...] But, erm, even beyond that, I knew that lots of the people I might meet would have some familiarity with issues like polyamory, open relationships and all that sort of thing [...] but even the people who might not know anything about that stuff, would be, erm, would not run away screaming, [inaudible] and would be likely to stay and listen and go, if nothing else, ok, fine, not my thing, but whatever.

H: Why do you think, do you think that's different to not-BiCon, even if they don't know anything about it?

C: I think it is different to not-BiCon, because I think, erm, that you, if nothing else, if you've arrived at BiCon and read the handbook, there's, there are clear warnings there that you're going to meet people who do things very differently to you, so people are kind of primed to expect weirdness. And if you come to BiCon you are, um, (pause) well (pause) you're sort of already dealing with a level of difference from what most people consider to be normal. Whether you are bi or your best friend's bi or whatever, you're already dealing with that. Erm, so you're likely to be just that bit more open to somebody describing another way they're different, than somebody on the street who might never have thought about any of this stuff at all ever, and be completely horrified. Erm, so that's why I think they're a bit less likely to run away screaming than the person in the pub.'

For Clare, as for the participant in Extract 4.6, BiCon is a safe space to express not just bisexuality, but other kinds of difference: a place where 'closet doors' can open. Looking more critically at Clare's account, two aspects stand out. The first is that BiCon attendees are credited with possessing, if not a certain kind of subcultural capital ('some familiarity

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with issues like polyamory'), then the ability to listen to accounts of difference without reacting adversely, perhaps drawing on their own experiences of dealing with 'difference' in the form of bisexuality. Since they are present at BiCon, they must also have signed the Code of Conduct, and they have therefore been warned to 'expect weirdness'. In contrast, the average person 'in the street' or 'in the pub' is positioned here as possibly 'not having thought about any of this stuff at all ever', and therefore perhaps being liable to 'run away screaming' or 'be horrified'. Here, then, Clare positions BiCon attendees as self-aware and reflexive in a way that 'the person in the street' may not be.

In this account, we see Clare juxtaposing two imagined and contrasting subjects: the BiCon attendee, who is reflexive, open-minded, and tolerant of difference and the 'person in the street' who is liable to extreme reactions. By engaging a hermeneutic of suspicion, and applying a little imaginative variation to the positioning of these two imagined subjects (Langdridge, 2007), we can envisage how this account might be constructed differently. For example, Clare might position the imagined BiCon subject as a 'victim' of the 'prejudice' of the person in the street. The person in the street might, for example, be positioned as having certain beliefs or values that would mean that they were ideologically opposed to the BiCon subject. Alternatively, they might be positioned as someone who had failed to 'check their privilege'<sup>1</sup> and was therefore not aware of the issues facing bisexual and/or non-monogamous people. However, what actually happens in this text is that Clare constructs the imagined bisexual subject as having access to particular forms of knowledge and reflexivity that are not available to 'the person in the street'. The imagined bi subject, having 'thought about this stuff' due to their experience

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<sup>1</sup> A term in common use in UK bi community circles, which is frequently used in social justice movements to urge people to reflect on their advantaged position within society and the ways that this shapes their worldview. See, for example, <http://geekfeminism.wikia.com/wiki/Privilege>

of 'dealing with a level of difference from what most people consider to be normal', therefore has an advantage over the person in the street, who, 'not having thought about any of this stuff at all ever', is reduced to visceral reactions such as 'run[ning] away screaming'. Despite the ways in which BiCon attendees position themselves as 'united by difference' (see section 1.1., above), what we are beginning to see emerging here is a classed discourse of bisexual habitus (Bourdieu 1994, Rooke, 2007).

### ***Summary of Part 1: BiCon as idealised 'bisexual home'***

In her analysis of the 1990 National Bisexual Conference in the USA, Clare Hemmings (2002) shows that the conference was explicitly conceived of as a 'homecoming' for bisexual people, a safe refuge from the biphobic outside world. Referring to the sense of 'bisexual home' evoked at the conference, Hemmings notes that, in this sense, 'home' is not simply geographical, but a site of meaning within which one recognises oneself and is recognised in return' (2002, p.169).

In the accounts above, as in Chapter 3, BiCon is constructed against the outside world, as a haven where participants can, for a short time, resolve the paradox of bisexual subjectivity, put aside the mask of the Trickster, and, free from the necessity of explanation and dissemblance, be recognised as bisexual subjects in the here and now. For once, the bisexual body-object can become a body-subject and, as a result of this, bisexuality, the characteristic that produces friction with the outside world, becomes less salient than in everyday life. So, too, do some other marginalised characteristics, such as gender-variance, non-monogamy, and unorthodox religious belief.

However, in attending critically to these idealised accounts we can begin to trace the emergence of tensions which undermine these utopic constructions of BiCon as an inclusive, borderless bisexual space. Below, I explore participants' accounts of their experiences at BiCon 2008 further, looking particularly at accounts of being seen and heard as a bi subject, in order to further interrogate who is (and is not) recognisable as a bisexual subject within this site of meaning (Hemmings, 2002).

## ***Part 2: Seen and heard***

### ***2.1 Benign visibility: the 'BiCon gaze'***

As I argued in Chapter 1, the (hypothetical) existence of a bisexual subject is both fundamental to, and undermining of, dominant understandings of the nature of gender and sexuality. As such, the spectre of the bisexual subject is continually raised and exorcised, flickering in and out of view like a badly-tuned television picture.

The bisexual subject finds themselves caught in a double-bind, damned if they are visible, damned if they are not. As I argued in Chapter 1, to embody or avow bisexuality is to embody the Trickster characteristics of excess: to be too sexual, too greedy, too changeable, to 'show off', to 'over-share'. The bisexual subject is 'too much' for the world, and must be complicit in their own erasure 'squash[ing] [themselves] in' to the subject positions available, making themselves invisible. And yet, of course, the invisible bisexual is then positioned as the enemy within, fraudulent, the wolf in sheep's clothing.

Small wonder, then, that, as I outlined in Chapter 1, the issue of bisexual invisibility/erasure has been a key feature of bisexual political discourse since the 1980s, nor that all the participants in the photo study, and many in the modelling study, spoke of BiCon as a place where they felt visible, recognised. In these utopic discourses of bisexual 'home' (Hemmings 2002:169), attendees describe themselves as not only *experiencing* bisexual subjectivity at BiCon, but also being intersubjectively constituted as bisexual subjects by what I have come to think of as the 'BiCon gaze', as I will outline below.

### ***2.2 'Licence to display'***

All eleven participants in the photo-production study described experiencing BiCon as a space where they were able to dress in a wide variety of ways without censure. Many

participants described planning spectacular costumes, often months in advance, for the evening social events, while also stressing that ‘dressing up’ was entirely optional:

#### **Extract 4.8**

Matt: [At BiCon] you don’t have a dress code. You know, no matter what you wear, almost-you’ll be accepted. Erm, people would take you to one side if you turned up in Nazi uniform, for example, and explain that, you know not so much, no, perhaps not here. Erm, but t-shirt and jeans? No problem. Even at a, even a dressing-up ball, there’s space for lots of people to dress up, but t-shirt and jeans? No problem. No dress code. No questions on the door.

Participant accounts show that they orient to three interconnected aspects of what Lovage, a participant in the photo study, referred to as the BiCon ‘licence to display’:

- First, there was an opportunity to experiment with different performances of gender.
- Secondly, participants stressed that body displays were not read as indicative of sexual availability or intention.
- Third, participants described these experimentations and displays as being taken at face value, rather than as identity statements<sup>2</sup>.

Each of these features of the ‘licence to display’ is constituted (sometimes implicitly, sometimes explicitly) in relation to its ‘everyday’ opposite. For example, participants

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<sup>2</sup> See Chapter 5 for discussion of this third aspect of the ‘BiCon gaze’ and its implications for the dialectic relationship between BiCon and everyday life.

compared the way that bodily displays and performances of gender were received differently at BiCon than they would be in the outside world.

Below, for example, Kathryn describes how at BiCon she feels free to express 'camp' aspects of her tastes that she doesn't express elsewhere, and to wear 'girly' clothes that would make her feel vulnerable in public spaces:

#### **Extract 4.9**

K: I like shininess, I like, I'm quite childlike about it, I love glitter and ridiculous camp-ness which I don't express a huge amount in my everyday life, I think the word shiny is very BiCon, or BiCon is very shiny, there's a lot, a couple of those dresses here [in the photograph] and I don't normally wear skirts and dresses in public, I don't like being that, I feel too vulnerable to be that girly but it's fine at BiCon.

H: How does that work in BiCon in a way that it doesn't in public?

K: I know people will look at me when I'm wearing a dress but it doesn't feel like it's so intrusive, it's a sort of soppy supportive looking, people will say nice things or they'll just ignore that I'm wearing bizarre clothes for me, and you can be a bit sexy without, and still sort of maintaining your integrity of, your own "yes"s and "no"s, but I'd be worried to be too, I'd feel very vulnerable being so girly in the outside world.

Here, Kathryn contrasts a rather threatening-seeming public gaze (which makes her feel 'too vulnerable' to wear traditionally-feminine clothes), and contrasts this with a different kind of 'BiCon gaze' - 'a sort of soppy supportive looking' which feels less 'intrusive' than the disciplinary gaze of the outside world, and allows her to 'be a bit sexy' in her choice of clothes without making her feel unsafe. Kathryn's use of the word

'integrity' here to describe this is interesting. It conjures both up an image of a discrete subjectivity, and the possibility of such a subjectivity being made less discrete, or eroded, by unwanted sexual attention (being unable to 'maintain your integrity of, your own 'yes's and 'no's'). Again, as discussed in Section 1.2, we can see a distinction being made here between experiencing oneself as a body-object in 'everyday life', abraded by an 'intrusive' gaze, and as a 'supported' body-subject at BiCon under a softer, 'soppier', more consensual gaze. In this account, too, as with Extract 4.7, the supportive BiCon gazer is contrasted with the intrusive 'public' gaze of the 'person in the street'.

This idea that dressing in a sexy and/or feminine way at BiCon is 'safer' than in the outside world is picked up by many other female participants. Clare, for example, said:

**Extract 4.10**

Erm, one of the things I keep telling people when I talk about BiCon, one of the things I really like, is the policy with hugs, where some people ask you if you want a hug, before you get one. And it's wonderful because you get, erm, you get, there are two good things, not one good thing. You get somebody's offered to give you a hug, and they care enough about how you feel to check whether you want the hug before they give it to you, so , so you've got two things, they like you and they aww, they care about your feelings, and that's great. Erm, and er, so yes, it's just that connection, that comes in because of the general atmosphere at BiCon, that people might be dressed up in all sorts of clothes, but erm, there are, erm, acceptable ways to respond to people, erm, er, and how to behave to people and how to keep your distance, and it doesn't always work but erm, it generally you can feel a lot safer and more comfortable, wearing less clothing, erm, or dressing up in some unusual way, or looking silly, erm, than you can somewhere else. Erm. [...] BiCon to an extent feels



like, not quite 'everybody is a friend', but it's that kind of social space rather than kind of anonymous, if you know what I mean. Of course it wasn't anonymous, everybody was wearing a name-tag. Well, nearly everybody. But yes, it's just a different feeling.

In this extract, Clare attributes this feeling of safety to two things: (i) the explicit culture of consent in operation at BiCon, and (ii) the closed-ness of the space - while everyone might not be a friend, everyone attending the event was identifiable ('wearing a name-tag'). Here, again, BiCon is contrasted with 'anonymous', public spaces. In another part of our interview, Clare describes dressing up for a fancy dress party in 'everyday life', and the ways in which her choice of outfit is limited by the fact that she has use public transport to get there: 'I wouldn't have worn the BiCon outfit to the party because I wouldn't have wanted to get from [town] to [town] in a skirt that short and in a top that revealing'.<sup>3</sup>

A similar framing occurs in Anita's account, where she describes how, at BiCon, bodily displays are not read as invitations to sex, and consent is taken seriously, while in public spaces, by contrast, the opposite is true:

**Extract 4.11**

If I were to go out in [city] or [city] wearing a corset, then people would assume, sort of: she's getting her tits out, she obviously wants sex, and they'd hit on me and they probably wouldn't leave me alone on the basis that they are assuming that because I've got my tits out that I'm looking for sex, and even if I say no, no doesn't

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<sup>3</sup> Veteran BiCon attendees and organisers have told me that 'dressing up' only became a particular feature of BiCon when a move to campus accommodation eliminated the need for attendees to move through public spaces between their accommodation and the evening events. (Ian Watters, Grant Denkinson, personal communication).

mean no in the real world whereas no does mean no at BiCon, and if you say no, people will leave you alone, and if you don't- if they don't' leave you alone then the people who are organising will deal with it'.

For these women, then, the 'closed-ness' of BiCon space, together with its relative lack of anonymity and clear rules of engagement, make it a space in which it is possible to dress in ways which, in the outside world, might feel unsafe. Again, in these accounts it is the imagined Other of the 'public' against whom the BiCon subject is positioned. This theme is continued in participant accounts of off-campus excursions, discussed below.

### ***2.3 Public performances of bi subjectivity***

As I discussed in Chapter 3, many participants took short excursions off-campus to shop for groceries or to explore the local area. Participants often described these trips as a highlight of their weekend, which surprised me, given the emphasis many placed on the importance of BiCon as a bisexual space.

However, for many participants, these excursions outside of BiCon provided them with the rare opportunity of a public performance of bisexual subjectivity. The difficulties of performing such a subjectivity that can be 'read' by others are well documented in the research literature (see, for example, Atkins, 2008; Ault, 1996; Bowes-Catton, 2007). While there is some support in the literature for the idea that some bisexuals deploy, and read, 'alternative' presentations of self (particularly Goth subcultural styles) as a way of communicating bisexual subjectivity, or at least bi-friendliness (Clarke et al 2012; Hayfield, 2011; Holland, 2004), there is no clearly defined bisexual 'look'. This means that bi individuals, unlike Hodkinson's Goths (Hodkinson 2002, p.41), are generally unable to recognise and acknowledge one another in the spaces of everyday life.

At BiCon, however, as we have already seen, bisexuality is the assumed 'default' sexual identity. One effect of this is that bisexuals are temporarily visible to one another, even outside the official event space. Small groups of people, often alternatively dressed, shopping together for convenience foods, were highly visible in the suburban setting of a supermarket, and were thus able to recognise one another, as Alexandra describes:

**Extract 4.12**

Alexandra: We went to the ASDA, erm, off there somewhere, but yeah, but that was something that we did, and that was fun, you know. Cos it was sort of meeting other people, cos that was sort of walking round and that sort of nod smile, wink wink, yeah- we know who we are! [...] An us and a them kind of thing, in a sort of 'we're doing this but there are other people here who are not, and we're not segregating ourselves, we just are', and yeah, stuff.

In the supermarket, Alexandra and her friends are both able to recognise other BiCon attendees, and to differentiate confidently between these and other shoppers. Their tacit 'nod, smile, wink wink' communication of their recognition of one another is constitutive of their shared subjectivity, but also conceals their recognition of this from other shoppers- it is, in short, a rare opportunity to perform an embodied bisexual habitus (Bourdieu, 1994; Rooke, 2007).

In Chapter 3, I pointed out that participants often described these excursions as happening within a 'portable bubble' of BiCon space, which allowed them to maintain their 'BiCon orientation' outside of the main space of the event, so that, rather than being positioned against the world by their 'difference', they were able to move through it smoothly, 'untouched' by it. This, I argued, was illustrative of the heterotopic nature of

the place-event of BiCon. However, it is also important to note the protective function of these bubbles: while participants clearly take pleasure in their temporarily-visible performances of bisexual subjectivity, many emphasise how such a public performance of difference could be dangerous in everyday life, especially for unaccompanied individuals. As described above, BiCon was described by participants as a safe space not only for bisexual subjectivity, but also other identities which were marginalised in the outside world.

Kathryn, for example, describes being vigilant for her safety in the 'real world', by working hard 'not to be visibly autistic' in everyday life, and, if possible 'not to be noticed' at all. Below, she describes waiting for a train:

#### **Extract 4.13**

Kathryn: And this is a picture of the station. There's a lot of them. [...] Erm, (very long pause). This is a very not-BiCon picture, here I'm on my, pretending to be a grown up getting on with erm, people, trying not to -be noticed really. Not to stick out. It's a nice day, I think it was, it was a nice day, but yeah it's very *un*-BiCon.

H: That trying not to be noticed thing and not to stick out thing, is that what you mean by it being *un*-BiCon?

K: Um, (long pause) that's part of it. Not that I hugely like want to stick out at BiCon but, you know. It's a very different kind of, (pause) not having the words, it's like this is the regular people's world and I just get to be (pause) in it. (pause). I'm not very good at waiting always and sometimes I get a bit stressy and autistic and I had to make a bit of an effort not to be visibly autistic at the station, it's not a safe space to do that. So, yeah.

In this account, Kathryn positions herself as not belonging to the world of 'the regular people', but being tolerated as long as she engages in self-surveillance and avoids 'stick[ing] out' in public. Kathryn engages in 'passing' as neurotypical (Bernstein Sycamore, 2006), by 'pretending to be a grown-up getting on with people', a pretence which she describes as very '*un-BiCon*'.

In the context of the 'BiCon bubble', however, she relates with amusement (see Chapter 3, extract 1.3), a supermarket trip during which she and a friend, whose name-badges and brightly coloured clothes made them visually distinctive from other shoppers, were asked to account for this difference by a member of the public- did they , perhaps, work in a nursery? Kathryn goes on to explain how she would ordinarily:

'feel very, much more shy in a new place if I hadn't been in BiCon space, but I'd also, I'd probably be doing my hiding thing very much more, if I wasn't, but I did feel we had a bubble of BiCon.'

The 'bubble of BiCon' thus protects Kathryn, freeing her up from the necessity of 'doing [her] hiding thing', allowing her to feel safer in public space.

Similarly, Alexandra described the 'safety in numbers' of moving through public spaces in a group of BiCon attendees, while pointing out hostility and even violence as real threats to lone Goths in everyday spaces:

#### **Extract 4.14**

Alexandra: [...] it's the mass of the people makes it into a- a safe space. You couldn't do it in your everyday life because there are neds and chavs and people out there just for the way you look and the way you dress and the way you act, just

because you're different and because it threatens them [...] A friend of mine was attacked in [City]. Erm, but once you get sort of a critical mass of people together it's not scary, you're less worried about it happening [...] cos everyday life is much more sort of 'you must want this, you must want that, you don't want the same things as me therefore you're a weirdo!' And its- yeah- there are so many poorly socialised children who suddenly have adult bodies. And effectively they are- they just haven't been properly socialised as children. They haven't been told, sort of, no, that's not how you react to people. Maybe because their parents probably react to people like that because they are just- nasty people. And they don't have that level of- but then, that, there's big questions about human nature, as to why people react in certain ways to things that are different, why are so many people threatened by people who want to be different?

In Alexandra's account, groups of BiCon attendees (and/or Goths) are once again positioned against an imagined 'person in the street' who is threatened by difference. In Claire's account (extract 4.7), this individual was positioned as 'not having thought about' issues of diversity and therefore responding viscerally to them by 'running away screaming'. Alexandra, however, positions people in 'everyday life' in more oppositional terms- as responding to difference with aggression and violence.

Alexandra's account, too, makes explicit the issue of social class which is implicit, yet arguably present, in many of the descriptions of 'the person in the street' we have seen so far. Alexandra's imagined public are described in classed terms as 'neds and chavs', and later in her account she draws on a dominant, pathologising discourse (Jones, 2012) of working-class people as 'poorly socialised children', parented by 'nasty people', who

are therefore unaware of how to behave ('they haven't been told, sort of, no, that's not how you react to people').

It is interesting that, in these accounts, the 'safe space' of BiCon is defined not against comparable social spaces in the outside world, or against the spaces of work and home, but against anonymous, public space. The bisexual subject is positioned against the 'generalised Other' (Mead, 1962) of the general public, sometimes in explicitly classed ways. As we shall see below, this framing is also evident in the ways in which participants describe BiCon as a space where they can 'talk about anything'.

## ***2.4 BiCon talk***

Another aspect of participants' construction of BiCon as a space to which they could bring 'all of themselves' is evident in their descriptions of BiCon as a space where they can have 'real conversations', on a wide range of subjects. In these accounts, too, we see the BiCon subject positioned as someone who is respectful and ready to listen, or who is open to talking about a wide range of topics.

### **Extract 4.15**

Person 1: Lots of you talked about, like I say, bisexual space, or the idea of being safe here kind of came up so although it was an anxious space, it also felt really safe, do you mean like safe from, safe from what?

Person 4: Freedom to express yourself.

Others: Yeah.

Person 6: Things you can't really talk about easily with your work colleagues or with some of your friends, people are very respectful here, even if they don't always agree with you they will allow you to talk.

Person 1: Is that specifically around bi stuff or just sort of like stuff in general?

Person 6: I think most things, not just bi stuff.

#### [Workshop 2]

In this extract from workshop 2, a participant responds to a question about BiCon as 'safe space' with a remark about self-expression. There is general agreement and the point is picked up by another participant. In contrast with the accounts we have seen so far, this participant references known others (friends and work colleagues) rather than 'the person in the street'. In contrast, Adam talks about an experience of leaving BiCon and taking public transport:

#### **Extract 4.16**

Adam: Um, I remember doing that before of being on the Tube in London and just thinking, or on the bus and going 'oh yeah- those people over there probably aren't talking about the type of sex they had last night'. Whereas at BiCon there's a good chance they were, or at least were open to having that sort of conversation, and you sort of go back to real world sometimes and 'oh! Right'. Yes it feels really closed off, and kind of weird. Yeah, it's defended I guess, people don't talk about themselves, there's almost a feeling of openness with BiCon.

In Chapter 3 (Extract 3.14), we saw Adam compare the experience of leaving BiCon unexpectedly (to take a fellow attendee to hospital) to being 'dropped into Afghanistan'-



such that the familiar world appeared temporarily alien, with a different set of values, and a different temporal pace, to the 'compressed' time and 'open' conversations at BiCon. Here, Adam again juxtaposes BiCon 'openness' with the 'closed-off' nature of conversations in the tube. Another participant, Anita, also references the Tube as an example of a public space where people are 'closed off', and takes delight in engaging in conversations with her partner that are not considered suitable for the context;

#### **Extract 4.18**

Sometimes we, we talk about obviously bi and poly stuff really overtly on the tube just to make people think: oh my god people talking on the tube and they're talking about sex, that's a lot of fun.

### ***2.5 Invalidations revisited***

In Chapter 1, I outlined Serano's (2013) view that the inclusivity of queer and feminist spaces might be improved through attention to the discursive techniques of invalidation which are commonly deployed to discredit minorities. Bisexuals, I suggested, were frequently discredited by being positioned as mentally incompetent, inauthentic, and hypersexual. Here, I want to suggest that participants' constructions of 'the person in the street' as 'not open' or lacking in subcultural knowledge, follow a similar pattern by positioning these 'others' as lacking in reflexivity ('openness', 'not having thought about this stuff before ever'), and prone to reacting viscerally rather than intellectually ('running away screaming', attacking people physically, 'being horrified').

### ***Summary of Part 2: 'Us and Them'***

In Part One of this chapter, I drew attention to some of the ways in which my interview partners, and the participants in the modelling workshops, positioned BiCon as

an idealised bisexual 'home' space where they could be 'all of themselves'. One feature of this 'safe space', I have argued, is a licence to engage in bodily displays and performances of difference under a safe 'BiCon gaze', and to move through the 'outside world' as a recognisably distinct group, protected from censure by the 'BiCon bubble'.

Moving on from a purely empathic analysis of participant accounts, and applying a critical hermeneutic (Langdridge, 2007), I have drawn attention to the ways in the imagined community of BiCon is positioned not just against 'the real world', but specifically against public spaces such as the street and public transport which are populated with strangers. Often, these discourses of 'us' and 'them' are implicitly classed, with the imagined BiCon subject positioned as reflexive, respectful, knowledgeable and open, and the 'person in the street' described as less knowledgeable, less reflexive, and prone to visceral overreactions to performances or articulations of difference, in ways which resonate with dominant, pathologising conceptualisations of working-class people (Jones, 2012).

### ***Part 3: Experiences of inclusion and exclusion at BiCon***

So far I have described how, for some participants in my studies, the heterotopic space of BiCon 2008 allowed for the expression and validation of bisexual subjectivities in the present tense. In this section, I first argue that BiCon is discursively constructed as a space in which other marginalised identities, particularly those around gender non-conformity, mental health and neurodiversity became unmarked, or less-marked.

However, as we shall see, this was not the case for all participants. In section 3.2, I move on to examine participant accounts of experiencing exclusion at BiCon. Some participants described ways in which they experienced BiCon 2008 as invalidating or marginalising some aspects of their identities or practices. In some cases, these were identities and practices that were taken for granted as ‘normal’ in everyday life, such as monogamy, vanilla sexual practice, and parenting. In other cases, however, experiences of invalidation at BiCon occurred along the same axes as those experienced in daily life, and compounded existing experiences of marginalisation. In this final section of the chapter, I outline the experiences of these participants, situating them in relation to existing work on inclusivity in subcultural spaces.

#### ***3.1 Unmarked identities that become marked at BiCon:***

##### ***Pregnancy and parenthood- Lovage***

Just two of the eleven participants in the photo-production study were parents, neither of whom brought their children to BiCon 2008. Historically, few children have attended BiCon, for a range of reasons. First, the relatively young demographic of the community has meant that there are relatively few parents among attendees. Secondly,

as we shall see in Chapter 5, many BiCon attendees see BiCon as a space where they can step aside from the responsibilities of everyday life, parenthood included. Third, and relatedly, parents and non-parents alike have raised concerns about the presence of children at BiCon being a constraining factor in their self-expression, resulting in a change in the nature of the event (Moore, 2008). Fourthly, for many potential BiCon attendees who are for a range of reasons unable or unwilling to leave their children with others for the weekend, a lack of childcare, family accommodation and child-friendly activities at BiCon was, and remains, a serious access issue (Moore, 2008).

Lovage, for example, described 2008 as a 'window of opportunity' to attend BiCon between her two children's babyhoods:

**Extract 4.17**

H: Can you like tell me a bit about BiCon and like why you go, what you look for there, what the focus is?

L: Well, all of once! Erm, why I went was, well, I mean why I went this year in particular was a very strong sense of, you know, a window of opportunity, that I couldn't go last year because I was breast-feeding [my child] too much, I won't be able to go next year probably for the same reason, you know, because it isn't very child-compatible.

Erm, so it was a kind of, you know, here is a window when I'm not breast feeding, [my child] feels old enough to leave with my parents, you know, this is a year I can go and have- You know, I'd have preferred to have not been pregnant and gone, but you know I kind of, it'll be, there will be compromises because of being pregnant but I can

have the more kind of, easy straightforward BiCon experience this year than I can in future years when I've got a small child and things.

Attempts have been made to make BiCon more inclusive by providing childcare, at considerable expense, but take-up has often been poor. Further, in the last decade or so, there has been something of a 'baby boom' amongst prominent bi activists (Bi Community News, 2014), and this has meant that the presence of children at bi events in general, and at BiCon in particular, has been perceived as a more pressing issue than previously.

For all of these reasons, the issue of 'family-friendliness' was of particular concern to organisers of BiCon 2008, and the organising team took a decision to make the Saturday of the event a specific 'Family Day', during which families and children would be particularly welcome (Ian Watters, personal communication, see also Appendix 1.2).

Of the two participants in the photo-production study who were parents, one (Matt) had a child in primary school and a teenager, and one (Lovage) had a child under five. Matt makes little mention of his child in relation to his experience of BiCon 2008. However, Lovage was in the third trimester of pregnancy at the time of the event, and her account of her experience of BiCon 2008 is dominated by her pregnancy. Below, she describes the way in which she experienced pregnancy as a marked identity at BiCon:

#### **Extract 4.18**

H: Did you notice any similarities and differences in your experience of bi-ness in each of those spaces [BiCon and everyday life]?

L: Mmmm! It seems to be much more about my body at BiCon than here [at home]. You know there's no images of me and my everyday stuff, is there? Whereas it's nearly all, or half, half images of me at BiCon. Which I think is about a difference of experience in that I felt much more focussed on my body at BiCon. Partly I think because of feeling- weird you know, that there were one or two other pregnant women there but I felt like a kind of aberration, whereas at home I didn't, you know, [...] And you know, at work people are kind of used to me, or pregnant people around, you know so I think something about, you know, I felt positioned as a pregnant person at BiCon in a way that I didn't in everyday life.

In contrast with the participants who experienced BiCon as a space of open-ness, airiness and bodily expansion (Chapter 3, and this chapter, section 1.2), Lovage's pregnancy brings her body into a frictive relationship with the space, and 'positions' her as a 'weird', 'aberra[nt]' body-object rather than as a body-subject. In describing her photographs, she remarks that her BiCon pictures are 'half images of me', whereas she does not appear in her 'everyday' photos. In everyday life, Lovage takes pictures from inside her body looking out at the world; at BiCon, her photographs are taken from outside her body looking in. The rest of Lovage's account of BiCon 2008 reveals the processes through which her body becomes foregrounded in a space which is not 'set up for' pregnancy. For example, the lack of readily available food on campus causes Lovage to feel 'this is not designed for people like me'.

#### **Extract 4.19**

Erm, and I was feeling very kind of, you know, shaky with low blood sugar. And sort of emotionally I was feeling a bit annoyed at that kind of delay and a sort of: don't they realise I'm a pregnant person I have to eat regularly! [...] So that was the kind of,

embodied-ness of that, it didn't feel specifically much to do with bi but it was sort of, here I am in a bi space kind of not being taken account of. So I suppose yeah there was a relationship to bi there actually, a sort of, this is not designed for people like me.

