This shows Hannah Scaife’s use of Thematic Analysis to code the excerpts from the interviews she undertook for her Master’s degree in Psychology (Scaife, 2016). This material is linked to an exercise to allow you to explore the application of Thematic Analysis which can be found in Chapter 11 of the book by Opie and Brown (2019).

Note: where (.) is used this indicates a very short pause and (.*n*) indicates a pause of approximately *n* seconds.

**Excerpts from interview transcripts: coded**

Participant W45YH

I: OK. In that case let’s get started. So, erm, with a focus on your own internal sense of self

W45YH: Mmhmm

I: can you describe to me the process by which you feel you’ve built an understanding of your own gender and sexual identities?

W45YH: That’s a big question.

I: (laugh)

W45YH: Ermm, it has been a long process. Obviously from – am I allowed to say how old I am?

I: yep

W45YH: from a child to age 26 and a half, quite a few years there and lots of different things have come into play, that have affected how I feel. So, the feeling, so, being young, I guess you could class me as a tomboy, then, wanted to wear boys’ clothes, play football, do all the boys’ stuff, it was that feeling of(.4), ‘am I a boy’? Erm, oh, wait, no I’m a lesbian, I don’t act like the people that I like, not like the people around me.

I: what do you mean by the people that you like?

W45YH: so the people that I fancied, and had relationships with. I was very different to them.

I: Mmhm.

W45YH: They were very feminine, I was quite the opposite. And I think there was this whole (.4) you know an (.4) it was like you had to label yourself, you know, categorise it all and I think I felt a pressure to (.3) erm, (.3) to work it out and be it, erm and at one point thinking that I was transsexual because I like the boys’ clothes, I do the boys’ things, I must be a boy.

I: When would you say that you felt like that?

W45YH: I was (.10) sss, fifteen? Seventeen? Fifteen seventeen::: erm.

I: and you don’t feel like that now?

W45YH: It’s it’s, no, it’s different now, it’s (.2), then it was, it felt like the options were you were a girl or you were a boy, you were straight, you were gay. That was it.

I: Mmhm

W45YH: Whereas now it’s brilliant, all these different terms are coming out. Pansexual, non binary, so it’s much more open, it’s not as rigid. So now after talking about it with friends, having bad reactions from family, erm, I’m kind of trying to work it out and speaking to a counsellor about it as well. It’s weird, self if the big thing about yourself; it’s the thing I didn’t want to admit or think about too much..

I: Mmhm

W45YH: ..go through phases of trying to work it out and then block it out. Erm..

I: Why, why do you think you wanted to block it out?

W45YH: Because it, it wasn’t the easy, it wasn’t the ‘I’m born a girl I feel like a girl I’m part of the majority I’m heterosexual’, it was the unknown, it was the minority. How many, how many people did I grow up with that were non binary? Well, there might have been a few but no one called it that..

I: Mmhm

W45YH: ..you were just, well, gay. Erm, yeah and there’s certain terms that I like, certain terms I don’t like. …..know that as well. Like I don’t like it when people say lesbian.

I: Why’s that?

W45YH: I just think the word itself is just, I think the way it’s been used (.) I think gay is better. It’s, for me, that’s that I prefer. Which is interesting because when I was at university doing a dissertation on performing gender, erm I found out that erm, er women who, cis [gender] women who identified as homosexual fought for the word lesbian.

I: Hmmm

W45YH: In the 70s I think it was. They didn’t want to be associated with ‘gay’, wanted their own, there was this whole movement. And when I said how people I knew liked to just say gay rather than lesbian …… my supervisor was very shocked, it’s kind of, changed. Erm but, self is a, is a, it’s a difficult one because you’re too close to it to work it out I think sometimes. And there’s so many different things at play. Society can make you feel many different ways without you realising. And the pressures and having to box it all. I think it’s great now with all these different terms.

I: What do you think is the process by which you’ve come to embrace different terms rather than just those binary gender and sexuality terms that you described before? Do you think that’s something that’s changed in society, do you think it’s that your personal experiences have opened it up for you, have you been exposed to something else, do you think it’s something that’s happened internally within you?

W45YH: I guess there’s a few different processes. Like, when I was growing up, you know, you had the dial up internet, so (.) whereas now everyone’s got internet on their phone, we’ve all got Facebook, the number of like erm there’s someone on Facebook, is it Lizzy the Lesbian or Lizzy the Lez or something.

I: I know it, yep.

W45YH: Every day there are interesting articles, and (.) great, moving stories and inspirational about not just lesbians but you know the whole (.1) rainbow, LGBT(.)Q(.) etc. Erm, so, the fact that it’s more visible, you know, as a group. It’s all more visible so that’s great, and then hearing the word ‘pansexual’ a lot more, and non binary a lot more, so (.) that wasn’t around when I was younger. You know, so it’s diff, that’s different, and also I don’t live in my home town where I was born and raised, I live away from home, which I think is great because I live somewhere where I went to university where there was an LGBT society, erm I have many queer friends here, so(.2) it’s (.2) it’s different it’s (.) like my world has opened up, in that way, when it comes to (.2) working out yourself, when it’s not, you know, the norm. Usual. Erm (.2) and yeah as you grow up and you have different relationships, I’ve always had support, for the most part, supportive relationships. Erm where (.3) you’ve got the space to kind of think about who you are and explore and yeah.

I: Do you mean romantic relationships, or?

W45YH: Mostly romantic, yes, yeah.

I: So you think that’s had an influence on how you understand your own identity?

W45YH: Definitely. When you’re, when you’re with someone who is supportive no matter what you, who you identify as then you’ve got room to explore. When you’re in, you know, your home town living with your parents and things are, aren’t understood and are weird or seen as weird, then you’re restricted, whereas being away from that and (.3) in a much more gay society up here in [city], then yeah, you’ve got more room to explore it.

I: You mentioned that for your (.2) university qualification you did a project that involved learning about gender and sexual identity. Do you think that your education has had an impact on how you understand yourself?

W45YH: Definitely, but it also caused a lot of confusion. So, looking into how we perform gender (.2) erm, and (.4) about, erm, (.), lots of different aspects of performance and gender made me question my own gender. Made me question, like, why I behave the way I behave, dress the way I dress, was it for me or was it for relationships, so that was quite interesting. But the fact that I went to that uni and did, I wanted to do that project, it just opened up so much literature that I didn’t know was out there, and finding out about performers who, whose work centred around gender, yeah, it opened up a lot that I wouldn’t have, that I don’t think I would’ve been exposed to if I hadn’t gone to that uni and done that degree, worked with that supervisor, etc.

Participant R67KJ

I: With a focus on your internal sense of self, your own identity, erm, can you describe the process by which you feel you built an understanding of your own gender and sexual identities?

R67KJ: [laugh]

I: It’s a big question isn’t it?

R67KJ: You know, it’s something I’ve never really thought about. I’ve always (.) known I’m a female and I’ve always been happy knowing that I’m a female. I’ve always been happy knowing that I’m a female who likes other females. It’s a bit of a (.3) as a child, I was never one of those (.2) I was a tomboy, but I had dolls. [laugh] I was quite happy to play, play with dolls. But then my brother had cars, I’d quite happily play with cars, I’d quite happily climb trees. I just, I’ve always known (.3) I think there are struggles with being female aren’t there? Getting used to (.4) it’s kind of, your teenage years isn’t it, when you start to get a bit of an identity. I was nonplussed, before that, as long as I was doing what I enjoyed. I used to wear dresses to parties [laugh] dresses when I was a teenager, but never (.) as I’ve got older, never been interested.

