

## **Marginal Marginalities Escaping the Double Bind: Double Complicity and Non-Monosexual Anti-Complicity**

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### **Introduction**

Marginalized groups, even when superficially resistant to mainstream ideology, often display the very same exclusionary tendencies they seek to defy. This paper deals with *non-monosexuality*<sup>1</sup>, an umbrella term covering bisexualities<sup>2</sup>, pansexualities, sexual curiosities, fluidities, and other forms of non-monosexual queerness. In LGBTQ+ spaces, just like in heteronormative spaces, one striking manifestation of these exclusionary tendencies is the following: non-monosexualities are discursively erased and under constant scrutiny as regards the 'truth value' of their identity label. In both spaces,

<sup>1</sup> The prefix *non-* may suggest that, instead of standing on its own, non-monosexuality is dependently defined through its negation of monosexuality. However, adopting the term *polysexuality* would create ambiguity since it already has acquired a very specific meaning (see e.g. *urbandictionary*). Moreover, *non-* can be made to signify the persisting marginality of non-monosexuals caused through their being 'damned' into a perpetual liminality between heterosexuality and homosexuality.

<sup>2</sup> Bisexualities are not singular: *bi-* refers to two sexual identities, but since the felt reality of a considerable number of people is such that there are more than two genders, *bi-* can refer to any two genders, not only male and female.

non-monosexuals are commonly considered transitional identities that lack 'authenticity' and need completion: while male non-monosexuals tend to be viewed as closeted gays, female non-monosexuals are often thought to be curious heterosexuals. This manifests itself discursively, with women who display or state same-sex desire being represented as 'heteroflexible'<sup>3</sup> considerably more often than men, who are persistently stereotyped as "straight, gay, or lying"<sup>4</sup>. The underlying assumption is that identities that are placed, and place themselves, beyond a system of binary oppositions must be impostors.

In that regard, LGBTQ+ spaces regularly mirror the discriminatory practices of heteronormative spaces: in the latter, a layer of mononormativity complements the normalizing forces of heteronormativity; LGBTQ+ spaces share the dominant discourse because they are likewise invested in identity politics. The discursive erasure of non-monosexualities is thus not only indicative of the queerphobia of heteronormative culture, but more importantly of monosexism as prevalent in both heteronormative and LGBTQ+ culture.

Viewed within both dominant and marginal spaces as non-unitary, fragmented, and less coherent, non-monosexualities cannot be parsed using a preformed dichotomy<sup>5</sup>. As Kenji Yoshino argues, homosexuals and heterosexuals have an 'epistemic contract',<sup>6</sup> tacitly agreed upon due to their shared interest in maintaining an immutable identity, leading them to

<sup>3</sup> Lisa Diamond: "I'm Straight, but I Kissed a Girl." The Trouble with American Media Representations of Female-Female Sexuality. In: *Feminism and Psychology*. Vol. 15, No. 1 (2005), pp. 104-110.

<sup>4</sup> Carey, qtd. in Meg Barker et al.: British Bisexuality. A Snapshot of Bisexual Representations and Identities in the United Kingdom. In: *Journal of Bisexuality*. Vol. 8 (2008). No pagination; the pages were counted. Here p. 10.

<sup>5</sup> The notion of *bi-erasure* is now well-established in academia and has become a useful concept criticizing mononormativity (see e.g. Yoshino 2000). Although useful conceptually, the term will not be utilized in the present analysis because it reifies the discursive erasure of non-monosexualities other than bisexuality unless *bisexuality only* is explicitly dealt with.

<sup>6</sup> Kenji Yoshino: The Epistemic Contract of Bisexual Erasure. In: *Faculty Scholarship Series*. Yale Law School Faculty Scholarship (2000), pp. 353-461, here p. 399. [http://digitalcommons.law.yale.edu/fss\\_papers/4384](http://digitalcommons.law.yale.edu/fss_papers/4384) (last viewed on 30 Dec. 2017).

strategically erase bisexual identities. Not the human cognitive inability to break up binary oppositions, but rather both straights' and gays'/lesbians' political investment in bi-erasure is decisive. After all, the dominant dichotomy *homosexual/heterosexual*, which positions bisexuality<sup>7</sup> as a mere transition, is contingent and could just as well be replaced by the dichotomy *monosexual/non-monosexual*, which does not place non-monosexuality as marginal. By representing homosexuality and heterosexuality as the only two categories available, *compulsory monosexuality*<sup>8</sup> perpetuates a system that validates homosexuality and heterosexuality as desired identities and that reifies the idea that non-monosexuality is a phase.