### ***Being non-progressive- Briar-Rose***

One participant, Briar-Rose, was very aware that her personal politics and lifestyle were at odds with the prevailing social norms at BiCon. For example, while, like the majority of attendees, Briar-Rose was white, middle-class, and highly educated, there were also a number of aspects of her character that she felt did not 'fit in' at BiCon. For example, she felt that her decision to pursue the conventional goal of a well-paying career set her apart in a space with a high proportion of people following vocations as academics and/or activists, as well as a large number of people without work. Throughout her interview, Briar-Rose made frequent references to her decisions to 'project' a certain kind of 'persona' in different circumstances, positioning herself as someone who was happy to be pragmatic about how to present herself in different spaces, for different audiences.

#### **Extract 4.20**

Briar-Rose: Everybody filters to some extent with all groups of people, but those filters are very much in place with both BiCon and work. Because there are aspects of my life that, in each group, are really not very socially acceptable as a norm for that group. So one of the things I don't talk about at BiCon is what I earn. Because the number of unwaged there, and people who really struggle to get any job, is very very high. [My job] pays a ridiculous amount for what I do. [...] And th- a couple of people have a real problem with [my job]. I will not be mentioning this at BiCon again. [...]. I

think BiCon as a space has a lot of people who are quite activist in their life. And that's one of the things I don't talk about, is I'm not. And actually, I'm okay with a lot of the things they're protesting against. Really, quite okay with it, I don't agree with them protesting. And that sort of discussion I'm not willing to get into at BiCon with people I don't know well.

Both Briar-Rose and Lovage describe feeling that BiCon is a space of which they, for different reasons, are not the imagined constituent. Their accounts cut across the idealistic positionings of BiCon as a space to which participants can bring 'all of themselves', and where they can display their bodies and 'talk about anything', which I discussed in Part 1 of this chapter. For all BiCon's 'licence to display', Lovage's advanced pregnancy positions her as 'an aberration' within the space. For all BiCon's 'talk about anything' culture, Briar-Rose knows that there are things she should not mention. In their different ways, both women understand themselves to be out of place at BiCon, just as their bisexuality renders them Trickster-ishly 'out of place' in everyday life.

However, if neither Briar-Rose, nor Lovage embody the imagined BiCon constituent, then neither are they its imagined 'other', the 'person in the street' against which the BiCon subject is constituted. Both women are, like most people at BiCon, white, middle-class and highly educated. While both bring aspects of their lives to BiCon which are not normative for the space, these attributes are highly valued in the 'outside world'. For some participants, as we will see below, BiCon is a space where characteristics which are marked in 'real life' become less marked, perhaps even unmarked. For others, however, BiCon is a space where existing experiences of marginalisation are further compounded.



### ***3.2 Marked identities that become less-marked or unmarked at BiCon***

#### ***Illness and disability***

In Extract 4.7, above, Clare alluded to the importance of having friends at BiCon who knew all the details of her recent breakup. The importance of support from friendship networks as a feature of BiCon 2008 was particularly stressed by participants who were facing some kind of personal adversity (as in Clare's account, above), and particularly where this involved illness or disability. For example, a modelling workshop participant who experienced chronic illness, said;

#### **Extract 4.20/Photo 4.6:**



Kind of sunken in the chest and leaning back  
because my lungs don't work very well, but I'm  
grinning because I like BiCon and all these little  
things on me are the hands of my support network  
[...] No matter what I'm physically going through,  
whether it's up, one level of being active and walk  
around and do stuff or whether I'm just, I'm in bed,  
my feet are on a heat pad, I've got my inhaler  
hugged to my chest then I can reach out and there's  
a hand. (Workshop 2)

Similarly, in the photo-production study, Kathryn, who had been ill during BiCon 2008, described the event as a space where;

#### **Extract 4.21**

K: people were very good about looking after me [...] and you know, random people who I only vaguely know were like asking how I was and making sure I had medicine and stuff, if you have to be ill it's quite a nice social space to be ill in but it was a bit of a waste of a BiCon',

H: Can you say a bit more about it's a nice social space to be ill in?

K: People are genuinely bothered about you, because I'm used to being ill on my own, people kept reminding me to drink and look after myself and they seemed bothered rather than just saying: how are you dear? And they understood, I felt I was understood that I only had a limited amount of energy and I'd do some things then go to sleep and the people I didn't do things with because of that, it was understood, it was disappointing but it wasn't criticised.

Anita, another photo-production study participant, also described BiCon as a supportive space for the management of mental health issues:

#### **Extract 4.22**

Well, I think just, well, say what I want to say and I don't need to make excuses for like, I have a lot of problems sort of with anxiety and things like that, which I'm trying, if I'm feeling panicky or anything like that in more normal space, then- I have to try and explain it. Whereas at BiCon people come up and ask you if you'd like a hug, and if you say no then they walk away again and they come back again in ten minutes and they offer again. And they keep offering until you're ready, and they it- it-it's a much

more accepting than- people look after you and everything and make sure you're ok, whereas sort of in my normal life I have to try and explain it and everyone's very sort of 'why, what's wrong with you?' and things like that, and BiCon isn't like that at all.

In these accounts of illness and disability at BiCon, there is a strong sense of embodied connection to others. In Extract 4.8, the participant describes her model's body as covered in 'the hands of my support network...No matter what I'm physically going through, I can reach out and there's a hand'. In Extract 4.9 and 4.10, these 'helping hands' are positioned as not just belonging to existing members of attendees' 'support networks', but also to 'random people who I only vaguely know' (4.9).

The help offered by these 'random people' is positioned as genuine rather than superficial, extending beyond polite enquiries to sustained practical help – 'people are genuinely bothered about you, they kept reminding me to drink and look after myself [...] rather than just saying how are you dear' (4.9), and, (in Extract 4.10) 'They keep offering [you a hug] until you are ready [...] people look after you and everything and make sure you're ok'. As with the accounts of inclusion we saw in Part 1 of this chapter, here we see participants remarking on the fact that they 'don't have to explain' their choices, behaviours or needs at BiCon.

However, such accounts of help and support are not universal. One photo-study participant, for example, outlined the ways in which fellow attendees displayed discomfort when she disclosed her status as a recovering alcoholic and diabetic.

#### **Extract 4.23/ Photo 4.7**



Ok, back at home, the blood test kit, I felt a bit numb but I always get that way when I test my blood sugar, and I felt like this is something that people don't really want to see and they don't know about my body, I mean it is, diabetes is an invisible disability really but it's a bit like when you talk, when you sort of mention to somebody, which I did at the last the last BiCon that I'm a recovering alcoholic, two different people tried to get me to have a drink and they were really, really persistent, and in the end I had to tell both of them, on two separate occasions: I'm a recovering alcoholic and one of them was: oh god, I'm so sorry. But the other one was really taken aback and didn't want to talk to me after and, yeah, not very, and I've had the same, similar sort of thing when I've got to tell people that I've got a disability, it's like just an uncomfortable, not really wanting to, yeah come near you sort of thing.

In this extract, we see the participant drawing a correlation between attitudes to two unseen disabilities: alcoholism and diabetes. In this participant's experience, disclosing these disabilities at BiCon has led to an increase in social distance - people are sometimes 'taken aback', and no longer want to 'come near you'. For this participant, as for Briar-

Rose, above, their disabilities are something that they have learned that they had better not mention at BiCon.

### ***3.3 Absences and silences***

In this chapter, I have outlined the ways in which BiCon is positioned as an inclusive bisexual space to which participants can bring their whole selves. However, I have also traced tensions between these idealistic constructions of BiCon as an inherently inclusive bisexual 'home', and the ways in which BiCon and its constituents are constructed against an imagined other. Further, I have outlined the ways in which some participants in the photography study experienced themselves as 'out of place' at BiCon 2008. For some participants, these marginalisations were specific to BiCon, and related aspects of their identities which were privileged in everyday life. Other participants, however, experienced multiple marginalisations in everyday life which are further compounded at BiCon. Significantly, their accounts do not, and cannot, appear here. This is because, in the context of a small and closely-knit community, to juxtapose even two or three of their defining characteristics would instantly identify them to large numbers of people. I have made as much use of their voices here as I can without compromising their anonymity, but it is ironic that, in a thesis which explores experiences of BiCon, the voices which most need to be heard are silent. I will discuss the ethical issues this raises further in Chapter 6.

While my dataset contains some information on experiences of multiple marginalisation at BiCon, it is marked by a relative lack of data on participants experiencing this kind of marginalisation. Their absence from the study is reflected in their absence from BiCon, where, as we have seen in Chapter 2, only a small percentage of people are educated to below degree level, and the vast majority are white (Barker et al, 2008; BiPhoria 2014).

In her study of the 1990 National Bisexual Conference in San Francisco, Hemmings points out that, by positioning the NBC as an inherently diverse, utopic 'space without borders or constituents' (2002, p.179), organisers and participants were ironically less able to address issues of classed and racial exclusion. We can see a similar dynamic in operation in these accounts of BiCon 2008. Beneath and between utopian descriptions of BiCon as an idealised bisexual home, we can begin to trace BiCon's borders, and to differentiate between its imagined inclusiveness and the experiences of those participants whose identities do not correspond to those of the imagined BiCon subject.

Since the fieldwork for this study was conducted, issues of intersectionality and marginalisation have emerged as key topics of discussion within the UK bi community, and in LGBT+/feminist politics more widely (see, for example, Serano, 2013). The responses of bi activists and academics to these issues will be discussed in Chapter 6. Nevertheless, as we can see from this chapter, while for many participants BiCon is a vital and highly valued space through which they can move as present-tense bisexual body-subjects, other participants find that, while their bisexuality is validated at BiCon, other aspects of their identities are marginalised.

# ***Chapter 5: Inside the playground looking out- BiCon and ‘the everyday’***

## ***Introduction***

In Chapter One- I outlined the paradoxical nature of bisexual subjectivity and pointed out the parallels between the figure of the bisexual and the archetype of the Trickster. The paradoxical bisexual subject, I argued, was spatio-temporally displaced to an ancestral past or a utopic future, while also being constantly called into being in the present, only to be summarily dismissed. Theorising bisexuality as a Trickster subjectivity, I argued, allowed for a clear articulation of this dynamic, while BiCon, I argued, provided a heterotopic space which allowed these paradoxical subjectivities to be temporarily experienced in the here and now.

In Chapter Three, I examined how the heterotopic place event of BiCon 2008 was intersubjectively, temporally and spatially constituted. Drawing on data from Study 1, I explored participants’ accounts of dis-orienting themselves from everyday life, and re-orienting themselves to the festive space of BiCon 2008. I showed how participants’ accounts of the experience of ‘feeling that they had arrived’ at BiCon demonstrated that arrival as the result of intersubjective, embodied and spatialized practices which resulted in a re-oriented bisexual subject.

In Chapter Four, I explored the possibilities that BiCon held for this re-oriented bisexual subject through participants’ descriptions of their experiences of BiCon 2008. In these accounts, BiCon was described as a place where the paradox of bisexual subjectivity

could be temporarily resolved- participants could lay down the burden of Trickster subjectivity, and be recognised as bisexual subjects in the present tense. Participants therefore spoke of BiCon as a place where they could be 'all of themselves' and more- experimenting with new practices and presentations of self. However, I argued, by applying a critical hermeneutic to these utopic discourses of BiCon as an inclusive bisexual 'home', we could see how BiCon was constituted against an imaginary, and invalidated public 'other' which bore a close resemblance to pathologising discourses of working class people as less 'civilised' than their middle-class counterparts.

Furthermore, this ability to be 'all of oneself' at BiCon did not apply to all participants equally. Some participants experienced BiCon 2008 as marginalising of some of their core identities, sometimes multiply so. The majority of data on marginalisation collected in these studies related to the marginalisation of identities that were validated in everyday life, such as pregnancy and parenthood. Significantly, while there was some evidence that marginalisations experienced in everyday life on the basis of characteristics such as class and race, were compounded at BiCon 2008, the distinctive characteristics of the participants to whom this applied made a developed discussion of their accounts ethically unviable.

This final analysis chapter mirrors the first, in that it is concerned with the relationship between BiCon and the spaces of the everyday. Chapter 3 was written 'from the outside looking in' - it dealt with the processes of leaving 'the outside world' behind, and becoming a subject of bisexual space. This chapter is written 'from the inside looking out', in that it is concerned with what participants take away from BiCon, and how they negotiate their return to everyday life. In the first section of the chapter, I take up a participant's suggestion that BiCon 2008's heterotopic space can be conceived of as a



playground, where clear boundaries and rules of engagement contribute to an atmosphere of both safety and adventure which facilitate exploration, experimentation and self-expression.

The second section of this chapter explores the implications of BiCon 2008 for participants as they return to their everyday lives, referring back to the themes of assimilation and radicalism in LGBT+ politics that I discussed in Chapter 1.

The place-event of BiCon, I argue, acts as both a carnivalesque 'safety valve' that provides a break from the paradoxes of bi subjectivity in the outside world, and as a heterotopic resource base, similar to Bey's Temporary Autonomous Zone (TAZ). BiCon attendees can, if they wish, treat their time at BiCon as a holiday, from which they return to pick up their daily lives as before. Alternatively, they can draw on their experiences at BiCon, and the connections made there, to make their everyday lives, as one participant put it, 'more BiCon-like'. In this way, I argue, symbolic journeys to and from the 'enchanted' space of BiCon can be seen as similar to the archetypal journeys to and from 'the woods' in many myths, from which participants may return transformed, and ready to transform their worlds.

In the final section of the chapter, I examine photo-study participants' accounts of leaving BiCon, showing how, as they return to the spaces of the everyday, they 'close down' their BiCon selves and prepare to re-accustom themselves to relative isolation.

### ***Part 1: 'Like a playground should be'?***

A defining moment in the fieldwork phase of this thesis came when Matt, a veteran BiCon attendee who had been involved in several organising teams, described BiCon as playground-like;

**Extract 5.1/Photo 5.1:**

Matt: All of these photos are about safe. [...] Because one of the things I want BiCon to be, [...] is a safe space for all sorts of things, nice things [...]. It, it this is, BiCon is, it's safe, partly because of the, the atmosphere, the overwhelming atmosphere is one of acceptance provided you behave. No matter what you do, almost,- you don't have a dress code. You know, no matter what you wear, almost-you'll be accepted. Erm, people would take you to one side if you turned up in Nazi uniform, for example, and explain that, you know not so much, no, perhaps not here. Erm, but t-shirt and jeans? No problem. Even at a, even a dressing-up ball, there's space for lots of people to dress up, but t-shirt and jeans? No problem. No dress code. No questions on the door. And it is the space at which I can be me, you can be you, and provided that there's a level of respect between us in terms of boundaries and not going round pushing each other's buttons and stuff like that, it is a really safe, I, I, I struggle to think of a, of anywhere else that's like it in that sense. (.) It is like what a playground

should be.



Matt's description of BiCon as an idealised utopian playground (a playground as it 'should be') is enormously useful in helping to bring together the arguments outlined thus far, and to assemble them into an account of the ways that BiCon 'works' (or 'should work') as a space, and of the ways in which participants position themselves within it. We can also stand back a little from Matt's utopian positioning of BiCon-as-idealised-playground, and consider the ways in which, as I suggested in Chapter 4, these utopian discourses of BiCon as heterotopic home/playground are defined against an implicit Other. Below, I outline three characteristics of an ideal playground, as taken from Matt's account

### ***1.1 Playgrounds are for children***

Firstly, at the risk of stating the obvious, children (watched over by adults) are the intended constituents of playgrounds. Matt's discussion of BiCon-as-playground comes in

the context of his account of taking his child to a playground. By describing BiCon attendees as the constituents of an idealised playground, Matt implicitly positions them as children. Matt is not alone in this positioning- many participants describe their experiences of BiCon by alluding to feeling childlike or youthful. Sometimes participants explicitly describe BiCon as a place where they can embrace their childlike qualities- for example, as we saw in Chapter 4, Kathryn describes enjoying ‘shininess, glitter and ridiculous campness’ in a ‘childlike’ way, and feeling safe to indulge this enjoyment at BiCon- (‘I think the word shiny is very BiCon, or BiCon is very shiny’, Extract 4.9).

Singular’s account of a trip off-campus with friends, for example, is characterised by a childlike delight and exuberance. The group visit the local botanic gardens, where the exhibition includes a ‘lollipop tree’, which Singular is particularly enchanted by-

**Extract 5.2/ Image 5.1<sup>1</sup>**



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<sup>1</sup> This is not Singular’s original image, which showed her standing next to the tree. I have added this image of the same tree, found at [https://c2.staticflickr.com/4/3033/2789893441\\_e03a2a0097\\_b.jpg](https://c2.staticflickr.com/4/3033/2789893441_e03a2a0097_b.jpg) , for illustrative purposes.

Lollipop tree...Little kiddies ran up to it, the gardens were shut, we only had about ten minutes left, and then as soon as the kids left I just- I ran up to it as well, I could feel my self regressing, in a very positive way, just really really girly and little, yeah, I felt very young, I felt reckless, reckless and free. I felt like a happy toddler, and it was safe to feel like that. Really fun and happy. You know, and that feels like a genuine smile (H: yeah, it looks like one) and I'm just pointing. It was great, it was really great. I just wanted to take it home with me. (laughs)

Singular's account of her visit to the botanical gardens places her firmly within the 'BiCon bubble', experiencing the 'everyday world' from within a safe, intersubjectively-constituted space. At closing time, as other visitors depart, Singular feels liberated from social expectations related to the behaviour of adults in public, and safe to express her delight in the tree by running up to it. Singular notes that as she does this, she experiences herself as 'regressing' to the point that she feels 'like a happy toddler', 'reckless and free'.

In setting aside their adult roles and responsibilities, and indulging in play and exploration, BiCon attendees can be seen as taking on childlike subjectivities- sometimes explicitly so.

### ***Youthful subjectivities at BiCon***

While some participants described themselves as becoming childlike at BiCon, others described being able to reconnect with a sense of possibility that they associated with their student days. Briar- Rose, for example, describes BiCon as a place to revive 'the part of you that believes anything is possible'

### **Extract 5.3:**

B-R: It's, it's an opportunity to bring out those aspects of yourself that were some of the best bits of going to uni. The staying up late, the partying, the losing track of time, the having putting-the- world-to-rights conversations til four in the morning, that the older and more grown-up you get and- ooh [ B-R shudders] horrible term- the more entrenched in a professional working life where you need to be up at six in the morning, you can't afford to stay up that late, your body clock resets. Where you might want to put the world to rights, but actually you're more worried about next month's mortgage payment. [...] That kind of combination of seeing the world as a huge plaything to go and find new stuff and new experiences and the willingness to, believe that some- anything is possible, if you just wanna go and look for it. And that's something I've seen as we've got older, a lot of people have that (.) gently sucked out of them by the demands of an everyday routine. And it's one of the things that for me, BiCon is a very, it is a very studenty atmosphere. ....And I feel, I have very strong emotional feelings around the idea that you shouldn't lose the part of you that believes anything is possible. And BiCon for me has an element of recreating that.

Briar-Rose's temporal framing here is revealing. University students, in Briar-Rose's account, are unfettered by the temporal conventions of the 'grown-up' world, and, with no alarm clock to worry about and no mortgage payment to make, are thus able to indulge in the luxury of 'losing track of time'. Like Singular's 'happy toddler', they can become absorbed in the moment, without having to orient towards the future. And yet, free of 'the demands of an everyday routine', which 'gently suck[s] out' their sense that the world is 'a huge plaything' and that 'anything is possible', they are also, we might

argue, free to dream of a utopian future where these endless possibilities might be realised.

For Briar-Rose and Singular, BiCon is a space in which attendees can, for a finite period, relinquish the expectations and constraints of the adult world. In Briar-Rose's account, this is expressed chiefly in terms of freedom from time, and in Singular's, it was expressed in terms of a sense of liberation from behavioural expectations. For other participants, this setting-aside of adulthood was framed in terms of refusing everyday responsibilities for self-care and for the care of others.

Alexandra, for example, described how, for her, BiCon and the Whitby Gothic Weekends<sup>2</sup> both represented chances to set aside her responsibilities to other people and focus on herself. In this context, she describes feeling crowded by a clingy friend at Whitby:

#### **Extract 5.4**

Alexandra: I felt like [my friend] was on top of me all the time, and it was sort of, no, Whitby's my space, Whitby is where sort of, I do what I do, I don't come with a partner, and I do my thing and I wander off and I come back, I don't have to be

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<sup>2</sup> A significant number of BiCon attendees also attend the twice-yearly Whitby Gothic Weekend. Hodkinson's description of the event in his ethnography of the UK Goth scene (Hodkinson, 2002) describes it in terms which are strongly reminiscent of participant accounts of BiCon in this study. The event brings together geographically dispersed individuals with a common interest, and serves as an opportunity to strengthen existing subcultural connections and make new ones, as well as to perform, and acquire, subcultural capital (ibid, p.105).

responsible to anyone else, and that-yeah- it's- yeah. I only have to be at me at various events like Whitby and BiCon, and I only have to be concerned about me and how I feel. I don't have to be responsible for others' emotions, for their physical state, it's- erm- [...] I spend a lot of [my life] feeling responsible for other people, and when I go on holiday these are windows when I don't have to do that. I leave all that behind, and that's why these bubbles are so important to me. I leave, because they are, I leave those things over there, and then I get back to being who I am.

H: So it sounds like you're describing it as very- BiCon and Whitby as very separate spaces from everyday life and the outside world.

A: Yep, very.

H: And you said 'where I can get back to being who I am'. Do you mean- in opposition to?

A: All the things that one has to do for an everyday life. I want to be a beautiful person who can swan around and do their makeup and wear fancy clothes all day and just be-arty and creative and all that kind of thing. But you have to pay the rent, you have to pay the bills, you have to do a job that you can do. And this [gestures towards her elaborate Whitby outfit] would not be practical for my job. [...] It's, yeah, it's it's the balance between what you can do, what you want to do, and what you have to do.

For Alexandra, then, BiCon and the Whitby Gothic Weekend are events are 'windows' or 'bubbles'- discrete, bounded periods of time which present opportunities for Alexandra to leave her everyday life behind , and indulge in her love of dressing up. Alexandra's description of 'gett[ing] back to who I am' positions her authentic self as



interrupted and constrained by the responsibilities of the everyday. On holiday at BiCon and Whitby, Alexandra explains, she can, for a short period of time, live life as she would ideally like to- ('I want to be a beautiful person who can swan around and do their makeup...'). In this context, she resents being expected to care for others.

Briar-Rose's account in extract 5.3 positions BiCon as a space where participants are freed up to experience life in the present tense, rather than being constrained by clock-time. Alexandra's continuing account, below, is marked by her frustration and inability to completely shrug off the demands of the adult world and achieve this present-time orientation- she has driven a group of her friends several hundred miles to attend the event, and is increasingly aware, as the weekend goes on, of the need to abstain from alcohol and to get enough sleep in order to make the journey home safely;

#### **Extract 5.5**

7: It really affected my experience of BiCon, that it was being cut short [...] it was not being able to do the things that I wanted to do. The whole partying all night, staying up til dawn, getting involved in deep and meaningful conversations, drinking some more when people say 'here! Have a drink of this' and just knowing that you couldn't. Because you had to have some sleep before being able to drive and, and keeping reasonably sane.

H: Yeah. So you were sort of pacing yourself in a way that you didn't really want to, you sort of couldn't let go, in a way?

7: Yeah! Yeah, exactly. I'm sort of pacing myself in a way that felt very unnatural for my BiCon experience basically. So yeah. [...] Natural would be to go with the flow, be in the moment, and just do what was going on, and being able to be joining the group and just hanging out and and not constantly have it in the back of my head of 'you've got eight hours before you have to get up and do such and such.' And it was a bit- yeah. I don't want to be aware of that when I'm at BiCon.

For Alexandra, the looming end of the event and the long journey it brings eats backwards into her time at BiCon and prevents her 'be[ing] in the moment' and 'go[ing] with the flow'. While, for her passengers, and for other participants, the journey home from BiCon will provide opportunities for reflection and re-orientation (as we shall see below), Alexandra's adult responsibilities begin the moment she sits behind the wheel of her car. The need to prepare for this moment keeps Alexandra from fully embracing the possibilities of BiCon, which are framed in much the same terms here as in Briar-Rose's account in extract 5.3 (staying up late, partying, having long, 'deep' conversations).

While Alexandra's account contains no allusions to youth or childishness, it shares one important feature with the other two accounts- that is, a sense of BiCon as a return to something that has been lost ('gently sucked out') by the demands of adult life. Later in the chapter, I will discuss the implications of such a return for participants' post-BiCon everyday lives.

## ***1.2 Playgrounds are safe places to try things out***

In Matt's account, above, BiCon, like a well-designed playground, is 'safe'. Like a playground, it is structured in such a way as to encourage and facilitate a variety of kinds of play, which can be engaged in with a reasonable level of safety, and with a minimum of supervision ('a safe space for all sorts of things, nice things'). Within a set of basic rules,

children are free to use the space as they wish. They may just want to indulge in play for its own sake, to run around and 'let off steam'. They may want to experiment with novel ways of performing the self or engaging with others, by trying out a new identity as a superhero. They may want to process recent events at home through a game of 'let's pretend', or just sit alone at the top of the climbing frame and watch the action below. As we saw in Chapter 4, many participants position BiCon as a safe, utopian space where one is free to explore, and to express oneself in a wide range of ways. Adam, Anita, and Kathryn for example, spoke about feeling free to dress in a variety of ways.

### ***Opening up possibilities***

#### **Extract 5.5**

Matt: Um, it is a space to explore, it is a space to play, it is a space to relax, it is a space to have friends, it is a space to do all these sorts of things, take risks- with some level of safety, um, yeah. And I'm aware that some people use it in spaces that- in ways that I don't, er, I don't do any recreational drugs, erm, [...] Erm, but it is a safe space for them to do that. Erm, what could you not do in that space? The only things I can think of at the moment are- not nice. (.) And you can play with your identity, how you present, your gender, your sexuality, all sorts of things. (.) You can play with other people in all sorts of ways. And if we look back at the programme, that one. [...] there's lots of stuff that's got nothing to do with bisexuality really, but it's still bisexual space and it's still safe and it's still play and it's still exploration. [...] Opening up possibilities. We're opening up possibilities.

As we saw above, what Briar-Rose most valued about BiCon was the opportunity to reconnect with the sense that ‘anything is possible’. In Extract 5.5, above, Matt continues his description of BiCon as a playground, describing the event as a space which ‘opens up possibilities’ for attendees to explore, relax, play, and take risks in a safe environment. As Matt points out, the programme (Appendix 2) contains a range of workshops on topics as diverse as Chi Gung, therapeutic flogging, self-help, and time management, which have ‘nothing to do with bisexuality really’, but provide opportunities for attendees to experiment with new activities, as well as to experiment playfully with different ways of presenting themselves or relating to others.

Many of the kinds of ‘play’ which are permissible at BiCon are those in which participants may not be able to engage safely in everyday life. A playground extends the actions of the bodies that inhabit it in a range of ways, putting a new set of actions ‘within reach’ (by providing, for example, safer opportunities for climbing than are usually found elsewhere). In a similar way, Matt positions BiCon as a ‘safe space’ to take recreational drugs, or to play with presentations and experiences of gender and sexuality.

For some participants, this sense of ‘the possible’ is directly related to the ways in which BiCon attendees are liberated, not just from the mundanities of everyday adult life, but from the constraints of hegemonic constructions of gender and sexuality.

One of Emma’s photographs, for example, captioned ‘exploring the endless possibilities of a BiCon dance floor’, showed her twirling around on the dance floor dressed as a lion. Asked to explain the caption, she said;

**Extract 5.6/ Photo 5.3**



Emma: Yeah, I think I was thinking about like, the dance space, especially a bi dance space, 'cos there've been like endless possibilities, endless combinations of friendships, relationships, pairings, you know? It just, it just, I just a little, I think that struck me at one moment, when I was dancing, that there were just all these endless possibilities in the room that you don't normally get. Cos you're normally in gay space, so one thing is possible, or you're in straight space, so another thing is possible, and you don't often get to be in a space where it doesn't matter. It doesn't matter what gender somebody thinks they are or. It doesn't matter, all of that doesn't matter anymore because, you know? We're all people.

Similarly, a workshop participant said;

#### **Extract 5.7**

Person 4: I, because last night when I, not observing, but when I was talking, and I'm a people watcher, and my feeling is I wasn't looking at- not bisexual people, I was looking at liberated people, and my feeling was there was freedom, there's a big sense of liberation of how people was expressing, I was never, I sort of never put it

towards bisexual and being attracted to members of either sex, but I just saw that people been liberated just to express their physical love or attraction to someone regardless, it just felt flowing, you know, flowing, sort of, in me. (Workshop 3)

For these participants, then, BiCon is a heterotopic space of liberation and possibility. The process of becoming a BiCon subject entails leaving the responsibilities and constraints of everyday adult life behind, and taking up a childlike or youthful subject position. Extract 5.7 reminds us how, as discussed in Chapter 4, bisexuality is not foregrounded at BiCon ('I sort of never put it towards bisexual and being attracted to members of either sex'). Indeed the 'frictionlessness' of bisexual subjectivity at BiCon is described as part of what generates the sense of 'endless' possibility that both Emma and the participant in Extract 5.7 refer to 'it just felt flowing, you know, flowing, sort of, in me'.

In Chapter 1, I outlined a theorisation of the relationship between the bisexual subject and bisexual space which positioned the bisexual subject as Trickster, and BiCon as a medieval carnival. The sense of possibility and liberation expressed in Extracts 5.6 and 5.7 echoes Bakhtin's description of the ways in which carnival temporarily transforms hierarchical social relations:

'[A]ll were considered equal during carnival. Here, in the town square, a special form of free and familiar contact reigned among people who were usually divided by the barriers of caste, property, profession and age. The hierarchical background and the extreme corporative and caste divisions of the medieval social order were exceptionally strong. Therefore, such free, familiar contacts were deeply felt and formed an essential element of the carnival spirit. People were, so to speak, reborn for new, purely human relations. These truly human relations were not only a fruit of

imagination or abstract thought; they were experienced. The utopian ideal and the realistic merged in this carnival experience, unique of its kind. (Bakhtin, 1984; p.10)

What Emma and the participant in Extract 5.7 are describing is a moment of experience of people temporarily ‘reborn for new, purely human relations’ outside the constraints and categories of the everyday. As we have seen in Chapter 4, BiCon does not succeed in fully setting aside the hierarchies of everyday life. But in these extracts we have a glimpse of what participants experience in peak moments/what BiCon ‘should’ be like.