I: So what happened, when you were a teenager, can you remember when you first started to feel like, oh I don’t feel comfortable in a dress, or, or did that not happen?

R67KJ: Erm, I would wear them on special occasions, I was quite happy, I went to my, my leaving dos and proms and whatever in dresses, but I never (.) I just didn’t. I don’t think there was any defining moment. I think when I was 15, 16, is where (.2) I came to the conclusion that something’s not quite right with me. Like all my mates, you know, kissing boys and whatever and I had no, no desire. I did, but I had no desire to have a relationship with any of them, no desire to take anything any further, I just weren’t interested. Erm, so I (.2) at the age of 16 I think I was just like, nah, I was very concerned about who I was I think. Because I grew up in a, a village, so it weren’t spoke about. There was only one black person in the village, let alone, like, a gay person in the village, so, in the middle of England, so I just (.) thought no, just ignore it, it’s not, it’s just a phase, don’t think about it. Because I started (.) to feel attracted to girls (.2) but, at the back of my mind if that makes sense. Not, sort of, oh god I’m going to go and do something about it, because, at 16 in the 80s and 90s you didn’t, [laugh] you didn’t do it. There was nobody gay in school, there, you know, it was a case of just getting on with your life and (.) going out riding your bike [laugh].

I: So then, at what point do you think you decided to stop kind of ignoring it and thinking of it as a phase, and embrace it as who you are?

R67KJ: I think when I got to college, I mean this is all (.2) I think I’ve always known but never acted. So when I got to college, I (.) there was certain girls who, you know, you’d sort of daydream about I suppose, and think I, you know, I could see myself in a relationship with them or, or whatever, I never ever thought, you know, boys, I’d liked to have settled down, get married and have kids with a boy, it’s never (.) never entered my head. So (.2) I came out on the day of my A Level results, actually.

I: [laugh] big day!

R67KJ: [laugh] Yeah. To a friend. Erm, but it was one of them where I said aw don’t (.) and she said are you going to tell me you’re pregnant? I was like no. You going to tell me you’re gay? I was like yeah I think I am, but you know when, I just never wanted to say yes, I definitely am. I was like I think I am I don’t know, maybe I am, I’m not sure. Erm, just for a bit of denial to myself really, so I’ve got a get out clause, in case it weren’t true.

I: [laugh]

R67KJ: that I could then turn around and go oh actually no, it was just a phase. But the more I got into college and the more, and I, and I met a gay lad, and I don’t know it just felt a lot easier to tell my parents and.

I: so meeting somebody that you felt had a similar, sort of, feeling?

R67KJ: Yeah because he was really (.) camp (.) and there was no escaping the fact that he was gay, whereas for me I think a few people were surprised. But not because I’d been really really feminine and talking about boys all the time, but because I was kind of, a nothing, do you know what I mean, like I didn’t say one way or another what, who I was, erm, so yea it was, and then he was like aw we’ll go out. Because I did come out to a couple of people and he found out and we ended up becoming friends and going out on the scene and stuff. In fact, no actually, what happened, I (.) knew there was something not quite right, and I rung this phone number. I’d just passed my driving test and I thought I’m just (.) tell my mum and dad I’m going out for a drive, I went out for a drive and I found a phone box in the next town, rung this number, in this town, and I said I think I’m (.) gay, what do I do about it? This support thing, and they said you can come along to this youth session, erm, so I went out , just took myself off in the car and went to this session.

I: Hmm

R67KJ: met some people there, they were like oh you need to come over to [city], because we’ve got a bigger group there. And I went over there, and there was about 20, 30, like teenagers, young people in this group that I got friendly with, and went every week and didn’t tell my mum and dad [laugh] where I was going.

I: and do you think that made you feel differently about yourself, when you, when you had other people to, to talk to and a place where you could feel?

R67KJ: Yeah because you become almost, because I was in a village and I went to the next, the next city. It was only 20 minutes down the road but a whole different mentality. So you’ve got (.) people where it’s just an everyday thing, and, just sort of sat chatting to them and just talking about stuff and then we’d go to the local, erm, bar that was just around the corner and just went from there really, just sort of become more and more comfortable and I thought I can’t (.) I’ve had a very honest and very good relationship with my parents so I can’t not tell them so I ended up telling them. Erm, which didn’t go down well with my dad. My mum cried, my dad said to me, it’s not normal, it’s not natural, erm, but, you’re my daughter and I love you. And that was all he said on it. So (.) it’s a bit of a hard one really because there was that little bit of (.2) getting used to it and going yeah this is who I am and that ain’t going to change (.) to then it just becoming (.) me. Do you know what I mean? I’ve not had any massive revelation about it, I’ve not had any huge dramas about it. It’s just who I am, and I’ve been lucky enough for people in my life to accept it and to have a friendship circle that the majority of people are. So it’s not really (.) I do count my blessings with it. Especially when you see what some people go through to be themselves. But wheth, whether it’s because I’ve got a strong character anyway (.) it’s always been a (.) I’m \*\*\*\*, I (.) I like music, I like this, I like that, I just happen to be gay.

I: So it’s just one part of what makes up

R67KJ: yeah

I: your identity as a whole?

R67KJ: Yeah, I mean, when you first come out there’s that bit of a buzz isn’t there, because it’s a, unique and it’s unusual and people are like oh my god, especially back then, like in the 90s (.2) people were like ohh, you know, like didn’t know many gay people and stuff. Even when I first moved to [city], you would go on GaydarGirls and there would be 30 people (.) you, you just didn’t, people were so underground, you didn’t find people, they went, there was one club night that people went to (.) erm (.) and that was 2000. And then (.) as the years have gone by it’s crept up and crept up and there’s, you know, I just remember thinking to myself there’s 300 people

I: [laugh]

R67KJ: on Gaydar now. Do you know what I mean, and slowly but surely people have started to come out and feeling more confident to come out.

I: Hmm

R67KJ: and be themselves. But, for me I’ve really noticed it and I don’t know why. Probably because I’ve not had an issue with it, I don’t know.

I: Do you think when you moved away from home, that made any difference to how you felt? Moving to a new city and not living with family any more.

R67KJ: Yeah definitely. I mean I (.3) where I came to uni obviously I didn’t know anybody, my mum and dad just, you know, when I come to see [city], I was like yeah this, I’ve seen loads of unis and this is where I wanna be. Erm (.) and the first few weeks in [city] so you know people are just getting to know each other and and it’s like you know, and I (.) I just made no qualms about it, I was just like everybody knew from the off, who I was. Because I thought what is the point of coming here, somewhere new, somewhere where i can be me, myself, without old school friends who think they know me but don’t really know me. I can start afresh, and (.) meet people or whatever, erm (.) and everybody at halls was just absolutely fantastic, so, just, it was more about going out and I become more of a (.) a rocker than a gay person, do you know what I mean? [laugh] We used to wear our baggy jeans and chains and tshirts and go and dance and (.) it was just a secondary thing. It wasn’t the primary thing for me. Everything else was the primary thing of meeting friends (.) you know, forming friendships. I’d already had experience of female relationships before I went to uni so (.3) but, yeah, it was. It is better, being away from parents and stuff. Because I don’t want them to feel embarrassed, sounds really odd [laugh], I’m comfortable with who I am but I’m not naive to think that other people in the world are (.) are comfortable with it. I’m not one of them who likes to force my sexuality and my identity on other people.