Since denying the existence of bisexuality implies that same-sex and cross-sex desire are mutually exclusive, the public performance of one's desire leads to one's being read as either straight or lesbian/gay; if, however, bisexuality were acknowledged as a fully valid identity by both the straight and gay/lesbian community, this acknowledgement would make it impossible for both communities to "safeguard a regime in which 'straightness' (or 'gayness') can be proved"<sup>9</sup>. Through their shared investment, then, both cultures may be considered accomplices in the maintenance of each other's identity politics: for straights to position themselves as the norm, it takes lesbian and gay identities to demarcate themselves from, and *vice versa*.

The current trend to view sexuality as spectral rather than categorical stands in contrast to the rigid binarisation of sexuality. Lisa Diamond,<sup>10</sup> in a large-scale survey on women's sexuality, found that sexual fluidity is the norm rather than the exception regardless of one's sexual orientation. While a considerable number of heterosexual-identified women report same sex

<sup>7</sup> The term *bisexuality* will only be used in reference to works where others have done so or where it is compared with other forms of non-monosexuality.

<sup>8</sup> Notion taken from: Maria San Filippo: *The B Word. Bisexuality in Contemporary Film and Television*. Bloomington 2013.

<sup>9</sup> Yoshino, *Epistemic*, p. 401.

<sup>10</sup> Lisa Diamond: *Sexual Fluidity. Understanding Women's Love and Desire*. London 2009.

attraction and activity, this applies less to heterosexual-identified men.<sup>11</sup> Homophobia and biphobia, Diamond suggests, are greater among men, which may lead them to underreport their sexual fluidity.<sup>12</sup> Although the notion of sexual fluidity, which questions the binarisation of sexuality, has been gaining momentum, it is still almost exclusively women who accept fluidity as part of their own sexual identity. Thus, the binarising forces of sexuality render spectrality a gendered phenomenon.

According to a 2015 survey, for young adults in the UK to identify as “not completely straight” – 1-5 on the Kinsey Scale – is much more common than it is for people from the age of 40 upwards. 43% of the 18-24-year-olds fall somewhere between “predominantly heterosexual, only incidentally homosexual” and “predominantly homosexual, only incidentally heterosexual”, as opposed to only 7% of people over 60.<sup>13</sup> To a lesser degree, the same tendency of spectrality in sexual self-identification can be found among young adults in the US.<sup>14</sup> Even though the Kinsey Scale has been around for over 60 years and has been embraced by parts of the LGBTQ+ community, terms such as *heteroflexible* or *homoflexible*, as well as the concept of sexual fluidity, have only recently been gaining salience, enabling people to inhabit decidedly non-categorical discursive positionalities. The surge of those newly introduced notions underpins the idea that sexuality is nowadays perceived to be much more fluid than the solid categories *homosexual* and *heterosexual* suggest – at least among the younger generations. In addition, the notion of *flexibility* further corroborates the idea that there are identities situated in-between homosexuality and

<sup>11</sup> Lisa Diamond: Sexual Fluidity in Males and Females. In: *Current Sexual Health Reports*. Vol. 8, No. 4 (2016), pp. 249-256.

<sup>12</sup> Diamond, Sexual Fluidity in Males and Females, p. 6.

<sup>13</sup> Will Dahlgreen, Anna-Elisabeth Shakespeare: 1 in 2 Young People Say They Are Not 100% Heterosexual, 2015, [https://d25d2506sfb94s.cloudfront.net/cumulus\\_uploads/document/7zv13z8mfn/YG-Archive-150813-%20Sexuality.pdf](https://d25d2506sfb94s.cloudfront.net/cumulus_uploads/document/7zv13z8mfn/YG-Archive-150813-%20Sexuality.pdf) (last viewed on 10 Dec. 2017).

<sup>14</sup> Casey E. Kopen et al.: Sexual Behavior, Sexual Attraction, and Sexual Orientation among Adults Aged 18-44 in the United States. Data from the 2011-2013 National Survey of Family Growth, 2016, <http://i2.cdn.turner.com/cnn/2016/images/01/06/nhsr88.pdf> (last viewed on 10 Dec. 2017).

heterosexuality, and, remarkably, also in-between bisexuality and the former two, undermining the dominant reading of bisexuality as an equal attraction to both female and male.

