

BISEXUALITY: a critical reader

EDITED BY MERL STORR

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BISEXUALITY: A CRITICAL READER

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This collection includes sections on:

- the genealogy of the concept of bisexuality
- bisexual identities and bisexual behaviours
- bisexual epistemologies
- the inner dynamics of bisexuality and its possible future in cyberspace

Bisexuality: A Critical Reader presents work by leading scholars in an easy-to-read format. Merl Storr's introductions give a straightforward overview of the texts included and set them clearly in the context of debates on bisexuality.

Merl Storr lectures in sociology at the University of East London.

BISEXUALITY

A critical reader

Merl Storr



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A NOTE ON THE TEXT

To distinguish my own editorial interventions (including my standardizations of referencing formats) from the words of the authors whose work is reproduced in this volume, a different typeface has been used in either case. Throughout the book, the authors' material appears in a serif typeface and my words, both in editorial introductions and in interventions in footnotes and references, appear in a sans serif typeface.

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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

This book is not *Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About Bisexuality But Were Too Afraid to Ask*. It does not aim to be comprehensive, or even to offer a representative sample of published work on bisexuality. It does aim, however, to introduce its readers to the *concept(s)* of bisexuality, and to some of the key areas of debate about what bisexuality means and how the concept(s) might be used.

It is the concern with concepts that provides the overall rationale for this book. This book is a critical reader on bisexuality in the sense that it aims to encourage you, the reader, to interrogate the concept of bisexuality: to think critically about where it has come from and how its origins continue to shape it in contemporary debates; to examine not just its potential for opening up new ways of understanding gender and sexuality, but also its potential for obscuring or even foreclosing new understandings—its limitations as well as its possibilities. It is important to make clear right away that this book is about bisexuality and not about bisexuals: although many of the texts selected are written by and/or about self-identified bisexuals, this is not the basis on which they have been selected. Indeed, one of the book's main intentions, as I will explain below, is to show not only how the notion of 'being bisexual' has been problematized in recent debates, but also, in some respects, how limited its historical and cultural relevance is, even today.

In selecting texts for inclusion in this book, I have tried to strike a balance between three main criteria: work that has had a lasting influence on understandings of bisexuality, and which in this sense is historically important; work which offers an example of a particular trend or concern in writing and research about bisexuality; and work which is particularly innovative, or makes a particularly insightful contribution to the debates. Arriving at the final selection has not been easy, not least because (contrary to what seems to be a fairly widespread misconception) the literature on bisexuality is absolutely vast, spanning

virtually all of the disciplines within the humanities and social sciences as well as sexology, psychiatry, psychology, epidemiology and biological fields. The vastness of the literature on the one hand, together with the balance of selection criteria on the other, has meant that many well-known and/or interesting texts have had to be excluded. Some of these excluded texts were widely read in their day (and in some cases still are), but conceptually they either do not differ markedly from some other work which is included in this book, or else have become so dated in the light of more recent work that they are no longer relevant to current debates. Still others, to my regret, have had to be excluded for simple reasons of space. Rather than produce an endless list of 'further reading' to compensate for these exclusions, I can only emphasize that my selection is by no means the definitive or only possible one, and hope in turn that you will find the material I *have* included sufficiently lively and interesting to inspire you to read more, both in the original works from which I have taken extracts, and in the wider literature signposted by the respective chapters of this book.

Bisexuality: A Critical Reader is deliberately multidisciplinary in scope. This is largely an inevitable result of the breadth of the literature on the topic, but I also have another motive—to promote further cross-fertilization of ideas among disciplines which do not often have much contact with one another. Epidemiologists do not often read the work of literary critics, and vice versa. While some of the chapters in this book (most strikingly, perhaps, that by Eadie) are strongly interdisciplinary in their approach to the topic, others are not, and some important debates about bisexuality appear to have been conducted in isolation from others which could offer valuable insights. Herdt's critical discussion, from an anthropological perspective, of the idea of bisexuality as 'fluidity' in Chapter 18, for example, is not widely cited by participants in the recent debates over bisexuality and epistemology, despite the common appearance of the term 'fluidity' in those debates. Those debates in turn appear to have had little impact on, for example, sexological approaches to bisexuality. Of course, different disciplines have different interests and objectives, and employ different methodologies accordingly, and I am not proposing that we do away with disciplines and disciplinary boundaries altogether—but that does not mean either that different disciplines have nothing to offer one another, or that reading work from different disciplines side by side in a book such as this cannot be fruitful.

The texts included in this book are organized into four parts: genealogy of the concept of bisexuality; bisexual identity and bisexual behaviour; bisexual epistemologies; and differences. I have provided

each chapter with a short editorial introduction, which sketches the context for the chapter (many, though not all, of which are extracts from larger works) and indicates some particular points of interest or importance. Each part, and each chapter within the parts, is presented so that it can stand alone—in other words, it is not necessary to sit down and read the whole book, or to read the various chapters or parts in any particular order, to make sense of individual chapters. But, conversely, the introductions are framed so that the reader is able to move progressively from one chapter or part to the next, if desired, and the introductions will also direct you to chapters which engage with, or relate to, one another, so that you may follow particular trains of thought as they thread in and out of the book as a whole.

There is one key question, however, which runs through all the chapters, and which I would like to set out here: the question of what bisexuality *is*. This question in fact falls into two parts. First, there is the question of what bisexuality actually consists in—what the two parts of the 'bi' in bisexuality actually are.¹ As Bowie (1992) and others have pointed out, there have broadly been three answers to this question, invoked in different ways and at different times by different authors. One response has been that bisexuality consists in maleness and femaleness, in a biological or anatomical sense, so that physical features such as male nipples and female facial hair are described as signs of human 'bisexuality': this meaning was particularly common in medical and sexological debates during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and appears in the discussion by Ellis in Chapter 1. Another response has been that bisexuality consists in masculinity and femininity, in a psychological sense: the most famous and influential author to advance this view has been Freud, who discusses bisexuality in Chapter 2. The third response is that bisexuality consists in heterosexuality and homosexuality. The second and third of these three definitions of bisexuality have had a greater and longer-lasting influence than the first, although the third (heterosexuality/homosexuality) is by far the most commonly used today. The definitive shift (outside of medical and psychiatric circles, at least) away from masculinity/femininity towards heterosexuality/homosexuality in fact seems to have occurred during the 1970s. This may in large part be attributable to the impact of the gay liberation movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s, and perhaps especially to the successful campaign to remove homosexuality from the 'official' list of sexual pathologies in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM) — the handbook of the US psychiatric profession — in 1973 (Fox 1996). The pathologization of homosexuality had long rested on its characterization

as an inappropriately gendered desire—a 'feminine' desire for men in male homosexuals, or a 'masculine' desire for women in lesbians. This strict correlation between gender and sexual object choice, such that desire for men is always feminine and desire for women always masculine, was vigorously challenged by the gay liberation movement, as indeed it continues to be today (Butler 1990, 1993; Weeks 1977). The popular force of this challenge, represented by the rewriting of the DSM in 1973, arguably dissociated (at least to some extent, if not entirely) ideas of masculinity and femininity from sexual object choice, so that now an individual's preference for male or female partners—or both—was no longer regarded as a question of masculinity or femininity—or both—but of heterosexuality or homo-sexuality—or both. So from the 1970s onwards one finds the heterosexual/homosexual definition of bisexuality steadily superseding the masculine/feminine definition, although the latter continues to haunt the former even now, especially in the discourses of those outside sexual minority communities.

The second question about what bisexuality *is* concerns the relationship between its two elements (maleness/femaleness, masculinity/femininity or heterosexuality/homosexuality). Is bisexuality a *combination* of these two elements, a mixture whose various proportions may (or may not) be measured? Or is it rather that its two elements are points at either end of a linear scale, with bisexuality situated at a third point *between* them? If bisexuality is regarded as a matter of heterosexuality and homosexuality, for example, does it mark a boundary which separates homosexuality from heterosexuality, or does it rather unite them? This second question is rather more subtle than the first, and it is not always explicitly acknowledged as a question, although it is always at least tacitly present in discussions of bisexuality. As the introduction to Chapter 6 suggests, for example, something as apparently insignificant as the redrawing of a graph can radically change one's working definition of bisexuality from one conception to the other. The two conceptions co-exist, and form an unspoken 'dilemma' for discussions of bisexuality which the chapters that follow address, some more explicitly than others.

The first part of the book, on the genealogy of the concept of bisexuality, traces the ancestry of the current concept(s) of bisexuality back to the ground-breaking sexological work of Henry Havelock Ellis. (Ellis was not the first to formulate a discussion of human bisexuality—the first such discussion seems to have been by Gley in 1884 (see Chapter 2)—but, as the introduction to Chapter 1 explains, the extracts from Ellis are particularly revealing of the ways in which the term 'bisexuality'

changed its meaning during the early years of the twentieth century.) This part marks important moments in the changing fortunes of the concept of bisexuality during the twentieth century: as such, its chapters are in need of relatively lengthy editorial introductions, and it is also the only section in the book to be organized chronologically. The chronological presentation of the material should not be taken to imply, however, that the genealogy of the concept of bisexuality has necessarily been about development in the sense of progress or enlightenment. The concept of bisexuality is not necessarily any clearer now than it was in the 1890s—in fact, it is arguably less so, sedimented as it is with all its past meanings and uses.

The second part, on bisexual identity and bisexual behaviour, discusses whether and how the term 'bisexual' can be applied to individuals, groups and behaviours. As such it draws largely on empirical research, which routinely makes the distinction between identity and behaviour, pointing out that one's sexual behaviour or sexual history may be bisexual (in the sense of one's having had or desired encounters with both men and women) without one's identifying as (a) bisexual—and vice versa. (One large-scale study of men in the UK, for example, collected data from almost 750 respondents, fewer than half of whom called themselves 'bisexual' or used cognate terms, such as 'AC/DC', to describe themselves (Weatherburn *et al.* 1996).) This distinction between identity and behaviour is extremely useful (and not only in relation to bisexuality); but it must also be treated with some caution, or at least with some provisos in mind. First, of course, it is a dichotomous distinction, and as such is something to which those writers hostile to dualistic thinking or epistemology are likely to be opposed (see Part III). Some writers may therefore consider that it is ultimately less useful than it appears, especially in relation to bisexuality. Second, the distinction between identity and behaviour may have a reductive effect on the understanding of human sexuality if it is generalized too far or applied too indiscriminately. While identity and behaviour are among its most important components, it is clearly not the case that all aspects of human sexuality can be reduced to one or the other. This is acknowledged, for example, in the Klein Sexual Orientation Grid (KSOG—see Chapter 6), which encompasses not just behaviour and self-identification, but also a number of other factors, such as fantasy and emotional bonding. Indeed, the KSOG itself is not exhaustive, and arguably excludes factors which, though perhaps more difficult to 'measure' on scales like the KSOG, nevertheless form an important part of sexual subjectivity. For example, one's perception of one's own body and erogenous zones— one's sexual or erotic body image—and

the ways one perceives the sexual body of one's partner(s) will both play an important part in one's sexuality. One might argue that a great deal of empirical research in this field neglects the erotic in favour of the sexual, or even reduces the former to the latter, thereby foreclosing some possibly more imaginative ways of conceptualizing the field of study. In their interview research with self-identified bisexuals in the USA, Weinberg *et al.* (1994) found their male and female respondents describing the bodily differences between male and female partners as an important feature of sexual experience. Some respondents, for example, emphasized the sizes and surfaces of female or male bodies, while some described powerful erotic and emotional feelings about their lover's penis. Understanding these data as descriptions of *erotic bodies*—whether of the respondents' own bodies, or of those of their partners, or for that matter of the mutual erotic mapping of one body onto (an)other(s)—may yield a more textured understanding of these people as erotic subjects than that offered by a more flatly conceived notion of 'sexuality'.

As with all research, the perspectives, aims and agendas of the researcher have played a major role in shaping empirical research on bisexual identities and behaviours. Concern over HIV and its transmission has been one of the major impulses, if not *the* major impulse, behind such research since the late 1980s. Such concern on the part of epidemiologists and other health professionals has often focused on the anxiety that bisexuals, specifically bisexual men, act as a 'bridge of infection', spreading HIV from gay communities to the 'general' (i.e. heterosexual) population. The stereotype at the heart of such fears—in their crasser popular incarnations at least—has been the closeted bisexual man who has unprotected casual sex (because, being closeted, he cannot access the resources of the gay community, including its safer sex information), contracts HIV, and then passes it on to his unsuspecting, 'innocent' wife, who is herself usually imagined to be neither aware of her husband's bisexuality nor, of course, bisexual herself (Gorna 1996). In fact much (though not all) of the research on this issue has found almost exactly the opposite of this stereotype: 'closeted' men (i.e. men who do not disclose their sexual activity with other men to their female partners) are not more but *less* likely to be having unprotected sex with those men than are those who are open about their sex lives with their female partners (Boulton and Fitzpatrick 1996; McKirnan *et al.* 1995; Weatherburn *et al.* 1996). This may be because, paradoxically, *not* using condoms is for many people a signifier of trust and intimacy in long-term relationships, and therefore men having casual sex or short-term relationships with other men may be

more inclined to use condoms and/or to practise safer sex during such encounters than men in long-term same-sex relationships, who are conversely more likely to be 'out' about their sexual desires for other men (Boulton and Fitzpatrick 1996).

Nonetheless, concern over the sexual practices and sexual health of bisexually active men in the face of HIV still serves as the primary rationale of most current empirical research on bisexual identities and behaviours, with a great deal of attention given to the question of how to formulate safer sex and other health promotion material in ways that will be accessible to bisexual communities (George *et al.* 1993; Weatherburn *et al.* 1996). This has meant that certain expectations (at best) or prejudices (at worst) about HIV and its transmission routes have had important effects on the kind of research that is done, and hence on the kinds of knowledge about bisexuality that both have and have not been sought (Gagnon 1989). The most obvious of these is that the research is almost entirely about *male* bisexuality. The bodies which receive funding for research on sexual behaviour and HIV transmission have conducted very little correlative research on women's bisexual identities and/or behaviours, and consequently there is a great deal more national and international information about male bisexuality than female. This is probably largely because researchers do not regard women as the major potential sexual transmitters of HIV, either to men or to other women; rates of transmission from women to men are relatively low, and the recorded rates of HIV transmission between women are regarded by many AIDS professionals as negligible (Gorna 1996). This is in marked contrast, however, with debates over HIV and safer sex that raged in feminist, lesbian and bisexual women's communities in the USA and UK during the 1990s, in which there was considerable controversy over the HIV risks of sex between women, and in which some lesbians did indeed represent bisexual women as 'HIV carriers' who might bring the virus into lesbian communities (Gorna 1996; Parmar and O'Sullivan 1992).

Thus expectations on the part of HIV researchers, and the research agendas which such expectations generate, have meant that research specifically on patterns of female bisexuality has tended to receive little or no funding, and consequently has been relatively small scale, with far less of the international or cross-cultural research that has been done on male bisexual behaviours.² On the other hand, if men have predominated as research respondents in HIV work, women have predominated as both researchers and respondents in work on bisexual politics and bisexual theory, thanks largely to the legacy of feminist activism and scholarship (see Chapter 19).

Some of this work is represented in Part III on bisexual epistemologies, much of which is either explicitly feminist or inspired by feminist theory. At first sight it may seem strange that such an apparently abstract realm as epistemology should form one of the major strands of recent scholarship on bisexuality. The impulse behind much of this work derives from the perception on the part of bisexuals themselves that they are in some sense 'misfits' or 'outsiders', who do not fit neatly on either side of the heterosexual/homosexual divide which organizes our understandings of sexuality in the overindustrialized world. This in turn gives rise among some bisexual scholars to a suspicion of, or even hostility towards, the categories of 'heterosexual' and 'homosexual' — and, for some scholars, categories and categorization in general. In fact categorization and its discontents are *the* main focus of the body of work referred to in this book as bisexual epistemology. Within that body of work, however, there are different emphases and foci. Some scholars direct their attention to the general principle of categorization, arguing that it hinders our understanding of bisexuality, and/or that bisexuality itself is inherently threatening to categorization in general and hetero/homosexual categorization in particular. Others direct their attention more particularly to the role played by bisexuality or bisexuals as the 'Other' or boundary marker of some identities and communities. Rust (1995), for example, draws on data gathered from lesbians in the USA to argue that the sometimes extreme hostility expressed by her lesbian respondents towards bisexuality and bisexuals is not actually 'about' bisexuality at all, but is rather a product of the ways in which *lesbian* identity has been constructed since the 1970s: bisexuality *has* to be excluded if lesbian identity, as Rust's respondents understand it, is to make sense as such. This conception of bisexuality as the *constitutive boundary* between other sexual categories lies at the heart of Part III.

Although the overall thrust of bisexual epistemology has been opposed to categorization — particularly to binary division and dualistic thought, which many commentators have attacked with especial force (see Chapters 16 and 19) — there have been some dissenting voices. Some scholars, for example, have pointed out that although the blinkered or rigid use of categories can undoubtedly be harmful, the formation of categories is in certain contexts actively useful, if not essential, and that in those contexts bisexuals should seek inclusion by expanding the categories available, rather than reject categorization on principle. Colker (1996), for example, has argued vigorously that the use of categories is indispensable if bisexuals are to fight for legal equality and protection from discrimination, because contemporary

jurisprudence simply cannot operate without them. Moreover, contrary to the claims by some scholars that bisexuality is inherently disruptive of categorization, the concept of bisexuality has arguably, in certain contexts, actually helped to *shore up* sexual and other categories rather than to dissolve them by, for example, acting as a conceptual 'buffer zone' between categories (such as heterosexuality and homosexuality, or maleness and femaleness, or even 'primitive' and 'civilized') which might otherwise be in danger of collapsing into each other (Storr 1997, 1998). At the time of writing, however, such arguments appear to be very much in the minority, and the anti-categorization trend in bisexual epistemology tends to predominate.

Several of the authors whose work is represented in Part III argue that the potentially transformative effects of bisexuality as an epistemological concept are undermined or even destroyed by the formulation of bisexuality as an identity, and the conflict between bisexual epistemology and bisexual identity is a recurrent theme in such arguments (see especially Chapters 17 and 19). The irony of this argument, as Dollimore (1996) has suggested, is that it is often predicated on exactly the kind of fixed or stable bisexual identity to which it is ostensibly opposed. As explained above, the primary insight behind many bisexual scholars' opposition to categorization in general and/or to hetero/homosexual categorization in particular is that bisexuals are excluded—that is, that they are neither heterosexual nor homosexual, but something else. This exclusion is arguably something which those who *identify* as bisexual are far more likely to feel than those who do not. One might speculate about how people who behave bisexually but do not identify as such might feel about the hetero/homosexual dichotomy, and to what epistemological perspectives they might give rise. What would an epistemology of trade³ look like, for example? Would it, too, be opposed to dichotomies and categorization, or would it rather be, precisely, an epistemology of compartmentalization and splitting, of keeping discrete areas of life and thought separate from one another? For example, does a heterosexual-identified man who has casual anonymous sex with other men have the same kind of investment in the annihilation of the hetero/homosexual binary as that felt by people who identify as bisexual? The separation of heterosexuality and homosexuality is probably important to him, perhaps even a source of pleasure (in the sense, say, of the thrill of the illicit) and a precious part of his erotic life; bisexual epistemology as it is currently conceived does not (yet) speak to his desires and ways of knowing, which would doubtless be very different from those articulated by the fictional 'Cloe' in Chapter 17. Cloe may not 'be'

bisexual, but she is not exactly *not* bisexual either, at least not in the same way as the straight man who does trade.

The different ways of being, and of not being, bisexual are among the issues raised in the last part of the book, on differences. The concept of 'difference' has long been central to many debates in contemporary scholarship, particularly those falling within, or influenced by, the spheres of feminist enquiry. As Hemmings points out in Chapter 21, difference, diversity and the recognition of multiple perspectives are now indispensable to such debates, which tend to understand difference(s) not as static, hierarchical social divisions, but as dynamic, intersecting and constantly in process (Brah 1996). 'Diversity' has been particularly valorized as a political concept by recent bisexual movements, not least because such movements have been anxious to avoid the kinds of exclusion which other movements, such as lesbian and gay or feminist movements, have (inadvertently or otherwise) performed in the past—including, of course, in some cases, the exclusion of bisexuals themselves (Storr 1999). In fact, difference and diversity have been regarded by some as political values in which bisexuals have particular investment (Roberts 1997). This is expressed not just in acknowledgements of the differences among bisexuals, and between bisexuals and non-bisexuals, but also in formulations of the concept of bisexuality, such as that offered by Cixous in Chapter 20, which present bisexuality itself as an embodiment or enactment of difference, especially sexual difference (cf. Buck 1991; Derrida and McDonald 1982).

However, as Kaloski suggests in the final chapter of this book, one of the effects of postmodernity in the overdeveloped world may be to multiply differences, including sexual differences, to such an extent that the term 'bisexuality' may in some contexts be no longer recognizable, much less comprehensible. Sexual encounters on the Internet are reconfiguring both gender and sexuality: remapping erotic bodies, and reimagining sexual selves. As Kaloski carefully points out, the fact that these encounters are mediated by technology does not mean that they are not *real* encounters—on the contrary, they *are* real interactions, taking place in real time, between actual embodied subjects, and, moreover, their effects are not just limited to those individuals actually taking part. These reconfigured sexual differences are indeed dynamic, intersecting and in process, and it is by no means clear yet whether this is a good thing, for bisexuals or anyone else. Be that as it may, it seems that, in overdeveloped societies—in the very societies, that is, where the idea of identifying as 'a bisexual' has been most readily available during the twentieth century (see Part II)⁴—the very concept of bisexuality may be about to undergo yet another reorientation, perhaps

even ultimately to become obsolete. As Kaloski asks at the end of the final chapter, 'What can bisexuality mean when latex and phonesex and cybersex are displacing sexual differences and producing new erogenous zones?' It is my hope that *Bisexuality: A Critical Reader* will, in some small way, encourage students and scholars in all disciplines to seek answers to this question, and to the many others which beckon tantalizingly from the horizon of current debates about bisexuality.

Notes

- 1 The binarism implied by the 'bi' in bisexuality has itself been cause for concern for some authors, especially those whose epistemological perspectives are broadly opposed to the prevalence of binary division in conceptual thought (see Part III). This has led some writers and activists to reject the term 'bisexuality' altogether in favour of what they feel to be less loaded terms, such as 'pansexual' or 'pansensual' (Rust 1992). It also raises the related problem that it is difficult to make sense of the term 'bisexuality' without some reference to the idea that human beings come in two sexes (or genders), whether the 'bi' is taken to refer to the bisexual person's object choice or to his or her own psyche. Some writers and activists, particularly in transgendered and/or transsexual movements, have recently challenged this, suggesting that at least some transsexual or transgendered people are neither men nor women, but something else (Bornstein 1994), although this position remains highly controversial (Califia 1997).
- 2 Another way in which the HIV agenda has shaped, and arguably constrained, research on sexual behaviours has been in the investigation of sexual repertoires. In so far as research is specifically concerned to discover the frequency with which subjects engage in sexual practices that might allow the transmission of HIV, only certain types of sexual activity are relevant, and data are collected about those types of activity only. The presentation and discussion of such data, however, can (perhaps inadvertently) give the impression that the types of activity discussed are the only types actually conducted by the respondents—severely impoverishing the sexual repertoires apparently available to them. This impression is often compounded in research on bisexuality by the division of sexual encounters or behaviours into 'heterosexual' and 'homosexual', with very separate repertoires suggested for either type. It is quite common, for example, for such studies to discuss 'receptive anal penetration' of men in relation to 'homosexual' encounters only, where the penetration has been penile (e.g. Messiah *et al.* 1996). This, of course, is the focus of concern for much HIV prevention work, but it can give the entirely false impression both that the penis is the only thing with which a (male or female) anus can be penetrated, and that it is only men who perform penetrative acts on their (male or female) partners. Similar false impressions are sometimes given about sex between women, where research data may conflate penetrative sex with oral sex, and/or elide the former altogether (McIntosh 1997).

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

- 3 'Trade' is a slang term for casual and/or anonymous sex between men who do not necessarily identify as gay or bisexual, often in (semi-)public places such as public lavatories ('cottages' in the UK, or 'tearooms' in the USA), and sometimes in exchange for money (see Cagle 1996; Field 1996; Humphreys 1970).
- 4 The claim that bisexual identity is a conception of self available primarily in overdeveloped cultures or societies should not be conflated with the claim that bisexual identity in such societies is a predominantly white phenomenon. This is certainly not the case, for example, in the USA, where evidence suggests that African-American men who are sexually active with both male and female partners are *more* likely to identify as bisexual than their white counterparts (Colker 1996; McKirnan *et al.* 1995). (No correlative data appear yet to exist for African-American women.) It is unclear whether similar evidence exists for people of African descent in other overdeveloped societies, such as Canada and the UK (Bisexual Anthology Collective 1995; George *et al.* 1993; Paul 1996).

Part I

GENEALOGY OF THE
CONCEPT OF
BISEXUALITY

HENRY HAVELOCK ELLIS

Extracts from *Studies in the Psychology of Sex, Volume I: Sexual Inversion* (1897)
and from *Studies in the Psychology of Sex, Volume II: Sexual Inversion* (1915)

Originally published in Ellis, H.H. (1897) *Studies In the Psychology of Sex, Volume I: Sexual Inversion*, London: University Press, and (1923[1915]) *Studies in the Psychology of Sex, Volume II: Sexual Inversion*, Philadelphia: F.A.Davis Co. Reproduced by permission of François Lafitte.

Havelock Ellis was one of the great pioneers of what was then the new science of sexology. He was a radical thinker and champion of sex reform who called for the toleration of homosexuality (or 'sexual inversion', in the terminology of the time), which he regarded as both natural and harmless. He firmly believed in the biological basis of all forms of sexual behaviour, and argued that 'true' sexual inversion was always innate. Ellis was also, like many British socialists and radical thinkers before the Second World War, a supporter of eugenics, albeit a relatively cautious one. (Weeks 1977, 1989).

Studies in the Psychology of Sex, from which these extracts are taken, is an extraordinarily wide-ranging work which draws on anthropology, psychology, medical and literary writings as well as case histories. *Sexual Inversion*, which began life in 1897 as the first volume of the *Studies*, presents and discusses a number of such case histories, including cases of women and men who sexually desire both male and female partners. Ellis follows the earlier example of the German sexologist Krafft-Ebing in categorizing these cases as 'psychosexual hermaphroditism'; the word 'bisexuality', on the other hand, is used to refer to the existence of two biological sexes within a species, or to the coincidence of male and female characteristics within a single body (Bowie 1992; Storr 1997, 1998b).

This usage of the term 'bisexuality' has changed, however, by the time that the third edition of the *Studies* is published in 1915 (with *Sexual Inversion* now having become Volume II). Ellis now abandons the term 'psychosexual hermaphroditism' and extends the meaning of 'bisexuality'

to cover not just sexual dimorphism, but also the sexual desire for both women and men experienced by some of his subjects. He indicates that in this he is following the popular usage of the time, and this therefore suggests that the term 'bisexuality' began to be widely used in this sense in English during the first few years of the twentieth century. Ellis also notes that even the apparently simple classification of subjects as heterosexual, homosexual or bisexual is in practice so difficult as to be hardly worth attempting; this problem has been a key concern in the literature on bisexuality ever since, both for those attempting to develop scales for the 'measurement' of sexual orientation (see Chapter 6), and for those arguing that bisexuality is inherently disruptive of categorization as such (see Part III).

*Studies in the Psychology of Sex, Volume I:
Sexual Inversion (1897)*

Sexual inversion in men

When the sexual instinct first appears in early youth, it seems to be much less specialised than normally it becomes later. Not only is it, at the outset, less definitely directed to a specific sexual end, but even the sex of its object is sometimes uncertain.

[...]

As the sexual instincts become stronger, and as the lad leaves school or college to mix with men and women in the world, the instinct usually turns into the normal channel, in which channel the instincts of the majority of boys have been directed from the earliest appearance of puberty. But a certain proportion remain insensitive to the influence of women, and these may be regarded as true sexual inverts. Some of them are probably individuals of somewhat undeveloped sexual instincts.

[...]

I do not propose any more complex classification than the clinical distinction between simple inversion and psychosexual hermaphroditism, as it is usually called, the first class including all those individuals who are sexually attracted only to their own sex, the second class those who are attracted to both sexes.

[...]

Psychosexual hermaphroditism

This is the somewhat awkward name given to that form of inversion in which there exists a sexual attraction to both sexes. It is decidedly less common than simple inversion. We are only justified in including within this group those persons who find sexual pleasure and satisfaction both with men and with women, but in [some] cases the homosexual is more powerful than the heterosexual instinct, and it is possible that these should really be regarded as cases of simple inversion. We have to remember that there is every inducement for the sexual invert to cultivate a spurious attraction to the opposite sex. In [some cases] the heterosexual instinct seems to have been acquired; in [others], however..., the homosexual instinct is apparently acquired.

[...]

Sexual inversion in women

With girls, as with boys, it is in the school, at the evolution of puberty, that homosexuality first shows itself. It may originate either peripherally or centrally. In the first case two children, perhaps when close to each other in bed, more or less unintentionally generate in each other a certain amount of sexual irritation, which they foster by mutual touching and kissing. This is a spurious kind of homosexuality; it is merely the often precocious play of the normal instinct, and has no necessary relation to true sexual inversion. In the girl who is congeni-tally pre-disposed to homosexuality it will continue and develop; in the majority it will be forgotten as possible, not without shame, in the presence of the normal object of sexual love.

[...]

The theory of sexual inversion

We can probably grasp the nature of abnormality better if we reflect on the development of the sexes and on the latent organic bi-sexuality in each sex. At an early stage of development the sexes are indistinguish-able, and throughout life the traces of this early community of sex remain. [...] The sexually inverted person does not usually possess any-gross exaggeration of these signs of community with the opposite sex. But, as we have seen, there are a considerable number of more subtle approximations to the opposite sex in inverted persons, both on the physical and on the psychical

side. Putting the matter in a purely speculative shape, it may be said that at conception the organism is provided with about 50 per cent, of male germs and about 50 per cent, of female germs, and that as development proceeds either the male or the female germs assume the upper hand, killing out those of the other sex, until in the maturely developed individual only a few of the aborted germs of the opposite sex are left. In the homosexual person, however, and in the psychosexual hermaphrodite, we may imagine that the process has not proceeded normally, on account of some peculiarity in the number or character of either the original male germs or female germs, or both; the result being that we have a person who is organically twisted into a shape that is more fitted for the exercise of the inverted than of the normal sexual impulse, or else equally fitted for both.

***Studies in the Psychology of Sex, Volume II: Sexual
Inversion (1915)***

If, indeed, we really accept the very reasonable view, that the basis of sexual life is bisexual, although its direction may be definitely fixed in a heterosexual or a homosexual direction at a very early period of life, it becomes difficult to see how we can any longer speak with certainty of a definitely spurious class of homosexual persons [...].

The real distinction would seem, therefore, to be between a homosexual impulse so strong that it subsists even in the presence of the heterosexual object, and a homosexual impulse so weak that it is eclipsed by the presence of the heterosexual object. We could not, however, properly speak of the latter as any more 'spurious' or 'pseudo' than the former. A heterosexual person who experiences a homosexual impulse in the absence of any homosexual disposition is not today easy to accept. We can certainly accept the possibility of a mechanical or other non-sexual stimulus leading to a sexual act contrary to the individual's disposition. But usually it is somewhat difficult to prove, and when proved it has little psychological significance or importance. We may expect, therefore, to find 'pseudohomosexuality,' or spurious homosexuality, playing a dwindling part in classification.

The simplest of all possible classifications, and that which I adopted in earlier editions of the present *Study*, merely seeks to distinguish between those who, not being exclusively attracted to the opposite sex, are exclusively attracted to the same sex, and those who are attracted to both sexes. The first are the homosexual, whether or not the attraction springs from genuine inversion. The second are the

bisexual, or, as they were formerly more often termed, following Krafft-Ebing, psychosexual hermaphrodites.¹ There would thus seem to be a broad and simple grouping of all sexually functioning persons into three comprehensive divisions: the heterosexual, the bisexual, and the homosexual.

Even this elementary classification seems however of no great practical use. The bisexual group is found to introduce uncertainty and doubt. Not only a large proportion of persons who may fairly be considered normally heterosexual have at some time in their lives a feeling which may be termed sexual toward individuals of their own sex, but a very large proportion of persons who are definitely and markedly homosexual are found to have experienced sexual attraction toward, and have had relationships with, persons of the opposite sex. The social pressure, urging all persons into the normal sexual channel, suffices to develop such slight germs of heterosexuality as homosexual persons may possess, and so to render them bisexual. In the majority of adult bisexual persons it would seem that the homosexual tendency is stronger and more organic than the heterosexual tendency. Bisexuality would thus in a large number of cases be comparable to ambidexterity, which Biervliet has found to occur most usually in people who are organically left-handed. While therefore the division into heterosexual, bisexual and homosexual is a useful superficial division, it is scarcely a scientific classification.

In the face of these various considerations, and in view of the fact that, while I feel justification in regarding the histories of my cases as reliable so far as they go, I have not been always able to explore them extensively, it has seemed best to me to attempt no classification at all.

Notes

- 1 This was the term used in the earlier editions of the present *Study*. I willingly reject it in favour of the simpler and fairly clear term now more generally employed. It is true that by bisexuality it is possible to understand not only the double direction of the sexual instinct, but also the presence of both sexes in the same individual, which in French is more accurately distinguished as 'bisexuation.'

SIGMUND FREUD

Extract from *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality: 1. The Sexual Aberrations* (1905)

This translation originally published in Strachey, J. (ed.) (1953) *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume 7*, trans. J. Strachey, London: Hogarth Press. Reproduced by permission of Sigmund Freud © Copyrights, the Institute of Psycho-Analysis and the Hogarth Press, and in the US by permission of BasicBooks.

The importance of the work of Sigmund Freud can hardly be overestimated, and his ideas remain as controversial as they are influential. This extract is from one of his earliest published discussions of sexuality. Freud repeatedly reworked the 'Three Essays' throughout his career, and the result is a richly layered text in which successive footnotes create an unusual and at times disorientating impression of ideas in perpetual motion. The impression is particularly strong in the discussion of bisexuality, where the footnotes are longer than the original text. This creates a peculiar situation, which psychoanalysis since Freud has never fully resolved: the concept of bisexuality is a corner-stone of Freudian thought, and yet it is itself never directly formulated as such (Bowie 1992). The extract below is Freud's most sustained substantive discussion of the subject.

Freud's strange reticence on the concept of bisexuality may at least in part be attributable to the painful dispute with his friend and early collaborator Wilhelm Fliess over the 'ownership' of the idea. Fliess maintained that it was he who had formulated the theory of bisexuality and was angry when Freud did not credit him as its originator (Garber 1995; Masson 1985). In the extract below, Freud rebuts Fliess' claim by producing his own genealogy of the concept of bisexuality in one of his footnotes.

The term 'bisexuality' itself is ambiguous in this extract. The entire section titled 'Bisexuality' is in fact part of a larger discussion of homosexuality (or 'sexual inversion'), and Freud begins by discussing the usual sexological notion of bisexuality as the combination of male and female characteristics within a single body. This is the sense in which sexologists such as Havelock Ellis and Krafft-Ebing used the term, and indeed many such theorists at that period claimed that bisexuality in this sense was the basis for homosexuality, which they regarded as an unusual or (more judgementally) inappropriate mixture of maleness and femaleness within a single individual. But Freud quickly rejects this argument: he is sure that there is such a thing as 'bisexual predisposition' in humans, but he does not think that the sexological account of it is tenable, and he states quite candidly that he does not know what it is. The development of his own account of the 'bisexual predisposition' appears in the succession of footnotes. In these footnotes he gradually develops the argument that all human beings are born with a bisexual predisposition from which heterosexuality or homosexuality will later develop (see Chapter 12). It is worth noting that this characterization of bisexuality as the original form of sexuality found in both individual children and 'primitive' societies tacitly reprises some evolutionary and heavily racialized themes from Victorian sexology and anthropology: that the differences between the sexes increase as evolution advances, so that bisexuality, in the sense of co-existing male and female characteristics, is a feature of 'primitive' humans; and that the adults of 'primitive races' resemble the children of 'civilized races' and vice versa (Russett 1989; Storr 1997). Moreover, although the notion of the 'bisexual predisposition' becomes increasingly well established in these footnotes, Freud still does not offer any account of what it actually is or in what it consists. Elsewhere in the 'Three Essays' Freud refers to bisexuality as a combination of masculinity and femininity—and not, it should be noted, of heterosexuality and homosexuality. But throughout his career he remained acutely aware of the difficulty—perhaps the impossibility—of understanding in what masculinity or femininity themselves consist, and could only designate them, with repeated expressions of profound dissatisfaction, as 'activity' and 'passivity' respectively (Freud 1953 [1905], 1953 [1933]). This is all the more remarkable given the centrality of bisexuality to Freud's thought on human sexuality, from infantile sexuality and the Oedipus complex to the development and diagnosis of nervous disorders. The concept of bisexuality is, in many ways, the mysterious heart of Freudian psychoanalysis; clearly, for Freud himself, it was the mysterious heart of human sexuality.

This English translation by James Strachey includes a number of editorial remarks and elucidations by Strachey himself, which appear below in square brackets. These elucidations by Strachey appear in the same typeface as Freud's own words.

Bisexuality

A fresh contradiction of popular views is involved in the considerations put forward by Lydston [1889], Kiernan [1888] and Chevalier [1893] in an endeavour to account for the possibility of sexual inversion. It is popularly believed that a human being is either a man or a woman. Science, however, knows of cases in which the sexual characters are obscured, and in which it is consequently difficult to determine the sex. This arises in the first instance in the field of anatomy. The genitals of the individuals concerned combine male and female characteristics. (This condition is known as hermaphroditism.) In rare cases both kinds of sexual apparatus are found side by side fully developed (true hermaphroditism); but far more frequently both sets of organs are found in an atrophied condition.¹

The importance of these abnormalities lies in the unexpected fact that they facilitate our understanding of normal development. For it appears that a certain degree of anatomical hermaphroditism occurs normally. In every normal male or female individual, traces are found of the apparatus of the opposite sex. These either persist without function as rudimentary organs or become modified and take on other functions.

These long-familiar facts of anatomy lead us to suppose that an originally bisexual physical disposition has, in the course of evolution, become modified into a unisexual one, leaving behind only a few traces of the sex that has become atrophied.

It was tempting to extend this hypothesis to the mental sphere and to explain inversion in all its varieties as the expression of a psychical hermaphroditism. All that was required further in order to settle the question was that inversion should be regularly accompanied by the mental and somatic signs of hermaphroditism.