### ***‘It’s not real’***

In arguing that participants’ accounts position bisexuality as a heterotopic space, I have mainly alluded to the symbolism of journeys to BiCon, rather than to physical distance. Importantly, however, for almost all participants, BiCon 2008 took place at a physical distance from their everyday lives, and for many, there was also an element of social distance- the relative lack of local bi scenes outside Manchester, Brighton and London meant that, for most, BiCon was one of a few times a year when they were able to meet up with other members of the bi community- between events, connections were maintained through social media rather than in person. This physical and social distance meant that, for many participants, BiCon was a space which they could, if they chose to, keep entirely separate from their everyday lives. This meant that their actions at BiCon had few, if any, unchosen implications for their lives outside the ‘BiCon bubble’, making BiCon a low-risk and relaxed environment for experimentation and exploration;

### **Extract 5.8**

Helen: Hmmm. You mentioned play, playfulness?

Briar-Rose: It's very, it's a very relaxed environment to explore different identities, to play with ideas. There's an element to BiCon that for me is, it's not real. It's a one-off weekend with a group of people, who some of whom I really really do like and would love to find enough time to get to know properly. But also it is a group of people whom, ultimately, I could step away from by just not turning up next year. I could, much like the whole idea of internet chatrooms, I could be anyone or anything and nobody would know any better.

As Briar-Rose makes clear, BiCon for her is a space that she could very easily walk away from without consequences. For Briar-Rose, this makes BiCon, like an internet chatroom, a space that is 'not real'- and one in which she, too, is not obliged to be 'real' ('I could be anyone or anything and nobody would know any better').

***It's just what you're wearing, not who you are***

In Chapter 3, I argued that participants oriented towards BiCon 2008 as a space where the paradox of bisexuality could be temporarily resolved, such that bisexual subjectivity could be experienced in the present tense. Within this space, I argued, participants' authenticity as bisexual subjects was taken for granted. This resulted, I argued, in bisexuality becoming less salient at BiCon than in everyday life.

As discussed in Chapter 4, one aspect of BiCon that was frequently mentioned in interviews and workshops was a sense of a safe 'BiCon gaze'- as Kathryn put it 'a sort of soppy supportive looking'- which allowed participants to experiment with gender presentation, or dress spectacularly without fear of harassment. Another aspect of this non-disciplinary gaze that participants emphasised was the idea that a person's dress or



gender presentation at a given moment would not be taken as a hard-and-fast statement about their identity:

Anita, for example, described her experience of wearing a corset at BiCon thus:

**Extract 5.9**

‘I was walking around [at BiCon, wearing a corset], people came to me and said: you look brilliant, kind of thing, whereas when I’ve worn my corset outside sort of, in the outside, people come up to me and say ‘are you a Goth’? [...] but at BiCon it’s completely different and you, you can wear those kinds of things like that so, [...], people won’t assume that you’re a Goth, they’ll just assume that you’re you and that happens to be something you’re wearing that evening, and then tomorrow night you might come out, come out dressed as a fairy or something. [...] It’s just what you’re wearing that night rather than what you are, at BiCon I think.’

For Anita, then, to wear a corset in everyday spaces is to expect to field questions about whether this is a statement of Goth identity. As I argued in Chapter 1, following Garber (1995, p.87), and Bower et al (2002, p.28) one of the most intractable problems of performing bisexual subjectivity in the present tense is that ‘authentic’ performances of identity are verified by their consistency over time, while bisexuality is characterised by fluidity. Thus, as Eisner (2013) puts it, bisexuality cannot be fully expressed in any given moment, and is therefore doomed to appear inauthentic. The bisexual subject is perennially cast as the untrustworthy Trickster. Within the ‘playground’ of BiCon, however, bisexuality is held constant, and participants are liberated from the need to engage in coherent performances of subjectivity. In this context, the presentation of the self becomes an occasion for playfulness and experimentation, and dress is seen on its

own terms- as Anita puts it - 'it's just what you're wearing that night rather than what you are'.

Below, Adam explains how this sense that, at BiCon, dress on its own does not make an identity statement frees him, like Anita, to experiment with costumes that would, in the outside world, be understood quite differently:

#### **Extract 5.10**

Adam: I feel reasonably supported in being a bit experimental and having a different look if I felt like it. I have turned up at BiCon with my hair dyed a different colour, erm, I can quite see me doing in- being supported in quite a lot of different types of dress [...]

I mean, I've certainly turned up to various bits of BiCon in a dress, and not this time, but actually it just feels like another outfit to try out, and I'm not even feeling like I'm necessarily playing a lot with gender at that point, it's just an interesting type of outfit I can play with there because BiCon doesn't read gender so hard, [...] so it's almost a, a wider variety of things I could wear, whereas if I went somewhere else, doing that would be a quite specific statement. To whoever saw it. [...] But at BiCon that doesn't matter so much, I don't think it makes- what I wear makes a single statement on its own, so that means that I've got a bit more variety to play with there, and it doesn't feel as important.

In BiCon space, Adam, a cisgender<sup>3</sup> male, can wear a dress without feeling as if he is even ‘playing with gender’, let alone making a statement about his own identity. Like Briar-Rose and Anita, he experiences BiCon as a place where self-expression and experimentation come without real-world consequences- another characteristic of a utopian playground.

### ***1.3 Playgrounds are open to all who meet the entry criteria***

Theoretically, a playground is open to all children who are prepared to abide by a minimal set of rules (no dogs, no ball games, under-fives only on the toddler swings). BiCon, too, is a space with a minimal set of rules and no barriers to entry (‘No questions on the door’), where everyone can be accepted, ‘provided [they] behave’<sup>4</sup>. Within these

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<sup>3</sup> Cisgender (sometimes abbreviated to ‘cis’) is a term used to refer to people who have remained in the gender they were assigned at birth.

<sup>4</sup> To ‘behave’ in the context of BiCon 2008 was to adhere to the event’s Code of Conduct (see Appendix 1). This document sets out a brief series of behavioural norms which focus on three principles:

- respecting difference (e.g. being aware of access issues),
- respecting boundaries (e.g. asking for consent before hugging someone, taking ‘no’ for an answer), and
- respecting confidentiality (e.g. keeping discussions within workshops private, getting consent before photographing someone).

Participants were encouraged to bring any breaches of the Code of Conduct to the attention of the organisers, who worked on a duty rota. Organisers, first aid, and the

boundaries, people are free to be themselves ('I can be me, you can be you') without facing censure except in extreme cases ('people would take you to one side if you turned up in Nazi uniform'). As we saw in Chapter 4, participants consistently describe BiCon as a space to which they can (or should be able to) bring 'all of themselves'.

### ***1.4 Playgrounds are heterotopic***

Finally, a playground can be understood as a heterotopic space- clearly boundaried, outside of 'everyday life' but close to it. As I showed in Chapters 3 and 4, there is substantial evidence to show that participants oriented to BiCon as such a space. Below, I develop this argument further, showing how, for many participants, the geographical and social distance between BiCon and their everyday lives means that, should they wish to do so, they can keep the two spheres completely separate. This means that BiCon can function for these participants as a carnivalesque space, where, for a limited time, they can leave aside the usual rules and constraints of the adult world without consequences for their daily lives.

### ***Summary***

In this first section of the chapter, I have drawn on a participant's description of BiCon as an idealised playground to show how BiCon is discursively constituted in participant accounts as a utopian space for exploration and experimentation. While participants' experiences of BiCon, like children's experiences of playgrounds, often fall short of these

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counselling team could all be contacted via the reception desk. There was also a post-box for anonymous comments and queries.

ideals, the idea that BiCon is (or should be) a 'safe space' to which one can bring one's whole self, is widely taken up, and is often deployed to position BiCon as a space which lends itself to a wide range of play and exploration. Separate from the world, with its own behavioural code, BiCon is a space, I have argued, where participants can discard adult roles and responsibilities and take on youthful, self-centred, present-time-oriented subjectivities. In this section, I have taken a descriptive, empathetic approach to participants' accounts of their experiences at BiCon. In the next section, I take a more critical approach, discussing the relationship between the BiCon 'playground' and the outside world, from the point of view of participants leaving the event and re-entering 'the everyday'. First, I suggest that participant accounts of BiCon's relationship to everyday life position the event both as a carnivalesque spectacle, and as a resource for personal and social transformation. Secondly, I draw on participant accounts of leaving BiCon to show how, as they return to everyday life, participants experience themselves as 'closing down' those aspects of themselves that are 'too much' for the everyday world-picking up once more the Trickster subjectivity that they set aside en route to BiCon.

## ***Part 2: BiCon and 'the everyday'***

A central argument of this thesis has been that BiCon can be understood as a heterotopia. Thus far, however, I have presented only partial evidence for this argument, showing how BiCon is constructed as a space outside of, but near to, 'the everyday'. A heterotopia, after all, is not defined solely as a space in opposition to 'the everyday', but is, as Hetherington (1997) notes, a space where alternative ways of ordering the social world can be tried out and, perhaps, put into practice back in the 'real world'.

What, then, is the relationship between BiCon and ‘the everyday?’ What do participants ‘take home’ from BiCon? For some participants, the answer seems to be ‘very little’. Below, I discuss how, in these participants’ accounts, BiCon is positioned as a carnivalesque space, a place to ‘let off steam’, but with few implications for their post-event everyday lives. Other participants, meanwhile, position BiCon as a life-changing experience<sup>5</sup>, and describe using the space as a resource for the gradual transformation of their daily lives.

## ***2.1 Homes and playgrounds***

In Chapter 1, I outlined the ways in which dominant constructions of sexuality and gender as dichotomous leave the bisexual subject suspended in an epistemological no-one’s land, a liminal space between the poles of the binary. I suggested that we might theorise the bisexual subject as embodying a kind of Trickster subjectivity- characterised by excess, instability and transgression. In Chapter 3, I suggested that, by making a symbolic journey to the heterotopic, festive space of BiCon, the bisexual-as-trickster could gain entry to a space within which, for a limited time, they could leave behind the paradoxes of being a bisexual subject in a gay/straight world, and be recognised and validated as a bisexual subject.

Thus far, I have attended to two possible theorisations of BiCon itself. First, in Chapter 1, I outlined Hemmings analysis of the 1990 NBC in terms of its utopic aspirations to be a bisexual ‘home’. In this sense, Hemmings points out, ‘home’ is not simply a geographical

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<sup>5</sup> Indeed, the following quote from an attendee is used in publicity materials from BiCon 2015- “BiCon has been a life-changing experience for many of us. Going has certainly been one of the best things that has ever happened to me.” (<http://2015.bicon.org.uk/about/why-come-to-bicon/> , accessed 13/06/15)

space, but rather 'a site of meaning within which one recognises oneself and is recognised in return'. As we have seen in Chapter 4, participants orient to BiCon as a space to which they can bring 'all of themselves' and be recognised for who they are. Whatever they might wear, say or do, they remain recognisable as a bisexual subject. BiCon, then, could be theorised in terms of an intra- and inter-subjectively constituted home space, a haven from a cruel, monosexual world. What the concept of bisexual spaces as 'homes' fails to capture, however, is BiCon's temporality. Home is popularly understood as a place to which one can always return when times are hard- BiCon, in contrast, comes but once a year.

In Part 1 of this chapter, I have discussed the ways in which my participants can be described as orienting towards BiCon as a kind of idealised playground- a space full of possibilities without responsibility, where they can 'let off steam' or explore the world from within a safe environment. Such a theorisation addresses BiCon's time-limited nature: you can only be in the playground at playtime, and must spend the rest of the day in the 'real world'. Seeing BiCon as a playground allows us to attend to temporality in a way that conceiving of it as 'home' does not.

In this section of the chapter, I develop the idea of BiCon-as-playground further by outlining two ways in which participants in the photography study (and, to a lesser extent, in the modelling study) position the relationship between BiCon and everyday life.

For some participants, BiCon is akin to a Bakhtinian carnival- a seasonal opportunity to shrug off the responsibilities of everyday life. These participants are largely content to maintain a clear separation between BiCon and their 'real lives'. For others, however, BiCon is an opportunity to gather connections, resources and information which they can then use to transform their everyday lives. In this way, it is more akin to a Temporary

Autonomous Zone (as described by Bey, 1990). Below, I outline these two concepts and illustrate them with extracts from my data. Finally, in Part 3, I briefly discuss participants' accounts of leaving BiCon and returning to the 'everyday'.

## ***2.2 Carnival***

In his landmark work 'Rabelais and his world', Mikhail Bakhtin (1984) describes the importance of the carnivalesque in medieval European popular culture. Carnival was a seasonally-occurring break from the rules and hierarchies of the medieval world, during which, in the marketplace and the fair, people would don masks and costumes, assume alternate personae and, as Hetherington (1997, p.27) rather delicately puts it, generally 'behave in an excessive way'. During carnival time, the usual hierarchies and rules of the world were inverted, and the distinction between the marginal and the central became blurred (Hetherington, 1997). The grotesque was celebrated in place of the classical, the flesh in place of the spirit, the bawdy in place of the sacred, greed and lust instead of abstinence (Bakhtin, 1984; Barber, 1959; Danow, 1995; Hetherington, 1997; Stallybrass and White, 1986).

Carnival built 'a second world and a second life outside officialdom, a world in which all medieval people participated more or less, in which they lived during a given time of the year' (Bakhtin, 1984, pp.5-6). Bristol (1997, p.236) describes carnival as characterised by its 'in-between-ness'. It is 'the liminal occasion par excellence, something that happens betwixt and between the regularly scheduled events of ordinary life'.

However, carnival was ultimately part of the social order, acting as a kind of 'safety-valve' which, for all its revolutionary appearances, was an officially-sanctioned festival which allowed medieval people to 'let off steam', the better to withstand the rigid



hierarchies of medieval life the rest of the year (Stallybrass and White, 1986). Carnival was, as Bassil-Morozow put it, a way of ‘temporarily distanc[ing] the official vision of the world’, without ‘challenging either the system or the economic circumstances’ (Bassil-Morozow 2014, p74).

Carnival, then, was a heterotopic space, set apart from everyday life, yet ultimately closely related to it (Hetherington, 1997), apparently revolutionary but ultimately conservative in its aims. For some participants, BiCon functioned as a carnivalesque space and time, during which they could suspend the demands of adult life and indulge in play and recreation.

### ***2.3 BiCon as carnival***

Accounts that position BiCon as ‘carnavalesque’ - that is, as a hedonistic opportunity to party and ‘let off steam’, tend to describe BiCon as physically and socially distant from the everyday world, and as having little effect on their everyday lives. When taking up these constructions of BiCon, participants do not express a wish for their everyday lives to become more ‘BiCon-like’. Rather, they position the boundary between BiCon and the ‘real world’ as necessary and useful. For example, throughout Alexandra’s and Briar-Rose’s accounts, BiCon and everyday life are positioned as very different spheres, with little movement between the two. It is in these more carnivalesque accounts that incursions of the ‘outside world’ into BiCon space are positioned as the most problematic. For example, Alexandra and Briar-Rose’s experiences of BiCon are both constrained by the intrusion of ‘real life’ into BiCon. For Alexandra, as we saw in

In Extract 5.4, above, for example, Alexandra presents BiCon as an opportunity to shrug off her daily responsibilities and indulge in her love of dressing up. She is resentful of a friend’s clinginess, as she sees BiCon as a space where she can leave behind her

responsibilities to others and just concentrate on enjoying herself. In Extract 5.5, we saw another way in which the 'real world' intruded into Alexandra's BiCon- the necessity of getting enough sleep, and avoiding alcohol, in order to be able to drive, meant that Alexandra was unable to relax into 'going with the flow' and had to continue to orient to her responsibilities as an adult.

The distinction between BiCon and everyday life is particularly clear in Briar-Rose's account, which is the most consistently carnivalesque of the photo-production study accounts. As we have seen throughout these three chapters, Briar-Rose enjoys the ways in which BiCon allows her (like Alexandra), to step aside from her adult responsibilities reconnect with her youthful sense of possibility (Extract 5.3), and then to return to her everyday life (Extract 5.8). For Briar-Rose, performing an authentic bi subjectivity, at BiCon or in everyday life, is not a concern, and she describes enjoying presenting different 'personae' in different contexts, positioning these as equally partial:

#### **Extract 5.11**

Briar-Rose: Mm. I am not strictly who I normally am at BiCon. I am much more (.) volatile and much more bouncy. Because it's this environment where you either throw yourself into it, or you're going to feel out of your depth. [...] And a lot of the personality I'm projecting is designed to fit in to a certain way, but- and also something that's quite fun- it's an aspect of my character that I enjoy. But it's not complete. And it's about as incomplete as the work personality, but in a very different direction.

Throughout our interview, Briar-Rose made a clear distinction between the self that she projected at BiCon, and her work persona. This demarcation was brought into particular

relief for Briar-Rose by the fact that she had attended a job interview on the way to BiCon. She had taken Photo 5.3, with its clear demarcation of fetish wear and work documents, as a way of documenting this, and referred several times to the ways in which the juxtapositions of objects in her photos illustrated the tension between her everyday and BiCon personae. This was a tension, however, which Briar-Rose enjoyed and did not seek to resolve, as she makes clear in Extract 5.12, below-

**Extract 5.12/ Photo 5.3**

Briar-Rose: Because I'm treating BiCon as a, almost as an unreal space I go into it with a slightly different set of expectations and a, an expectation I will dress up and be something slightly different for this event, and then I will have my real life to go back to.

BiCon to me is very slightly unreal, it's not what my life should be like all of the time, because what my life should be like all of the time, it actually is. It contains lots of the people I love, I'm out to all of the ones whose opinions really matter, I have hugs and cuddles and kisses and people to massage and people to be tactile with, I have a career which fits really well with who I think I am. All these good things are part of what completes me and some of these things are not things I necessarily want as part of what goes on at BiCon. But my life is richer in its wholeness than it is at BiCon, but BiCon is a really cool highlight.



Here, Briar-Rose juxtaposes the ‘unreal space’ of BiCon against her ‘real life’, which is ‘richer in its wholeness than it is at BiCon’. It is noticeable that the ‘wholeness’ of Briar-Rose’s life, as described in this extract, does not include BiCon. Indeed, Briar-Rose describes BiCon as ‘unreal’, and she describes her ‘real life’ as ‘what it should be’. However, BiCon provides a useful opportunity to step away from the tyranny of clock-time (Extract 5.3), to leave behind the responsibilities of being a ‘grown-up’ and to reconnect with the youthful sense of possibility that Briar-Rose associates with her student days (Extract 5.8). Importantly, however, this has no implications for Briar-Rose’s everyday life- during BiCon/carnival, Briar-Rose can ‘dress up and be something slightly different’ (Extract 5.12), secure in the knowledge that she could ‘be anyone or anything and no-one would know any better’, and that she could ‘step away from [this group of people] by just not turning up next year’. This unreality makes BiCon ‘a very relaxed environment to explore different identities, to play with ideas’.

## ***2.4 Into the woods: Temporary Autonomous Zones***

Situationist and anarchist writers such as Bey (1990) and Debord (1984), have reimagined the festive space of the carnival as another, more radical kind of heterotopia- the temporary autonomous zone, or TAZ.

In his book 'TAZ: The temporary autonomous zone, ontological anarchy, poetic terrorism' (Bey, 1990), the American political writer Hakim Bey argues that would-be agents of social change should strive to create temporary uprisings- free enclaves outside, although adjacent to, the mundane world.

Revolution, Bey argues, inevitably leads to oppression and betrayal, with the revolutionaries becoming part of the system they had tried to overthrow: in order to sustain itself in the face of resistance, revolution inevitably results in a State even more oppressive than its predecessor. Thus, argues Bey, the cycle of oppression-revolution-oppression continues. This vicious circle can be broken, Bey suggests, by aspiring not to revolution as-such, but to temporary autonomous zones (TAZs) such as those seen in the 'pirate utopias' of the eighteenth century, and described in science fiction, such as the work of cyberpunk author Bruce Sterling (Bey, 1990<sup>6</sup>).

These 'islands in the net', or 'temporary autonomous zones' (TAZs), are by their very nature temporary- they are intense, peak experiences which 'like festivals...cannot happen every day- otherwise they would not be 'non-ordinary'.' Nevertheless, 'such moments of intensity give shape and meaning to the entirety of a life. The shaman

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<sup>6</sup> <http://hermetic.com/bey/taz3.html#labelTAZ> , accessed 28 June 2015

returns- you can't stay up on the roof forever- but things have changed, shifts and integrations have occurred- a *difference* is made.' (Bey, 1990).

To spend time in a TAZ might be thought of as akin to the symbolic journeys that characters in fairytales take into the woods (Bettelheim, 1991). The Stephen Sondheim musical *Into The Woods* combines several of these archetypal stories to show how characters such as Red Riding Hood, Cinderella, Jack (he of the beanstalk) and Prince Charming return transformed from such journeys, and ready to make changes in their worlds (Sondheim and Lapine, 1993).

## ***2.5 BiCon as a space for transformation***

Some participants clearly positioned BiCon as a space for making connections and collecting resources for transforming their everyday lives, in ways that are reminiscent of Bey's description of the TAZ, above. This discourse is particularly clearly demonstrated in Adam's description of BiCon 2008. A veteran BiCon attendee, Adam's experience of BiCon that year was shaped by the fact that he lived close enough to that year's venue to commute from home daily, rather than staying on-site. Here, he discusses how, in 2008, moving in and out of the venue meant that experienced BiCon as less separate from his everyday life. He compares this with the way that, over time, his life has also become 'closer' to BiCon in social terms.

### **Extract 5.8**

Adam: Yeah. I've had BiCons where I've dipped in and out before and it was extremely weird. [...] And actually this time it didn't feel that way, it didn't feel so much like a retreat this time, it was closer to my everyday life, and actually it is

closer to my everyday life now, than it used to be. It used to be sort of regular life would be a lot different from BiCon -

H: right, right

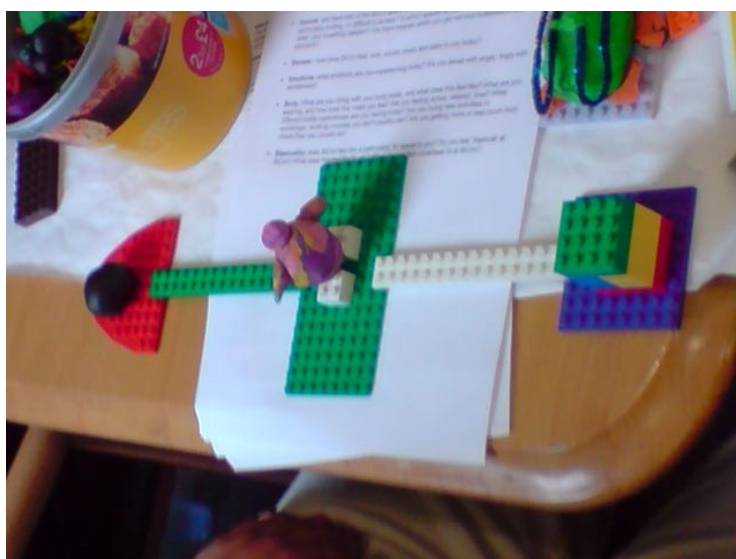
A: they're closer now. So it felt not- I was explaining to people at the time, there wasn't a big transition, compared to other times, and I wasn't going somewhere that was - I was going home. Which is very different than when I've been at one part, going between quite a sexual part of BiCon to going to a [religious ceremony] in a different city, and then back again.

[...]

H: Do you mean, what sort of things do you mean?

A: Erm, certainly at home I can be dressed how I like and talk about what I like, and that sort of feels a bit that I'm not, I'm not living in a straight world, certainly with partner and housemates. And I know some people, you know their, their family life is very different from their BiCon life whereas mine isn't cos sort of, almost, chosen family are from BiCon, that's where I mainly know my friends from now, I've got some university friends but a lot are BiCon friends [...] Erm, and I guess yeah, being able to see some of these [BiCon] people other places- you know, they're not just people I see once a year, erm, again, online's a bit weird for that 'cos it's very partial, erm, but I do, less so this year but because I've been going for quite a few years, what happens one year or another doesn't feel quite as important, erm, spread out, but over the last you know four or five years I've gotten to see a lot of the people and spend time with a lot of the people I see at BiCon as well, so it's sort of spread itself out a bit that way

I have quoted Adam at length here, because in this extract he expresses very clearly the ways in which he feels that his everyday life and BiCon have become less discrete over time. BiCon used to feel like ‘a retreat’ for Adam, but as he has made more friends and connections within the bi community over the years, BiCon has ‘spread itself out a bit’ into his everyday life. While, as I have discussed above and in Chapter 4, some participants define BiCon in opposition to the public spaces of ‘the outside world’ and to a ‘generalised Other’, Adam frames BiCon much less strongly against ‘the straight world’. Adam juxtaposes BiCon with his home and personal relationships, positioning them as having become ‘closer together’ over time. Whereas, Adam notes, some people have a ‘family life’ that is ‘very different from their BiCon life’, his ‘chosen family’ and friends are ‘from BiCon’, and, living with his partner (who is also a regular BiCon attendee) and their housemates, he does not feel as if he is ‘living in a straight world’. This means that each individual BiCon has become less important, since there is now far less social distance between BiCon and his everyday life than there used to be. In short, Adam no longer needs the ‘retreat’ of BiCon, because he has successfully closed the gap between BiCon and his ‘regular life’. We can see a similar process happening in the following extract from workshop 3:



**Extract 5.9 /photo 5.4**



Person 2: Ok, I kind of did a journey metaphor with my piece so I sort of started, before coming to BiCon, the work I do sort of in boxes with different places, different places like different people, different things about me, sort of coming here, so I used the multi coloured clay to represent well actually there's been a bit, able to be a jumbling of the boxes a bit more, I've been able to open myself up a bit but sort of still using the legs there as the sort of Lego bits, there's still a bit of, you know catch over from my old life still maybe some of the inhibitions or whatever there and then sort of moving on thinking about after BiCon those are all of the things that I've learnt about here so there's kind of a sense of anticipation of well, how do I then go and apply that to a future state and I've kind of used a nebulous black blob there to show I don't actually know what that's going to be but it will be based on some of the stuff that I've learnt here. (Workshop 3)

In this extract from Workshop 3, which took place on the last day of BiCon, this participant describes their model in temporal terms as a 'journey metaphor'. Their account echoes the temporal framing of BiCon that many participants in both studies drew on, and that is reflected in the organisation of these three empirical chapters. Similarly, they also draw on the discursive constructions of BiCon as a place to which people can bring 'all of themselves', that I outlined in Chapter 4- their everyday life is described in compartmentalised terms of 'boxes with different places...different things about me'. They describe BiCon as a place where these boxes can be 'jumble[d]', and they have described representing this in their model through multi-coloured clay showing that they have 'been able to open myself up a bit'.

Significantly for my purposes here, while at the start of their description they describe their everyday life in the present tense ('the work I do'), by the time they have shifted to a description of the middle section of their piece, which represents themselves at BiCon, they are positioning this as their 'old life' (represented in the present by the model's Lego 'feet', which represent 'inhibitions', and they are now looking forward to the future which 'will be based on some of the stuff that I've learnt here'. This participant, like Adam, then, positions BiCon as a place to learn things and to acquire resources for the transformation of the everyday.

Similarly, during her interview, Singular described leaving the campus to visit the nearby botanical gardens. When I asked her what it had been like to leave BiCon, she responded by recounting an afternoon at the previous year's event when she and some friends spent an afternoon exploring a rural area of Wales.

#### **Extract 5.10**

H: What was it like? Did it break the space, did it feel different to go out?

No, I went out of BiCon at the first one, in Wales... I also went out for a sort of day trip with some of the Dutch crowd, and it was fantastic, it was just like (.) BiCon, but on the road, I think I put in one of the surveys, in your survey, that the best bit of BiCon that I could think of, and it was when I went out with two on, with two of the Dutch people on the Brecon railway, on the Welsh mountain railway, and I was completely in drag, as a bloke, on the railway

H: oh! I remember you in drag actually, it was fantastic

S: It was great, I've never done anything like that before, but the responses of people who weren't part of BiCon were just so positive, and it was just fantastic, it really made me sort of feel like, yeah, I can take this out of this weekend into the rest of my life, and a couple of months after, I came into work completely dressed as a bloke as well.

In this account, Singular gives an example of how her explorations and experimentations at BiCon have informed her everyday life: she and some friends have taken the 'portable space' of BiCon 'on the road', with Singular dressed in drag. Here we can see how, as I outlined in Chapter 4, being with a group of friends inside a 'protected bubble' of BiCon, some distance away from her everyday life, gives Singular the chance to experiment with publically performing gender in a different way. The positive responses of the public reassure her that she can 'take this out of this weekend into the rest of my life', and result in her going into work in drag a couple of months later.

### ***'Carnival' vs. 'Woods'***

Throughout these three empirical chapters, I have shown how participants position BiCon against the everyday world, as a discrete-yet-portable temporary space in which paradoxical bisexual subjectivities can be performed and experienced in the present tense. In other words, bisexuality is held constant as a default identity within the heterotopic space of the event. This allows participants to recognise and validate one another as bi subjects, and also to perform bisexuality publically by making small-group forays into the world. At first sight, it might appear that BiCon is a space where the paradox of bisexuality has been temporarily resolved, and bisexuality stabilised as an identity category, if only for the weekend.

