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Researching Bisexuality and Christianity: Locating a Hidden Population and the use of Reflexivity

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INTRODUCTION

Research focussing upon bisexual Christians is an emerging area of investigation. Although the research into non-heterosexuality and Christianity is growing (Yip 1997, 2003, Wilcox 2003, to name a couple of important contemporary empirical researchers), research specifically focussing solely upon bisexual Christians is much less widespread. I see the issues facing bisexual Christians as distinct from those of gay and lesbian Christians. My previous research has shown that bisexuality is such a complex issue, the strategies and techniques used to align (if possible or desirable) bisexuality with Christianity are different to those faced by gay and lesbian Christians (Toft 2010).

Bisexual Christians face discrimination and/or exclusion not only from the heterosexual and Christian communities but also the gay and lesbian communities. This is due in part to bisexuality's rejection of monosexuality. By its very nature bisexuality works against society's assumption that individuals are monosexual (attracted to members of one

sex only) and challenges what we understand about human sexuality (Toft 2009a, 2009b). There is also a general misunderstanding of what bisexuality actually is. Unlike heterosexuality and homosexuality it is difficult to reduce bisexuality to a single behaviour or act. Research exists to suggest various definitions of bisexuality. Storr (1997) has suggested that historical bisexuality is seen as a combination of maleness and femaleness, a combination of masculinity and femininity or a combination of homosexuality and heterosexuality. Furthermore, contemporary research has suggested that bisexuality is a distinct sexuality rejecting the idea of gendered attraction (Garber 2000), this has been furthered by Diamond (2008) who suggests female sexuality is fluid and other attributes such as sense of humour and intelligence can act as the initial contact rather than physical attraction, or attraction to gendered characteristics.

Christianity, mostly specifically Anglicanism, sees bisexuality differently (see House of Bishops 2003). The Church sees bisexuality as promiscuous:

> If bisexual sexual activity involves simultaneous sexual relations with people of both sexes then…this would either imply promiscuity or infidelity or both? (House of Bishops. 2003:283)

Furthermore, bisexuals are seen as having a choice about their sexuality:

> If God's overall intention for human activity is that it should take place in the context of marriage with someone of the opposite sex, then clearly

the Church needs to encourage bisexual people who are capable of entering into such a relationship to do so… (House of Bishops 2003:283)

This suggests that bisexuals have the choice to be heterosexual, denying the idea of a distinct bisexual identity. It is therefore arguable that bisexuals have different issues to gay men and lesbians because their sexual identity itself is denied.

This chapter is an exploration of the methods used to obtain a sample of bisexual Christians, a community which has no official support networks. It explores the strategies used to locate such a population. In addition, the chapter explores the issue of reflexivity as a key research tool in obtaining data. I argue that reflexivity on the behalf of the researcher is vital in accessing the bisexual Christian community. This is due, as I have pointed out, to the fact that bisexual Christians potentially suffer discrimination from numerous quarters, and therefore a reflexive approach in which any previous thoughts, any personal obligations and so forth are laid on the table. Furthermore, reflexivity is beneficial in that it allows a two-way discourse if necessary where the respondent is reassured by the interviewers own experiences. This allows for greater empathy and 'opening-up' on the part of the respondent. This has broad implications for academics interested in methodology and it suggests that reflexivity may hold a vital key in accessing information which is closely guarded.

METHODOLOGICAL ASPECTS

The chapter first considers the overarching methodological aspects of the research project. This section explores firstly how bisexual Christians were located and how one goes about recruiting such a hidden population. Secondly, the sampling techniques and strategies which were employed are examined, exploring which were successful and how problems were overcome. Thirdly, there is a consideration of response rates this links to the sampling strategies how successful they were. The section concludes with an overview of the sample which was gained. This gives the reader an indication of the people who took part.