I: Hmm

R67KJ: Do you know what I mean, I want, I don’t like going down the street and seeing straight people all over each other, so why should I, just because I’m gay think that I’ve got, do you know what I mean, the right to rub it in people’s faces. (.3) But people think that, you know, they’ve got that right.

I: Mmm. It’s interesting that you (.) are a person who recently got married.

R67KJ: [laugh] yeah

I: So, you, that obviously is like a public declaration of your relationship.

R67KJ: I think, if (.2) before gay marriage become legal, I was quite happy not to get married. I always, I almost find it as a bit of a, oh great, there’s no excuse now, to not get married, because we can. Erm, but I think again, it’s happened at this time in my life because I’ve met somebody who is worth it, who I actually love, and (.) everything’s sorted slotted into place. It’s going to sound a bit cliché, but our families get on, our friends get on, we both want the same things out of life, and I spent majority of the 20s thinking that’s what I want, but I’m not going to force that issue I’m going to quite happily enjoy me being me and you know, meeting women and, not being promiscuous but [laugh] do you know what I mean? When you’ve supressed something for so long, I suppose that’s another journey isn’t it, to find out who you are, and who your type is, and who you want to surround yourself with in your life of, not just relationships but friendships and what’s the point of surrounding yourself with people who are negative and don’t accept you for who you are? And it’s probably took, probably my dad the longest. My mum was fine, straight off, she was ringing places and saying my daughter’s gay is there anything, you know, and she got information and stuff of how to. My dad wasn’t interested, he wouldn’t be in the same room as, like, my first girlfriend. And then as the years have gone on, he’s always been worried about my career, more than about my sexuality, but what he probably doesn’t understand is that (.) bad as it sounds, your sexuality can probably get you more places in a career than (.) not. [laugh] Because people, it’s harder and harder to discriminate against people now isn’t it, so (.) daft as it sounds it’s probably an advantage, in some respects. Erm.

I: Do you think it’s had any impact on your career, either way?

R67KJ: Erm (.) well equality monitoring is supposed to be separate to the job isn’t it, but I would question how much that is, especially when those questions are asked in the first place. Why ask them? It’s not going towards somebody’s, you know, the BME community, there’s, especially in my profession, there’s not enough BME community in it. How are you going to tell that from an application form if someone isn’t saying ‘I’m black, white, British’, er, black minority ethnic.

I: Oh ok.

R67KJ: people, you’re not going to find out who those people are unless they’re telling you. So, and the same goes with sexuality, because the, people can’t discriminate.

I: Hmm

R67KJ: And then people then have to have balances within the workforce don’t they? To show that they’re diverse. But erm, yeah so (.) what was I talking about? Oh, my wedding. Yeah so now it was the right time that I felt (.) my parents were comfortable, B\*\*\*\*\*’s [wife’s] parents’ were comfortable, the families are really supportive (.2) erm, so, why not? [laugh] I know a lot of my mates would be like I can’t believe that you’ve got married after all the things you’ve said about gay marriage and whatever, but for me it’s about, it’s a security thing as well (.) it’s like (.) knowing someone’s there and I’m there for somebody else. And to me it doesn’t matter who that is, does it? In terms of gender, sexuality. It’s the connection you have.

I: Hmm

R67KJ: But yeah if you, if it was a few years ago nah, my, I wouldn’t have done it. Because, that’s why I didn’t want my dad to do a speech at the wedding, because I didn’t want to make him feel awkward if he didn’t want to do it. But obviously my mam was like well ‘you’re doing it’, so he ended up doing it [laugh].

Participant 2Q3DF

I: With a focus on your internal sense of self, can you describe the process by which you built your own understanding of your gender and sexual identities, as you understand them now?

2Q3DF: So I’ve always felt like I’m a girl. There’s never been any ambiguity. I’ve always been a kind of girly girl, or what I guess society you know dictates a girl should be. I’ve always worn dresses, I’ve always wanted to wear dresses, play with dolls. Ever since I can remember I’ve wanted to wear my mum’s high heels, and put on a lipstick, erm, dye my hair different colours, and I guess I’m just happy being a woman, I know that I’m meant to be a woman and you know I don’t ever look and guys and feel jealous other than the fact that they can take ten minutes to get ready [laugh] and I take two hours. But there’s been absolutely no kind of confusion or anything. Definitely 100% sure that I should be a woman. Erm, and in respect to my sexuality I always feel like I’ve always been attracted to men, erm, right from the off, and I’ve always gone after a particular type of man, I’m not sure why that is. Erm but I guess, and more so as I’ve got older, I’ve felt like I’ve become more attracted to women. I’ve always appreciated, you know like pretty women, erm but I guess the older I’ve got the more I’ve felt like it’s kind socially acceptable to do that. But I don’t know if, you know, because we’re becoming more liberal as a population, the kind of literature that I read are like buzzfeed and, you know where everyone’s really liberated, you can kind of say and do as you want as there’s no judgement, erm, I also think that my friends A\*\*\* and H\*\*\*\*\* have had a good influence in terms of you know not being judgemental and you know encouraging me to kind of explore stuff that I wouldn’t necessarily have done or thought was appropriate before.

I: Ok, so, you said you’ve always been attracted to a particular type of man.

2Q3DF: Yeah

I: what type of man is that?

2Q3DF: So, I guess manly, in the typical sense. So someone that’s strong, erm, in terms of like physical appearance, manly, I’m using a lot of stereotypes here [laugh] so broad, hairy, I guess the kind of alpha male type. And someone that would, can kind of protect me, even though I’m really independent I like someone that can kind of (.) take control and knows what he wants and can look after me, in a way, because I can be quite vulnerable.

I: So do you think more recently when you’ve been open to being physically attracted to women, do you look for similar qualities in women?

2Q3DF: Completely the opposite [laugh]. So now I’m kind of attracted to effeminate women, feminine women sorry. So I don’t, I definitely don’t get turned on by really kind of butch women, it’s the complete opposite. So, you know like curvy, beautiful (.) erm and I’m not sure why there’s such a (.) a difference between the two but yeah.

I: So would you say that the women that you find attractive look similar to what you find attractive in yourself, or how you would like to present?

2Q3DF: Yeah, 100%. Yeah.

I: So girly..?

2Q3DF: Girly, feminine, cute, I guess. Things I aspire to be.

I; Yeah?

2Q3DF: Yeah.

I: What do you think is the distinction then between how you feel about men and how you feel about women, sexually, relationship-wise?

2Q3DF: Erm, that’s a really hard question. I guess I, I’ve never wanted to be in a relationship with a woman, I just, I don’t feel that draw towards women in that particular way, it’s more a sexual thing. So I guess I don’t need women to look after me, I don’t need them to, you know, support me, in that sense. It’s purely sexual. Whereas with a man, I do (.) I am kind of drawn to that side of them and that, I think is why I would (.) want to be in a long term relationship with a man and get married to a man (.) erm, and the kind of (.) the sexual (.) stuff surrounding women is still relatively new as well so I don’t know if that might change as the years go on or if I’ll (.) you know stop fancying women all together and this is just about me exploring that at the minute, and just kind of finding out whether I do want to pursue it more or actually I am completely straight erm and just want a relationship with a man.

