

# Is bisexuality invisible? A review of sexualities scholarship 1970–2015

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## Abstract

This article provides a review of sexualities scholarship within the social sciences between 1970 and 2015. It takes an innovative approach by focusing on the way in which bisexuality is addressed in this body of literature. The article reveals the marginalisation, under-representation and invisibility of bisexuality within and across the social sciences in relation to both bisexual experience and identity. Reasons for this varied across the different eras, including the heterosexist nature of the literature, the impact of gay and lesbian-focused identity politics, and queer deconstructionism. In addition, patterns of bisexual erasure and invisibility were uneven, with some scholarship taking inclusive approaches or criticising prejudice against bisexuality. The initial findings of the review were enriched by critical commentary from key relevant sociologists and political scientists. The article concludes that future sexualities scholarship could be enhanced by greater consideration of bisexuality.

## Keywords

biphobia, bisexuality, gay, lesbian, political science, queer, sexuality, sociology

## Introduction

I think 'B' was added to LG<sup>1</sup> in the later 1980s ... In any event the B has rarely (if ever) been taken seriously in my experience. (Ken Plummer, personal communication January 10, 2016)

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This article provides an original perspective regarding the development of sexuality studies over the last 45 years in the UK and the US. It stems from previous work by the main author (Monro, 2005, 2015), which revealed a disconnect between the large, established bodies of literature associated with sexualities, and the smaller and more marginal body of literature that has developed around bisexuality. With a few exceptions (Seidman, 1997), there is a lack of integration between bisexual-centric literatures and the lesbian and gay-centric sociology and political science literatures. The article complements work done in other fields concerning the exclusions found in sexuality studies, including the whiteness of lesbian and gay studies (Hammonds, 2004). It was part-funded by the Foundation for the Scientific Study of Sexuality.

The main aim of this article is to examine the historical trajectory of sexuality studies in the UK and US, focusing on sociology and political science, in order to ascertain the ways in which bisexuality is addressed. If bisexuality is overlooked, we wish to explore the possible reasons for this, and to consider larger issues concerning the unevenness of sexualities studies and possibilities of moving the broad field in a more integrated direction. As part of this, we seek to develop constructive critique of lesbian, gay, heterosexual, queer and bisexual sexuality studies. A subsidiary aim of the article is to raise questions of relevance to broader debates within sociology and the social sciences. What is the role of the sociologist in framing matters of concern and in developing scholarly fields, which may then affect the way that identities, and identity politics, play out? Is 'impact' always beneficial? Recent publications emphasise the importance of critical debate (Wood, 2014), and the possibilities provided by information technology mean that 'There is more opportunity to re-imagine sociological craft now than at any other point in the discipline's history' (Back, 2012, p. 18). By focusing on one specific issue – the way in which bisexuality has been addressed within the social sciences literature over an extended period – the article sheds some indicative light on these broader questions. The political science literature regarding sexualities is underdeveloped overall, whereas sexualities have been more fully under the sociological gaze; political science literature is included in the review because it provides material concerning identity politics.

The article takes a conceptual stance that foregrounds a specific set of subjectivities and identity-based political claims; those associated with bisexuals and bisexuality. This approach follows the strategy of a key sexualities author:

I guess the politics of identity is very important in the earliest stages of a field of study. My earliest arguments were good examples – alongside my involvement in the early 1960s and 1970s Gay Movement and my academic work, we were busy 'assembling' the very identities we studied. (Ken Plummer, personal communication, January 10, 2016)

Identity politics are relevant to social scientists concerned with impact, because of the ubiquitous use of identity categories by activists and policy makers. For bisexual activists, the discursive invisibility, under-representation, misrepresentation and marginalisation of bisexuals and bisexuality are paramount concerns (Monro, 2015). For some bisexuals, the rendering of bisexuality as invisible could be seen as a form of epistemic violence; 'others' (in this case, bisexual people) are rendered inferior, unworthy of

discussion, or non-existent. However, we are aware of the dangers of essentialism, as reflected in ontologically discrete and sedimented identities such as ‘heterosexual’, ‘gay’ and ‘bisexual’, and the work of bisexual theorists such as Hemmings (1997, 2002) who critique essentialising bisexual identity politics and point to bisexuality as an epistemological project problematising normative gender and sexuality categories. Our use of ‘bisexuality’ as an identity category here is temporary and strategic (following Spivak, 1990), as a means of informing the development of future sexuality studies.