Taking into consideration several examples from contemporary culture and language use, the following twofold pattern will be illustrated: (1) both mainstream culture and LGBTQ+ culture have been largely complicit<sup>15</sup> in marginalizing non-monosexual identities by erasing the latter discursively and by accusing them of complicity in the other culture, respectively. This double bind of complicity prevents non-monosexuals from occupying subjectivities in either of the two cultures because both deny them compliance within their own space. Here, one form of complicity entails the other: both cultures are complicit in depicting non-monosexuals as frauds that are viewed as complicit in both cultures.

Conversely, (2) the tendency to adopt identity labels that contest binary oppositions, such as *queer* and *pansexual*, as well as identity labels that view sexuality as spectral, polar, and non-static, such as *-fluid* or *-flexible*, has increased. Hence there is a tendency to be *anti-complicit* in perpetuating binary oppositions in sexual identity. I adopt Afxentis Afxentiou, Robin Dunford, and Michael Neu's definition of *anti-complicity* as "a [collaborative] commitment to understanding and resisting structures that cause harm"<sup>16</sup>. This anti-complicity is part of a recent youth cultural identity politics in Western societies that counteracts sexual categorical stasis. Commonly referred to as 'Generation Y', and sometimes dubbed the 'gender fluid generation', this youth culture enables identities situated in the grey areas of opposed spaces to counteract stereotyping and claim validity. Young

<sup>15</sup> Rather than using complicity as a disciplinary tool of blame assignment, I adopt Paul Reynolds' definition of *complicity* as a rhetorical device that "highlight[s] the forms through which [...] dominatory orders are reproduced", in this case the dominatory order produced by monosexism. Paul Reynolds: Complicity as Political Rhetoric. Some Ethical and Political Reflections. In: Afxentis Afxentiou, Robin Dunford, Michael Neu (eds.): *Exploring Complicity. Concept, Cases and Critique*. London 2017, pp. 35-52, here p. 48.

<sup>16</sup> Afxentis Afxentiou, Robin Dunford, and Michael Neu (eds.): Introducing Complicity. In: *Exploring Complicity. Concept, Cases and Critique*. London 2017, pp. 1-16, here p. 12.

people's anti-complicity must be situated within post-feminism<sup>17</sup> and postmodernism, in that both "destabilise fixed definitions of gender [and sexuality] and [...] deconstruct authoritative paradigms and practices."<sup>18</sup> In addition to counteracting the erasure of bisexuality – an identity sometimes acknowledged but more regularly misread as either straight or gay – more marginal non-monosexualites, which have in turn been veiled by bisexuality and bisexual scholarship, are gradually being acknowledged. To use Gayatri Spivak's concept<sup>19</sup>, this acknowledgement implies a form of anti-complicity, as it were, of the subaltern *within* the subaltern.

### **Is Non-Monosexuality the Current Queer Other?**

Identities that are denied access to both heteronormative and LGBTQ+ spaces render visible the current connotation of the ever-changing, inherently slippery notion of *queerness*. In the present analysis, *queer* is considered a floating signifier<sup>20</sup>, one which absorbs rather than emits meaning and one which is constantly being negotiated, thus producing ever-shifting "[r]elations of domination and subordination"<sup>21</sup>; of Self and Other; and in terms of mainstream culture and subculture. In the words of Jasper Laybutt, "queer transcends any gender, any sexual persuasion and philosophy. Queerness is a state of being. It is also a lifestyle. It's something that's eternally the alternative. To both the gay and lesbian mainstream. What's queer now may not be queer in five years' time. If transgender queer

<sup>17</sup> Here, only one of many implications of post-feminism is stressed: post-feminism is not complicit in essentialising gender and sexual identities, whereas (first and second wave) feminism corroborates essentialist narratives of binary oppositions.

<sup>18</sup> Sarah Gamble (ed.): *The Routledge Companion to Feminism and Postfeminism*. London 2001, p. 277.

<sup>19</sup> Gayatri C. Spivak: Can the Subaltern Speak? In: Cary Nelson, Lawrence Grossberg (eds.): *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Urbana 1988, pp. 271-313. Thanks so much, Alexander Kurunczi, for this formulation of my idea.