I: So what do you think, can you (.) can you reflect on the process by which you began to think that you could look at women sexually, if that’s not something that you’ve felt historically has been how you’ve

2Q3DF: To be honest I think at points throughout my life I’ve kind of always wondered what it would be like to have sex with a woman, erm, but (.) I don’t know my parents are quite traditional (.) I’m not sure, well, they love me unconditionally but (.) I think they would prefer that I was in a relationship with a man, so I’ve always kind of thought well (.) my parents I don’t know if my parents would be accepting so there’s no point even going there. Erm, but again as I’ve got older and you know my friends change and you know I start associating with different people who have different ideas about stuff, and that’s kind of become more (.) I’ve felt like I’ve accepted it a bit more. So I can allow myself to explore it a bit more. Erm, so yeah.

I: And it sounds like you feel certain that it won’t ever become more than just a sexual attraction to women.

2Q3DF: Yeah, yeah, right now, I just, I have absolutely no intention of having a relationship with a woman. And I just, I don’t know in my head it just doesn’t feel right (.) like having sex with them is one thing, but, to just be in a relationship and, I guess it would be a complete life transformation as well and I don’t know if that’s probably a bit daunting or because it’s so (.) different to what I’m used to, and what I built my whole belief system around, maybe that has something to do with it, but when I (.) look (.) to my future in like ten years’ time, I do want to be married and I do see that as being married to a man, not a woman.

I: Mm. So you talked about your parents. So at what point do you think that their influence became less of a priority in terms of your thoughts about your own relationships?

2Q3DF: Erm, I would think (.) I would say that up until maybe a couple of years ago, even throughout university, erm I didn’t sort of act on any urges I might have had toward women. I think it’s purely over the past couple of years like I’ve said because of the kind of friends that I surround myself with and (.) the stuff that I read, what I find interesting on Facebook for example. Yeah I think (.) yeah as I’ve g, as I’ve got towards my late 20s I’ve thought, ‘do you know what, it’s my life’, I can do what I want, you know I’m independent I live on my own I you know, have my own job I’m an adult, so I can make my own choices. And I kind of think as well, if (.) it’s just sexual with women that’s something that my parents aren’t going to know about, and what they don’t know about [laugh] can’t you know, hurt them. I mean (.2) if I were to (.) have a relationship with a woman I think my parents would, they’d be shocked, because obviously I’ve never kind of alluded to the fact that you know, I might feel that way towards women, but ultimately they love me and they would never, you know, disown me or, be nasty to me, but obviously my parents want grandkids and you know they (.) they want me to be happy though, so.

I: Do you think you would feel any differently about women if you didn’t feel that way about your parents’ expectations?

2Q3DF: Yeah maybe, I mean maybe if I’d have grown up in a household where my parents talked about (.)you know (.) not just ‘oh when you get older and you have a boyfriend’, cause that’s always been (.) you know the kind of done thing, maybe I’d be more open to having a relationship with a girl. But I still feel like, I don’t know, like there’s just something in myself that I wouldn’t feel quite right about doing that. Erm but I don’t know, maybe I just haven’t found the right person.

I: And do you feel certain that that person, whoever that turns out to be, is going to be masculine and male or do you feel like it could be different?

2Q3DF: If it was a man, yes, definitely. If it was a woman I feel like they would be feminine.

I: So there is, there is a chance that you could feel that way about a woman?

2Q3DF: I yeah, I definitely, yeah, there’s definitely a chance. You can’t rule anything out. Because ultimately if you, if you meet someone and you’re sexually attracted to them and you love everything about them then love is love. But I just (.) for whatever reason can’t see myself falling in love with a woman.

Participant 7FTN7

I: Erm with a focus on your internal sense of self, can you describe the process by which you feel you built an understanding of your own gender and sexual identities, please?

7FTN7: Ermmmm, so do you mean like, how I decided I was female and gay?

I: Yeah, if that’s how you identify yourself then the question is about by what process you feel you came to those conclusions.

7FTN7: Ok. Well. Erm I never, I’ve never thought of questioning my gender. Erm, you know, I’ve always assumed I was female. And there have been points in my life where I’ve felt like I haven’t fit in with the stereotype, because I’ve never been very stereotypically girly, never liked wearing dresses or wearing makeup or going shopping or hanging out with girls, kind of thing, or boys or anyone [laugh]. Erm so there’s been times you know in my life where I’ve felt self conscious about that or worried about that or (.) not like necessarily down about it but maybe a bit insecure about it. But erm, it never crossed my mind that I was anything else. I just felt like this is what I am, and this isn’t like most people, and that sucks, but then as I got older, I mean I also tried like being more girly, and to, to wear different clothes and do things that I was uncomfortable with you know, like going on nights out to like clubs and things wearing dresses and heels and things like that. Especially when I first came to uni I decided I was going to try and do that so I came to uni with dresses [laugh], erm (.) but that did not work and that made me extremely miserable and even more uncomfortable and I realised I am far more comfortable if I can just be myself, and (.) so then I just accepted that I can be my version of female and that’s fine, and I think reading a lot about feminism helped to get me to that point, where it’s like (.) however you are it’s fine. And you can define your own gender and your own version of being a girl. So I did that, and now I feel fine and comfortable with my gender identity even if that may sometimes be different from the stereotype. And, my sexuality, similar kind of story in that when I was younger in school and I started liking women, at first I was like ‘no, it’s fine, it’s not, it’s fine, you just wanna be friends with them’ [laugh], erm and then I realised that that wasn’t true so then I was like ‘no, I do fancy this girl, but it’s just this girl, that’s it, like, it’s just this girl’. But then I fancied more girls so then I identified within myself as bisexual for a while. Because I hadn’t told anyone at this point at all. Erm so I just decided, I just went with that for a while. But then as time went on I never felt any attraction towards men in any way and I wanted to explore being with women more because I had boyfriends but never girlfriends. Erm, so then I guess at some point around that stage I accepted to myself that I was gay, and and then I, when I first started wanting to speak to women in that way it was online. Before i told anyone in real life, and I started identifying as gay that way, like just from talking to people online, not through people who knew me, and then eventually when I felt more comfortable with that, that’s when I started telling people in real life. And I was never really, after that stage (.) and after like having my first girlfriend I was never really uncomfortable with it and there’s never been a problem with it since. Erm, so that’s how I came to being a gay female [laugh].

I: So you mentioned reading feminist literature, and that that had an impact on you feeling more comfortable accepting who were in terms of gender. So at what point did you get exposed to that and how did that happen, and were there any other things that you feel might have impacted on you reaching a point where you felt you could define your own female gender?