Before discussing the methodology and research findings, it should be noted that bisexuality has historically been defined in three ways: ‘a combination of male/female, masculine/feminine, or heterosexual/homosexual – [these] have different histories, [but] they are far from distinct’ (MacDowell, 2009, p. 4). We follow Rust (2000) in using the term ‘bisexual’ as an adjective to refer to sex acts and attractions to same-sex and other-sex persons, and as a noun to mean people who have these attractions. A pragmatic use of the terms ‘bisexual’ and ‘bisexuality’ is made in this article, because ‘bisexual\*’<sup>2</sup> is more widely understood than broader terms such as ‘pansexual’ (see e.g. Mitchell, Howarth, Kotecha, & Creagan, 2008), and the word ‘bisexual’ is often used in practice to include gender-diverse people (Monro, 2015). The term ‘homosexuality’ is used only where it is found in the reviewed texts. The categories adopted in this article are limited: in some localities, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex (LGBTQI) or other groups of identities are used (see Monro, 2015). We do not address intersex or transgender inclusion here (see Davis, 2015; Hines, 2013), as the focus is primarily on issues of sexuality not gender. Other identities could be addressed, including polyamorous and kink (see Klesse, 2007); these too are outside the scope of this article.

The article uses historiographical methodology in order to trace the ways in which bisexuality is represented in sexuality studies across the 1970–2015 period. As Jacoby contends, ‘sociologists can, through a combination of assessed “secondary” historiographic data and an occasional return to “primary” sources, develop existing archival research, challenge conventional assumptions of the day and offer new findings and research frameworks’ (2004, p. 405). A literature trawl of books with a sexuality studies remit was conducted in collaboration with the subject specialist librarian (Antony Osborne) using databases including COPAC and the British Library.<sup>3</sup> At least 10 texts per decade were included. These were purposively sampled aiming to include different types of sexualities studies text (general sexuality social science texts, empirical studies, lesbian and gay-focused studies, feminist studies, queer studies, edited collections, policy and practice-based contributions) and apparent author political affiliations (for example heterosexist or radical feminist). The texts were searched electronically where possible, manual scanning took place where paper-based texts only were available, and indexes were analysed.<sup>4</sup> This process provided an indicative description of the inclusion/non-inclusion of bisexuality.<sup>5</sup> The preliminary analysis was then critiqued by senior British academics who have contributed significantly to the fields of sexuality and gender studies over many years: Davina Cooper, Jeff Hearn, Ken Plummer, Diane Richardson and Jeff Weeks; commentary was also provided by Val Bryson.<sup>6</sup> Their input is included as personal communications where direct quotes have been used (informed consent was provided). Following their feedback, one text was removed due to its primary focus on gender, and six others were purposefully used because of a need to include texts

foregrounding race and ethnicity, making a total of 81 books (only 73 were used in the index analysis provided below as some lacked indexes). We have developed our analysis with regard to levels of lesbian, gay and bisexual identities and behaviours. However, statistics vary: Ward, Dahlhamer, Galinsky, and Joestl (2014) found that 1.6% of the US population identify as gay or lesbian and 0.7% as bisexual, and the Integrated Household Survey (2014) found that 1.6% of UK adults identify as lesbian or gay and 0.5% as bisexual. However YouGov (2015a, 2015b) found that 16% of US adults identify as somewhere between homosexuality and heterosexuality and only 4% identify as homosexual, while in the UK 43% of young adults identify as neither exclusively heterosexual nor homosexual.

The article begins with a brief overview of the development of sexuality studies within the social sciences. It then delineates the ways in which sexualities social scientists overlooked and marginalised bisexuality and bisexuals. We then discuss bisexual-inclusivity in the literature. The article concludes with an examination of the reasons for bisexual invisibility, and some indicative thoughts about the future direction of sexualities social science.

## **An overview of the development of sexuality studies within the social sciences**

This section of the article provides a snapshot of the development of social sciences sexuality studies over the last 45 years. Sociological approaches to sexuality developed to critique the socio-biological individualist approach of sexology. McIntosh's (1986) text was foundational in challenging the prevailing view that homosexuality was a biological 'condition' and in forging an account of the culturally contingent construction of sexualities. Alongside McIntosh, the work of Gagnon and Simon (1973) was important in the development of a sociological approach to sexuality. Sexual behaviour was, they argued, a result of social scripts and interactions. From this perspective, sexual scripts work to set the parameters of socially accepted sexual behaviours, which are reinforced through social interaction. These early interventions were taken up by scholars such as Millett (1970), Plummer (1975, 1981, 1992), Jackson (1978), Rich (1981) and Weeks (1985), whose work was key to the broader development of sexuality studies.

A focus on script and interactionist theory in the social sciences was paralleled by the development of discourse theory in cultural studies and humanities (1970s–2000s); notably through Foucault's (1976) work. Here, discursive formations constitute and exercise power over social objects, including human bodies. Hugely influential to the work of early queer theory scholars such as Sedgwick (1991), Foucault's work has also gained much traction within the sociology of sexuality as it has continued to expand as a distinct discipline.