And yet, despite this holding-constant of bisexuality, a rule-bound identity category does not seem to emerge. As we have seen in section 1.2 of this chapter, and in Chapter 4, some participants position BiCon as ‘not real’ - as a space in which performances and explorations are taken at face value rather than interpreted as statements of identity. Bisexuality might be assumed, but what that assumption *means* is not made explicit, beyond an invocation of ‘possibility’ and ‘inclusion’ (Chapter 4). As Bower et al (2002) suggest, we might see this in terms of a Butlerian ‘appearing under the sign [...]while at the same time permanently retaining the lack of clarity about what the sign signifies’ (Butler, 1991, p.13, cited in Bower et al, 2002, p.34)

And yet, as Hemmings (2002) suggests, by defining bisexuality *as* diversity, as some participants do here (see, for example, Chapter 4.1), we risk obscuring the ways in which power dynamics operate in the experience and production of bisexual spaces and subjectivities.

In this final section of the chapter, I want to tease out this point by returning to my assertion that BiCon might be interpreted as either a ‘carnival’ space, or as a space akin to the ‘woods’ in fairy tales, and framing the findings of this research in these terms.

In Table 5.1 (below), I have outlined for comparison a number of features of ‘carnival’ and ‘woods/TAZ’ constructions of BiCon 2008, and I discuss these below.

**Table 5.1**

	Carnival	Woods/TAZ
Distance from ‘the	Far <sup>7</sup>	Near

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<sup>7</sup> This is an inversion of some versions of the carnival archetype, in which the carnival appears in the midst of the social world, in the market square. However, in other carnivalesque literatures, the carnival is

everyday'		
Relationship to 'the real world'	Not real	Real
Impact on participants' everyday lives	No impact	Impact

In carnivalesque accounts of BiCon, participants tend to position themselves as enjoying the sense that, to adapt a popular phrase; 'what goes at BiCon, stays at BiCon'. These participants' accounts tend to be quite individualistic: they do not make reference to ideas of 'community' or 'activism', for example. In contrast, accounts of BiCon as a TAZ tend to position 'the everyday' as becoming nearer to BiCon all the time, and participants who take up these accounts describe themselves as actively seeking to bridge the gap between BiCon and 'real life'. These participants tend to express more desire to change the world through activism, and their accounts are less focused on 'living in the moment', and more focused on using BiCon as a resource for action, for example by learning things which can be applied in the outside world.

In these discourses, we can trace the radical and assimilationist currents in LGBT+ politics that I outlined in Chapter 1, and that are still current today. For example, 2015's London LGBT Pride event was marked by considerable tension between groups which saw Pride as an event which should be focused on celebration (backing a theme of 'Heroes'), and those who sought to maintain a more political focus (who argued in favour of a theme of 'Solidarity'<sup>8</sup>). These divisions are often interpreted as arising on the basis of different levels of access to power and privilege, with those who are most privileged by

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represented by spaces which are distant from 'the real world', such as the Island on which Ariel and Prospero are marooned in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (McLelland, 2011).

<sup>8</sup> <http://leftunity.org/pride-2015-and-lesbians-and-gays-support-the-miners/>, accessed 30 June 2015.

the status quo being the least inclined towards political action (Eisner, 2013; Serano, 2012). It is not possible, on the basis of my data, to say whether or not this was the case at BiCon 2008, since almost all of my participants were White British, highly educated, and middle class. However, there is a clear distinction between the political orientations of participants who took up 'carnival' and 'woods' discourses of the relationship between BiCon and everyday life, with those who described BiCon in 'carnival' terms expressing less commitment to personal and social change than those who saw BiCon as an opportunity to collect resources with which to transform their everyday worlds.

### ***Part 3: Back to reality***

#### **Extract 5.11/Photos 5.5 and 5.6**

Singular: Ok, this is Sunday, in the morning [...] (pause) I did want to go home, at the same time I didn't really want it to end either, I had mixed feelings. (long pause) Um, yeah (.) yeah, a slightly empty feeling, to be honest, about how after BiCon I can feel a bit lonely, a bit jumpy. And I've got [reads from notes] 'people used to be here. Clothes used to hang here' (long pause) Ooh yeah, but those were the chairs as well, the chairs, with the same sort of feeling. Oh yeah, people used to be there, but they've gone now. It's a bit sad, but. [...] I felt like, even if I am the only bi in the space, that erm, that I'm going back to, it's what (laughing) I have to get used to it. (inaudible) it's just what things are fifty-one weeks out of the year, which (H: yeah), that, um, I'll be the only bi person around. Erm, not just the only bi person, but the only bi person, black person, [...<sup>9</sup>], it feels like minorities within minorities.



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<sup>9</sup> Here, Singular lists another marginalised identity that she holds. I have not included this in order to preserve anonymity.

In extract 5.1, Singular anticipates feeling 'lonely' and 'jumpy'. She describes her photographs of an empty wardrobe and chairs as marking the absence of people and their possessions who formerly inhabited these spaces but are now gone. These absent presences are associated with an 'empty' feeling for Singular, whose account is marked by a sense of isolation as she contemplates returning to a space where she is not just the only bi person, but also the only black person, describing her experience of everyday life as that of being in 'minorities within minorities.' The return to the everyday, for Singular, is a return to isolation. The cost of attending BiCon is that, having experienced a different way of being, she must now re-orient herself to 'what things are fifty one weeks out of the year'.

#### **Extract 5.12**

Eddie: Me on the train on the way back. Erm, I took that because I was at the station and I'd been wandering around finding my platform and I realised that I still had this half-focused grin, and I was just smiling at everyone! And um, it's, I suddenly thought to myself, you've got to stop doing this or you will get strange looks. And it was, I, I don't have very good facial recognition, so I tend to do that anyway in a place where I know I'll know a few people but I might not recognise them. But also because, you know, you feel faintly, partly I might not know people, partly people are, -might be newbies who might want to have an encouraging face. Um, so I'd just been walking around the BiCon campus just going like this [grins] to everyone. And I got to the train station and thought, I'm going to have to stop doing this. [...] and I was really thinking, oh God, now I have to stop smiling to everyone, I have to sort of pull all the barriers back in, I have to stop being open to other people smiling at me and I have to stop,



um being ready to take compliments at face value and giving other people compliments.

In this extract, Eddie describes the reverse of the process that we saw them go through in Chapter 3. In that chapter, Eddie used the liminal space of the train to disorient themselves from 'the everyday' and to re-orient themselves towards BiCon. Key moments in this process were Eddie's interactions with a fellow passenger, and then with a friendly buffet car staff member, which reminded them that at BiCon, a wider range of gender expressions were welcome, and that people 'may well be flirting with me' (Extract 3.3). Where accounts of travelling to, and arriving, at BiCon were marked by descriptions of 'opening up' and 'airiness', and interactions in the space were characterised by their 'openness' and 'real'-ness (Chapter 4), here we see Eddie realising that they need to 'pull all the barriers back in'. During the event they have been 'just smiling at everyone' but now that they are back in everyday space, they need to re-orient themselves to a more 'closed' way of being ('I have to stop being open to other people smiling at me') where they can no longer 'take compliments at face value' or smile at strangers.

## **Summary**

In these final accounts, and others, participants clearly position themselves as returning from a heterotopic space where 'another way of being' is possible. For some participants, as we have seen, the experience of having gone to 'this magical place' (Chapter 3.1) inspires and empowers them to transform their everyday realities (Extract 5.9). Others have enjoyed the temporary respite from being 'grown-up' (Extracts 4.13, 5.3) and now return, resignedly or contentedly, to 'the way things are' (Extracts 5.3, 5.10, 5.11). However they feel about their everyday lives, it is clear to all that the carnival is

over, that the path that leads back to the woods cannot be re-traced until next year. As Eddie puts it 'this thing, it just evaporates afterwards...'.

# ***Chapter 6: Discussion and Conclusions***

This thesis has sought to answer the research question ‘How are bisexual subjectivities experienced and produced in bisexual spaces, in relation to everyday life?’ The three empirical chapters have examined participants’ accounts of their experiences of journeying to and arriving at BiCon 2008, the event which was the focus of fieldwork (Chapter 3), being at the event itself (Chapter 4, Chapter 5), and preparing to return home (Chapter 5).

This final chapter will first give a brief overview of the findings of the research, followed by a detailed summary and a discussion of the results in relation to the literature. Limitations of the study, directions for future research, and the implications of the findings of current research, will be considered before concluding.

## ***Part 1: The findings of this study***

### ***1.1 Outline summary of findings***

The main findings of this research, which will be outlined in more detail below, are as follows:

- In everyday life, bisexuals are discursively positioned as Tricksters - characterised by inauthenticity, excess, deceit and transgression. Present-tense articulations of bisexual subjectivity are culturally unintelligible. Bisexuality can only be expressed in the past or future tense.
- BiCon can be seen as a heterotopic place-event, outside of, but adjacent to, the everyday world, which is produced through the movements and practices of its constituents.

- Participants describe BiCon as an intersubjectively-constituted 'bubble' of space which is discrete and yet portable. Within this 'bubble', participants can be recognised and validated as present-tense bisexual subjects, and can engage in public performances of bisexual subjectivity.
- Many participants position BiCon as an inclusive, utopic bisexual 'home' where they could be 'all of themselves' and dress and speak as they wished without censure under a safe 'BiCon gaze'. Spectacular, revealing or experimental modes of dress are taken at face value rather than being read as identity statements or invitations to sexual contact.
- However, not all participants experience BiCon as a place to which they can bring 'all of themselves'. Some identities are less valued than others. In particular, some participants who experienced multiple marginalisations in their everyday lives found that these were compounded at BiCon.
- The imagined community of BiCon was often constituted against an unreflexive, less-educated Other in ways that reflected dominant discourses of working-class culture.
- One participant described BiCon as akin to an idealised playground: a safe space for experimentation and recreation. This, I argued, was echoed in other participants' descriptions of BiCon as allowing them to return temporarily to a more 'youthful' or child-like view of the world, centred on present-time orientation, freedom from responsibility, and a sense of the possible.
- Some participants saw BiCon as a carnivalesque annual opportunity to party, and valued its separation from their everyday lives. Other participants sought to narrow the gap between BiCon and the everyday, positioning BiCon as a place from which to gather resources for personal and social transformation.

## ***1.2 Detailed summary of findings***

In Chapter 1, I argued that bisexuality is discursively constructed as paradoxical. On the one hand, it is impossible to conceive of sexuality as binary without at least the notion of a mid-point where the two 'sides' of the binary meet. On the other hand, if a binary has a mid-point, then it is not a binary at all, but rather a continuum. Bisexuality, while being conceptually central to the idea of a gay/straight binary, simultaneously undermines the very binary whose poles it holds in tension. Drawing on Angelides' (2001) genealogical analysis of the history of bisexuality, I argued that bisexuality's destabilisation of gender and sexual dichotomies is neutralised by discursively displacing bisexuality to either an ancestral, polymorphous past, or to a utopian future where labels had become irrelevant. Bisexuality, I noted, is deployed in the present tense only to shore up the gay/straight binary by being dismissed as inauthentic.

For these reasons, I argued, the everyday bisexual subject can be understood as analogous to the Trickster archetype. Like the stereotypical bisexual, the Trickster is characterised by excess, inauthenticity and by being perennially 'out of place'. Like the bisexual, he is the maintainer and transgressor of borders, the one who wants 'the best of both worlds'. The Trickster has no 'way' of his own, and must therefore imitate others. He has no 'home' of his own, and is always on the move. By theorising bisexuality as a Trickster subjectivity, I argued, we are able to account for the paradoxical, fluid-yet-constrained, everywhere-yet-nowhere, impossible-yet-necessary nature of bisexual subjectivity. By theorising bisexuality in this way, we are able to hold onto its fluidity, while insisting on its coherence. We are able to account for the ways in which bisexuality appears at both the margins and the centre, troubling hegemonies of sexuality and gender, while also upholding them, and for the continual resistance that it faces for this Trickster-esque ability to 'cross the boundary and confuse the distinction' (Hyde, 2008, p.7).

To move through the world embodying the Trickster, I argued, was to experience oneself as a body-object rather than a body-subject, continually chafing against the constraints of the binary categories of gender and sexuality which they simultaneously reinforce, subvert and exceed. Try

to appear in plain sight by avowing a bisexual identity, and your authenticity is doubted- allow yourself to be read as gay or straight, and prove yourself a liar by failing to perform a 'consistent' identity over time.

If the everyday bisexual subject could be theorised as a Trickster, then BiCon, I argued, could be seen as a heterotopic space which allowed the paradox of bisexual subjectivity to be resolved. BiCon provided a discrete space in which bisexuality was the default identity. For the duration of the event, bisexuals could experience themselves as body-subjects instead of body-objects, moving smoothly through the world rather than being abraded by it.

In Chapter 3, I showed how participant accounts of travelling to BiCon are replete with descriptions of experiences of bodily expansion into airy, open spaces. These accounts, I argued, showed that participants oriented to BiCon as a heterotopic space, distinct from the everyday, where a different kind of bisexual subjectivity was possible. Central to my theorisation here was the idea of BiCon as an intersubjectively-constituted place-event, produced through the movements and practices of its constituents. In this context, participants' journey narratives can be seen as accounts of dis-orienting from the rules and constraints of the everyday, and re-orienting to those of BiCon.

Having arrived at BiCon, participants describe engaging in a range of embodied, spatial and intersubjective practices in order to gain entry to what many describe as the BiCon 'bubble'. In particular, passing through Reception, settling into bedrooms, and making or renewing connections with other attendees were important to feeling that one had truly 'arrived'. The process of journeying to BiCon, and engaging in practices of arrival, can be seen as engendering a shifting from an experience of the self as body-object, continually 'rubbing up against' the constraints of the everyday world, to body-subject, able to move smoothly through space, 'untouched', as one participant put it 'by everyday life'.

Participants who were unable to engage in these practices of entry to the bubble described themselves as feeling dislocated and disoriented, and, once inside the bubble, any unsolicited intrusions of the outside world such as telephone calls were experienced as extremely jarring when these were experienced on an individual level. Conversely, when these incursions were a shared experience (such as a fire alarm) they served to reinforce a sense of 'BiCon-ness' as defined against 'the world'.

The intersubjectively-constituted BiCon 'bubble' could be carried outside the venue and into the spaces of the everyday world by small groups of attendees. The bubble was experienced as protective-participants' recognition and validation of one another as bisexual subjects maintained its surface tension, and the bubble thus allowed participants to move smoothly through the world in small groups, protected from censure and misunderstanding. From within the safety of the bubble, participants could engage in public performances of bisexual subjectivity, which were legible, if not to strangers, then at least to their peers.

In Chapter 4, I moved on to discuss the ways in which participants in my studies described BiCon in utopian terms as an idealised and inherently diverse and inclusive bisexual home. The event was described by participants as a place in which they could be 'all of themselves'. One aspect of this was the ability to 'talk about anything' and to segue between diverse topics of conversation – as one participant put it, 'from sex to sewage'. Another aspect was a freedom to dress spectacularly or revealingly, without having to field unwanted sexual attention, or to otherwise experiment with appearance, particularly with regard to gender presentation, in the knowledge that such experimentations would be taken at face value rather than as identity statements.

In this chapter, I began to apply a more critical hermeneutic to my participants' accounts, suggesting that these utopian descriptions of BiCon as an inclusive and diverse bisexual 'home' were not all that they appeared. Often, I noted, BiCon was defined against a hostile 'outside world' and an unreflexive 'person in the street' in ways that drew on pathologising discourses of

working-class culture as threatening and defective. Ironically, I noted, in positioning ‘the person in the street’ in this way, participants deployed the same tropes of invalidation that bisexual politics has railed against, positioning these ‘Others’ as ignorant, unreflexive, threatened by difference and prone to visceral over-reactions.

I then moved on to look at experiences of inclusion and exclusion within BiCon itself. In contrast to the utopic discourses of inclusion articulated in the first part of the chapter, some participants found that they could not bring ‘all of themselves’ to BiCon. While some identities that were marginalised in the outside world were unmarked or less-marked at BiCon (for example, neurodiversity and some physical impairments), others, which were validated and centralised in the outside world, were not as well-received at BiCon (for example, parenting, pregnancy, and non-progressive politics). I also noted a number of absences and silences within the data: my participants were almost all white, middle-class and highly educated. Those who were not experienced BiCon as a welcoming space in terms of their bisexuality (although this was not unmitigated by, for example, racial stereotyping), but often found that some of the multiple marginalisations they experienced in everyday life were compounded at BiCon. This was reflected, I argued, in the low attendance at BiCon of people of colour, people from working-class backgrounds, and people whose highest level of education was below degree level. Ironically for this research, the low numbers of these groups of people in the community made it difficult to centre their voices in the ways that I would have liked to, since their characteristics made them highly visible in ways which were difficult to navigate in relation to confidentiality and research ethics more broadly.

In Chapter 5, I discussed one participant’s description of BiCon as an idealised playground, and outlined the ways in which some participants positioned BiCon as a space where they could return to a childish or youthful subjectivity characterised by present-time orientation, a temporary escape from adult responsibilities, and a renewed sense of possibility.



In the second half of the chapter, I discussed participants' accounts of the relationship between BiCon and their everyday lives. For some participants, I argued, BiCon could be seen as a Bakhtinian carnival where they could temporarily set aside the constraints of everyday adult life and indulge in play and recreation (Bakhtin, 1984). However, these participants valued the separation of BiCon and everyday life, and seemed relatively content to pick up their everyday lives at the end of BiCon. Another group of participants positioned BiCon as a space akin to Bey's Temporary Autonomous Zone in which they could gather resources for personal and social transformation (Bey, 1990). These participants looked to decrease the distance between BiCon and their everyday worlds, and those who were veteran attendees had succeeded in doing so over time.

Finally, I examined accounts of leaving BiCon, in which participants clearly positioned themselves as having returned from a heterotopic space where alternative ways of being were possible.

## ***Part 2. Evaluating this thesis***

### ***2.1 Addressing the bisexual paradox***

In Chapter 1, I gave a brief discursive history of bisexuality, explaining how bisexuality had come to be constituted as a paradoxical subjectivity. Following Angelides (2001), I argued that, while bisexuality was conceptually essential to dominant binary conceptualisations of sexuality, it also disrupted them. There can be no 'either/or' without an implied 'both/and' but, for different reasons at different times, bisexuality's 'both/and' was unacceptably destabilising of the very sexual taxonomies it underwrote. The early sexologists resolved this discursive problem by explaining that bisexuality was a primitive developmental state from which humans as a species, and by extension, each human being in turn, developing from a hermaphroditic embryo, had moved on. Mid-twentieth century sexologists, despite Kinsey's best efforts, denied the existence of bisexuality altogether, while the gay liberation movements of the 1960s and 1970s displaced it

to a utopian future, 'beyond labels'. The strategic essentialism of the identity politics of the 1980s onwards, meanwhile, has resulted in what Yoshino (2000) has termed an 'epistemic contract of bisexual erasure', as attempts to widen the 'charmed circle' of acceptable sexuality to include homosexuality, have positioned bisexuality as the transgressive, inauthentic Other against which respectable monosexualities could be defined.

By attending to this discursive history, I argued, we could understand how and why bisexuality had acquired its paradoxical status, and why studies of bisexual subjectivity consistently find that bisexuals reject the term bisexuality (and the binary it rode in on), yet are unable to articulate a coherent bisexual subjectivity, because of a lack of discursive resources for articulating sexual subjectivity without making reference to gender.

However, by moving beyond discourse reductionism, and applying a hermeneutic phenomenological analytic lens to the data, I hoped that, with the help of visual and creative research methods, I would find a way of eliciting accounts of bisexual subjectivity that were grounded in material, bodily and spatio-temporal practices.

Did it work? In this chapter I consider this question, first from a substantive point of view, in relation to the empirical literature summarised above, and secondly from a methodological standpoint.

## ***2.2 Bisexual subjectivity and space: what have we learned?***

At the beginning of this chapter, I outlined the substantive findings of this project. Here, I consider them in relation to the literature reviewed in Chapter 1.

As discussed in Chapter 1, there is very little extant work on bisexuality and space. Although I am aware of work in preparation by Voss, Gupta and Browne (in prep) and by Maliepaard (in prep), and of work by McLelland (2011) which discusses an early publication from this thesis in relation to Shakespearian festive spaces, Hemmings' (2002) book has been the only substantial contribution so far. Accordingly, in Chapter 1 I located this work in relation to wider geographies

of sexuality such as Alison Rooke's (2007) work on lesbian geographies of the everyday. This thesis builds on Hemmings' work by discussing her findings in relation to the UK context, and by suggesting that the 1990 NBC, and BiCon, can both be theorised as heterotopic bisexual spaces. While it is not the first piece of work to apply the concept of heterotopia to a sexual community space (see, for example, Pantazopolous and Bettany, 2010; Persson and Richards, 2008), or to theorise such spaces as carnivalesque (see, for example, Cappellato and Mangarella, 2014) it is the first to do so specifically in relation to bisexuality.

As outlined in Chapter 1, recent qualitative work on bisexual identity and subjectivity has generally been conducted from a traditional discourse analytic perspective, and has found that articulations of bisexual identity are stymied by discursive limitations. I believe that, by adopting an approach to bisexual subjectivity as a process of becoming rather than being, and by attending to bisexual subjectivity as constituted through embodied and spatialized practices, I have been able to contribute to the literature on bisexual subjectivity. Specifically, while work on the Trickster frequently mentions the bisexuality of Trickster figures (see, for example, Hyde 2007; Bassil-Morozow, 2014), I believe that this piece of work is the first to theorise bisexuality as a Trickster subjectivity.

While phenomenological approaches to lived experiences of sexual and gendered subjectivities continue to make important contributions (see, for example McClelland and Fine, 2008; Del Busso, 2011), the work on affect that has emerged during the last five years or so (Wetherell 2013; Fox and Alldred 2013, 2014, 2015; Alldred and Fox 2015) has also done a great deal to bridge the gap between discourse and experience, by theorising affect as pre-personal and pre-cognitive. While this thesis is constituted in relation to work which places the body at the centre of lived experience, new materialist work seeks to move beyond anthropocentric understandings of affect, theorising sexuality, for example, in terms of 'an affective flow within assemblages of bodies, things, ideas, and social institutions, and the (sexual) capacities produced

in bodies by this flow' (Allred and Fox 2013, p.770), rather than as a characteristic of the individual.

Unfortunately it was beyond the scope of this thesis to engage with such theorising in detail because much of this work appeared after my thesis was already well underway and the theoretical approach decided upon. As has been clear throughout this thesis, the need to account for bisexual subjectivity in terms of time, space, and motion is key to my argument, and it seems to me that new materialism offers a potentially more sophisticated framework for doing this than the phenomenological, anthropocentric approach I have adopted here. This is an approach that I hope to engage with further in my future work in this area.

### ***2.3 Limitations of study and reflexive reflections***

In planning the fieldwork for this thesis, as outlined in Chapter 2, I aimed to develop a methodological approach to the study of bisexual subjectivity which would allow me to gather data which 'said something new' on the topic. In particular, I was concerned to move beyond a traditional discursive approach which seemed likely to reproduce previous findings on bisexuality as a 'structurally fractured' subjectivity which was impossible to articulate without making reference to the very binary categories of gender and sexuality that it claimed to repudiate.

My approach to this was twofold: on the one hand, I adapted Gauntlett's use of Lego Serious Play methodology, and ran modelling workshops at BiCon 2008, where I recorded participants' descriptions of the models they had made. On the other, I asked a group of participants to take photographs of 'moments of experience' at the event, and during a week in their everyday lives.

Looking back, I can see a number of limitations in my planning and execution of fieldwork, which I would attempt to avoid in future studies:

#### ***Reflecting on the modelling study***

I initially envisaged the modelling workshops as providing the main source of data for this study, with the photo-production study playing a supplementary role. In practice, the opposite has been the case, for several reasons.

Firstly, the photography study produced much more data: around 21 hours of the 24 hours of audio recordings, and hundreds of photographs, and was thus bound to predominate.

Secondly, although I imagined that the processual, hands-on approach of the workshops would allow for richer data, which was more focused on embodied and spatialised experiences than that produced in the photo-production study, this was not the case. Although in pilot workshops I had been encouraged by the rich descriptions produced, there were several practical limitations in the design and execution of the modelling study which meant that it did not work as well as I had envisaged. Firstly, the constraints of a 75-minute BiCon workshop time slot (compared to Gauntlett's four hours) meant that the process of making and describing models was not as leisurely and reflexive as I had hoped it would be. The pace of the workshop was simply too swift to allow for much reflection.

There was also less discussion of the models than I had imagined. In previous research projects using similar methods, individual work producing visual artefacts had resulted in extended discussions in which participants discussed their differing experiences at length, resulting in high quality data (Bowes-Catton et al, 2011). However, in this project, discussions were relatively brief and cursory. After each stage of the workshop, participants would take turns to describe their models, and, while this produced some interesting insights (see Chapter 4), these accounts were generally brief and undeveloped. This was due in large part to the time constraints of the workshop, which limited the opportunities for discussion of the models. I believe that two other factors also played a role.

One was the physical setting in which the workshops were conducted: the room allocated was the main social space of the convention, and was located between reception and the bar area.

This meant that, despite signage on the door asking people to take another route, the workshops were frequently interrupted by people passing through, and even where this was not the case, the knowledge that someone *could* walk through the space at any minute (and the need for myself and my helpers to keep a constant eye on the door to avoid this), made for a far less private and relaxed setting than would have ideally been the case.

The second inhibiting factor was the structure of the workshop itself. Although I had limited the workshop to ten participants, in retrospect this was too many for such a short workshop, and it would have been better to have perhaps half the number of participants, in order to allow more time for discussion, and for a more intimate atmosphere.

The part of the modelling workshops which yielded the most interesting data was the one in which I asked participants to revisit the models they had made of their experiences of BiCon, and to make any changes that reflected how they would have ideally liked to be experiencing BiCon, in comparison with how the event was turning out for them. This engagement with ‘imaginative variation’ (Langdrige, 2007) produced some interesting data which drew out tensions between participants’ utopic anticipations of their experiences, their actual experiences, and the kinds of experiences they would like to have in the future.

### ***Reflecting on the photo-production study***

The photo-production study was carefully designed *not* to produce chronological accounts of BiCon 2008. In line with my phenomenological approach, I was keen to elicit rich descriptions of moments of experience, and avoid eliciting narratives, which I believed would reproduce the kinds of discourse about bisexual identity that were already well documented in the extant literature. Therefore, I provided participants with prompt sheets (see Appendix X), which were designed to help them to focus on aspects of the lifeworld.

Naively, I had omitted to consider the relationship between space and time- as Pink (2012) notes, as we move through space, we are also always-already moving through time. I had also

overlooked the importance of time as an aspect of the BiCon experience- as outlined in Chapters 3 and 4, participants frequently described BiCon as having a particular temporal quality, with time described as 'compressed' and/or moving at a different pace to time in the outside world.

In practice, then, participants produced a series of photographs which charted the course of their BiCon, and, in our interviews, all chose to narrate these in chronological order. In retrospect, this proved useful as it alerted me to the ways in which participants made sense of their experiences of BiCon using a narrative arc of arriving/being at BiCon/leaving, and this chronology of BiCon has resulted in some of the key insights of this thesis in terms of theorising the relationship between BiCon and the outside world, and in terms of understanding practices of arrival and re-orientation. I am not entirely sure that I would have understood the importance of temporality to my participants' experiences of BiCon, had I not been working so hard to discourage participants from narrativising their accounts.

This study was also much more successful at eliciting data about embodied and spatialised experiences of subjectivity than the modelling workshops. The photos did, as I had anticipated, serve as useful shortcuts back into moments of experience, especially supplemented by participant notes. Between the photographs and the notes, participants were generally well able to recount the specific moments of experience which had motivated the taking of a photograph, and were often able to recount these in highly embodied and spatialised terms.

As I outlined in Chapter 2, I initially intended this study to compare the ways in which bisexuality was produced and experienced at BiCon, and in the spaces of everyday life. Unfortunately, by juxtaposing BiCon and 'everyday life' in the way that I did in the participant briefing materials (Appendix 2), and by asking participants to photograph/discuss their BiCon experiences first, and their 'everyday' experiences second (Appendix 2), I strongly pre-structured my participants' accounts. So that BiCon and the everyday were constructed in dialectic relationship to one another. This has undoubtedly had an effect on the ways in which participants described the relationship between BiCon and the everyday, and may account for the strong

positioning of BiCon as a heterotopic space which is a central finding of this thesis. I was encouraged however, that the modelling study, which was entirely focused on experiences of BiCon, and did not mention the everyday , produced similar results, with BiCon and everyday life being constructed as in sharp contrast to one another (see, for example, Chapter 4.1)

## ***Part 3. Where next?***

### ***3.1 Implications and applications***

The findings of this project draw attention to a number of points that will be of interest to bisexual activists and community organisers. A number of the issues raised here were already recognised as key issues within the community by the time fieldwork was conducted in 2008, while others have come to the attention of community organisers since that time.

Like other heterotopias, BiCon is permeated by the structures of power and privilege that are evident in the everyday world. Bi community organisations are already well aware that BiCon is dominated by white, middle-class, educated people, and have done much to address these dynamics during the decade in which this thesis was written. However, significant issues still persist, specifically around classed and racialized exclusions, with real consequences for the wellbeing of attendees whose experiences of marginalisation are compounded at BiCon. And there are wider implications, too, beyond the BiCon community, in that many potential attendees are excluded from a significant source of social support. As Hemmings (2002) and Eisner (2013) have noted, utopic positionings of bisexual spaces as inherently inclusive only serve to deflect attention away from such mechanisms of exclusion.

The research presented here will, I hope, be helpful in exposing some of the mechanisms through which such exclusions are perpetuated. While BiCon is nominally ‘open to all’, my findings have



shown that participants' middle-class worldviews construct BiCon as a 'safe space' from a world that is defined as 'hostile' in terms that pathologise working class people for example. I hope that my application of Serano's techniques of invalidation will be useful in examining how such marginalisations are perpetuated, and how they might be avoided.