But this expectation was disappointed. It is impossible to demonstrate so close a connection between (the hypothetical psychical hermaphroditism and the established anatomical one. A general lowering of the sexual instinct and a slight anatomical atrophy of the organs is found frequently in inverts (cf. Havelock Ellis [1897]). Frequently, but by no means regularly or even usually. The truth must therefore be recognised that inversion and somatic hermaphroditism are on the whole independent of each other.

A great deal of importance, too, has been attached to what are called the secondary and tertiary sexual characters and to the great frequency of the occurrence of those of the opposite sex in inverts (cf. Havelock Ellis [1897]). Much of this, again, is correct; but it should never be forgotten that in general the secondary and tertiary sexual characters of one sex occur very frequently in the opposite one. They are indications of hermaphroditism, but are not attended by any change of sexual object in the direction of inversion.

Psychical hermaphroditism would gain substance if the inversion of the sexual object were at least accompanied by a parallel change-over of the subject's other mental qualities, instincts and character traits into those marking the opposite sex. But it is only in inverted women that character-inversion of this kind can be looked for with any regularity. In men the most complete mental masculinity can be combined with inversion. If the belief in psychical hermaphroditism is to be persisted in, it will be necessary to add that its manifestations in various spheres show only slight signs of being mutually determined. Moreover the same is true of somatic hermaphroditism: according to Halban (1903),² occurrences of individual atrophied organs and of secondary sexual characters are to a considerable extent independent of one another.

The theory of bisexuality has been expressed in its crudest form by a spokesman of the male inverts: 'a feminine brain in a masculine body'.³ But we are ignorant of what characterises a feminine brain. There is neither need nor justification for replacing the psychological problem by the anatomical one. Krafft-Ebing's attempted explanation seems to be more exactly framed than that of Ulrichs but does not differ from it in essentials. According to Krafft-Ebing [1895:5], every individual's bisexual disposition endows him with masculine and feminine brain centres as well as with somatic organs of sex; these centres develop only at puberty, for the most part under the influence of the sex-gland, which is independent of them in the original disposition. But what has just been said of masculine and feminine brains applies equally to masculine and feminine 'centres'; and incidentally we have not even any grounds for assuming that certain areas of the brain 'centres', are set aside for the functions of sex, as is the case, for instance, with those of speech.⁴

Nevertheless, two things emerge from these discussions. In the first place, a bisexual disposition is somehow concerned in inversion, though we do not know in what that disposition consists, beyond anatomical structure. And secondly, we have to deal with disturbances that affect the sexual instinct in the course of its development.

Sexual object of inverts

The theory of psychical hermaphroditism presupposes that the sexual object of an invert is the opposite of that of a normal person. An inverted man, it holds, is like a woman in being subject to the charm that proceeds from masculine attributes both physical and mental: he feels he is a woman in search of a man.

But however well this applies to quite a number of inverts, it is, nevertheless, far from revealing a universal characteristic of inversion. There can be no doubt that a large proportion of male inverts retain the mental quality of masculinity, that they possess relatively few of the secondary characters of the opposite sex and that what they look for in their sexual object are in fact feminine mental traits. If this were not so, how would it be possible to explain the fact that male prostitutes who offer themselves to inverts—today just as they did in ancient times—imitate women in all the externals of their clothing and behaviour? Such imitation would otherwise inevitably clash with the ideal of the inverts. It is clear that in Greece, where the most masculine men were numbered among the inverts, what excited a man's love was not the masculine character of a boy, but his physical resemblance to a woman as well as his feminine mental qualities—his shyness, his modesty and his need for instruction and assistance. As soon as the boy became a man he ceased to be a sexual object for men and himself, perhaps, became a lover of boys. In this instance, therefore, as in many others, the sexual object is not someone of the same sex but someone who combines the characters of both sexes; there is, as it were, a compromise between an impulse that seeks for a man and one that seeks for a woman, while it remains a paramount condition that the object's body (i.e. genitals) shall be masculine. Thus the sexual object is a kind of reflection of the subject's own bisexual nature.⁵

The position in the case of women is less ambiguous; for among them the active inverts exhibit masculine characteristics, both physical and mental, with peculiar frequency and look for femininity in their sexual objects—though here again a closer knowledge of the facts might reveal greater variety.

Notes

- 1 For the most recent descriptions of somatic hermaphroditism. see Taruffi (1903), and numerous papers by Neugebauer in various volumes of the *Jahrbuch für sexuelle Zwischenstufen*.
- 2 His paper includes a bibliography of the subject.

- 3 [The description was Ulrichs': '*Anima muliebris in corpore virili inclusa*'...]
- 4 It appears (from a bibliography given in the sixth volume of the *Jahrbuch für sexuelle Zwischenstufen*) that E.Gley was the first writer to suggest bisexuality as an explanation of inversion. As long ago as in January, 1884, he published a paper, 'Les aberrations de l'instinct sexuel', in the *Revue philosophique*. It is, moreover, noteworthy that the majority of authors who derive inversion from bisexuality bring forward that factor not only in the case of inverts, but also for all those who have grown up to be normal, and that, as a logical consequence, they regard inversion as the result of a disturbance in development. Chevalier (1893) already writes in this sense. Krafft-Ebing (1895[:10]) remarks that there are a great number of observations 'which prove at least the virtual persistence of this second centre (that of the subordinated sex)'. A Dr Arduin (1900) asserts that 'there are masculine and feminine elements in every human being (cf. Hirschfeld 1899); but one set of these—according to the sex of the person in question—is incomparably more strongly developed than the other, so far as heterosexual individuals are concerned...' Herman (1903) is convinced that 'masculine elements and characteristics are present in every woman and feminine ones in every man', etc. [Added 1910:] Fliess (1906) subsequently claimed the idea of bisexuality (in the sense of duality of sex) as his own. [Added 1924:] In lay circles the hypothesis of human bisexuality is regarded as being due to O.Weininger, the philosopher, who died at an early age, and who made the idea the basis of a somewhat unbalanced book (1903). The particulars which I have enumerated above will be sufficient to show how little justification there is for the claim.

[Freud's own realisation of the importance of bisexuality owed much to Fliess... He did not, however, accept Fliess's view that bisexuality provided the explanation of repression. See Freud's discussion of this in *A Child is Being Beaten*' (1953 [1919])...]

- 5 [This last sentence was added in 1915. — *Footnote added 1910:*] It is true that psychoanalysis has not yet produced a complete explanation of the origin of inversion; nevertheless, it has discovered the psychical mechanism of its development, and has made essential contributions to the statement of the problems involved. In all the cases we have examined we have established the fact that the future inverts, in the earliest years of their childhood, pass through a phase of very intense but short-lived fixation to a woman (usually their mother), and that, after leaving this behind, they identify themselves with a woman and take *themselves* as their sexual object. That is to say, proceeding from a basis of narcissism, they look for a young man who resembles themselves and whom *they* may love as their mother loved *them*. Moreover, we have frequently found that alleged inverts have been by no means unsusceptible to the charms of women, but have continually transposed the excitation aroused by women on to a male object. They have thus repeated all through their lives the mechanism by which their inversion arose. Their compulsive longing for men has turned out to be determined by their ceaseless flight from women.

[Added 1915:] Psychoanalytic research is most decidedly opposed to any attempt at separating off homosexuals from the rest of mankind as group of a special character. By studying sexual excitations other than those that are manifestly displayed, it has found that all human beings are

capable of making a homosexual object-choice and have in fact made one in their unconscious. Indeed, libidinal attachments to persons of the same sex play no less a part as factors in normal mental life, and a greater part as a motive force for illness, than do similar attachments to the opposite sex. On the contrary, psychoanalysis considers that a choice of an object independently of its sex freedom to range equally over male and female objects—as it is found in childhood, in primitive states of society and early periods of history, is the original basis from which, as a result of restriction in one direction or the other, both the normal and the inverted types develop. Thus from the point of view of psychoanalysis the exclusive sexual interest felt by men for women is also a problem that needs elucidating and is not a self-evident fact based upon an attraction that is ultimately of a chemical nature. A person's final sexual attitude is not decided until after puberty and is the result of a number of factors, not all of which are yet known; some are of a constitutional nature but others are accidental. No doubt a few of these factors may happen to carry so much weight that they influence the result in their sense. But in general the multiplicity of determining factors is reflected in the variety of manifest sexual attitudes in which they find their issue in mankind. In inverted types, a predominance of archaic constitutions and primitive psychical mechanisms is regularly to be found. Their most essential characteristics seem to be a coming into operation of *narcissistic object-choice* and a *retention* of the erotic, significance of the *anal zone*. There is nothing to be gained, however, by separating the most extreme types of inversion from the rest on the basis of constitutional peculiarities of that kind. What we find as an apparently sufficient explanation of these types can be equally shown to be present, though less strongly, in the constitution of transitional types and of those whose manifest attitude is normal. The differences in the end-products may be of a qualitative nature, but analysis shows that the differences between their determinants are only quantitative. Among accidental factors that influence object-choice we have found that frustration (in the form of an early deterrence, by fear, from sexual activity) deserves attention, and we have observed that the presence of both parents plays an important part. The absence of a strong father in childhood not infrequently favours the occurrence of inversion. Finally, it may be insisted that the concept of inversion in respect of the sexual object should be sharply distinguished from that of the occurrence in the subject of a mixture of sexual characters. In the relation between these two factors, too, a certain degree of reciprocal independence is unmistakably present.

[Added 1920:] Ferenczi (1914) has brought forward a number of interesting points on the subject of inversion. He rightly protests that, because they have in common the symptom of inversion, a large number of conditions, which are very different from one another and which are of unequal importance both in organic and psychical respects, have been thrown together under the name of 'homosexuality (or, to follow him in giving it a better name, 'homo-erotism'). He insists that a sharp distinction should at least be made between two types: 'subject homo-erotics', who feel and behave like women, and 'object homo-erotics', who are completely masculine and who have merely exchanged a female for a male object. The first of these two types he recognises as true 'sexual intermediates' in Hirschfeld's sense of the word; the second he describes, less happily, as obsessional neurotics.

According to him, it is only in the case of object homo-erotics that there is any question of their struggling against their inclination to inversion or of the possibility of their being influenced psychologically. While granting the existence of these two types, we may add that there are many people in whom a certain quantity of subject homo-erotism is found in combination with a proportion of object homo-erotism.

During the last few years work carried out by biologists, notably by Steinach, has thrown a strong light on the organic determinants of homo-erotism and of sexual characters in general. By carrying out experimental castration and subsequently grafting the sex-glands of the opposite sex, it was possible in the case of various species of mammals to transform a male into a female and vice versa. The transformation affected more or less completely both the somatic sexual characters and the psychosexual attitude (that is, both subject and object erotism). It appeared that the vehicle of the force which thus acted as a sex-determinant was not the part of the sex-gland which forms the sex-cells but what is known as its interstitial tissue (the 'puberty-gland'). In one case this transformation of sex was actually effected in a man who had lost his testes owing to tuberculosis. In his sexual life he behaved in a feminine manner, as a passive homosexual, and exhibited very clearly marked feminine sexual characters of a secondary kind (e.g. in regard to growth of hair and beard and deposits of fat on the breasts and hips). After an undescended testis from another male patient had been grafted into him, he began to behave in a masculine manner and to direct his libido towards women in a normal way. Simultaneously his somatic feminine characters disappeared (Lipschutz 1919:356–7).

It would be unjustifiable to assert that these interesting experiments put the theory of inversion on a new basis, and it would be hasty to expect them to offer a universal means of 'curing' homosexuality. Fliess has rightly insisted that these experimental findings do not invalidate the theory of the general bisexual disposition of the higher animals. On the contrary, it seems to me probable that further research of a similar kind will produce a direct confirmation of this presumption of bisexuality.

3

WILHELM STEKEL

Extracts from *Bi-Sexual Love* (1920)

This translation originally published in Stekel, W. (1950 [1922]) *Bi-Sexual Love*, trans. J.S. van Teslaar, New York: Emerson Books.

Bi-Sexual Love, as it appeared in English in 1922, was taken from the longer work *Onanie und Homosexualität (Masturbation and Homosexuality)* (1920). In this extract, the psychoanalyst Wilhelm Stekel declares himself a follower of Freud, and presents his own work as a development of Freud's ideas. Stekel, however, differs significantly from Freud in a number of ways (Garber 1995). While Freud cautiously develops a conception of bisexuality which is nuanced to the point of mysteriousness, Stekel boldly asserts that everyone is innately bisexual and that monosexuality—exclusive heterosexuality or homosexuality—is unnatural.

Freud's sense of complexity (see Chapter 2) is largely lost in Stekel's text. This is at least partly because Stekel differs from Freud's own formulation in presenting bisexuality as the combination not of masculinity and femininity—with all of the difficulty attached to those terms—but of heterosexuality and homosexuality, terms whose meaning appears to be far more obvious and clear cut. In tacitly making this change to Freud's original usage of the term 'bisexuality', Stekel side-steps rather than solves the mystery of bisexuality, and arguably oversimplifies Freud's ideas in the process. Moreover, Stekel's claim that monosexuality is unnatural is far from even-handed: although he presents both heterosexuality and homosexuality as potentially neurotic abnormal states, he still nevertheless suggests that homosexuality is in some sense *more* neurotic and abnormal than heterosexuality.

Stekel is by no means the only one of Freud's disciples who can be accused of simplifying or misrepresenting the work of Freud himself, and the battles over Freud's intellectual legacy have been raging since

before his death (Mitchell 1982). Indeed it is arguable that much of Freud's influence on popular understandings of sexuality actually derives from misconceptions and misrepresentations of Freud rather than from Freud's own ideas. This extract from Stekel not only offers an example of how Freud's ideas were taken up by others, but also articulates the still widespread popular view that everyone is 'originally' bisexual or bisexual at birth, where 'bisexuality' is understood as a combination of, or lack of distinction between, homosexuality and heterosexuality.

Psychoanalysis has proven that all homosexuals, without exception, show heterosexual tendencies in early life. There is no exception to this rule. *There are no monosexual persons!* The heterosexual period stretches far into puberty. *All persons are bisexual.* But persons repress either the homosexual or the heterosexual components on account of certain motives or because they are compelled by particular circumstances and consequently act as if they were monosexual. Even the 'male hero' (*Maennerheld*) type and *Hirschfeld's* 'genuine' homosexual is only apparently monosexual. A glance through the confessions disclosed by all writers is enough to convince one of this fact. *Hirschfeld* himself points out that it is to the credit of psychoanalysis that it has revealed the transitory heterosexual cravings of the homosexual.

The instinct of the homosexual originally is not exclusively directed towards the same sex. Originally the homosexual is also bisexual. But he represses his heterosexuality just as the heterosexual must repress his homosexuality. *Blüher* who is unwilling to recognise a pathogenesis of homosexuality for the 'male hero' type, contends that one could claim with equal relevance that there is a pathogenesis of heterosexuality.

That is a fact. Every monosexuality is other than normal or natural. *Nature has created us bisexual beings and requires us to act as bisexual beings.* The purely heterosexual is always a neurotic in a certain sense, that is, the repression of the homosexual components already creates a predisposition to neurosis, or is in itself a neurotic trait shared by every normal person. The psychology of paranoia, for whose investigation we are indebted to the genius of Freud, shows us the extreme result of this process of repression on one side, just as homosexuality shows us the other side of the same process.

There is no homosexual who is not more or less neurotic, that condition being due to the repression of the heterosexuality. The repression is a purely psychic process and has nothing to do with degeneration. Homosexuality is not a product of degeneration in the

ordinary sense. It is a neurosis and displays the etiology of a neurosis, as we shall prove later.

[...]

Finally I turn to my own conception of homosexuality, formulated on the basis of psychoanalytic data and as an outgrowth of the teachings of *Freud*.

All persons originally are bisexual in their predisposition. There is no exception to this rule. Normal persons show a distinct bisexual period up to the age of puberty. The heterosexual then represses his homosexuality. He also sublimates a portion of his homosexual cravings in friendship, nationalism, social endeavors, gatherings, etc. If this sublimation fails him he becomes neurotic. Since no person overcomes completely his homosexual tendencies, every one carries within himself the predisposition to neurosis. The stronger the repression, the stronger is also the neurotic reaction which may be powerful enough in its extreme form to lead to paranoia (Freud's theory of paranoia). If the heterosexuality is repressed, homosexuality comes to the forefront. In the case of the homosexual, the repressed and incompletely conquered heterosexuality furnishes the disposition towards neurosis. The more thoroughly his heterosexuality is sublimated the more completely the homosexual presents the picture of a normal healthy person. He then resembles the normal heterosexual. But like the normal heterosexual individual, even the 'male hero' type displays a permanent latent disposition to neurosis.

The process of sublimation is more difficult in the case of the normal homosexual than in the case of the normal heterosexual. That is why this type is extremely rare and why a thorough analysis always discloses typical neurotic reactions. The neurotic reactions of repression (Abwehr, Freud) are anxiety, shame, disgust and hatred (or scorn). The heterosexual is inspired with disgust at any homosexual acts. That proves his affectively determined negative attitude. For disgust is but the obverse of attraction. The homosexual manifests the same feeling of disgust for woman, showing him to be a neurotic. (Or else he hates woman.) For the normal homosexual—if there be such a type—would be indifferent towards woman. These generalisations already show that the healthy person must act as a bisexual being.

We know only one race of people who recognised formally the bisexual nature of man: the Greeks. But we must recognise also that the Greeks had attained the highest level of physical and cultural development. We shall have to inquire into the reasons why homosexuality fell into such disrepute and why the example of the Greeks found no imitation among the moderns, despite the recognition accorded the tremendous cultural achievements of the ancient Greeks [...]. We conclude: *There is no inborn homosexuality and no inborn heterosexuality. There is only bisexuality. Monosexuality already involves a predisposition to neurosis, in many cases stands for the neurosis proper.*

ALFRED C.KINSEY,
WARDELL B.POMEROY AND
CLYDE E.MARTIN

Extracts from *Sexual Behavior in the
Human Male* (1948)

Originally published in Kinsey, A.C., Pomeroy, W.B. and Martin, C.E. (1948) *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*, Philadelphia: W.B. Saunders. Reproduced by permission of The Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction, Inc.

Alfred Kinsey began to conduct interview-based research on human sexual behaviour in the 1930s, and from relatively modest beginnings his research ultimately produced two large volumes of quantitative data, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* and its 1953 sequel *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female*. At the time of their publication Kinsey's findings attracted enormous publicity, much of which expressed shock at the extent and prevalence of sexual variation that he claimed to have found in the US population.

Kinsey's findings continue to be controversial today. Now, however, the controversy is more often conducted among scholars than in the popular press, and is attached to questions about Kinsey's methodology, the reliability of his statistical conclusions, and the reductionism of his decision to focus on sexual behaviour rather than sexual attitudes or (self-) perceptions (Davidson and Layder 1994; Nardi and Schneider 1998; Segal 1994). Whatever the shortcomings or otherwise of Kinsey's data, however, his conceptual contribution has been of major and lasting importance, and his model of human sexuality as a continuum running from heterosexuality to homosexuality has become a staple of sexological and popular debates alike. This model of sexuality is not without its weaknesses (see Chapter 6), some of which Kinsey *et al.* themselves acknowledge in the extract below. However, it remains an extremely influential model of fluidity in human sexuality, both between individuals and across an individual's life course. Moreover, the discussion of the term 'bisexuality' with which this extract

closes demonstrates that the dispute over its terms of reference—heterosexual/homosexual, male/female or masculine/femi-nine—was still very much alive among sexologists in the late 1940s.

The heterosexual-homosexual balance

Concerning patterns of sexual behavior, a great deal of the thinking done by scientists and laymen alike stems from the assumption that there are persons who are 'heterosexual' and persons who are 'homosexual,' that these two types represent antitheses in the sexual world, and that there is only an insignificant class of 'bisexuals' who occupy an intermediate position between the other groups. It is implied that every individual is innately—inherently—either heterosexual or homosexual. It is further implied that from the time of birth one is fated to be one thing or the other, and that there is little chance for one to change his pattern in the course of a lifetime.

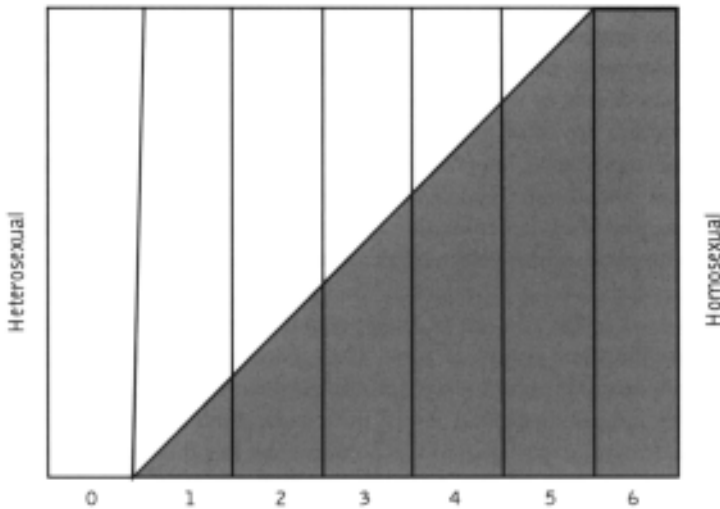
[...]

The histories which have been available in the present study make it apparent that the heterosexuality or homosexuality of many individuals is not an all-or-none proposition. It is true that there are persons in the population whose histories are exclusively heterosexual, both in regard to their overt experience and in regard to their psychic reactions. And there are individuals in the population whose histories are exclusively homosexual, both in experience and in psychic reactions. But the record also shows that there is a considerable portion of the population whose members have combined, within their individual histories, both homosexual and heterosexual experience and/or psychic responses. There are some whose heterosexual experiences predominate, there are some whose homosexual experiences predominate, there are some who have had quite equal amounts of both types of experience.

Some of the males who are involved in one type of relation at one period in their lives, may have only the other type of relation at some later period. There may be considerable fluctuation of patterns from time to time. Some males may be involved in both heterosexual and homosexual activities within the same period of time. For instance, there are some who engage in both heterosexual and homosexual activities in the same year, or in the same month or week, or even in the same day. There are not a few individuals who engage in group activities in which they may make simultaneous contact with partners of both sexes.

Males do not represent two discrete populations, heterosexual and homosexual. The world is not to be divided into sheep and goats. Not all things are black nor all things white. It is a fundamental of taxonomy that nature rarely deals with discrete categories. Only the human mind invents categories and tries to force facts into separated pigeon-holes. The living world is a continuum in each and every one of its aspects. The sooner we learn this concerning human sexual behavior the sooner we shall reach a sound understanding of the realities of sex.

While emphasizing the continuity of the gradations between exclusively heterosexual and exclusively homosexual histories, it has seemed desirable to develop some sort of classification which could be based on the relative amounts of heterosexual and of homosexual experience or response in each history. Such a heterosexual-homosexual rating scale is shown in Figure [1]. An individual may be assigned a



[Figure 1] Heterosexual-homosexual rating scale

Based on both psychologic reactions and overt experience, individuals rate as follows:

0. Exclusively heterosexual with no homosexual
1. Predominantly heterosexual, only incidentally homosexual
2. Predominantly heterosexual, but more than incidentally homosexual
3. Equally heterosexual and homosexual
4. Predominantly homosexual, but more than incidentally heterosexual
5. Predominantly homosexual, but incidentally heterosexual
6. Exclusively homosexual

position on this scale, for each age period in his life, in accordance with the following definitions of the various points on the scale:

0. Individuals are rated as 0 if they make no physical contacts which result in erotic arousal or orgasm, and make no psychic responses to individuals of their own sex. Their socio-sexual contacts and responses are exclusively with individuals of the opposite sex.
1. Individuals are rated as 1 if they have only incidental homosexual contacts which have involved physical or psychic response, or incidental psychic responses without physical contact. The great preponderance of their socio-sexual experience and reactions is directed toward individuals of the opposite sex. Such homosexual experiences as these individuals have may occur only a single time or two, or at least infrequently in comparison to the amount of their heterosexual experience. Their homosexual experiences never involve as specific psychic reactions as they make to heterosexual stimuli. Sometimes the homosexual activities in which they engage may be inspired by curiosity, or may be more or less forced upon them by other individuals, perhaps when they are asleep or when they are drunk, or under some other peculiar circumstance.
2. Individuals are rated as 2 if they have more than incidental homosexual experience, and/or if they respond rather definitely to homosexual stimuli. Their heterosexual experiences and /or reactions still surpass their homosexual experiences and/or reactions. These individuals may have only a small amount of homosexual experience or they may have a considerable amount of it, but in every case it is surpassed by the amount of heterosexual experience that they have within the same period of time. They usually recognize their quite specific arousal by homosexual stimuli, but their responses to the opposite sex are still stronger. A few of these individuals may even have all of their overt experience in the homosexual, but their psychic reactions to persons of the opposite sex indicate that they are still predominantly heterosexual. This latter situation is most often found among younger males who have not yet ventured to have actual intercourse with girls, while their orientation is definitely heterosexual. On the other hand, there are some males who should be rated as 2's because of their strong reactions to individuals of their own sex, even though they have never had overt relations with them.
3. Individuals who are rated 3 stand midway on the heterosexual-homosexual scale. They are about equally homosexual and heterosexual in their overt experience and/or their psychic reactions. In general, they accept and equally enjoy both types of contacts,

and have no strong preferences for one or the other. Some persons are rated 3's, even though they may have a larger amount of experience of one sort, because they respond psychically to partners of both sexes and it is only a matter of circumstance that brings them into more frequent contact with one of the sexes. Such a situation is not unusual among single males, for male contacts are often more available to them than female contacts. Married males, on the other hand, find it simpler to secure a sexual outlet through intercourse with their wives, even though some of them may be as interested in males as they are in females.

4. Individuals are rated as 4 if they have more overt activity and/or psychic reactions in the homosexual, while still maintaining a fair amount of heterosexual activity and/or responding rather definitely to heterosexual stimuli.
5. Individuals are rated 5 if they are almost entirely homosexual in their overt activities and/or reactions. They do have incidental experience with the opposite sex and sometimes react psychically to individuals of the opposite sex.
6. Individuals are rated as 6 if they are exclusively homosexual, both in regard to their overt experience and in regard to their psychic reactions.

It will be observed that this is a seven-point scale, with 0 and 6 as the extreme points, and with 3 as the midpoint in the classification. On opposite sides of the midpoint the following relations hold:

- 0 is the opposite of 6
- 1 is the opposite of 5
- 2 is the opposite of 4

It will be observed that the rating which an individual receives has a dual basis. It takes into account his overt sexual experience and/or his psychosexual reactions. In the majority of instances the two aspects of the history parallel, but sometimes they are not in accord. In the latter case, the rating of an individual must be based upon an evaluation of the relative importance of the overt and the psychic in his history.

In each classification there are persons who have had no experience or a minimum of overt sexual experience, but in the same classification there may also be persons who have had hundreds of sexual contacts. In every case, however, all of the individuals in each classification show the same balance between the heterosexual and homosexual elements in their histories. The position of an individual on this scale is

always based upon the relation of the heterosexual to the homosexual in his history, rather than upon the actual amount of overt experience or psychic reaction.

Finally, it should be emphasized again that the reality is a continuum, with individuals in the population occupying not only the seven categories which are recognized here, but every gradation between each of the categories, as well. Nevertheless, it does no great injustice to the fact to group the population as indicated above.

From all of this, it should be evident that one is not warranted in recognizing merely two types of individuals, heterosexual and homosexual, and that the characterization of the homosexual as a third sex fails to describe any actuality.

It is imperative that one understand the relative amounts of the heterosexual and homosexual in an individual's history if one is to make any significant analysis of him.

[...]

From all of this, it becomes obvious that any question as to the number of persons in the world who are homosexual and the number who are heterosexual is unanswerable. It is only possible to record the number of these who belong to each of the positions on such a heterosexual-homosexual scale as is given above.

[...]

Bisexuality

Since only 50 per cent of the population is exclusively heterosexual throughout its adult life, and since only 4 per cent of the population is exclusively homosexual throughout its life, it appears that nearly half (46%) of the population engages in both heterosexual and homosexual activities, or reacts to persons of both sexes, in the course of their adult lives. The term bisexual has been applied to at least some portion of this group. Unfortunately, the term as it has been used has never been strictly delimited, and consequently it is impossible to know whether it refers to all individuals who rate anything from 1 to 5, or whether it is being limited to some smaller number of categories, perhaps centering around group 3. If the latter is intended, it should be emphasized that the 1's, 2's, 4's and 5's have not yet been accounted for, and they constitute a considerable portion of the population.

In any event, such a scheme provides only a three-point scale (heterosexual, bisexual, and homosexual), and such a limited scale does not adequately describe the continuum which is the reality in nature. A seven-point scale comes nearer to showing the many gradations that actually exist.

As previously pointed out, it is rather unfortunate that the word bisexual should have been chosen to describe this intermediate group. The term is used as a substantive, designating individuals—persons; and the root meaning of the word and the way in which it is usually used imply that these persons have both masculine qualities and feminine qualities within their single bodies. We have objected to the use of the terms heterosexual and homosexual when used as nouns which stand for individuals. It is similarly untenable to imply that these 'bisexual' persons have an anatomy or an endocrine system or other sorts of physiologic or psychologic capacities which make them partly male and partly female, or of the two sexes simultaneously.

The term bisexual has been used in biology for structures or individuals or aggregates of individuals that include the anatomy or functions of both sexes. There are unisexual species which are exclusively female and reproduce parthenogenetically (from eggs that are not fertilized). In contrast, there are bisexual species which include both males and females and which commonly reproduce through fertilization of the eggs produced by the females. Among plants and animals which have an alternation of generations, there are unisexual or parthenogenetic generations in which there are only females, and bisexual generations in which there are both males and females. In regard to the embryonic structures from which the gonads of some of the vertebrates develop, the term bisexual is applied because these embryonic structures have the potentialities of both sexes and may develop later into either ovaries or testes. Hermaphroditic animals, like earthworms, some snails, and a rare human, may be referred to as bisexual, because they have both ovaries and testes in their single bodies. These are the customary usages for the term bisexual in biology.

On the other hand, as applied to human sexual behavior, the term indicates that there are individuals who choose to have sexual relations with both males and females; and until it is demonstrated, as it certainly is not at the present time, that such a catholicity of taste in a sexual relation is dependent upon the individual containing within his anatomy both male and female structures, or male and female physiologic capacities, it is unfortunate to call such individuals bisexual. Because of its wide currency, the term will undoubtedly continue in use among students of human behavior and in the public in general. It should, however, be used with the understanding that it is patterned on the words heterosexual and homosexual and, like them, refers to the sex of the partner, and proves nothing about the constitution of the person who is labelled bisexual.

FRITZ KLEIN

Extracts from *The Bisexual Option:
A Concept of One Hundred Percent
Intimacy* (1978)

Originally published under the name Fred Klein: Klein, F. (1978) *The Bisexual Option: A Concept of One Hundred Percent Intimacy*, New York: Priam Books. Reproduced by permission of the author.

The Bisexual Option was published at a particularly complex moment in the history of bisexuality. On the one hand, the gay liberation movement of the 1970s had placed sexual preference and identity firmly on the agenda as political issues, with a heavy emphasis on the personal and political importance of 'coming out'. This new wave of energy in sexual politics included a burgeoning bisexual movement and community, particularly in the USA, where a number of bisexual community groups were established (Donaldson 1995; Raymond and Highleyman 1995; Udis-Kessler 1995). The mainstream US magazines *Time* and *Newsweek* both ran cover stories on bisexuality in 1974 (Garber 1995), and bisexuality achieved a certain cachet as an exciting or 'trendy' lifestyle. Indeed *The Bisexual Option* is one of a relatively large number of significant discussions of bisexuality published around this period, including Margaret Mead's 'Bisexuality: what's it all about?' in 1975 and Charlotte Wolff's *Bisexuality: A Study* in 1977. On the other hand, members of medical, psychiatric and therapeutic professions were often hostile to the idea that bisexuality might be regarded as a viable adult sexual orientation. Far from sharing Stekel's view that bisexuality was both normal and healthy (see Chapter 3), some psychoanalysts and psychotherapists maintained that adults who claimed to be bisexual were really just in denial about their homosexuality (or, less often, their heterosexuality). Ruitenbeek, for example, writing in 1973, dismissed bisexuality as a 'myth' which was not only useless to psychotherapists but positively harmful for patients, who needed 'to commit [themselves] to making a genuine sexual choice' (Ruitenbeek 1973:204).

Klein's *The Bisexual Option*, written against this contradictory background, is a landmark text in the development of both the bisexual movement and the concept of bisexuality itself. The ancestry of the idea of 'one hundred percent intimacy' can perhaps be traced back to Stekel (if not to Freud) and in this respect Klein is continuing a tradition of thought which dates back long before the advent of the bisexual movement. Klein also follows Stekel in treating bisexuality as a combination or co-existence of *heterosexuality and homosexuality*—not of maleness and femaleness, or masculinity and femininity. Most bisexual theorists and commentators since Klein have followed suit, although many sexologists and psychologists of the day, such as Wolff (1977), continued to be ambiguous on this issue. The continuum model of sexuality which Klein invokes can also be traced back to Klein's conceptual forebears, in this case to Kinsey. But the text also anticipates themes and images which recur in much subsequent writing about bisexuality, particularly in the epistemological debates of the 1990s. For example, the resistance to categorization and to 'either/or' thinking is a predominant feature of bisexual epistemologies (see, for example, Chapters 14 and 17); the image of the bisexual as a 'spy' or 'traitor' reappears in Clare Hemmings' (1993) image of the bisexual as a 'double agent' of sexual politics; the comparison of sexual categorization with racial categorization—the 'one drop of blood' rule—is widely made in the 1990s (see Part III), particularly by bisexuals of colour (Jordan 1992a; Fehr 1995; see Chapters 13 and 16).

In 1993, Fritz Klein published a second edition of *The Bisexual Option*. This second edition has been updated, particularly in the light of HIV and AIDS, and includes an outline of the Klein Sexual Orientation Grid, which explicitly draws on Kinsey's continuum model (see Chapter 6).

[...] I took down a book from my shelves called *Changing Homosexuality in the Male* by Dr. Lawrence J. Hatterer [1970]. I had read the book previously and I remembered that the point of view toward the bisexual was on the side of nonexistence.

In a list describing common and uncommon homosexual subcultures, Dr. Hatterer places the bisexual in the 'disguised' group—along with closet queens and married males who regularly practice homosexuality. This almost universally held opinion is passed onto the public, both heterosexual and homosexual. And because it is easier to accept and understand the bisexual as a disguised homosexual, public acceptance of expert opinion goes for the most part unchallenged.

As disguised homosexual, the bisexual is by this process 'reduced.' We tend to categorize people, to put them into the most readily available group. In the worlds of commerce, government, and religion, this is to some degree logical. That this mistaken practice is also adopted by the individual in his or her search for self-identity—and held onto at all costs for lack of a suitable alternative—is tragic.

[...] Human beings need to belong. They need to communicate with their peer group. They need to sit around the communal fire not only in warmth but in dignity.

This is especially true in our society when it comes to the business world. In the world of business, banners of visible achievement are flown. Products are manufactured and sold, people are employed, money is made and lost, all in the name of business. Coca-Cola is as internationally known a symbol as the Union Jack or the Stars and Stripes. Buying and selling is most successfully carried on when the people flying the banners know the buyers to whom they are selling. Advertisers know that certain groups of people will remain loyal to a product for a lifetime—if that product can be correctly aimed by means of a direct emotional appeal to the given particular group.

In government, too, the virtue of loyalty can be extolled and exploited for all kinds of personal gain, both good and bad, if the exploiter knows his consumer's place in society and can keep him there. Wars are 'sold' this way, and such lofty ideas as the notion that all men are equal. As long as human beings can be simply classified as one thing or the other, the possibilities are endless.

It would be absurd to suggest that bisexuals are any more or less evil (or, for that matter, good) than heterosexuals or homosexuals. It is as well absurd to suggest that bisexuals are any more or less loyal than other groups around the communal fire. But the quality of loyalty may be different. What we have failed to see up to this point is that the bisexual may be less loyal to the status quo than to nature. Differences, freedom of choice, have been a threat to the group since before the beginning of recorded time.

One of the classic romantic questions asked of psychiatrists is, can a man, can a human being, love two women at the same time? My answer to that one is, 'He can if he can.'

Can human beings love both men and women at the same time? They can if they can.

What does this do to the individual's standards of loyalty? Is he or she able to carry the burdens of trust necessary in relationships that are more than transient or skin-deep? Or is he or she, by playing a dual role, a 'spy'?

It is a fact of international law that during wartime spies, when captured, are shot. An even worse fate is in store for a citizen, man or woman, convicted of treason. They are held up to public scorn, the quality of which is particularly vicious, and then they are often killed. Loyalty to 'one's own' is held feudally dear by the human race north, south, east, and west. We simply do not condone spying or treason. They are acts so abhorrent that we are shocked by their existence, and often feel no guilt in erasing the spy, the traitor, so that no living trace remains. Being 'drummed out' is, in a very real sense, being told that it would have been better had you never been born, and that from this time forward the position will be taken that you never were. 'My country right or wrong, my country' is a line straight to the human heart, a place of worship in the human psyche.

The bisexual resembles the spy in that he or she moves psychosexually free among men, among women. As well, the bisexual resembles the traitor in that he or she is in a position to know the secrets of both camps, and to play one against the other. The bisexual, in short, is seen as a dangerous person not to be trusted, because his or her vision of party loyalty, so to speak, is nonexistent. And if one lacks this vision of loyalty, one is so far outside the human sexual pale that one is virtually nonexistent.

Let us return again to Dr. Hatterer's interesting word 'disguise.'

A disguise is a deceit. If a human being spends his or her life in disguise, then he or she is not to be trusted. It follows that a Jew in Europe, from 1930 to 1945, who disguised him- or herself as something other than a Jew to keep from being killed, was not to be trusted by anyone. Yet, in retrospect, there are few of us with a claim to intelligence, let alone humanity, who would not trust the 'disguised' Jew above the S.S. officer who proudly showed his true face to the world.

In our society, with its strong negative connotation on homosexual behavior of any kind, it is quite understandable that the bisexual, or the 'closet' homosexual, disguises his or her behavior. *But bisexuality is not disguised homosexuality, nor is it disguised heterosexuality.* It is another way of sexual expression. Although it contains elements of both heterosexual and homosexual behavior, it is a way of being, in and of itself, a way neither better nor worse than the more accepted ways of healthy heterosexuality and healthy homosexuality.