The development of sexuality studies over the last decade is illustrated by an expansion of its interdisciplinary focus and sub-disciplines. As Plummer comments, 'the generic field of sexualities is now a mass of diversities, with their own scholars and journals' (personal communication, January 10, 2016). While sexuality studies emerged to problematise heteronormativity by focusing on same-sex practices and identities,

recent years have witnessed a diversity of foci so that a critical gaze is now turned on a range of sexualities, including heterosexuality itself. This represents a broadening of the traditional focus of same-sex sexualities within sexuality studies, which, as Plummer argues, ‘excludes all kinds of sexual diversities and difference’ (personal communication, January 10, 2016).

Anglophone bisexuality studies exists as a small interdisciplinary academic field, including work by Mead (1975), Klein (1978), Firestein (1996), Storr (1999), Rust (2000), Hemmings (1997, 2002), Yoshino (2000), Fox (1998) and Angelides (2006), as well as the many contributions contained in the *Journal of Bisexuality*. This article does not address this body of literature. This is because it seeks some depth of analysis regarding sexualities studies more broadly. However, the article builds on Hemmings’ (2002) assertion that bisexuality has not generated the same level of scholarship as feminist and lesbian and gay issues, and Angelides’ (2006) historical critique of the elision of bisexuality by gay and lesbian studies, feminism and queer theory.

### **Bisexuality: Is it invisible in sexualities scholarship?**

This section of the article discusses the key themes emerging from the content analysis of texts: bisexual invisibility or exclusion, bisexual marginalisation or under-representation, and differences over the key eras (sexologists and psychoanalysts; lesbian, gay and feminist approaches; poststructuralism and queer studies; and LGBT studies). We provide indicative evidence that bisexuality is rendered invisible, or under-represented and marginalised, in sexualities scholarship between the 1970 and 2015 period; however, the reasons for this are complex and set within the context of broader dynamics.

Table 1 shows the extent of bisexual marginalisation, under-representation and invisibility in the indexes of the surveyed texts over the 1970–2015 period.<sup>7</sup>

#### *Bisexuality as invisible*

Analysis of the trajectory of sexuality studies over the entire 1970–2015 period shows that, across the decades, bisexuality is commonly overlooked. More than a quarter of the

**Table 1.** Representation of bisexuality in 73 book indexes.

| Decade    | Absence of bisexual*, lesbian, gay and homosexual* in index | Bisexual* absent but lesbian, or gay, or homosexual* present in index | Lesbian, gay and/or homosexual* present; bisexuality included but less than 50% as frequently | Bisexuality included approximately as frequently as lesbian, gay and/or homosexual |
|-----------|---|---|---|--|
| 1970–1979 | 0   | 4   | 3   | 2  |
| 1980–1989 | 1   | 2   | 3   | 2  |
| 1990–1999 | 0   | 5   | 13  | 5  |
| 2000–2009 | 0   | 11  | 11  | 3  |
| 2010–2015 | 0   | 1   | 3   | 4  |
| Totals    | 1   | 23  | 33  | 16   |

analysed texts include lesbian, gay and/or homosexual\* in their indexes, but bisexuality is not named in either their indexes or the body of their books, for instance, Caplan (1987), Cooper (1994) and Graupner and Tahmindjis (2005).<sup>8</sup> For example, Gagnon and Simon in their (1973) book on sexual conduct have 25 index terms for lesbian, 22 for homosexual (gay is not used) and none for bisexual.

While it could be argued that lesbian, gay, or heterosexual-focused texts overlook bisexuality in order to delimit, a large number of the texts that we analysed have a generic sexualities focus. This is the case across the decades in question, for example Smart and Smart (1978), Caplan (1987) and Moran and Skeggs (2004). Many of the texts, both those with a generic focus on sexualities, and those that are homosexual, lesbian and/or gay-focused, provide no caveat to explain the elision of bisexuality. These include authors such as Gagnon and Simon (1973), Plummer (1981), Cvetkovich (2003) and Jonasdottir, Bryson, and Jones (2011). A few texts which are about lesbian and gay topics index heterosexuality but overlook bisexuality (for example, Cooper, 1994), showing that these authors are not just delimiting in a focusing way, rather, they are including some non-lesbian/gay identities but not others. Useful practice is shown by a few early authors, for example Tanner (1978), who states in her introduction that she excludes bisexuals and only includes self-identified lesbians, but this approach is not emulated by many later authors.