Locating bisexual Christians

It has been argued previously that research into LGBT individuals is difficult due to the possibility that respondents may be closeted and unwilling to risk exposure of their sexuality (Keenan 2007). Keenan found that due to the secrecy on the part of the respondents, recruitment was often difficult. It is possible that recruitment of bisexual Christians was as difficult if not more so. Bisexual Christians are misunderstood in both sexual and religious communities. They are ostracised from gay communities (Hemmings 2000, Eadie 1997) and like gay and lesbian people they are often excluded from religious communities. Further to this, it would seem to be the case that even within religious spaces that

they are supposedly welcome, such as the MCC (Metropolitan Community Church) respondents had often been made to feel unwelcome. For some the MCC was too focussed around gay Christians without room for bisexual individuals. The idea of bisexuality, and what people think it means to be bisexual, is so full of stereotyping and pre-judgement that for someone to describe their sexuality as bisexual this results in more questions than answers (Ochs 2008).

Obtaining a representative sample of bisexual Christians was not possible. As Heaphy, Weeks and Donovan (1998) point out in their study of gay relationships, it is impossible to define what other people consider as 'bisexual' (in this instance). Put simply it is not useful or possible to create fixed definitions on such populations. Doing so would impose some sort of preconception on the part of the researcher. A representative sample is not desirable because it presumes things about people, such as what bisexuals 'should' be like. For example, if I as a researcher think that all Christian bisexuals are monogamous, then the sample obtained would be rather specific. In other words, it was imperative to not take any preconceptions about bisexuality forward into the sampling stage. As a researcher at this point it was not my role to qualify bisexuality (for example) in any way. Therefore it is more useful to allow respondents to define their own sexuality and then explore these definitions.

Sampling Techniques and Strategies

Sampling techniques therefore were very limited. Yip (2008) has shown the important role that support groups/networks play in obtaining respondents, and highlights the important relationship between gate-keeper and researcher. With the assistance of a committed gate-keeper it is often the case that they can access respondents who willing to be contacted. However, unlike the gay Christian population, there are no specific bisexual Christian support groups that I could locate within the UK. There may be unofficial private gatherings but no officially advertised national or local organisations currently exist. Although it is clear that there are numerous LGBT or non-heterosexual Christian support networks the orientations of those attending such groups is unclear and could be a wasted venture. Even if the congregation/support network contained a hundred or more individuals such a technique would result in wasted time and resources. Therefore, blanket sampling- sending a number of blank questionnaires to support groups/networks- could not be carried out due to the financial and practical restrictions in place. Respondents, therefore, had to come to me and express their willingness to take part in the research. Although advertisement in printed and online media gave me full control as the researcher over what people understood the research was about, it is also a possibility that there is a significant danger that respondents attracted would not be representative due to this sampling. The respondents would have to be aware of their own sexuality and spirituality for example in order to be reading the publications in which the research was advertised. Although with such a small sample size it is

not representativeness that the project aims for, it has been shown by Yip (1998) that such sampling strategies do attract respondents who are more vocal and open about their sexuality. I combined my sampling strategy with snowballing in order to try and balance this and to try and recruit those who would not respond to an advertisement.

I created a four-tier research sampling strategy:

1.   Advertisement through national and local press.
2.   Approaching support groups.
3.   Use of personal connections/networks.
4.   Snowball sampling.

The strategies did not happen as phases and they are not mutually exclusive. As I will discuss in the section regarding my role as the researcher it is vitally important to be both reflexive and flexible in the sampling stages and throughout the research project.

A project flyer was constructed for the purposes of advertising the project to potential respondents. This outlined the project in terms of what was expected of respondents, what they should expect from me, the importance of the research and ethical considerations. This flyer was published in various forms in printed media such as: 'Gay Times', 'Diva', 'Shout Magazine', 'QUEST newsletter' and 'BiCommunity News'. Online resources were also used to their full potential and both secular and spiritual organisations were used such as: 'BiCon Live Journal', 'LGCM'

(Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement), '(Y)LGCM' (Young Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement) and 'Bi Research JISC forum'.