No matter what sexual orientation a person has, he or she lives on a continuum. Despite the certainty of eventual death, the life of an individual goes on until that time. During the course of a lifetime, each individual plays a number of roles: father, mother, soldier,

teacher, heterosexual, homosexual, and so on. We take comfort in the labels; they help define our relationships with one another and with the world at large. Yet with each label we acquire, we limit our infinite possibilities, our uniqueness. It is our insistence on labels that creates the 'either-or' syndrome.

[...]

Labeling is a tried and true method of eliminating the threats of uncertainty, ambiguity, fear. A familiar old myth illustrates this. In the form of an ill-conceived joke, it says that a man may father many beautiful children, be a transcendent lover of women, earn numerous degrees at the highest university level, discover a cure for an incurable disease, earn his country's most bespangled award on the field of battle; but should he fellate one penis, he will be forever known thereafter not as a loving parent, a lover, a scholar, a Nobel Prize-winner, a brave soldier, but as a 'cocksucker.'

There is another myth that, though not primarily sexual, is equally absurd in assigning a negative connotation, based on prejudice to begin with, to a mere fact of life. In many parts of the country, a person with 'one drop' of Negro blood is considered to be a black. Why is this person not seen as white at least in degree? The answer is as simple as it is profane. A threat is best dealt with if it is dismissable. In the world of sexual choice the homosexual is the black. He is a 'fag,' a 'fairy,' a 'cocksucker.' We need not take him seriously. Somehow, God seems more secure in his heaven if we are not burdened with the element of degree, when we are judging threatening behavior, especially sexual behavior. Hence, if the bisexual is really a homosexual with a screw loose, his or her social and psychological obliteration is a comfort and a safeguard to all. This holds true for the homosexual as well as the heterosexual because existence, however negative its connotations, is preferable, better, a higher state, than nonexistence.

Abhorrent as 'The Love that Dared not Speak its Name' has been to society over the centuries, at least no serious case has ever been made for its nonexistence: the homosexual may have been despised for his or her 'perversion,' but his or her psychosexual existence has never been in question. The homosexual belongs. He or she has a culture. He or she can be loyal to a team.

Our culture considers itself liberal and permissive, but the heterosexual view of the homosexual is, to say the least, negative. In a 1960's CBS poll, 72 percent of the people polled considered homosexuality an illness, 11 percent a crime, 9 percent a sin, and only 8 percent a preference. A

Harris poll in the same decade found that 82 percent of the males and 58 percent of the females polled thought that homosexuals were the third most harmful group to the nation, behind Communists and atheists.

Is it any wonder that now, with the advent of Gay Lib and a measure of gay recognition, that the homosexual may not want to recognize his possible bisexuality?

To most heterosexuals and homosexuals, the bisexual is an alien being whose dual sexuality opens up the possibility of their own sexual ambiguity. They cannot understand the bisexual's ability to share their own preferences but not their own aversions.

The heterosexual's erotic preferences and aversions usually do not permit an understanding of the homosexual. Homosexuals as well are baffled by attraction to the opposite sex. This creates two distinct camps from which banners can be flown. And though they may be ideological threats to each other, the two camps are distinct; they are clearly as different as the American eagle and the Russian bear. Their threat to each other is familiar, and the battle lines are clear-cut.

The wish to avoid conflict is natural and essential to life. Without peace of mind (if only of the kind available to the Sunday golfer), madness nips at our heels. Should we fail to defend ourselves, it will go for our throats. In our time, peace of any kind may be available only to the few who know themselves—and the many who keep their heads 'securely' in the sand. Denial is one of the classic mechanisms by which this brand of security is sustained. For the heterosexual male, for example, the homosexual male's behavior may contain components of his own, but denial of the homosexual's label (and thence his role) is relatively easy. The heterosexual is not free to identify beyond certain vague, 'neuter' acts, such as kissing or being fellated. But this same male confronted with a bisexual male must, if only unconsciously, deal with his own possible sexual ambiguity. The reason he is relieved to hear that the bisexual does not exist is that he thereby avoids his own inner conflict. If a homosexual male finds other males attractive, that fact has nothing to do with the heterosexual. But if a bisexual male finds both men and women attractive, that does have something to do with him in a way too close for comfort. The possibility of identification then is considerably broader. When the head in the sand comes up for air, what it sees may be unbearable.

[...]

In our society fear of intimacy is expressed in part through heterophobia and/or homophobia—the fear of the opposite and/or

the same sex. The main cause of the fear and resulting confusion is that sexuality and intimacy, though closely related, don't necessarily live together. They are complementary but also strongly independent emotions. Their compatibility is dependent on individual circumstance and social pressure.

Being close with a good friend who is laid up in the hospital can reach a level of pure, hundred-percent intimacy without sex being part of it at all. But when, say, the friend gets better and the possibility of sex arises, the intimacy is more complex than what it was in the hospital. Or suppose two people share the oneness possible within an intimate situation to the point where a simple hug (whether sexual or emotional in nature) is the next logical progression. If that hug is denied out of individual or social pressure, then the two people are less than a hundred-percent intimate, in that they are not responding freely to all the choices possible within the situation.

Sexual orientation affects the quality of intimacy, too. If a person has been oriented from childhood to think and behave sexually in a particular way. Total intimacy is possible within that orientation, whatever it may be.

All persons, irrespective of where they are on the continuum, need what we call love. The wisest heads have pondered the nature of love, and no one has ever defined it to the satisfaction of everyone. What is life? What is love? No attempt will be made in these pages to answer such lofty questions. But there is a less celebrated, more humble question that relates to life and love. We will attempt to answer this question.

What is intimacy?

The borderline of intimacy is as natural a crossing as the first vital breath taken on entering this world and the last patch of air breathed before leaving it. On the question of life or death we have no choice. Birth and death, no matter how gently administered, are the two great shocks of life. One we view as generally positive, the other as generally negative. In the beginning we were one with our mother, and life began with the trauma of birth, the death of unity. Intimacy, then, is strongly related to the experiences of birth and death. Since—in my view—we don't consciously remember birth, and don't return to this life to remember death, intimacy the striving for unity with another human being, is our strongest link with the two most extraordinary events of our living existence on this earth. The feeling of liking or loving another person with complete trust, and the action of sharing emotions and experiences with that person, are seen as lying somewhere between the two events. How often have we heard someone say, in the springtime of love, 'I feel reborn.' Or at the end of a relationship, 'Part of me has died.' It's the great paradox. We

welcome it. We fear it. We experience it to the degree that we welcome it. We deny it to the degree that we fear it.

The possibility, then, of a pure, hundred-percent intimacy becomes a question of being willing to lose in order to win. What do I mean psychosexually when I say a hundred-percent intimacy? If we lived in a remote location with only ten people, five men and five women, sharing, liking, and loving in complete trust exclusively with our opposite sex, or exclusively with our own sex, we would be operating at fifty-percent intimacy. If, on the other hand, we are open to complete intimacy with both sexes, at least the potential for hundred-percent intimacy is obvious.

Motion is the condition, continuum the framework in which we can see and judge our capacity for intimacy. Within this framework, though, are three stages of intimacy—*minimal*, *circumscribed*, and *complete*. Every human being is born with the psychological potential and need for intimacy. A person's environment, neuroses, or both, can bring about an almost total inability to be intimate with other people; this reflects a *minimal* capacity for intimacy. *Circumscribed* intimacy goes beyond minimal but is eventually blocked because of an absence of complete trust in sharing experiences and emotions. 'Trust' is the bridge word from circumscribed to complete intimacy. Once over this bridge a person is capable of selective *feelings* of liking and loving, and *actions* of sharing emotions and experiences completely with another person.

In addition to the degree of intimacy, the possible situations of intimacy are as generally and individually different as the infinite variety-found in life itself. Still, we can divide intimacy into two broad types: sexual and emotional. The currency of sexual intimacy is physical satisfaction, sexual gratification. The closeness of the infant state is achieved once again but this time as a sexual adult. The need and desire for this type of intimacy is powerful, and is usually achieved starting at an early-age and lasting into old age.

[...]

The worst punishment possible is isolation through the removal of intimacy. Solitary confinement is the worst punishment short of death. Emotional intimacy is a basic necessity for the social animal called 'human.'

A most important element of sexual and emotional intimacy is closeness through touching. Touching need not necessarily be sexual to be intimate. Feelings of love and trust transmitted by touch begin

at birth, and this early contact is more complete than at any other time of life, except during the sexual act. But body contact is always there, even if in an adult's formal and ritualized fashion. The handshake of the stranger, the kiss on the cheek, the hug, the touching of the shoulder are all acceptable behaviors among all people and races. The specific touch may vary, but some form of touching is necessary and desirable.

I hope we can now understand somewhat better the causes of hetero- and homophobia. Essentially, they result from the fear of sexual intimacy when emotional intimacy is present; emotional intimacy also requires body contact or proximity and that, of course, can get too close for comfort. So to ensure that sex stays far enough away, we also sometimes avoid emotional intimacy. The heterophobic male homosexual can't and won't imagine himself in a situation with a woman where the transcendent effects of true emotional intimacy might make the idea of sexual intimacy unnecessary. That next logical touch on the arm is waylaid by heterophobia. The homophobic heterosexual man can't and won't imagine himself in a situation with a man where the transcendent effects of full emotional intimacy can make the possibility of touching and of physical satisfaction on a nonerotic, nonsexual level not only logical but necessary. His homophobia is stronger than his sense of the intimate truth of the situation.

Hetero- and homophobia also cause, in part, the formalization and ritualization of physical contact during intimate adult behavior. The full embrace is permitted only between lovers (where sexual intimacy is openly acknowledged), and sometimes between relatives (but not always, because of the underlying fear of incest). It's also permitted between people in times of triumph (sports), of relief, after a disaster or when in despair. At such times two men are permitted to hug, even kiss; taboos are forgotten and no sexual significance is given to the contact because it resembles, or is equal to, the primary, 'presexual' embrace of infancy.

What happens to someone who, over a long period, denies such a personal human need when it is there, when it is what it is and should be dealt with? The neurotic functioning inherent in such behavior depends on how hard a line the individual eventually takes in denying the possibility of pure, hundred-percent intimacy.

[...]

The longer the diameter of the possibility of hundred-percent intimacy, the wider the shadow of fear can become. Psychosexually, the fear monsters of our time are the homophobia of heterosexuals and the heterophobia of homosexuals. The exclusivity of homosexual or

heterosexual behavior splits us into two camps, both scratching the fear monster's back and feeding him like some dragon in a cave. We will slay the dragon only when we join together, yielding to what it is that unites us (the capacity for intimacy) rather than what separates us (fear).

When he arrives, our St. George may be a bisexual because he or she, having experienced sexual intimacy with both men and women, shows us that there is nothing to fear in selective emotional intimacy. He or she will be, as well, a healthy bisexual because of his/her capacity for emotional intimacy with both sexes. Without that capacity, possible in the healthy heterosexual and homosexual, there is only limited sexual intimacy, however pleasurable. And that is not enough, because constant sex without the element of intimacy adds up to the spiritual desolation inherent in promiscuity. This is not to say that selective random sex for its own sake is not good. But sex for its own sake is not enough for complete intimacy.

We can have it all. We can also have it even without complete bisexuality. Tom A., an acquaintance of mine, would not call himself bisexual, nor would his relatives, friends, or business associates put such a label on him. He operates, however, at hundred-percent intimacy through a loving marriage of eleven years and through the friendship of Paul W, with whom he has had an open-armed communion of feeling for nine years.

Tom has a good emotional and sexual exchange with his wife (a union that has produced two children) and a good emotional bond with his best friend. Both Tom and Paul enjoy intimacy without sexual exchange occurring—an uneroticized intimacy.

[...]

Tom, though not a bisexual, operates on a *nonerotic bisexual level* only in that his capacity for emotional intimacy knows no gender limit. It is his own sense of freedom on this emotional level, which in his case we call 'bisexual', that helps make Tom psychosexually healthy.

The healthy bisexual is healthy not because of his sexual intimacy with both sexes, but because of the enormous range of his emotional capacity. The healthy heterosexual and homosexual are also able to achieve equal states of emotional intimacy with both men and women. The essential difference between the healthy bisexual, heterosexual, and homosexual is only evident in individual sexual preferences and behavior. Emotionally, the three groups all operate on a 'bisexual' level, that is (as with Tom), they have no fear of emotional intimacy with either sex. On the 'bisexual-intimacy level,' men and women are more alike than

they are different, which of course isn't to say that no differences exist. For one thing, men and women treat intimacy itself differently. Culturally important, too, is the manner of communication between men and women, as compared to the communication between men, and between women, since the manner of communication affects the type of intimacy achieved.

The two types of interaction possible between any given two people are often called *symmetrical* and *complementary*. In symmetrical interaction, the partners mirror each other's actions. It is based on equality and minimization of differences. An example would be two people of any sex, both excellent cooks, who try to outdo each other while preparing a good meal. Complementary interaction maximizes differences to the mutual satisfaction of both people. For example, if the husband makes the decisions and the wife follows them, he being assertive and she submissive, then complementary interaction is taking place. Both types of communication are necessary for a prospering relationship, which needs both competitive behavior (symmetrical), and one-up and one-down behavior (complementary).

In relationships between men and women, our society stresses the complementary mode of behavior. Until recently little emphasis was placed on the competitive aspect of a male-female relationship. In fact, in many areas it was forbidden. In order for a man and woman to live successfully together, it was felt that they should only complement each other. This frequently meant that the woman buried her competitive drive in order not to run head-on into the man. Most people now realize that a good relationship requires that the woman also compete, in symmetry, with the man.

In friendship between men and men, and women and women, the intimacy type generally allowed is symmetrical. Little complementary interaction is permitted because that usually implies pairing, and pairing implies sexual intimacy. But since emotional and sexual intimacy are different, two male or two female friends might, if they chose, complement each other very well, with no hint of sexual intimacy being necessary. The balance between the symmetrical/complementary types of interaction depends on the chemistry of the two people, male-female, male-male, or female-female. Competition, though, holds little sexual overtone. That is why many friends rely on it to achieve a satisfying intimacy level. But the 'bisexual-intimacy level' allows for both, and it is in both that the transcendent closeness inherent in hundred-percent emotional intimacy is achieved.

AMANDA UDIS-KESSLER

*Notes on the Kinsey Scale and Other
Measures of Sexuality (1992)*

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In this article, Udis-Kessler surveys the strengths and weaknesses of three important scales developed to 'measure' sexuality, and discusses their role and influence in different understandings of bisexuality. How we attempt to 'measure' sexual orientation or desire not only determines the proportions of the population we assume to be bisexual, heterosexual and homosexual, but also reflects the different ways we conceptualize sexuality in general, and bisexuality in particular. Such issues lead on to questions about the relationship between identity and behaviour, raised in the next section.

It is worth noting that this article represents the famous Kinsey homosexual-heterosexual scale as a one-dimensional line (see Figure 2), rather than a two-dimensional graph (see Chapter 4, Figure 1). It has become much more common to represent the Kinsey scale in this way; but this apparently minor detail actually makes some difference to how the nature of the scale is understood. The one-dimensional figure suggests that bisexuality—or degrees of bisexuality—can be situated at (a) more or less fixed point(s) on a single axis, at a certain *distance from* 'pure' homosexuality or 'pure' heterosexuality. Kinsey's original graph, however, represents the degrees of bisexuality as *mixtures* of heterosexuality and homosexuality, in various relative proportions. The dilemma that these two different versions of the Kinsey scale represent—whether bisexuality is better understood as a *combination* of heterosexuality and homosexuality, or as a position *between* them—is in effect an insoluble one, to which different answers are proposed at different times by different—or sometimes the same—writers and respondents. (On the instabilities of (bi)sexual discourse, see Chapter

19). The fluctuating dynamics of these two co-existing models, together with the different meanings of bisexuality itself (as male/female, masculine/feminine, heterosexual/homosexual), constitute a recurring theme in debates about bisexuality, as will be seen in many of the chapters that follow.

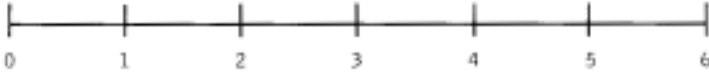
The Kinsey scale is so well known among lesbians, gay men and bisexuals that it is commonly mentioned in writings on sexuality without further explanation. It is one of at least three scales that have been developed to measure sexuality; two other well known scales were created by Michael Storms and Fritz Klein (see Figures 3 and 4).

Alfred Kinsey was a zoologist at the University of Indiana in the 1940s. He was tapped to teach the human sexuality course, so the story goes, because he was an extraordinarily boring man and the school administration, which did not want to offer the course at all, thought that if he taught it no one would attend. What they did not take into account was Kinsey's painstaking commitment to research; when he went to prepare material for the course, he found that no current research on human sexuality existed to teach and so set out to gather his own data. He developed an extensive questionnaire and interviewed over ten thousand people, publishing his data in *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* [Kinsey *et al.* 1948] and *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* [Kinsey *et al.* 1953].

The books received attention mainly for their 'value-free' (read: nonjudgmental) approach to sexuality, unheard of at that time, but one set of findings in, particular turned out to have a great deal of impact: Kinsey's discovery that one-third of the men he surveyed had had homosexual encounters to orgasm as adults, and that forty-six percent of the men surveyed were neither exclusively homosexual nor heterosexual. Although the sheer amount of homosexuality reported was entirely unexpected, the sexual range was at least as surprising and led Kinsey to draw up a scale in order to make sense of his data.

Kinsey developed the scale to stress sexuality as a continuum, but it has generally been cited to prove that ten percent of the population is gay. This famous number, so useful to us since Kinsey's day, is almost undoubtedly wrong,¹ and it has since become clear that Kinsey's sample (the set of people who provided his data) was not representative of the country as a whole. Nonetheless, phrases such as 'one in ten' and 'Kinsey 6' are probably as ingrained in queer culture as Judy Garland, Oscar Wilde, leather, Desert Hearts, Provincetown and Ferron.

Kinsey's model went unchallenged until the 1970s. At that point, a debate began to occur among psychologists and social psychologists interested in gender roles, a debate that would ultimately lead to a



[Figure 2] The Kinsey heterosexual-homosexual scale

0. Exclusively heterosexual.
1. Predominantly heterosexual, only incidentally homosexual.
2. Predominantly heterosexual, but more than incidentally homosexual.
3. Equally heterosexual and homosexual.
4. Predominantly homosexual, but more than incidentally heterosexual.
5. Predominantly homosexual, only incidentally heterosexual.
6. Exclusively homosexual.

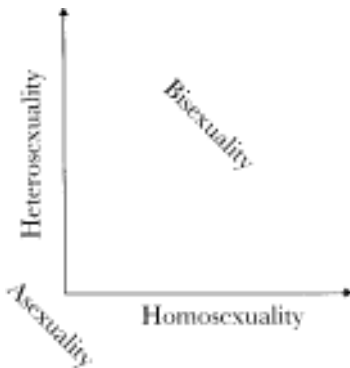
second sexuality scale. Traditionally, gender roles had been understood as consisting largely of traits or attributes that could be labeled masculine or feminine (independence, aggression, empathy, gentleness and the like). Such traits had been measured on a single bipolar scale, with ‘masculine’ traits at one end of the scale and ‘feminine’ traits at the other; the standard masculinity-femininity scale thus looked very much like the Kinsey scale. The ends of the continuum were exclusive of each other: one was either feminine or masculine. Moreover, the middle of the scale was not well defined; it was unclear whether someone in the center would have attributes of both men and women, or few attributes of either men or women. During the 1970s, gender role researchers began to question whether the traditional scale was the most useful way of understanding gender role attributes. Psychologists such as Sandra Bem, Janet Spence and Robert Helmreich proposed an alternative approach: two separate scales, one measuring ‘feminine’ attributes, one measuring ‘masculine’ attributes [Bem 1974; Spence and Helmreich 1978]. This new method of measurement cleared up a number of problems. A person could score high on both scales, or low on both scales, or high on one and low on the other; the first two possibilities were no longer blurred into one confusing ‘middle range.’

Given that the Kinsey scale operated on the same bipolar format as the earlier gender role scale, it was only a matter of time before the same problems that had been raised with regard to gender would be focused on sexuality. The Kinsey scale presented homosexuality and heterosexuality as exclusive of each other and failed to clarify what was measured by the middle section. Kinsey surely intended the continuum to show degrees of bisexuality, but—like the early gender role scale falling between the two extremes could mean that

one was both homosexual and heterosexual, or that one was neither one nor the other. (Someone with little sex drive and few sexual desires for anyone might show up at '3' on the Kinsey scale, as would someone with strong sexual desires for both men and women. The former person would be considered asexual, whereas the latter would be considered bisexual.)

Michael Storms, a psychologist at the University of Kansas, had been studying sexuality and erotic fantasies, and his research seemed to point to some of these conceptual problems with the Kinsey scale. He found that bisexuals engaged in as much heterosexual fantasizing as heterosexuals, and as much homosexual fantasizing as their lesbian and gay counterparts.² He ascertained from this that bisexuality seemed to somehow incorporate total heterosexuality and total homosexuality in a way not indicated by the Kinsey scale (in which bisexuality is between the two 'extremes,' rather than encompassing them). Storms was also bothered by the issue of asexuality described above. In 1980, he proposed a new sexuality scale, similar to Bem, Spence and Helmreich's work on gender roles, but using an x-y axis rather than two separate continua [Storms 1980].³

Few people of any sexuality seem to be aware of this model; Kinsey's and Fritz Klein's models are cited far more frequently. This may be because Storms published in a psychology journal, while Kinsey produced two books and Klein published in the *Journal of Homosexuality*. Or it may be because Storms's model does not translate into catchy phrases like Kinsey 6, or because the subtlety of his argument differentiating bisexuality and asexuality was lost on most of the people who did encounter his articles, or even because of social



[Figure 3] The Storms sexuality axis

trends in lesbian and gay communities, in which the Kinsey scale has been especially valued.⁴ Regardless of the reason, Storms's model did not set off a new debate about the conceptualization of sexuality, and Klein's model, created several years later, does not appear to have been a response to Storms.

Psychiatrist Fritz Klein developed the Klein Sexual Orientation Grid (KSOG) 'in an attempt to better demarcate and understand the complexities of human sexual attitudes, emotions and behaviors' [Klein *et al.* 1985:35–49]. Klein found prior definitions of homosexuality, heterosexuality and bisexuality to be hopelessly vague and inconsistent. He thought that Kinsey's original scale was useful to a degree, but was concerned that the different factors that make up sexual identity— attraction, fantasies, behaviour and the like—be taken into account, and that the variance of these factors over time be duly acknowledged. Klein created the KSOG to rectify these problems and, in one of the most interesting sampling strategies I have ever heard of, tested its usefulness by having *Forum* (a *Playboy* clone) readers fill it out.⁵

The Kinsey scale offered a range of numbers correlating with different degrees of heterosexuality and homosexuality; the Klein grid is filled out by using Kinsey's number system. A 'Kinsey number' between 0 and 6 is placed in each box of the grid. Thus, a woman who has only slept with men but who only wants to sleep with women in the future would fill out the 'sexual behavior' boxes '0' (completely heterosexual), '0', and '6' (completely homosexual) respectively. A man who currently socializes only with men would fill in 'social preference— present' with a '6,' but if he is equally sexually active with men and women, he would fill in the number '3' (equally homosexual and heterosexual) in the 'sexual behavior—present' box.

Klein's model seems to have found many fans among sex educators and among bisexuals in general. Its multidimensional focus is certainly a step forward in precision from the conceptual vagueness of Kinsey and Storms, but Storms might complain that, like Kinsey, Klein blurs the asexual—bisexual distinction—twenty-one times per subject!

Because sexuality measures, especially Kinsey's, have appeared to be so useful for so many people, it may seem odd to raise objections to them. Yet feminist social scientists and others concerned with research methodology have pointed out that it is problematic to abstract any one aspect of a person, sexuality included, and hold it up as useful data on its own terms. Moreover, surveys, questionnaires and other self-reporting methods tell us only about someone's self-perception,⁶ not necessarily about her behavior, motivations or

The Klein Sexual Orientation Grid

In order to ascertain your sexual orientation, add the numbers in the twenty-one boxes and divide by twenty-one in order to see where you place on the Kinsey scale. If you have a dash in any box, divide by one less for each dash. You can then ask yourself if this grid is a fairly accurate indicator of your sexual orientation.

| | Past | Present (in past year) | Ideal Future Goal |
|----------------------|------|---------------------------|-------------------------|
| Sexual attraction | | | |
| Sexual behavior | | | |
| Sexual fantasies | | | |
| Emotional preference | | | |
| Social preference | | | |
| Self-identification | | | |
| Lifestyle | | | |

Sexual attraction. Who turns you on? Who do you find attractive as a real or potential partner?

Sexual behaviour. Who are your sexual contacts (partners)?

Sexual fantasies. Who do you enjoy fantasizing about in erotic daydreams?

Emotional preference. With whom do you prefer to establish strong emotional bonds?

Social preference. Which sex do you prefer to spend you leisure time with, and with which sex do you feel most comfortable?

[Figure 4] The Klein Sexual Orientation grid

unconscious influences. At a more basic level, the research methods generally used by the social sciences have been developed within a larger philosophical perspective that some feminists find problematic, because of its unquestioning valuation of male gender-stereotyped attributes as normative. Claims about scientific objectivity (both the

possibility of it and the value of it), emotional distance from the subjects of study, and the 'neutral' character of science are among the many areas of research contested by feminist thinkers. This is not the place to delve into a feminist critique of science or methodology, but I think it is important to mention that such a critique exists [Bordo 1986; Harding 1986; Smith 1987, 1990] Another critical line of thought, influenced (ironically) by both ethics and postmodernism, sees sexuality scales as part of the trend of technologizing sex.⁷

Criticisms notwithstanding, sexuality scales are not likely to disappear in the near future; if anything, they may be continually redesigned to take sexual styles (such as s/m) into account or to reexamine sexuality-gender dynamics.

Postscript: As this book was going to press, I learned about a new sexuality scale [Berkey *et al.* 1990] Created in order to 'validate and to contrast six proposed categories of bisexuality, as well as categories related to heterosexuality, homosexuality and asexuality' [Berkey *et al.* 1990:67] the Multidimensional Scale of Sexuality represents a recasting of some of Klein's ideas, while taking Storms's concerns into account. The six categories of bisexuality encompass those people who have switched from exclusive heterosexuality to exclusive homosexuality or the reverse; those people who are primarily attracted to one sex or always focused on one sex—whichever one it may be—but who have infrequent desires for, or sexual contacts with, the other sex; and those people who are primarily attracted to one sex—whichever one it may be—but who have infrequent desires for, or sexual contacts, with the other sex, and those people who are equally oriented towards both sexes, but who are either always focused on one sex at a time or always attracted to, and active with, both sexes. If this scale becomes well-known, I predict that bisexuals will find it extremely interesting if complex (one ascertains one's score by filling out forty-five item questionnaire), and that the new jargon associated with it ('sequential' versus 'concurrent' bisexuality) will find its way into many a bi circle.

Notes

- 1 There is, ironically, conflicting data on whether 'ten percent is too high or low a figure. Part of the problem is that Kinsey's designation of sexuality by 'counting orgasms': an exaggeration, but not an unrealistic description, of his methodology with male subjects; is culturally far removed from the identity and subjectivity of the contemporary self-designated 'queer,' and as such cannot speak to lesbian, gay or bi life post-Stonewall very effectively.

- 2 Storms did not fixus on the heterosexual fantasizing of self-identified lesbians and gay men. or on the homosexual fantasizing of self-identified heterosexuals. He took people's self-definitions at face value and did not 'redefine' people by discrepancies in their fantasy lives. Whether such an exercise would have been more interesting must thus remain open to question until someone else researches this area.
- 3 It should be noted that Storms's sample was quite small as compared to Kinsey's (several dozen people as opposed to several thousand), and that his thesis about the best way to conceptualize sexuality has not really been tested. I believe that the greatest value of his model is its stimulation to our thinking; at this point, it is difficult to make any claims about its accuracy in describing human sexual experience.
- 4 This is not the place to discuss the political implications of the different sexuality scales or the ways in which they have been used historically by different groups. However, it is interesting that of the few people I know who are conversant with all three scales, bisexuals seem to be more fond of the Storms scale than are lesbians and gay men. The extent to which this is tied to social and cultural trends among the different groups is unclear, but I think some connection quite likely exists.
- 5 Klein did not focus on the breakdown of sexuality revealed by his sample — and with good methodological reason, given the nonrepresentativeness of his sample. He merely tested it for validity and reliability. To my knowledge, no one has used it on a large, diverse population to discover sexuality breakdown yet.
- 6 Or at least that part of her self-perception that she is willing to reveal.
- 7 Other aspects of this trend include sexual technique manuals, sex therapy and in some versions, sex toys and books. An interesting socialist-feminist treatment of this topic can be found in Edwin Schur [1988:48–52, 63–66, 90–95, 135–138].

Part II

BISEXUAL IDENTITY
AND BISEXUAL
BEHAVIOUR

PHILIP W. BLUMSTEIN AND
PEPPER SCHWARTZ

*Bisexuality: Some Social Psychological
Issues (1977)*

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Blumstein's and Schwartz's research on bisexual identities and behaviours in the 1970s was truly ground breaking. Not only did they conduct empirical, interview-based research with people whose sexual histories included encounters with both women and men—perhaps the first time such research had been conducted on a significant scale—they also regarded bisexuality as an important topic for the understanding of human sexuality as a whole. While a handful of scholars around this period were gathering similar data from people with ostensibly bisexual histories or backgrounds, such as 'swingers' (Symonds 1976; cf. Dixon 1985), Blumstein and Schwartz took a distinctive approach which interrogated bisexuality conceptually as well as empirically. In this chapter they offer some reflections on the conceptual dilemma arising from different interpretations of the Kinsey scale outlined in the introduction to Chapter 6.

Blumstein and Schwartz were also ground breaking in that they paid careful attention to the differences between male and female bisexuality, rather than treating 'bisexuality' as a monolithic entity which applied to men and women in the same way. Their previously published articles had dealt with male and female bisexuality separately, and had considered the different factors involved for the different sexes (Blumstein and Schwartz 1974, 1976a, 1976b). The article reprinted here brings together these two aspects of their research and offers an overview both of their findings and of their views on the significance of the research for wider issues in the study of human sexuality. Sadly, their predictions for the future of sex research in the light of their findings may have proved to be optimistic: in a similar (albeit larger-scale) longitudinal

study based on interviews with bisexual respondents, Weinberg *et al.* lament the 'virtual absence of research on people attracted erotically to both sexes' (Weinberg *et al.* 1994:4), almost twenty years after Blumstein and Schwartz stressed the importance of such research.

The scientific study of human sexuality has not reached a stage of conceptual maturity. Any scientific endeavor must, as an important early step, develop a workable number of abstractions to simplify a complex universe of phenomena. The study of sexuality has had little success at such a task because it has failed to address an even more fundamental problem, i.e., to recognize and map the complexity and diversity of the very sexual phenomena under scrutiny. It is not difficult to understand why sex research is replete with oversimplifications masquerading as scientific abstractions. By and large, investigators working with sexual data have accepted uncritically the pervasive cultural understandings of sexuality, and have assumed there to be a simple and 'correct' conceptual scheme readily modifiable to the requirements of scientific rigor. As a result of our continuing study of sexual identity we have been led to quite the opposite view, and have become disaffected with scientific conceptions that simply reflect the prejudices of folk wisdom. Indeed, the most fundamental conclusion from our research has been that the closer we probe such questions as how people come to define themselves sexually or how their erotic and affectional biographies are structured, the more—not less—the data defy organization in terms of the classical simplicities.

Escaping scientists' borrowed conceptions of sexuality is difficult indeed, because these lay notions, we feel, play a very important part in shaping the actual sexual data themselves. We take the simple position that personal views about sexuality in the abstract reflect wider cultural understandings, and affect, in turn, the concrete constructions people place on their own feelings and experiences, and thereby affect their behavior. So it is essential to accept cultural understandings of sexuality as crucial data, while at the same time rejecting the scientific validity of their underlying premises.

Guiding our primary cultural understandings concerning sexuality—are three related dichotomies: gender (female versus male), sex role (feminine versus masculine), and affectional preference (homosexual versus heterosexual). Although departures from these dichotomies can be accommodated (e.g., trans-sexualism has been allowed to emerge as both a concept and as an empirical reality), the very extraordinariness that accompanies such departures reflects and reinforces the cultural simplifications.

Bisexuality is another conceptual loose-end which has been forced by recent media events¹ into a precarious niche in an otherwise neat conceptual apparatus. There is certainly nothing new in the fact that some people do not limit their lifetime of sexual experiences to one sex or the other. In fact, sex researchers over the years have presented compelling evidence of bisexuality in both our own culture and elsewhere around the world (Ford and Beach 1951). Nevertheless it seems clear that such behavior has been seen as a curiosity, and no attempt has been made to integrate the occasional data on bisexuality into any coherent scientific view of sexuality, nor to modify the hegemony of dichotomous concepts.

As far back as 1948, Kinsey admonished sex researchers to think of sexuality in general, and sex-object choice in particular, in terms of a continuum rather than as a rigid set of dichotomous categories [this volume]. His studies found that '37% of the total male population had had at least some overt homosexual experience to the point of orgasm between adolescence and old age,' and that between 8% and 20% of females (depending on marital status and education) had made at least incidental homosexual responses or contacts in each of the years between 20 and 35 years of age (Kinsey, Pomeroy, Martin, and Gebhard 1953). These data, as revolutionary as they were, need to be contrasted with the findings that only 4% of Kinsey's white males and between 0.3% and 3% of his females were exclusively homosexual after the onset of adolescence. The inescapable—but often escaped—conclusion from Kinsey et al.'s findings are that a mix of homosexual and heterosexual behaviors in a person's erotic biography is a common occurrence, and that it is entirely possible to engage in anywhere from a little to a great deal of homosexual behavior without adopting a homosexual lifestyle.

The implications of viewing human sexuality as being plastic and malleable have never really been exploited. Even the word bisexuality gives a misleading sense of fixedness to sex-object choice, suggesting as it does a person in the middle, equidistant from heterosexuality and from homosexuality, equally erotically disposed to one gender or the other. Our data show that exceedingly few people come so neatly park-aged, thus if we were to be really true to Kinsey's idea of a sexual continuum, we would instead use the preferable term, *ambisexuality*, connoting some ability for a person to eroticize both genders under some circumstances. However, *bisexuality* seems to have already become entrenched in our language, and we will have to settle for it, rather than the term Kinsey would have preferred. Indeed, even though we are indebted to Kinsey for

his insistence on a homosexual/heterosexual continuum, we must emphasize that this view also misleads by focusing on the individual, with his or her sexual 'place' as a unit of conceptualization, rather than on the sexual behavior (with all of its antecedents and subjective meanings) as a unit for theorizing.

Kinsey et al.'s data were not the only ones indicating that homosexual and heterosexual behavior could be incorporated in a single sexual career. Other studies have pointed to a bisexual phenomenon, although they have never dealt with the question of bisexuality per se. McCaghy and Skipper (1969), for example, argued that because of the social organization of the occupation of striptease, many of the women become involved in homosexual relationships, although they often continue to have heterosexual involvements. Furthermore, it has been well documented that women in correctional institutions commonly develop homosexual relationships within a well-articulated, quasi-kinship system (Giallombardo 1966, 1974; Ward and Kassebaum 1965). While the homosexual liaisons seem to be very important for the psychological well-being of the inmates and serve as a major foundation for the social organization of the institutions, the homosexuality is for most inmates situational. Most of those women and girls who were committed to a heterosexual lifestyle before incarceration return to the same pattern upon release.

The existence in our society of bisexuality in males has received somewhat greater documentation. Studies of prisoners (Kirkham 1971; Lindner 1948; Sykes 1958) have repeatedly shown a fair incidence of homosexual behavior and the development of homosexual liaisons among men who had no prior homosexual experience and who would return to exclusive heterosexuality upon release. A study of brief homosexual encounters in public restrooms (Humphreys 1970) demonstrated that a sizeable number of men who take part in 'tearoom' activities are heterosexually married and do not consider themselves to be homosexual. Ross (1971) has reported that some of the men in his sample of self-identified homosexual men who were married to women had ongoing sexual relationships with their wives. Reiss (1961) interviewed teenage male prostitutes who engaged in homosexual relations with adult men, while maintaining a heterosexual self-perception and an otherwise heterosexual career. Reiss viewed this duality as a reflection of the legitimizing effects of peer group norms, the depersonalized nature of the sexual relations, and the financial gain that could be used as a neutralization technique.

What has been obscured in all of this haphazard treatment of bisexuality is that these sexual data can be used to address more general

questions of theoretical importance. Bisexuality illustrates and illuminates important facets of processes of self-labeling, of the plasticity of human sexuality, and of the differences between the erotic and emotional socialization of men and women in our society.

The present study

In our study of bisexuality, we were interested in four major questions. First, in deference to Kinsey et al.'s observation of sexual fluidity, we were particularly interested in how sexual object choice develops, and how this development fits into the life experiences of the individual. Is bisexuality, for example, a continuous theme throughout a person's life, foreordained by events occurring in childhood and adolescence—as much of psychosexual theory (e.g. Fenichel 1945) would argue—or does it emerge and change with the buffeting of events and circumstances throughout the life cycle? Second was the question of self-definition. When does a pattern of sexual or other social behaviors give rise to a person's sense of his or her sexual identity, and when are they simply behaviors with no further implications? Our third concern was with the circumstances and conditions that either encourage or allow, discourage or prevent, the development of bisexual behavior. And finally, our fourth interest was in how these three things—continuity, self-definition, and causal factors—would differ between males and females in our society. What might a comparison of the processes of becoming a bisexual woman and the processes of becoming a bisexual male tell us about male and female sexuality in general?

Our observations in response to these four questions are based on lengthy semistructured interviews with 156 people (equally divided between men and women), who had had more than incidental sexual experience with both men and women. We also interviewed a number of persons who had strong feelings about bisexuality as it pertained either to their own lives or to groups to which they belonged. The interviews were conducted in Seattle, New York, Berkeley, San Francisco, and a few other locations between 1973 and 1975. The respondents ranged in age from 19 to 62, and reflected a broad spectrum of occupations, educational levels, and sexual histories. Most of those interviewed were recruited through advertisements in taverns, restaurants, churches, universities, voluntary associations, and even a few embryonic bisexual rap groups. A large number of respondents were from a 'snowball' sample or were personal contacts of the authors. The interviews generally lasted between 1 1/2 and 3 hours and were tape-recorded. They covered the following areas of the respondents' lives: sexual and romantic history, family relationships and background, preferred sexual behaviors and fantasies, and most important,

critical events in the formation of a sexual identity and the development of a sexual career. These interviews were conducted against a backdrop of several years of formal and informal observation and interviews with self-identified male and female homosexuals.