Many books in which bisexuality is absent in indexes also overlook bisexuality in their content.<sup>9</sup> In some texts, empirical examples of sexual behaviour are interpreted in bisexuality-erasing ways. For instance, Humphries, whose book does not once use the term 'bisexual', discusses one of his informants as follows: 'he feels that his sexual needs are "adequately met" in his relationships with his wife. I also know that, from time to time, Tom has sex in the restrooms of a public park' (1970, p. 107). Ken Plummer commented that:

I find it very interesting that this very early book (the work is in the 1960s) does not use the term, as the book is largely about it and of course at this stage of his life Humphries was bisexual himself. (Ken Plummer, personal communication, January 10, 2016)

In texts without indexes, similar patterns are observed, for example Maganet (1995) mentions 'gay' 44 times, 'lesbian' 25 and 'bisexual' once. In a number of texts, authors overlook bisexuality while demonstrating sensitivity to other exclusions. For instance Pointek (2006), in a lesbian and gay-focused book, critiques the way that interpretations of the Stonewall riots excluded transgender, working class and female individuals, stating that, 'The consolidation of a unified gay and lesbian identity in turn requires the exclusion of difference and the policing of that identity's boundaries [by lesbians and gay men]' (2006, p. 22), but bisexuality is ignored.

It appears that in other texts, bisexuality is subsumed within lesbian and gay identities, for example Plummer (1992) discusses a relationship where both partners developed same-sex relationships and retained their marriage. Their sexual identities shifted to that of a 'lesbian' married to a 'gay man',<sup>10</sup> and the woman stated that 'I can at least understand that it is perfectly possible to love someone of the same sex and opposite sex ... one can do both' (1992, p. 87). In his commentary on our article, he remarked that:

I guess I have never explicitly written/engaged with bisexuality across my research life, and this neglect might well mean it has been invisible to me. Whether I have erased it is another matter. Still I have often thought about it. (Personal communication, January 10, 2016)

This commentary shows that the scholarly elision of bisexuality may not be wilful. Ken Plummer also explained that he started to consider bisexuality seriously in the mid-1970s and that the work of Phil Blumstein and Pepper Schwartz (unpublished) was important: ‘some of their earliest work was very intellectually sophisticated about the development of bisexual identity’ but that this work ‘seems to have been completely lost’. In this case, dynamics concerning the wider academic landscape may have been a factor: ‘The work was never properly published (you could have that luxury in those days!)’ (personal communication, January 10, 2016).

### *Bisexuality as marginalised*

The largest group of analysed texts (almost half) address bisexual\* considerably less frequently than homosexual\*, lesbian or gay in their indexes (for instance, Carbado, 1999; Dugan, 2005; Tanner, 1978; Taylor, Hines, & Casey, 2011; Vance, 1989). Cross-decade analysis provides evidence of bisexual marginalisation and under-representation in generic sexualities texts. For example, Plummer (1975) in his book about sexual stigma has extensive references to homosexuality but only eight index terms for bisexuality; Vance (1989) in her book on sexual pleasure and danger has about 30 indexed pages for lesbian, 25 for homosexual and two for bisexual, and Giddens’ (1992) book on intimacy has 11 indexed pages for lesbian, 21 for homosexual and two for bisexual. The pattern continues post-2000, for instance Rahman’s (2000) book on sexuality and democracy has 25 indexed pages for gay and related terms, two for homosexual\*, one for bisexual; and Taylor et al.’s (2011) collection on intersectionality and sexuality has almost double the number of index terms for both lesbian and gay, in comparison to terms for bisexuality.<sup>11</sup>

The marginalisation and under-representation of bisexuality is reflected in book contents as well as indexes.<sup>12</sup> For instance an electronic search of Carver and Mottier’s (1998) full text about politics and sexuality showed the following occurrence of terms: gay 93; lesbian 76; homosexual 58; queer 24; heterosexual/straight 68; and bisexual eight. Another, related issue is that bisexuality is dealt with in a limited or problematic way in many texts. In some books, it is mentioned in a useful way but only in specific contexts, for example Richardson’s (2000) discussion of HIV/AIDS. Some accounts highlight advantages that bisexuals may experience, without acknowledging the prejudice they can also face, for example, Jackson and Scott state that ‘“Bisexual” is a safer label than lesbian, for it posits the possibility of a relationship with a man’ (1996, p. 156). This is problematic because it could contribute to the establishment of ‘hierarchies of oppression’, fuelling the rejection of bisexuals by the lesbian and gay communities (see Monro, 2005, 2015). Another problematic issue is the framing of bisexual as one of a set of ‘transgressive’ social groups. This first appeared in the work of Rubin: she states that ‘Bisexuals, sadomasochists, individuals who prefer cross-generational encounters [*sic*], transsexuals, and transvestites are all in various states of community formation and

identity acquisition' (in Vance, 1989, p. 287). The repetitive framing of bisexuality alongside other stigmatised identities (such as sadomasochism practitioners and sex workers) was perpetuated for some years (see Caplan, 1987; Sinfield, 1998; Weeks, 1985). This mimetic practice appears to have worked to 'other' bisexuals and bisexuality, possibly leading to misrepresentation even if this was not the intention of the authors. Bisexuality appears framed as one of a group of identities too deviant for consideration as 'good citizens' with legitimate rights claims (see Richardson & Monro, 2012).<sup>13</sup>