Although as previously stated there are no specific support groups/networks for bisexual Christians, there are support groups/networks for non-heterosexual Christians which either claim to be all inclusive (MCC) or could possibly contain bisexual Christians (such as QUEST which is primarily for gay Roman Catholics). The gatekeepers of such organisations were approached in order to pass the information on to their members/congregation or if they chose publish it in their newsletter or on their website. The MCC in Manchester for example ran the advert in their printed newsletter and placed an entry on their website for all visitors to read. Examples of such groups who were approached apart from those mentioned are: URC (United Reform Church, First Sunday, and numerous other gay affirming Churches such as Liberty Church Blackpool). It was my aim to advertise in both secular and religious spaces in order to maximise the potential respondent rate.

Getting the advert published was not a straightforward task, there was resistance to its publication. Several Evangelical organisations refused to publish on the grounds that being bisexual and Christian is a contradiction in terms. No other denomination I approached refused to publish the document although the gatekeepers who I contacted were usually part of pro-LGBT organisations. I negotiated such difficulties by using gatekeepers who had seen the advertisements and were willing to ask their communities for volunteers.

Snowballing took place even within the first phase of the project. Those who completed questionnaires were also sent a copy of the advertising leaflet to pass onto friends or acquaintances if they could. This snowballing was very successful and often resulted in the information being passed onto other gatekeepers who in turn passed the information onto their members and so forth. I believe that I recruited at least 20 questionnaire respondents through either direct (leaflet passed from me to respondent to potential respondent) or indirect (leaflet passed from me to respondent to gatekeeper to potential respondent snowballing strategies. Lee (1993:67) suggests that one of the key advantages of adopting snowball samplings such as its ability to reach 'rare' (author's expression) populations and also the fact that the researcher knows the respondents will be suitable:

> 'Security' features are built into this method because the intermediaries who form the links with the referral chain are known to potential respondents and trusted by them.

Although in my research project snowball sampling is vital there are potential pitfalls of relying on snowballing as a main recruitment strategy. Davies (1986) has particularly noted the bias in recruiting this way. He argues that snowballing often results in a sample which contains a lot of similar minded people, due to the fact that people pass information to their friends who are often similar to them. I tried to off-set such bias by asking the respondents to contact people in their support groups but also those who do not take part in such groups, through

personal friendship groups for example. Although, I recognise that it is often the case that friends associate with those who are often like-minded, and this is a problem with small-scale research projects in general.

Response rates

The overall response rate to the research project was higher than expected. The original research proposal aimed for 50 completed questionnaires and 10 in-depth interviews, when in fact 80 completed questionnaires were returned and 20 in-depth interviews took place. The larger sample has meant that issues that would have gone unnoticed have been bought to attention and although as mentioned there are no claims to representativeness, a larger sample helps build a more powerful argument in terms of statistical significance. I attribute my success in terms of sampling to four reasons:

1. The research on bisexual Christians is so limited that respondents understood that in taking part in the research they would really be giving their community a voice.

2. I approached/advertised through secular and religious

organisations and sexuality groups (organisations who support people struggling with their sexuality). The sampling therefore covered all the communities where bisexual Christians could be residing whether closeted in terms of either their sexuality or spirituality.

3. The research project was a flexible as possible particularly with regards to the practicalities of carrying out the project. I fit my activities around the availability of the respondents in terms of location and time. This was combined with a reflexive approach, noting that as a researcher I will influence the research and therefore self-scrutiny is required (Mason 1996:5). This is discussed further in the relevant section.

4. Almost half of the respondents displayed signs of enjoying the interview and saw the process as a therapeutic experience (Letherby 2001). Respondents noted that they had not had the chance to talk about their experiences to anyone. This was reflected in some of the interview lengths, although only scheduled for an hour and a half, interviews often went over two hours in length with the longest being two and a half hours. Talking to me as a researcher who they would never see again, allowed them to discuss things they wouldn't otherwise have the opportunity to.

Although I feel that the response rate was good there are three key factors why respondents may not have wanted to take part:

1. The Anglican Church is still going through a period of uncertainty particularly with regards to gay priests (Keenan and Yip 2004). As Keenan states: 'These events brought about a situation whereby many individuals replaced, and reinforced their defences. Along with this the danger that the project could be seen as 'jumping on the bandwagon' was constantly there, and may have put some people of coming forward'. (Keenan 2005:100)

2. The emphasis was firmly on respondents to contact me and express interest in the research. Although the sample size is smaller than other comparable research projects on for example, gay male Christians (Yip 1996), it would be unreasonable to assume that there are as many bisexual people as gay people. Bowes-Catton's (2005) research highlights the fact that the bisexual community is relatively small.