7FTN7: well (.) I think I was kind of completely oblivious to feminism errr, until (.) probably until I went to uni I think and my friend S\*\*\*\*\* who lives in Liverpool, was at a separate uni to me at the time, and she started speaking to me about it and giving me information about it, and introducing me to authors like Caitlin Moran erm (.) and I think then I just started reading more about it and then with Facebook becoming more of a thing I guess while I was in uni, and following news outlets on Facebook then you start to see more articles and get more information, and then, so I guess it started from there, and then I started exploring like feminist music, feminist books and things like that. And then I met H\*\*\*\*\* [laugh], erm and you know H\*\*\*\*\* had these ideas too, being more advanced in [their] life than I was when we met, erm and so then I shared things with H\*\*\*\*\*, so that was (.) that was how I kind of got introduced to feminism and made it kind of an integral part of my life, not just something that I read but something that I like really identified with and cared about. Erm (.) but then also there’s things about me even though I’m not stereotypically girly that are still really girly, like, I mean I’ve got big boobs [laugh], erm (.) and I don’t know I do like, I do wear like some makeup and things like that, so I just realised that nothing can like (.) make it, make me being a girl like, not legitimate. Because I am. And, and (.) and I think that’s it.

I: The other thing was about if you think that there’s other things, so now it sounds like as well as what you were reading at the time there were people that you met and knew that had an impact. Do you think that there’s anything else that contributed to you feeling like you had a greater understanding of your gender?

7FTN7: Hmmmm (.) I don’t think so, I don’t think there’s anything else.

I: Ok and, in terms of your sexuality, you said that it was easier to come out to people who weren’t part of your life at the time, so it sounds like in terms of what had an impact there it was having a space where you could discuss that and explore it without it impacting on your social or family life.

7FTN7: Yes.

I: So do you think there are any other things, is it, do you think that is the most integral thing in terms of being able to declare who you were?

7FTN7: Yeah I think so because it meant that you could like explore it, and kind of like try it on in a way, but without there being any consequences in your life if you changed your mind like it didn’t feel, obviously coming out felt like a big deal and if you do it you can’t change your mind. So doing it like online in this way meant that you could speak to people that were similar, read about stuff, and find out more about yourself before you took it out into a way that was going to impact you.

I: Did it, do you feel like you had any negative reactions either at that point or when you came out to people who were already in your life?

7FTN7: Erm not negative, no. Erm (.) nothing bad at all, nothing really negative. There were things like people thinking it was a phase, or, erm (.) people saying that it wasn’t a real thing or something like that, but nothing that I feel was like personal or nothing that ended badly for me really.

I: Do you think it made a difference then when you had relationships with women that it like legitimised it for other people, rather than them thinking that it was a phase?

7FTN7: Yeah, actually I didn’t want to come out until I had a girlfriend, probably maybe for that reason because I felt like it was easier to say to people ‘this is my girlfriend and I’m gay’ than by telling them that you’re gay because I guess yeah it made it seem more legitimate and I had more of a reason as well, so even things did go wrong then (.) I was doing it for someone.. not for someone because it was for myself as well, but it wasn’t like if it all went wrong I would lose everything. So maybe it was kind of like safety as well, like safety net.

Participant WZC8Y

I: So, with a focus on your internal sense of self, can you describe the process by which you think you built an understanding of your own gender and sexual identities?

WZC8Y: I think, I’ve always been aware that I’m a girl, and I’m probably quite stereotypically girly, and probably comes from the fact that I’ve always been put in dresses and played with dolls. But I’ve never thought against, rebelling against that, I’ve always been happy doing that. And I had, you know, stereotypical toys as a child, but then used to quite happily play with schools and Barbies and I was always mummy to something, I had a doll as a kid that [laugh] I think I was 7, and used to like treat her like a child and if I went to school and hadn’t put her in clean, my, leave her with my mum, and if my mum hadn’t put her in a clean dress when I got home from school I’d tell my mum off for [laugh] not looking after this doll, and she had like a car seat and a pram and literally went everywhere

I: [laugh] you committed!

WZC8Y: Yeah I was proper, I was like a proper 7 year old mum, I really was. Erm and then I think I’ve always been within those groups at school and just kind of like typically girly, I’ve never questioned that, I’ve never felt I should be anything different. Erm, and I think yeah always been happy in my body and who I am and my mind seems to fit with what I look like in a mirror, and things like that [laugh].

I: Good. And your sexual identity? What about the process of understanding that?

WZC8Y: That’s a longer story. Erm, I think I knew I was different from about 14; 13, 14, it was whenever Tipping the Velvet was on the TV.

I: [Laugh]

WZC8Y: And I remember that being on and being like ‘OK’. But I was very Christian upbringing, erm, never, was never appalled by the idea of being with men and so I thought I would grow out of it, so I had boyfriends and quite serious relationships, and people went home and met my mum and I lived with somebody, and was in heterosexual relationships until I was 24. Erm, had flings on the side, had threesomes, was interesting to boys because I liked to do things with girls. And then actually when I was about 24 I met my ex and realised it was more than that, and felt very different, for the first time felt a different kind of happiness, a different kind of erm, I can’t remember the words I’m looking for, just more real I think, more genuine. So even though I’d had happy relationships and I’d never been miserable and I’d never thought ‘ugh I don’t want to have sex with this person’ or ‘ugh this person isn’t what I want’, when I then was with a girl it just seemed to tick the boxes, it was on another level almost. She turned out to be an utter moron [laugh] but that’s beside the point. Erm, an absolutely hideous human being but in a way I’ve got her to thank for making me realise who I was, what I was, and initially making me very happy. Erm, and then it kind of went from there and (.) the Christian thing, my mum and stepdad weren’t great when I told them, it took a while. And my mum now has apologised for her behaviour [laugh]. It was not an easy time, coming out, but they’re on board with it now and we’re, you know, I’ve just recently got married and my mum was the most annoying mother of the bride ever with taking over [laugh]. But yeah it took a long time to come to terms, I think, with being gay (.) to accept it for myself to then be confident enough to (.) you know almost force other people to be accepting of it.

I: And what do you think influenced you in starting to accept that?

WZC8Y: I think you get, I was caught up in a moment and initially when I went for this drink with C\*\*\*\*\* after work one day, wasn’t with her and thought to ending up in a relationship with her or anything like that. But I’d always had this thing with girls, I’d slept with girls and had these kind of on/off, nothing serious, so when it started with her obviously initially it was just a fling and it would’ve just been another, you know, something until what I thought would be the next heterosexual erm relationship came along. And then actually as time developed and I was with her and saw how she was in her life and how her life was turning out, how accepting people were of her (.) and her life how she lived it, made you, me think actually ‘no this is where I fit more, this is where, how I feel’ and it fits better than where I’d tried to make myself fit for the whole of my life.

I: And do you think, it sounds like maybe the fact that she’d managed to come out and live that lifestyle quite happily, did that make you feel like that was more doable for you than it might have been?

WZC8Y: Yeah, and like how accepting her parents were of her and I mean she was butcher than me so I still have the problem now (.) problem trying, like if I was on my own trying to get into a gay bar, the amount of times I’ve been turned away because I don’t look gay, whereas if I was with C\*\*\*\*\*, or when I am with L\*\*\*, my wife now, or other people who I’m now friends with, you wouldn’t get turned away because people look more like what people expect lesbians to look like. So she was, so therefore her statement was she didn’t have to say anything because if you can’t tell by looking at me then you’re stupid, whereas with me (.) I still have to tell people. But then I think in a way that makes me more proud of it, because, they laugh at work that I will walk into somewhere and be like ‘hi, I’m B\*\*\*\*\*, I’m a lesbian’ [laugh]. It’s like, it’s maybe, maybe taking so long to come to terms with it means now that I’m really proud of it and I want everyone to know, because it’s something that I’ve had to kind of be happy with.