### *Dynamics across the different sexuality studies eras*

The reasons for bisexual marginalisation, under-representation and invisibility vary considerably over the 1970–2015 period. Broadly speaking, the initial reason for invisibility was tied together with the erasure of non-heterosexualities in general, as evident in early sexualities texts such as Schofield (1973). The issue of same-sex sexualities being erased or subsumed by dominant heterosexualities persists. There may be nervousness about addressing any issues of sexuality at all in some fields. The issues are explicated by Val Bryson:

My academic background is in political theory, which until recently has had virtually nothing to say about sexuality in any form. This continues to be largely the case for mainstream/ malestream thought ... my impression is that although both gay men and lesbians now have a visible presence in academia, this remains highly marginalised, and where bisexuality is addressed a further process of marginalisation or 'othering' occurs. (Personal communication, October 9, 2015)

During the early part of our historiography, scholarship was often influenced by psychoanalysis, and behavioural accounts such as those using Kinsey (see, for instance, Brake's [1982] collection). The seminal work of Kinsey, Pomeroy, and Martin (1948) and others such as Klein (1978) supported sexual diversity but took a largely individualist approach. Thus fluidity of desire across and between gender categories was highlighted to exemplify individual sexual diversity, although the social norms, values and structures that enable or disable sexual agency remained un-theorised in this body of work. It seems that bisexuality studies branched off from other areas of sexuality studies at this point, following a separate trajectory from lesbian and gay studies, and drawing largely on the approaches of key authors such as Klein (1978) until the poststructuralist and queer turn in the 1990s.

In the late 1970s and 1980s there was an epistemological shift in sexuality studies more broadly, associated with the development of lesbian feminist studies and gay studies. The diversity-positive work of Kinsey and Klein was framed by authors such as Jeffreys (1994) and Kitzinger (1987) as privatised, depoliticised, individualist and tied into neoliberal agendas. Instead, an approach that sought to tackle heterosexism emerged, related to lesbian politics. Lesbian and/or radical feminists also critiqued heteropatriarchy and, in attempts to develop a strong identity politics, some of them changed notions of lesbian identity to incorporate behavioural bisexuality (see Jeffreys, 1994; Rich, 1981). This had the effect of erasing bisexualities. Lesbian feminist accounts sometimes directly co-opted bisexuality:



Labels used to invalidate a woman's lesbianism by indicating that she is not a 'real' lesbian include ... 'bisexual' ... meaning that she is also attracted to men ... this collection of invalidatory labels has the effect of severely reducing the number of 'real' lesbians in existence. (Kitzinger, 1987, pp. 67–68)

For lesbian feminist authors such as Kitzinger (1987), the dissolution of discrete sexual identity binaries is also seen as politically problematic. Such views contribute to the epistemic erasure of bisexuals, who move between, across, or over sexuality binaries in their identities and intimate practices.

Gay and lesbian studies, which later switched to 'lesbian and gay studies' in order to denote the greater social marginalisation of lesbians as compared to gay men, developed in parallel to lesbian feminist scholarship:

This is 'the Golden Age of gay and lesbian studies' (Plummer 1992:3) and, as such, there could be no better time to begin carving out space for lesbian studies. Lesbian and Gay studies is an innovative and rapidly expanding academic enterprise. (Wilton, 1995, p. 1)

While there were divergences between the work of different authors (see Richardson & Monro, 2012), between 1980 and the 1990s, institutionalised lesbian and gay studies tended to develop, rather than sexuality studies that included many sexual identities. This may be partly because the homophobia faced by gay and lesbian authors in the academy (Plummer, 1992; Wilton, 1995) contributed towards the development of separate scholarly communities which did not include people who crossed homosexual/heterosexual boundaries. The institutionalisation of lesbian and gay studies (rather than a more inclusive LGBT or LGBTQ studies) is still pertinent, for example 'Researchers in lesbian and gay studies are now not writing in the sole context of silence and invisibility, where critical stances may well be possible only because a literature, which can be mobilised in our defence, exists' (Taylor et al., 2011, p. 38). Lesbian and gay studies seems to have been far more successful than bisexuality studies in becoming established, as has transgender studies (Hines, 2013).