3. The only real incentive to take part is 'to make their voice

heard'. No financial rewards or benefits were offered. And because I was flexible and went to the respondents to conduct the interviews no travelling expenses had to be paid. I did however, pay for the postage for respondents to return the questionnaires.

The Sample

Such a collection of quantitative data furthered by the qualitative data created a vast amount of information unlike any dataset in the UK. Here I would like to briefly outline the respondents' I obtained using these strategies. Although the respondents will be discussed in more specific detail in the data chapters, here I would like to highlight the diversity and success of the sampling:

The only qualifying features in order to take part in the research were that respondents must self-define their sexuality as bisexuality, there were no specific categorisations or pre-determined ideas imposed by myself. For example, there were no preconceptions about the relationship status of the respondents (e.g. they must be in relationships with two people opposite sexes- because this may be a false representation of what bisexuality is). It turned out that apart from a couple of younger participants, the sample was at least historically bisexual in that they had had relationships with members of both sexes. Although some were actively seeking male (for example) partners they still defined as bisexual and would consider relationships with females (for

example) in the future. There were no instances where I suspected the respondents were not bisexual.

They also had to self-define their religion/spirituality as Christian. What this meant was up to the respondent and it would be part of the questionnaire and interview process to explore this further. A brief overview of the respondents: 47.5% (38) were male and 52.5% (42) female showing a good balance between the sexes. They were aged between 18 and 72 with the average being approximately 29. Eight different denominations were represented: Anglican, Methodist, Metropolitan Community Church, Unitarian, Evangelical, Quaker, Catholic and Russian Orthodox although 35% (28) stated that they had no denomination. 53.8% (43) either never attended or only attended on special occasions, however 28.8% (23) attended weekly. The majority (78 or 97.5%) described their ethnicity as white British and most of the respondents (40 or 50%) were in a relationship (but not married or co-habiting).

The interviewee sample of 20 was varied also, although this was done to fortune rather than planning, as I interviewed everyone who was willing to take part. 55% (11) were male and 45% (9) were female. They were aged between 20 and 72 with the average age being approximately 31. Seven different denominations were represented. Anglican, Methodist, Metropolitan Community Church, Unitarian, Evangelical and Catholic. Four were not regular Church attendees. All respondents described their

ethnicity as white British and three respondents were single with the rest in relationships (two were married).

During this section I hope to have outlined how I undertook the research and the general research design. I now move the chapter forward to explore the issue of reflexivity and its importance in researching bisexual Christians.

Reflexivity and the Interviewer/Interviewee Relationship

As a reflexive researcher I understand that my role is never neutral, my actions, appearance and particularly in the case of this research my sexuality and religious/spiritual belief will all impact on the respondents and therefore the data collected.

To give a simple example of this, the dynamic achieved between a researcher and respondent will be different if for example I told them I was no longer a practicing Christian before the interview than if I did not tell them. During the research I interviewed a respondent who I called Hope. At the beginning of the interview I shared no personal information with her but during the break in the middle of the interview she asked about my religious background. Upon telling her that I was raised in the Christian faith but had been struggling with my own spirituality for several years, the relationship changed. Rather than telling what I suspect she

thought I wanted to hear she began to fiercely analyse the traditions of the Church that she didn't agree with and why she thought the Church was out-dated. It was rather as if the shackles had been broken and image of me as a Christian man had been replaced by a Christian man who was not set in his ways so much that he would not question Christianity.

It has been a point well-made in the literature that the interviewer will affect the data collected. As Yip states:

> Social research is influenced by the research workers' personal characteristics. Our age, gender, linguistic ability and other qualities influence our ability to form relationships and gather information. (Yip 2008:2.5).