I hope, therefore, that the research presented here will be helpful in exposing some of the subtle mechanisms through which such exclusions are perpetuated- while BiCon is nominally 'open to all', my findings have shown that participants' middle-class worldviews construct BiCon as a 'safe space' from a world that is defined as 'hostile' in terms that pathologise working class people, for example. However, this kind of discriminatory framing is implicit and hard to articulate. In recent years, the concept of the micro-aggression has been usefully deployed by many critical race theorists, social justice campaigners and bloggers to draw attention to the ways in which sexism, classism, racism, homophobia, biphobia and other prejudices are perpetuated not just by overt or institutional discrimination, but by a constant barrage of tiny disparagements (see, for example, Pérez Huber and Solozano, 2015; Bates, 2014). While bisexual people of colour have consistently noted the prevalence of racist micro-aggressions at BiCon (see, for example, Applebee 2010; Eisner 2013, p.282) these framings are operating at an implicit level which is much harder to identify and articulate, and may be experienced at an affective rather than cognitive level. This is one area which I hope to explore further in future by applying new materialist approaches to my future research in this area. In the meantime, I hope that my application of Serano's techniques of invalidation will be useful in examining how such marginalisations are subtly perpetuated, and how they might be avoided.

The UK bi community continues to develop and change. Over the decade that I have been writing this thesis, there has been an increased engagement with issues of marginalisation and intersectionality among community members and activists. Following feedback from attendees of colour about their experiences of racism at BiCon, a group of bi community organisers took part in

equality training, and an email list was established for white bisexuals working on educating themselves about race.

There has also been a proliferation of bisexual events, aimed at a variety of audiences. While BiCon can still claim to be the highlight of the bisexual year, there are now more opportunities to attend local and regional events such as BiFests, and the highly successful and family-friendly Big Bi Fun Day, throughout the year. As the community has developed, there has been a move away from a 'one size fits all' approach to bi events, and towards more specialist groups which cater for specific demographics and seek to address issues of inclusion. When this fieldwork was conducted, for example, the organised London bi scene consisted of a single monthly pub meet which took place in an inaccessible downstairs venue. Today, the pub meet continues, but a monthly daytime coffee meet-up has been added. This takes place in an accessible, family friendly venue, and has improved inclusion for parents, people with disabilities, and those who do not wish to socialise at night, or who wish to avoid environments where alcohol is served. There are also coffee-shop meet-ups run by and for bisexuals of colour, and bis over 50 years of age.

There has also been an increasing formalisation and specialisation of bi community organisations such as BiCon Continuity Limited, The Bisexual Index, and BiUK. These organisations are increasingly consulted by policymakers and large LGBT organisations such as Stonewall, and they are increasingly engaging with issues affecting bisexuals of colour and working class bisexuals, such as immigration, although this work is mostly still informal and individual.

And what of BiCon? Now in its 31<sup>st</sup> year, the event continues to draw 250-300 people each summer. This year's event has a clear focus on improving inclusion, and has an additional access fund to enable people who are new to BiCon and from groups traditionally under-represented at BiCon (people of colour, including those of mixed heritage, working class people, people aged over 55, and people aged under 21, to attend the event for as little as £3.

### ***3.2 Future Directions***

### ***What next for bisexual research in the UK?***

This thesis has explored experiences of bisexual subjectivity at BiCon, and has argued that, while some participants use BiCon as a carnivalesque, party space, others use it as a place to gather resources and contacts for political and personal change. As I explained in Chapter 5, this tension is illustrative of the wider tensions between assimilationist and radical perspectives on LGBT politics that I outlined in Chapter 1, and I believe that further research will substantiate my conviction that BiCon participants who adopt a ‘carnival’ approach to BiCon are socially and financially privileged relative to those who take up ‘resource’ discourses of BiCon. While I am not able to back up this hunch with my current dataset, I also suspect, based on my own experiences within the BiCon community, that carnivalesque approaches to BiCon predominate, and will continue to do so. BiCon will, I believe, continue to be a space dominated by middle-class, highly educated white people.

In this context, it is perhaps not surprising that, as pointed out in Chapter 1, a large proportion of the notable academics publishing on bisexual issues in the UK have long histories with BiCon and the communities around it. Ultimately, if bi academics are to be of service to bisexuals, we will need to move beyond our comfort zones and explore ways to support and signal-boost the work of LGBT+ groups run by and for people of colour, and/or working class people. The marked absence of these voices in this research echoes the absence of these groups from the UK bi community. A key direction for future research in this area, then, is to design research which allows these important voices to be heard more clearly.

We will also need to move beyond a focus on people who are active in bi communities, and develop strategies for identifying the needs of people whose feelings and/or behaviours may be understood as ‘bisexual’, but who do not themselves identify as bisexual, as well as those who identify as bisexual but are not involved in bisexual communities and social networks. As I outlined in Chapter 1, bisexuality is associated with significantly poorer mental health outcomes than any other sexual identity group. As we have seen from bi community data in Chapter 2, this

is clearly reflected in the high numbers of BiCon attendees with mental health diagnoses. If this is the case within the organised bi community, where there is significant support and validation of bisexual subjectivities, and where attendees benefit from high levels of cultural and economic capital relative to the general population, then the implications for bi people who are not able to access such support, or who are less privileged than the average BiCon attendee, are worrying indeed.

### ***Discourse, materiality and space***

This thesis represents the results of an attempt to engage with issues of bisexual subjectivity as experienced and produced in relation to space. Like many researchers seeking to maintain a focus on the importance of discourse while also attending to the fact that, as Reavey (2011) puts it ‘we are so much more than we say we are’, I adopted a hermeneutic phenomenological analytic approach in an attempt to elicit rich data about embodied experiences of bisexual subjectivity in space. This approach has been largely successful, and I have been able to produce a piece of research which makes a contribution to our understanding of bisexual subjectivities. As I noted above, however, I believe that new materialist approaches to research may offer a productive way forward for future research in this area, by facilitating a greater engagement with multiple modes of experience.

Methodologically, I remain convinced that visual and creative methods of data-production which allow participants to think through a question before answering it, have great value as fieldwork tools. However, as with other methodologies, limitations in the design of studies are writ large upon the resulting data. In future work using photography, I would take great care to avoid over-structuring participants’ responses. My use of modelling was not successful, but I suspect that this was due at least in part to a mismatch between the research question and the method used, since, contrary to my expectations, the modelling workshop did not result in articulations of embodied experiences of space. It did, however, allow participants to reflect on their experiences of BiCon and to present a summary of them, and in this sense allowed

participants to 'present a set of ideas all in one go', as Gauntlett and Holzwarth maintain, and as such it may prove to be a useful tool for research which seeks to understand the ways in which participants make sense of the world, rather than research which aims to elicit descriptions of lived experience.

## ***Conclusions***

How, then, are bisexual subjectivities experienced at BiCon, in relation to everyday life?

In everyday life, I have drawn on participant descriptions of feeling 'squashed in' and abraded by everyday life to argue that to experience bisexual subjectivity in the spaces of the everyday is to experience oneself as a Trickster figure, characterised by excess, inauthenticity and instability.

As a heterotopic space, BiCon, I have argued, represents an opportunity for bisexual subjects to temporarily resolve the paradox of bisexuality, and to spend time in a space where bisexuality is the default identity. One effect of this is that bisexuality becomes less salient at BiCon than in everyday life. Another is that bisexual subjects are temporarily visible to one another, and can recognise and validate one another's subjectivities in a way that is not possible in everyday life. A third effect of being in a bisexual space is that participants are able to engage in group forays into the outside world, where they can engage in joint performances of bisexual distinctiveness.

Despite discursive constructions of BiCon as a utopic, inclusive bisexual home, however, the space reproduces many of the mechanisms of exclusion and oppression that are found in the wider social world. For some participants, BiCon's social and topographical distance from their everyday lives makes it an annual opportunity to party and relax with few consequences - for others, it means that BiCon is a space from within which the everyday world can be re-imagined, and where resources for personal and social transformation can be gathered.

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## **Appendix 1:**

# ***Key documents from BiCon 2008***

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## ***Appendix 1.1:***

### ***BiCon Code of Conduct***

#### ***How to keep BiCon a safe and welcoming place***

##### ***Context***

By its nature, this can sound like a long list of "*Do this, do that, don't do this, please do that*". We hope you will read it in the spirit it's meant: having these guidelines spelt out from the start is intended to prevent a sticky moment or misunderstanding which might spoil someone's BiCon.

This is the code of conduct from BiCon 2007: 2008's is unlikely to have any significant changes

##### ***Your responsibilities***

Everyone has a part to play in making BiCon a safe space. If you notice an incident of harassment, or anything else that doesn't belong at BiCon, please report it to BiCon Reception or the nearest organiser as soon as possible. (If you don't feel comfortable bringing an issue to us directly, you can still put a note in the organisers' postbox.)

##### ***BiCon organisers' responsibilities***

The organisers have final say. We will try to deal fairly and respectfully with any issue which you bring to us. Breaches of this Code of Conduct will in most cases be met with a warning from a member of the organising team. We reserve the right to ask anyone to leave BiCon, and if asked to leave you will not receive any refund.

##### ***Respecting difference***

- People are welcome to attend BiCon regardless of how they define their sexuality.
- Transgender people are accepted at BiCon as the gender they choose to present.
- Remember that some people are new to BiCon. Be helpful if you can. Racism and other bigoted behaviour will not be tolerated at BiCon.
- Respect the choices people have made regarding their beliefs, gender or sexuality, and how they choose to express them.
- Access is not just a matter of wheelchairs. Different aspects of the environment affect different people, e.g. some people may be lipreading, some need smoke-free space, some find busy crowds difficult. You can't always know without being told, but try to be aware of what the people around you might need to make BiCon accessible to them.

##### ***Boundaries / harassment***

**No means no**

No-one at BiCon should be put under any pressure to join in with things they don't want to. Obviously this includes any sexual behaviour, but it also includes hugs, touching, playing a game, being in a photo, disclosing information or even having a chat.

It's fine to ask someone once if they would like to do something. Pestering someone counts as harassment; if someone asks you to leave them alone, do so.

BDSM games or scenes should not be carried out in BiCon public spaces. BiCon welcomes BDSMers but it is not primarily a BDSM space and consent involves onlookers as well as participants. BDSM scenes and games can be distasteful or frightening to some people.

In public, "**no**", "**stop**", and "**don't do that**" will be taken at face value by the BiCon organisers.

## ***Personal space***

Don't invade people's personal space without being invited to. A useful phrase is "*Would you like a hug?*".

## ***Public behaviour***

Please keep any public behaviour legal. Remember that consent includes any audience.

## ***Confidentiality***

### ***Within BiCon***

Not everyone at BiCon wants to be "*out*" about their sexuality to the whole world.

If you take a photo, it is your responsibility to make sure everyone in it is happy to be photographed and knows what you intend to do with the photo. **Everyone** includes people in the background / in the distance / facing away from you.

Similarly, ask permission before identifying anyone in a public write-up of BiCon. For the avoidance of doubt, "public" includes personal web sites and blogs.

### ***Within discussion sessions***

No photography, recording or filming is permitted in programme sessions unless it's specifically stated in the programme.

Feel free to discuss the content of sessions with people who weren't there. But don't name names, and don't describe someone in a way that identifies them.

### ***Press policy***

Members of the press should identify themselves to BiCon Reception and at any sessions they attend. If not everyone is happy with their presence in a session, the session organiser may ask them to leave.

### ***Who's who***

People attending BiCon should wear their pass to all events; if you don't, your right to attend may be challenged.

People wearing sashes are involved with the organisation of BiCon and are 'on duty'.

### ***Health and safety***

### ***Smoking***

Smoking inside public buildings is now illegal in England, Scotland and Wales, .

You cannot smoke inside any University buildings. In particular, please do not smoke in the flats, as these are protected by smoke detectors, and the whole building will have to be evacuated if the alarm goes off.

It is illegal not only to smoke in a public building, but also for those who manage the premises to permit smoking in such a building. Please help us and the venue to comply with this legislation by smoking outside (if in doubt, ask a member of the BiCon team or venue staff). If you are smoking outside, please dispose of cigarette ends etc in the bins provided.

### ***Wellbeing***

Party responsibly; don't use the amazing BiCon environment as an excuse. Take care of yourself, and make sure you eat and sleep when you need to.

### ***Animals***

We can't allow animals on-site, except for registered assistance animals. If you know you are bringing an assistance animal please let us know so we can ensure you are accommodated in a flat with people who are not allergic to animals.

## ***Sessions programme***

### ***Age limits***

Some sessions may have age limits, such as over-16s or over-18s. These will be indicated in the programme and/or on the door of the session room. Parents are responsible for knowing where their child is, and giving or withholding their permission as they consider appropriate.

Babes in arms are welcome at all sessions unless otherwise stated.

### ***"Only" sessions***

A few sessions may have other restrictions on the people that may attend: for example, 'women only' or 'bisexual men only'. This will be indicated in their description in the programme. If you're not included, please don't gatecrash. If it's not clear who is or isn't included or you are unhappy with the 'restriction' please confer with the session organiser in good time before the session. People at BiCon Reception can help you find them.

Session facilitators reserve the right to ask anyone to leave a session at any time.

### ***Content***

Some sessions will deal frankly with topics that some people find offensive or difficult. It's fine to leave quietly if a session isn't what you expected, or you realise you're not in the mood for it. If you feel that the content breaches this Code of Conduct, please tell the BiCon organisers.

### ***Mobile phones***

Unless you are on call as a volunteer counsellor or First Aider, please turn off your phone before joining a programme session.

### ***Confidentiality***

As stated above under 'confidentiality': feel free to discuss the content of sessions with people who weren't there, but don't name names, or describe someone in a way that identifies them.

It's also good manners not to assume that just because someone talked about a particular issue in a session, they'll want to carry on talking about it somewhere else later.

### ***When a session is "closed"***

Some sessions may become 'closed' either when a certain number of people have arrived or after a certain amount of time. This will be indicated by a notice on the door. If a session is already closed, please don't try to join it.

### ***Additional tips for good manners in sessions***

- Turn up on time, or slightly early.
- Don't interrupt or talk over other people.
- In discussions, be aware of how much you're speaking, compared to other people. Help the session organiser to make sure that the quieter people get a turn to speak if they want to.

(accessed 24/05/2014)

*Appendix 1.2:*

# **BiCon 2008 Handbook**

**Leicester University  
(Oadby Campus)**

**28th—31st August 2008**

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# Key Contacts

## Venue Contact Details

Gilbert Murray Conference Centre  
University of Leicester Conference Services Stamford  
Hall  
Stoughton Drive South  
Leicester  
LE2 2LG  
0116 271 9933

## The BiCon 2008 team are:

- Ian: BiCon team leader, venue liaison and Friday's entertainments
- Natalya: Bookings, finance, website, accessibility and deputy-everything
- Tonnvane: Workshops and finance
- Libby: PR, marketing and handbook
- Alison: Registration desk coordinator and all round useful person
- Katy: Saturday's entertainments and room allocations

## Contacting the team during BiCon

If you need to contact the organising team during BiCon, go to the registration desk. Out-of-Hours in an emergency you can call the team member on duty on 07531 365 796. Please note this number will only be available during BiCon.

**In a real emergency call 999 for the appropriate services before contacting the organisers.**

## Emergency and helpline Numbers

- Oadby Campus Security: 0116 2522 888
- NHS Direct: 0845 4567
- Leicester LGB Helpline: 0116 255 0667
- The Samaritans: 0116 270 0007
- Turning Point (for confidential drug advice): 0116 506 1111
- Leicester Rape Crisis: 0116 255 8852
- Leicester Victims of Crime: 0116 255 0107
- Local Police: 0116 222 2222

## Booklet credits

Booklet edited by Libby Baxter-Williams. Thanks to past BiCon organisers for the basis of the Code of Conduct, to past handbook editors and everyone who contributed material.

All information contained in this booklet is, to the knowledge of the BiCon 2008 team is correct at the time of going to print. Attendees should regularly check the BiCon 2008 website (before the event), and the information displays at BiCon Reception (during the event), for updates.

# Room Names Explained

Over the years BiCons have developed a habit of calling rooms strange names, from Teletubbies to planets, famous bisexuals to famous computers. This year our rooms are named in honour of Joe Orton.

Joe Orton was born in Leicester seventy five years ago, living about two miles from our venue until he was 18. He won a scholarship to RADA, where he met Kenneth Halliwell. They became lovers, moved in together and started writing novels.

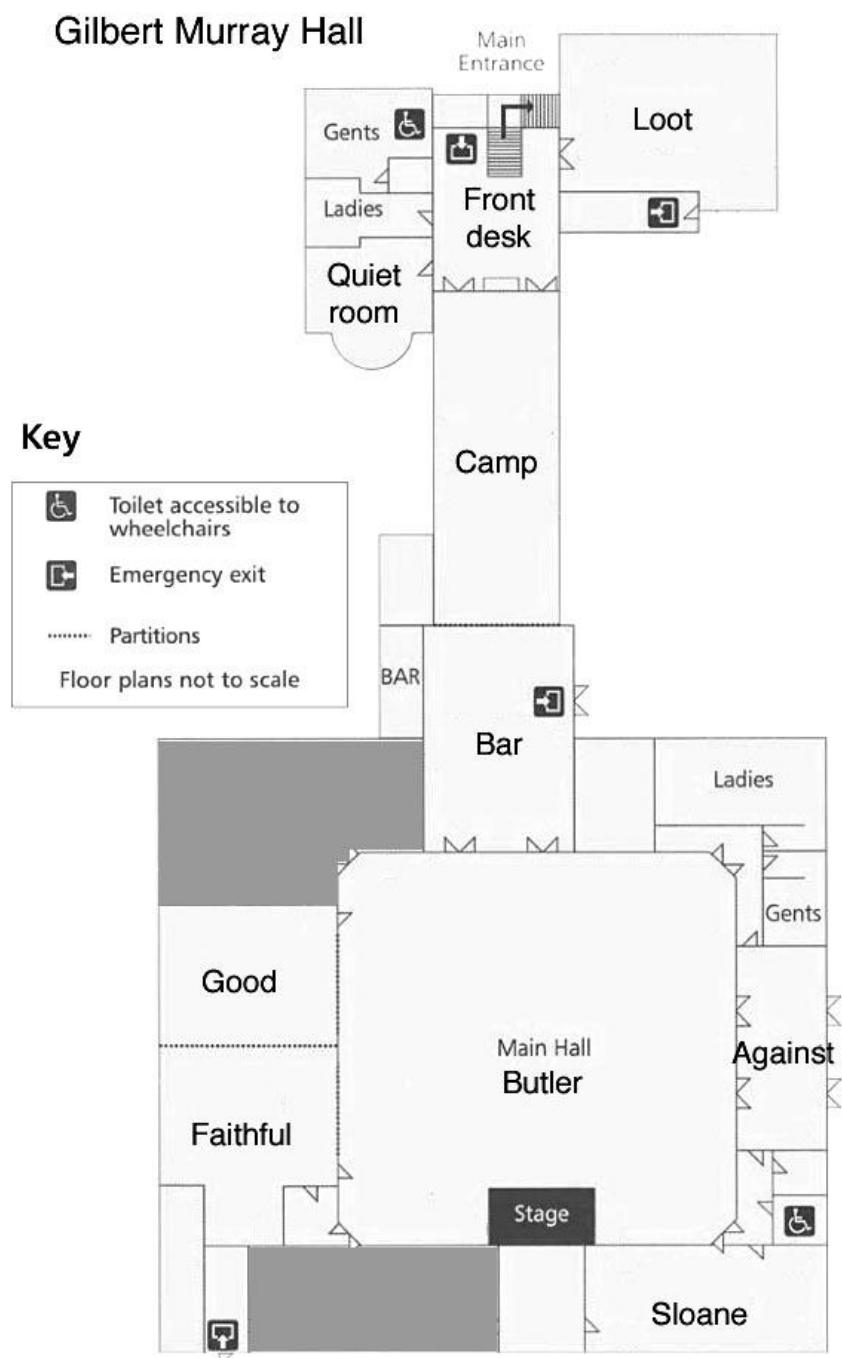
When those failed to attract a publisher, they moved on to rewriting the blurbs on book dust jackets on books borrowed from Islington Library. When these were discovered, they were charged with theft and malicious damage and imprisoned for six months. (Ironically, the books are now far more valuable than they would have been without their 'damage'.)

In the early 60s Orton started writing plays, and it was these which were much more successful. In 1967, Halliwell murdered Orton and then committed suicide. Jealous of Orton's success, Halliwell probably also feared (correctly) that he was going to leave him.

Orton's diary, revelling in his delight for casual gay sex, was used for his biography, 'Prick Up Your Ears', adapted into the film starring Gary Oldman in one of his best performances.

His plays live on. Dripping with bisexual characters, it's appropriate that we've used the titles of some to name the session rooms:

- Entertaining Mr **Sloane**
- **Loot**
- The Erpingham **Camp**
- The **Good** and **Faithful** Servant
- What the **Butler** Saw
- Up **Against** It



# Welcome to BiCon 2008!

## Hello and Welcome.

2008 finds BiCon back in Leicester. Every BiCon is run by a team of unpaid volunteers; your team have been working hard over the past two years to make sure that BiCon 2008 is just as fantastic as ever.

We've got a packed timetable of meetings, events, workshops, entertainments and parties to keep you as busy as you want during BiCon, and we hope you have a wonderful time!

Whatever happens, what makes a good BiCon is the attendees –you!

Every BiCon is run by the bisexual community, for the bisexual community, and it's a chance to meet friends old and new, learn a little, laugh a lot, and celebrate what a wonderful and diverse bunch we are.

**So here's to a wonderful BiCon!**

All the best,

The BiCon 2008 Team

## All About BiCon

### So what's a BiCon anyway?

BiCon is an annual festival for bisexual people, their friends, partners and allies. Held in a different UK location each year, BiCon attracts between two and three hundred people and is the single biggest event in the UK bisexual calendar.

### About this booklet

This booklet contains various things we can already tell you before BiCon starts. If you get your copy before BiCon, do have a look through it. It contains information about the venue and local area, as well as about BiCon itself. As well as giving you some idea what to expect, it may help you to decide what to bring.

The main thing not here is the complete timetable and details of sessions and entertainments: that will be finalised and we'll print that information just before BiCon in the programme booklet you will receive when you arrive.

In the meantime, see the outline timetable on page 14 of this booklet for a glimpse of activities taking place at BiCon.

# On Site Sources of Help

## Reception Desk

This is a good first point of contact for anyone with any questions. Desk volunteers may be able to answer queries, provide assistance or contact members of the organising team for you.

## The BiCon team

If there's anything you need over the weekend, please talk to us (refer to page one for details of how to contact us). Besides knowing where to find First-Aiders and Counsellors, we have lots of other practical information, and we can liaise with the venue staff about any problems that they should be dealing with.

## Identifying the team

People wearing purple sashes are 'on duty'. Anyone wearing a purple sash is a good person to ask if you need help or resources.

## Security

The Security Office is staffed twenty four hours every day. The campus is regularly patrolled by security staff, day and night. The night porter can be called on 0116 2212035 and security can be called on 0116 2522 888.

## First Aid and Counselling

Some BiCon-goers are trained First-aiders or Counsellors and have volunteered to be available during the weekend. If you have a need for a sticking plaster (whether physical or emotional), we will try to find someone who can help. Please ask at BiCon Reception or call the BiCon mobile phone on the number in the front of this booklet.

# Providing feedback or information

## Organisers' postbox

We will check the postbox at least once per day (shortly before the announcements plenary session), and sometimes more often. It will be in BiCon Reception or somewhere nearby. It can be used for anything you want to communicate to the organisers (and perhaps also to the whole of BiCon). For example:

- A suggestion about how things could work better.
- A problem you want us to be aware of.
- Something you want to tell us anonymously.
- Something you'd like brought to everyone's attention at a plenary, but don't want to say yourself.
- Thank you to someone (on the team or not).
- How much you're enjoying yourself!

Leave your name and some way of contacting you (email, telephone number) if you want us to know who sent the message (e.g. if you want us to get back to you) or not if not.

If you particularly do want or don't want your message to be mentioned or read out at the plenary, please say so; otherwise we'll use our own judgment on that.

# Getting External Help at BiCon

For emergencies call 999.

## Medical

We have access to the University's medical facilities for use in non-emergencies. They are open Monday - Friday 8:30am - 5:00pm. Surgery Telephone Number: 0844 815 1105.

Freemen's Cottages,  
161 Welford Road,  
Leicester  
LE2 6BF.

## Hospitals & Clinics

The nearest hospital with an A&E Department is the Leicester Royal Infirmary Infirmary Square  
Leicester  
LE1 5WW  
Telephone: 0116 254 1414

The nearest GUM (Sexual Health) Clinic is also at Leicester Royal Infirmary

A walk-in service is available every weekday morning, or appointments are available in the afternoon. Please be aware that you may have a long wait at the walk-in clinic.

## Pharmacists / Dispensing Chemists

- Boots the Chemist – 35 The Parade, Oadby, 0116 271 7514
- Severn Chemists – 40 Severn Road, Oadby, 0116 271 9053
- J&A Pharmacy – 19-21 Main Street, Evington, 0116 273 6047

## Dental Surgeons

Please call for an appointment and directions

- Dr G.K Kee - 0116 272 1800
- K Suida - 0116 271 2591
- Lebens, Ziff & Associates - 0116 271 4792

## Opticians

Please call for an appointment and directions

- Davies Hill Opticians – 0116 271 7456
- Vision Care Optometrists – 0116 272 0230
- York & Cooper – 0116 271 2310

## Police

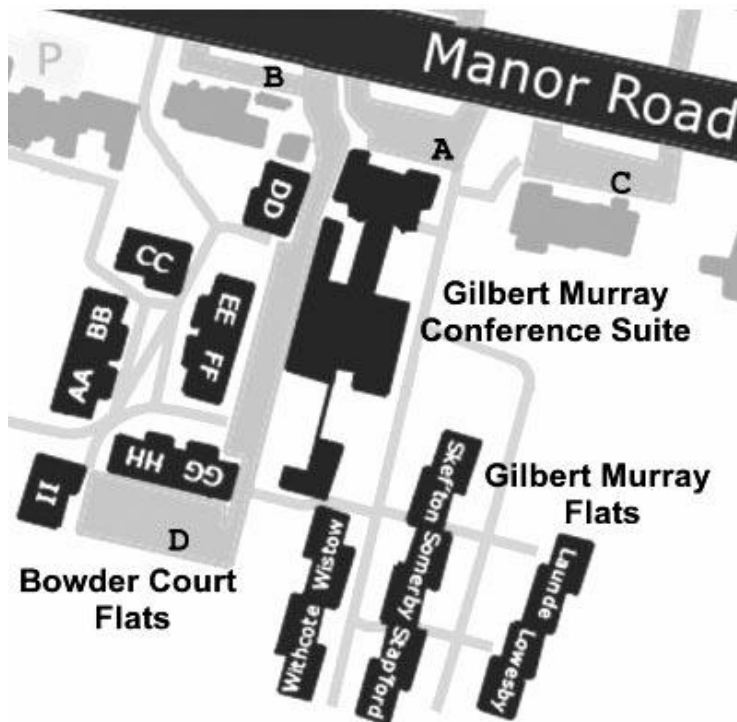
Oadby Campus is served by Oadby Local Policing Office — 0116 222222 5,  
Leicester Rd  
Oadby  
Leicester  
Leicestershire  
LE2 5BD

## Venue

Oadby campus is a 40 acre site, complete with beautiful landscaped grounds. The location combines impressive early nineteenth century houses with modern facilities. The campus is an enclosed space, and very peaceful and secluded.

### Daytime

For all of the daytime and evening programme we will be using the purpose built Gilbert Murray Conference Centre, which includes a chillout zone and social areas. All of the workshops and plenaries will take place in this building. The BiCon Reception desks for registration and information will be in the foyer.



### Evening

Our evening entertainment events will take place in the Gilbert Murray Bar and main hall (the same place we'll be holding plenaries). BiCon will have exclusive use of these areas for the weekend.

### BiCon Accommodation

BiCon accommodation will be in Gilbert Murray, Bowder Court and John Foster Flats across the road.

BiCon accommodation is loosely divided into party, medium and quiet flats where possible based on what you've told us about your preferences.

# Venue Facilities

## Car Parking

There is a plenty of car parking available on campus (see map).

Please note that car parks A, B and C are set aside for people with access difficulties.

Drivers with any access needs should contact BiCon prior to the event by emailing [bookings@bicon2008.org.uk](mailto:bookings@bicon2008.org.uk) or ask to speak to an organiser at the reception desk.

## Gym

There is a little-used sports ground adjacent to the campus, and a fully equipped gym, The Green House, next door. For more information, ask at BiCon reception desk.

## Internet Access

If you are bringing your own laptop, WiFi access is available in the main buildings with wired access available in rooms. Access is free, but please provide your own RJ45 network cables as these are not provided. Instructions for connecting to the wireless Internet will be provided when you register for BiCon.

## Cashpoints and Banks

There is no ATM on site; the nearest ATMs are on London Road and at the local ASDA, both about a ten minute walk away.

**Please note that BiCon Reception will not be able to provide attendees with cash or change for machines.**

## Laundry

Laundry facilities are available for BiCon attendees at the laundrette next to the conference suite. Costs are approximately £1.50 for a wash and 50p to dry.

# BiCon Accommodation

## Kitchen

This accommodation is self-catering, and a kitchen is provided in each flat. Please keep the kitchen clean and tidy for other attenders who may be sharing the flat with you.

Each flat has a kitchen with the necessary white goods:

- Kettle
- Toaster
- Fridge
- Freezer
- Microwave
- Cooker with oven and electric rings (en suite only)
- Two-plate hob and grill (standard only)

**Pots & pans, crockery & cutlery, utensils and glassware are NOT provided.**

Rubbish and recycling bags are provided in each kitchen for your use.