While our respondents constitute a very diverse and heterogeneous group, they are certainly not representative of anything but themselves. It is quite inappropriate to think in terms of random sampling of a specifiable universe of persons when dealing with underground populations or sexual minorities (Bell 1974; Weinberg 1970), and it was our intention to find any bisexuals we could and explore with them any themes that they might have shared in their socio-sexual development. Because the sample was heterogeneous we are quite confident that we are not simply describing the idiosyncrasies of a unique set of persons, and that we are able to suggest some regularities that exist among a broad group of people in the present cultural and historical context. But we also feel that to place great stock in the frequencies of response patterns would give a misleading sense of concreteness to what we have observed. Therefore we have chosen to present data only when patterns occurred with sufficient regularity to deserve interpretation, and to present data in the form of verbatim responses that represent (perhaps with a prejudice to more articulate statements) a class of responses that were found among a sizeable number of respondents. In this paper we present a general discussion of how our interview data were used to address the four guiding questions outlined above. [...]

The erotic biography of respondents

We found no such thing as a prototypic bisexual career. This is not to say there are no patterns to the lives of our respondents, but rather no single or small number of patterns seems to predominate among those who call themselves bisexual, or among those whose behavior might be given that label. For example, a sizeable number of male respondents and the majority of the females had no homosexual experiences prior to adulthood. Furthermore, the occurrence of family patterns often claimed to predict a nonheterosexual adaptation (e.g., boys with weak distant fathers and overwhelming mothers) was quite rare. A few respondents had early-sexual experiences that might be termed traumatic, but their adult lives had very little else in common. Major themes in psychosexual theory were of little utility in understanding our respondents.

Perhaps the most interesting finding was that many respondents, who had once seemed well along the road to a life of exclusive hetero-sexuality or of exclusive homosexuality, made major changes in sex-object choice.

For example, early in the study we interviewed a young professional woman who referred to herself as 'purely and simply gay,' even though she had had sexual experience with men. In recounting her life history she mentioned that at the age of 7 or 8 she habitually initiated sexual contacts with her friends at pajama parties. Eventually one girl's mother learned about it, and our respondent was castigated by her friends' families, her friends, and her own family. If that stigmatizing experience were not enough to plant the seeds of a deviant self-definition, in adolescence she was the victim of a brutal sexual assault by a group of boys. She pointed to both of these experiences as reasons she had become a lesbian 10 years prior to the interview. We found her analysis convincing since it was so consistent with prevailing views on the psychodevelopment of lesbianism (e.g. Wilbur 1965). Then, a year later she wrote to tell us she was in love with a man and they planned to marry.

Clearly, this woman's early experiences, as well as her 10 years of lesbian relationships and her active adherence to a lesbian self-label, did not guarantee that she would not experience a significant change in her life. Other interviews like this one, some starting with homosexual identification, some with heterosexual, suggested to us that while childhood and adolescent experiences do have a place in developing sexuality, their effects are far from immutable. For the majority of respondents, pivotal sexual experiences occurred in adulthood, and those whose experiences or fantasies stemmed from adolescence or childhood were no more or less likely to make a subsequent change than the larger group.

We were continually surprised at how discontinuous our respondents' erotic biographies could be. For example, a number of men who had decided they were homosexual at an early age and lived in almost exclusively homosexual networks later met women with whom they had sexual relationships for the first time in their lives. A very large number of both male and female respondents had made at least one full circle— an affair with a man, then one with a woman, and finally back to a man, or vice versa. For example, one woman of about 45 had been married and had three children. After divorcing and having several heterosexual relationships, she fell in love with another woman of her own age, and they began the first homosexual relationship that either of them had experienced. Neither had ever had any homosexual fantasies prior to their meeting. After a three-year relationship, they broke up and our respondent had a number of brief affairs with both women and men. Our interview captured her at this point in her life, but she reflected that in each of her relationships she considered herself to be what was implied by the gender of the person with whom she was amorously involved: homosexual when with a

woman, heterosexual when with a man. She wondered aloud whether perhaps bisexual might be a more appropriate term.

It is clear from these cases that it was crucial for us to have the respondent's retrospective report as well as some longitudinal data. Fortunately, we were able to retain contact after the interview with about a quarter of our sample. It is misleading to try to understand anything about the achievement of sexual identity or about the importance of sexual events in a person's life without longitudinal observation. Speaking to respondents more than once was important, too, because they often tended to see more continuity in their lives than we found. It was very common for them to say that prior changes in sex-object choice were part of a past history of self-misperception, and that they had finally found their sexual 'place.' A follow-up interview often contradicted their assertions.

Our conclusion was that classical notions of the immutability of adult sexual preference are an overstatement and often misleading. Because of the unrepresentativeness of our sample, we cannot speculate about how widespread such erotic malleability is in our society. Perhaps there are many people who have undergone major life changes. The ease with which we found respondents with such a background suggests that it is more than a rare occurrence. Perhaps there are many people who could experience such monumental changes if they were not insulated from precipitating circumstances; or perhaps the vast majority would not be subject to such changes under any circumstances. If future research proves bisexual potential to be relatively rare, then classic developmentalist approaches that view childhood socialization to be all-important will be vindicated. If, on the other hand, the potential is not uncommon, then approaches that emphasize the situational emergence of human behavior will be supported. From our data, we conclude that (a) sex-object choice and sexual identification can change in many ways and many times over the lifecycle. (b) the individual is often unaware of his or her ability to change, and (c) childhood and adolescent experiences are not the final determinants of adult sexuality.

Sexual behavior and sexual identity

In our early interviews it became clear that people often adopted homosexual or bisexual self-identifications without having any homosexual experience. It was equally clear that, for many people,

extensive homo-sexual experience had no effect on their heterosexual identity. For example, one male respondent recalled:

I had this affair with a gay guy for almost a year. We were good friends and we became identified as a couple after a while. I think he basically saw me as a straight person who was kind of stepping over the imaginary line for a while. I was also sleeping with a woman, and, while I liked them both, I thought I was heterosexual as a person.

Another female respondent recalled her first homosexual encounter:

It was a great experience. I think everyone should have it. Before this happened, I was really hung up. When I got involved with another woman, I realized how nice it was. It was really enlightening. I think heterosexually though, so I don't feel any big drives to repeat it. But I probably will if the opportunity comes along.

Still other respondents could have a single erotic encounter with a person of either the same or opposite gender and decide unequivocally what they 'really were.' As one woman reported:

The first time Linda touched me, I went weak. The men I had made love with were so clumsy and awkward by comparison. I just realized who I was, that I was gay, and men were OK, but not the main thing.

On the other hand, experience with both genders could be seen as confirmation of a bisexual identity. One respondent told us how it had seemed reasonable to him:

'Well,' I thought as this guy climbed in my bed, 'What the hell? Why shouldn't I? There's no reason why I should cut off my nose to spite my face. It's going to be fun; it's been fun before, and why can't I have the best of both possible worlds?' Bisexuality seemed like me.

We feel that certain conditions were significant in making a sexual event either crucial or irrelevant in the process of assuming a sexual identity.

Labelling

Consistent with what sociologists have noted in regards to other self-definitions (Becker 1973), events or behaviors that produced a public reaction or otherwise affected the reactions other people made to our respondents were important in providing a bisexual self-definition (or homosexual or heterosexual). Such events were particularly significant during adolescence, when peer-group definitions have tremendous power over people. Several male respondents, who had been labelled the 'class sissy,' had felt that surely they must be sexually odd, and that their oddness was recognized by their peers. They had believed that their peers knew more about them than they had known themselves, and this was often self-fulfilling when it came to sex-object choice. Interestingly, such labelling processes seemed to be more important for males than females in the assumption of a homosexual or bisexual identity in adulthood. In contrast, boys and girls who escaped such labelling, even though some of their behavior might be homosexual, seemed somewhat less apt to apply deviant labels to themselves. For example, we interviewed two men who had been successful high school athletes. They shared a sexual relationship throughout high school and also had sexual relations with girls. They were never ridiculed or stigmatized in high school, even though their inseparability was well-known. Because so much of these men's behavior was considered sex-role appropriate, they escaped a homosexual label from others who might suspect their relationship. The two continued their homosexual activities into adulthood, one finally deciding he was homosexual, the other preferring to be bisexual.

Conflicting events

The ability to perform sexually with a person of the opposite gender was not sufficient to inhibit the adoption of a homosexual identity, nor was it necessary for a bisexual identification. But it did seem to increase the likelihood of the latter. Many respondents seemed to be caught up in dichotomous thinking about sexuality, and struggled to resolve conflicting events (sexual experiences, attraction, or fantasies directed at both genders) by emphasizing one set of events as more plausible than the other. Commonly, one set of explanatory events was adduced for one's heterosexual behavior and a completely different set for one's homosexual behavior. For example, a male respondent reported:

I'm straight, but I need outlets when I'm away from home and times like that. And it's easier to get with men than women. So I

go into the park, or at a rest station on the highway and get a man to blow me. I would never stay the night with one of them, or get to know them. It's just a release. It's not like sex with my wife. It's just a way to get what you need without making it a big deal. And it feels less like cheating.

While attempts to balance the two sets of conflicting information might have offered the chance of deciding one was bisexual, for most of our respondents (especially men) fairly strong heterosexual feelings and a good deal of heterosexual experience from an early age were necessary for a bisexual identification to compete with a homosexual identity. Our cultural logic holds that it is almost impossible to have only some homosexual feelings. The idea is seldom questioned that a single homosexual act or strong homosexual feelings reveal the 'true person.' Hence, since we have no imagery for partial states of being, the individual often reinterprets past events as further confirmation of his or her undeniable homosexuality. As one respondent said:

I was married for four years when I started to have these fantasies about a guy I worked with. I would get these fantasies and I would have to masturbate. I think that this was just the most mature crush I had, because when I think back on it, there had been lots of others, although I didn't know what they were then. I began to think I was homosexual about this time, even though I was still sleeping with my wife and enjoying it. But I felt guilty, and I was worried she would find out what I really was.

Of course, interpretations of respondents' erotic recollections are indeed risky, and commonly the present shapes the past more than the reverse. Nevertheless, it seemed clear that most respondents actively searched their memories for significant events that would help confirm their lay hypotheses concerning present events and feelings.

Among our interviewees, it seems that sexual attraction, as well as enjoyable sexual experience with both genders, helped people adopt a bisexual identity. Another factor was the emotional response to persons of either gender. Whom a person loved seemed to have an impact somewhat independent of whom that person eroticized. This was particularly true of women, since love and sexuality are customarily such interwoven themes in female erotic socialization. But it was also true of a sizeable number of males. It was not uncommon for a nonsexual but deeply emotional attachment between two people of the same gender who had no prior homosexual feelings to develop into a sexual

relationship, and sometimes a shift to a bisexual identification for both partners. On the other hand, if a person (mostly men) could relate sexually to men and women but could only love one or the other, then that person would not likely assume a bisexual label.

Reference group contact

Sexual behavior and sexual identification both seem to vary by whether the respondent was a social isolate, was involved in an ongoing relationship, or was part of a sexual community. By the latter we mean subcultural groups that have formed and organized around members' sexual similarities, e.g., the various gay subcultures. So, for example, some respondents were strongly committed to particular homosexual relationships for a number of years without assuming a homosexual identity if they were not involved in the gay community. When most of their friends were homosexual, respondents were likely to be treated as homosexual and come to define themselves as such.

Our conclusion, after noticing the regularity in the differences of sexual identity depending on subculture membership and involvement, was that the social ratification of identities provided by such groups can be very powerful (Berger and Luckmann 1966). Respondents who were ambivalent or questioning about their bisexual attractions or behaviors often encountered people in the gay world who could provide easy vocabularies for interpreting these feelings and acts (Blumstein and Schwartz 1976b [...]). Sometimes they were told that heterosexual attractions were only a cop-out or an aspect of false consciousness, that the respondent was really denying his or her true sexuality, being unwilling to come to grips with being a homosexual. After varying amounts of personal struggle, some respondents found this explanation plausible and moved toward adoption of a homosexual identity, developed a gay lifestyle, and concentrated on homosexual relationships. Others, finding the gay world unsympathetic or incredulous when it came to their bisexuality, either left the community for periods of time or kept their bisexual feelings private. For example, one woman who had a lesbian identification fell in love with a man and felt compelled to leave her women's collective because the other members would not grant support or legitimacy for her new relationship and asserted that it was simply 'neurotic acting out.'

We do not mean to paint the homosexual communities as villains in thwarting people's bisexuality. Indeed, respondents were much more likely to report hostility to their lifestyles among heterosexuals (who could not appreciate the distinction between bisexual and homosexual) than

among homosexuals, and many reported a great deal of support for a bisexual identification among homosexual friends. But in both the straight and gay communities, the fact that respondents had had homosexual relationships tended to define an identity for them, while their heterosexual relationships were considered somehow irrelevant or a passing fancy.

The final step, we began to see, especially in the San Francisco area, was a deliberate attempt to create a bisexual community, where members could come together to give mutual support and to share with one another a collective wisdom for developing a bisexual lifestyle. Although it is premature to know, it seems very likely that such institutions as bisexual rap groups will increasingly support people's assumption of a bisexual identification.

Circumstances conducive to bisexuality

While there is a wide array of situations or conditions that serve to introduce people to novel sexual experiences, we found three themes to be particularly prevalent among our respondents. The first of these was experimentation in a friendship context. Many respondents (especially women) progressed to a sexual involvement from an intense emotional attachment with a person of the gender they had never before eroticized. A male with a homosexual identification might develop a casual experimental heterosexual relationship with a close woman friend at a point in his life where he seemed perfectly comfortable with his homosexuality. Several previously heterosexual men who came to a bisexual identity in their 30s reported they had had early homosexual experiences with close teen-age friends when heterosexual relations were somewhat limited. They had treated these experiences as irrelevant teen-age play, until adult experiences precipitated reconsideration. A few respondents with no previous homosexual experience reported that they were able to eroticize adult male friendships. A few lesbians reported being able to develop sexual involvements with male friends, especially homosexual men whose sexual politics they found less objectionable. The most common finding, however, was that previously heterosexual women who developed deep attachments to other women, e.g., as college roommates or later in life when involved in the women's movement, ultimately shifted these feelings into the erotic arena and began long-term homosexual relationships.

Bisexual encounters also emerged frequently in such liberal hedonistic environments as group sex, 'three ways,' and other combinations. These often proved a less threatening arena for sexual experimentation

for heterosexuals than would a dyadic homosexual encounter. Females found these experiences less difficult than males, who were customarily the instigators of the event. These occurrences were understood to be pleasure seeking in a diffuse sense, rather than a specific act with stigmatizing implications for one's sexual identity. Focus was on the good feelings rather than on the gender of the person providing them.

The third pattern was supported by a number of critically based ideological positions. For example, some people came to a bisexual identification (occasionally without any corresponding behavior) because of adherence to a belief in humanistic libertarianism. They felt that everyone should be free and able to love everyone in a perfect erotic utopia. For them, love meant sex, which was seen as a means of communication and 'becoming human.' Encounter groups or group massages often progressed to a sexual stage. As one respondent explained, 'It only made sense. We had all been psych majors, and every psych major learns that we are all inherently bisexual.' How much of this ideology preceded the behavior and how much provided post hoc legitimacy is, of course, difficult to assess.

Many of the women in our study decided to experiment with homosexual relationships because they felt encouraged by the tenets of the women's movement to examine their feelings towards other women and to learn to be close to them. The movement had encouraged them to respect and like other women, and for many this novel feeling was closely akin to the feelings they had felt with those men whom they had eroticized. Sometimes these women instigated sexual encounters for ideological rather than erotic reasons, but soon developed erotic responses and became more generally physically attracted to other women. In some cases the homosexual attraction became a dominating force in the women's lives; in other cases it coexisted with heterosexual responses; and in still other cases it never established any prominence and homosexual behavior was discontinued (although a political bisexual self-identification was sometimes retained).

Differences between women and men

There were a great many differences in the bisexual behavior of male and female respondents, which seemed quite consistent with what we know about general patterns of male and female sexuality (Gagnon and Simon 1973). Most prominently, men and women differed in the ease with which they incorporated homosexual activity into their lives. Women found initial experiences much less traumatic than men, and they were less likely to allow a single experience or a

few experiences to lead them to an exclusive homosexual identification. Women often felt that such activities were a natural extension of female affectionate behavior and did not have implications for their sexuality. Men, on the other hand, were much more preoccupied with what the experience meant for their masculinity, sometimes fearing that they might never again be able to respond erotically to a woman. Some men insulated themselves from the homosexual implications of homosexual behavior by exclusively engaging in either impersonal sex as in public restrooms (Humphreys 1970), or in homosexual acts where they took what they considered to be the masculine role, i.e., the insertor role in fellatio or sodomy. As one man recounted, 'There are four kinds of men: men who screw women, men who screw men and women, men who screw men, and then there are the queers [i.e., the ones who get screwed].'

For men, both their first heterosexual and first homosexual experience were very likely to be with strangers (prostitutes, 'bad girls,' homosexual tricks), whom they would probably never see again. The predominant pattern among women was for sex to occur with a close friend, and this to them was a natural and logical outgrowth of a strong emotional attachment. The realization that they were in love with a person (of the same or opposite gender) was often a prerequisite for sexual attraction, sexual behavior, or a change in sexual identity.

Males reported much more difficulty coping with homosexual behavior and developing a homosexual identification than women. We attribute this to the stigma attached to homosexuality among American men (more than among women). Masculinity is a major element in men's sense of self-worth, and homosexuality, in the popular imagination, implies impaired masculinity.

Conclusion

This study has been part of our ongoing research on sexual identity and how it reflects the interaction of social forces, cultural perspectives, and psychological processes. We chose bisexuality as a vehicle of inquiry because we feel it has a strategic capacity for illuminating more general issues in the study of human sexuality. We view our research as exploratory, but we feel that when more investigators have addressed themselves to the phenomenon of bisexuality the accumulated evidence will help transform the way science views human sexuality. We anticipate that the perspective which emerges

will reflect a number of thematic questions. What is the nature of the relationship between people's sexual experiences and the ways they make sense of their sexuality? How do cultural and subcultural understandings regarding sexuality affect sexual experience and sexual identification? How much of sexuality can be understood by focusing on the continuities among males and the continuities among females, irrespective of affectional preference or sexual lifestyle? How much of adult sexuality is determined by socialization experiences and how much reflects adult experiences and events? And finally, what do the answers to these questions tell us about the variability and plasticity of sexual behavior and sexual definitions?

Notes

- 1 This probably refers to the flurry of US media interest in bisexuality which centred around simultaneous articles on the subject in both *Time* and *Newsweek* magazines in 1974. See Garber (1975).

J.M.CARRIER

Mexican Male Bisexuality (1985)

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This article was probably one of the first to consider what anglophone commentators call 'bisexuality' in a comparative cross-cultural context. Drawing on Blumstein and Schwartz's research on bisexuality in the USA (see Chapter 7), Carrier's findings suggest that the very notion of bisexual identity is specific to 'Anglo-American' contemporary culture. Carrier argues that, for Mexican men, the distinction between heterosexuality and homosexuality is not so much a matter of object choice—whether one's sexual partner is male or female—as of the role one takes during intercourse—specifically, whether one is 'active' or 'passive'. Carrier's male respondents were able to engage in frequent sexual activity with other men as well as (or instead of) with women and yet still regard themselves as heterosexual as long as they always played the 'active' (i.e. insertive) role.

Since the publication of this article in 1985, other researchers on male sexuality, especially those working in the context of HIV and its prevention, have made similar findings about the sexual identities and behaviours of men in Central and Latin America (Cáceres 1996; García García *et al.* 1991; Liguori 1996; Parker 1996; Parker and Tawil 1991; Schifter and Madrigal 1996). Indeed, the notion of a 'Latin pattern' of male bisexual behaviour, to be found '[f]requently in societies that are based on Mediterranean cultures' (Ross 1991:23), has become a common feature of the literature on global trends in HIV/AIDS. However, as Cáceres (1996) points out, the notion of 'Latin bisexuality' may actually hinder rather than help cross-cultural understandings of sexual behaviours. It is inappropriate to unite the dynamic complexities of sexual behaviours across different regions and cultures under the single category of 'Latin bisexuality', and to do so is to create a cumbersome

stereotype. Such stereotyping has already occurred with the stereotype of 'African promiscuity' found in some areas of AIDS literature and research, to very ill effect (Patton 1990; Watney 1994).

This paper presents some preliminary observations and comments on Mexican male bisexual behavior, and on the cultural factors which appear to be related to the behavior. Some recent findings on Anglo-American male bisexual behavior will be compared with the Mexican findings. The Mexican data on which the paper is based were gathered by the author over a period of 15 years from 1968 to 1983, and include both participant-observation and interview data. Although the data were gathered primarily from Mestizo males in the northwestern states of Mexico, there is some evidence (see, for example, Taylor 1978; Zapata 1979) that the patterns of behavior observed are similar among Mestizo males in other areas of Mexico. (Mestizos are Mexican nationals of mixed Indian and Spanish ancestry. They make up a large majority of the population, and their culture is the dominant one.)

Few studies have focused on human bisexual behavior. This has been due, in part, to the dichotomization of sexual orientation in Anglo-American culture into heterosexuality and homosexuality. In Anglo-American culture any homosexual behavior in an individual's sexual biography, especially as an adult, raises the question of homosexuality, not bisexuality, regardless of the ratio of heterosexual to homosexual behavior or feelings. The general view in Anglo-American society, therefore, is that most people are heterosexual; those who are not are homosexual.

Data gathered by Kinsey and his associates (1948, 1953) and by anthropologists (see, for example, Davenport 1965; and Herdt 1981) have empirically established bisexual behavior in human populations. Based on the Human Relations Area Files, Ford and Beach (1951) presented additional cross-cultural information on bisexuality.

A major problem in evaluating the available data on bisexuality is the meaning of the sexual behavior to the individuals involved. As pointed out by Blumstein and Schwartz (1977 [this volume]) [...] 'When does a pattern of sexual or other social behaviors give rise to a person's sense of his or her sexual identity, and when are they simply behaviors with no further implications?' [above, p. 63]. In a paper on the social control of sexuality, DeLamater (1981[: 266]) noted that:

Every society has a 'folk theory' (Davenport, 1977) or 'common-sense theory' about sexual behavior. It includes assumptions about the purposes of sexual behavior; from these are derived beliefs or norms that specify what types of activity are appropriate and inappropriate given these purposes, and what types of partners are acceptable. The theory includes definition or criteria for distinguishing behaviors and partners.

He identifies three distinct sexual perspectives in American society: procreational, relational, and recreational. The procreational emphasizes the reproductive aspect of sexual activity. The relational is 'person-centered' sexuality and 'assumes that sexual activity is an integral part of some relationships, that such behavior is a means of expressing and reinforcing emotional and psychological intimacy' (266). The recreational is 'body-centered' sexuality and 'assumes that the purpose of sexual activity is physical pleasure...and is appropriate with any partner who is similarly inclined' (266).

An evaluation of bisexuality in any given society must also consider the availability of sexual partners. Irrespective of individual preferences, when suitable heterosexual partners are unavailable to certain segments of a society for whatever reason, some individuals will turn to members of their own sex for sexual satisfaction. A number of sociocultural factors, operating separately or in varying combinations, may curtail or completely shut off the supply of heterosexual partners. Some important factors are expectations with respect to virginity, segregation of sexes prior to marriage, age at marriage, polygamy, sex ratio, segregation of the sexes as a result of incarceration, and available economic resources or distribution of income. Additionally, in some traditional Melanesian societies, male initiation rites may include homosexual behavior where semen is transferred by the older males to the initiates through fellatio or anal intercourse in order to bring about growth and masculinity. All males in these societies are also expected to take wives and perform heterosexually.

Blumstein and Schwartz (1977 [this volume]) believe that 'when more investigators have addressed themselves to the phenomenon of bisexuality the accumulated evidence will help transform the way science views human sexuality' [above, pp. 73-4]. The most fundamental conclusion of their research on bisexuality is that the closer they probed 'such questions as how people come to define themselves sexually or how their erotic and affectional biographies are structured, the more—not less—the data defy organization in terms of the classical simplicities' [above, p. 60]. They also make the observation that:

The implications of viewing human sexuality as being plastic and malleable have never really been exploited. Even the word bisexuality gives a misleading sense of fixedness of sex-object choice, suggesting as it does a person in the middle, equidistant from heterosexuality and from homosexuality, equally erotically disposed to one gender or the other. [above, p. 61]

The socio-cultural setting in Mexico

Those socio-cultural aspects of Mexican society which appear to be particularly relevant to male bisexuality are the lack of stigmatization of the masculine insertor role in homosexual encounters, an easily identifiable group of effeminate male sexual partners, the generally permissive attitude toward sexual behavior by males, the dual categorization of females, the proportion of single males past the age of puberty, the homosocial nature of much male socialization, and the inequitable distribution of income.

Masculine males who play the active insertor role in homosexual encounters generally are not conceptualized as *homosexuals* in Mexico. This lack of stigmatization provides prospective active participants with the important feeling that their masculine self-image is not threatened by their homosexual behavior. There is no doubt some level of homosexual involvement at which even a masculine male may be concerned about his self-image, particularly if he develops a pattern of non-association with females. But in Mexican society at large, as Paz (1950) has noted, 'masculine homosexuality is regarded with a certain indulgence insofar as the active agent is concerned' (39). Observations I made in many different parts of Mexico support the notion that those masculine males who utilize passive males as sexual outlets are greatly tolerated.

Effeminate males provide easily identifiable sexual targets for interested males in Mexico. There is the widely held belief in the society that effeminate males are homosexual, and sexually interested only in masculine males with whom they play the passive insertee sex role in anal intercourse. The beliefs linking effeminate males with homosexuality are culturally transmitted by a vocabulary which provides the appropriate labels, by homosexually oriented jokes and word games and by the mass media. From early childhood on, Mexican males are made aware of the labels used to denote male homosexuals, and the connection is always clearly made that these homosexual males (usually called *putos* or *jotos*) are guilty of unmanly effeminate behavior.

The generally permissive attitude toward sexual behavior by Mexican males appears to be partly the result of the sexual stimuli presented them from birth onward by way of joking and the public media. They are thus sensitized to many different kinds of sexual relationships. By the time they reach puberty, they are especially aware of the availability and acceptability of effeminate males as sexual outlets. The acceptance and desirability of heterosexual intercourse is further enhanced by the fact that adolescent males, often at the first signs of puberty, may be pressured by their brothers, male cousins, friends, or all three, to prove their masculinity by having sexual intercourse with either prostitutes or available neighborhood girls. The crowded family circumstances in which a majority of the Mexican population live also contributes to a heightened awareness of the body's daily functions and needs, including those sexual. Body contact, sexual joking, or both, between male members of the family sleeping in the same bed or close together is apparently not unusual, nor is their knowledge about sexual intercourse.

Another relevant feature of Mexican society is a belief system that leads to the categorization of females as being either 'good' or 'bad.' A good woman is conceptualized by a male as a wife and mother of his children. Prior to marriage, according to the normative cultural ideal, she must be chaste and faithful. After marriage she must continue to be faithful and should not demonstrate excessive sexual interest even in her husband. The categorization 'good' thus comes down to a basic belief that a woman cannot be considered a prime sexual target and still be considered good. A woman is therefore labeled 'bad' precisely because she is primarily thought of by males as being immediately exploitable as a sexual outlet.

A related aspect of the 'good-bad' dichotomization of females is the double standard of sexual morality allowed Mexican males, a standard which begins prior to marriage. In the Mexican courtship system, the prospective bride is labeled a *novia*, the prospective groom a *novio*. (There is no counterpart to this system in the United States. The Mexican couple can be said to have an understanding; the arrangement is more serious than going steady, but less formal than an engagement.) The period of courtship may last as long as five years or more. Since she may one day be his wife and the mother of his children, a *novia* must in the eyes of her *novio* fall into the category 'good'; she obviously cannot be considered a prime sexual target prior to marriage. Under existing mores, however, at the same time a Mexican male is courting a *novia*, he may also have a series of sexual contacts with whichever outlets are available. Girlfriends

considered appropriate for sexual seduction are referred to as *amigas*; lovers as *amantes*. After marriage the husband may maintain the double standard and continue to seek sexual outlets in addition to his wife.

Unfortunately, I know of no sound general studies of attitudes toward sexual permissiveness in Mexico. LaBeff and Dodder (1982) briefly report a comparative study of 278 American and 145 Mexican college students using Reiss' Sexual Permissiveness Scale. The items rated by the students concern the acceptability of petting and sexual intercourse for females in the following affection-related states: within an engagement, with affection, and without affection. Their findings, however, are limited by the fact that their sample was confined to college students. Yet, it is nevertheless interesting to note that in all of their comparisons 'the Mexican students were less permissive' (286). They also note 'that attitudes toward female sexual permissiveness were more complex and difficult to interpret for the Mexican sample of college students...some basic differences in structure were apparent' (286).

Some preliminary data gathered by Taylor (1974) suggested that heterosexual anal intercourse, considered to be a common occurrence by his Mexico City respondents, may be used in Mexico as 'a method of maintaining the female's status as a vaginal virgin during courtship and a common form of birth control' (5).

Another relevant characteristic of Mexican society is the proportion of single males past the age of puberty. Marriage patterns in Mexico at present indicate that a sizable percentage of males do not marry until their late twenties. While single, a large majority of Mexican males, a little over 80 percent according to the 1970 census, continue to live in some kind of family grouping. This pattern apparently holds true even when single males are in their late twenties or thirties. The available data suggest that the only way a single male is able to move away from his family, even if he wants to and can afford to, is to move to a different geographical area.

Male socialization patterns in Mexico tend to be all male in character, both before and after marriage. Peer-group relationships, of particular importance in adolescence, remain essentially unchanged by marriage. Peñalosa (1968) summed it up as follows: 'In social life a Mexican man's marital status is of little practical importance, as a man carries on virtually the same sort of social life after marriage as he did before—and one in which the women have little part' (683).

Drinking establishments in Mexico, cantinas, bars, and nightclubs, are popular locations for Mexican males to spend some of their free time away from their families. With few exceptions, these establishments are restricted to male customers. Females who go to those establishments

generally have working relationships as dance hostesses, prostitutes, or both. Thus, they obviously fall into the 'bad' category. A 'good' woman in Mexico would never be seen in a public drinking establishment, except possibly in cities which have designated 'ladies bars,' hotel bars or nightclubs for tourists. However, even there a Mexican woman would have to consider herself somewhat 'liberated' to frequent such establishments on any regular basis.

The final aspect of Mexican society to be considered is distribution of income. In Mexico, inequalities in income distribution, combined with high birth rates, result in large segments of the urban as well as rural population living on incomes that barely provide the basic necessities of life. Although urban dwellers generally fare better than rural, the available data suggest that a majority in both segments of the population still tend to live in marginal situations. In recent years, the economic situation has worsened as inflation rates have climbed close to 100 percent. Less available income for males seeking sexual outlets may make effeminate males more desirable sexual targets because they are available at little or no cost, and may even be a source of income for their masculine suitors.

Some bisexual behavior patterns

The following discussion of Mexican male bisexual behavior is based on 53 structured interviews with male respondents in Guadalajara. Two-thirds (33 of 53) had had both heterosexual and homosexual experiences. In addition, there were 20 unstructured interviews with male respondents in various locations in the northwestern states of Mexico, all of whom had had both heterosexual and homosexual experiences. Participant-observation data collected by the author are also used in the discussion.

Family, peers, and the media provide strong motivation for Mexican males to become romantically involved with females from their early teens. Strong sexual needs, combined with pressure from male relatives and peers, also provide powerful motivation for males in this age group to seek sexual outlets in addition to masturbation. Societal rules governing the behavior of females who want to stay in the 'good' category, however, present an obstacle for males interested in also receiving sexual satisfaction in their relationships with novias. A sizable percentage of Mexican males may thus rule out sexual intercourse with their novias, and seek other sexual outlets. The search for sexual outlets may last for many years because some Mexican males do not marry until their late twenties; 27% of the male population in the age group 25-29 were unmarried at the time of the 1970 census.

The search by Mexican males for sexual outlets other than their novias may focus on females or males who have established reputations for sexual availability. The sexual partners they choose depends on such obvious factors as sexual excitement, attractiveness, mutual interest, timing, and cost. Over time some may choose female partners only, others male partners only, and still others both female and male partners. Since a Kinsey-type survey of male sexual behavior has never been done in Mexico, there are no data from which an estimate can be made for any given age set of the percentage of the sexually active male population who at some time have utilized both female and male sexual outlets. However, judging from the sociocultural factors described above, I believe that for any given age set, a larger percentage of sexually active single males in Mexico have had sexual intercourse with both genders than have Anglo-American males. The Kinsey (1948) data suggest that about 15 percent of single sexually active Anglo-American males between 15 and 25 have mixed sexual histories. The percentage of Mexican males with mixed histories may be as high as 30 percent for the same age group.

My data suggest several patterns of bisexual behavior in Mexico. The following patterns appear to be most salient. Some post-pubertal males utilize pre-pubertal boys as sexual outlets prior to marriage, and, after marriage, continue to utilize both heterosexual and homosexual outlets. Another pattern is that some males in their first year of sexual activity initiate sexual encounters both with post-pubertal girls, and effeminate boys, they find in their neighborhoods, at school, at social outings. They continue to utilize both sexual outlets prior to marriage, but discontinue, or only occasionally use, homosexual outlets following marriage. Still another pattern exists where some males utilize both genders as sexual outlets during their first couple of years of sexual activity. They have novias and plan to marry, but they also become romantically involved with males prior to marriage. After they marry, they continue to have romantic and sexual relationships with males.

Although these patterns are the most salient ones suggested by the available data, *the data are limited*. The patterns presented above (and discussed below) thus represent perhaps only a few of the many possible patterns male bisexual behavior may follow in Mexico. They do illustrate, however, the plasticity and malleability of human sexual behavior. It should be noted that none of the males following the three patterns described above considered himself 'homosexual.'

Males following the first pattern described usually initiate sexual encounters with pre-pubertal effeminate boys who are relatives, nephews or cousins, or neighbors. Because of the proximity of these pre-pubertal boys, the interested post-pubertal males may maintain long-term sexual

relationships with them. While these homosexual relationships are going on, the older males also have novias, and occasionally have sexual intercourse with available neighborhood girls or prostitutes. The sexual relationships with the younger males are usually terminated when the older males marry. The older males, however, may continue occasional homosexual contacts with other males after marriage.

The following presents an example of this pattern. One Mexican male initiated his first homosexual relationship at the age of 15 with his 8-year-old cousin. They slept together for one year. During that time, the younger boy played the anal insertee sex role an average of once a week. The older boy then moved to another town for one year. During that time, he had his first heterosexual contacts with prostitutes. When he returned to his younger cousin's house, they no longer shared the same bed, but they resumed their weekly sexual relationship for another three years. The relationship terminated when the informant married at the age of 20. Although the informant wanted to continue the sexual relationship with his younger cousin after marriage, the younger cousin terminated the sexual relationship by saying, 'there was no longer any reason for him to feel love for him.' At the age of 23, the informant reported that he is sexually satisfied with his wife, but occasionally has sexual contact with males he meets downtown.

Males following the second pattern establish durable relationships with novias between the onset of puberty and marriage. They may engage in heavy petting with their novias, and perhaps occasionally have sexual intercourse. But they do not routinely have a sexual relationship with their novias because of a general unwillingness on the part of both to go beyond heavy petting prior to marriage. Other sexual outlets are thus sought by these males wherever they can be found, and with whichever gender is available and affordable. Their interest in these sexual partners is mainly recreational. They seek additional sexual outlets after marriage only occasionally, and are more likely to seek a heterosexual outlet rather than a homosexual one if they do.

Males following the third pattern have novias and plan to marry, but the intensity of their relationships with novias is not as strong as for those males following the second pattern. They seek both female and male sexual outlets apart from their novias. Although a majority of their sexual contacts may be recreationally oriented, the males following the third pattern become emotionally as well as sexually involved with some of their male sexual partners. They generally postpone marriage until their late twenties or early thirties. The reasons given for marriage are the desire for a family or fear of

loneliness as they grow older. After marriage, they maintain an extramarital relationship with a male rather than a female.

Mexican versus Anglo-American bisexuality

In their paper on bisexuality in Anglo-American men, Blumstein and Schwartz (1976[a]) noted that: 'Popular understanding of the concept "masculinity" implies that one must show erotic distaste (not mere neutrality) toward other males, and that one must demonstrate competent performance in the heterosexual arena' (339). They also note that: 'Many homosexuals, like their heterosexual counterparts, believe that for most people "one drop" of homosexuality makes one totally homosexual' (349). They further conclude:

The skepticism with which some of our respondents' claims to being bisexual were met reflects our dichotomous notions of sexuality, as well as the 'logic' that homosexual reactions eradicate heterosexual responsiveness, and the idea that heterosexuality is superior to homosexuality (i.e., when given a free option one would always choose to be heterosexual). Therefore, most of our cultural thinking demands significant heterosexual credentials before a homosexual label can be skirted. Much of society is willing to disbelieve an uncredentialed assertion of bisexuality, and attributes such a claim to the inability to come to grips with a homosexual label.

[Blumstein and Schwartz 1976[a]: 345-346]

A major difference between the Anglo-American and Mexican cultural setting for male bisexuality is the lack of stigmatization in Mexico of the active insertor participant in homosexual encounters. As a result, most Mexican males do not believe that 'one drop of homosexuality' makes one totally homosexual as long as the appropriate sexual role is played; most do not appear to believe that they must show erotic distaste toward other males as long as they are masculine, and play the insertor role in homosexual encounters. However, similar to their Anglo-American counterparts, Mexican males do feel that they must demonstrate competent performance in the heterosexual arena.

Another difference between Anglo-American and Mexican males is that Mexican males are not as concerned about homosexual reaction eradicating heterosexual responsiveness. Anal intercourse

is the preferred homosexual practice between Mexican males. Males playing the insertor role often compare the anus to the vagina when talking about their male partners. There is a saying among men in Mexico, 'the woman for her beauty, the man for his narrowness,' the implication being that a man's tight anus is better than a woman's vagina. As noted above, it has also been reported that some Mexican males practice anal intercourse with their novias as a birth control measure, and as a means of maintaining vaginal virginity. Heterosexuality is considered superior to homosexuality in Mexico. A Mexican male's gender identity, however, is not necessarily threatened by his homosexual behavior as long as he is masculine and plays the insertor role.