Yip here is talking about researcher reflexivity, a concept that has been defined thusly:

> Reflexivity requires an awareness of the researcher's contribution to the construction of meanings throughout the research process, and an acknowledgement of the impossibility of remaining 'outside of' one's subject matter while conducting research. Reflexivity then, urges us "to explore the ways in which a researcher's involvement with a particular study influences, acts upon and informs such research." (Nightingale and Cromby 1999: 228).

Writing about qualitative research in psychology, Willig (2001) has argued that in fact there are two forms of reflexivity: Personal and Epistemological. Willig (2001) defines these types rather succinctly and therefore I quote at length:

Personal reflexivity' involves reflecting upon the ways in which our own values, experiences, interests, beliefs, political commitments, wider aims in life and social identities have shaped the research. It also involves thinking about how the research may have affected and possibly changed us, as people and as researchers. 'Epistemological reflexivity' requires us to engage with questions such as: How has the research question defined and limited what can be 'found?' How has the design of the study and the method of analysis 'constructed' the data and the findings? How could the research question have been investigated differently? To what extent would this have given rise to a different understanding of the phenomenon under investigation? Thus, epistemological reflexivity encourages us to reflect upon the assumptions (about the world, about knowledge) that we have made in the course of the research, and it helps us to think about the implications of such assumptions for the research and its findings (Willig 2001:10)

As a qualitative researcher there has to be a consideration of both personal and epistemological reflexivity, and each idea has to be given consideration. With regards to being epistemologically reflexive, the fact that the area is under-researched meant that I could leave to research as open as possible and then allow the data to speak to me. This meant that in a way the research findings are as much about the data itself as the original research proposal. The personal epistemology is more complex however and requires consideration from seemingly trivial things such as what one wears whilst conducting the interview to the interaction between the researcher and respondent. In this context reflexivity is general viewed in negative terms where the researcher must be on their guard to

stop bias or to think about how they are presenting themselves. However, reflexivity can be used in order to assist the research. Heaphy (2008) points out that whilst considering how the 'social, cultural and academic positioning has shaped the narrative' (4.3) reflexivity is also about giving the interviewer something back, and giving them something to work with and to make the process more interactive.

Finlay (2002) has argued that how reflexivity is used is dependent upon the aims of the research project. The most powerful use it would seem is dissolving the boundaries of 'them' and 'us' or 'insider' and 'outsider'. This will be discussed in the following section but it is important here to say that reflexivity can be used if desired to situate the research within the 'inside' sphere and to become an ally to the cause.

Reflexivity however, has consequences for the interviewer as well as the actual data collected. Sampson et al. (2008) has warned against the 'cost' of reflexive research methods for the actual researcher. It is argued that in being reflexive and involving ourselves with other people's relationships will inevitably distress the person conducting the research. The summary they provide for this feminist approach is 'no pain, no gain' (Sampson et al 2008). Here it is the emotional burden that becomes problematic. If one is interviewing victims of violence for example as a victim of violence, then the emotional involvement will inevitably be very demanding. In this research project there were several times at which as I researcher I felt overwhelmed by the stories shared with me by complete strangers. One interview in particular with a respondent I called Alfred

who at 66 was one of the oldest respondents. During the interview he told me about been ostracised by his parents and the breakdown of his marriage through adultery on the part of his wife with his best and longest known friend. He told me of his boyfriend in Thailand who has stolen his money to pay for his marriage to his girlfriend. His three hour story was heartbreakingly tragic and I was the first (and maybe last) to ever hear it so openly and honestly. There was also the story of Kimberley who was raped in Church by her priest and the Church warden as a way of 'teaching' her not to have sexual interest in other women. Such emotional work is exhausting on the researcher and there are things which one would like to 'un-hear' but of course such stories of full of insight.

Reflexivity then can turn the interview process into a two-way conversation where we take Weber's lead and declare our biases (Yip 2008: 2.6). I can see several reasons why such an approach would be taken: Firstly, such openness would hopefully give one access to data as 'one of their own'. In being inside the group you are studying respondents would be more honest and forthcoming. Yet this can have consequences too, as will be discussed in the next section. Increased reflexivity could lead to easier access to potential respondents if gatekeepers know that there would be sympathy shown to potential respondents. A critical response to one's owns community is highly unlikely. Finally, respondents can relate to the telling of your story in order to reflect about their own narratives. If there is commonality with the stories data collection is likely to be easier. As discussed above, Hope's story is a good example of this.