## Bedrooms

Bedrooms are provided in corridors of 7 or flats of 6. In standard flats two corridors of flats will share kitchen facilities. In ensuite rooms, flats will be of 6 people.

Bedrooms have the following provided:

- One single bed with blankets and two pillows
- Wardrobe
- Writing desk plus desk lamp
- Two towels (one bath, one hand)
- A welcome toiletries pack
- Tea and coffee making facilities (standard rooms will have these in the kitchens)

A welcome leaflet is also provided detailing emergency contact numbers and useful information.

**Please note that electrical sockets within rooms are 2 Amp fused and are not suitable for power equipment.**

Every room has a smoke or heat detector. When activated, you will hear the fire alarm. All occupants must evacuate the building and muster at the designated fire assembly point. Please familiarise yourself with evacuation procedures in your room. Please do not re-enter until told to do so.

It is an offence to use safety equipment such as fire extinguishers unless it is an emergency. Remember that smoke detectors can be quite sensitive to perfume spray, incense, burnt toast etc. Please take care to avoid the inconvenience of false alarms.

## Accessibility

A limited number of rooms equipped for people with additional needs are available. If you require any extra assistance please contact [bookings@bicon2008.org.uk](mailto:bookings@bicon2008.org.uk) before BiCon. It is unlikely one of these rooms will be available after BiCon has started.

## Health and Safety

### Smoking

Smoking has been illegal inside enclosed public spaces in all of the UK since July 2007. You cannot smoke inside any University buildings including the accommodation.

Anyone caught smoking in the flats will face a fine of £60 from the venue. BiCon will not cover this cost.

If you are smoking outside, please dispose of cigarette ends etc. in the sand buckets or litter bins provided.

### Animals

We can't allow animals on-site, except for registered assistance animals.



# Plenaries (announcements and decision-making)

The word 'plenary' is from a Latin word meaning 'full'.

A plenary is simply a gathering open to all BiCon delegates. There are several plenaries during the weekend. You don't have to attend all, or any, of them, but they will probably help you to know what's going on.

The plenaries are:

- An **opening plenary** to welcome everyone to BiCon
- A **daily** plenary where announcements can be made (for example, about late changes and additions to the programme).
- A **decision-making plenary** - this is the Annual General Meeting of BiCon, where we agree the venue and organising teams for future BiCons, discuss the finances, and review any changes to the BiCon Guidelines (the 'constitution' of UK BiCons).
- The **closing plenary**, where everyone says thank you to the organisers (hopefully!) and says goodbye.

## Some notes on The Decision Making Plenary from David Matthewman.

The Decision-Making Plenary (DMP) is the session at BiCon that ... well, makes decisions on issues. The 'issues' it decides on are things like who's going to run BiCon in future years, whether there are any projects that BiCon should help to fund, and whether any changes need making to the BiCon Guidelines (see below).

The debate can get heated, and occasionally veers into pedantry, but it's a very necessary part of BiCon and it's not always the nightmare its reputation would suggest. Because it's so important, it's never scheduled against other sessions, which allows everyone at BiCon to come to it – this year it's on Saturday evening.

If you want to raise an issue at the DMP, you should if at all possible bring it to the pre-DMP session on Friday. The purpose of this session is twofold. Firstly it allows the issues to be discussed in a smaller, more manageable group, where suggestions can be made and the ideas may be refined. Secondly, it allows the issues to be publicised on the notice board on the Saturday so that BiCon attendees can read the notices and know what is coming up. Please do read these notices (they'll be posted at or near the reception desk) if you're intending to come to the DMP – it will make things run more smoothly if everyone knows in advance what's going to be discussed.

If you can't make the pre-DMP session for any reason, and can't find someone to go in your place, please leave a note with reception before the end of Friday so that I can at least publicise the issue. Some small issues may be raised at the DMP without prior warning (it's not that formal), but not changes to the Guidelines, as those really do require more notice.

## Making proposals at the decision-making plenary

The decision-making plenary tends to run more smoothly if the proposals being presented have 'had the corners knocked off' beforehand. This year, this is the structure we've set up to help that to happen. At Thursday's evening plenary, we'll invite anyone with an idea for a proposal to stand up and outline it. We won't debate it then; this is just a 'heads-up' so that people with an interest in that issue know it's worth their while to go to the workshop the next day. The proposals will go on display afterwards for the benefit of people arriving later.

On Friday, interested parties get together in a 'knock the-corners-off' session (Pre DMP). This may mean that the original form of the proposal changes, or even that a completely different and better idea is invented. After that session, we put up a list of the proposals in their evolved form, along with the proposers and perhaps any main opposers who want to be named, at BiCon Reception. This allows for people to approach the proposers and opposers as individuals if there's a point they want cleared up, even if they missed the discussion. People may also want to put up written arguments for and against, for people to read while browsing the notice boards.

At Friday's evening plenary, we'll read out the list, so even if you hadn't had a chance to look at the noticeboards, you'll know what the hot topics are. If anything's really unclear we can hopefully make it clearer, but there won't be a big debate. With any luck this process will mean that things appear at the decision-making plenary on Saturday in a form that is clear to vote on, where the substantive issue has been identified and the undergrowth of 'yes buts' and 'what ifs' cleared away. It also gives people time to think about the stuff and/or discuss it and/or get clarification before they turn up to debate & vote.

## The BiCon Guidelines by David Matthewman

The BiCon Guidelines, written and agreed at the 1998 BiCon, are guidelines describing what BiCon is and how it should be run. They're intended to make things easier for teams running BiCon rather than being restrictive, and to make sure that any BiCon covers the bare minimum of requirements for content and accessibility.

Occasionally they get added to and amended at the DMP; this requires the approval of two consecutive BiCons. This year there's a proposed amendment carried over from last year which reads '***The intent is not that the Equality Fund be how unwaged people generally attend BiCon***'; if that seems overly gnomic to you, feel free to track me down sometime before the DMP and I'll discuss it, or come to the DMP itself for a debate and a vote.

The full text of the BiCon Guidelines is available on-line here: <http://www.bicon.org.uk/guidelines.html> and will be available at the reception desk and at the pre-DMP session. Bear in mind that they're not intended so that you can walk around BiCon ticking them off and awarding marks to the current BiCon team, you'll make yourself very unpopular if you do that.

**Please do come to the DMP, though. It's important that decisions made on behalf of BiCon are made by as many people at BiCon as possible.**

## Workshops

Most or all of the sessions (or workshops – we'll use the terms interchangeably) at BiCon are run by attendees who have a skill to share or a hot topic they want to talk about. Some facilitators have lots of experience of running groups; others are running their first session this year.

Usually sessions are offered before BiCon starts, so that the organisers can work out a timetable and print a programme with details. However, it's also common for a few more to be added as BiCon goes on. Perhaps you wanted to get a sense of the BiCon vibe, or see what was already in the timetable, before making your offer. Or perhaps the idea for the subject was a spin-off from a discussion during the weekend.

If you decide during BiCon that you'd like to offer an additional session, tell BiCon Reception about your idea for a subject, and they'll find out whether there is space available for you to do this.

# Entertainments

**All evening entertainments are included in your day or weekend ticket.**

## **BiCon Bar**

The bar is open from noon each day, serving tea, coffee, soft drinks, alcohol and snacks for BiCon attenders. There are comfy seats for people to sit around on and socialise throughout BiCon.

Please note that under 18s will not be permitted in the bar area after 8pm.

## **Quiet Space**

There will be a quiet room with comfy seating available throughout the time that the Gilbert Murray Conference Centre is open—approx 9am to midnight each day. We ask that people are quiet in here, so no noisy games or conversations.

## **Games**

We will have games in the bar and some of the workshop rooms; there will be board games for people to borrow. If you have any games you fancy playing with others please bring them along.

## **Thursday and Friday nights**

On Thursday night our resident DJs will be playing some sets while giving BiCon attenders a chance to settle into the BiCon vibe.

Friday night will be Ian's slightly themed disco.

## **Saturday Night: The 'Circus of the Bizarre' BiCon Ball**

This year the ball is themed upon the 'Circus of the Bizarre'. Fancy dress is not mandatory at this event, but it is encouraged! Take your inspiration from Moulin Rouge, Cabaret, The Circus of Horrors, Victorian music halls, the Big Top or anything else that springs to mind. Come as a burlesque beauty, emcee, strong man or whatever takes your fancy. We want you to feel free to use your imagination but some people might not feel comfortable being near clowns/masks etc, so please consider their feelings.

**Under 16s are welcome at the BiCon Ball until 9pm.**

**Watch out for announcements for any unscheduled events.**

# BiCon Programmed Events

## **‘-Only’ spaces**

A few sessions may have restrictions on the people that may attend: for example, ‘women only’ or ‘bisexual men only’. This will be indicated in their description in the programme.

If you're not included, don't gatecrash. (If it's not clear who is or isn't included, please confer with the session organiser in good time before the session. People at BiCon Reception can help you find them.)

## **Content**

Some sessions will deal frankly with topics that some people find offensive or difficult. It's fine to leave quietly if a session isn't what you expected, or you realise you're not in the mood for it. If you feel that the content breaches the Code of Conduct, please tell the BiCon organisers.

## **Mobile phones**

Unless you are on call as a volunteer counsellor or First Aider, please turn off your phone before joining a programme session. Members of the organising team will have their own mobile phones or the team phone on at all times, though these will be switched to ‘silent’ or ‘vibrate’ mode during workshops.

## **Session Confidentiality**

As stated on page 19 under ‘confidentiality’: feel free to discuss the content of sessions with people who weren't there, but don't name names, or describe someone in a way that identifies them. It's also good manners not to assume that just because someone talked about a particular issue in a session, they'll want to carry on talking about it somewhere else later.

## **When a session is ‘closed’**

Some sessions may become ‘closed’ either when a certain number of people have arrived or after a certain amount of time. This will be indicated by a notice on the door. If a session is already closed, please don't try to join it.

## **Additional tips for good manners in sessions:**

- Turn up on time, or slightly early. There's a 15 minute break between sessions to give you plenty of time.
- Don't interrupt or talk over other people.
- In discussions, be aware of how much you're speaking, compared to other people. Help the session organiser to make sure that the quieter people get a turn to speak if they want to.

# Outline timetable

## Thursday: Bi ReCon

Registration opens at 10 am for Bi ReCon, and at 3pm for BiCon.

A day of workshops, presentations, research seminars and activities aimed at bringing together members of the bisexual community with key organisations, and researchers who study the experiences and needs of this group. Recent sexual equalities legislation specifically recognises bi people and outlaws biphobic activities and discrimination. Therefore organisations now have to pay attention to the 'B' in LGBT, but may not know what specific issues bi people face.

This day aims to address these issues and to build bridges between bi communities, researchers and key organisations and groups.

Bi ReCon is a jointly run event by the BiCon 2008 team and BiUK. BiUK is a group of researchers and activists who are committed to studying bisexual matters and working with bi communities.

### 10:00-17:30 Bi ReCon

### 18:00-21:00 BiCon introductory sessions

## Friday:

- 09:45-10:10 'Opening' plenary
- 10:15-11:30 Workshops (75 min)
- 11:45-13:00 Workshops (75 min)
- 13:00-14:30 Lunch (90 min)
- 14:30-15:45 Workshops (75 min)
- 16:00-17:15 Workshops (75 min)
  - 17:20-17:30 Announcements
- 17:30-18:45 Evening Meal (75 min)
- 18:45-20:00 Workshops (75 min)

## Saturday:

- 10:00-10:10 Announcements
- 10:15-11:30 Workshops (75 min)
- 11:45-13:00 Workshops (75 min)
- 13:00-14:30 Lunch (90 min)
- 14:30-15:45 Workshops (75 min)
- 16:00-16:20 Photo
  - 16:30-17:30 DMP inc announcements (60 min)
- 17:30-18:45 Evening Meal (75 min)
  - 18:45-20:00 Evening Session

## Sunday:

- 10:00-10:10 Announcements
- 10:15-11:30 Workshops (75 min)
- 11:45-13:00 Workshops (75 min)
- 13:00-14:30 Lunch (90 min)
  - 14:30-15:30 'Closing' plenary (60 min)
  - 15:30-17:00 The clean-up begins. We'd love volunteers!

## Preparing for BiCon

### Things you might like to bring to BiCon

***“Reminds me of my safari in Africa. Somebody forgot the corkscrew and for several days we had to live on nothing but food and water” - WCFields.***

- Comfy clothes.
- Clothes to dress up in, if you like to dress up. This could include fancy dress (maybe an outfit for the BiCon ball), or any other clothes you like, especially ones you wouldn't usually get the chance to wear.
- Your favourite board game or card game.
- Knitting/sewing if you enjoy them (there will be a "Stitch & Bitch" space, as well as costume workshops before the BiCon Ball on Saturday).
- Any sports equipment e.g. yoga mats, juggling balls, swimming things, walking boots.
- Proof of your date of birth, if you look young for your age.
- Kitchen equipment, such as pots & pans, crockery & cutlery, basic utensils and glassware.

# Finding your BiCon feet - Advice for first-timers

With so much to take in and so many people you don't know, it can take a while to 'find your BiCon feet'. Even people who come back year after year have their moments of feeling a bit anxious or 'alone in a crowd'.

Here, we'll try to give you a little of the flavour of BiCon, and tell you some useful things to help you settle in at your own pace.

## Ice-Breaker Activities

### Food for thought – the Noshers' Network

#### What if you want company for lunch?

At meal breaks, there's usually a Noshers' Network get-together. Meeting Points and times will be posted on the noticeboard at BiCon Reception. The idea is very simple: people who want the same kind of food get together.

That might mean going to a supermarket or takeaway and then back to the kitchen in someone's flat, or if the weather's good perhaps having a picnic, or walking into Oadby for a pub lunch.

The group doesn't necessarily all go to the same place - it depends what people want. Aside from finding people to chat with, this can be a good way of getting to know the local places to go for food.

### Meet & Mingle zones

Look out for '**Meet & Mingle**' signs. The idea is that in those areas, you can go and join a table where you don't know the other people (yet) and join in. Obviously you could do that anywhere, but this way you know in advance that you're not interrupting a private conversation as people sitting there will be specifically welcoming other people.

#### Meet & Mingle rules:

- Anyone is welcome to sit down and join in the conversation.
- Once you're in the Meet & Mingle zone, look out for passers-by or people who've recently come into the room, and invite them to join you.

Maybe you want to create your own Meet & Mingle zone – perhaps one with a theme, such as 'Stitch & Bitch' (for both keen knitters, and people who just want to have a go), or card games.

Ask at BiCon Reception if you want pens & paper to create your own Meet & Mingle sign with a particular theme.

### Meeting new people

#### You are not alone!

Approximately a third of the attendees each year are there for the first time, so even though you might feel alone when you arrive, it won't be long before you meet people. We've all been there, and we'll try to make sure that there are plenty of icebreaker-type opportunities to help ease things along. And hopefully, by the time you leave, you'll have made some good friends.

## **Don't know what to do?**

It's helpful to go to daytime sessions as a good way of meeting people. You won't necessarily make friends instantly in the sessions, but the discussion topic can lead into some interesting conversations then or later.

This year, as with previous years, we will be running sessions that are particularly aimed at first-timers, although these will be open to anyone who wishes to attend. It is expected that these sessions will include icebreaker-type exercises as well as offering advice, reassurance, and a chance for you to ask any questions you may have.

## **Everybody needs good neighbours**

Unless people have specially asked to be with a friend (whom they've named), we usually aim to put newcomers together in the flats with other newcomers, and/or other people from the same geographical area.

## **Want to help?**

BiCon is run by volunteers, some of you will already know we are looking (as always) for people with specific skills, such as counselling, first aid and signing. In addition, we're going to need general helpers for the event – staffing the reception desk or being a 'gopher' (general helpful person).

Ask at BiCon Reception if you'd like to help; we're glad for a hand from anyone willing to lend one. Volunteering is a great way to meet people, especially for people who are attending BiCon for the first time.

# **Food**

## **Food available on site**

There will be tea, coffee, juice and a small selection of snacks available at the conference centre. You will also find soft drink and snack vending machines in the bar.

## **Supermarket**

The nearest supermarket is an ASDA which also has cashpoints. This is about 10-15 minute walk or short drive from the BiCon venue. The opening hours are 8am-10pm Mon-Sat and 10am- 4pm on Sundays.

BiCon reception will have lists of people offering or requesting lifts to the supermarket. If you are able to offer seats or would like seats in someone's car please ask at reception.

If you wish directions to the ASDA these will be available from the reception desk.

## **Takeaways**

There are takeaways, cafes and restaurants aplenty in Oadby. We hope to have some delivery menus at BiCon Reception throughout the weekend.



# BiCon Code of Conduct

## Context

By its nature, this section can sound like a long list of "Do this, do that, don't do this, please do that". We hope you will read it in the spirit it's meant; having these guidelines spelt out from the start is intended to prevent a sticky moment or misunderstanding which might spoil someone's BiCon.

## Your responsibilities

Everyone has a part to play in making BiCon a safe space. If you notice an incident of harassment, or anything else that doesn't belong at BiCon, please report it to BiCon Reception or the nearest organiser as soon as possible. If you don't feel comfortable bringing an issue to us directly, you can put a note in the organisers' post-box at Reception.

## The BiCon organisers' responsibilities

The organisers have final say. We will try to deal fairly and respectfully with any issue that is brought to us. Breaches of this Code of Conduct will, in most cases be, met with a warning from a member of the organising team. If warnings are ignored, or in the event of serious misconduct, we reserve the right to ask anyone to leave BiCon, and if asked to leave you will not receive any refund.

## Respecting difference

- People are welcome to attend BiCon regardless of how they define their sexuality.
- Transgender people are accepted at BiCon for all purposes as the gender they choose to present.
- Remember that some people are new to BiCon. Be helpful if you can.
- Racism, sexism, heterophobia and other bigoted behaviour will not be tolerated at BiCon.
- Respect the choices people have made regarding their beliefs, gender or sexuality, and how they choose to express them.

Access is not just a matter of wheelchairs. Different aspects of the environment affect different people, e.g. some people may be lip-reading, some need smoke-free space, some find busy crowds difficult.

You can't always know without being told, but try to be aware of what the people around you might need to make BiCon accessible to them.

## Boundaries / harassment

### No means no

No-one at BiCon should be put under any pressure to join in with things they don't want to. Obviously this includes any sexual behaviour, but it also includes hugs, touching, playing a game, being in a photo, disclosing information or even having a chat.

It's fine to ask someone once if they would like to do something. Pestering someone counts as harassment; if someone asks you to leave them alone, do so.

In public, "**no**", "**stop**", and "**don't do that**" will be taken at face value by the BiCon organisers, regardless of any safewords\* within BDSM games/scenes. (\*For explanations of "BDSM" and "safeword", see the Community Info Zones; you can safely skip over the above paragraph for now if they're not ideas you're already familiar with.)

## Personal space

Don't invade people's personal space without being invited to. A useful phrase is *"Would you like a hug?"*

## Public behaviour

Please keep any public behaviour legal and consensual. Remember that consent includes any audience, and that the audience may include not just attendees, but venue staff too.

BiCon should be a place where people feel free to express their sexuality, but we ask that overtly sexual behaviour, particularly 'kinky' or BDSM activities, be kept out of the public areas. (For explanation of "BDSM", see the Community Info Zones.)

# Confidentiality

## Within BiCon

Not everyone at BiCon wants to be 'out' about their sexuality to the whole world.

Ask permission before identifying anyone in a public write-up of BiCon. For the avoidance of doubt, 'public' includes personal web sites and blogs including those with restricted audiences.

## Photography

Please do not take any photographs of people without their express permission. It is your responsibility to make sure everyone in shot is happy to be photographed.

If you give permission for your photo to be taken, assume it may end up online linked to you by name as people may not remember your preferences after BiCon.

If you believe someone has taken your photograph without your permission you may ask them to delete the image or report this to the reception desk and an organiser will ensure that any images are deleted where possible.

## Within discussion sessions

No photography, recording or filming is permitted in programme sessions unless it's specifically stated in the programme.

Bear in mind that very personal issues may be raised in discussion sessions. Feel free to discuss the content of sessions with people who weren't there. But don't name names, and don't describe someone in a way that identifies them unless you have already checked they're OK with it.

## Passes

People attending BiCon should wear their pass to all events; if you don't, your right to attend may be challenged. Different passes will indicate under-18s. If you're over 18 but look younger please bring proof of your date of birth.

People involved with the organisation of BiCon who are 'on duty', are identifiable by their purple coloured sashes. You can learn more about this on page 5.

## Press Policy

Members of the press should identify themselves to BiCon Reception and at the start of any sessions they attend. If not everyone is happy with their presence in a session, the session organiser may ask them to leave.

# Children at BiCon

BiCon is primarily an event for adults. However, children are welcome with a parent or carer. There may be some workshops suitable for children, however we cannot guarantee suitability of the others.

## During BiCon

You retain responsibility for your child(ren) throughout the event. As this is a conference based around a shared sexuality, conversations taking place around your child may be adult in nature; if you do not want your child to hear these conversations, you are responsible for removing them from earshot.

Adult behaviour at BiCon should remain legal and comply with BiCon's guidelines at all times, but we cannot force people to, for example, stop swearing or showing affection. Please think in advance about what you are happy for your child to see. This applies particularly to evening events.

If you feel worried by the behaviour of anyone towards your child, please report this to the reception desk people know and the team will intervene if you want us to.

Please do not leave your child with anyone you don't know and trust.

Some sessions may have age limits, such as over-16s or over-18s. These will be indicated in the programme and/or on the door of the session room.

Some sessions, such as crafts or dance, may be appropriate for people of any age. However, parents attending with their children are encouraged to use their discretion on what is acceptable for their children to see and hear.

Exempting Family Day events, session organisers may ask a parent to remove their child(ren) from a session if discussion topics take an unexpectedly explicit turn.

Babes in arms are welcome at all sessions unless otherwise stated.

## Childcare

Children are welcome throughout the event, but as no one has requested it, we aren't providing childcare ourselves.

## Family Day

On Saturday, we will have a family-friendly day with some child-friendly workshops, a picnic, face-painting and other activities.

We can put people who are bringing children to BiCon in touch with each other. Just contact us, and we'll add you to the mailing list to discuss whatever you want - e.g. arranging shared resources such as toys and games, finding out who else has children of a similar age to yours, or perhaps getting together to volunteer a session on queer parenting.

We realise that you may wish to discuss with other parents the option of sharing some childcare at BiCon on an informal basis; please note that BiCon does not formally suggest this course of action and cannot take any responsibility for any arrangements made.

# Where is information provided?

## Notice Boards

There will be some notice board space available for attendees to use. As well as the workshop timetable and general information, there's space for you to put up a notice for other attendees. Feel free to advertise for other people to meet up, e.g. from your geographical area or sharing a particular interest.

## Plenaries

You might also like to make a brief announcement at an evening plenary session, or ask for your announcement to be read out by the team.

## Prior to BiCon

This year's BiCon web site is at [www.bicon2008.org.uk](http://www.bicon2008.org.uk) , and there's one at [www.bicon.org.uk](http://www.bicon.org.uk) which links to info about past years and next year.

You might consider introducing yourself on the BiCon community on LiveJournal, <http://community.livejournal.com/bicon> . There usually seem to be at least one or two newcomers who say hello there before BiCon, and more afterwards. If you don't have a LiveJournal (a.k.a. LJ) yourself, you can still join in the conversation there by commenting on someone else's post. A lot of regular and recent BiCon-goers read this group, including many of this years' organising team, so it's a good place to get questions answered.

## Community Info Zones

Coming to BiCon can be quite a learning curve in terms of different words and different communities. For instance, BiCon-goers include people who identify as transgender, transsexual, deaf, disabled or Goth. You might also hear words and abbreviations like polyamory (or poly), BDSM, genderqueer and so on.

Look out for Community Information near BiCon Reception - written displays which try to answer the basic questions about these various areas. You won't be the first person who's wondered what those words mean.

## Who are these people in the strange clothes?

One of the wonderful things about BiCon is that it's a very non-judgmental place when it comes to dressing up. Leather, latex, purple velvet; corsets, drag, sparkly things; BiCon's seen it all (especially in the evenings).

Sometimes it's easy to get the impression that these dressed-up people are of a different, cooler species, or indeed strange alien weirdos. However, they're mostly much the same as anyone in ordinary life, as you'll find out if you get chatting.

In a display of true BiCon diversity, you'll also see plenty of people in their favourite ordinary comfy clothes, especially in the daytime but even on the dance floor.

## Not necessarily bi

Not everyone who comes to BiCon identifies as bisexual. Some non-bi people come to BiCon as the partner, friend or relative of a bi person. Some people visiting are questioning their sexuality. Some people don't like the word 'bisexual', and some don't like labels at all; others have found creative ways of identifying their preferences.

## Terms and Unfamiliar Jargon

You will probably hear a number of terms you have never heard before, and you may find that coming to BiCon helps you make sense of your own sexuality. Some non-bi people feel at home here thanks to the accepting attitude to other non-mainstream things. There may also be a few people with a professional interest in bisexuality, e.g. academic researchers (though anyone at BiCon as a journalist must identify themselves). In short, don't assume that everyone you meet at BiCon is bi.

There is an Allies workshop where being non bi at BiCon will be the main theme of the workshop. Look out for it in the workshop timetable.

## Sex and no sex

Just like in life outside BiCon, there are those who like to talk about their sexual activities, and those who don't. BiCon is certainly a sex-positive environment, but you'll also find plenty of people who, just like Boy George, *"would rather have a cup of tea"*.

Because BiCon is such an accepting and non-judgmental environment, many people who attend take the opportunity to be open about other aspects of their sexuality, some of which might not be so openly discussed in the outside world.

If you want to take the opportunity to learn about these aspects, you will probably find many people who will be happy to talk to you about them. Some things will also be covered in workshops. If you are not interested in kinks or fetishes, that's fine too!

## What's your pronoun?

Although the majority at BiCon are conventionally gendered, it also attracts a lot of gender diversity. Some people identify (and live full time) as a gender you wouldn't necessarily have predicted from their appearance; others are just playing with a different role for an evening.

To be respectful, use the pronouns (he, she, her etc) which people prefer themselves. But how do you know which those are? Sometimes you can guess from the person's name or appearance, but sometimes the only way to know for sure is to ask. So don't feel you ought to know by some secret sign, and don't worry if you get it wrong sometimes, as long as you were doing your best to be polite. By the same token, if you want to be known by a different pronoun than someone's guessed for you, let them know. See also Community Information Zones.

## What if I'm not bi enough?

Perhaps because there are so many different ways to be bi, it seems to be a common thread among bi people to worry sometimes that they don't quite qualify as a 'real' bi person. Let's just say that we're not going to be asking for some mythical certificate of bisexual authenticity!

Besides, as we already mentioned, BiCon is open to people who don't even consider themselves bi. So don't worry - if you can respect the diversity of others then you're welcome at BiCon, whatever the element of bisexuality in your life.

Many bisexual people have experienced forms of prejudice and intolerance because of their sexuality, and know first hand how difficult it can be to accept yourself when others do not. As a result, people at BiCon try to be accepting and non-judgmental.

## **Take it easy**

Because BiCon is such an exceptional experience, it can feel like you don't want to miss a moment. It might sound obvious to say this, but do remember to eat and sleep a reasonable amount.

Most people don't go to things in every session, but take time out in the day to chat, snooze, ring home, have a bath or go food shopping. It's not possible to do everything - if you didn't fit in everything you wanted to, well, you'll just have to come back next year.

## **Counselling**

Being at BiCon may stir up big feelings of one kind or another. Some BiCon-goers are trained counsellors who have volunteered to be available over the weekend to provide non-directional non-judgemental listening services.

If you need a confidential listening ear, ask at BiCon Reception or ring the BiCon mobile phone on the number in the front of this book.

## **After BiCon**

A lot of people have a sense of post-BiCon comedown a day or two after the event ends. It's also common to be fired up with activist inspiration and feel you can't wait to hook up again with some bit of the bi community. Or both!

It can be useful to think in advance about how you might feel when you get home, and build in a few plans to take care of yourself. Some people book a day or two off work after BiCon finishes, to unwind and catch up on sleep (though if you're already at BiCon when you read this, it may be too late to arrange for this year).

If where you live is somewhere you're not out as bi, it can be good to stay a night with a friend where you can talk freely and let off steam. You might want to fix up your next bi social event before you leave BiCon, to have something to look forward to. If there's nothing going on near where you live, you could still plan to stay in touch with people by phone or to join one of the internet groups.

Towards the end of the weekend, we'll be offering a 'Re-entry' session, offering advice about returning to 'normal life', and what to do with that leftover BiCon buzz.

# Travelling to Bicon

## Car

Try these websites for travel directions from wherever you're coming from (your destination postcode for the venue is LE2 2LG):

- [www.multimap.com](http://www.multimap.com)
- [www.google.com](http://www.google.com)
- [www.theaa.com](http://www.theaa.com)

## Rail

Leicester London Road station is served by Midland Mainline, Virgin and Central Trains.

All platforms at the train station have lifts to get onto and off the platform and into the main part of the station.

Booking a specific train will give you the cheapest fare – it is often best to book two singles rather than a return. You can get rail fares and times on 08457 48 49 50 or by looking at [www.nationalrail.co.uk](http://www.nationalrail.co.uk).

Please note that East Midland trains leaving from London St. Pancras sometimes leave up to five minutes before the listed departure time or have a large queue before the check-in gate. We advise that people using these services plan to arrive at least 15 minutes before the listed departure time.

## Bus

Long-distance bus services to Leicester are operated by:

**Megabus** direct from London only. Megabus fares start from £1. Book at [www.megabus.com](http://www.megabus.com) or 0900 160 0900 (60p/min from landlines).