Conclusion

One is impressed by the erotic responsiveness many Mexican males have developed to members of both genders, and by the apparent ease with which some are able to maintain sexual relations with both females and males. An important factor related to this may be that in Mexico, a male's gender identity is not linked to his sexual identity the same way it is in the Anglo-American culture. Also related, homosexuality in Mexico is talked about and joked about openly between males, and privately between some boyfriends and girlfriends. As one informant in Guadalajara put it: 'Daily, practically daily, in school and outside of school and everywhere around...it's something to joke about; every-body talks about it...it just comes up all the time.'

This is not to imply that maintaining sexual relationships with both genders does not generate cognitive dissonance for some Mexican males. It does. The form such dissonance takes appears to be related mainly to the extent of involvement in homosexuality. A major fear concerns the playing of the anal insertee sex role, which would directly threaten their masculine image. Prior to sexual intercourse, 'masculine' males may do everything with their 'effeminate' male partners that they do with a woman, have body contact, caress, and French kiss; however, for most, their anus is out of bounds for touching or penetration by a penis. As a preliminary sex act, fellatio is often used by anal insertees to arouse their sexual partners. The ultimate objective of the sexual encounter for both participants, however, is almost always anal intercourse.

Finally, when one considers that a large number of single Mexican males must deal with their sexuality for a long period of time,

sometimes 10 to 12 years before marriage, a period in their lives when their sexual needs are the strongest, their choices of sexual partners may relate to all three of DeLamater's sexual perspectives. The ratio of person-centered to body-centered sexual relationships may vary considerably over time, and between individual males. The available data suggest that a majority of sexual outlets for most single males in Mexico are body-centered rather than person-centered. However, a cross-over point prior to marriage, perhaps in the early twenties, may exist when person-centered sexual outlets become more important. Yet even after marriage, Mexican males continue to seek outlets from a recreational perspective.

WIRESIT SITTITRAI,
TIM BROWN AND SIRAPONE
VIRULRAK

Extracts from *Patterns of Bisexuality in
Thailand* (1991)

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This article represents a different moment in the development of research on bisexual identities and behaviours from that represented by Carrier's study in Chapter 8. The context of Sittitrai *et al.*'s discussion is explicitly HIV and its prevention, and the burgeoning interest in bisexual behaviours on the part of epidemiologists.

The concern among researchers in the 1990s to develop HIV education strategies targeted at specific populations means that a great deal of attention is given to the complexities and nuances of identities and behaviours, carefully building on the attention these issues receive in Carrier's earlier work. This article offers a particularly instructive example of this kind of research in a cross-cultural context. As Sittitrai *et al.* make clear in the extracts below, it is important that HIV strategies reflect actual sexual behaviours while also respecting the self-perceptions of different population groups.

However, as they argue in the closing section of these extracts, the stakes involved in developing such strategies are even higher than that. It is not just that Thais who have sex with both women and men might not regard themselves or their behaviour as 'bisexual'; they may not even regard certain forms of behaviour, such as oral-genital contact or even anal penetration, as 'having sex' at all. In other words, a Thai man who engages in penetrative activity with both men and women not only may not regard himself as 'bisexual', but may not even regard himself

as a man who 'has sex' with men. In such a case, even to describe this man as 'behaviourally bisexual' is arguably to impose on him an inappropriate and Eurocentric concept. There are individuals all over the world who engage in what 'Anglo-American' perspectives regard as bisexual activity; but given the wide cultural variations in definitions of gender role, sexual identity and sexual behaviour, I would argue that to label all such individuals, or their behaviour, as 'bisexual' is fraught with difficulties and misrepresentations, and should only be done with many caveats and cautions if it is to be done at all.

Introduction

This chapter attempts to describe bisexuality as it occurs in Thailand. First, the existence and meaning of bisexuality in the Thai social context will be discussed, followed by a description of the patterns of bisexuality observed. [...] At present, available research material on the subject of Thai bisexuality is extremely limited. For this report, the primary sources of information are self-reports as published in various Thai gay magazines, existing survey data, in-depth interviews with key informants, and observations in various community settings in both Bangkok and other provinces.

Opening remarks

Before beginning, we would like to spend a few moments outlining some of the difficulties that must be kept in mind in discussing the term 'bisexuality.' Bisexuality can be taken in several ways. First, it may be used as a description of sexual experience or behaviors on the part of an individual, i.e., as a description of a person who has sex with members of both sexes during some arbitrary period of time. It can also be used as a description of the person's underlying preference for sexual partners, i.e., that the person finds sexual encounters with either sex to be sexually exciting and generally prefers having sex with both men and women to having it exclusively with one sex. It can further be taken as a term of self-identification, that the person sees himself/herself as desiring or engaging in sexual encounters with members of both sexes. A final definition of 'bisexuality' comes at the societal level, i.e., what other members of the society perceive as a 'bisexual.' For example, in some societies a married effeminate man might be viewed and regarded societally as bisexual regardless of his own behavior, preference, or self-identification.

Any single individual may be described as fitting any one of these frames of reference for 'bisexuality' without fitting into the others. For example, in Thailand the majority of male bar workers definitely engage in sexual intercourse with both men and women but actually prefer having sex with women and would describe themselves as heterosexual in orientation, i.e., their behavior is bisexual, their preference is heterosexual, they self-identify as heterosexuals, and society sees them as homosexual or bisexual. They choose to have homosexual encounters out of a profit motive.

The issue of societal perceptions of bisexuality can become very complex, with different portions of the population seeing bisexuality in a different light. For example, in general Thai society, bisexuality is considered more acceptable than homosexuality, so many men with homosexual orientations might prefer to be labeled bisexual. Gay men in Thailand tend to find bisexuals and straights more attractive than other gay men. This may be illustrative of the perception that they are 'harder to get' than gay men, that many Thai gay men perceive themselves as being more feminine in nature and find the masculinity attractive, or that bisexual and straight men are thought to be better in bed, especially if the gay man prefers anal-receptive intercourse.

A final group whose perceptions of bisexuality are critical in the context of HIV transmission is the epidemiologists, and through them the medical establishment and the public. The most common perception of bisexuals by epidemiologists is as a 'risk group' that may serve as a bridge between different segments of the population. From a public health-planning point of view, this is a useful concept, especially in terms of providing targets for prevention efforts designed to reach those individuals whose behaviors place them at the highest risk of HIV transmission. But when this concept is conveyed to the public, it results in what the authors will label 'risk-group syndrome.'

In 'risk-group syndrome,' the term 'risk groups' is presented to the public, generally through the popular media. The picture presented implies that if you are not a member of a risk group, you need not be concerned about AIDS/HIV. In receiving only a limited definition of 'risk groups' without full information on risk behaviors, an individual may then easily avoid self-identification as a member of existing risk groups, regardless of the actual level of risk behavior. What many believe to be a good concept for those targeting interventions now becomes a dangerous misconception in the public mind. Given the human propensity for self-identifying out of any group perceived as a social problem, most individuals, even those engaging in high levels of risk

behaviors, will not identify themselves as being members of any risk group and will continue to engage in risk behaviors.

[...]

This concept must be remembered when discussing bisexuality in Thailand. It must be remembered that what is important here is risk behaviors, not risk groups. If the picture is painted of bisexuals as a major risk group, people will find personal justifications for placing themselves outside of this group rather than altering their behaviors. If the emphasis is placed on risk behaviors, however, stressing the risk in both heterosexual and homosexual encounters with infected partners, it will be more difficult for people to avoid recognizing their own risk. Those working in AIDS prevention would do well to remember this when communicating with the media. While concepts of risk groups may be easier to explain to reporters and the general public than risk behaviors, they generally create long-lasting misconceptions that may set back prevention efforts by years.

With the issues discussed in this section in mind, the following discussion will be framed primarily in terms of bisexual behavior. For purposes of this chapter, a functional definition of a bisexual as one who engages in sexual interactions with members of both sexes will be used. This is the most germane definition when addressing issues of HIV transmission; however, when dealing with interventions with individuals exhibiting bisexual behavior, issues of self-identification, preference, and societal perception become important.

Socio-cultural context

Thailand is situated in Southeast Asia with a population of 56 million people, approximately 20 percent of whom live in urban areas. The largest city is Bangkok with a population of 9 million, and the country is divided into four regions. Ranked from largest to smallest in terms of population, they are the Northeast, Central, North, and South. There are distinctive regional variations in terms of dialect and subculture, but there is a strong national identity, with the Central dialect being taught and understood in all regions. This sense of national identity is strengthened by good mass-media communications and a reliable transportation network reaching almost everywhere in the country. In the last two decades urbanization has been rapid, with towns becoming cities and the cities subsequently expanding in size. This has happened in each region; examples are Chiangmai, Khon Kaen, and Phuket.

Notable characteristics include Westernization of lifestyle (encouraged by the importation of Western movies, music, and television), rapid expansion of the tourist trade, industrialization related to agriculture and garments, immigration into the cities from rural areas, and widespread development of sexual-service industries. In terms of sexual opportunity, larger cities offer not only convenient places for individuals to meet and locations for casual sexual contacts, but also the anonymity of being able to move about freely without the feeling that one's actions are known to one's neighbors, as in small towns or villages.

In terms of socio-economic and cultural contexts, the status of women in Thailand has always been higher than in other countries in Asia. When compared to women's position before the turn of the century, the status of Thai women has been improving. Women can now continue on to higher education and are attaining high political and business ranks. The usual norms are that women control the finances of the household and that many of the important decisions in the households are shared by the husband and wife. Despite this, the general norms of sexual expression for women are still limited, although more open than in some other societies, while men have few limitations in terms of sexual freedom. Thailand is known for its culture of permissiveness, in which the existence of norms and guidelines for behavior is rarely accompanied by serious social sanctions for their violation. The dominant Buddhist religion and the traditional Thai personality contribute to the existence of liberal values and attitudes in general.

The recent rapid modernization in conjunction with these traditional attitudes has resulted in changes in patterns and norms concerning courtship, freedom in mate-selection, lessened importance of virginity and marriage in the popular perception, and decrease in age of first intercourse. It has also led to more open discussion of sexual matters among certain groups of the population. It is likely that different patterns of sexual preference have existed in Thailand for some time but only recently have they been expressed more openly. In this context the expansion of tourism, the increased availability of various forms of commercial sex both for men and women and for locals and tourists, and the increased openness of sexuality are all interrelated (Sittitrai and Barry 1991).

Social images of gender/factors affecting sexuality

Before beginning the discussion of current patterns of bisexuality in Thailand, it is worth noting that many Western concepts of gender (perceived appearance and identification of sexual orientation) and rules

of social interaction within and between the sexes do not apply. In this section some of these issues are outlined to set the stage for a discussion of the forms of bisexuality in Thailand.

In discussing bisexuality in Thai society, it is necessary to realize that male/female differences in appearance have not always been perceived to be as great as in Western societies. In fact, one must inquire whether the social images of males and females that are gaining popularity today, which are much more in line with Western images of 'masculine' males and 'feminine' females, are the same as those in the past, and if they are not, how much of this change is the result of adopting Western standards.

For example, in traditional Thai literature and epics the male heroes were described as having beautiful features, slim bodies, smooth skin, and a soft manner. The leading male stars in *Likay*, the popular musical folk plays, were expected to have this appearance to be described as handsome and desirable by the audience. This same image was identified with the aristocrats as well, while those with dark skin, a muscular build, and a rough manner were generally seen as members of the lower classes.

Another major difference between Thai and Western cultures comes in terms of the lack of social restraints on physical contacts between members of the same sex. Some Western cultures severely restrict allowed forms of public same-sex contact, the result of negative attitudes toward homosexuality that are an outgrowth of Christianity. In Thai society, it is common for members of the same sex, whether having a close relationship or not, to be involved in a great deal of physical contact and touching. It is not uncommon to see two boys or two girls walking down the street holding hands or with arms around each other's shoulders. Often they spend their nights at one another's homes, sharing beds. Kissing a member of the same sex on the cheek in public can be a joking way of expressing affection. The lack of social constraints on physical contact facilitates many of the boys' having their first experiences with sexual excitation with other boys. While in the West this would be considered homosexual activity and would be severely sanctioned as sinful or deviant behavior, there is no associated religious guilt in Thai culture. If these boys go on to have heterosexual contacts with girlfriends or female sex workers while they continue having same-sex contacts, this might be identified by society as bisexual behavior in a Western context, although the Thais might not perceive it in this way at all.

By contrast, in Thai society, the strong social sanctions are reserved for physical and sexual contacts between males and females, not between members of the same sex. It is worth noting that Western influences are starting to break down the barriers proscribing contact

between the opposite sexes, while at the same time light sanctions are developing on same-sex physical contacts in public.

Another factor in Thai society that may affect the forms bisexuality may take is strong social pressure toward marriage. Traditionally, Thai males are expected to enter the Buddhist monkhood for a period of time and then to marry upon leaving. In spite of the recent trend toward urbanization, Thailand is still a predominantly agricultural society, with the majority of the people living in rural settings. This creates pressure for individuals to marry for several reasons. There is a strong desire to see the family line continued. In earlier Thai society, the choice of marital partner was often made by the parents. Since the settings are small rural communities, the failure to marry can often lead to gossip among the neighbors. Finally, there are strong socio-economic reasons for marrying because it brings the spouse and children into the family labor pool, providing additional hands to work in the fields. In this environment, even if a man or woman has sexual preferences for members of the same sex, the social pressures will encourage marriage, forcing the individual to look to bisexual contact outside the marital relationship for some of his/her sexual release. This situation and the associated pressures still exist to a lesser degree among the new urban middle-class generation (Anonymous 1990).

Accounts of bisexuality

There do exist some accounts of bisexual behavior in Thailand. It is recorded historically, for example, that in the Royal Court, the living quarters of the king and queen where only females were allowed, there was sex between the women. This was a form of situational homosexuality that filled both sexual desires and needs for companionship. There was even a special term to describe sex between women in the court. Later many of these women would leave the court to marry. It is unknown whether they continued same-sex behaviors after this time, but their life experience clearly involved sexual contacts with members of both sexes.

Anecdotal reports indicate the existence of a class of individuals known as *kratuei*. In its original meaning it referred to anyone of either sex who liked to dress up or behave as a member of the opposite sex or liked to have sex with the same sex. These days it has taken on the meaning of a man who likes to dress up or behave as a woman. There are reports (Bunnag 1990a) of *kratuei* men attending parties organized at military bases in Bangkok twenty-five

to thirty years ago. The *kratuei* considered these parties to be major events and dressed up for them. The author reports that there would often be competition between the *kratuei* and women at the dances over some of the military men. The military men were aware that the *kratuei* were men, but some still danced with them and dated them. Many of these men had wives, while others were single but would later go on to marry. While men having sex with both women and transvestites was not generally accepted societally, in the context of military-base parties it was not subject to social sanctions.

The existence of linguistic terms can often reveal the presence or social recognition of certain behaviors and norms. In premodern Thailand there were other terms used to describe bisexuality in an indirect fashion. For example, *chob tang song yang*, which translates as 'liking both ways,' meant that the person, either male or female, liked having sex with both men and women. The term *sua bi* (a fierce thief named Bi) referred to someone who can or did have sex with both men and women, with no clear-cut implication of where the person's true sexual preference lay. These days, with the increasing openness in discussing sexual matters, new terms have entered the language with more specific meanings, for example, 'gay' for men who prefer sex with men though they need not have exclusively male partners or announce themselves openly as homosexual; *tut*, a modern substitute for *kratuei* which became popular after the movie *Tootsie* in which actor Dustin Hoffman dressed up as a woman; and *sao praped song* (the second type of woman) for a man who dresses up as a woman or a transsexual. The term *aab* (hiding) is used to describe men who like to have sex with men but do not want to admit it to themselves or are sensitive and paranoid about their homosexual behavior. Often the term is used for married men who have extramarital sex with other men.

There are also terms to describe women, either single or married, who have sex with women. *Tom* (from the English 'tomboy') is used to describe women who appear or would like to appear as men, and *dee* (from the English 'lady') is used for those who prefer a feminine appearance. These terms are used without regard to the women's experience with the opposite sex. *Saw* (from the Chinese for 'elder sister') is another word used to describe women who come to massage parlors for sex with the masseuses. Based on in-depth interviews, the number of *saw* who are married is higher than the number who are single.

Anecdotal reports in gay magazines frequently describe bisexual situations. One such report (Bunnag 1990b) describes the difficulties of a man who hides his sexual preference for men carefully, even to the point of marrying, and his struggle over whether or not to tell his

wife his sexual preference. In the end, he did tell his wife but continued having sex with men while living with his wife and children. Another report (Bunnag 1990c) describes two male bar workers who have bisexual experiences before their orientations later shift toward men.

Modern pornography produced and sold in Thailand sometimes portrays bisexual contacts, usually in the context of trios of one man and two women. Bisexuality in the form of two males and a woman with sex between the men and with the woman is still rare, as it appears to be more acceptable to see homosexuality between women rather than between men. How much of this is due to Western influences is unclear.

Modern patterns of bisexuality in Thailand

With the above as background, it is time to turn to a discussion of modern patterns of bisexuality. The reader is reminded that this is a description of some of the existing patterns, but that little actual research has been done. It is also worth mentioning that many of the forms of men having sex with men or women with women will rarely lead to any form of self-identification among the Thai as bisexual or homosexual. This is important to remember when analyzing studies that ask questions of self-identification. Because of social restrictions on open discussion of sexual matters, such questions may not give much information about the actual behaviors in which an individual engages. From the point of view of HIV transmission, the behaviors matter more than the self-identification.

The first category is what can be termed early bisexuality. In this form, given the lack of sanctions on same-sex contacts as mentioned above, individuals may experiment with members of the same sex while undergoing integration into the publicly heterosexual pattern that will apply for most of their lives. For many Thai males, part of this integration involves visiting female sex workers. In other cases, some male adolescents at the earliest stages of their sexual lives are seduced or pressured to have sex with older men. Since there is no strong guilt associated with sexual behaviors, it is possible that some people find sexual contacts with both sexes enjoyable and continue regularly or occasionally to practice bisexual contacts later in life. No studies have been done that explore the extent and nature of same-sex contacts during the formative years in Thai adolescents. However, college surveys (Sakondhavat *et al.* 1988; Chompootaweep *et al.* 1988) do exist that show that a large number

of the male students have visited female sex workers, and that a few of them admit to having had sexual contacts with other men.

The second category of bisexuality consists of those who have a strong preference for members of one sex or the other, but who choose encounters with the nonpreferred sex for either social or economic reasons. An example of the first would be the man described above who prefers sex with men, but who marries for reasons of social conformity. Because of social pressures, he will be required to have sex with his wife and produce offspring, but his true sexual interests are elsewhere. A few of these cases have become publicly known, particularly after divorce when the wives spread the news. Further evidence comes from bar workers at male bars who have reported that many of their customers are in fact married. Social pressures may also take other forms, e.g., peer-group pressure. An example of this is one young man who prefers homosexual contacts but visits female sex workers as part of social activities with his friends.

Social pressures are not restricted to men. An in-depth interview with a village woman revealed that she was pressured by her parents to get married and have children. During her married life, she still occasionally had sex with her female lover. After she divorced her husband, she lived openly with her female lover who helped to raise her child.

Examples of economic reasons for bisexuality are found in the sexual-service industry itself, which is extensive and well-developed in Thailand. (The existence of the sexual service industry is primarily a response to indigenous demand; however, in many areas it was accelerated by the American presence in the Viet Nam era and has been sustained by the tourist industry.) If one examines men working in male go-go bars, one finds that many of the men describe themselves as heterosexual in preference, often with girlfriends or wives on the side, but commercially engaging in sex with men because it is economically-attractive. In one survey conducted by the Thai Red Cross Society among 141 male bar workers in Bangkok (Sittitrai *et al.* 1989), it was found that 82 percent of the men had taken the job because of unemployment. In the two weeks prior to the interviews, 100 percent had sex with male customers, 23 percent with female customers. 13 percent with noncustomer males, and 50 percent with noncustomer females. It should be stressed that regardless of their actual sexual preferences, many of the male bar workers have long-term partners, some male lovers but the majority girlfriends or wives.

Bangkok has several bars with male workers in which only female customers are allowed. However, in-depth interviews reveal that sometimes transvestites or transsexual men utilize the services of the boys. In addition, some of these boys have male customers, but contacts

are made outside of the work setting. Bisexual activities are not confined to only the male bars; there have also been a few reports from the female bar workers and massage parlor girls of married women coming in for sexual services from other women.

Another aspect of this sexual trade is that it is not uncommon to find adolescents in the parks who will engage in sex with men in order to pick up additional money. With little of the guilt or social sanctions associated with these behaviors in Western cultures, it is merely viewed as an additional service that can be done in the pursuit of economic gain. From that point of view, it can be quite lucrative, with an individual earning a great deal of money from customers in a short period of time for something which can be mutually enjoyable. The majority of these men selling sex, both in the bars and outside, do become sexually excited and climax with their customers. As one bar boy put it: 'If the customer is good in bed, I enjoy sex with him also.' Another one said: 'Sex is sex, a turn-on is a turn-on, you get hard and come anyway with male or female, especially when you are still young and virile.'

The third category of bisexuality is situational bisexuality, that is bisexuality that arises when there are limited opportunities for contact with members of the opposite sex, for example, in prisons or in military bases. Experiences in prison settings have been reported through magazine columns (Anonymous 1989) and in-depth interviews with released prisoners. The existence of homosexual behaviors can be seen in the development of linguistic terms to describe the sexual acts and the roles played in homosexual contacts in prison. These contacts constitute only a portion of the lifetime sexual experience of the prisoners, the majority of whom are married or will later marry. In-depth interviews with military recruits reveal that having sex with 'buddies' was used as a means of sexual release when they could not get out to visit female sex workers or girlfriends.

The next category is what one would class as true bisexuals, i.e., those who actually do enjoy sexual contacts with both sexes and maintain bisexual behavioral patterns throughout their lives. For each individual, the degree of sexual experience with each of the genders may vary, from mostly experience with men and occasionally with women, to the opposite extreme of mostly with women and occasionally with men. We have no accurate way of assessing the size of this population in Thailand and the social restrictions on discussing sexual behavior do not make it easy for individuals to identify themselves as such. However, given permissive Thai attitudes toward sexuality and the ease of locating either male or female sexual contacts through the sexual-service outlets, there

is little question that most of these individuals can engage in sex with either gender if they so desire.

There is a final category of bisexual behavior and preference. This is the men who prefer sex with transvestites or transsexuals. Strictly speaking, they should not be classed as homosexual since they prefer to have sex with persons having both male and female features and appearances in the same body. The existence of this form of bisexuality is illustrated by the case of one young man whose love is a transsexual. He says he gets turned on the most by a man who has female genitals as a result of an operation. This form of bisexuality will likely be practiced by only a small number of individuals.

Existing data on bisexual contacts

There are no direct studies of bisexuality in Thailand. One study that has asked questions about sexual experience is the Survey of Partner Relations and Risk of HIV Infection, sponsored by the World Health Organization and carried out by the Thai Red Cross Society and Chulalongkorn University. Respondents were asked to characterize their lifetime sexual experience in terms of the gender of their partners.

[...]

Another part of this study bearing on questions of bisexuality was a section inquiring about definitions of 'having sex.' In this section respondents were asked about which forms of male/female, male/male and female/female sexual behavior they considered to be 'having sex.' [Figure 5] lists the percentages of males and females who thought that each of the behaviors listed constituted 'having sex.' As can be seen from the table, only 25 percent of the men and 22.5 percent of the women consider oral sex between men as 'having sex.' This implies that the majority of the males in the fifteen-to-forty-nine age group surveyed might not consider their same-sex orogenital experience as placing them in the bisexual category. In addition, less than half of the men and women consider anal intercourse between males to be 'having sex.' If this is the case, then interventions that are not explicit in terms of HIV risk behaviors but are targeted at using condoms while having sex' generally may fail to provide sufficient information for many men practicing anal risk behaviors to identify themselves as being at risk. The results of this table further imply that self-identification as bisexual may not always occur even in the presence of HIV risk behaviors with both

sexes. It is worth noting that there is little difference in opinion between the male and female groups interviewed here.

| | % | % |
|---------------------------------|------|--------|
| | Male | Female |
| | — | — |
| Man caressing/kissing a woman | 19.4 | 24.9 |
| Man caressing/kissing a man | 6.8 | 7.4 |
| Woman caressing/kissing a woman | 7.4 | 7.0 |
| Placing penis in vagina | 98.3 | 98.3 |
| Male placing penis in male anus | 48.7 | 44.2 |
| Male/female orogenital | 33.6 | 33.8 |
| Male/male orogenital | 25.0 | 22.5 |

[Figure 5] Definitions of 'having sex' (sexual intercourse) (n=2902)

SUE GEORGE

Extracts from *Women and Bisexuality*
(1993)

Originally published in George, S. (1993) *Women and Bisexuality*, London: Scarlet Press. Reproduced by permission of Scarlet Press and the author.

In her book *Women and Bisexuality*—the first book-length discussion of the subject ever to be published in Britain—George draws on interview and questionnaire data from almost 150 female respondents in the UK. (George also utilized the Klein Sexual Orientation Grid as part of this research—see chapter 6.) In the extracts below, George considers how some women in the UK come to accept or reject a bisexual identity for themselves.

Taken together, the work by Blumstein and Schwartz, Carrier, and Sittitrai *et al.* sampled in Part II seems to suggest that the concept of bisexuality is not just historically specific (as suggested throughout Part I), but also culturally specific to the overdeveloped world, and perhaps especially to anglophone or 'Anglo-American' culture(s). Clearly, the concept of bisexuality and of identifying as (a) bisexual *is* part of the established repertoire of sexual categories and terminology in the UK. But the mere availability of the concept of 'bisexuality' to people in the UK does not necessarily mean that all those who desire both men and women will choose to regard themselves as bisexual: George considers some of the factors, such as gender, class, 'race', and the state of both feminism and lesbian/gay politics in the UK, which influence her respondents' self-perceptions and identities. In doing so, she teases out some of the gaps and mismatches between identity, behaviour, desire and fantasy which affect *all* sexual subjects, not just those facing the decision to accept (or reject) the term 'bisexual' for themselves. As George suggests elsewhere in her book (1993:38–63), for some women the sexual politics and debates internal to feminism have played a major role in shaping their sexual identities,

and especially their feelings about the term 'bisexuality' — a theme taken up by Clausen in Chapter 11.

For the majority of people whose only desire is and has been for the opposite sex, sexual identity is not an issue: they automatically consider themselves 'normal', without even having to wonder what 'normal' means. Lesbians and gay men, by contrast, have needed to find their own identities to challenge heterosexist assumptions of normality—and to decide for themselves what it means to be a lesbian or gay man, which usually differs from what dominant ideology thinks it means.

The creation of the label 'bisexual' is a fairly recent phenomenon, in operation only over the past twenty years.¹ There was always a recognition that some people (men) were 'really' homosexual, and that some acted that way only part of the time, a recognition which appeared in the Wolfenden Report on homosexuality in the 1950s. However, it was only within the contexts of sexual liberation and then gay liberation that bisexuality was recognised as a specific form of sexual behaviour. Like lesbian or homosexual, it was regarded as negative, with connotations of vacillation, indecision, 'sitting on the fence', 'having the best of both worlds', transition, hedonism. Nevertheless, it existed, and people could relate to it if they could overcome its negative associations.

So is the creation and solidification of the category 'bisexual' a positive or negative phenomenon? Once forms of sexuality are named, then people find that their longings, which had previously been lonely, unspeakable, perhaps unformed, have a home. Therefore it could be argued that once a particular sexuality is defined and named publicly, it attracts more active adherents. (This, of course, is one of the supposed justifications of Section 28.²) The advantages of taking on an identity (as opposed to being labelled by others) are clear: an individual can work out for herself what it means to be bisexual (or lesbian); can regard it as positive rather than negative; can work to create a culture in which her sexuality is validated. Lesbians and gay men, and more recently bisexuals, have also used sexual identity as a rallying point for political action.

On the other hand, creating categories fixes sexuality, which for many individuals is a fluid concept. Some people are attracted to a certain type of person when they are teenagers, and remain attracted to that type, and only that type, for the rest of their lives. Other people like different genders, types of people, ages and activities at various stages. To box people into a fixed category from which they can emerge only at great personal cost, is surely not a progressive aim. Another

danger of identity politics is that the immense differences between various groups within the broad sexual categories can be glossed over and the most powerful group-within-a-group (white upper-and middle-class men, for instance, or white middle-class women within the feminist movement) be the only voices to be heard.

However, the creation of a common agenda which includes the acceptance of difference can be an important position of power from which to challenge dominant ideologies, and the validation of sexual identities other than heterosexual is a necessary strategy in the fight against heterosexism. But such identities should not be an end in themselves: we need them only so we can get to the stage where sexualities other than heterosexual are fully acknowledged and we can all be as sexually fluid (or not) as we like.

People who want to take on a bisexual identity, or do not consider they fit straightforwardly within any of the existing categories, have to decide what it means to identify as such.

[...]

Identifying as bisexual

To describe a person as 'a homosexual', 'a lesbian' or 'a heterosexual' is fairly straightforward: they are 'oriented' towards same or opposite-sex relationships. But one of the problems of defining oneself as bisexual is the lack of agreed meaning of the word. According to the Oxford Concise English Dictionary, bisexual means 'sexually attracted by members of both sexes'. However, within this broad definition, there are many different situations which may lead a woman to wonder if 'bisexual' is really the term to describe her feelings. If she has had many relationships with men for instance, and then falls for a woman, was she really always a lesbian? If she is much more interested in one sex than the other (although she likes both), is she still bisexual? If she has only had relationships with people of one sex, but has strong desires for, sexual fantasies about, or deep and exciting emotional attachments to people of the other, can she say she is bisexual?

[...]

At present, sexual labels are almost inescapable. Gay and heterosexual people are perceived and treated very differently, and people of all sexualities are anxious to 'place' the sexuality of others so as to know

how to relate to them. The fact that bisexual people may not be so easily classifiable is often a cause for anxiety.

Although terms such as 'lesbian', 'gay', 'dyke' or 'queer' have negative connotations in mainstream society, the lesbian and gay communities are constantly challenging those definitions and forming and re-forming their own. Positive connotations for the word 'bisexual' are being formulated within the bisexual movement, but such changes in language take time and require the visible support of substantial numbers of people. This is perhaps why many people who by 'objective' criteria would be considered bisexual do not identify as such.

[...]

To claim a reviled sexual identity can be a radical act, and for many people there are other issues involved. Few respondents to [my] questionnaire came from traditionally marginalised groups: for instance, women of colour and women with disabilities were under-represented, as they are under-represented in the bisexual community. It seems likely that women who already suffer oppression for other reasons may be reluctant to take on a sexual identity which will result in further oppression. Many people of colour prioritise racial and cultural identity,³ although the number of black people loosely connected with the bisexual community is growing and there is a more representative proportion of 'out' black bisexuals in the US. Women with disabilities are often thought of as asexual, Asian women as submissive, and working class women, Jewish women and black women as hyper-sexual [e.g. Stember 1976; Bullard and Knight 1981]. These pre-existing stereotypes can make the claiming of bisexual identity more difficult for women from these groups.

What bisexuality is remains unclear, and its definition varies from person to person. For instance, are married lesbians (women whose sexual and emotional inclinations are towards other women, but who are married) bisexual? Or what about women who consider themselves lesbians, but who nevertheless are sexually attracted to men? The issue was hotly debated at the 1991 National Bisexual Conference in London, in the light of a growing number of lesbians and gay men who are talking about having sex with each other, or recognising their attraction to the opposite sex. Similarly, heterosexual women may have had sex or intimate friendships with other women, but may nevertheless still see themselves as heterosexual.

[...]

Fantasy (whether imagining sexual scenarios or 'daydreaming' about potential partners) is an important part of sexuality [...]. Psychologists have claimed that the gender fantasised about is the key to determining a person's 'true' sexuality [Freud 1979:121], implying

that fantasy is what people would like to do, but don't. But of course the connection between fantasy and action is more complex than this. Surveys ranging from the Hite Report to those in women's magazines such as *Elle* [April 1992] indicate that some 6 per cent of heterosexually-identified women would like to have sex with women, that is would like to act on their fantasies, while for others, fantasy plays a different role: for example, imagined scenarios may be arousing precisely because they are forbidden (this is certainly the case for some lesbians, who enjoy sexual fantasies about men precisely because they feel sex with men is taboo [e.g. Califia 1988]). The answer perhaps is that having sexual fantasies about women may lead an outwardly heterosexual woman to identify as bisexual (and having fantasies about men make a lesbian identify in this way, too) if they see them as important enough.

It is, in any case, possible to argue that sexual identities are a white western construct that does not apply through the rest of the world. In many cultures, bisexual behaviour—although not spoken about or labelled as such—is common. Men and women are expected to marry and have children, and locate themselves primarily in a family context, yet their strongest emotional, physical and often sexual relationships are with people of the same gender. This applies in places as diverse as parts of North Africa, where men will have sex with other men before and after marriage [Gollain 1996]; Kenya, where all women are or have been married, but form sexual friendship networks [Shepherd 1987]; Nigeria, where it is common for women to be semi-sexual with each other, but to stop short of genital contact [*New Internationalist* 1989]; and Mexico, where men having sex with each other are not stigmatised as long as they play the 'masculine' role [Carrier, this volume]. This is not to say that legitimised sexuality, as in the west, does not centre on the penis/vagina. But the prevalence of other scenarios clearly makes a mockery of definitions of sexuality which posit an absolute either/or for hetero/homosexuals.

A future bisexuality

How do we define bisexual? [...A] bisexual identity encompasses many different elements, and as bisexuality as an identity gains strength and visibility, more people will probably come to identify in this way. Could it be that everyone is bisexual, as 15 respondents [to my questionnaire] specifically stated?

Everyone is bisexual—but they don't admit it, they repress it. I think everyone is born bisexual. I was: and I rediscovered it when I was seventeen.

Yet even if everyone has the potential to be bisexual, and in an ideal world in which gender would not matter, the majority of people would behave bisexually, it does not mean that everyone is bisexual here and now.

Perhaps the easiest option is to claim as bisexual anyone who defines themselves in this way. Unlike 'lesbian' or 'heterosexual', 'bisexual' does not describe a specific sexual activity, and to link bisexual identity to behaviour, whereby people could only claim to be bisexual if they have currently or recently had sex or a relationship with people of both sexes, would limit the number of people who could use bisexual as a consistent identity. In my view, one is bisexual through feelings, fantasies, attractions, identifications, friendships, community and political activity—whether one is celibate, in a monogamous relationship with a person of either sex, or having multiple relationships. It is an identity which cannot be altered by a partner—whatever they are, whatever the type or length of the relationship. The only person who can decide on your sexual identity is you—and no matter how hard other people might try, they cannot dictate your feelings.

As Colin Spencer writes:

As far as I can detect, I have always felt bisexual, strongly and equally attracted to men and women. At certain stages in my life, for psychological reasons, I have felt impelled to love and be loved by a man instead of a woman, or vice versa.

[Spencer 1990:259]

Bisexuals, like people of other sexualities, often see their own orientation as superior. And although bisexuality may not be the best of both worlds, it can be a bridge between the two, pulling together two sides of sexuality which are usually distant. It can be a way of expressing a sexuality which sees the person rather than the gender; it can be a way of having relationships which do not rely on stereotypes; it can be a way of relating more closely to people of both sexes; it can encompass many types of sexuality and many different people. Ideally, bisexuality is a way of forming relationships without putting boundaries on them because of gender.

Defining and labelling sexuality is not an end in itself. Ideally, labels will become irrelevant, and everyone will be able to have sexual/emotional relationships with whomsoever they choose. But that day is a long way off: at present, bisexuality has negative connotations for the vast majority of people and the only way to change that is for people who consider themselves to be bisexual to say so, loudly. To define oneself in any way is, perhaps, restrictive, presupposing a fixed identity which for many people is not possible; however, bisexuality does allow for a multiplicity of behaviours and is a more open label than most.

Notes

- 1 Compare discussions of the term 'bisexual' in Part I, and George's own discussion of the development of the term elsewhere in her book (1993: 25–37)
- 2 This refers to a piece of homophobic legislation in the UK. Section 28 of the Local Government Act of 1988 prohibits local authorities—in a notoriously imprecise phrase—from 'promoting homosexuality'.
- 3 Pratibha Parmar [in Smyth 1992] and Carmen, Gail, Neena, Tamara [1989] make this point.

JAN CLAUSEN

Extract from *My Interesting Condition*
(1990)

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In this article, Clausen offers a detailed and intimate reflection on her feelings about her own sexual identity. Clausen, a US writer and scholar, was for many years a lesbian feminist. Lesbian feminism gave her a strong sense of identity as well as offering her a sense of political and intellectual 'home', and it was therefore a major personal event for Clausen when her long-term lesbian relationship ended and she began a relationship with a man. This event had many repercussions, which Clausen discusses at some length in her article; in the extract below, she reflects on the difficulty of knowing how to name her sexual self now that she no longer feels able to call herself a 'lesbian feminist'. Clausen explicitly rejects a bisexual identity for herself: not only does she find the term 'bisexual' specifically problematic, she also has reservations about the concept of sexual identity itself. This theme is taken up by Valverde's discussion of psychoanalysis in Chapter 12.

Clausen's sensitive discussion of her dilemma offers many insights into a situation which many other women may have experienced: there is some evidence from both the UK and the USA that a significant proportion of women who identify as bisexual may previously have identified as lesbian and have faced difficulties in coming to terms with the loss of lesbian identity (Chater and Finkler 1995; Clarion 1996). Whether or not this situation is common, the decision to discuss it in a public forum was a bold one. When an earlier version of the article was published in the US lesbian and gay periodical *Out/Look* in 1990, it provoked a storm of controversy: as one of the editors of *Out/Look* later commented, 'Clausen's story proved to be the magazine's single most divisive article ever' (Stein 1997:155), with some lesbian

readers praising Clausen for her honesty, and others condemning her for her treachery.

[T]he dilemma of terminology [with which to describe my sexual identity] takes up a ridiculous amount of energy, both my own and other people's. 'But what do you call yourself?' dykes keep anxiously prodding, until the lack of a label seems like more of an embarrassment than the actual behavior. (I'm reminded of stories I've read about the disgrace and discomfiture associated with being 'kiki' –neither butch nor fem–in lesbian circles in the 50's.) I feel put on the spot when a lesbian organizer solicits my endorsement of her group's demonstration, then insists I identify myself as a lesbian on the leaflet; I end up telling her the story of my life over the telephone. I feel put on the spot again when a lesbian editor solicits a coming out poem for inclusion in an anthology of gay and lesbian poetry. It's clear to me, however, that the poem in question is a lesbian poem, and I'm furious when another lesbian passionately denounces me for 'lack of ethics' because I agree to the inclusion.