I: Interestingly we are kind of skipping ahead to one of my other questions.

WZC8Y: Sorry [laugh]

I: so I will bring that up now actually since we’re on the subject. Erm, which is about erm, the way that gender and sexual identities can influence and co-create one another, so erm, we’re kind of here talking about the role of masculinity or appearing or presenting as masculine, and how that erm intersects with being a lesbian, erm so do you think you’ve had different experiences yourself as a n, as a feminine presenting lesbian, and do you think that those two identities can influence how each other develops, like h, have you ever felt like maybe you wanted to try presenting as masculine so that you fit more into that stereotype, or have you ever felt like your identity as a lesbian is not as legitimate as a masculine presenting lesbian, or do you think they’re two completely separate things that are unrelated?

WZC8Y: No I think they are related, and I think each, each end of the spectrum you have your different problems, so I think when you’re a feminine lesbian you’re less likely to experience the prejudice if you’re a girl out in the street. No one would ever look at me and have kind of homophobic thoughts about me or look at me in disgust because they would never know unless they knew me or they saw me holding hands with Lucy, whereas I think obviously if you look what people think as a stereotype you’re more open to the kind of abuse and the looks and the, the people who just disagree. But then sometimes within your own community I, you do feel like you don’t fit, because it’s almost like why, but, with the day and age we’re in you shouldn’t have to conform to what society thinks you should look like, to feel a part of your own community. So you’re standing at a, a door to a gay bar and it’s like well why should I have to prove to you whether I’m gay or straight, I want to come into this bar to feel safe in an environment that’s meant for you know, where, the community I feel I fit in and you’re questioning whether I should be here. So I don’t know how you, then how do you go about proving that and sometimes you just have to walk away because unless you’re on the arm of somebody or you can randomly find somebody to snog [laugh] it’s, you can’t really prove it. So then that, that is a hard thing to, to deal with.

I: Do you think that your femininity made it, erm, less obvious to you that you m, were a lesbian or do you think it didn’t have any impact on.

WZC8Y: I think possibly, erm, I think it was easier to hide it from everybody, so even though, I mean at university I was playing around and I knew, you know I was having affairs or having like little experiments and experiences, but even my closest friends didn’t necessarily know about all of it because it’s the last thing they almost would’ve expected, and then when I did come out so many people said ‘well, we really didn’t expect it. So I think (.) it’s (.) I’ve lost my train of thought [laugh]. It’s erm, ah what was I talking about? Erm

I: Being feminine as a lesbian and how that impacts on your identity.

WZC8Y: Yeah it’s easier to hide, so I think like and because I’[d done such a good job of being straight and had not had unhappy relationships and kept it from my parents, it was harder for them. Because I obviously didn’t look like what they expected a lesbian to look like, erm.

I: Have you ever tried presenting as more masculine?

WZC8Y: No because I don’t think I’d really pull it off, erm, and one of the things my mum, I had to reassure my mum that I wasn’t going to like cut my hair off and start wearing dungarees and get rid of you know my dresses and makeup and things, and I was like that’s not what it’s about, that’s not what anyone is about, you don’t choose to feel how you feel, kind of thing. Erm, we did a gig once where, it was for Comic Relief, when I was at uni, and er we did a vice versa, so the horns section the guys put dresses on and we put tuxes on and drew moustaches, that’s about the most I’ve ever [laugh] come as kind of switching how I present. I just, it’s not me. And I’ve never felt that it needs to be me.

I: So it almost sounds like for you personally your gender and your sexuality have no relationship with one another but in terms of societal expectations there are expectations about how you look depending on your sexuality.

WZC8Y: Yeah. Yeah I think so, erm, which is why I think I’m always very, I’m very open with who and what I am. So I will always speak, you know if I’m speaking I’ll always use ‘she’ and it’s much easier now it’s wife because you have no confusion between partner and fiancé; it’s wife, she’s clearly a girl, the person I’m talking about, I’m clearly married to a woman. And I’m very open with that, I’ve never been shy of using the right, using a pronoun rather than making it just a ‘my partner’ erm. But in a way I have to do that else people wouldn’t know and then you have those conversations where you do say ‘oh my fiancé’, ‘oh what does he do?’, ‘well, she..’

I: [Laugh]

WZC8Y: and it’s, but yeah, I wouldn’t necessarily, I don’t think I, like you say, my, how I, the fact that I’m a woman and that I’m a lesbian and that I’m girly, I don’t necessarily think about that. But I do feel like I need to make that clear to society because they would never know.

I: OK

WZC8Y: But then why do I feel like I have to make that clear to society? That’s a can of worms I think [laugh]

I: Yes I agree [laugh], I have the same problems. Erm, just backtracking slightly, you talked about your parents’ religious beliefs. Would you say that you, er, have a religion? Do you affiliate with a religion?

WZC8Y: Yeah, I mean, we’re, a Christian upbringing and like real serious churchgoers and (.) so yeah twice on a Sunday a lot of the time when I was younger, and do music within church as well, so you, it’s such a family. And I think (.) it’s hard because I really want to believe it. I would class myself still as Christian. Erm, I’d like to think that there’s something bigger, but then, all the, you know, have the usual conflicts of well if there’s somebody why is the world so shit, why is there so much bad? But then I think that it’s that, it’s human comfort to look for something, just to, you know, put your eyes up to the sky and say ‘please can you help me’, or ‘please can this go right’, or ‘can you just make this person happy’ or ‘please show me a way to fix this problem’. Erm, so I’d like to think that there’s something there, erm that I have some faith in, there must be a purpose to everything and there must be a reason why you go through the things you go through and why the world is as it is.

I: Ok, and in that case, I have two questions based on that. One of which is what do you think has been the impact of your religious beliefs on your own feelings about your identity, and also how do you think that impacted er your relationship with your parents and their influence in terms of your identity.

WZC8Y: I think, it frustrates me that it, in a way hindered me being myself for so long. And I wonder sometimes you know how different would my uni years have been if I was out and I hadn’t spent those years in heterosexual relationships, sat with my friends going, you know, chasing boys and things, but then (.) the group of friends I’ve got are primarily, my university friends are all straight, so maybe if I’d have been in a different crowd of people they wouldn’t be my best friends, my best friend wouldn’t be my best friend, so therefore that must be one of the reasons why. So yes there is part of me that wishes, if I, I’d thought the world was more accepting or I hadn’t thought ‘well that’s not the right way to do things, this is the right way to do things, I’ll grow out of that it’s just a phase’, then I would be in a different place, but then maybe the world, the life wouldn’t have worked out. Maybe then C\*\*\*\*\* wouldn’t have been my first which wouldn’t have meant she wouldn’t have treated me like I did to then get the confidence from that. L\*\*\* [wife] kind of pieced me back together a little bit when we first met, and if I hadn’t have been in that state maybe that wouldn’t. So there’s the chain of events, erm, and I think with my parents there was a rocky few weeks or so, erm, I didn’t tell them in the best way. Because it’s hard to try and pick a time and a place, and in the end it, it was kind of blurted out [laugh]

I: [Laugh]

WZC8Y: And they weren’t great and they didn’t react very well, and it was upsetting and it made me really sad at the time. But it also made them sad and then I think also I presented such a, you know, a version of myself to them for so many years that it was a big shock. I hadn’t, they had no idea that I’d been dabbling, they had no ideas that I even had these thoughts, so to them, 24 years old, it’s a real, it was a bolt out of the blue and I think they, they didn’t react very well, but they also just needed some time to get their head around it, and I actually think our relationship’s stronger because of it, and I’m very close with them now. I talk to my mum more than I did before I came out because you’re always hiding something so you can’t really, if you’ve got such a big secret you can’t form a kind of truthful relationship if you’re keeping something so fundamental about yourself hidden from somebody. So now that there are no secrets it’s actually better and the foundations are true and they’re supportive and they absolutely love L\*\*\* [wife] and would, you know there was no question of of her being accepted into the family. They were there at the wedding, my dad and my stepdad made speeches, and everybody, they love her to pieces, some of the family photos with my dad and my stepdad hugging L\*\*\* [wife] and they look so happy in them. Just because, I mean, she is lovely and wha, they just want me to be happy.