<sup>20</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss: Introduction à l'Œuvre de Marcel Mauss. In: *Sociologie et Anthropologie* (1950), pp. 1-33.

<sup>21</sup> Elizabeth Grosz: Experimental Desire. Rethinking Queer Subjectivity. In: Donald E. Hall et al. (eds.): *The Routledge Queer Studies Reader*. London 2013, pp. 194-211, here p. 196.

was accepted by both communities, then there would be no queer. It's a reflection of the times you live in."<sup>22</sup>

*Queer*, which originally meant 'peculiar' or 'dubious', in the twentieth century was used as an insult for men who had same-sex intercourse before it was turned into a positive identity label by gays and lesbians towards the end of the century. The term has thus undergone a considerable semantic shift in a short period of time. Today, while it can signify 'gay' or 'lesbian', it is also used as an umbrella term for LGBTQ+ identities or as a political label that defies categorisation. The last definition, '*queer-as-opposition*', is essential in the present work, since it illustrates best how non-monosexualities (and other marginal identities) are perceived in present-day culture. *Queer* is used here to refer to identities that are the Other of mainstream culture as well as of LGBTQ+ subculture: being non-monosexual invokes being sexually spectral, rather than categorical; shifting, rather than immutable. Its opposition to the culturally validated monosexualities deconstructs the naturalness of the latter, which makes it clear that non-monosexuality can be read as a *queer* signifier.

Young adults' resistance to mono-normativity, just like other social movements, takes a long time to seep into mainstream society: "[t]he word 'movement' [...] suggests an accelerating transformation of consciousness among a group of oppressed people and a growing sense of collective power [...]. Prior to a movement's emergence its coming into being is difficult to imagine, but once it begins the initial problem of radical social change is solved and how people could have ever accepted their own powerlessness becomes increasingly difficult to imagine."<sup>23</sup> In order to render certain identities subjects and to introduce them into mainstream society, the boundaries of social conventions and discourse tend to be pushed further than mainstream society is instantly, and readily, willing to permit them to.

<sup>22</sup> Jasper Laybutt, qtd. in Grosz, *Experimental*, p. 194.

<sup>23</sup> Ellen DuBois: *Feminism and Suffrage. The Emergence of an Independent Women's Movement in America, 1848-1869*. Ithaca 1978, here p. 18.

During the first wave of feminism, women's marginal status in society prevented radical social change from taking place immediately. Although most social movements have suffered negative repercussions and backlash responses given the dominators' resistance to change, there has been a gradual blending of initially novel ideas into the mainstream. Non-monosexuals' anti-complicity may turn out to be characteristic of the dynamics that have been marking Western feminist movements throughout history<sup>24</sup>: "The wave metaphor has been meaningful because it captures the forward and backward movement, the ebb and flow, of feminism."<sup>25</sup>

### **Non-Monosexual Erasure and Resistance in Anglo-American (Popular) Culture**

There is ample evidence of the phenomenon of discursive bi-erasure and misrepresentation in popular culture: in British soap operas, bisexuality is depicted as a "temporary confusion on the way to becoming heterosexual or homosexual"<sup>26</sup>, rendering the characters "promiscuous wicked people with insatiable desires".<sup>27</sup> Bisexuals are furthermore viewed "in general as amoral, hedonistic spreaders of disease and disrupters of families".<sup>28</sup> For example, in the soap opera *Emmerdale*, (UK 1972-), Robert Sugden is a bisexual character constantly referred to as "turning gay". While he does come out as bisexual in later episodes, this is only after months of him being represented as a closeted gay. In episode 7643 he justifies his bisexuality to his boyfriend, explaining that it does not make him a promiscuous cheater. Bisexuality is framed here as part of a blame discourse revolving around unfaithfulness and promiscuity<sup>29</sup>. Indeed, considering the depiction of

<sup>24</sup> Rory Dicker: *A History of U.S. Feminisms*. Berkeley 2008, p. 5.

<sup>25</sup> Although it has been acknowledged that the wave metaphor fails to take into account ethnicities other than white, this metaphor can still be useful in describing movement-backlash dynamics.

<sup>26</sup> Barker et al., *British Bisexuality*, p.7.