The 1990s saw the emergence of queer theory and poststructuralist approaches to sexuality studies as a major force. At this point, other reasons for the marginalisation of bisexuality within sexuality studies entered the picture. Authors such as Sedgwick (1991) have largely overlooked bisexuality in their analysis of the heterosexual/homosexual binary. Thus 'in spite of occupying an epistemic position *within* this very opposition, the category of bisexuality has been curiously marginalised and erased from the deconstructive field of queer theory' (Angelides, 2001, p. 7). The erasure of bisexuality is apparent, then, in queer-focused discussions (for example, Bristow & Wilson, 1993). One reason for this is that, as Richardson points out: 'Queer, it is argued, displaces previous sexual categories such as "lesbian", "gay", "bisexual" and "heterosexual" ' (2000, p. 41). The deconstructive potential of queer is echoed in contemporary narratives within the bisexual communities (Monro, 2015), as well as those in the 1990s; some bisexual people 'champion bi precisely because the term resists the pull of identity' (Richardson & Seidman, 2002, pp. 94–95). In terms of the representation of bisexuality within sexuality studies, we suggest that the peak years of queer theory – the mid to late 1990s – was a period in which scholars were particularly silent about bisexuality.

From around 2000 there is a shift away from queer and poststructuralist approaches towards the production of books about LGBT and LGBTQ issues. Institutionalised lesbian and gay studies has to a degree also been widened to include other non-normative groups, such as polyamorous or kink communities. However, LGBT and LGBTQ texts have a tendency towards bisexual invisibility or a lack of bisexual-specific material (for example, Dugan, 2005). Ken Plummer further substantiates our observation about the paucity of bisexual representation in recent texts: ‘There seem to be a lot of LGBT/Queer handbooks lately ... I pull down two I have on my shelf ... and I notice how little bisexuality there is in them at a quick glance (and the index!)’ (Ken Plummer, personal communication, January 10, 2016).

The discussion above clearly signposts a lack of engagement with bisexuality within sexuality studies scholarship over the 1970–2015 period, pointing to the invisibility, under-representation and marginalisation of bisexual practices and identities across the literature. The subsequent section balances the discussion by outlining scholarship which is bisexual-inclusive, and then turns to ways of understanding the scholarly negation of bisexuality, before concluding with some indicative remarks about future sexualities social science.

## **Analysis and conclusion**

The analysis of book indexes and content showed that some texts (16 out of 73) produced across the decades had indexes that were roughly equal in their inclusion of index terms for bisexual\*, lesbian, gay, homosexual\* and/or heterosexual (for example, Johnson, 2015; Plummer, 1975). A few monographs and collections produced in the 1970s and 1980s take an inclusive stance regarding bisexuality (for instance, Brake, 1982; Butler, 1979). Texts that seek to explicitly include bisexuals and bisexuality alongside lesbian, gay and sometimes heterosexual and other sexualities begin to appear in the 1990s (for example, Beemyn & Eliason, 1996). These include those that are empirically-based and/or have a policy or practice focus, such as Shakespeare, Gillespie-Sells, and Davies’s (1996) contribution concerning disability and sexuality. The production of texts that included bisexuality alongside other sexual identities continues into the 2000s and subsequently, including Richardson and Seidman (2002), Monro (2005) and Drucker (2015). This is, perhaps, indicative of a shift towards greater bisexual inclusivity in the field.

Some texts critique bisexual marginalisation, although their primary remit is not bisexuality. For example, ‘People who have sex with both genders often find themselves under great pressure to “be one thing or the other” ’ (Gagnon & Simon, 1973, p. 273). These and later texts include some discussion of the stigmatisation of bisexuals among lesbians, and in some cases gay men (see, for instance, Butler, 1979), often linked with broader critiques of gay and lesbian identity politics (for example, Faderman, 1981; Seidman, 2003). Authors such as Weeks (1985) and Altman (1993 [1971]) also provide analysis that contributes to bisexuality studies; for example Altman suggests that ‘The repression of polymorphous perversity in Western societies has two major components: the removal of the erotic from all areas of life other than the explicitly sexual, and the denial of our inherent bisexuality’ (1993 [1971], p. 90). An important intervention is provided by Phelan (2001), who posits the normalisation of lesbians and gay men as

being predicated on the demonisation of bisexuals and transgender people. A few authors also frame queer as bisexual-inclusive, for example Sinfield remarks that 'Bisexuals became more assertive at about the same time as, and partly through, the Queer movement' (1998, p. 9). Overall, the existence of bisexual-inclusive texts demonstrates that bisexual invisibility and marginalisation were by no means the only trend apparent in the 1970–2015 period. The way that bisexuality is addressed by sexuality studies appears overall to be contested and uneven.

Why does a field such as sexuality studies develop in such an uneven way, with certain subjectivities being more represented than others? One explanation can be found in the work of bisexual scholars who claim that the social invisibility of bisexuality and bisexual people constitutes an aspect of biphobia (Barker, Richards, Jones, Bowes-Catton, & Plowman, 2012). Biphobia, defined as negative behaviours, attitudes and structures concerning people who are attracted to others of more than one gender, has received far less scholarly attention than homophobia or transphobia. There is substantial evidence of bisexual invisibility and marginalisation in the UK and US societies (see Monro, 2015). It appears that biphobia may have affected the development of sexualities social science. As the seminal work by Yoshino (2000) demonstrates, lesbians, gays and heterosexuals have an epistemic interest in overlooking bisexuality, in order to maintain stable heterosexual/homosexual binaries and gender binaries as an ontological basis for erotic relations, also reinscribing mononormativity (the notion that people have unidirectional desires). It would be naïve to imagine that social scientists are immune to broader forces such as biphobia, mononormativity and heterosexism.