I: So erm, when you first came out, did you come out to anybody before your parents, what was the process, did you come out to them because you were in a relationship or was it outside of that context, did you, did you speak to anybody else about it first?

WZC8Y: I had come out to people before then. My brother, I told my brother. I’ve always been very close with him. Erm and he was fine. I actually my, my, my dad, my biological dad in the, in Octo, in October. And I thought he would be the worst, and I was in actual tears on the phone to him because I thought there was, you know, I thought you’re going to hate me, you’re never going to talk to me again.

I: Like this October?

WZC8Y: No, like when I was 24 [laugh]

I: [Laugh] ok I see.

WZC8Y: So it would have been whenever.

I: So that was before or after?

WZC8Y: Before my mum. And, so my brother already knew, some friends knew, erm, a lot of my friends I kind of told in the summer when it was happening, so I got with C\*\*\*\*\* in July, August time, would have been about 2011, 10 or 11, 10 maybe. And my dad actually in the October, he called me and I was crying about, and he was like ‘what’s wrong what’s wrong?’ and I was like ‘oh I think I’m in love with a woman’, and he was just like, he was like ‘that’s fine’, he pulled his car over because I was crying and he was like ‘I thought you were going to tell me you’d killed somebody, but that’s fine, I don’t care, that’s great’, so the only thing he wouldn’t want me to ever do is kill someone [laugh] so that’s fine, that’s a long list of things I can do. So he was, he was really understanding. My brother was, had, didn’t bat an eyelid, but I think he’d been a bit more aware of it anyway, always been quite close with him so he knew of things that perhaps I’d been getting up to at uni and stuff. And I didn’t actually tell my mum until the January, as I was trying to find a time, I didn’t want to do it over the phone, I didn’t want to make that call and then put the phone down and not deal with it, erm, but then because I was then by then in a relationship with C\*\*\*\*\*, I was scared that something was going to go on Facebook, that she’d piece it together and I didn’t think it was right for her to either suss it out or hear it from somebody that wasn’t me. So I think (.) it came out when it did because it had to. Erm and it was, it was that thing of maybe telling them face to face wasn’t the best way, but I still think probably it was better than finding out through kind of a third party.

I: And what was your experience when you came out to other people, and who who, who were they?

WZC8Y: Most people were ok, like people were surprised, and there was quite a lot of shock and there were a few people who thought perhaps that was a phase, that it was just that I’d fallen for this person and it would be short lived and then I’d go back to what they’d always known, erm, but generally people were accepting I think, I’m from an artsy fartsy musician friends background, and every other person is gay and it’s just that it’s never an issue, it’s just it’s, it’s just recognised that people and people and who you love doesn’t matter who you love kind of thing. Erm, and my friends just were as I say probably a bit surprised but then very quickly just it was, then it became the norm. And I remember R\*\*\*\*\*, who’s my best friend, saying erm probably about a month or so after I’d told her, she was like ‘I don’t think I can remember what it was like when you were straight’ [laugh]. So it’s like, because I think they could see that I was more relaxed, and I was more you know they were seeing a more genuine me than they’d ever seen.

Participant 78NE5

I: So, can you describe the process by which you think you came to a conclusion about your gender and sexual identity?

78NE5: Yeah [laugh]. Ok well, when I was (.) 3, about 3 or 4, no 3, my brothers told me that God didn’t love me and didn’t give me a willy, but I was a boy [laugh].

I: Strong start [laugh].

78NE5: Yeah. Erm, so yeah, they told me I was a boy but God didn’t love me, erm, so I wasn’t as good as them [laugh].

I: [laugh]

LK: And I don’t know if I believed them, but obviously I knew that I looked different.

I: Yeah.

78NE5: But I think I was quite aware that there was other girls, so I was like, one of them. Erm, but (.) I did like wearing their clothes, and my mum was like really good. Well, the clothes we had were passed down so generally I wore them anyway. But if I wanted like erm, we all went to the market and they were getting boxer shorts, and I was like ‘I want a pair of boxer shorts’ so I was allowed to wear boxer shorts. Erm

I: Nice.

78NE5: Mm (.) and at nursery I was erm, I learnt to wee standing up after they [laugh] erm, said that I was a boy, and my best friend at nursery was Patrick, me and Patrick used to go to the toilet and I’d be like ‘I can do that as well’. Erm but then the nursery staff told my mum that she needed to talk to me because I can’t use the boys’ toilets. But then, at nursery I used to grab girls and try and kiss them, and they didn’t like that very much [laugh].

I: You did start early [laugh]

78NE5: Yeah. Erm, but at secondary school (.) I was like in the football and cricket teams and stuff, like the only girl in in them, but in the year above there was also a girl in them so I thought that was like alright. Because I, I thought it was just normal until other people said, like one school wouldn’t let me play because they were like ‘it’s against FIFA rules to let girls play’, so I had to sit out. Erm, so I think it’s generally other people (.) sort of saying ‘you’re a girl, you should be doing this’, erm and I remember at primary school as well a girl a year above, came up to me with all her mates and was like ‘you think you’re a boy don’t you?’, I was like ‘no I don’t think I’m a boy’, like ‘yeah you do, you play football, all your friends are boys, you think you’re a boy but you’re not’, and I was like ‘I don’t think I’m a boy’. I thought (.) I think I do think like a boy, like I play Kiss Cat on the boys’ team [laugh] so erm (.3) maybe I think like a boy, but I don’t think (.) I know I’m not a boy. What was the question?

I: How, well how did you feel about that? Feeling like, different? Did it bother you?

78NE5: It wasn’t too bad until I left (.) erm, because none of my boy friends, not boyfriends but my friends who were boys (.) said anything like that. Erm, it just seemed to be the girls who thought that it was really weird. And then, so my best friend throughout primary school was Harry, and when we got to secondary school he went to a mixed school, mum wanted me to go to an all girls’ school, which I was petrified about because I don’t like girls, I don’t, there’s, I don’t have girls who are my friends, like (.) so when I went there I had to make friends who were girls (.) and (.) I suppose being around more girls, it was, and like all different types of, like girly girls and not girly girls, so I felt a bit more normal there. I guess (.) but like (.) they all fancied like boybands, and I didn’t really, I think I fancied them [laugh]. But I don’t think I really knew that.

I: So at what point do you think that you started thinking about your sexuality and being attracted to girls?

