Bisexuality, Organisations, and Capitalism

This chapter addresses bisexuality, organisations, and capitalism. It focuses, firstly, on bisexual people as actors within workplace organisations, and secondly, on the ways in which certain bisexualities are commodified in order to generate profit. Commodification is defined here as the transformation of social processes and identities into ‘things’ that can be used to make money. The chapter explores the ways in which the commodification of bisexuality takes place in different ways in various sectors, including the sex industries and the media.

The chapter aims to help remedy the bias in the existing bisexuality-related literature, which is weighted towards issues of identity and of sexualities within private and community spheres. It also addresses the relative deficit of scholarship concerning sexuality in organisations (see Hearn and Parkin, 2001; Wilson, 2003). The chapter speaks to the literature concerning the equality of LGB people in organisations (see Colgan et al., 2007, 2009; Monro, 2007; Richardson and Monro, 2012). It focuses on providing an overview of bisexual people’s experiences of employment, and an analysis of their views regarding the sectors where bisexuality is commodified. The chapter is focused on two countries where bisexual people have some human rights (the UK and USA, although the legal situation for bisexuels varies across different US states), and other forms of analysis are required for countries where this is not the case.

This chapter argues that bisexuality is rendered marginal within the statutory, voluntary, and private sectors of employment. In contrast, some types of bisexuality are an important part of the practices present in organisations which commodify sexualities, particularly the sex industries (see, for example, Capiola et al., 2014). The chapter is underpinned by the observation that variations across these sectors are
related to the operation of capitalism, together with heterosexism and mononormativity. Within workplace contexts, processes of heterosexualised domesticisation and desexualisation may render bisexual people unable to express their identities in the ways that heterosexual people can (for example being able to talk about partners at work). This leads to bisexual marginalisation and erasure, and it may be linked to organisational anxieties about non-heterosexualities generally (see Richardson and Monro, 2013). The erasures of bisexuality within the public sphere of mainstream employment may fuel the relegation of (certain) visible bisexual behaviours to sex industry or dating website spaces, which means that people may have to pay if they wish to access them. This relegation of bisexuality away from quotidian spaces and into the commercialised sex industries works to fuel neoliberal accumulation; if all bisexual sexualities were socially acceptable, there might be less of a commercial market for images and activities that are framed as ‘bisexual’.

The chapter addresses bisexual hypersexualisation, which is a theme cutting across both mainstream workplace organisations and the sex industries. ‘Hypersexualised bisexuality’ refers to the discursive framing of bisexual people (and others involved in bisexual behaviours) in such a way as to prioritise their sexuality over other aspects of their identity, and also to frame bisexuals as being people who are very sexual in particular ways (for example promiscuous and sexually adventurous). The hypersexualised construction of bisexuality means that bisexuals are likely to be especially marginalised in mainstream organisations, given the way in which they are constructed as public spaces and ‘sexuality is [seen as] the antithesis of what organisation is about. Organisation is about control, instrumental rationality and the suppression of instinct as emotion’ (Wilson, 2003, p.193). The hypersexualisation of bisexual people is an issue that emerges from the research about bisexuality in the UK as well as elsewhere; it underpins some of the stigma that bisexual people face within workplace organisations and elsewhere. In contrast to lesbian and gay identities, which have been subject to a degree of domesticisation (see Chapters 1, 4, and 6), bisexuality continues to be associated, within dominant discursive frameworks, primarily with sex and sexuality.

The chapter adopts a materialist feminist framework (see Evans, 1993; Richardson et al., 2006; Hines, 2010), building on the themes outlined in Chapter 2, and speaking to Monro’s (2010a) assertions about the need for a materialist turn in sexuality and gender studies. In particular there is a concern in this chapter with lived and socially situated