I discover that I have to keep on coming out to straight people—not in so many words, perhaps, but the method hardly matters. When I describe the plots of my novels, when I challenge heterosexist assumptions, when I explain how it is I come to have a daughter without having been a biological mother, naturally I'm viewed as a dyke. Currently, I'm fast becoming the semi-official lesbian at the institution where I teach; there are other women on the faculty who have female lovers in the here and now, but I've got the rep. Of course, I sometimes feel like an impostor. Yet when I tell straight people I have a male lover, I feel doubly exposed, my sexuality open to prurient speculation not only because I've done unspeakable things with women but because I apparently couldn't live without the almighty penis.

I decide that this difficulty in devising appropriate labels is merely the most obvious symptom of an underlying process marked by many-layers of ambiguity, which might aptly be termed *identity loss*. I amuse myself by inventing ironic self-descriptions, metaphors for my non-identity: Stateless Person of the Sexual World. Tragic Mulatto of the Sexual World. Lesbian-feminist Emeritus. Twilight Girl. In conversations with myself, I make reference to 'my interesting condition' –that old-fashioned euphemism for pregnancy which seems to me to convey not only the thinly-veiled, at times intrusive curiosity with which others regard me, but my own hopes for extracting meaning from the mess.

There's an obvious solution to my dilemma over labels, and perhaps to the deeper questions as well. Why don't I simply accept my bisexuality, proclaim it to the world, and perhaps become active in some sort of group?

Throughout much of my adult life, the insights of identity politics have shaped my worldview, informing my activism, my writing, and in many respects the conduct of my most intimate relationships. I've been privileged to know many brilliant, principled women who've used the precept that 'the most profound and potentially the most radical politics come directly out of our own identity, as opposed to working to end somebody else's oppression' [Combahee River Collective 1983:275] as though it were a surgeon's scalpel with which to dissect experience in the interests of healing. Given this, it may seem peculiar that I would willingly remain in identity limbo.

On the other hand, I've often felt uneasy about the intensity of the lesbian-feminist focus on identity. At times I've seen it lead to an obsessive narrowing of perspective. Stress on the potential for change in individuals and social structures is too often abandoned in favor of an essentialist preoccupation with what one 'is,' as defined by an ever-growing list of measures. At the worst, I've seen paranoid opportunists wield simplistic political theory—and their own identities—as though these were blunt instruments with which to discipline adversaries.

Perhaps an overdose of identity politics has something to do with the fact that I now experience a foreboding of exhaustion at the prospect of digging out, dusting off, 'dealing with,' polishing up, inhabiting, and promoting yet another identity. I do not want to become an identity junkie, hooked on the rush that comes with pinning down the essential characteristic that for the moment seems to offer the ultimate definition of the self, the quintessence of oppression, the locus of personal value—only to be superseded by the next revelation.

I have, besides, a second problem with 'identifying' as bisexual even as I accept the term as a technical description of my sexuality. I do not know what 'bisexual' desire would be, since my desire is always for a specifically sexed and gendered individual. When I am with a woman, I love as a woman loves a woman, and when I am with a man, I love as a woman loves a man. Therefore, bisexuality is to me not a sexual identity at all, but a sort of anti-identity, a refusal (not, of course, conscious) to be limited to one object of desire, one way of loving.

British feminist Jacqueline Rose has argued for recognition of a '*resistance to identity* [italics added] which lies at the very heart of psychic life' [1983:9]. Basing her discussion on elements of Freudian and subsequent psychoanalytic theory, she paints a picture of identity

as a deceptively smooth facade hiding an endless turmoil of contradictory impulses and desires. Socially powerful groups have a stake in promoting the illusion of unconflicted identity because the maintenance of their power depends on keeping in place a constellation of apparently fixed, 'natural,' immutable social relationships and psychological postures. She, therefore, spots an irony in the feminist tendency to view psychic conflict as 'either an accident or an obstacle on the path to psychic and sexual continuity—a continuity which we, as feminists recognize as a myth of our own culture only to reinscribe it in a different form on the agenda... (18).

I would like to suggest that when any of us has assumed lesbian identity to be unambiguous, when we have been dismayed to discover attractions to men co-existing with woman-loving, we have reinscribed in a different form a prevailing cultural myth about sexuality—one which, I seem to recall, the early gay liberation movement with its emphasis on exploration and human variety attempted to debunk. Rose's argument helps me make sense of my suspicion that in choosing to love a man, on some level it was chaos itself I needed to invoke. It confirms me in my reluctance to hurriedly replace my lost identity. It also encourages me to inquire how that identity functioned in my life. What were the benefits that made it worth my while to ignore contradiction and conflict? (It's worth reemphasizing that I'm focusing on what it meant to me to be a lesbian-feminist, as opposed to what it meant to be lovers with a woman.)

One answer to the question is suggested by my nagging feeling that in getting involved with a man, as I put it to myself, I stopped being golden. I cannot explain this feeling in rational terms, since I always cast a jaundiced eye on theories of the natural superiority of women, ridiculed separatism, and was vocal about the flaws I saw in lesbian politics and culture. Nevertheless, being a lesbian-feminist apparently provided me with a sense of special worth which is palpable in its absence, and which I don't believe I will ever get back, no matter the future course of my love life. Apparently I bought into the superstitious notion that oppression is destiny, and the more oppressed the more politically valuable and morally admirable the person. My identity was both a membership in an elite sorority and a lavender badge of courage which partially compensated for a lot of things I disliked about myself, like class background and skin color.

I can see this quite clearly when I think about my writing: when I felt that my work was only that of a woman who is white and middle-class, and consequently doubted what of any real and lasting interest I might have to say to the world about its predicament and

its glory, I could take comfort in the fact that it was also the work of a lesbian, someone on the cutting edge. If I say, therefore, that my identity was part of an elaborate guilt management system, I don't mean to dismiss very real questions about the relationship of artistic insight to various forms of privilege, but rather to remind myself how damaging I've found this reductive approach to my own experience to be. It makes me too cautious, leads me to veil my feelings, smothers whatever fire I may have in me to share, which is fueled by a subtle, infinitely nuanced combination of early experience and adult learning.

My lesbian identity also bestowed, I thought, a basic dignity that my gender had denied me. This was partly a practical matter—as a lesbian, I interacted less frequently with men, thereby avoiding a certain amount of sexism—but the symbolism was just as important to me. I was still a female in a patriarchal system, of course, subject to rape, unequal pay, and the tender mercies of the military-industrial complex. But I felt emancipated, felt I'd declared my independence and was, therefore, less compromised by my actual second-class status. When I contemplated the possibility of no longer being able to call myself a lesbian, what came to mind was the sense of humiliation I associated with being a straight woman.

My symbolic autonomy had its advantages, but it interests me to see that at this point in my life I actually feel far less helpless as a woman-in-relation-to-men than I'd anticipated. I believe this evolution has its parallels in the experience of the many lesbians who in recent years have become re-involved in friendships and working situations with men, following a period of de facto separatism.

MARIANA VALVERDE

Extract from *Sex, Power and
Pleasure* (1985)

Originally published in Valverde, M. (1985) *Sex, Power and Pleasure*, Toronto: The Women's Press. Reproduced by permission of the author.

In this extract, Valverde discusses the psychoanalytic account of sexual identity to which Clausen alludes in Chapter 11; she also deals with the related claim that 'everyone is born bisexual' which George heard from a number of her respondents in Chapter 10. Valverde is thus offering a commentary on the Freudian conception of bisexuality featured in Part I of this volume. It is worth noting in this regard that, like most commentators since the 1970s but unlike Freud himself, Valverde discusses bisexuality in terms of heterosexuality/ homosexuality rather than masculinity/femininity.

As Valverde points out, even if one accepts Freud's account of sexuality and sexual identity, this does *not* mean accepting that we are all 'born bisexual'. Infantile sexuality operates *regardless* of gender; adult bisexuality, although directed towards both women and men, is at least premised on the understanding that there *is* such a thing as gender, and that women and men are different in significant ways (if only anatomically). As Clausen points out in Chapter 11, the specific individuals one desires are always *sexed* individuals—and this is so whether or not that individual's sex (or gender) was one of the criteria for having desired him or her in the first place. Valverde's argument suggests that this sex/gender dimension is integral to adult bisexuality, and hence to the 'anti-identity' which bisexuality represents for Clausen. The extract closes with a discussion of the position of bisexuality in relation to heterosexuality and homosexuality, which both recalls the dilemma in conceptions of bisexuality outlined at the end of Part I, and anticipates the epistemological debates sampled in Part III.

Nobody knows how sexual orientation is in fact determined. One reason for this failure is that almost all research to date has concentrated on finding the ‘causes’ of homosexuality, as if heterosexuality had no cause. Thus, it might be better to work from a hypothesis that allows for both change and positive choices, rather than one which sees people as mere pawns of some hard, fixed core of sexual identity. It is true that there are some people who are exclusively attracted to either one gender or the other, and who from a very tender age felt ‘pushed’ by their exclusive desire. But many other people, and women in particular, experience their own sexual orientation as more fluid. This has to be recognized in any theory of sexual orientation, and clearly the category of bisexuality is an important conceptual tool in this type of analysis.

And yet, the rejection of hetero- and homosexuality as two different species with fixed boundaries does not mean that we should go to the other extreme and dismiss all differences in sexual orientation by blandly saying, ‘but everyone is bisexual anyway.’ This statement is often legitimized by reference to the Freudian model of sexual development, which sees early childhood sexuality as the child’s pleasure in his/her own body. According to Freud, heterosexuality develops only by means of the resolution of the Oedipus complex. Prior to this, the child does not make gender distinctions in his/her desire, and is primarily focused either on autoerotic activities or on the mother (because she is the primary parent, not because she is female).

This theory can be used to suggest that bisexuals are closer to the innocence of pre-Oedipal childhood than those who have singled out one gender as the sole object of desire. One sometimes hears that bisexuality is superior to both the conformity of exclusive heterosexuality and the narrowness of exclusive homosexuality. In other words, this approach legitimizes bisexuality in the same way that conservative thought legitimizes exclusive heterosexuality, i.e. by reference to a myth of what is ‘natural.’ The only difference is that the bisexual myth emphasizes the innocence of early childhood, while the heterosexual myth emphasizes concepts such as ‘maturity.’

The bisexual-as-innocent myth, however, is based on an incorrect reading of Freudian theory. One cannot assume that because babies and young children do not differentiate very much between genders—the significant distinctions are pleasure versus non-pleasure, mother versus absence of mother—therefore adults are in some essential way bisexual. The baby’s generalized erotic drives, or ‘polymorphous perversity’ (as Freud called it), is not the same as or even the foundation for adult bisexual behaviour. The baby’s erotic drives are not directed toward ‘men’ and ‘women’ as distinct genders, but rather toward

autoerotic pleasures such as sucking one's thumb or touching one's genitals, or to the mother as object of desire and source of nurture and pleasure. The infant's sexuality is both pre-genital and pre-gendered.

The bisexual behaviour of adults who choose to eroticize both men and women is the furthest thing from this primeval innocence. Adult bisexuality is both genitally focused (unlike the child's oral, anal and phallic eroticisms) and gender conscious. It is not an innocent, pre-genital eroticization of all bodily experience, but rather involves the selection of properly gendered men and women as objects of desire within the context of fairly rigid rules about what constitutes real sex.

The false analogy between the baby's polymorphous eroticism and the adult's bisexuality has been used to suggest that, far from being indecisive or fickle sexual beings (which is the view of mainstream society), bisexuals are 'closer to nature' and are even superior because of their non-exclusivity.

If the myth of a sexual state of nature (in which bisexuals get to play the noble savage) is a useful one in terms of the psychological self-justification of bisexuals, the myth also has certain political uses and consequences. By stressing the alleged 'essential' bisexuality of all human beings, heterosexuality and homosexuality tend to appear simply as alternative ways of narrowing down the original sexual drive. They tend to be presented as comparable choices, as 'sexual preferences.'

The model of 'sexual preference,' as Adrienne Rich [1980] points out in her classic essay 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence' is problematic mainly because it is based on the liberal myth that one makes one's sexual choices through individual preference. Rich points out that, given the enormous social weight of heterosexism, one cannot accurately describe heterosexuality as merely a personal preference, as though there were not countless social forces pushing one to be heterosexual. People do not generally choose heterosexuality out of a number of equally valid, equally respected lifestyles. Rather, people tend to 'naturally' become heterosexual as they become adult sexual beings. By speaking of homosexuality and heterosexuality (and for that matter bisexuality) as 'preferences,' one is disguising and mystifying the institution that Rich calls 'compulsory heterosexuality.' As long as certain choices are punished while others are presented as natural, as the norm, it is naive to describe the complicated process of the construction of conformity and/or deviance by reference to a consumer-type notion of personal preference.

To point out that heterosexuality is not accurately described as a 'preference' is not to imply that homosexuality or bisexuality, as non-

conformist lifestyles, are necessarily 'free' choices. [...] By stepping out of respectability one does not necessarily escape the grasp of the sexual experts; one does not step out of the realm of necessity and into the realm of pure freedom. Many people who are attracted to the 'wrong' gender feel driven by their own desires, feel compelled to seek homosexual partners, and do not experience their homosexuality as the exercise of freedom. However, even those people who have experienced their homosexual desires as dark forces governing them, rather than as freely chosen paths to self-fulfilment, are forced at some point to define themselves, and ask how and why they have come to have such desires. One may choose to say, 'I was born gay,' or 'I am bisexual because...'; but regardless of the answers that we give ourselves, we all have to spend some time thinking about the reasons why we took this particular path, and what the social consequences are. Heterosexuals do not have a comparable experience. Since we all 'naturally' grow up to be heterosexual, it is only the deviations that call out for an explanation; the norm appears as natural, and few heterosexual people ever wonder whatever caused them to be homosexual.

[...] Society does everything in its power to construct a certain pattern of heterosexual behaviour out of each child's autoerotic and polysexual drives. Sometimes the social forces are for one reason or another ineffectual, and the adolescent or adult 'discovers' certain deviant desires in her/himself. Society then does what it can to mould the deviant desires into one of the patterns provided by the experts. If it failed to give you a normal heterosexual identity, it will give you a deviant identity as a homosexual.

It is interesting that although bisexuality, like homosexuality, is just another deviant identity, it also functions as a rejection of the norm/deviance model. People who are bisexual, and not just in a transition between heterosexuality and homosexuality, are people who have resisted both society's first line of attack and its second offensive, i.e. they have resisted both the institution of heterosexuality and of homosexuality. This means that every day they have to make specific choices about how they will appear, with whom they will flirt, what style they will express in clothes and mannerisms.

However, the flexibility and ambiguity inherent in bisexuality do not suffice to allow bisexuals to hover comfortably somewhere 'above' the gay/straight split. Nobody can escape the social structures and ideologies that govern both gender formation and sexual-orientation formation, which have created hetero- and homosexuality as the main, institutionalized sexual identities. What bisexuals do is not so

much escape the gay/straight split, but rather *manage* it. They are not above the fray, but participate in it by locating themselves at different points in the split according to the circumstances. Bisexuality is best seen not as a completely separate Third Option that removes itself from all the problems of both hetero- and homosexuality, but rather as a choice to combine the two lifestyles, the two erotic preferences, in one way or another.

Part III

BISEXUAL
EPISTEMOLOGIES

Extracts from *Activating Bisexuality:
Towards a Bi/Sexual Politics* (1993)

Originally published in Bristow, J. and Wilson, A.R. (eds) (1993) *Activating Theory: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual Politics*, London: Lawrence and Wishart. Reproduced by permission of the author.

This article offers what has become a classic formulation of bisexual epistemology. Eadie points to the many ways in which bisexuals and bisexuality have been excluded from lesbian and gay discourses and communities in the UK and USA, and argues that this is not merely accidental, but is rather a 'symptom' of a much deeper epistemological issue. He suggests that homosexuality as such is predicated on its distinction from heterosexuality, and vice versa; and that, in turn, that distinction is predicated on the elision of bisexuality. To acknowledge bisexuality, according to Eadie, is to acknowledge that the distinction between heterosexuality and homosexuality is inherently unstable, and he argues that this instability should be welcomed, not just because the recognition of bisexuality and bisexuals is a desirable goal in itself, but because the breakdown of the heterosexual/homosexual dyad will ultimately transform the ways in which sexuality is lived and organised. Drawing on lesbian and gay studies, feminist theory, anthropology, and film and literary criticism, Eadie suggests that bisexuality offers a 'hybrid' position from which to rethink sexual diversity.

Since this article first appeared in 1993, Eadie has explored similar territory—the ambivalence of lesbian and gay communities towards bisexuality and bisexuals, and the representation of bisexuality in popular cultures and discourses—in increasingly refined and sophisticated ways (Eadie 1996b, 1997a, 1997b). In this more recent work, Eadie is less optimistic about the transformative potential of bisexuality in and of itself, and more concerned to examine the limitations, as well as the subversive possibilities, of bisexuality and bisexual identity. Nonetheless, this article has remained a key reference point for bisexual theory, and is an important example of bisexual epistemo-logy's central concern

with the critical examination—and sometimes the deconstruction—of boundaries, definitions and categories.

Rather than embrace an idealist faith in the necessarily, immanently corrosive efficacy of the contradictions inherent to these definitional binarisms, I will suggest instead that contests for discursive power can be specified as competitions for the material or rhetorical leverage required to set the terms of, and to profit in some way from, the operations of such an incoherence of definition.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick [1990:11]

Bi way of an introduction

Like all sexualities, ‘bisexuality’ has a history. A double history: of the ways in which there are and have been sexual subjects who desire both men and women; and of the ways in which that word has evolved and been deployed relatively recently. Its current deployment is bringing it into a series of conflicts with lesbian and gay communities.¹ This essay looks at the nature of those conflicts, argues for some ways out of them.² I will be suggesting that the problem—and also the solution—is bound up with fights over definitional incoherence, whereby the instabilities of sexual identity become a battleground.

In speaking of bisexuality, I am trying to attend to its different histories. When I refer to bisexuality I am therefore gesturing towards a range of sexual-political phenomena: self-identifying bisexual people; people experiencing both same-sex and opposite-sex desires or practices who choose positively to identify as lesbian, gay or straight; people who have non-bisexual identities which struggle to contain outlawed bisexual feelings; people who desire both men and women, for whom the term ‘bisexual’ is anachronistic or culturally inappropriate. Those parameters in themselves mark some of the issues of definitional incoherence.

Danger and safety will be continuing themes in this essay and many of the current conflicts involve calls by lesbians and gay men for safety. There are three main arguments for the need for safe spaces, and all have been used to exclude bisexual people:

- (i) The need for a space free from the oppressive behaviour of the group in power. Bisexual people are said to have ‘heterosexual privilege’: they are therefore assumed to behave in heterosexist ways.

- (ii) The need for a group to be together to share experiences and define an agenda, free from the imposed interpretations, norms and contempt of dominant groups. Bisexuals are said to have different interests and therefore threaten the possibility of free discussion. They will also dilute the common experience, and because they have not shared them will be uninformed.
- (iii) A place to be free of the fears and feelings of anxiety caused by being around members of an oppressive group. Some lesbians and gay men do not feel comfortable around bisexuals.

Even where personal safety is not such an immediate issue, bisexuality is dealt with in ways that are closely tied to such thinking. My aim is to undermine those positions. I shall not simply be arguing against them, but disputing the sexual epistemology on which they are premised, and the forms of identity politics which follow from that.

For me, the most recent airing of these arguments was in a discussion between the Nottingham Bisexual Group³ and The Outhouse Project, a local group which is working to establish a 'lesbian and gay community centre' in Nottingham. It was the content of that name that was being contested. Would they, we asked, include bisexual people among their users? While they referred to such arguments largely as examples of what they did *not* think, the sticking point of the discussion (for a while) was that they did not actually see the need for a name change. Since their full charter stated that 'the co-operative welcomes members of both genders and all sexual orientations', they felt that it was unnecessary to mention bisexual people in their title. Against this, we were arguing that the absence was a very powerful one for us. A crucial point in the discussion was around bisexual history. We pointed out that historically places that have said 'lesbian and gay' in their titles mean very specifically 'and not bisexual'. Lesbian and Gay Switchboard in London did at one time not accept bisexual volunteers; the London Lesbian and Gay Centre had for many years [a] policy excluding bisexual users; the NUS [National Union of Students] Lesbian and Gay Campaign was not open to bisexual students. We also pointed out that the bisexual community had now reached a point where 'bisexual' was no longer simply a diagnostic or classificatory term, but a positive, self-chosen, and political identity. Prospective users would therefore assume that if this were not explicitly recognised by an organisation then this was a deliberate exclusion.

What is perhaps most interesting in this event is the constitution of a bisexual 'we' at all itself symptomatic of the very changes that were being discussed. It was not so long ago that I was involved in such

discussions as a sole bisexual 'I', arguing for policy changes which would make organisations in which I was involved reflect my needs. Now J am part of a community.

Negotiations such as this with lesbian and gay communities mark a return to the point at which many of us have left it: feeling that there were no spaces in which we could mix, or where we were accepted, we have built our own communities. Now we are back. But that return is not a simple negotiation between separate parties. Much of the work of building a bisexual community has involved producing collectivities which have no secure borders. For instance, many have predominantly lesbian, gay or heterosexual lives and identities, either by choice or under duress.

Given this, the work of a bisexual politics is at least as much about dismantling the entire apparatus which maintains the heterosexual/homosexual dyad as it is about creating a third term to add to it. Such a dismantling questions the grounds on which a separation of sexual orientations is assumed to be possible—and it is perhaps this which makes the work of creating a bisexual community so contradictory. The 'we' which was able to speak in the discussion was the product of a great deal of time and energy, enabling a group of us to develop a bisexual community in Nottingham. That work was itself predicated on the existence of a larger bisexual community spread through the country, which is dependent on the last twelve years⁴ of intensive activism, generating groups and events which could make the affirmation of bisexual practice and desire, within whatever identities it circulates, a very real option. For many of the people coming to the Nottingham Bisexual Group it is the fact of such a larger context that makes it possible for them to validate their sexualities. And it does so by offering the possibility of a community where there is an ongoing discussion of these issues, rather than a pre-established identity to take up.

What this suggests is the need for a form of sexual politics which is always attentive to the collapse of the categories with which it operates. Too much activism draws its energies from the anxieties attendant on that collapse, and is primarily motivated to defend those borders. More productively, we can think of strategies whereby, to quote Judith Butler, 'without the presupposition or goal of "unity" ...provisional unities might emerge in the context of concrete actions that have purposes other than the articulation of identity' [Butler 1990:15]. Such unities are not generated by themselves: this is not a voluntaristic call for a form of activism which can simply be adopted at will. While the basis of community work is that forms of activism and campaigning are chosen and negotiated, the ground on which such negotiations take

place is densely structured by existing debates, problems and opportunities. To risk some sociological generalisations, there are a series of historical changes which have facilitated the growth of a bisexual community, not least the rise of lesbian and gay politics. While that politics has increased the languages and opportunities for addressing same-sex desires, and has thereby encouraged bisexual visibility, it has also pushed bisexuality onto the agenda by its hostility towards it. Alongside this, capitalism's increasing commodification of desire has lent the logic of the market to sexuality, so that even as the right strengthens its 'family values' agenda, sexual pleasure becomes, paradoxically, an ever more acceptable purchase. The rise of the New Right in general, and perhaps the AIDS crisis in particular—a crisis generated by the wilful neglect of governments—has mobilized lesbian and gay communities into action. The intensification of gay pride in response to this increasing homophobia, and the tightening of the boundaries of the queer nation that has accompanied it, has led to an increased stigmatization of bisexuality, and therefore a greater need for supportive bisexual spaces. And it is this experience of past exclusions which so strongly marks the bisexual community's commitment to a more diverse model of sexual oppressions.

By being non-prescriptive around sexual desires, practices, relationships and identities, bisexual collectivities undermine the very ground on which they gather. It is often that non-prescriptiveness which then comes to form the basis of our gathering. Some groups established by bisexual people have chosen not to centre on bisexuality, but on a wider sexual diversity, on the grounds that it is an inclusive sexual agenda which will best serve our interests, rather than an attempt to set up pure bisexual spaces.⁵ Thus the discussion with The Outhouse Project also included questions of transsexuality and sexual diversity. This addresses the inclusion of bisexual people not simply as 'the bisexual issue', but as part of a shift in the picture of sexual dissidence so that activism can embrace more than just the needs of lesbian and gay-identified people.

This approach is not without its problems: the major one is that throughout the bisexual community there are fears about not being bisexual 'enough'. With alarming regularity I encounter people who feel that, in the absence of a coherent (which would also mean policed) bisexual identity, their expression of bisexuality is wanting. Monogamous people feel they should be having more relationships, and people in multiple relationships feel they are perpetuating a stereotype. People who have had primarily same-sex relationships feel they are expected to have opposite-sex relationships, and people in opposite-sex relationships feel they have not proved themselves until

they have had a same-sex relationship. This persistent insecurity is generated by the absence of any normative identities which might provide the security of being bisexual in ‘the right way’.⁶ However it is this very absence which, when valued, enables the growth of communities where a range of sexual subjectivities are articulated with one another.

My concern in this essay is to suggest the conditions under which such a valuing can [take] place, and to explore how dominant lesbian and gay sexual epistemology has obstructed such a valuing because it has been structured not only to exclude bisexuality, but also to cement a heterosexual/homosexual dyad.⁷ What are the investments in such a structuring, and what are the consequences? What might be formulated in its place? What conditions are available for such a change to occur? In pointing out the problems of prevalent sexual epistemology, I am not arguing that there is any true or final model which might have been set in place at some mythical starting point of all sexually dissident communities. I am also not denying the effectiveness of the strategic decisions that have been taken in the history of sexual politics, and which have shaped the epistemologies we now have. Nor am I ignoring the shaping presence of hostile cultures within whose shadows our histories have been made. But I hope to show why it is time to change now, and to find ways not only to give up old certainties, but also to profit from that incoherence.

Bisexual lives

To suggest how bisexuality is marginalised by existing sexual epistemologies, I will begin with a reading of *Modern Homosexualities* [Plummer 1992], a recent anthology of contemporary lesbian and gay social theory which has been described as setting ‘the parameters of lesbian and gay studies for the 1990s’.⁸ I was not sure how I would find bisexuality represented in a book called *Modern Homosexualities*, still less in one sub-titled ‘fragments of lesbian and gay experience’. The bad news was that we did not make it into the index (although the word ‘bisexual’ appears twelve times in the book). The good news was that where we did—and for that matter did not—appear makes for very illuminating reading. The problems highlighted by a bisexual reading of this text fall into five broad categories, which are representative of other cultural-political phenomena arising from a lesbian/gay engagement (or not) with bisexuality. These five fields—or symptoms—are: the ignoring of documented changes, the language of the homosexual act, collapsing distinctions, unspecified instability, and the love whose name dare not be spoken.

1. *The ignoring of documented changes.* A first warning sign in the book might be the absence of bisexuality from sites of enquiry where its presence is very well known. Beth E.Schneider's 'Lesbian Politics and AIDS Work' addresses safer-sex information for lesbians [...] There is [one] issue which [...] always makes it into lesbian safer-sex guidelines, and that is sex with men. This goes unnoted.

[...]

2. *The language of the homosexual act.* It is standard practice to use 'homosexual desire/behaviour/experience/practice' to describe sex between men or between women. This, supposedly, does not impose assumptions about the identity of the people involved. But the word 'homosexual' is still dependent on the model of sexuality which divides the world into 'heterosexual' and 'homosexual' populations. Thus one writer refers to 'both heterosexuals and homosexuals' [Plummer 1992:182] as if this covered the entire population. The continued use of 'homosexual' in anthropological or sociological research eclipses the possibility of bisexuality. Bisexuality simply cannot exist as a category in discourses which name all male-male and female-female sex 'homosexual' and all male-female sex 'heterosexual'.
3. *Collapsing distinctions.* As a counterpart to this supposedly identity-neutral language there is also 'identity positive' language, which explicitly identifies subjects as lesbian or gay. This renders bisexuality invisible by imposing an assumed shared identity on all the people in a specific setting. This is not a simple call for a 'bisexual history' where Langston Hughes and Oscar Wilde are reclaimed as bisexual figures (although there is obviously a place for that work). It is rather to insist on the participation of self-identifying bisexual people and the existence of bisexual desire, in spaces that are called 'lesbian and gay' –a fact which is being excluded from analysis.

[...]

4. *Unspecified instability.* Another avoidance of the necessity of theorising bisexuality is the way that contributors to *Modern Homosexualities* address the inadequacy of the labels 'homosexual', 'lesbian' and 'gay'. They raise this issue repeatedly [...]. But this acknowledgement of the limitations of terms never goes so far as to name bisexuality as an issue.
5. *The love whose name dare not be spoken.* Coming at it from the other side, there are several encounters in the book with the facts of

opposite-sex sex within a lesbian or gay identity, where the theoretical implication[s] simply go unremarked.

[...]

Modern Homosexualities operates with a structural exclusion of bisexuality, so that its emergence, and the questions it raises, cannot be accommodated or theorised by these essays. The writers register bisexuality only in their attempts to exclude or rewrite it. In this sense, the promise that the book ‘sets out the parameters of lesbian and gay studies for the 1990s’ may prove too depressingly true for a range of lesbian and gay spaces. These evasions of bisexuality do nothing to address the serious implications of the facts of opposite-sex desires for dominant lesbian and gay self-understanding, political action, and community norms. Some of the implications have been theorised in Elisabeth D.Däumer’s recent argument for bisexual practice as that which ‘reactivates the gender and sexuality destabilizing moment of all politicized sexual identities’ [this volume] and disarticulates comfortable identity-positions. She describes bisexuality as ‘a sign of transgression, ambiguity and mutability’ [Däumer 1992:103] which prises open ‘radical discontinuities between an individual’s sex acts and affectional choices, on the one hand, and her or his affirmed political identity, on the other’ [99]. She refuses to set up bisexuality as a stable identity itself, to avoid resolidifying the boundaries she is trying to erode. For Däumer, bisexuality is rather a disruptive potential, which haunts and unsettles lesbian, gay and straight identities, by keeping open the possibility of dissident desires: ‘What if, by mistake, one forgot that the person holding one’s hand was a man—or a woman—and if one [as a woman], equally by mistake, were to slip into a heterosexual relationship with a woman, a lesbian relationship with a man?’ [this volume].

While I agree with her analysis, what she overlooks is the centrality of a hostility to opposite-sex desires and practices in lesbian and gay-culture. Däumer’s hope is that bisexuality will facilitate links between those currently identifying as lesbian or gay, and those currently identifying as straight, by eroding their separateness. But a recent comment in *Gay Times* reveals the capacity of those communities to transform—or to contain—bisexual practice, so as to forestall any such rapprochement. Graham McKerrow writes:

Sex between gay men and lesbians is also coming out of the closet.... Now people talk openly of their opposite-sex-same-

sexuality lovers and at the party after the SM Pride March a gay man and a lesbian had sex on the dance floor, but it wasn't heterosexuality. You can tell.

[*Gay Times* January 1993:29]

There are two pieces of disavowal in those few lines. The most obvious one is that ominous 'it wasn't heterosexuality' and its accompanying appeal to a gut-level awareness of difference: 'you can tell'. I am reminded of Elizabeth Wilson's assertion at the Activating Theory conference⁹ that bisexuality just 'isn't the same'. This is not something that is up for discussion: these issues are decided by being referred to a deeper, supposedly instinctive, sense of otherness. It might be important—but it should never have been necessary—to remember all the other regimes of oppression, inequality and persecution that have been propped up by the words 'they're just not like us'. The other telling phrase is 'opposite-sex-same-sexuality'. Earlier, I outlined the collapse of 'bisexual' into 'lesbian' and 'gay' [...]. What is being collapsed here under the words 'same-sexuality'? Does this cover relationships between gay men and bisexual women? It certainly ignores those opposite-sex relationships between lesbians and straight men, or bisexual men and heterosexual women. The word 'same' hermetically seals the boundaries of gay and lesbian communities, banishing the awkward questions of what else is going on in such instances of opposite-sex sex. Bisexuality seems caught between a position where it is completely other to lesbianism or gayness, so that no connection or alliance—let alone more intimate relationship—is possible, or so similar that it doesn't disturb current thinking at all. As another gesture towards keeping the heterosexual/ homosexual binary intact, and thickening that slash to the point of impenetrability, Bernard Devlin, Alex Easki and Shimonn McKenzie recently wrote an article in *The Pink Paper* entitled 'Deconstructon into Heterosexual Oblivion'. They stated categorically that:

No evidence exists to substantiate...[the] claim that it 'has been a noted phenomenon for about ten years' that lesbians are having sex with straight men, or that gay men are having sex with straight women, or (more ludicrously still) that lesbians and gay men are having sex with each other.

[*The Pink Paper* 14 March 1993:10]

Returning to *Gay Times*' assertion that 'it wasn't heterosexuality', under-pinning these ways of dealing with bisexuality is the positioning of the straight world as a monolithically privileged and

hostile force ('stop the straight war against queer love', read the stickers). This drawing up of the battle lines is nothing new in sexual politics, and the demonization of the straight world is certainly nothing new in lesbian and gay communities. The creation of an enemy performs a cleansing ritual, whereby the embattled community is totally free of the disgusting traits of 'them'. The expurgations of lesbian and gay culture have included identifying the straight world as the sole possessors or practitioners of, among other things: heterosexual privilege, eroticizing difference, old age, boring clothes, gender role conformity, bad dancing, cross-gender desire, bad looks, and breeding. Along with the exclusions which each of these terms performs is a purging of the 'straight' lesbians and 'straight' gays who have children, do SM, enjoy gender roles, or have opposite-sex relationships. All such deviants can be represented as symptoms of the invasion, or persistence, of straight ideology in the queer world: to be repelled, persuaded, or ignored. In Ara Wilson's memorable phrase these are 'heterosexual incursions into our cosy but fun little world' [*Outlook* 1992:28].

To put itself at ease, the body politic rids itself of all those dis-easing (for which read 'diseased') subjects, practices, pleasures and attitudes which trouble it. Discourses of normalisation produce what Erving Goffman has called spoiled identities. These are the irredeemably tainted identities, produced in the name of a world which might be easy, habitable, comfortable for some by excluding certain groups from legitimation, rights or power. In anti-oppressive practice one manifestation of such a 'politics of ease' is the 'safe space', a space purged of power and prejudice—which often amounts to a space purged of those people who do not share assumed norms. *Gay Times* articulated this position in a review of BBC2's *Open Space* documentary 'Bi' by asking: 'How can a person really know how badly a group is oppressed unless s/he's at least a member of that group? But if a bisexual can't fully comprehend the oppression of lesbians and gays, the reverse is also true' [*Gay Times* August 1992:66]. Can't fully comprehend? Does a lesbian lose all her memories, insights and awareness the moment she fantasizes about a man? How many years of living and loving is erased by the first shade of opposite-sex desire? The ease with which those comments draw up a line between 'us' and 'them' is frightening. I have already indicated how bi people can be presented as no different at all: no need for change, questioning, adaptation. At the other end of the spectrum there is a talismanic power to the word 'bisexual' whereby it can invoke an entirely separate, discrete, dissimilar, self-contained group. It is sometimes said that bisexuals don't exist—we are 'really' gay or 'really' straight. Now we are 'really' different.

The *Gay Times* comment is the soft end of lesbian and gay communities' policing of bisexuality within their space. In Manchester's 'Flesh' nightclub people are asked at the door if they are lesbian or gay—the bisexuals are refused entry (including those bisexuals in same-sex relationships). The straights have the sense to lie: pride costs these days. In many lesbian and gay telephone helpline organisations bisexuals are seen as a group who cannot be dealt with: 'we haven't shared their experience'. The same people who will confidently take calls from heterosexual transvestites give apologies and brush-offs to bisexual people. I recently had a call passed on to me by a well established helpline: it was from a straight man who had just discovered letters to his partner from her girlfriend. So great was the halo of difference attached to the very presence of bisexuality in this equation that *trained gay workers* saw it as appropriate to pass the call on, in breach of the organisation's own rules on confidentiality, rather than deal with it.

So much disavowal suggests a very strong anxiety. And the anxiety is, very simply, this: if there is not a discrete group of people who only ever experience homosexual desire, then *what if we are not so different from the straight world after all?* While the fight is on to ward off bisexuality's presence as a 'heterosexual incursion' by consigning it to its own space, the basic anxiety persists: what if the rituals of exorcism fail? What if the enemy turns up in our own community, erupts—like the scene in *Alien*—in our own flesh?

Now none of this is to suggest that there are no differences. There are clearly legal and institutional pressures on us which do not affect straight-identified people (and yet there are still straight men being arrested for cottaging). There are social spaces which are ours rather than theirs (and yet increasingly straight-identified people are dancing in gay clubs). There are cultural products and sub-cultural conventions which originate, or circulate, particularly within our communities (and yet always find audiences beyond them). While it would be foolish to deny the specificity of lesbian and gay communities as they have developed, their borders are permeable. And among the differences which constitute them, the one difference which it might be assumed would most strongly delineate lesbian and gay space from straight space—that is, same-sex desires and sexual practices—is definitely not confined to them. Nor are opposite-sex desires and practices confined to the straight world. Thus while there may be a range of differences, there is no transcendent difference upon which to establish the heterosexual/ homosexual binary.

I do not mention *Alien* casually. The drama of *Alien* is the confrontation between Them and Us (on the surface). Human crew against non-human monster. While the alien's eruption from John Hurt's stomach

marks the unnerving fact that the non-human can inhabit the human, it also dramatises something much more reassuring: the two cannot, ultimately, coexist. The Other cannot be inside our own space: its birth destroys the host, so that where 'them' begins, 'us' has to stop. John Hurt is the sacrificial victim in this particular exorcism ritual—much as bisexual people are sacrificed by ostracism from lesbian and gay communities, for not being 'one of us'. To acknowledge, to *give birth* to the other in us is supposedly to cease being who we were altogether. The reality, of course, is very different.

Dangerous politics

If the main obstacle to the acceptance of bisexuality, in all its meanings, is the construction of 'lesbian and gay' around an opposition to opposite-sex desire, then the key issue for a theorisation of bisexual politics is the dissolution of those boundaries. I want to begin that work with Mary Douglas' [1966] book *Purity and Danger*, an anthropological enquiry into the ways that certain practices and people are declared dangerously polluting to an otherwise 'pure' state. She defines dirt, that which menaces purity, as 'matter out of place' and therefore 'dirt is the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification' [35]. Pollution exists only where there is strong categorisation, and where 'eliminating ... [is an] effort to organise the environment' [2]. Douglas comes down firmly in favour of pollution as a process of social change: 'purity is the enemy of change, of ambiguity and compromise' [162]. By a close study of attempts to forestall such change, she produces a theory of the function of purity and stigmatised dirt. These analyses attend to forms of separation and demarcation which serve particular social interests. Douglas sees ritual danger as marking a real danger to a particular set of assumptions, which is then represented as dangerous to mental or physical health.