Both generic sexualities and lesbian and gay-focused texts produced in the 1975–2015 period are profoundly shaped by forces associated with heterosexism, either directly, or through the resistances developed to it. A minority of the analysed texts (for example, Benson-von der Ohe, 1982) reinscribe heterosexism as a social structuring force. In others, for example Schofield (1973), there are moves to de-stigmatise homosexuality, but heterosexuality remains the normative imperative. Homophobia and heterosexism also structured the experiences of early authors working in the area of non-heterosexualities. For example, Plummer (1981) discusses the way that being 'out' as gay could discredit authors. Discrimination against non-heterosexuals by heterosexual feminists is identified as a factor in the development of lesbian feminism (see Wilton, 1995), some of which has biphobic elements. Early authors observed that: 'it is probably true that individuals are often forced into exclusive homosexuality because of both the way in which society brands those who deny its roles and the penalties meted out to those who are unwilling to accept them' (Altman, 1973, p. 83). The impact of heterosexism and homophobia is intertwined with the gender binarism which is endemic in earlier sexuality studies (for example, Smart & Smart, 1978) and with mononormativity. Lesbian and gay claims to normalcy and social assimilation rest partially on the adoption of the monogamous relationships which are a normative component of heterosexualities. While some bisexuals are monogamous or celibate, others are not, rendering them outside of logics of appropriateness and therefore subject to discrimination (Monro, 2015).

The trajectories of the different identity-based communities will also have affected the ways that sexuality studies included, or excluded, bisexuality. Jeffrey Weeks argues that:

Some of the work cited in fact shows that a bisexual identity has emerged relatively recently, and by no means all bisexually active people adhere to it, so surely it is hardly surprising that the literature is sparser than on gay identity. Distinctive bisexual identities, like what we now mean by trans identities, developed more slowly than post GLF lesbian and gay identities. This doesn't mean bisexuality or transgender didn't exist, obviously, but that there might be a distinctive bi or trans agenda does seem to me a later development – the 1980s and 1990s. I think a crucial moment was the AIDS crisis. (Personal communication, January 4, 2016)

Here, it is evident that key social issues such as HIV/AIDS shaped the development of sexualities studies. Broader political forces also played a part, so that bisexuality could perhaps have been positioned as irrelevant. Davina Cooper argues that 'My book, for instance, was a study of lesbian and gay activism because this was how dissident sexual politics in local government was framed at the time' (personal communication, January 10, 2016), and in a later communication she clarified that 'I wouldn't say bisexuality was irrelevant. More that the municipal struggles at the time were being fought on other fronts – mainly against the Christian Right' (March 3, 2016). The bisexual communities were active and organising from the 1980s onwards (Monro, 2005), but there is clearly a disjunction between community-level activism and the largely grassroots scholarship emerging from these communities, and the more prominent lesbian and gay activism and literature. Later bisexual scholars, including the main author, have utilised the conceptual contributions of lesbian and gay scholars in relation to bisexuality 'especially on the social construction of sexuality and identities, and the concept of heteronormativity' (Jeffrey Weeks, personal communication, January 4, 2016).

The marginalisation and under-representation of bisexuality in the sexualities literature can also be explained by looking at issues of categorisation. In the 1960s and 1970s, authors such as Ken Plummer were in the early stages of the formulation of terms, and 'it is unclear whether ultimately bisexuality related to gender or sexuality or both [in the 1960s]' (Ken Plummer, personal communication, January 10, 2016). Semantics play a part: pioneering authors such as Altman (1993 [1971]) and Plummer (1975) discuss homosexual behaviours (which both gay/lesbian individuals and bisexual individuals can take part in) and then demonstrate a definitional slide by which homosexual behaviours become related to homosexual identities in such a way as to elide bisexual identities (see Plummer, 1975, p. 98). Plummer explains that 'People who have sexual partners of the same and opposite gender during their lives seem to represent a serious intellectual and scientific problem for those trying to understand human sexual conduct' (1975, p. 259). This 'problem' appears to be contained in a number of ways, notably the reinvention and/or reinscription of sexual identity binaried ontological positions. In early contributions, there is an identification of the challenges that bisexuality poses to rigid sexual identity categorisation, but an inability to move into a structural critique of heterosexism and gender binarism. This difficulty may be due to the nascent nature of sexuality studies, rather than biphobia or bisexual marginalisation per se. One of the key debates concerning identity politics was already apparent in the 1970s but remains pertinent: categories are arguably important for identity politics, but at the same time, constrain subjectivities (Altman, 1973; Plummer, 1981). There are some signs that sexual identities may be becoming less important among bisexual men

in the US and UK (McCormack, Wignall, & Anderson, 2015). However, we believe that assertions that prejudice against bisexuals is lessening (McCormack, Anderson, & Adams, 2014) are flawed, given the extent of discrimination faced by those who express same-sex desires (Itaborahy & Zhu, 2014).