**National Express** - from most UK mainland major cities, Book at [www.nationalexpress.com](http://www.nationalexpress.com) or call 08705 808080 between 08:00 and 20:00 (max 8p/min from landlines), textphone 0121 455 0086.

Coach or bus services all arrive at St Margaret's Bus Station in Leicester City Centre.

## Air

The nearest Airport to Leicester is East Midlands Airport approximately 20 miles away. There is no direct rail link but there are coach services from the Airport to Leicester, Loughborough and Nottingham which all may be useful depending upon your time of travel. See [www.eastmidlandsairport.com/emaweb.nsf/Content/Bus](http://www.eastmidlandsairport.com/emaweb.nsf/Content/Bus) for more details.

Other popular airports in England are Manchester, Birmingham and Stansted all of which are close to cities with direct railway or coach connections to Leicester.

The address of the BiCon venue is:  
Gilbert Murray and Stamford Hall Manor  
Road  
Oadby  
Leicester  
LE2 2LH

## From Leicester Bus and Rail Stations

The 31/31A bus route passes both St. Margaret's Bus Station and Leicester London Road Railway Station every ten minutes. The destination bus stop is at the bottom of Stoughton Drive South which is about 10-15 minutes walk up a moderate slope to the BiCon part of the venue.

Taxis are available at a cost of approx £6.50 for black cabs and minicabs from the railway station; the bus station will be a few pounds more. We recommend taxis for attendees with mobility problems or heavy bags.

## By car

### From the M1:

- Exit at Junction 21, M1/M69 roundabout onto A5460.
- Filter left onto A563 Leicester South & East (Lubbersthorpe Way).
- Continue straight on A563 Outer Ring Road (Soar Valley Way).
- After 3.5 miles (5.6km), take the second exit off the roundabout onto A6 South (Leicester Road).
- Follow the signs for University Halls.

### From A6 North:

- Continue on A6 (Loughborough Road) towards Leicester.
- Follow the central ring road A594 towards Market Harborough/Leicester Railway Station.
- Pick up A6 towards Market Harborough.
- After 2.5 miles (4km), take the second exit off the roundabout.
- Follow the signs for University Halls.

### From A47 North:

- Follow A47 (Uppingham Road) towards Leicester.
- Turn left onto Spencerfield Lane (becoming Evington Lane).
- At the traffic lights, turn left onto A6030 Leicester South (Stoughton Drive).
- Take the first exit at the second roundabout.
- Take the second exit at the second roundabout (Stoughton Drive South).
- Follow the signs for University Halls.



## Things to see and do outside BiCon

Leicester University is home to the Harold Martin Botanic Garden. The University website describes it as '16 acres of lovingly-cultivated grounds with origins dating back to 1920'. 'The grounds are perfect for a pleasant walk and there are benches for those who simply wish to relax and admire the surroundings'.

Leicester also boasts the National Space Centre, Twycross Zoo, and Great Central Railway, the UK's only mainline steam railway.

More information on things to see and do in the area can be found at [www.visitleicester.co.uk](http://www.visitleicester.co.uk)

## Places of worship

- Baptist: Oadby Baptist Church, Leicester Road, Leicester, LE2 5BD
- Buddhist: Leicestershire Buddhist Society, 6 Half Moon Crescent, Oadby, LE2 4HD
- Church of England: St Peters, Wigston Road, Oadby, LE2 5QE
- Hindu: Swaminarayan Hindu Mission, 3 St. James St, Leicester, Leicestershire LE1 3SU
- Jewish: Jewish Progressional Congregation, 24 Avenue Road, Leicester, LE2 3EA
- Muslim: Masjid-ul-imam-il-Bukhani, Loughborough Road, Leicester, LE4 5LR
- Methodist: Bishop Street Methodist Church, 10a Bishop St, Leicester, Leicestershire LE1 6AF
- Roman Catholic: Church of the Immaculate Conception, New Street, Oadby, LE2 4LJ
- Sikh: Gurdwara Guri Guru Deshmesh Shib, Gipsy Lane, Leicester, Leicestershire LE4 6RF
- Spiritualist: National Spiritualist Church, 82 Vaughan Way, Leicester, Leicestershire LE1 4SH

# Background of BiCon

## History and basics

The first national UK bi gathering was in 1984, although it wasn't yet called BiCon. This is the 26th. In recent years, they've all been on a university campus in late summer and lasted three or four days. There is no permanent BiCon organisation, although there is a permanent web site ([www.bicon.org.uk](http://www.bicon.org.uk)) and mailing address (BM BiCon, London WC1N 3XX).

Since its beginnings, the organisers of BiCon have never quite decided whether '-con' is short for 'convention' or 'conference'. There is a good reason for this: BiCon has elements of both. Some parts of the programme are aimed at celebrating bisexuality; other parts of the programme are aimed at more serious discussions. Each year, the organisers try to ensure that the programme is as varied as possible, so that you can make the event what you want it to be.

Each year, it's run by a new team of volunteers, sometimes a mix of past BiCon organisers and people new to the challenge. The formal hand-over from one team to the next is often at the BiCon closing plenary. The team is usually, but not always, based in the same city as the BiCon venue; these days, much of the planning takes place over the internet.

The essentials of a BiCon are defined by the BiCon Guidelines, formalised in 1998. If a team wants to run BiCon differently from these guidelines, they're supposed to say so up front when they say "we want to run BiCon in such-and-such a year". Usually that's in a plenary session at BiCon. The Guidelines can be seen on the web at [www.bicon.org.uk/guidelines.html](http://www.bicon.org.uk/guidelines.html).

If it happened that two groups both wanted to run the same year's BiCon, there would be a vote to decide, although in recent years that's never been necessary. Some years it's seemed like nobody wanted to do it; other years, there's been a kind of organically evolved consensus where word goes around that "so-and-so is thinking of such-and-such a year".

Usually most people in the organising team identify as bi, but straight & gay people can be and have been BiCon organisers too.

Several recent BiCons (though not all) have ended up with surplus money. Thus the next groups of BiCon organisers have been able to start off with seed money, e.g. to pay the deposit to the venue. What's in the bank also protects BiCon organisers from having to dip into their own pockets in the event of a financial loss.

The suggestion comes round regularly that BiCon (as a whole) should be formed into some kind of limited company; this is being looked into at the moment.

## Helping out

**We have a policy of inclusion, of involving anyone from the wider BiCon community who wants to help, to whatever extent they can contribute. So, if you'd like to help, let us know. We will certainly need additional help, especially as BiCon 2008 gets closer.**

## **The BiCon 2008 Team would like to thank:**

- Jen Yockney
- Grant Denkinson
- All the members of biconorganisers on LiveJournal
- Jo & Emma at The University of Leicester
- The Safe Organisation Ltd
- All the workshop facilitators
- All the DJs
- Volunteers for lending their time and talents
- Past BiCon team members for their support and advice
- All our partners, housemates and friends for their love, encouragement, patience and tea making capabilities

**Most of all, the BiCon 2008 team would like to you for coming and making BiCon what it is**

## ***Appendix 1.3: BiCon session timetable (overleaf)***

Friday	Updated 2pm Friday						
	Butler	Good	Faithful	Loot	Sloane	Camp	Against
	Opening Plenary						
	One 09:45-10:15	Bigging up the B in LGBT	BiCon for Beginners		Chi Kung	BiCon for Old Timers	Experiencing Bi Identity with Lego
	Two 10:15-11:30	Bisexuals at Pride(s) (tea & cake)	Being Bisexual in the Workplace		Photography Basics	Flogging	Fitting & Misfitting in the Bi Community
	Giant Canvas Painting Project – outside						
	Lunch 11:45-13:00	Time Management for Non-monoqamists	Getting to know you: A circle game		Shy Social Staging Queer Shakespeare	Naked Lunch Pre Decision Making Plenary	BDSM for Nervous Newbies
	Three 13:00-14:30						Men's Workshop
	Four 14:30-15:45	Your Legal Rights: Employment	SM for Smers		Solving Conflict in Poly Families	Stitch & Bitch	Transgender for the Bi Community
	Dinner 16:00-17:15						
Five 17:15-18:45	Clothes-Free: Chill-out Zone		Foot Massage	Self-Harm: How we Cope with Stress	Volunteering in the Bi Community		
Ents 18:45-20:00							
20:00-01:00	Lovingboth's No. 1 Disco Agency						
Saturday	9:40 – Silent worship / meditation						
	Butler	Good	Faithful	Loot	Sloane	Camp	Against
	Announcements						
	Opening 10:10-10:15	Bisexuality in History Pre-20thC	BiCon for Beginners	Family: Children at BiCon 0-5 year strategies	Kids of all ages: Games	Using Body Language to Improve Flirting Skills	Personality Snap
	Six 10:15-11:30	Juggling – outside					
	Seven 11:45-13:00	Bisexuality in History 20thC	Self-help for the Mainly Sane	Family: Non Traditional Families	Kids of all ages: Crafts	Smutty Bisexual Storytelling	Experiencing Bi Identity with Lego
	Swimming – meet at reception						
	Updated 2pm Friday						
	Butler	Good	Faithful	Loot	Sloane	Camp	Against
	Lunch 13:00-14:30	Teddybear Picnic			Naked Lunch		
Eight 14:30-15:45	Laughing Yoga	Building Queersafe	Family: Organising Alternative Parenting Weekend	Kids of all ages: Stories	Writing your own Personal Ad	High Tea (aka Slow Dating)	
Photo 16:00-16:20	Outside if fine!						
DMP 16:30-17:30	Decision Making Plenary		Kids of all ages: Co-operative games				
Dinner 17:30-18:45							
Ooooh 18:45-20:00			Glamour: The Other Side		Cover Bis		
BiCon Ball 20:00-01:00	Circus of the Bizarre						
Sunday	9:40 – Silent worship / meditation						
	Butler	Good	Faithful	Loot	Sloane	Camp	Against
	Announcements						
	Opening 10:10-10:15	Your Legal Rights: Housing	Poly Activism (Polyday)		Tantra and Bisexuality		Fitting & Misfitting in the Bi Community
	Nine 10:15-11:30						
	Ten 11:45-13:00	What do we want from BiCon		Inter-fath spiritual space	Solving Conflict in Poly Families: Follow-up	Therapeutic Flogging	Experiencing Bi Identity with Lego
	Lunch 13:00-14:30						
	Bye! 14:30-15:30	Closing Plenary					
	BiCon officially ends at 15:30 on Sunday... however we'd be amazed if there weren't a picnic on the grounds later and we'd be utterly delighted if people helped tidy up as well!						

## BiCon 2008 session blurbs

### **Allies and non-bis: non-bisexuals at Bicon**

*David Matthewman*

BiCon - and the bi community in general - attracts a number of non-bisexual 'allies'. Some have partners who are bi, some are 'politically' bisexual, some find their own identity unrepresented in national conferences and find BiCon a 'best fit', and some people simply feel as though this is 'home'. This session is for us; come and discuss how it feels to be a non-bi at BiCon with some fellow bi-friendly folk.

### **BDSM for Nervous Newbies**

*Webcowgirl*

Top? Bottom? Switch? If you've been looking to learn a little bit about BDSM and how to play safely, this workshop will give you an introduction to the basics - from commonly used terminology to negotiation to making sure everyone's safe and having fun. There will be a show and tell of a basic toybox, and, with luck, we'll have time for a hands-on demonstration. You'll leave with recommended readings for later and hopefully more confidence.

### **Being Bisexual in the workplace/college**

*Michael*

We can choose our friends but not our work colleagues. A participatory workshop in which you can share your experiences of being bisexual at work... Pass on your advice to others from your own experience. What works, what doesn't, including any do's and don'ts. Have you tried to influence /educate your organisation on being LGBT in its HR policies and methods of working with people /clients? How successful were you?

### **Bicon for Beginners**

*Marcus*

Where do I go? What's a plenary? What's he wearing? Does everyone know each other? How do I contact the organisers? How many workshops do I have to go to? Where's the food? What if I need help? Seriously, dude, what's he wearing? For over twenty years BiCon has seemed a frantic clique to people attending for the first time, so come along and let old-hand Marcus will slow it all down and bring you up to speed. He'll explain the terminology, decode the workshops, and help you to meet others in the same boat. He'll be wearing a t-shirt.

### **Bicon for Old timers**

*Alison Rowan*

A workshop for jaded BiCon old hacks who've had enough workshops, or those who've just come back and want to get in the swing of things again. See if you can find someone in the room you don't know, talk about how much better it was in your day find out how many uses there are for a piece of string (not to mention how long it is).

### **Bigging up the B in LGBT - working in UNISON for bi workers rights**

*Susan*

*Mawhood /UNISON*

UNISON, the public service trade union, has a proud history of organising marginalised groups of workers; tackling discrimination in the workplace and in society; and campaigning for equality for all. UNISON has had an organised lesbian and gay group since the union came into being. Three years ago, the group became a lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender group. Over the past three years, our bi caucus has led the national LGBT group in working to examine our organising, negotiating and campaigning, to make sure that bi issues are properly addressed. This workshop is for anyone interested in joining this discussion.

### **Bisexuality in History - pre-20th Century**

### **Bisexuality in History - 20th Century**

*Alex and Laws*

By popular demand, this session is being split into two.

### **Bisexuals at Pride(s)**

*Saxey*

There are over 30 UK Pride festivals each year. Some have an official bisexual presence - a banner in the parade, a stall at the event. Got a Pride in your area and want some support? Got an idea for something different? Never been to a Pride but fancy attending?

Chat about what you'd like Pride to do for bisexuals.

**Building Queersafe**      *Melissa*

How can Safewoman best develop our QueerSafe service to meet BiCon members needs? In this meeting we will seek your input.

**Children at BiCons - A possible 0-5 year strategy?**      *Natalya*

In recent years the small number of adults attending BiCon and bringing their children has dropped from low to almost non-existent. Meanwhile BiCon and other bi events are perceived to not be meeting the needs of parents in the bi community. BiCon is what attenders make it - people power is needed to make things happen! I would like to bring interested people together to discuss the issue of children at BiCons and how BiCon can be less anti-children. Please note this is not a workshop to discuss making BiCon 18+ only.

**Clothes Free Chillout Zone**      *Jemma Charlton*

Come and chill out in a Clothes Free Zone. Wear as much or as little as you want. Bring your sandwiches and chill with like minded people. Cold Drinks Provided and Music and Magazines. Nudity not compulsory. A Fun Way To Spend Your Lunchtime.

**Cover Bis**      *Katie Sutton*

Cover Bis is back! Katie and Mikey will be snapping away for bi publicity photos and covers of Bi Community News, so get dressed up or come as you are and show off for the camera!

**Craft for Kids**      *Libby*

In this messy workshop, open to all ages, we'll be using all sorts of materials to decorate masks.

**Experiencing Bi Identity with Lego/Plasticine**      *Helen Bowes-Catton*

What is it actually like to be bisexual, at BiCon? How similar and different are people's experiences of bi-ness, and of being at BiCon? In this workshop, we'll be using plasticine and Lego to explore experiences of bisexual identity, and BiCon, in fun and thought-provoking ways. This workshop is part of a research project I'm carrying out, and the discussions we have will be recorded, though your participation will remain completely anonymous and confidential - please do come and talk to me if you have any questions/concerns about this. *This is being run twice - you don't need to attend both.*

**Fitting and misfitting in the Bi Community**      *FaerieRhona*

Ever looked round BiCon and felt unfashionable / 'too normal' / not quite at home? Or ever been dissatisfied with the words 'bi' and 'bisexual' because they don't quite fit for you? Or wondered where you fit in as the non-bi partner of a bi person, or as someone questioning their sexuality or 'only a little bit bi'? Or, on the other hand, ever thought how much you like it here - even if you're not bi? These and other interesting questions will be explored in this session, which will run several times during the weekend. You're welcome whether bi or not, whether new to BiCon or not. It's especially recommended if you're in the process of settling in and 'finding your BiCon feet'. The format will include discussion in small groups, and some writing. Shy people should find it not too scary. Doors will be closed after a few minutes' intro.

**Flogging techniques for the budding and improving flogger**      *Robin K*

There will be a maximum of 20 places in this workshop, which was very popular last year, so please come early to ensure your spot. Please bring floggers. Be prepared for some upper body nudity, although nudity is not at all a requirement.

**Foot massage**      *Geoffrey Payne*

For this workshop, you will be working in groups of 3; 1 person to receive, another to give and the third to help. After a fixed period of time, we will swap around, and by the end of the massage workshop each one of us would fulfil each role. You are welcome to attend regardless of previous experience, but I will attempt to ensure that each group has

a mix of experience levels. It is vitally important that your fingernails are cut and are



smooth. The person receiving the massage will be lying on the floor face down. Please ensure you are comfortable in this position, and bring cushions and towels/mattresses to facilitate this. The massage I will be teaching will require you to remove your clothing from your feet and lower legs (up to your knees) only. A good foot massage is a remarkably pleasurable experience and the main focus of this workshop is to teach you to give an intensely pleasurable massage. In addition I will be teaching how to relieve the build up of habitual tension which is often particularly acute in the toes, feet, ankles, calves and knees. I will teach different types of touching, including pressing, kneading, holding, stretching, shaking, falling and catching and percussion. The style of massage I teach is derived from different styles massage including shiatsu, Thai massage, Feldenkrais Method and Swedish massage. It is not formally reflexology, although I am sure there are similarities between what I teach and reflexology.

### **Getting to know you: a circle game** *nickie{D}*

In this workshop you will learn something about everyone who participates. The game is structured for fun and to enhance memory and connection. It will help you begin talking to people if you meet them again in social areas. It's perhaps especially useful for anyone who finds chatting to strangers difficult, but it's a great game that everyone can enjoy!

### **Giant Canvas Painting Project** *Matthew Swift*

A giant canvas for everyone and everyone to add a picture/painting of sorts to... open to all ages disabled friendly. There is no real agenda in this workshop just a space to express one selves and have a little fun.

### **Glamour - the other side** *FaerieRhona*

At BiCon 2007 the Glamour workshop concentrated on the classic Hollywood Glamour of stars such as Audrey Hepburn and Vivien Leigh. In 2008 I want to look at the other side of glamour - rockstars, punk princesses and gothic beauties, smudged eyeliner, black roots, too little skirt and too much lipstick - whatever your taste, not everyone wants to look perfect all the time, sometimes you just want to look like you partied too hard last night and you're ready to do the same again tonight, like a good girl turned bad or just like a bad girl being herself. From Debbie Harry to Courtney Love, from Siouxsie Sioux to Amy Winehouse, from Helena Bonham Carter to Emily Autumn - they all have their own glamour, their own style - and they don't compromise it for the sake of someone else's vision. Come along and see how to make your glamour a little edgier, more alternative; learn how to smudge your eyeliner on purpose and have it look good, how to break the rules on purpose and which rules not to break for this look, and most of all to have lots of fun! The workshop is suitable for all genders and ages, but is unlikely to be of interest to children. As well as talking about the rules, there will be the opportunity for 2 people to have a make-over during the workshop, and if there is time afterwards we may convene in one of the social spaces to do some more. All tools will be provided for the workshop, however, if you wish to have a make-over and do own your own foundation and powder this would be helpful to bring along as I will only have the palest of these.

### **Harry's Pirate Party Games** *Harriet*

Arr me Hearties! Sail on over and join the pirate party or walk the plank. There will be lots of adventures, (suitable for all ages) such as pass the parcel, musical islands, pin the eye patch on the pirate and smash the pinata for hidden secrets. There'll be plenty of treasure for everyone including squash and party biscuits rings for refreshments, courtesy of Captain Harry.

### **High Tea (aka Slow Dating)** *Jason MacVaugh and Stephanie Auty*

Love a good cup of tea? Want to meet people at a more genteel pace than speed dating? Or do you just want another chance to tart about in something frilly? Jason and Stephanie host 'High Tea', an afternoon event for bicon (18)08. Please feel free to bring a tea cup (tea, pots, cake etc. also appreciated), your dance card (for the ball, of course!) and wear something Victorian if you want to. We look forward to seeing you there.

### **Juggling & Circus Skills**      *Michael Preston*

A fun and enjoyable workshop. If you can juggle, come along to show your skills, if you can't, come along to learn. There'll be some sets of balls for people to play with and I'm happy to teach anyone who wants a try. I'll also have my own poi with me and feel free to bring your own Diablo's or other circussy type stuff with you. If you want to buy stuff before coming, there's a list of UK shops here: <http://tinyurl.com/6fs4hg>

### **Laughing Yoga**      *Erich Schultz*

Laughing is good for your body in all kinds of ways; it is terrific cardio-vascular exercise and a great way to combat stress. This low-impact workshop will begin with ice-breakers to put people at ease and then follow on with laughing exercises and some playful activities which stimulate natural laughter. The session will end with some stretching and relaxation. Come have a laugh.

### **Non-traditional Family Structures**      *David*

"There are three parents in this family, so it's a bit crowded." This session will discuss family structures that don't fit the neat models society expects; if and how you explain those structures to the children, school, parents, social workers etc; and how to work out what your responsibility is to children when you're sort-of a parent and sort-of not. All welcome; bring your ideas, questions and experiences.

### **Nonviolent Conflict Resolution**      *Grant Denkinson*

I've experienced difficult personal conversations, relationship breakups, arguments that stress and divide friends and community (sometimes for years), and debate that looks more like trench warfare. I wonder if I and others can do better. I've read a little about nonviolent conflict resolution methods to sort out facts, fully share feelings and work towards getting everyone's needs met. In this workshop I'll share what I have learnt so far. Then we can talk about whether we want to try more nonviolent conflict resolution in our lives, and how we might do that.

### **Photography Basics**      *Michael Preston*

An introductory level workshop on photography. Not overly technical, (I'll aim to make it accessible to everyone's level) but with some basic pointers and a chance to try out a few techniques with others. It doesn't really matter if you have a cameraphone, a simple point and shoot or a digital SLR, come along and swap tips, hints and technique and let's learn from each other. Notes will be available via email after the workshop if you want them.

### **Poly activism (Polyday)**      *Erich Schultz*

Come discuss the future of poly activism in the UK Where should we be going? What would we like out of Polyday? Polycon? How should we address the media? What should we be doing to increase poly visibility and acceptance?

### **Pre-Decision-Making-Plenary discussion**      *David Matthewman*

If you're intending to bring something up at the Decision-Making Plenary (guideline change, request for money, bid to run BiCon), please come to this session to discuss it here first. Not only can we give you help and advice (which you're free to ignore anyway), but this lets us publicise any issues in advance, so that they're not a total surprise at the Plenary.

### **Queer Space/Family Space**      *Katy*

The purpose of this workshop is to discuss the best way to hold events that are both queer and family-centred, and specifically, to plan an alternative families weekend sometime in 2009.

### **Tantra and bisexuality**      *Isabelle Micholet*

Tantra is a spiritual path that honours the body and celebrates the experiencing of life through the pleasures of the body. Tantra helps us to recover our sensual, emotional and spiritual wholeness, liberating ourselves from tensions, inhibitions and shame. It enables

us to move towards living life more totally and more intensely. This workshop will briefly

cover basic theoretical tantric principles relating them to bisexuality. It will also include some experiential exercises such as a movement meditation, a visualisation and/or a massage structure. While there will be no request for anyone to remove any clothing, nudity will be welcome for participants who enjoy being naked.

**Self-Harm: How we cope with stress** *Katie Sutton and Kay*

Kay and Katie will be talking about self-harm, how we cope with stress and the different ways our coping strategies are perceived by other people

**Self-help for the mainly sane** *Alison Rowan*

One in four of us will suffer from some sort of mental health problem in our lives, yet most of us either don't seek help or get very little. This workshop is for us to share some of our own self help ideas, things we've learned from therapists or just by trial and error, and to help us acknowledge that we often cope better than we might give ourselves credit for. You don't have to be 'mainly sane' to attend, but bear in mind that it's a short workshop and I Am Not A Medical Professional

**Shy Social** *Nye*

Some of us can feel a little left out when the extroverts get loud together. This is a chance for us shy people to have a bit of time together.

**SM for Smers** *Jess Barker*

Do it and love it? Got your head around the idea that giving and receiving pain, service or humiliation can be fun? Want to share experiences, thoughts and stories with other sado-masochists? This year in SM for SMers, we'll discuss consent and communication about SM, both in and out of scene. Talking about sex can be hard, talking about our deepest kinks even more so - how do we get over this and communicate our desires, whether it's to a casual trick or a long term partner? In the second half of the workshop, we'll have a show and tell. Bring your favourite toy, item of fetish clothing or kinky photo you love. Or just use your allotted time (which will depend on numbers attending!) to talk about your kinks and what you like about them. We'll start you off with a few of our own. This is a friendly, non-judgemental and sexually explicit workshop.

**Smutty Bisexual Storytelling** *Jacquie Applebee*

Please join Jacqueline Applebee and a heady selection of bisexual writers as they read their erotic stories and poems for your pleasure. We aim to make your summer even hotter with some scorching smutty tales!

**Solving Conflict in Poly Families** *Lisa Lovely and nickie{D}*

We will be discussing and trying out techniques that can be used to help solve problems and arguments in poly relationships and poly families or social groups. And if never a cross word is said in your household you can either come along to share your wisdom or sit in the bar polishing your halo :)

**Staging Queer Shakespeare** *Sam Kelly*

Bisexual, crossgender, and other queer readings of Shakespeare often get viewed as something unusual, when they're actually both common and completely in keeping with the plays and their original staging. *Twelfth Night* is perhaps the most obvious example of these themes, so I'll be using it as a starting point for a performance-based look at how to find them, and how the way we perform it can change the way we see things, in addition to a brief dash through theatre history and culture.

**Storytime** *Ian*

One of the great benefits of being a parent is getting to read some great stories: here's a selection of Ian and Jo Anna's favourites. If you haven't seen a "children's" story book since you were a kid, come and be surprised.

**Teddybear Picnic** *Nye*

For bears (whether stuffed or human) and their friends. Bring your own bear if you can!

### **Therapeutic Flogging** *Robin K*

"Therapeutic" in this context refers to the floggee, not the floggist. This flogging involves no pain or discomfort of any kind. This is about using safe touch to stimulate analgesic responses. Please bring floggers, and be prepared for some upper body nudity. There will be a maximum of 6 places for participants. People wishing solely to watch will be admitted, but will not be permitted to participate, as the time available will not allow for adequate supervision of more than 6 participants.

### **Time management for non-monogamists** *Sanjibabes*

Managing your time with one partner and all of life's other commitments is hard work. How about if you have more than one partner? Using group activities and discussion, we will have a go at managing some time and tips for doing so. A fun interactive session.

### **Volunteering in the Bi Community** *Natalya Dell and Jen Yockney*

Do you want volunteers to help you get a bi project or event off the ground? Would you like to be more involved in a Bi Community project but don't know where to start? Do you sometimes feel it is the same people doing all the high visibility projects over and over again? Do you feel you don't have enough of the right skills to be a useful volunteer? Do you think the bi community could improve its openness to volunteers and opportunities? If any of those questions feels familiar to you. If you are interested in volunteering, the bi community and finding out about opportunities to volunteer - then this workshop is for you. We welcome anyone who is interested to this workshop.

### **What do we want from BiCon?** *Martin Winfield*

Is BiCon really meeting our needs? Do we have the balance between "fun" and "serious" right; and how about activism versus personal liberation? Are we "a community" or just a disparate bunch of people under one roof for four days of the year? How can we avoid BiCon becoming too insular and reach out to new people? This session will take the form of a group discussion in which the above and many other issues will be covered. Newcomers welcome: you won't be forced to say anything & can just sit in & listen if you'd prefer.

### **Writing your own Personal Ad** *FaerieRhona*

Or 'how to get who and what you want from relationships'. Facilitator, gsoh, lively and interesting with great shoes, owns good pens and paper, has workshop space, seeks attendees for discussions, exchanges of ideas and maybe cups of tea. Chocolate desirable. If interested meet me in Sloane at 14:30 Many times we might say "I want a relationship" without really considering what that means. In this fun and participatory workshop we will explore how to express effectively what we have to offer in a relationship, what we are looking for and also what we can't offer and don't want. Whether you are looking for fun, friends, lovers or a long term partner it's important to understand and say what you can offer to avoid misunderstandings and pain on both sides. This workshop takes a fairly lighthearted approach to an important topic, and while the aim is not to write an actual personal add for a dating site or paper, it will also enable you to do that more easily too. Due to the sexual nature of some of the topics that may be discussed, this workshop is not suitable for children. All genders welcome

### **Your Legal Rights 1 & 2** *Alex and Laws*

Various aspects of the law, especially those of interest to bi people and their friends and allies; each session would be on a different topic: housing, employment, and access to services/challenging decisions by public bodies...

# ***Appendix 2: Photo study documentation***

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## ***2.1 Call for participants, May 2008***

### **Bisexuals in Space!**

What's it like to be bi in everyday life?

What's it like to be bi at BiCon?

My name is Helen Bowes-Catton and I'm conducting research into bi people's experiences of bisexuality as an identity. I'm interested in what it's like to be bi in everyday life, and also in the ways that people experience their identities in bi spaces like BiCon and BiFest. I'm using the idea of embodiment (the way people experience the world through their bodies) as a way of trying to find out more about this.

I'm looking for a group of participants to take part in a photo-diary study, in which I'll ask 10-15 people to take photographs of their experiences of BiCon 2008, and of a week in everyday life, and to take part in an interview.

I'll be asking participants to take photos around the theme 'My body'. These could take whatever form you like- they wouldn't necessarily have to be photographs of you, though they could well be. You might like to take photos around topics like 'how I look at BiCon/at home' 'what it feels like to be in my body at BiCon/at home', 'in my body looking out', and so on.



You could use a mobile phone, digital camera, or ordinary camera to take your photographs, then email them to me, or I can provide you with a disposable camera and pay for the photos to be developed. Once your photo diaries are complete, I'll contact you to arrange a mutually convenient time and place to have an interview to discuss the photos you've taken.