78NE5: Well I had a naughty dream about girls when I was 11 (.) but I guess I sort of supressed it a bit maybe, and just sort of went along with sort of like if my friends said that they fancied this person I’d be like ‘oh yeah yeah, I fancy them’, erm (.). I think when I really, because I think I ignored it quite a lot. But when the first time I really really sort of realised, I was talking to, erm, my P.E. teacher. And she was talking to me and I was thinking ‘I really want to kiss you’. And and then I thought a while like after that like ‘ooh should I be thinking that? That’s a bit weird’.

I: How old were you then?

78NE5: 15. It was towards the end of secondary. Mm then we got to college and I was just desperate to lose my virginity because everyone was shagging. And (.) at, erm, 6th form there was a girl in my photography who erm I went to nursery with. One of the girls I tried to kiss all the time

I: [laugh]

78NE5: Erm, and she was friends with her, so this girl in my class was like ‘oh, so and so’s mum says that you’re a lesbian’, [laugh], like ‘no I’m not’, erm, I guess because there wasn’t really many about, or I didn’t know any, erm, and if someone tells me I’m something I like to go ‘no I’m not’. Erm (.) so I think I went the other way to sort of prove them wrong. Erm, and started like snogging loads of boys. But then there was a few girls who liked to go out and kiss girls, erm, and then I was like ‘oh maybe it’s like, not so weird’.

I: Yeah

78NE5: Erm (.) so I properly kissed a girl when I was 17, I think. But then I think I was like they were, like ‘it’s not a thing’, you know, it’s like, erm, but actually, going back to school, there was a girl called L\*\*\*\* and she had a girlfriend. Erm who was older, and not very nice. And I definitely didn’t fancy L\*\*\*\*, but I thought I fancied her girlfriend. Erm and I guess from then til I had my first girlfriend I’d thought about her, like, a lot.

I: When did you have your first girlfriend?

78NE5: When I was 19. And that was L\*\*\*\*’s ex girlfriend, the girl that I’d thought about a lot [laugh].

I: Good work!

78NE5: Yep, and she doesn’t remember me, I only met her once. But erm, I saw her in Silhouettes, and I was like ‘oh hi, you know L\*\*\*\* who I went to school with’. She was like ‘yeah’, I was like ‘I’ve met you once’ [laugh]. Yeah.

I: So did you tell anybody about it, at any point?

78NE5: Erm (.) when I was 18 I (.) was I 18? Yeah, and I’d come back from travelling, I’d met er, a gay guy while I was travelling, and I knew that I was going to meet him because he was a friend of Harry’s, who I was going out to see. And I was quite sort of eager to meet him, like I don’t, well, I suppose I did know why, but, and on the first night, erm we started drinking and I was like ‘so how did you know?’ like, just sort of wanting some confirmation I suppose. And that was the first time I’d sort of talked to anyone, and when I came back I told erm E\*\*\* [friend] that erm, I got really drunk and I said I think I might be bisexual. Think, I might be. I stressed that [laugh]. Erm and she was like ‘yeah yeah yeah it’s fine’, and I’m like ‘nooo it’s nottt’. Erm, and then I told my mum (.) when I was 19, when I first started going out with C\*\*.

I: Was it all right telling your family?

78NE5: No. Well it, telling my mum, I came in from a night out and she was sat watching telly and I was like ‘I’ve got something to tell you’. She was like ‘what?’, but she didn’t look at me, she carried on watching telly. And erm (.) I was like ‘it doesn’t matter, it doesn’t matter’. And this went on for, for about 10 times ‘I’ve got something to tell you’, ‘what?’, ‘I can’t tell you I can’t tell you’. I was like ‘I’ll write it down’. So I wrote ‘I’m gay’ on this bit of paper, and I passed her it, and she reached for it and I took it back, and this went on for ages, then, I gave her it. And she looked at it and then looked at me and went ‘do you think so, because I thought I was once?’. And I was like ‘yeah’, and then she went ‘aw that’s a shame because I always thought out of the three of you, you’d be the best one to have kids’ [laugh] and I went ‘I’m so sorryyyy’ and started crying, and I was like ‘don’t tell anyone’. She was like ‘I won’t’, I was like ‘don’t tell dad’. So over the next few days she was like ‘your dad wants to talk to you’, and I was like ‘why?’ and she was like ‘well I had to tell him’ and I was like ‘I told you not to say anything’. So eventually he caught up with me, I avoided him quite well for a while, and he, he came to my room (.) and sat on the sofa and just started crying and he said ‘is it something that I’ve done?’, and like ‘no don’t be silly’. Like, I’d seen him cry once before, and that was when his mum had just died, and it was in another room and I was sort of spying through the door, like I’d never actually seen him cry. So I just felt really really awful. Erm, and it didn’t help as well that C\*\* [ex partner] wasn’t very nice and didn’t get along with them. And I sort of took myself (.) away from them a bit. But my brothers were fine about it.

I: And then how did it, how has it evolved with your parents then?

78NE5: Think, they’ve got better, but I’ve always sort of felt that erm (.) well, when \*\*\* [brother] came back from London one time he was like, he went to get some cream cakes with my dad, and he said as they were walking along, he said ‘oh dad I’ve got some good news’ and he was like ‘oh what?’ and he went ‘\*\*\*\*’s [interviewee] erm, split up with C\*\* [ex partner]’, and apparently his face like lit up and he went ‘oh good’, ‘and she’s got someone else’, and he went ‘ really, really? Is it a boy?’. And it was like ‘no, it’s a girl’. And then his face dropped and was like ‘nooo’. Erm, but he he’s got better, but not until I suppose (.) over the past 4 years that I think he’s really sort of accepted it and I’ve heard him (.) sort of, when gay marriage was legalised and stuff, erm, I was with him like watching the news and he’s like ‘what, has this only just happened? This is ridiculous’ and seemed quite sort of pro, erm, which is nice. And er, he really got along with L\*\*\* [ex partner #2], and (.) like asked if I wanted to get married and stuff, whereas before I think I was partly against that because I’d think my parents wouldn’t think of it as if my brothers got married to women, that it wouldn’t be sort of seen the same. Erm.

I: So you said that when you came out to E\*\*\*

78NE5: Yeah

I: You told her you were bisexual.

78NE5: Yeah

I: Did you think that you were bisexual then, or were you just trying to opt for a safer option?

78NE5: I think it was a safer option.

I: What made you feel like you could talk to her about it? I’m just thinking because 18, that’s quite late on, if you’d have been from nursery even

78NE5: Yeah

I: feeling that way, but then you didn’t have that conversation with anybody until you were 18.

78NE5: It’s a long time [laugh]

I: Yeah, like, what do you think got you to the point where you were like ‘I need to have this conversation now’, or ‘I can have this conversation now’?

78NE5: Erm, alcohol, probably, was a big factor [laugh]. Erm, I guess (.) people were a bit more, like the people around me were a bit more worldly. People knew more gay people, and I (.) I sort of realised that they were comfortable with that so I could be more comfortable.

I: Do you think it made a difference meeting somebody who was out?

78NE5: Yes, definitely, because (.) yeah. I don’t think my parents have got any friends who are. Just all the sort of talk around it, like especially at an all-girls school is like, you couldn’t do anything. You couldn’t look at somebody because then you were a lesbian, like, it was all quite, used in like a negative way.

I: Yeah

78NE5: So that was something that you didn’t want to be.

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