The literature search conducted for this article indicates that bisexuality has been invisible, under-represented and marginalised in a number of different ways within sexuality studies in the period between 1970 and 2015. First, the early period of scholarship on sexuality by social scientists in the 1970s tended to focus on redressing heterosexism, sometimes by centring gay men. Second, the period of the 1980s saw the development of lesbian-feminist analyses of sexuality, which theorised same-sex desire between women as a practice of resistance to the axes of heteronormativity and patriarchy. In both of these modes of analysis, bisexual identities and subjectivities were unaccounted for due to bisexuality falling between the political orientations of these bodies of work. During the 1990s, queer theory deconstructed sexual categories and, where bisexuality was addressed, it was often positioned within a framework of transgression alongside other normatively identified practices. Given that bisexuality raises important critical questions about the intersections of sexuality and gender, and the epistemologies of these categories, we find it is surprising that little attention has been given to bisexual sexualities within sexualities social sciences. The study has limitations, and further research is needed. Only books were included, in order to delimit the sample, but a multitude of relevant articles exist (for example, Anderson, McCormack, & Ripley, 2014). The study aims to provide indicative findings only; the field of sexuality studies grew exponentially during the 1990–2015 period, so that purposive sampling of texts in the later eras will be less representative than that conducted in the earlier periods.

At the start of this article we set out our remit as that of addressing literature within the social and political sciences. We acknowledge the existing work on bisexuality that has been developed broadly within cultural studies and the humanities (for example, Hemmings, 2002). The traditional disciplinary divide between the social sciences and the humanities may be a further reason for the marginalisation of bisexuality in social science based studies of sexuality. Bisexuality is often positioned as a cultural practice – a ‘lifestyle choice’ – rather than a sexual ‘orientation’ that falls under the rubric of structural analyses of discrimination. The work of the second author of this article has argued strongly for the integration of scholarship on gender and sexuality from the social sciences and humanities (Hines, 2013). It seems overall that bisexuality has not been taken seriously within the social sciences, raising questions about the ways in which issues are framed as worthy of scholarly concern, and the impact that academic work may have on social discourses concerning sexualities. The invisibility of bisexuality and the discursive marginalisation of bisexuals negatively affects their wellbeing (Barker, 2015), and we argue that scholarly representation of bisexuality may be a normative issue, as well as one of rigour.

We hope that more attention will be placed on bisexuality and bisexual theorists such as Hemmings (1997, 2002), Storr (1999) and Yoshino (2000), in terms of understanding identity formations and inequalities, as the cultural and the material continue to intersect within gender and sexuality studies. Moreover, we suggest that there is evidence that sexuality studies is beginning to turn more of its attention to bisexuality, alongside

developing critical analyses of heterosexuality, and we welcome this development. Intersectional studies also provide a rich theoretical avenue for the consideration of bisexuality in terms of the intersections between gender and sexuality, also in relation to the intersections of bisexual practices and other social formations, including those of race, class and age. We see this as a dynamic and crucial site of further development within the field of sexuality studies in coming years, and one which may enable bisexuality to move from its position of marginality within the literature.

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### Notes

1. Bisexual, Lesbian and Gay.
2. The \* indicates use of an abbreviated term for search purposes.
3. Texts included in the literature analysis are denoted in the bibliography by an 'S' after each reference.
4. Some inaccuracies are inevitable because the indexes varied considerably in style.
5. Findings are reported in the present tense to maintain cohesion throughout analysis of the 1970–2015 period.
6. UK authors were chosen to provide depth in one country; research with US authors would be useful. Also, as Jeff Hearn remarked (personal communication, December 1, 2015), the time-scales of US and UK political trajectories regarding sexual identities are somewhat different.
7. Each term (e.g. lesbian, gay) was searched for and analysed separately for each text.
8. No texts included bisexual in their index while excluding lesbian, gay, or homosexual\*.
9. This is problematic, given levels of behavioural bisexuality.
10. Plummer uses the terms 'lesbian' and 'gay' to describe the research participants' experiences.
11. There are a few exceptions, for example Stockhill (2003).
12. It should be noted that inclusion of other key identities in indexes is patchy in places, for example Rahman (2000) does not include lesbians.
13. The framing of other subjects as unworthy for inclusion is of course also problematic.

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