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> Promiscuity carries negative connotations in contemporary Western society; just like non-monosexuality, non-monogamy is marginalized.



bisexuality in other televised series corroborates the notion that bisexuals are 'wicked':<sup>30</sup> for instance, *House of Cards* (USA 2013-) protagonist Frank Underwood is most evidently characterized as a 'wicked' cheater engaging in cross-sex as well as same-sex sexual encounters.

In the US American series *Orange is the New Black* (USA 2013-), although the character Piper Chapman is represented in both heterosexual and homosexual relationships, the 'b-word' is never used. This phenomenon has come to be referred to in popular culture as the "fear of the word 'bisexual'"<sup>31</sup>. It applies to almost all depictions of non-monosexuality in popular Anglo-American culture: unlike monosexual orientations, bisexuality is scarcely represented linguistically. Thus, for lack of interpellation, or due to misnaming, a fully valid subject status is not granted to bisexuals.<sup>32</sup> Instead, the trope of having been 'turned gay' is dominant, suggesting that the protagonist has moved from one stable sexuality to another. Bisexuality is acknowledged only tacitly as inherently liminal. While it is true for some non-monosexuals that their sexuality is felt to be changing over time and according to circumstances, the idea that non-monosexuality is a stable identity is not even entertained: it still is represented in a reductionist fashion, making it a stereotype rather than a type.

On the other hand, the increased visibility of queerness on television also yielded rounder depictions of non-monosexuality. For instance, in *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* (2015-), Darryl Whitefeather comes out to his co-workers with a song called "Getting Bi". The frequent repetition of the 'b-word' in the song

<sup>30</sup> While rejecting the idea that promiscuity is an inherently bad human trait, I here refer to its being very negatively connoted in contemporary Western culture. The 'slut' discourse is particularly salient when it comes to non-monosexuality – however, elaborating on this is beyond the confines of this work.

<sup>31</sup> Anna Pulley: Why Won't "Orange Is The New Black" Acknowledge That Bisexuals Exist? 2015, [https://www.buzzfeed.com/annapulley/bisexual-erasure-on-television?utm\\_term=.qdBW6YXNQ#.bk77DzgQL](https://www.buzzfeed.com/annapulley/bisexual-erasure-on-television?utm_term=.qdBW6YXNQ#.bk77DzgQL) (last viewed on 9 Dec. 17).

<sup>32</sup> Neither is the label *pansexual* used – however, the lack of representation of bisexuals, arguably the first non-monosexuality to undergo normalization, suggests that *no* form of non-monosexuality has been readily granted subject status in contemporary Western society: not until bisexuality is fully normalized do the more marginal non-monosexualities even start to undergo normalization.

breaks with the taboo of labelling bisexuality and the lyrics dispel negative stereotypes of bisexuality in a jocular fashion.<sup>33</sup> A well-received representation of non-monosexuality in UK television is Captain Jack Harkness, who stars in the relaunch of *Doctor Who*. Although applauded by the bisexual community, he is still stereotyped as “flamboyantly promiscuous, [or as Jack] puts it: ‘So many species, so little time’” and not explicitly labelled as bisexual.<sup>34</sup> Garber suggests that the hostility towards bisexuals is attributable to the assumption that no one person should ‘have it all’ – a formulation that invokes greed and excess. Garber, among other critics, argues that sexuality is still viewed by mainstream society as a choice – a choice either *for* or *against* something.<sup>35</sup>

Bi-erasure is a gendered form of misrepresentation: female non-monosexuals tend to be read as bi-curious heterosexuals catering to the male gaze, whereas men are misread as either “straight, gay or lying”<sup>36</sup>. Simon Hughes, a politician who openly resisted labelling, was misrepresented by *The Sun* as gay.<sup>37</sup> Conversely, female celebrities and reality TV stars who label themselves as bisexual are often dismissed by the British press and accused of “just being fashionable, or doing so for publicity purposes”.<sup>38</sup> TV shows such as *Bisexual Girls* (2003-2004), airing first, tellingly enough, as *BiCurious Girls* on channel Five, used postfeminist discourse that presented the protagonists’ sexuality as a commodified lifestyle choice ephemeral in nature, thereby perpetuating the stereotype that female bisexuality is indeed no more than curiosity.<sup>39</sup> The gendered nature of bi-erasure must be attributed to the power relations produced by

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5e7844P77Is> (last viewed on 19 Dec. 17).