For people who want to, there will also be an opportunity to take part in a group workshop later in the year, using the photos as a basis from which to create collage or models.

#### **A bit about me.**

I'm 32 and I identify as a bisexual/queer woman. I've been a regular at UK bi community events since 2004. I'm a member of the Bi Research Group, and I've conducted research into bisexuality and polyamory at previous bi events. I'm a PhD student in the Psychology Department at London South Bank University, supervised by Dr Meg Barker and Dr Paula Reavey, and this research project is part of the fieldwork that will eventually become my thesis.

#### **Interested in taking part?**

If you're interested in taking part in this research, and would like more information, please contact me at [helenbowescatton@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:helenbowescatton@yahoo.co.uk), or on 01234 401687.

## ***2.2 Consent form***

### **Bisexuals in Space!**

#### **BiCon and everyday life photo study consent form**

##### **Consenting to take part in this research:**

**Please initial box**

I confirm that I understand what this photo study is about. I have read the information sheet and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

☐

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

☐

I understand that I retain the copyright to all my photographs, and give permission for these to be published by Helen Bowes-Catton.  
I agree to take part in the above study.

☐☐

***Please tick box***

**Yes**

**No**

I agree to my interview with Helen Bowes-Catton being audio recorded

☐☐

I agree to the use of anonymised photographs in publications

☐☐

I agree to the use of anonymised quotes in publications

☐☐

**Participant signature:**

**Date:**

**Researcher**

**signature:**

## ***2.3 BiCon participant briefing sheet***

### **Bisexuals in Space! BiCon photo-project participant prompt sheet**

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

This study is about how people experience bi identity in bi spaces, through their bodies- basically, about what it feels like to be bi, at BiCon.

#### **What should I be taking pictures of, again?**

I'd like you to take any pictures that help you get across what it's like to be you at BiCon, at different moments during the weekend. For example, you might take pictures while you're getting ready for the Ball, or pictures that show how you feel when you're in your room, or in the bar, or in your flat. You might photograph bits of the space you find especially comfortable or intimidating, inviting or difficult to access. You don't have to take photographs of yourself, although you might well want to. Your pictures don't have to be of anything in particular, and I'd like you to aim to capture *how you're feeling* at particular moments, rather than to worry about taking good photographs, or thinking too hard about how to get a particular point across. Try to bear in mind that the main point of the pictures is to use as prompts so that you can talk about how BiCon felt for you- it doesn't matter if they don't show how it felt very well.

#### **Making photo-memos**

Please take a moment as soon as you can to make a note of how you were feeling when you took the photo, as it will probably be several weeks before your interview. What I'm really interested in is the detail

of your feelings and sensations during BiCon, and you're not likely to remember these later on. I'm sending you some photo-memo prompt sheets you might like to use to help you do this.

**Some prompts you might find useful to get you started:**

- **Movement:** how do you feel in your body as you move around at BiCon today? What reactions and responses do you notice? When/where do you feel confident and relaxed, and move freely? When/where do you feel less confident to move around?
- **Spaces:** are there bits of the BiCon space you find especially comfortable, or intimidating, particularly inviting, or difficult to access? In which spaces do you notice your body start to relax, your breathing deepen? Are there spaces where you get nervous butterflies in your stomach?
- **Senses:** you could take photos to show how BiCon feels, looks, sounds, smells, and tastes to you right now.
- **Emotions:** what emotions are you experiencing right now? Are you tense with anger, tingly with excitement?
- **Body:** What are you doing with your body, and what does this feel like? What are you wearing, and how does this make you feel? Are you feeling active, relaxed, tired? What different bodily experiences are you having today? Are you trying new activities in workshops, working muscles you don't usually use? Are you getting more or less touch from others than you usually do?
- **Bisexuality:** does BiCon feel like a particularly 'bi' space to you? Do you feel 'bisexual' at BiCon? What does this feel like to you? When do you feel most/least bi at BiCon?

**Remember to try and take photos inspired by how you are feeling in your body**

**- don't think about them too much!**

**Please remember to make a note about each photo.**

**If in doubt, just start taking pictures! Thank you very much for taking part!**

## ***2.4 Everyday participant briefing sheet***

### **Bisexuals in Space! Everyday life photo-diary participant prompt sheet**

**What is the study about?** This study is about how people experience bi identity in everyday spaces, through their bodies- basically, about what it feels like to be bi in everyday life.

#### **What should I be taking pictures of, again?**

I'd like you to take any pictures that help you get across what it's like to be you at different moments during your week. For example, you might take pictures that show how you feel when you're in different parts of your home. You might photograph bits of the spaces you pass through, live or work in everyday, that you find especially comfortable or intimidating, inviting or difficult to access. You don't have to take photographs of yourself, although you might well want to. Your pictures don't have to be of anything in particular, and I'd like you to aim to capture *how you're feeling* at particular moments, rather than to worry about taking good photographs, or thinking too hard about how to get a particular point across. Try to bear in mind that the main point of the pictures is to use as prompts so that you can talk about how that week in your life felt for you- it doesn't matter if they don't show how it felt very well.

**Some prompts you might find useful to get you started:**

- **Movement:** how do you feel in your body as you move around? What reactions and responses do you notice? When/where do you feel confident and relaxed, and move freely? When/where do you feel less confident to move around?
- **Spaces:** are there bits of the spaces you encounter everyday that you find especially comfortable, or intimidating, particularly inviting, or difficult to access? In which spaces do you notice your body start to relax, your breathing deepen? Are there spaces where you get nervous butterflies in your stomach? How does it feel to move between spaces? Do you feel a sense of continuity, or do you feel different in different spaces?
- **Senses:** you could take photos to show how different moments feel, look, sound, smell, and taste to you.
- **Emotions:** what emotions are you experiencing right now? Are you tense with anger, tingly with excitement?
- **Body:** What do you do with your body in everyday life? Is this moment an active or physically tired one for you, or is it relaxing? Is it a time when you take more, or less, care of your body than usual? What different bodily experiences are you having right now? Are you getting more or less touch than you usually do? What are you wearing and how does it make you feel in your body?
- **Bisexuality:** do you feel 'bisexual' right now? What does this feel like to you? Are there spaces in your everyday life that feel like particularly 'bi' spaces to you? In which moments do you feel most/least bi in everyday life? What's it like to move between these different spaces?

**Remember to try and take photos inspired by how you are feeling in your body.**

**If in doubt, just start taking pictures!**

## ***2.5 Photo-memo prompt sheets<sup>1</sup>***

### **About photo-memo prompt sheets**

I've made some photo-memo prompt sheets to help you record what you were feeling as you took each photo.

I've also included some of the information from the prompt sheet, so that you could have a pocket-sized version of that to refer to during BiCon.

Only use these sheets if they're helpful to you- if some other method of making photo-memos works better for you, do that instead! But please do keep a written note of your photos.

The prompt sheets are available for you to print off in a couple of sizes below. Please print off a few to get you started- I'll also make lots, and leave them in a box at BiCon reception, with some notebooks, so that you can easily pick up more during the weekend, or grab a notebook if you'd prefer to write your memos up that way.

---

<sup>1</sup> The layout of these sheets has been adapted in order to fit them on the page. Originals were half A5 size and contained more white space for writing.



Photo-memo prompt sheet	Some prompts you might find useful to get you started:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• When/where I took this photo, and anything about the space:</li><li>• Anything I was feeling in my body/noticing thorough my senses when I took this photo:</li><li>• Any emotions I was feeling when I took this photo:</li><li>• Anything to do with bisexuality</li><li>• Anything else I'd like to note down about this photo:</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Movement:</b> how do you feel in your body as you move around at BiCon today? What reactions and responses do you notice? When/where do you feel confident and relaxed, and move freely? When/where do you feel less confident to move around?</li><li>• <b>Spaces:</b> are there bits of the BiCon space you find especially comfortable, or intimidating, particularly inviting, or difficult to access? In which spaces do you notice your body start to relax, your breathing deepen? Are there spaces where you get nervous butterflies in your stomach?</li><li>• <b>Senses:</b> you could take photos to show how BiCon feels, looks, sounds, smells, and tastes to you right now.</li><li>• <b>Emotions:</b> what emotions are you experiencing right now? Are you tense with anger, tingly with excitement?</li><li>• <b>Body:</b> What are you doing with your body, and what does this feel like? What are you wearing, and how does this make you feel? Are you feeling active, relaxed, tired? What different bodily experiences are you having today? Are you trying new activities in workshops, working muscles you don't usually use? Are you getting more or less touch from others than you usually do?</li><li>• <b>Bisexuality:</b> does BiCon feel like a particularly 'bi' space to you? Do you feel 'bisexual' at BiCon? What does this feel like to you? When do you feel most/least bi at BiCon?</li></ul>

**Bisexuals in Space- participant demographic questionnaire<sup>2</sup>**

**1.How old are you?**

**2.How would you describe your ethnicity?**

**3a.Are you currently**

☐ In full time education ☐ Employed ☐ Unemployed ☐ Retired

☐ Medically retired or long term sick leave ☐ Full time carer

☐ Look after home/family ☐ Other, please specify\_\_\_\_\_

**3b.What sector do you work in?** (eg, IT, Education, Care work etc)

**4a. How would you describe your social class background?**

**4b.What is your highest educational qualification?**

☐ No educational qualifications ☐ GCSEs/O-Levels or equivalent. ☐ A-Levels or equivalent

☐ First Degree/HND/DipHE or equivalent ☐ Postgraduate Degree ☐ Other (please specify)

**5a Do you experience a physical or mental health issue which affects your day to day life?** ☐ Yes ☐ No

**5b.If you ticked yes, please indicate the type of issue you experience:**

☐ Hearing impairment ☐ Visual impairment ☐ Speech impairment

☐ Mobility impairment (eg wheelchair user) ☐ Unseen impairment (e.g. diabetes,epilepsy,asthma)

☐ Learning difficulties (e.g. dyslexia) ☐ Other, please specify

☐ Mental health issue, please specify

<sup>2</sup> Adapted from the 2008 BiCon survey, for comparability purposes.

**6a. Which years did you attend BiCon?**

**7. What term(s) do you use to describe your gender?** (tick all that apply)

☐ Female only ☐ Female mostly ☐ Female somewhat more ☐ Female/male equally ☐ Male somewhat more ☐ Male mostly ☐ Male only ☐ None/no gender ☐ Androgynous ☐ Genderqueer ☐ Other terms you use, please specify

**8a. What term(s) do you use to describe your sexuality?**

☐ Bisexual ☐ Lesbian ☐ Homosexual ☐ Gay ☐ Heterosexual ☐ Straight ☐ Queer ☐ Asexual  
☐ BDSM/kinky  
  
☐ Vanilla ☐ I don't use a term ☐ Other(s) please specify

**8b. Have you ever described yourself as bisexual?** ☐ Yes ☐ No

**8c. When, if ever, did you first 'come out' about your sexuality?**

**8d. Which of the people in your life (e.g. friends, family, colleagues, etc.) are aware of your sexuality?**

**9. What term(s) do you use to describe your relationships?**

☐ Non-monogamous ☐ Monogamous ☐ Polyamorous ☐ In love! ☐ Single ☐ Married  
☐ Divorced ☐ Separated ☐ Widowed  
  
☐ Registered civil partnership ☐ Long term/serious relationship with \_\_\_\_ partner(s)  
  
☐ Commitment ceremony with \_\_\_\_ partner(s)  
  
☐ Other(s) please specify

### ***Appendix 3:***

***Photo study interview schedule and participant  
sketch-maps***

## **Bisexuals in Space! Interview schedule:**

### **Research questions:**

**How do bi people experience and produce bi identity, through their bodies, in bi and everyday spaces?**

- **What is it like to be bi, in bi space?** What is the embodied experience of that space like? How do bi people perform bisexuality/belonging in bi space? What is it like to do being bi, in bi space? What are the embodied and social practices (dress codes, norms, etc) of the space?
- **What is bi space like?** How is it constituted? What are its borders? Who are its constituents? Who is left out/excluded/unwanted? What is 'bi' about bi space?

**Final confirmatory email a couple of days before interview-** Confirm details of time and place. Ask participant to have their photo memos/notes on photo-taking handy.

**Things to take:**

- A4 paper for sketchmap
- Dictaphones x2, and batteries
- Consent forms
- Info sheets
- Participant prompt sheet
- BiCon programme/timetable
- Demographic info sheet
- Participant photos!

### Interview schedule:

Rough timing	What's happening	Rationale
0-5 mins	Introduction- chat through information sheet	Frame the discussion by reminding them what the study's about (bi bodies and spaces), check informed consent. Dictaphones on!
BiCon focus		
5-10 mins	Give participant the photos and get them to sort them into BiCon/everyday ones.	Refreshing their memory of all the photos, as they've probably not looked at them for a while.  Also getting them to handle them, do something physical, embodied.  And to invoke a sense of their own processing/construction of the interview/their data  Getting them to start thinking (implicitly) about the differences between spaces.
10-15	Ask participant to draw a quick sketch-map of BiCon, from their own point of view. (Interviewer do something else while this is happening to reduce awkwardness- read through notes or something.)	Get them started thinking about BiCon as a space, to help get spatial focus to interview.  Get to see how BiCon is perceived by them, what the constituent parts of the space are.
15-20	Get participant to talk about their map a bit.  Ask them about the areas on the map where they spent most time during the	

	day/in the evening. Notice anywhere they didn't go/anywhere they don't mention.	
20-25	Ask participant to sort BiCon photos into piles/ an order that makes sense to them- say it doesn't have to be chronological, but don't prompt further.	<p>Again, getting them to be active in setting the agenda for the interview, and getting them to engage physically with the photos.</p> <p>Anticipating chronological ordering (bc traditional way of 'showing photos'), but interested to see whether they do order the photos chronologically, or by day/night, or in terms of who's in them.</p> <p>For those who have taken huge numbers of photos, get them to select the 10 or so they most want to talk about.</p>
<b>Main body of Bicon interview</b>  25-70	<p>Ask participant to talk me through photos.</p> <p>For each one, prompt as necessary along the lines suggested on the participant prompt sheet, making sure to get them to start from their bodily/sensory experience.</p> <p>Keep returning to bodily/sensory experience. Put them back in the moment- imagine yourself back in that moment/space, how did you feel (in body)?</p> <p>Remember to follow up with further questions, e.g. 'Can you say a bit more about that/how that felt?'</p>	<p>Try to keep focus on embodiment/spatiality as much as possible and avoid too much narrative rehearsal.</p>



	<p>When photos are all seen/discussed, chat about which times/places are/aren't photographed- any patterns to this?</p>	<p>Suspect lots of photos at beginning of event (because of intensity of event, and because of setting up/settling into/leaving space being more conscious than just 'being' there)</p> <p>Wonder if there will be lots of photos in flats/at bar (esp on Ball night) and less of liminal spaces eg on way to/from accommodation. Suspect more liminal spaces will be photographed in everyday life.</p>
	<p>Talk about BiCon- what does it mean to them? How would they describe it to someone who'd not heard of it, what's it about?</p> <p>Why do they go, what do they look for at BiCon, what's the focus for them?</p> <p>Get them to talk about bicon comedown- transition from one space to another- what's it like, what are its features, what causes it?</p>	<p>Wanting to get a general sense of what BiCon means to them cognitively, but putting it here at the end so as not to provoke too much narrative rehearsal during interview. Though anticipating a lot of this stuff will be covered by the photographs, wanting to remind myself to ask this stuff here, if it isn't.</p>
<b>Everyday focus- maybe a take a brief break here?</b>		
<b>70-75</b>	<p>Ask participant to sort everyday photos into piles/ an order that makes sense to them- say it doesn't have to be chronological, but don't prompt further.</p>	<p><b>Getting them to switch focus from BiCon stuff.</b></p> <p><b>Interested to see if they sort photos chronologically or by space, or in some other way.</b></p>
<b>75-80</b>	<p><b>Chat to participant about the kinds of everyday spaces that are covered by</b></p>	<p><b>Again, establish spatial focus. Try to spot any absences, to pick up</b></p>

	the photos.	on later.
<p><b>Main body of everyday interview 80-125</b></p>	<p>Ask participant to talk me through each photo.</p> <p>For each one, prompt as necessary along the lines suggested on the participant prompt sheet, making sure to get them to start from their bodily/sensory experience.</p> <p>Keep returning to bodily/sensory experience. Put them back in the moment- imagine yourself back in that moment/space, how did you feel (in body)?</p> <p>Remember to follow up with further questions, e.g. ‘Can you say a bit more about that/how that felt?’</p> <p>Try to get sense of continuity /not between different spaces- do they move through diff everyday spaces with a coherent sense/presentation/experience of self?</p> <p>When photos are all seen/discussed, chat about which times/places are/aren’t photographed- any patterns to this? <b>Ask participant about any absences- e.g. are online spaces important to them.</b></p> <p><b>Ask and questions about the structure of their everyday life- family, work, outness, etc. Does bi come into their everyday lives much?</b></p>	<p>Try to keep focus on embodiment/spatiality as much as possible and avoid too much narrative rehearsal.</p>
125-135	Return to BiCon photos- spread them out on table again with everyday	Suspect from Lego studies that bisexuality actually not foregrounded

	<p><b>photos and ask participant about similarities and differences they notice in their experiences of being bi in both spaces.</b> Get them to talk about how often they get to be in bi spaces- are there any ‘everyday’ bi spaces? Keep an eye out for stuff about gender expression.</p>	<p><b>at BiCon, which is a space where you ‘just get on with it’, but that it’s more felt in everyday life where it may be experienced as difference/isolation etc.</b></p>
135-145	<p>How method worked for them- easy/hard? Easier to take photos at BiCon/in everyday life?</p>	<p>Suspect probably BiCon because of boundedness of event/sort of thing you do take pics at. But also probably easier in embodiment sense bc of the way bodies are foregrounded at BiCon.</p> <p>Generally want to get some idea of how they found the method and what was easy/hard about it.</p>
	<p><b>General chat about bisexuality- how long they’ve identified, what it means to them, how important it is, how out they are.</b></p>	<p><b>In case not covered elsewhere- want to get a sense of what bi means to them discursively, but putting it at end so as not to provoke narrative earlier.</b></p>
145-155	<p><b>Rounding up- anything else they want to say?</b></p>	<p><b>Give them chance to say anything else that occurs to them.</b></p> <p><b>Encourage them to email/phoneme with any further thoughts.</b></p>
	<p><b>Negotiate consent again</b></p>	<p><b>Talk through form, check their understanding of it, get them to sign it, choose pseudonym</b></p>
	<p><b>Get demographic information</b></p>	<p>Get them to fill in the demographics form.</p>
		<p>Ask to borrow their notes.</p>
	<p><b>Thanks</b></p>	

## ***Appendix 4: Modelling workshop documentation***

## ***4.1 Workshop schedule***

### ***Experiencing Identity***

**Check out the room in good time- but definitely limit this to 10-12**

**participants**

#### **Resources:**

- Lego
- Plasticine
- Modelling materials
- Wet wipes- lots!
- Plastic tablecloth
- Pens and labels
- Camera/s, batteries, memory card
- Dictaphones x3, batteries, tapes

Set up the tables and materials.

Give out information sheets and consent forms- get people to read these as they come in.

**1hr 15 mins (75 mins)**

- Information sheets
- Consent forms
- Prompt sheets
- 'Workshop full' sign, and blu-tack for the door.
- A helper or two to take photos of the models, pass out forms, etc.

#### **Before the session:**

Check out the room.

Check resources.

Timing /75 mins	Section of workshop	What Helen's doing	What participants are doing	What helpers are doing
-5 mins	Beforehand-hoping we can get in the room early.	<b>Taking deep breaths.</b> <b>Placing dictaphones</b>	Arriving. Reading info and consent forms, and signing them.	Passing out info and consent forms, and pens, to people as they arrive.
0-5 mins	Introduction	<p><b>Saying something like:</b> Thanks for coming to this session. As some of you know, I'm doing some research into how people in the bi community experience their identities. This session is about trying something new in research into bi identity. Lots of previous research has used interviews, questionnaires, etc, which tell us lots about what people say about their identities but tend to be quite limited in what they can tell us about how people <i>experience</i> their identities. So this session aims to get you thinking about what it's <i>like</i> to be bisexual, at BiCon, using modelling as a tool. Hopefully you've all had chance to give the information sheets a read, and understand that the discussions we'll have at the end of the workshop are going to be tape recorded as part of the research. Does anyone have any questions about the research?</p> <p><b>Pause for questions</b></p> <p>You can either use Lego to make your models, or the Plasticine/craft materials, or some combination of both. I'd advise you to just start with one material at first to get you going, and then add other bits in as you go along.</p> <p>In the next few minutes we're going to try some warm-up activities to get you started on making models, and to introduce everyone to each other.</p>	listening	<p>Putting up the 'workshop closed' sign as soon as there are 12 participants in the room.</p> <p>Passing out info/consent sheets to any latecomers.</p> <p><b>Switching on Dictaphones as soon as H has cleared this with everyone.</b></p>
5-15 mins	Warm-up activities:	<p><b>Leading the activity.</b> <b>Checking Dictaphones on.</b> <u>Icebreaker/experiential modelling exercise:</u> <b>Remember to make timings clear</b> Build/model a small creature (3 mins) Change your creature to show what kind of day you've had so far (2 mins) Get people to show their creatures to the group, giving their names, talk briefly about their day so far. (5 mins) <b>Get them to put models away/dismantle them.</b></p>	<p>Making models</p> <p>Talking about their models</p>	<p>Passing out prompt sheets.</p> <p>Listening to discussion</p>

15-20 mins	Intro to main activity	<p><b>Saying something like:</b></p> <p>Now we're moving onto the main bit of the workshop, which is going to be split into two parts. In the first part of the session, I would like you to think about how it feels to be you, at BiCon, today. You should each have a copy of a prompt sheet, with some ideas to get you started. (talk very briefly through these in eyes-closed exercise below).</p> <p>What I'm looking for here, is for you to make models that show <i>what it's like</i> to be you at BiCon today, how that <i>feels</i>, rather than what you think about it. So what I'm going to do right now is ask you to take a minute with your eyes closed to try and notice how you're feeling today- in your body. (they close eyes)</p> <p><b>(SLOWLY)</b> Just take a minute to connect with your body and notice how you're feeling, any tension or discomfort, anything that you particularly notice about how your body feels.<b>(long pause)</b> And think for a minute about the day you've had so far, how that's felt to you- how you've felt as you've moved through the different spaces at BiCon, places where you've felt confident, places, where you've felt less confident or comfortable. <b>(long pause)</b> Think about the emotions you've experienced today, and how they've felt in your body. <b>(long pause)</b> Think about the things you've done with your body today. Have you tried new things, used muscles you don't normally use? Are you getting more or less touch from others than you usually do? <b>(long pause)</b> Think about BiCon as a bi space- does it feel 'bi' to you? what's that like? Do you feel 'bi' at BiCon? When do you feel most/least 'bi' here? <b>(long pause)</b></p> <p>When you're ready, open your eyes and start modelling. If you're not sure what to make, just start modelling. You've got about 20 minutes for this first model.</p>	<p><b>Listening</b></p> <p><b>Feeling embodied!</b></p>	Listening/being still
20-40 mins	Main activity part 1	<p>Continuing to give time checks during modelling process, e.g. 15 mins, 10 mins, 5 mins, 2 mins.</p> <p><b>Switching on dictaphones 2 mins before stopping them.</b></p>	<b>Making models</b>	<p><b>Turning over the tape in the Dictaphone before it runs out (30 mins in)</b></p> <p>Taking pictures of</p>

				models in progress, and making sure to get a photo of each model when it's finished.
40-55 mins	Group discussion of models.	Facilitating group discussion- initial go-round, then hopefully time for a bit more discussion about the experience of BiCon. Use prompt sheet to help.	Discussing models	Listening to discussion.  Putting a new tape in the tape Dictaphone before it runs out (60 mins in)
55-65 mins	Main activity part 2	<p><b>Saying something like:</b> Now I'd like you to change your model, or make a second one, showing how you'd <i>like</i> to be feeling at BiCon today- you have about 10 minutes to do this. (If not all finished models have been photographed, get them to make a second model, instead).</p> <p>Would really like to do this if time- if people are ready to move on from modelling/if discussion doesn't take off. Getting people to do this last year produced some really interesting results and helped to expose tensions/absences in the initial models produced. Also, Gauntlett very big on the value of getting participants to make something, reflect on it, and then change it. It isn't as important as getting to experience, but I think it would be really valuable to do, if time. Will jettison it if not though, or if the discussion is really going well.</p>	Listening  Changing models	<p>Taking photos of original models.</p> <p>Taking photos of second/alterd models, when done.</p> <p>Collecting consent forms as and when</p>
65-75 mins	Group discussion of models	Facilitating group discussion. Thanking participants. Reminding them to hand in consent forms	Discussing models	
afterwards	Clear-up	Filling in and handing in remaining consent forms. Filling in and handing in feedback sheets.	Filling in forms	Collecting forms Tidying up



## ***4.2 Participant information sheet***

### **Bi Bodies in Bi Spaces: Workshop information sheet.**

#### **What this workshop is about:**

This workshop is part of an ongoing research project into bi people's experiences of their identities through their bodies. I'm interested in finding out about how people experience their identities in bi community spaces like BiCon, and also in everyday life. This session is particularly about our experiences of our bodies and identities at BiCon.

#### **What's going to happen in this workshop:**

- You'll be given the opportunity to explore this topic by making plasticine and/or Lego models.
- We'll then discuss what we've made as a group.

I'd like to ask that we keep discussions inside this workshop confidential, so that it's a safe space for everyone to contribute.

I will be recording our discussion, and taking pictures of your models, so that I can use them in my research. I will transcribe the recordings onto a computer, removing all identifying details and giving you a different name (which you can choose), and changing anything that might identify you to others (e.g. where you live, place of work). I will also make sure that all photographs are anonymised. All tapes and transcripts will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in my home. If you want to, you can have a copy of the transcript yourself.

The transcripts and pictures will be analysed and used to write reports and articles about the research. For example, I might write about the similarities and differences between the way people experience their identities at home, and give examples of things people have said to illustrate what I'm saying. What I

write will hopefully be published in journals and books which are read by academics and others who are interested in this area of research, and also used in my teaching. Everything in these publications will be completely anonymous. If you would like to see final versions of these publications, please let me know and I will be happy to send you copies.

If at any point during the workshop you feel you want to not take part, please feel free to just slip out, that's absolutely fine. And if, at any point after the workshop, you change your mind about taking part in the research, or think of something you've said that you don't want quoted, just let me know and it will be removed from the transcripts.

**The important things for you to remember, in terms of ethics are:**

- You can leave the workshop, or decline to take part in the research at any time, without having to give a reason.
- You can ask me to take out anything you're not happy saying, at any point after the workshop,

- You can have a copy of the transcript and ask me to remove anything from that,
- All transcripts will be made anonymous, and tapes kept securely,
- You can have copies of any reports based on the data.

**A bit about me:**

I'm a postgraduate student in the Psychology Department of London South Bank University. My work is being supervised by Dr Meg Barker and Dr Paula Reavey. I identify as bisexual/queer, and have been attending bi community events since 2004.

**How to contact me:**

Helen Bowes-Catton, c/o Dr M. Barker, Psychology Department

London South Bank University, Borough Road

London SE11 0AA

bowescah@lsbu.ac.uk

## ***4.3 Workshop feedback form***

### **Workshop Feedback Form**

**First of all, please tell me a bit about your model. What does it show about how it feels to be in your body at BiCon?**

**How easy did you find it to understand what to do in this workshop?**

Very easy ☐ Quite easy ☐ Neither easy nor difficult ☐ Quite difficult ☐  
Very difficult ☐

**How much did you enjoy this workshop?**

Lots ☐ A fair bit ☐ It was OK ☐ Not very much ☐ Not at all ☐

**How interesting did you find this workshop?**

Very interesting ☐ Quite interesting ☐ Neither interesting nor boring ☐  
Quite boring ☐ Very boring ☐

**How could I improve this workshop so it's better next time?**

**Anything else you'd like to sa**

## 4.4 Workshop prompt sheet

### Some prompts you might find useful to get you started:

- **Movement:** how do you feel in your body as you move around at BiCon today? What reactions and responses do you notice? When/where do you feel confident and relaxed, and move freely? When/where do you feel less confident to move around?
- **Spaces:** are there bits of the BiCon space you find especially comfortable, or intimidating, particularly inviting, or difficult to access? In which spaces do you notice your body start to relax, your breathing deepen? Are there spaces where you get nervous butterflies in your stomach?
- **Senses:** how does BiCon feel, look, sound, smell, and taste to you today?
- **Emotions:** what emotions are you experiencing today? Are you tense with anger, tingly with excitement?
- **Body:** What are you doing with your body today, and what does this feel like? What are you wearing, and how does this make you feel? Are you feeling active, relaxed, tired? What different bodily experiences are you having today? Are you trying new activities in workshops, working muscles you don't usually use? Are you getting more or less touch from others than you usually do?
- **Bisexuality:** does BiCon feel like a particularly 'bi' space to you? Do you feel 'bisexual' at BiCon? What does this feel like to you? When do you feel most/least bi at BiCon?

## ***4.5 Workshop research consent form***

### **Bi Bodies in Bi Spaces**

#### **Research Consent Form**

**If you're happy for your comments from the discussion and feedback form, and a picture of your collage/model to be used anonymously in my research, please fill in the form below to indicate your consent.**

**Please initial box**

I confirm that I understand what this study is about. I have read the information sheet and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

☐

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

☐

I agree to take part in the above study.

☐

*Please tick box*

**Yes**

**No**

I agree to the discussion being audio recorded

☐☐

I agree to the use of anonymised photographs of my collage/model being used in publications

☐☐

I agree to the use of anonymised quotes in publications

☐☐

**My contact details are as follows:**

**Name:**

**Email/phone/address:**

**The pseudonym I'd like to be used in place of my real name in this research is:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signed:** .....(participant)

**Signed:**.....(researcher)