Also, look at the interchange between myself and a respondent I called Eleanor:

> Eleanor: I'm not sure really…I guess the Church is important in terms of religious upbringing, you know with regards to sexuality.
>
> AT: At school we had a service every week. There was a little altar in school which had been blessed by the Bishop, I guess it was.
>
> Eleanor: Yes it starts young doesn't it…
>
> AT: The first thing I remember about school is being told by the priest that marriage is the most holy relationship…to be protected.
>
> Eleanor: Yes, I know what you mean. The Church is very much pro marriage and nothing else…

Such an exchange shows that if some sort of commonality can be achieved then there is more chance that the respondent will either remember something they have experienced or be able to relate to my story.

Yip (2008) has warned however, that there needs to be a distinction between 'doing' reflexivity and 'being' reflexive and it is the 'being' that is most useful. 'Doing' reflexivity seems to refer to a constant state where the interviewer's story becomes as important as the respondents', they are also forced to 'out' themselves, not simply in terms of sexuality (in my research) but also in terms of other key issues. 'Being' reflexive implies less involvement on the behalf of the researcher. It refers

to reacting rather than enacting in that the researcher is able to offer prompts to assist the respondent in relation to their own personal experiences rather than fully immersing themselves in the story. This therefore does not always require the researcher to disclose information that they do not desire to. This is a difficult area in qualitative research and something that I was always aware of when conducting interviews as will be discussed in the following section.

Situating Myself as the Researcher

The key issues that I had to address were whether to tell interviewees whether I was Christian or not and that I was not bisexual before conducting the interview. I could either tell them if they asked or to side-step the issue. I felt this was unethical and unfair to respondents who had given up time in order to help me. In order to be consistent I decided to tell respondents before the interview if it was raised. This took the form of a short explanation as to where I would indicate my personal involvement in the research area. This meant that in terms of sexuality I was setting myself up as an 'outsider'. However, as someone who was raised religiously I felt that in terms of their religious lives I could relate as an 'insider'.

There were three main concerns that I had to address:

1- Why I was doing this research. This was the most common

question I received from the respondents and usually came before the interview. The response had to be considered as my answer would affect how respondents related to me and the stories they would tell. My reasons for doing the research are grounded in an academic interest in that I am using the life-stories of bisexual Christians to look at identity, the role of support groups/networks and official Church standpoints on human sexuality. However, I indicated my own personal interest in the religious aspect of the research and this seem to effectively satisfy the query.

2- My sexuality. I took the standpoint that I would be open about my own sexuality although it put me partially outside of the community that I intended to investigate. Although, as I shall discuss, this is viewed as problematic by some scholars and researchers, I argue that the there are as many positive reasons for being outside of the participants' community. The interest in bisexuality stems from an academic interest. I feel that bisexuality, because it does not fit in the general schema of heterosexual/homosexual and the idea of monosexuality, it is possible that bisexuality can throw light upon human sexuality and expose Christian thinking as being too hetero-centric (for example). One criticism that could be levelled against this is that I am not a bisexual activist, but I would take issue with such an accusation. As someone who is

arguing that sexual and gender binarism is inaccurate, it is
clear to me that you can be not bisexual yet pro the bisexual
cause.

3- My religion/spirituality. Respondents were not as inquisitive
about my own religion, however I was open with respondents
that I had been brought up in a rather strict Anglican school
and attended Church at least weekly until the age of 16. More
recently my faith has not belonged within any particular
denomination. As religious individuals respondents took this to
mean I was a someone struggling with faith and opened up
particularly well when discussing the potential dissonance
between spirituality and sexuality.