<sup>34</sup> Barker et al., *British Bisexuality*, p. 9.

<sup>35</sup> Marjorie Garber: *Die Vielfalt des Begehrens. Bisexualität von Sappho bis Madonna*. Frankfurt am Main 2000 [1995], p. 44.

<sup>36</sup> Carey, qtd. in Barker et al., *British Bisexuality*, p. 10.

<sup>37</sup> Kavanagh, qtd. in Barker et al., *British Bisexuality*, p. 8.

<sup>38</sup> Barker et al., *British Bisexuality*, p. 10.

<sup>39</sup> *ibid.*, p. 11.

heteronormativity. Since the dichotomizing forces of mononormativity permeate the whole of society, like heteronormativity, “often through unspoken practices and institutional structures”,<sup>40</sup> most non-monosexuals’ attraction to both genders is presented as a phase, or, especially in the case of female bisexuals, as a mere marketing ploy. Since women’s sexuality is generally perceived as less threatening than is men’s, women tend to be moulded into some sort of ‘open-minded’ heterosexuality that caters to male heterosexual fantasies of having sex with (at least) two women. Also, since women’s sexuality is only validated in heteropatriarchal society when viewed in relation with men, women’s bisexuality is often read as bi-curiosity: while this is not to deny the validity of sexual curiosity, the tendency to read instances of female bisexuality as bi-curiosity casts bisexual women as ‘actual’ heterosexuals whose ‘open-mindedness’ is a strategy to attract men, excluding the possibility of an agentic female sexuality that does not revolve around men. In opposition to that, men, once having felt same-sex desire, can hardly return to a heterosexual identity.

Some women who have been part of the separatist lesbian-feminist movement in the 1980s and 1990s have come out as bisexual only later in life<sup>41</sup>. If we construe these lesbian-feminist communities as safe spaces accessible only to members, non-monosexuals’ free movement from this space to mainstream spaces would have been a rupture force, rendering the ‘safe’ space permeable. From a gay and lesbian angle, the idea that non-monosexuals deny their ‘actual’ homosexuality to maintain heteroprivileges whilst remaining members of LGBTQ+ culture is an enduring myth.<sup>42</sup> Including non-monosexuals in the gay and lesbian rights movement would thus have made for a less coherent protest. Homosexuals moreover have an interest in the erasure of non-monosexuality to “retain the immutability

<sup>40</sup> Siobhan Somerville: Queer. In: Bruce Burgett, Glenn Hendler (eds.): *Keywords. For American Cultural Studies*. New York 2007, pp. 187-191, here p. 190.

<sup>41</sup> David A. Gerstner (ed.): *Routledge International Encyclopedia of Queer Culture*. London 2011, here p. 82.

<sup>42</sup> Barker et al., *British Bisexuality*, p. 9.

defense”, since homosexuals “often defend their homosexuality by characterizing it as an immutable trait”.<sup>43</sup> From a heterosexual perspective, non-monosexuals are still perceived as hypersexual carriers of STDs: specifically, AIDS is still very much coded as a ‘gay’ disease carried over by non-monosexuals to mainstream society.

Fear of the non-monosexual Other is also evident in academia. Garber gives an example of a gay fellow academic, who is concerned that a theory on bisexuality might undermine the prominent position of lesbian and gay activism because it occupies a position in-between homosexuality and heterosexuality and hence thrusts scholarship on homosexuality out of the limelight.<sup>44</sup> It may be concluded that the inherently exclusionary tendencies of the identity politics of gay and lesbian circles “inevitably [exclude] potential subjects in the name of representation”<sup>45</sup>, thereby reproducing oppression based on sexuality only to secure one’s increasingly less marginal status.

Alongside negative depictions of non-monosexuality, we can witness a recent surge of anti-complicity in monosexuality and the gender binary. In British culture, ‘Mx.’, a honorific denoting either a non-binary or a non-specified gender identity, was first documented already in 1970<sup>46</sup>, but has only recently gained momentum. It is an option now in government departments, well-known companies and organisations, universities, and driving licences.