Hence the anxieties centred on bisexuality can be read as expressing a very real fear of the collapse of a symbolic system: the heterosexual/homosexual dyad. Douglas presents a picture of paranoid societies, where 'people living in the interstices of the power structure [are] felt to be a threat to those with better defined status. Since they are credited with dangerous, uncontrollable powers, an excuse is given for suppressing them' [Douglas 1966:104]. That statement makes interesting reading in the light of current myths about bisexuals, many of them shared by gay and straight people: that if you get involved with them they convert you; they always leave you for a partner of the other sex; they drain the vital energies of gay politics; they are an HIV risk; they are psychologically unstable. You only need to watch *Basic Instinct* to

see a range of straight anxieties cohere in the figure of a bisexual woman who is, quite simply, a threat to life—a set of images which was deployed to almost identical effect in Alison Maclean’s 1993 New Zealand film *Crush*. Similarly, in 1983 in the USA *Gay Community News* printed a now infamous cartoon advertising ‘bisexuality insurance’ to protect lesbians and gays from the dangers of a bisexual lover [Hutchins and Kaahumanu 1991:224].

A second important focus for danger is territory. The creation of spaces that are safe from heterosexism has been a successful, and often very difficult, enterprise. It has included the creation of clubs, support groups, phonelines and magazines. But the equation of heterosexism with heterosexuality now fuels mostly a ghetto mentality which impedes political alliances and which is a luxury of those whose oppression is apparently so restricted to sexuality that alliances are not an issue. It also generates a constant fear of discovering ‘heterosexuality’ in your own lesbian/gay body, or in a lover, or friend—which is, for instance, behind the assertion that ‘it wasn’t heterosexuality’ in *Gay Times*. The demonization and othering of heterosexuality polices the sexuality of those within such spaces at least as effectively as it keeps anyone straight-identified out of them. For while heterosexist abuse poses a very real danger to all of us, a disproportionate amount of energy is being expended on ‘the enemy within’, via a range of discursive engagements every bit as invasive, and final in their judgements, as the x-ray pictures which capture the enemy within Sigourney Weaver’s body in *Alien 3*.

Douglas cites three approaches to the threatening impact of category violations:

1. Consign them to another fixed category: bisexuals are really gay, or really straight. The anomaly doesn’t exist.
2. State that they are dangerous, and should therefore be avoided or controlled. Pass on the phone call, keep them out of the club, don’t have relationships with them.
3. Find some way of acknowledging them, in order to disrupt existing limited patterns.

Pursuing this last option requires models of a non-devouring relationship to difference, which operate by miscegenation and hybridity, in a celebration of boundaries transgressed and never simply unified.

Miscegenation has been explored as a metaphor for political practice in the work of Donna Haraway, as part of her project to produce a postmodern feminism which both undoes fixed binaries, and preserves

radical difference. Haraway's use of such a charged word makes analogies between the violence generated by white racist desires to maintain separateness in the face of the collapse of black/white boundaries, and the consequences of other attempts to keep categories separate. Haraway is in effect arguing for the inevitability of miscegenation, in spite of such attempts, and highlighting the oppressive function of the horror that has been attached to that fact (the horror of *Alien*—the horror of letting the other into our bodies).

For Haraway the projects of domination practised by a range of systems of oppression are explicable as 'a search for a common language in which all resistance to instrumental control disappears and all heterogeneity can be submitted to disassembly, reassembly, investment and exchange' [Haraway 1990:206]. A world in which we are all compatible and reconciled—where there is only 'self' and no 'other'—enables a system of monolithic values to co-ordinate us in a single (capitalist) economy, a single (white) culture, a single (patriarchal) gender system, and a single (heteronormative) sexuality. Against this is her dream 'not of a common language, but of a powerful infidel heteroglossia' [223] where networks of resistance are not coherent—which would involve submission to a central organising principle—but productively conflictual. Underpinning this form of politics is Haraway's insistence on the partiality and isolatedness of every subject. We are situated in specific places and speak from there, shaped by them. She argues for 'situated and embodied knowledges and against various forms of unlocatable, and so irresponsible, knowledge claims. Irresponsible means unable to be called into account' [Haraway 1991b:191]. Here, to be called into account is to be called to account for the specificity of one's vision, the contexts, histories and power differentials which produce it. Questions of knowledge then become, from a Foucauldian perspective, a question of the dangers and abuses of any particular epistemology.

If any transcendent, omniscient position is irresponsible, we can learn to relinquish the search for a single, total explanatory politics, in which conflicts of understanding are regarded as inefficient, and disagreement with any project is understood by that project as a threat to its liberatory trajectory. As we reject the image of the pure and integral self, defending itself against contaminating incursions, we can develop new models in which, as Haraway puts it:

The knowing self is partial in all its guises, never finished, whole, simply there and original; it is always constructed and stitched together imperfectly, and therefore able to join with

another...we do not seek partiality for its own sake, but for the sake of the connections and unexpected openings situated knowledges make possible.

[Haraway 1991a:23]

Knowledge, then, is partial in two senses: it is incomplete and it is biased. Haraway argues that once we accept this partiality, our knowledge becomes a resource for coalitions. For participants in coalitions, the acquisition of new knowledge does not simply mean locating others within our framework, but requires an acceptance of contradictions and discrepancies. Within the coalition we encounter other perspectives which cannot simply be subsumed into our own but which must negotiate with them in order to form a viable political force. Politics involves a mapping out of a web of abuses—not organised as simple hierarchies of who has power and who does not—which can be communicated and addressed in mutually transforming ‘power-sensitive—not pluralist— “conversations”’ [Haraway 1991a:23]. We can then move beyond embattled positions of mutual blame and pure/dangerous dynamics, where the name of the game is to prove who oppresses whom and there is only one winner. For Haraway the consequence of such ‘conversations’ is miscegenation.

Bisexuality is a miscegenate location. On the one hand, it raises the need for a sexual politics where queerness can positively embrace opposite-sex desires. On the other, it is itself a place where there is a difficult mixing of supposedly incompatible orientations. These meetings are dangerous exchanges, which disrupt the identities we have built up, and lead to unpredictable places. ‘Conversations’ of lesbians and gay men with bisexuality include: defining agendas for shared actions; sexual relationships; angry debates on adding ‘bisexual’ to the names of ‘lesbian and gay’ organisations, books, conferences; the inclusion of information about safer sex with women in HIV education aimed at gay men. They also include internal ‘conversations’ about and between the contradictory and perhaps never unified positions within ourselves: gender identities, sexual practices, sexual fantasies, sexual identities, sexual orientations, sexual politics. None of this is comfortable or easy. Reading Douglas and Haraway together, then we may gain a picture of a sexual-political epistemology whose categories defend deeply partial visions with strong emotions. Such a defence holds lesbian/gay politics in a particular place, resistant to articulation with other sexual politics.

I want to use one other writer to look at some of the specific historical concerns which shape these resistances, and to suggest some of the

directions of transformation that our current situated positions open up. Homi K. Bhabha has used 'hybridity' as a tool to analyse the specific material, symbolic, and psychic imbrications of certain cultural histories. His work has focused on issues of race and colonialism, and I am interested in examining how far it is also useful for accounts of sexually dissident communities. For Bhabha, cultural difference is the produce of active 'cultural differentiation' [Bhabha 1985:99]. Systems of separation and organisation—such as those outlined by Douglas—create difference as a function of power, with rights and privileges inhering in certain specified cultural identities (taking us back to 'they're just not like us'). 'Hybridity', writes Bhabha 'puts together the traces of certain other meanings of discourses' [Bhabha 1990:211], by reconfiguring existing cultural material. It supplements dominant terms, and signals their limitations by finding new uses for them. That insinuation of the supplement into the dominant means that the processes of differentiation falter, no longer achieving what they did. Consequently hybridity effects 'a disturbing questioning of the images and presence of authority' [Bhabha 1985:98] and the terms on which authority declares its supremacy.

Bhabha suggests two ways in which hybridity challenges authority—one orientated towards the future, one towards the past. As new communities form out of the old, they indicate that the old material-symbolic regime of authority cannot go on forever: they are no longer encompassed by the existing system, even as they inhabit it. Any authority's own practices slip away from it, and it is no longer self-identical in what were its own secure spaces. One piece of bisexual hybridity effecting just such an intervention is the call for the adoption of the title 'Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Pride'—which has already taken place in parts of the USA.¹⁰ A slogan which has been integral to lesbian and gay communities, and which has shaped them in ways which homogenised them so as to exclude bisexuality, now crops up in the centre-stage of bisexual politics, as part of a hybrid politics. The hybrid does not seek a radical break with its past. Rather, the hybrid acknowledges the part that the past has played in constituting new cultures and identities, and then displaces the dominant (and dominating) culture's attempt to enshrine itself in 'an eternity produced by self-generation' [Bhabha 1992:299], by supplementing it and thereby rewriting the future.

The other process of hybridity is the rewriting of official history, and the forms of present culture which supposedly perpetuate it. Any normative culture enacts 'a continual displacement of its irredeemably plural modern space' [Bhabha 1992:300]. It repeatedly disavows its

own differences from itself in appeals to a construction of the nation or the queer nation—which claims a homogeneous past. One particularly strong symbol in the production of a narrative of gay homogeneity is the pink triangle, deployed in ways that make a claim for gay identity, analogous to ethnicity, where the gay community is read as the cultural manifestation of an inherent sexual orientation.¹¹ The triangle situates gay people as grouped in a distinct culture or community, our own separateness proven by the separation of gay people for extermination in the concentration camps of Nazi Germany. The circulation of the triangle as a badge, an earring, a T-shirt design, makes it operative in maintaining such a community by acting as an element of a putative gay ethnicity. But the production of that community is seen to be based on a shared sexuality which is already, and invariantly, in place.

The stakes in changing such a history are high. The bisexual use of pink and black triangles was recently described to me as ‘cultural theft’. When bisexual people take up those symbols it is as a marker of the fact that the history of bisexuality is—and has always been—densely bound up with homosexual identity. The collectivity of queers marked by the Third Reich included people who experienced opposite-sex as well as same-sex attractions. And so do the contemporary collectivities of lesbian and gay communities. The hostility to bisexual use of these symbols marks a defence of a history which supposedly proves gay collectivity and similarity, but which in fact is a history of differences which have never been fully contained.¹² When the other voices start to inhabit this history ‘a hybrid [queer] national narrative’ emerges to turn ‘the nostalgic past into the disruptive “anterior”’. The historical fixing points of present regimes of differentiation prove unstable, and this ‘displaces the historical subject—opens it up to other histories and incommensurable narrative subjects’ [Bhabha 1990:318].

Bhabha argues that ‘the paranoid threat from the hybrid is finally uncontainable because it breaks down the symmetry and duality of self/other, inside/outside’ [Bhabha 1985:100]. As well as bisexuality insinuating itself into collective histories and collective futures, it comes to inhabit the personal histories and futures of many lesbians and gay-men. The adoption of a lesbian or gay identity currently involves the rejection of past opposite-sex experiences, and the denial of any such possibilities for the future. The lesbian and gay activist group OutRage advertised one of its events as a chance to ‘rejoice at being saved from HETERO HELL’. With ‘hetero’ standing uncompleted, it remains unclear whether this hell is the social structure of heterosexism, or the very fact of heterosexual desire—so that an escape from the former seems to require an escape from the latter. While the two are in many

ways implicated in one another, the conflating of all heterosexual desire with the destructive mechanisms of heterosexist and heteronormative oppression does nothing to enable people to accept their own sexual diversity. Indeed, it produces a mirroring of that hellish structure of exclusion and sexual purism from which it claims to effect an escape.

Bhabha offers a model for the incorporation of otherness in a way which does not deny its disruptive potential. I have opened his theory up to a more nuanced model of the distribution of authority and difference, for his tends to rely on a clear-cut division between the central and the marginal, rather than a multiplicity of centres and margins around different issues. Bhabha's choice of 'irredeemable' to describe modern plurality acts as a powerful counterweight to such Salvationist rhetoric as the example from *OutRage*. There is no redemption from plurality. Deviance persists in the culture which is trying to expel it, thereby disrupting the myths of any authority's heritage as an always homogeneous past, and its persistence as an always identical future.

In spite of our best efforts, then, we are those people we always warned ourselves about. The narratives, identities and spaces which we have, contain other histories, selves and places, which make of us very different people. And we require a sexual politics which can adjust to that. Making such changes means, for me, putting 'bi' into the 'sexual' of 'sexual politics', and for others means making other hybrids by putting their bodies and desires into a 'sexual' that has increasingly meant only 'lesbian and gay'.

Notes

- 1 Given that distinctive social, geographical and economic lesbian and gay spaces do exist, it seems unfair to put every use of 'community' in scare quotes. However, I am noting here that it is a term which is predicated on the very fixity of boundaries that I will be disputing.
- 2 I am focusing on these conflicts, rather than straight conflicts with bisexual people, for three reasons. Firstly, my own involvement with lesbian/gay communities makes this my area of experience. Secondly, in a classic example of Foucault's reverse discourse, it has been lesbians and gay men who have said the most, and been most hostile, towards bisexual people as bisexual, and so it is around that that we have organised. Heterosexual hostility has targeted us as if we were lesbian or gay—just more of those perverts. As bisexuality acquires an identity which is visible to the straight world, this is changing. Thirdly, I feel that we belong together, and I am writing out of that desire.
- 3 The Nottingham Bisexual Group, which I was involved in setting up in October 1992, provides spaces for support and discussion for people exploring issues around bisexuality. It also arranges training for a range of organisations, and

is involved in various activism projects [...]. It is one of the largest bisexual organisations in the UK.

- 4 This figure is based on the establishment of The London Bisexual Group in 1981, the first bisexual group in the UK.
- 5 For instance, the Freedom of Sexuality groups in Liverpool and Bristol. Obviously this non-prescriptiveness does not extend to abusive behaviour or harassment.
- 6 This is not the only source of these anxieties. Gay and straight discourse alike are concerned with disputing the 'credentials' of people describing themselves as bisexual. One particularly strong and offensive instance was offered by *The Pink Paper* [18 April 1993:14] commenting on singer Brett Anderson's announcement of his bisexuality: 'a "bisexual who's never had sex with a man" ...stinks as bad as a white boy blacking up'.
- 7 Politicised lesbian and gay sexual epistemology is obviously not 'dominant' when compared to heterosexism. However, within lesbian and gay communities, various forms of the epistemology I am describing dominate and they are also a replication of that dominant division of heterosexual from homosexual in which the straight world has so much invested.
- 8 Elizabeth Wilson, quoted on the book's cover.
- 9 This was the conference, held at the University of York (UK) in 1992, which gave rise to the collection of essays in which this article originally appeared.
- 10 This article was published before the annual national Pride event in the UK changed its name to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Pride in 1996. Both the name and the event itself have continued to attract enormous controversy within lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities.
- 11 For a summary of such arguments see Steven Epstein [1987]
- 12 For another critical account of the deployment of the pink triangle, see Stuart Marshall [1991].

MARJORIE GARBER

Extracts from *Vice Versa: Bisexuality and the Eroticism of Everyday Life* (1995)

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In these extracts, Garber reflects on the many different meanings of the term 'bisexuality' already seen at work in previous chapters: whether it should be understood in relation to homosexuality/hetero-sexuality, male/female or masculine/feminine; whether it should be seen as a combination or mixture of two elements, or as a point located somewhere between them. Garber's argument is that, in fact, it is fruitless to try to resolve such questions. The multiple, shifting meanings of 'bisexuality' are precisely the point: bisexuality for Garber signifies elusiveness and flux—and, as such, signifies the nature of eroticism itself. Bisexuality does not just problematize or deconstruct the distinction between heterosexuality and homosexuality, or masculinity and femininity, but ultimately, for Garber, it represents the inevitable failure of categorisation as such. Bisexuality thus has truly enormous potential, not just for the transformation of sexual categories (as suggested in Chapter 13), but for epistemological transformations on a much wider scale.

Bisexuality unsettles certainties: straight, gay, lesbian. It has affinities with all of these, and is delimited by none. It is, then, an identity that is also *not* an identity, a sign of the certainty of ambiguity, the stability of instability, a category that defies and defeats categorization. What critic Elisabeth Daumer calls 'the multiplicity of at times conflicting identifications generated by the bisexual point of view,' an 'ambiguous position *between* identities,' can produce 'radical discontinuities between an individual's sex acts and affectional choices, on the one hand, and her and his affirmed political identity

on the other' [Däumer, this volume]. No wonder it makes sexual politicians uncomfortable.

The real question remains: Is bisexuality, even if difficult to define, cognate with the categories of gay and lesbian, in so far as it names a distinct, identifiable minority? Or is it in fact something else, a category so large that, like the proverbial large-print letters on a map, it is really too big to read? If so, what does this say about identity politics and the politics of inclusion and recognition? How can we resist lapsing back into an undifferentiated 'humanism' that says 'we're all the same,' while perpetuating differences in tolerance, visibility, and social acceptance that compel a sense of second-class citizenship?

[...]

What, then, is a bisexual politics?

First, bear in mind that biphobia is modeled on, and a direct by-product of, homophobia—not just heterosexism, the assumed centrality of opposite sex partnerships in human relations, but homophobia, a hatred and fear and ignorance manifested against lesbians and gay men. There would be no 'biphobia' against a (presumed) minority within a minority unless that minority, the gay and lesbian community, were oppressed by hostile and fearful heterosexuals often overly anxious or overly complacent about their own sexual identities. When homophobia comes to an end, by any combined process of legal remedy, moral regeneration, and social education, biphobia will be easy—by comparison—to eradicate. The primary problem here, let us not forget, is unthinking prejudice against gays, lesbians, and bisexuals from people who think they have the right (they often say God gave it to them) to pontificate on matters of human desire.

Second, let us dismiss, as the courts are now beginning to do, the 'comfort factor' issue, the claim that has been made, for example, by some in the military that having homosexuals around makes heterosexuals 'uncomfortable.' This argument, as has often been pointed out, is the same one that was used to maintain segregated armed forces (until blacks were urgently needed for combat), single-sex service academies, and other bastions of separatism that have subsequently been integrated without the world coming to an end. 'Because they make me uncomfortable' is not a good reason to justify exclusion. It isn't a good reason for whites and men, and it isn't a good reason for heterosexuals or for separatist lesbians and gay men. Once more, the analogy is far from exact: Lesbians who have been oppressed and

reviled for years have very good reason to want a ‘safe space’ free from oppression. The hope here, if a somewhat utopian one still, is that the opposite of oppression need not be, or remain, separatism. Bisexual lesbians say they seek inclusion, not a takeover of lesbian communities.

Third, a bisexual politics is in a certain sense neither ‘sexual’ nor a politics. It is about eroticism, which in many of its most powerful manifestations, today and over time, has been determinedly politically *uncorrect* depending on scenarios of inequality, power, denial, demand, and desire. Neither love nor lust is politically correct except in a state that regulates (and regulates out) all human choice. Susie Bright is right when she says it’s ‘preposterous’ to think that people can assort themselves into ‘the rapidly imploding social categories of straight or gay or bi, as if we could plot our sexual behavior on a conscientious, predictable curve.’ And June Jordan is right to say ‘if you are free, you are not predictable and not controllable,’ and to claim that ‘that is the keenly positive, politicized significance of bisexual affirmation.’

A bisexual politics, then, is a model for understanding the overlap between political action and sexual desire. For as bisexuality, by its very ‘existence,’ unsettles ideas about priority, singularity, truthfulness, and identity, it provides a crucial paradigm—in a time when our culture is preoccupied with gender and sexuality—for thinking differently about human freedom.

[...]

Ovid tells the story of Tiresias, who became the victim of a quarrel between the king and queen of the gods because he ‘knew both sides of love.’ One day in the forest, Tiresias came upon a pair of snakes coupling. He struck them with his staff, separating them, and was thereupon transformed from a man into a woman. After seven years, he encountered again the same pair of serpents, struck them again, and was restored to male form. Tiresias was asked by the royal couple to say whether man or woman had the most pleasure in sexual love. When he answered, ‘women,’ Juno blinded him. Jupiter, unable to reverse this punishment, gave to Tiresias (was it a gift or a curse?) the art to prophesy the future.

Hesiod’s earlier Greek version of the myth is even more specific about the increments of pleasure: ‘Teiresias [this is the usual transliterated Greek spelling] was chosen by Zeus and Hera to decide the question whether the male or female has most pleasure in sexual intercourse: And he said: “Of ten parts a man enjoys one only; but a woman’s sense enjoys all ten

in full.” For this Hera was angry and blinded him, but Zeus gave him the seer’s power’ [Hesiod 1977].

Tiresias is perhaps the classical figure most insistently invoked by poets, writers, and gender theorists to describe the paradoxes of bisexuality. Why should this be?

[...]

[W]ho is Tiresias? In what shape does he appear? How does his own sexuality get conceptualized or overwritten by today’s commentators on gender, from high art to pop art to pop talk? We might notice that Tiresias himself has become a shape-shifter in these various invocations. Martin Duberman [1980...] seems to regard him as a transsexual while Larry Rivers [1992] calls him a ‘hermaphrodite.’ Jan Clausen [1990, excerpted in this volume], who ‘feel[s] like Tiresias,’ raises the question of ‘bisexual identity’ and ‘bisexual desire,’ only to set them aside as terms that seem to reify and restrict rather than to open up the complex possibilities of individual response.

In each case the term ‘bisexual’ is rejected or resisted, even though it is also in some way invoked. For various reasons the authors themselves won’t, or don’t, call themselves bisexual. So we are left to observe that Tiresias shows up in multiple forms where bisexuality is simultaneously evoked and avoided. It is, I think, not an accident that the word ‘bisexual’ in these instances has both too many meanings and too few adherents. Far from constituting a problem or an obstacle in understanding bisexuality, this elusiveness, this shifting is itself central to the question of bisexuality—central because it demonstrates something crucial about the nature of human desire. Eroticism is what escapes, what transgresses rules, breaks down categories, questions boundaries. It cannot be captured in a manual, a chart, a lab test, or a manifesto. To ‘be’ a bisexual is an impossible use of the copula.

It may seem, therefore, as though the figure of Tiresias is being used to evoke everything *but* bisexuality. Bisexuality here constitutes itself precisely as resistance—the ‘refusal to be limited to one’—even if that ‘one’ is defined as ‘bi.’ And if, as I think is the case, bisexuality is related to *narrative* as transvestism or hermaphroditism is to *image*, then it makes sense that the naming of Tiresias should mark the place of a *story* rather than a *body*. It is not any one state or stage of life but the whole life, the whole life ‘story’ as we like to call it, that is sexualized and eroticized. By its very nature bisexuality implies the acknowledgment of plural desires and change over time.

Despite the contrary example of *Nightwood* [Barnes 1937], Tiresias seems often, if not always, to be imagined heterosexually: as a man presumed to have had sex with a woman, or as a woman presumed to have had sex with a man. In Ovid's myth, as in many of these modernist rewritings, Tiresias changes sex rather than change partners. His knowledge would seem to be that of his own pleasure as a male or a female.

Is 'bisexuality' here really just an alternation of maleness and femaleness, a version of what Freud in his early writings called the 'bisexual disposition' of all human beings? Is Tiresias to be read allegorically merely as someone 'getting in touch with his feminine side,' in the phrase popularly in use among many male-to-female transsexuals?

As it happens, the transsexual, the hermaphrodite, and the homosexual have all been very much part of the history of 'bisexuality' as it has evolved in scientific and social discourse. The word 'bisexual' first had reference to the copresence of male and female sexual organs (and sometimes reproductive capacities) in the same body. Early psychoanalytic writings equated 'bisexuality' with hermaphroditism, regarding what we would today call bisexuality—sexual attraction to both men and women—as an aspect of homosexuality, or 'sexual inversion.'

In cultural terms, with regard in particular to myth and to literature, these conflicting definitions converge on the figure of Tiresias. What is at stake—and it is far from trivial—is the question of whether 'bisexuality' has reference to the subject or the object. Perhaps it is in fact the question of whether any sexuality has reference to subject or object. Is Tiresias's mysterious knowledge, which makes him so revered and so reviled, gifted with prophecy and afflicted with blindness—is his knowledge finally about his *own* pleasure, or about that of the other?

'The conceptualization of bisexuality in terms of *dispositions*, feminine and masculine, which have heterosexual aims as their intentional correlates,' says Judith Butler, 'suggests that for Freud *bisexuality is the coincidence of two heterosexual desires within a single psyche*' [Butler 1990:60–61]. If this were in fact the case, Tiresias would then be an accurate emblem of the bisexual. But this whole matter of 'dispositions,' as Butler and others have insisted, accepts as a biological given a concept of maleness and femaleness in the human psyche, and a 'heterosexual matrix for desire,' that has in fact been produced by culture—by cultural prohibitions and sanctions. As Gayle Rubin points out, a notion of normative heterosexuality is part of the social organization of sex and gender: 'Gender is not only an identification with one sex; it also entails that sexual desire be directed toward the other sex. The sexual division of labor is implicated in

both aspects of gender—male and female it creates them, and it creates them heterosexual' [Rubin 1975:180].

If, as many gender theorists maintain, to imagine bisexuality heterosexually is to resist the acknowledgment of primary same-sex desire, then this image of the 'male' and 'female' or 'masculine' and 'feminine' sides of the personality or the brain needs also to be set aside as imprecise oldthink—or, more urgently, as cultural homophobia masking an unwelcome truth about the existence of queer desire.

But to regard the knowledge of Tiresias as 'heterosexual' and therefore not 'gay' or 'queer' seems to me to forgo some of the very real pleasures of sexual role-playing. To me, at least, the idea of Vita Sackville-West taking Virginia Woolf off on a secret weekend while dressed as 'Julian' has its own distinct and hot erotic appeal. Was 'Julian' a third presence in Vita and Virginia's bed? And was he 'male' or 'female'?

MARIA PRAMAGGIORE

Extracts from *Epistemologies of the Fence*
(1996)

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This article, which originally appeared as an introduction to a collection of essays on bisexuality, gives an overview of the developing field of bisexual scholarship during the 1990s. Pramaggiore frames her discussion with the idea of an 'epistemology of the fence' — an image which has occasionally appeared elsewhere in discussions of bisexuality (Bell 1994) but which Pramaggiore develops at length in the extracts below. The 'epistemology of the fence' takes its inspiration from Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's celebrated *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990), which interrogates the ways in which 'the closet' renders homosexuality and homosexual desire both visible and invisible at the same time. Pramaggiore suggests that the image of the fence can offer a similarly potent metaphor for understanding the cultural meanings of bisexuality—in particular, the puzzling but widespread heralding, in 1990s US popular culture, of bisexuality as a 'new' form of sexuality, when in fact it is not new at all.

Good fences make good neighbors.

Robert Frost. 'The Mending Wall'

When *Newsweek's* July 17, 1995, cover story proclaimed 'Bisexuality: Not Gay. Not Straight. A New Sexual Identity Emerges,' many of us who have identified ourselves as bisexual for some time wondered what exactly could be considered 'new' about bisexuality except the kind of public recognition enacted by the *Newsweek* cover, particularly since the article itself refers to a number of famous historical bisexuals

(Cary Grant, Billie Holiday, and James Dean) [*Newsweek* 17 July 1995: 44–50]. Does making the cover of *Newsweek* put bisexuality—the ‘wild card of our erotic life’—on a peak (or in a valley) of our sexual topography, and how does such a mapping affect politics and/or theory? Does Marjorie Garber’s claim in that article that ‘[w]e are in a bisexual moment’ (46), reinforced by her recently published book *Vice Versa: Bisexuality and the Eroticism of Everyday Life* [excerpted in this volume], authorize academics and activists to explore sexualities beyond the categories of straight, gay, and lesbian? Do appearances by ‘out’ bisexuals on ‘The Maury Povich Show’ (June 7, 1995) and on ‘Leeza’ (‘Not Gay, Not Straight: Bisexual and Proud,’ September 7, 1995) embody and lend credibility to a set of sexualities that has been called bisexual, often for lack of a better word? And from what location did this ‘new’ sexual identity ‘emerge’ anyway?

[...] If we heed the lessons contained in one of the founding documents of gay and lesbian studies, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990), then this recent flurry of interest in bisexuality, and the generalized mainstreaming of previously closeted deviant sexualities, should remind us that ascribing newness to any sexuality (or any cultural phenomenon) is a peculiarly flexible trope of US consumer culture. The practices that comprise bisexuality are hardly new; furthermore, they may not precisely be called the basis for sexual identities in many cases, which in itself is one of the paradoxes of bisexuality.

The *Newsweek* article on bisexuality, predictably, focuses on an individual’s personal choice of sexual partner(s). ‘In the end, it is really about the simple, mysterious pull between [but not among?] warm human bodies when the lights go out,’ the writers conclude (50), but they neglect to examine why bisexuality might appear to be ‘new’ at this moment in time. Is bisexuality merely the most recently acknowledged taboo-breaking sexual fashion trend under the sun? Or [...] do bisexual epistemologies go further than trendiness, charting the politics of sexualities in Western culture, redistricting and redistributing desire, and creating new cartographies for our cultural erotics?

It is our contention that the fence, a position attributed to bisexuals, and [...] claimed by those of us who theorize from it, is more than merely the latest sexual position. In fact, fence-sitting is not a new position at all. [...] Although they may not appear on any map, fences dot the cultural landscape in this century and others: well-worn, splintered, and split, sometimes uncomfortable and, until very recently, untheo-rized.

In *Epistemology of the Closet*, Sedgwick maintains that the relations of the closet, dependent as they are on distinctions between knowing and not knowing, seeing and not seeing, reveal both the power-laden nature of speech acts and the dynamics of what counts as a speech act [Sedgwick 1990:3]. She writes that ‘[t]he special centrality of homophobic oppression in the twentieth century...has resulted from its inextricability from the question of knowledge and the processes of knowing in modern Western culture at large’ (33–34). Sedgwick’s recognition that the closet helps to define our ways of knowing the world informs but does not circumscribe [work on bisexuality] which directs our attention to a related location—the fence—and its attendant epistemologies. ‘Something there is that doesn’t love a wall...and makes gaps two can pass abreast,’ writes Robert Frost [1963:23]. Those gaps rewrite the wall as fence, opening up spaces through which to view, through which to pass, and through which to encounter and enact fluid desires.

Sedgwick’s closet is a rich visual and spatial metaphor—a location and a way of viewing and dividing the world. But closets are not definitive: they continuously dissolve and reproduce themselves. Nor are they comprehensive: the logic of the closet does not define all sexualities, despite that metaphor’s resonance across modern and postmodern Western cultures. [...]

The fence, in its nominal form, identifies a place of in-betweenness and indecision. Often precariously perched atop a structure that divides and demarcates, bisexual epistemologies have the capacity to reframe regimes and regions of desire by deframing and/or reframing in porous, nonexclusive ways. Fence-sitting—an epithet predicated on the presumption of the superiority of a temporally based single sexual partnership—is a practice that refuses the restrictive formulas that define gender according to binary categories, that associate one gender or one sexuality with a singularly gendered object choice, and that equate sexual practices with sexual identity. Bisexual epistemologies—ways of apprehending, organizing, and intervening in the world that refuse one-to-one correspondences between sex acts and identity, between erotic objects and sexualities, between identification and desire—acknowledge fluid desires and their continual construction and deconstruction of the desiring subject.

Marjorie Garber writes that ‘eroticism and desire are always to some degree transgressive, politically *incorrect*’ [this volume], yet it is also the case that eroticisms and desires are structured and policed at individual and cultural levels. Cultures, conceived of both as Foucault’s disciplinary apparatuses and as constructive mechanisms,

continually hem in and border our desires; enacting those desires produces institutional and psychological structures which are necessarily punctured by gaps through which 'other' modalities of sexuality can be apprehended and performed. Thus the fence, a permeable and permeating structure, is most akin to the mutually inclusive 'both/and' rather than the exclusive 'either/or,' just as Frost's mending wall is reconstructed and reinforced by persons on both sides: 'And on a day we meet to walk the line/And set the wall between us once again. /We keep the wall between us as we go' [Frost 1963:23]. The attention required to maintain this exclusionary wall forces those on either side to recognize not only both sides of the wall but also the wall's position as a third term in between them which continually deconstructs itself.

Sedgwick points toward the complexity of examining the 'both/andness' of our sexual choices and behavior, not only in terms of gendered object choice, but also in relation to race, class, age, and species: 'Without a concept of gender there could be, quite simply, no concept of homo- or heterosexuality. But many other dimensions of sexual choice (auto- or alloerotic, within or between generations, species, etc.) have no such distinctive, explicit definitional connection with gender; indeed, some dimensions of sexuality might be tied, not to gender, but instead to difference or similarities of race or class' [Sedgwick 1990:31].

One of the challenges of [work on bisexuality] is to create a space for fencing with oppositions that, Möbius-strip like, sometimes become identities. This space overlaps and is adjacent to queer and feminist theories and also absorbs and infuses theories of race and class. Yet we are often fenced in by existing practices and discourses even as we theorize sexualities around, through, and beyond gender and object choice to address distinctions and identities of race and class.

The fence, in its verb form, implies sparring, dodging, and parrying with a single opponent. [...] But fencing, like many martial arts, is also a kind of dance: opponents are also partners. If monosexual models of hetero- and homosexuality can be conceived of as our sparring partners, then bisexualities are also unreliable third parties, refusing the agreed-upon rules of engagement and questioning the dualistic sport itself. Our theoretical points of contact and conflict, though often set up as oppositional terms, often shift to become points of mutuality. Good fences make good friends, indeed. We recognize that bisexual theorizing and activism are implicated in the fencing match already under way: bisexual theories have come of age in an environment of newly prominent queer movements of the 1980s and 1990s and might be unthinkable outside that context.

One area in which theories of bisexuality have developed through a productive and sometimes painful interaction is within lesbian feminist discourse and politics, partly in response to the lingering postulate, prominent in Freudian psychoanalysis, of women's unique relation to bisexual desire and partly because of the significant body of lesbian and feminist politics and theory which addresses the pleasures and dangers of sexuality. A number of the papers on bisexuality presented at the 'In Queery/Theory/Deed' Conference in November of 1994, for example, focused on the experiences of lesbians who come out as bisexuals, on differences in the construction of bisexual/lesbian identities, and on the fraught political alliances among bisexual women and lesbians.¹

Anthologies of bisexual coming out stories published in the early 1990s point to the important role constructs of gender play in theorizing and enacting bisexualities for those who define their gender identities and sexualities according to heterosexual difference and for those who do not. The cluster of recent books, including *Bi Any Other Name: Bisexual People Speak Out* [Hutchins and Kaahumanu 1991], *Closer to Home: Bisexuality and Feminism* [Weise 1992b], *Women and Bisexuality* [George 1993], and *Dual Attraction: Understanding Bisexuality* [Weinberg *et al.* 1994], raises the question of how gender differences are or should be important to bisexual theories and practices. In 'Locating Bisexual Identities,' Clare Hemmings speaks to the relationship between contemporary feminist theory and bisexuality, claiming that theorizing bisexuality offers a means of 'making sense of the impasse that seems to have occurred between theories (and theorists) of identity and those of difference(s)' within feminism since the 1970s [this volume]. [...]

Perspectives on bisexualities do seem to me to have a gender inflection: men's work on bisexuality [...] more often deals with transgender issues, androgyny, and polymorphous perversity, whereas women's and feminist-inflected work often looks at the ways in which bisexuality, despite its binary implications, is a useful term precisely because it acknowledges that the world is divided by and governed according to gendered power relations. [...]

Because the fence stakes out a position between visibility and invisibility, a location 'between two worlds,' models of racial identity and passing often are adopted and elaborated upon in order to examine bisexualities [...]. Poet, essayist, and activist June Jordan has drawn an analogy between bisexuality and interracial or multiracial identities. In 'A New Politics of Sexuality,' she writes of her hope that a bisexual politics, an 'emerging movement [that] politicizes the middle ground...

[and] invalidates either/or formulation, either/or analysis' [Jordan 1992b:193] will help to make possible a freedom in which a person is neither predictable nor controllable and need not choose between or among identities. Jordan addresses the fact that making connections between and among racial and sexual identities is often controversial: 'I do not believe it is blasphemous to compare oppressions of sexuality to oppressions of race and ethnicity,' she states. 'Freedom is indivisible or it is nothing at all besides sloganeering and temporary, short-sighted advancement for a few' (190).

[...]

We emphasize fluidity and mutual inclusion, yet bisexual epistemologies are not without particular conventions and concerns. Theoretical issues [...] include, but are not limited to: (1) the manner in which bisexualities disrupt and displace monosexual models of identity, most notably the Freudian model; (2) the relationship between temporality and sexuality; (3) triangulated structures of desire within and across genders (tellingly echoed in both the cover photograph for the *Newsweek* article, which depicts two men and a woman, and the cover of [the US edition of] *Vice Versa*, which depicts three 'pears/pairs'); (4) notions of invisibility and passing that differ from those posited by gay and lesbian models of the closet and models of essentialized racial difference; (5) the difficulty of distinguishing between/among identifications and desires; (6) the resonances between and among notions of sexual, gender, and racial ambiguity; (7) the search for ways of thinking about identity which do not rigidly codify sexuality in terms of gender; and (8) the tensions between and among gay, lesbian, queer, transgendered, transsexual, and bisexual studies and politics.

Notes

- 1 The panel 'Bisexual Positions,' moderated by Robyn Ochs, is a good example. That panel included Amanda Udis-Kessler, 'Identity/Politics: A History of the Bisexual Movement'; Amber Ault, 'Bifurcated Consciousness: Lesbian Feminists and the Erasure of Bisexuality'; Jill Nagle, 'Bisexuality in a Gender Container: The Tupperware Theory'; and Both Firestein, 'How Biphobia Hurts the Struggle for Queer Liberation.' The 'Identities' panel, moderated by Mickey Eliason, included Julia Wallace, 'Biphobia: Gay and Lesbian Dismissals of Bisexuality'; Arlene Stein, 'Leaving the Fold: Ex-lesbians and the Maintenance of Sexual Binarism'; and Paula Rust, 'To Identify or Not Identify: The Process of Becoming or Not Becoming Bisexual Identified.'