Although being outside a group seems problematic, scholars are
not unanimous in this and warn that being an 'insider' can indeed
negatively affect the data collected. 'Insiders' may have: easier access,
stronger trust bonds, more empathetic understanding of the situation.
However, it is not this clear-cut. Naples (1992) in particular has suggested
that such categorisation of insider/outsider is problematic because as Yip
states the LGB population is not 'monolithic' (Yip 2008: 6.4). The LGB
community is diverse and cannot (just as the heterosexual community) be
neatly summarised in order to produce a model to which one must
conform. In a nutshell there is no archetypal bisexual individual. There are

examples where being outside of the community which is being studied can benefit the research taking place. For example being outside gives you potentially a less biased standing and respondents are less likely to try and provide 'safe' answers for fear of not being a valid member of their community. On the other hand there is the accusation that I cannot relate to the stories that participants are telling me because of my sexuality. I would firmly argue that as human beings we have enough general commonalities in order to empathise with each other even if we have different sexualities. We relate to each other in terms of family lives, relationships, education, spirituality. I do not subscribe to the school of thought which argues that in order to empathise we must be the same in every aspect. As Heaphy, Weeks and Donovan (1998) have pointed out difference is as important as similarity.

During the research process the respondents did not treat me as an outsider and there are no examples of a respondent not telling me something because of my own personal background. The overwhelming response was because I was conducting the research I must be in favour of their ideas and lifestyles. One respondent, Rose, brought this up during the interview:

Rose: Ok, but you said at the start you were Christian, that's fine. Everyone struggles with faith as well, so I get that. You will know what I mean, talking about faith. But sexuality?

AT: I'm not bisexual.

Rose: No, but you are doing this research so I guess you must be interested in things?

AT: Oh yeah of course, I'm not coming from a religious aspect...

Rose: I didn't think so, from what you were talking about. You are doing the research, so it will do good for the bisexual community.

AT: Well, yes, I hope so.

Rose here echoes a trend throughout the research process. I was a temporary insider in many ways because of my standpoint and wanting to do the research.

Conclusions

This chapter has been an exploration of two key issues of research methodology that I encountered when researching bisexual Christians. Firstly, how do you find a population without official support networks or groups, who may or may not be interspersed throughout religious and gay and lesbian communities? And secondly, how does reflexivity work in such research and what role does the researcher play in this.

The research found that through flexibility and snowballing in particular it is possible to allow respondents to come to you. If the potential respondents feel that the story that you intend to tell is important and beneficial to their community, or it will help in the quest for

knowledge, it is clear that people are willing to take part. This is of course, as mentioned, one of the potential drawbacks of the research and will continue being so for such projects as it is only possible to speak to those who want to talk. This is not necessarily a problem with this project specifically but all social research of this scale, it is difficult to find those who don't want to be found.

My research has implications in terms of methodology, specifically in regards to reflexivity and its importance in research non-heterosexuality. The interview is a two-way process in which the respondent gets some kind of physical and emotional value back from the researcher. The researcher plays a key role in relating to the stories being told and they can have a real impact on the type of information and quality of information that is shared. I found that being open and honest with the respondents allowed them to share with me as a confident. I am reminded again of the reaction of Alfred's interview. After the tape recorder stopped he told me that he had never told anyone about his sexuality before and that he had enjoyed the experience, he also got something from the interview, rather than it being simply a knowledge collection exercise. He said that sharing someone else's experiences and sharing his own helped him to work out some important things about where to go next. The stories were so personal that a number of the respondents requested that I kept their contact details to share news on publications and future research with them, which I have regularly done.

The research I undertook, in terms of the sociological content, has implications for the Church and religious policy makers. I found that the picture of bisexuality that had been constructed by the religious community was at odds with the bisexuality of which my respondents spoke. The project itself spoke to the sociology of religion, sexuality and identity, seeking to explore how bisexual individuals did their sexuality and spiritual identities simultaneously whilst being told by the Church and society that they were incompatible. I hope to explore contemporary Christianity further, specifically in relation to bisexuality. Little research has been done looking at specific Christian denominations and how their opinions differ. I also feel there is merit in the emerging body of work using personal diaries as a research tool and feel that this could be a future avenue of exploration for sensitive research topics.

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