First pieces of evidence of a resistant youth culture can be found in the university context: students at Newcastle University, England, for instance, have started to counteract the binarisation of sexuality and gender: the university’s Students’ Council (NUSU) have a marginalised genders officer, who represents “Women, Trans and Non-Binary people” and who aims to

<sup>43</sup> Yoshino, *The Epistemic Contract of Bisexual Erasure*, p. 405.

<sup>44</sup> Garber, *Die Vielfalt des Begehrens*, p. 29.

<sup>45</sup> Annamarie Jagose: *Queer Theory. An Introduction*. New York 1996, p. 82.

<sup>46</sup> Oxforddictionaries. <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/mx> (last viewed on 18 Dec. 17).

tackle issues such as “#freeperiods, international women’s day, beyond the binary, gender neutral toilets, consent classes, lad culture [and] intersectionality”<sup>47</sup>. Also, the university’s feminist society has successfully pushed through gender neutral toilets on campus, which implies an effort to normalise hitherto *queer* identities. Since sexuality is “analytically distinct from gender but intimately bound with it, like two lines on a graph that have to intersect”<sup>48</sup>, shifts in the perception of gender may be indicative, too, of shifts in the perception of hitherto marginalized sexualities. Acknowledging that there are trans and non-binary gender identities entails that there must be an acknowledgement of sexualities hitherto unacknowledged, since most notions of sexuality are sex-of-object-choice oriented: acknowledging trans and non-binary identities is intimately bound up with the acceptance of sexualities defying the gender binary, such as pansexuality. Defying the binary means doing away with the assumption that non-monosexuality only denotes bisexuality. The deconstruction of the sexual and of the gender binary are mutually reifying.

#### **Resistance Enabled through Linguistic Change**

Finally, the documentation of different notions of non-monosexuality in the English language merits scrutiny. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines *bisexuality* as the sexual attraction “to individuals of both sexes”<sup>49</sup>. However, we must speak of *bisexualities* in the plural,<sup>50</sup> because they are situationally, culturally, and temporally sensitive: this includes, *simultaneous bisexuality* and *successive bisexuality*, to name but a few forms. Apart from bisexualities, still largely erased or mis-sexualized in discourse, both the asterisk/plus and the Q in the alphabetism LGBTQ+ mark linguistically what is still perceived as the queer Other within LGBTQ+ subculture and the

<sup>47</sup> Saffron Kershaw Mee: *Marginalised Genders*. Introducing Saffron, 2016, <https://www.nusu.co.uk/blogs/blog/gender/2016/09/24/Marginalised-Genders-Introducing-Saffron/> (last viewed on 10 Dec. 17).

<sup>48</sup> Susan Stryker: *Transgender History*. Berkeley 2008, p. 16.

<sup>49</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*: <http://www.oed.com> (last viewed on 14 Dec. 17).

<sup>50</sup> Garber, Vielfalt, p. 32.

dominant culture. This renders visible the widely held belief in Western societies that there are only two genders: male and female. The asterisk/plus often represents the intersection of marginalized gender identity and sexuality: a person who rejects both a binary identity label and a binary sexuality label faces even more eradication, oppression, and misrepresentation.

According to the OED, *pansexual* means not being “limited or inhibited in sexual choice with regards to gender or practice” and it is documented to first appear in this sense as late as 1969<sup>51</sup>. *Urbandictionary* also documents the usage of *pansexuality* for persons who “can love not only the traditional male and female genders, but also transgendered, androgynous, and gender fluid people”.<sup>52</sup> The fact that the term has only recently been included in dictionaries suggests that the idea of attraction to more than two genders is still novel.

The blend *heteroflexible*, not in the OED yet, refers to individuals that are “predominantly heterosexual but not exclusively so”<sup>53</sup>. Conversely, *homoflexible*, a backformation of *heteroflexible*, must be deemed more marked because the submission is still pending. According to cultural perception, being a bi-curious heterosexual is a lot more common than being a bi-curious homosexual. This could be considered a remnant of the 1970/80s lesbian and gay rights movement: to fight for rights and acceptance, there was a need to create unambiguous subject positions completely demarcated from heterosexuality. Today, *homoflexibility* is still far less commonly used than its counterpart, even though identity politics and the immutability argument have become much less vital for gays and lesbians.

<sup>51</sup> OED\_(last viewed on 14 Dec. 17).

<sup>52</sup> *Urbandictionary*: <http://www.urbandictionary.com> (last viewed on 19 Dec. 17).

<sup>53</sup> *Collins Dictionary*: <https://www.collinsdictionary.com> (last viewed on 19 Dec. 17).

Further, the definitions of *homoflexibility* and *heteroflexibility* suggest two things: first, the underlying 'truth' of both terms is that one is either actually straight or gay, and that occasional exceptions cannot be deemed serious romantic or sexual attraction; second, since *homoflexibility* as a term is far less common, LGBTQ+ society seems not to approve of its members' identification as part of the heterosexual mainstream. The top definitions on *Urbandictionary* of both *heteroflexible* and *homoflexible* suggest that same-sex and other-sex activity, respectively, are viewed as a slip-up involving lots of alcohol, rather than a fully conscious decision; as curiosity rather than a serious option; and as a fleeting whim of 'actual' monosexuals rather than a valid degree of non-monosexuality. Instead of being positioned somewhere on the sexuality spectrum, both identities are represented as *heterosexual* and *homosexual* in essence.

### **Conclusion**

By using complicity as a tool for analysis, the present paper aimed to elucidate that LGBTQ+ and heteronormative culture marginalize non-monosexuality through their mutual investment in upholding the stable identity categories *heterosexual/homosexual*. Acknowledging the possibility of non-monosexuality may fracture this ostensibly solid binary: accepting it as a viable alternative implies that the staging of straight and gay/lesbian identities no longer entails a negation of heterosexual or homosexual desires.

Moreover, subject status is not readily granted to non-monosexuals; subjectivities made available to non-monosexuals are marked by heavily biphobic stereotyping. While many non-monosexuals are characterized as hypersexual cheaters, others are moulded into heterosexual or homosexual identities because monosexuality is perceived as inherently 'inauthentic' in present-day Western culture.

Non-monosexuals are subdued by and become anti-complicit in mononormativity: many millennials self-identify as non-monosexual as opposed to older generations. Through the introduction of new notions, then, the possibility of a counter-discourse is opened up. Both self-identification and language change must be regarded as mutually constitutive and mutually reinforcing. From a Foucauldian point of view, the surge of new notions and

the shift towards plurality in sexual self-identification may be read as forms of resistance within the confines of established binary structures, for by questioning the *heterosexual/homosexual* binary a new binary opposition is created: bisexualities, pansexualities, pluralities, fluidities, and polarities are juxtaposed with mono-categories. Power is both enabling and confining: anti-complicity in mononormativity is productive of a new dichotomy; at the same time, this new dichotomy privileges bisexuality over other non-monosexualities and enables the former to undergo normalization first.

The newly emerging cultural anti-complicity in binarising sexuality, especially among young adults, is closely related to their anti-complicity in binarising gender identities. This intersection is still largely underrepresented in present-day Western culture. The double erasure is obvious since there is as yet ample research on bisexuality, biphobia, and bi-erasure – however, theorizing *bisexuality only* implies doing away with one mono-normative force and neglecting another: although definitions of bisexuality do vary, denoting attraction to *all* or to *two* genders, the prefix *bi-* is strongly suggestive of the latter definition. The dominant cultural reading of bisexuality implies an attraction to *both* genders, suggesting that there are only two viable options, male and female. Hence, while monosexuality's complicity in biphobia is overtly criticized in bisexual scholarship, this scholarship can be argued to be itself complicit in mononormativity. Other forms of non-monosexual queerness still remain largely undertheorized. Bisexuality is evidently normalized first. Can non-monosexualities other than bisexuality therefore be considered to be the current, yet ever-shifting, *queer* Other, a marginal marginality, within LGBTQ+ and mainstream culture?

This work, though analytical, is also invested in activism. While it does not try to deny the validity of bisexual scholarship, it proposes that more inclusive language be used, covering bisexualities as well as the more marginal non-monosexualities. This inclusion reflects more accurately the reality lived by many young adults in Anglo-American culture. Promoting anti-complicity in sexual and gender binaries in academia appears worthwhile. The present work intends to add a new twist to intersectional analyses: I suggest that more recently theorized, as yet less used analytical categories, such as non-binary, non-monosexual, and asexual identities, but also the newly emerging fields of (dis-)ability and neurodiversity, be put on an equal footing with the



quite well-established categories of race, class, and gender, in order not to reproduce power relations within feminist studies by privileging some marginalities over others.

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