YASMIN PRABHUDAS

*Bisexuals and People of Mixed-Race:
Arbiters of Change* (1996)

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This article offers a particularly succinct and direct argument for the analogy between bisexual identity and ‘mixed-race’ identity, and for the political insights to which it might give rise. Prabhudas is by no means the only author to advance this view: Tracy Charette Fehr (1995), for example, has offered a similar account of her own ‘dual nature’, while June Jordan states emphatically that ‘the analogy is interracial or multiracial identity. I do believe that the analogy for bisexuality is a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-racial world view’ (Jordan 1992b:193). As Pramaggiore points out in Chapter 15, the interdynamics of ‘race’ and sexuality have been an important feature of bisexual thought, and *analogies* between the two have been especially prevalent; examples in this volume include Eadie’s use of the figures of ‘miscegenation’ and ‘hybridity’ (see Chapter 13), and Klein’s invocation of the ‘one drop of blood’ rule of racial categorisation in the USA (see Chapter 5). Other authors have drawn on the notion of ‘passing’ –appearing to be something or someone other than one’s ‘real’ self—to make an analogy between, for example, Jews ‘passing’ as gentile or Christian and bisexuals ‘passing’ as either straight or gay, not always voluntarily (Tucker 1996). The use of such analogies creates an epistemological perspective which emphasises the importance of interconnection and the blurring of divisions—themes which, as previous chapters have illustrated, are common features of bisexual epistemologies.

To be bisexual is to be both gay and straight. It means that we benefit from fulfilling relationships with people of both sexes.

To be mixed-race is to be both black and white. It means that we benefit from the richness of two different cultures.

Bisexuals and people of mixed race are often confronted by parallel difficulties—both may feel alienated from the established group categories of gay/straight, black/white and are frequently derisively dismissed as ‘in-betweens’. This negative experience can, however, be turned on its head and used to positive effect.

Bisexuals and people of mixed-race have a positive role to play in bringing together the frequently very separately perceived realms of ‘gay’ /‘straight’, ‘black’ /‘white’, through our experience of each of these realms as interwoven threads of one world. As social constructs, these polarities are increasingly recognised as obsolete—people’s ethnic origin or sexual orientation is no longer a clear-cut matter, but rather a merger of identities, which everyone could usefully explore.

Yet we appear to be conspiring with society’s consistent efforts to set minorities against each other, to continue a policy of ‘divide and rule’. Whilst it is important to set up our own separate groups, based on race, gender, sexuality, disability and other identities which are discriminated against, as these provide safe and comfortable environments, where people do not feel intimidated, this can only represent a short-term measure against oppression.

On a long-term basis, a policy of separation only reinforces a ghetto culture, enabling society as a whole to ‘pass the buck’ where minority issues are concerned, and helps to perpetuate already prevalent myths, cultivated through ignorance. It is time we sought to challenge this ignorance by broadening our view, and embracing a philosophy of unity, rather than one of division, making sexuality everyone’s issue, making race everyone’s issue.

Under the banner of queer politics, bisexuals who are also people of mixed race can help to establish a dialogue between different oppressed groups. This will enable us to focus on common issues and concerns, whilst at the same time celebrating difference. There is no doubt that single issue politics is important and has made considerable headway in the past few decades, but how much stronger our voices would be if we worked more closely with one another through setting up networking groups, organising joint actions and sharing resources, expertise and experiences. The political power which such co-operation accesses, by bringing people together from a range of minority groups to debate issues of concern to everyone, is immeasurable.

This all requires a great deal of effort and a strong commitment to co-operative working. Bisexuals and people of mixed race are well-placed to embrace this vision.

ELISABETH D.DÄUMER

Extract from *Queer Ethics; or, the
Challenge of Bisexuality to Lesbian Ethics*
(1992)

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In this much-cited article, Däumer considers both the usefulness and the limitations of bisexuality, firstly as an identity and secondly as an epistemological perspective. Her contention is that not only are these two instances of bisexuality extremely different, but they may actually be incompatible—in other words, that if one wishes to exploit the insights yielded by a bisexual epistemological perspective, one should not also attempt to claim it as an identity. Identities must always be, in some sense, fixed and stable, if only relatively so; but the radical epistemological potential of bisexuality derives precisely from its ambiguity and self-contradiction. In many ways this argument chimes with those presented in Chapters 13 and (more particularly) 14, although Däumer's argument is more squarely situated within feminist and lesbian—feminist debates. The notion of 'bisexual perspective' with which these extracts close has subsequently also been taken up by a number of other theorists, notably by Clare Hemmings (1997).

The first part of the article describes the sexual feelings and choices of a fictional character called Cloe, whose situation in many ways mirrors the real-life situation of Jan Clausen (excerpted in Chapter 11), and who, like Clausen, decides not to reify her identity under the label 'bisexual'. Cloe also evokes the other fictional Chloe famously discussed by Virginia Woolf in *A Room of One's Own* (1945 [1928]), and may thus further evoke both Woolf's ambiguously sexed creation Orlando (1977 [1928]) and Woolf's own relationship with Vita Sackville-West (to whom *Orlando* was dedicated), alluded to by Garber in Chapter 14. The dizzying sexual transformations undergone by Orlando, who lives for many centuries and (like Garber's Tiresias perhaps) changes from a

man into a woman, may find their echoes in Däumer's figure of the lesbian man, discussed in the second part of the extract below.

I

We are increasingly aware that sexuality is about flux and change, that what we call 'sexual' is as much a product of language and culture as of nature. But we earnestly strive to fix it, stabilize it, say who we are by telling of our sex and the lead in this conscious articulation of sense of self has been taken by those radically disqualified for it by the sexual tradition.

(Weeks 1985:186)

In an age of constructed sexualities a new type of constructed being is claiming our attention. She identifies as female. Let us call her, like earlier heroines of feminist history, Cloe. Neither straight nor gay, Cloe is also not bisexual, at least not in the traditional, still current, sense of the word—pre-genderized, polymorphously perverse, or simply sexually undecided, uncommitted, and hence untrustworthy. Cloe can make up her mind; but she would be so much better at explaining how indeed she is making up her mind, if others—her lesbian friends worried about her relapse into an inevitably heterosexist heterosexuality, her straight friends enchanted or disquieted by her exoticism—if many of these well-meaning friends wouldn't try to make up her mind for her.

To be historically exact, Cloe owes much of her existence to the valiant struggles of lesbian feminists who established oases of political and sexual sisterhood, which despite certain censorious tendencies allowed women like Cloe to move away from straightness, to explore their sexuality, their emotional, sexual attraction to other women in a welcoming environment—an environment quite different from that which older lesbians had faced and many other lesbians are still struggling with. Thus Cloe is deeply grateful to these women who weathered homophobic ostracism and enabled their younger—i.e., newer—sisters to explore their 'deviancy' joyfully, often playfully, safe from the twin specters of internalized guilt and external ostracism.

Of course, these differences in experience invariably produced tension and at times division. While Cloe no longer feels straight (i.e., heterosexual), indeed is passionately nonstraight, she also does not, if the truth be told, feel that she ever came out of the closet.

There had been for her no closet to begin with. Rather, her experience of being closeted coincided with her coming out as a lesbian or, to be more accurate, with her first female lover, whose hand she dared not hold in public, whose presence she needed to explain—not once, but again and again—to friends, family, colleagues, who, until then, had had no reason to assume she was not heterosexual, like them.

Like other women coming to feminism in the 1970s and 1980s, Cloe fell in love with women not out of a deep-seated sense of sexual orientation but in the course of political bonding and passionate intellectual conversations. Nor was it sexual or social aversion to men that drove her to women, but something positive—enchantment and delight with the company of people who excited her intellectually, emotionally, then sexually, who did not expect, like men she had known, nonreciprocal access to her at all times. Over the months and years, Cloe simply preferred being with women; and it seemed to her a small, and natural, step from intellectual passion to sexual intimacy.

Nevertheless, when she took that step she was deeply startled by the difference it made. Nothing had prepared her for the sweetness of a woman's mouth, the mystery of a woman's breast. Nor could she have described how she changed. Falling from her old sense of self, she was reborn into a new way of experiencing her body, her sexuality, her femininity. She could not even say that her new way of being in the world was truer. On the contrary, she walked about like a stranger, newly alive to what had appeared to her a familiar world, a familiar body, a familiar self. But most of all, she felt enlarged, filled with wonder at her ability to give abundantly and to receive joyfully. And to her mother, who could not help observing the flowering of confidence and well-being in her daughter, Cloe said that now, for the first time in her life, she felt she had a choice—a choice about whom to love, a choice in creating and re-creating her sexuality.

Cloe soon found out, however, that choosing to love a particular woman was not, for her, the same as affirming a specific sexual identity. Not that she didn't try to become a lesbian. She did. But after a brief and enthusiastic effort at making herself into a real sister, when Cloe lovingly invested herself with all the paraphernalia of lesbian feminism and fell in and out of love with a small-boned dark-haired woman, after what should perhaps be described as a second adolescence, Cloe began to wonder: Could it be possible to relate to men and women, or the creatures answering to these names,

not as men and women, as straight or gay, but—and here she would whisper to herself embarrassedly—as *humans*? Of course, she was wise and self-resisting enough not to voice such deluded, liberal gibberish.

Nevertheless, she could not help dreaming. She would see herself at a table with a beloved—was she male, he female, she a celibate androgyne, he a lesbian mother?—with whom, over glasses of deep red wine, she could engage in beautiful, deliciously double- or triple-voiced conversations. She was dreaming not of a genderless, sexless creature, nor of an androgynous one (although this was closer to her vision), but of somebody with whom she was not primarily a woman, a lesbian, or a misrecognized heterosexual. Navigating questions of identity in a postmodern age, Cloe dreamed not of instability or indecidability so much as of an intimacy not regulated through positionings in ostensibly stable sexual identities. Cloe longed for people with whom she could create herself anew, again and again, and for whom she could do the same.

What delusions, we might say. Poor Cloe! After a brief relapse with a man, closely monitored by her lesbian sisters, the question of her sexual identity became pressingly imminent. She refused, passionately, to return to straightness, but neither could she in good conscience call herself a dyke. So why not say she was bisexual, as some sympathetic friends had tentatively suggested? Yet somehow Cloe wasn't happy with that label, even if in terms of her sexual and emotional experience it seemed closest to the truth. After all, she had loved men in her life and she had loved women, and she could not imagine ceasing to love either. But to assume the label of bisexuality? That gave her pause. A host of little comments, brief remarks, as well as her own assumptions made this a less than savory, and hardly political, identity: it seemed one was bisexual by default, for lack of commitment and the ability to make up one's mind. True, a male friend—now homosexual, formerly married, and in both apparently happy—had remarked that bisexuals have the best of both worlds. A lesbian friend disagreed. To her it seemed a bisexual had the worst of both worlds: who, she asked, would your friends be?

And Cloe agreed with her. For even if her heterosexual or hetero-identified friends tended to view bisexuality with tolerant, sometimes condescending, curiosity, the lesbian community—as community—expressed above all suspicion, even contempt, for women 'who went back to men,' women who were 'ac-dc,' on the fence. The threat of AIDS has only exacerbated such suspicion, leading many lesbians to view bisexual women as potential AIDS-carriers. Inherently contami-

nated, they endanger lesbian purity. Moreover, because such women might refuse to assume either a clearly lesbian or heterosexual identity, they carry the taint of promiscuity, as if they were floundering, promiscuously and opportunistically, back and forth between people of either gender—exploiting heterosexual privilege on the one hand, while savoring, unrightfully, the honey of lesbian sisterhood on the other. And while Cloe was careful not to minimize the social ostracism endured by gays, she could not help but feel that those who dared to call themselves bisexual were also subjected to a sort of ostracism, not only by the larger society but by lesbians as well.

II

It is a rather amazing fact that, of the very many dimensions along which the genital activity of one person can be differentiated from that of another (dimensions that include preference for certain acts, certain zones or sensations, certain physical types, a certain frequency, certain symbolic investments, certain relations of age or power, a certain species, a certain number of participants, etc. etc. etc.), precisely one, the gender of object choice, emerged from the turn of the century, and has remained, as the dimension denoted by the now ubiquitous category of ‘sexual orientation.’

(Sedgwick 1990:8)

Prompted by my reading of Sedgwick’s *Epistemology of the Closet*, from which the above quotation is taken, I recently argued during a dinner with friends that we ought to problematize more stringently the relations between sexual acts, sexual identity, politics, and gender. Inspired by Sedgwick’s dazzling description of the infinite multitude of ways in which sexuality could be defined were we not as exclusively fixated on riveting it to the gender of whom we are attracted to or sexual with, I impersonated Cloe and wondered if it was possible for a woman and a man to engage in a lesbian relationship. After all, if, as some lesbian theorists like Monique Wittig have suggested, a lesbian is ‘outside the categories of sex (woman and man), because the designated subject (lesbian) is not a woman, either economically, or politically, or ideologically’ (Wittig 1981:53), why, then, could it not be possible for a man to resist his designated gender (including the relations of domination embodied within it) and assume a lesbian identity?¹ On a theoretical level, at least, Sedgwick’s observations add a

twist to Wittig's construction of lesbian that gives rise to exciting—or disturbing—questions and possibilities: How would we define the relationship between a female lesbian and a gay man, who, like a character in Caryl Churchill's *Cloud Nine* wants to be a lesbian? Would their relationship be heterosexual, even though neither partner views her/himself as straight? Could such a union not be called 'lesbian' in the utopian feminist sense of the term? Both partners, after all, insist on being not a woman and not a man; and for both, gender identification is secondary to, or entirely determined by, their commitment to establishing a relationship that resists the domination of heterosexually gendered positions.

One of my friends immediately pinpointed what was to her most problematic about this proposition. It would, she said, efface her own identity as a lesbian, and, by stretching the term beyond any intelligible, useful boundaries, perpetuate lesbian invisibility in new and dangerous ways. She also asked, disbelievingly, who—i.e., what woman, what man—would want to define their relationship in this manner, and how would the concept of heterosexual privilege fit into this scheme? Since these are serious charges, I'd like to respond to them in some detail.

Let us start with the second. In light of Cloe's desultory attempt to fashion for herself a sexual identity from the startling dearth of currently available options (hetero, homo, or bi), we ought not be surprised that she would think up something as improbable as a lesbian relationship between a woman and a man. Since she herself feels no longer straight, she wonders, of course, how to name her current relationship to a man. Is it heterosexual just because it implies certain sexual practices—namely, penetration—that can or cannot be performed? Is it heterosexual because clearly she is a woman, at least anatomically, and he a man? Is it heterosexual because it conforms to the dominant idea of a 'normal' relationship—and thus also reaps the benefits of heterosexual privilege despite the fact that the individual members in this relationship might view themselves as 'queer'?

Cloe is not oblivious to the sociopolitical connotations of engaging in what to most would look like a heterosexual relationship. Nor is she unaware of the privileges conferred upon this relationship: social endorsement and a certain visibility; legal and financial benefits; relative safety from homophobia (she is also affected by homophobia, if differently from a woman who is lesbian-identified and lives in a relationship with another woman).² Cloe would not, moreover, seriously insist on describing either herself or her relationship as lesbian. Yet her half-mischievous proposal to do so reflects her increasingly dizzying awareness of the many possible sexual and gendered selves, the many passions and attractions, fantasies and relationships—whether sexual, erotic,

affectional or intellectual—that remain frustratingly silenced, unspoken in the discourses of sexuality currently available to us. Her own sense of the fissures and contradictions (between sexual and political identities, political and personal, emotional commitments, etc.) that attend her way of being in the world has produced in her a hunger for language differentiated enough to capture the wealth of contradictions that pervades the efforts of individual men and women to subvert or modify dominant constructions of gender and sexuality.

I have so far resisted calling Cloe ‘bisexual’ because it seems to me that the term ‘bisexuality,’ rather than broadening the spectrum of available sexual identifications, holds in place a binary framework of two basic and diametrically opposed sexual orientations. Contributors to a recent anthology on this subject, *Bi Any Other Name*, affirm that bisexuality, when made visible, disrupts a ‘monosexual framework’ by challenging ‘assumptions about the immutability of people’s sexual orientations and society’s supposed divisions into discrete groups’ (Hutchins and Kaahumanu 1991:3).³ Yet the various efforts chronicled in this anthology to construct a bisexual identity—distinct from heterosexual and homosexual identities while comprising aspects of both—do not always bear out the radical potential of its affirmation.⁴

Some of the contributors, for instance, view themselves as divided between homosexual and heterosexual orientations; thus Loraine Hutchins, one of the editors, describes her struggle to ‘[accept] myself as the 70-percent straight person I probably really am,’ while ‘constantly [fighting] to have the 30-percent lesbian side not be ridiculed or misunderstood’ (xv). Others think of themselves as integrating both orientations and thus, as one of the editors, quoting Robin Morgan, maintains, ‘[sacrificing] nothing except false categories and burned-out strategies’ (xxiv). Yet such tropes of bisexuality as either neatly divided between or integrating heterosexuality and homosexuality threaten to simplify bisexuality: on the one hand, they retain a notion of sexuality—and sexual identity—based exclusively on the gender of object choice, thus implying that a bisexual woman, for instance, would be heterosexually involved with a man, homosexually involved with a woman. (Cloe, for one, finds it impossible to say, with the absolute certainty that such definitions of bisexuality imply, that she loves men and women differently; and although she finds it equally impossible to say that she loves them the same, she is reluctant to ascribe the difference in these encounters—whether imaginary or real—to gender alone. Is it really always that easy, she wonders, to keep straight whom one was loving and how? What if, by mistake, one forgot that the person holding one’s hand was a man—or a woman—and if one, equally by mistake,

were to slip into a heterosexual relationship with a woman, a lesbian relationship with a man?)

On the other hand, in their tendency to reduce bisexuality to a third sexual orientation (or a mixture of orientations), these tropes of bisexuality simplify its sociopolitical implications. Bisexuality is not merely a problem of an unrecognized or vilified sexual preference that can be solved, or alleviated, through visibility and legitimation as a third sexual option. The problems of bisexuals are social and political ones, resulting, as Lisa Orlando, one of the contributors to the anthology, points out, 'from [our] ambiguous position...between what currently appear as two mutually exclusive sexual cultures, one with the power to exercise violent repression against the other' (224–225).

To be sure, the affirmation of an integrated, unified bisexual identity, fostered within supportive bisexual communities, might boost the psychological well-being of many bisexual people. It remains to be seen, however, if and how such increased visibility would contribute to our struggle against homophobia, sexism, and heterosexism—the forces that have made the formation of an oppositional sexual culture necessary in the first place. Put differently, as long as there are two mutually exclusive sexual cultures, and as long as it is politically essential to maintain oppositional cultures—based on sexuality as much as on gender—the effort to disambiguate bisexuality and elevate it into a sign of integration might counteract the subversive potential of bisexuality as a moral and epistemological force, as well as obscure its contribution to current discussions among feminist and lesbian theorists on the limitations of identity politics and the urgent need to respect differences among women.

I propose, therefore, that we assume bisexuality, not as an identity that integrates heterosexual and homosexual orientations, but as an epistemological as well as ethical vantage point from which we can examine and deconstruct the bipolar framework of gender and sexuality in which, as feminists and lesbian feminists, we are still too deeply rooted, both because of and despite our struggle against homophobia and sexism.

What are the advantages of assuming bisexuality as a perspective? I can think of many:

1. Because bisexuality occupies an ambiguous position between identities, it is able to shed light on the gaps and contradictions of all identity, on what we might call the difference within identity. This ambiguous position, while it creates painful contradictions, incoherences, and impracticalities in the lives of those who adopt it, can also lead to a deep appreciation of the differences among people—whether cultural, sexual, gendered—since any attempt

- to construct a coherent identity in opposition to another would flounder on the multiplicity of at times conflicting identifications generated by the bisexual point of view.
2. Because of its nonidenticalness, bisexuality exposes the distinctive feature of all politicized sexual identities: the at times radical discontinuities between an individual's sexual acts and affectional choices, on the one hand, and her or his affirmed political identity, on the other. By doing so, bisexuality reactivates the gender and sexuality destabilizing moment of all politicized sexual identities, at the same time that it can help us view contradiction, not as a personal flaw or a danger to our communities, but as a source of insight and strength, as a basis for more inclusive 'we's' that enable rather than repress the articulation of difference.
 3. Because of its ambiguous position between mutually exclusive sexual cultures, bisexuality also urges us to problematize heterosexuality in ways that distinguish more clearly between the institution of compulsory heterosexuality and the efforts of individual men and women to resist heterosexualism within and without so-called heterosexual relationships. Thus as feminist and lesbian theorists we need to inquire more intently into the possibility of antiheterosexist heterosexual relationships and describe such relationships in ways that neither obscure how they are impacted by heterosexualism nor collapse them univocally with heteropatriarchy. Marilyn Frye took an important step in this direction in a speech delivered at the 1990 National Women's Studies Association conference, 'Do You Have to Be a Lesbian to Be a Feminist?' In this speech, which was published later that year in *off our backs*, Frye firmly asserted that we do not but that we need to be 'virgins' in the radically feminist lesbian sense—i.e., women 'in creative defiance of patriarchal definitions of the real, the meaningful' (Frye 1990:23). A series of letters to *off our backs* in response to Frye's speech revealed, however, that many non-lesbian-identified or heterosexual women understood her to affirm the opposite—that you need to be a lesbian to be a feminist. This misreading on the part of the respondents reflects, perhaps, their sense that many lesbian feminists, because they tend to equate the difficulty of being a feminist in relation to a man with its impossibility, are unable to be curious about, or respectful of, the antipatriarchal, antiheterosexist struggle waged by many non-lesbian-identified women and mothers. Of course, heterosexually identified feminists need, on their part, to embrace more emphatically feminism as a sign of sexual ambiguity and refuse

- to disavow the destabilizing ‘queer’ force of feminism by, for instance, publicly dissociating themselves from lesbianism.
4. Because the bisexual perspective enacts within itself the battle of contradictory sexual and political identifications, it can also serve as a bridge between identifications and communities, and thus strengthen our ability temporarily to ‘forget’ entrenched and seemingly inevitable differences—especially those of race, gender, and sexuality—in order to focus on what we might have in common.

Notes

- 1 Diana Fuss asks a similar question when she points to Monique Wittig’s and Adrienne Rich’s problematic attitude to male homosexuality: ‘given the way in which gay men, in their social and sexual practices, radically challenge the current notions of masculinity and the “naturalness” of heterosexual desire, one would think that they, too, disrupt and disable the logic of the straight mind (or what Rich prefers to call the “institution of compulsory heterosexuality”)’ (Fuss 1989:47).
- 2 In the welcome and useful anthology *Bi Any Other Name: Bisexual People Speak Out*, which I will discuss in more detail below, the painful difficulties of bisexual passing are compared, by a number of contributors, to the problems of multiracial people. Indeed, in her review of the anthology, Aurora Levins Morales points out that ‘bisexuality and mixed race heritage feel so similar because they pose the same kind of challenge to a category: the societal belief in immutable, biologically based groupings of human beings’ (Morales 1992:24)
- 3 According to the editors of *Bi Any Other Name*, ‘*Monosexual* is a term coined by the bisexual movement to mean anyone (gay or heterosexual) who is attracted to just one sex, their own or the opposite one’ (Hutchins and Kaahumanu 1991:10). [In fact the term ‘monosexual’ was being used by sexologists long before the advent of the bisexual movement, as the work by Wilhelm Stekel excerpted in this volume illustrates.]
- 4 By saying this I wish in no way to question the tremendous usefulness and timeliness of this anthology. Apart from reassuring me that my own thoughts and experiences were shared by many other people, the anthology has also provided an important starting point for the present study of bisexuality and lesbian ethics.

GILBERT H.HERDT

Extract from *A Comment on Cultural
Attributes and Fluidity of Bisexuality*
(1984)

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Many formulations of bisexual epistemology, including a number of those reproduced in this volume, centre around the notion of 'fluidity' as an inherent feature of bisexuality. This article, originally published as one of a collection of pieces reflecting on DeCecco's and Shively's *Bisexual and Homosexual Identities* (1983/4), interrogates this image of 'fluidity'. Drawing on his own anthropological fieldwork, Herdt argues that the 'fluidity' of bisexuality has many different aspects, and thus may mean different things in different situations; he teases out these aspects, and situates them in their cultural and cross-cultural contexts. This article has not often been cited by bisexual epistemologists of the 1990s, but it offers a valuable caution against the casual use of the term 'fluidity' in discussions of bisexuality: the word tends to be used as if its meaning were self-evident, but as Herdt points out, this is not necessarily the case.

Throughout this collection of essays [*Bisexual and Homosexual Identities: Critical Theoretical Issues*, edited by DeCecco and Shively (1983/4)] the term *fluidity* appears as a metaphor for bisexuality. That researchers utilize this word so casually should give us pause. Fluidity implies the rigidity of the old heterosexual-homosexual dichotomy, reviewed in several of the papers but insightfully analyzed in Murphy's (1983/1984) piece. Here [...] I will utilize the Melanesian data to elucidate this provocative but slippery notion.

First, we should be clear about the significance of the term fluidity and its referents. Fluidity denotes that which is capable of flowing or is easily changed, not fixed or solid. What is it in the bisexual identity

that is changeable: gender role, sexual identity, object choice, erotic technique used in sexual contact (e.g., oral vs. anal intercourse), exclusivity of sexual contact, or the degree of intimacy characterizing a contact or relationship? I believe some of the ambiguity surrounding the idea of fluidity of sexual orientation described in the papers in this collection revolves around the potential change *culturally inherent* in any person's sexual orientation. Weeks (1977) has pointed to important situation-specific factors that mediate between sexual identity and culture. The emergence of the cultural idiom *coming out* with its associated attitudes and meanings, generally indicates social expectations of greater fluidity of sexual behavior and identity development among Americans than have hitherto existed. Moreover, one could ask why should sexual identity remain stable over the entire life cycle when so much else changes about the person, unless, that is, sexual monogamy and exclusivity are presumably its bedrock? In short, prominence of fluidity as a metaphor in sexology raises new questions about the salience of bisexuality in scientific and popular culture.

There are four interrelated aspects of sexual identity and fluidity that I wish to highlight. The first aspect draws from culturally constituted, lifecycle transitions that allow relative flexibility of bisexual obligations and choices. Societies vary according to their sexual restrictiveness or permissiveness. The variance arises from such factors as the economic division-of-labor (D'Andrade 1966) and sexual stratification. Clearly, some societies permit or even prescribe universal homosexual or bisexual contact at different stages in the life cycle. Some Melanesian societies may be classified in this way: for a few years their sexual codes direct male activity toward other males and away from females. These prescriptions are congruent with harsh taboos associated with premarital heterosexuality virginity in women, and adultery. In American society we recognize adolescence as a cultural phase of experimentation and rebelliousness that incorporates strong sex peer bonds between young people of the same biological sex, which may include homosexual play. British boarding schools and European gymnasiums provide comparable but more overt examples. Paul's (1983/1984) useful contrast between sequential and contemporaneous bisexual phases applies here. There seems little doubt that a thorough cross-cultural survey would reveal parallel behavioral and cultural phases of bisexual fluidity

The second aspect of fluidity concerns the cultural system of sexual signs and symbols used as contrast features in the stimulation of bisexual erotic response. Phenomenologically, these erotic possibilities would seem to be virtually infinite. As noted in this collection, Freud's ([1953]

1925) well-known essay on gender differentiation classified erotic features in three domains: physical anatomy (sexual signs), mental traits (masculine and feminine symbols), and object choice (signs and symbols that internally stimulate arousal to others). The degree of polarity structured into a culture in the three domains determines the degree of sexual restrictiveness. Who may interact with whom? What sexual activity is permitted and under what conditions is it preferred or acceptable? Such questions, and the social pressures they indicate, ultimately restrict choices of sexual identity. There is the possibility that, with greater sexual antagonism between females and males, their interactions may become erotically charged. Ritual taboos rigidly structure, for example, older-younger or interethnic interactions between individuals of the same sex which are thereby more eroticized than in unrestricted societies. Specific forms of anatomy, adornments, and behavioral acts may thus become stimulating and attractive *regardless of the sex of the object*. Stoller (1979) has brilliantly explored this erotic terrain. In this regard the concept of fetishization holds promise in deepening our general understanding of the psychological and cultural interplay of a broad spectrum of erotic elements (Herdt 1982). Bisexual fluidity may point to a paradigm of eroticism that suggests a broader field of arousal than is normative in western societies.

Linked to sexual arousal is the bewildering question of what constitutes sexual desire. As a concept, sexual desire embodies myriad objects of attraction and states of being. Many individuals have the capacity for erotic response to a wide range of people. By erotic I refer to conscious sexual response (the unconscious counterpart is distressingly complex). Some erotic responses may involve homosexual acting. Depending upon various restrictive elements, most responses will not be those that are incongruent with the individual's self-image. It may be that the initial arousal of bisexual response hinges on highly specialized sexual scripts and personal traits in the object of attraction as well as the right situation. Erotic desire, in this sense, implies a great deal about the persons involved, their culture, and the direction of their sexual activity.

For the most part this collection does not examine the self-concept of bisexuals as a third aspect of fluidity. We read, for example, about the generally negative response of both heterosexuals and homosexuals to the bisexual. As Paul (1983/1984) states, this disdain partly arises from the pressure for monogamy in western culture. The commentaries on coming out as a key aspect of self-affirmation note the political and social pressures embedded in homosexual identity.

The bisexual here poses a dilemma for the gay movement in its effort to institutionalize the gay life-style in western culture. Yet, heterosexual family members and friends may pressure bisexuals to be exclusive and exercise their heterosexual option. The matter of choice is a key. Traditional social pressures belie the fluidity of self-concepts in intimate ties between friends and sexual partners, as reviewed by Cass (1983/1984). One wonders whether western abhorrence of anomaly (Douglas 1966), the blurring of boundaries or the ignoring of oppositions, such as the heterosexual versus homosexual, is not at play in pressures on bisexuals to adopt either a heterosexual or homosexual identity.

In certain Melanesian societies there is no great concern with classifying people into the dichotomous categories of heterosexual or homosexual. People simply are; they exist, and, in the course of the life cycle, they may engage in sexual contact with the members of the same or opposite sex. Yet these societies have highly restrictive sexual codes of their own. The Sambian male, for example, has the opportunity for direct experience of both homosexual and heterosexual relations and the opportunity to compare and evaluate them. Shared communications about the relative quality of all sexual activities are an ordinary part of male discourse (Herdt 1984[c]). And, yes, homosexuality is secret among Sambians, as it is among most Melanesian groups (Herdt 1982, 1984[b]). Clearly, these features, sexual restrictiveness, verbal comparison of bisexual experiences, and ritual secrecy surrounding homosexuality, affect self-disclosure. These features, in turn, surely affect the self-concept. I believe, however, that the self-esteem of bisexuals in Melanesia is relatively high and their bisexuality egosyntonic. Neither they nor their fellows are out to lobby for or against their bisexuality. Bisexuals bear no stigma. This attitude seems to me both more humane, as well as more pragmatic, than the western.

A final aspect of fluidity concerns the correlation between social and sexual interactions in the person's social network. I was surprised that the contrast between homosocial and homosexual behavior was ignored in this collection. Homosociality indicates the extent of same-sex exclusivity of social contacts and interactions. Generally, the more polarized the gender roles and restrictive the sexual code, the more homosociality one expects to find in a society. Homosociality and homosexuality are independent factors; however, I do not know how they are correlated cross-culturally (cf. Read 1980). We expect much homosociality in sexually antagonistic regions like that of Melanesia. Certainly homosociality does not lead inevitably to homosexuality,

as exemplified by male socialization in Ireland (Messenger 1969). In some instances, a specific cultural concept or situation may permit the development of a special form of erotic response in homosocial relationships. Doi's (1981) discussion of homosexual feelings as a function of the concept *amae* in Japanese culture provides a brilliant example.¹ He argues that the desire for passive love among socially intimate males 'is the essence of homosexual feelings' (118). His view not only allows for an interplay of sociality and sexuality, but also includes the essentiality of homosexuality as a cultural phenomenon. Attention to societies and situations of this sort would help clarify the range of bisexual fluidity in various cultural settings.

Notes

- 1 *Amae* means dependence and the desire to be passively loved and accepted. I recommend Doi's (1981) work for illumination on cross-cultural ideas on homosexuality. I regret that the many fascinating aspects of *amae* and bisexuality cannot be pursued here.

AMBER AULT

*Ambiguous Identity in an Unambiguous
Sex/Gender Structure:
The Case of Bisexual Women (1996)*

Originally published in *Sociological Quarterly* 37, 3:449–463. Copyright 1996 Midwest Sociological Society. Reproduced by permission of the University of California Press and the author.

Ault's article closes Part III with an examination of the real-life epistemological tactics deployed by bisexual women in their everyday lives. Like Garber and Däumer in previous chapters, Ault concludes that the reification of bisexuality as an identity is incompatible with the allegedly transformative potential of bisexuality as an epistemological force. Ault analyses data from her own questionnaire-based research to reveal some of the ways in which bisexual women cope with this incompatibility in relation both to their sense of identity and to their stated positions within feminist, lesbian or bisexual political debates. While many of her respondents do believe in the transformative potential of bisexuality as instability, anti-binarism, and indeed fluidity, the ways in which they describe their own bisexual selves constantly undercut that potential by reinscribing bisexuality within binary frameworks of gender and sexuality. Ault paints a complex and perhaps troubling picture, in which bisexual identities and bisexual politics—or at least certain aspects of them—appear ultimately to be at odds with each other. This issue reappears, in a slightly different guise, in Part IV.

At the present time, the regions where the grid is tightest, where the black squares are most numerous, are those of sexuality and politics; as if discourse, far from being that transparent or neutral element in which sexuality is disarmed and politics pacified, is in fact one of the places where sexuality and politics

exercise in a privileged way some of their most formidable powers.

Michel Foucault

No wonder people think we [bisexual women] are all sleazy.

Bisexual woman

Whether encoded as the relationship between the socially desirable and the pathological, the normal and the stigmatized, or the dominant subject and its dominated other, sociological studies of privilege and perversion often reinscribe the binary codes of Western epistemology. Such studies quickly relegate ambiguous social categories to one side of the divide or the other, thereby thwarting the productive theoretical exploration of indeterminate categories. In this essay, I track the discursive negotiations of subjects marked by an ambiguous identity category in order to explore the relationships between discourse, structure, and identity. Treating identity as a discursive product made meaningful by its structural context, I explore how women who have adopted the culturally ambiguous 'bisexual' identity category are positioned within the terms of the dominant gender structure and how they, in turn, respond to social censure from both heterosexuals and lesbians.

Recent scholarship on structure and subjectivity has examined the relationships among discourse, domination, and identity formation. Studies of white racism, male chauvinism, Christian anti-Semitism, and colonial Orientalism explore the discursive practices through which dominant groups reinforce social structures and their own positions of privilege within them by stigmatizing those whom they wish to exclude, constrain, and control (Corroto 1996; Ezekiel 1995; Frankenberg 1993; Said 1978; Taylor 1994). Complementary work in postcolonial studies, cultural studies, queer theory, and social movement analysis demonstrates how the terms of stigmatization and domination also serve as the foundations of deviant identity formation, the politicization of marginalized subjects, the emergence of oppositional consciousness, and political mobilization around sexual, ethnic, and national identities (Butler 1990; Fanon 1969; Sedgwick 1990; Taylor and Whittier 1992; Terry 1990, 1991). Like Emile Durkheim, who conceptualized the category of the 'pathological' as stabilizing the 'normal' (Durkheim [1893] 1964, [1895] 1964), postmodernists argue that margin and center, subaltern and colonizing subject, constantly negotiate with one another through processes of mutual distancing and denial. Unlike Durkheim, critical postmodernists (Smart 1993) hope that the center will not hold but

nonetheless concede the impossibility of escape from the symbolic system that establishes the codes through which center produces periphery.

The difficulty of escaping the binary structures of the dominant system is apparent in recent work on social categories that could be understood as ambiguous. Despite recent theoretical incitements to explore 'aporia, ambivalence, indeterminacy, the question of discursive closure, the threat to agency, the status of intentionality, [and] the challenge to totalizing concepts' (Bhabha 1994:173; see also Visweswaran 1994), sociologists often analyze indeterminate subjects as subgroups of other dominated categories, instead of investigating the hazards and pleasures of their categorical ambiguities. Bisexual women, for example, have most often been viewed relative to the lesbian community (Ault [1996b], 1994; Blumstein and Schwartz 1974; Clausen 1990; Rust 1993) despite the persistence of lesbian disavowal of bisexuals. Such explorations of deviance among the marginalized make important contributions to studies of discourse, identity, and hegemonic systems of domination (Gramsci 1971) by demonstrating how marginalized groups deploy dominant discourses in the formation of their own collective identities. Nonetheless, to focus on lesbian stigmatization of bisexual women as a reiteration of heterosexual constructions of lesbians is to read from the dominant position, to universalize the dynamics of oppression, and to present each social site as a fractal image of the larger binary system.

Appending ambiguous subjects to marginalized groups erases important features of the experience of those marked by the stigma of categorical excess or inadequacy. In the case of bisexuals, such conceptualizations reproduce the binary hetero/homo divide, elide the direct relationships between the dominant heterosexual and ambiguous bisexual categories, and leave observers with the impression that ambiguous subjects are most significantly 'oppressed' by an already dominated group: in this instance, by lesbians. The imprimatur of binary logic appears in the difficulty of describing ambiguous categories as between or beyond margin and center, as multiply located, or as alternating between oppositional categories.

While it may be impossible to move outside of a dominant discursive system, the terms of the system always suggest its subversion; binary oppositions ultimately prefigure the possibility of categorical transgression through recombination. Discourse, while shaped by structure, offers the prospect of recursively destabilizing structure. What becomes of subjects asserting discursively produced identities not clearly, wholly, or only located in either of the categories in the binary oppositions of the sex and gender structures? Are such

subjects, like Franz Fanon's (1969) native bourgeoisie, dupes in the process of cultural colonization? Alternatively, do their identities, like those of postcolonial hybrid subjects (Bhabha 1994; Visweswaran 1994), denaturalize the apparent social system so profoundly that domination expressed through its terms becomes illegitimate?

The political projects of gender bending, racial transgression, and binary smashing indicate both the inadequacies of current systems of sexual, racial, and gender classification and the urgency of renegotiating the dynamics of domination articulated by them. It remains unclear, however, to what extent material and social inequalities can be challenged by renegotiating the systems of identity through which they are expressed. In a social world increasingly organized around identities as sites of domination and liberation, one in which social movements vie for 'recognition' over 'redistribution' (Fraser 1995; Epstein 1987; Taylor 1994; Hennessey [1993]), it is incumbent upon social theorists to explore the relationships among structure, discourse, identity, subjectivity, and politics.

Bisexual women provide an especially interesting example. Although meaning inheres in the bisexual label's reference to a binary system for organizing biological sex and social gender, many politicized bisexual women issue trenchant invectives against Western cultural dualism, particularly as it is manifest in the binary sex/gender/sexuality system (Rubin 1975); they often suggest that bisexual identity challenges this dualistic social system (Ault 1994; Firestein 1994), long theorized by feminists as one that structures men's dominance over women. The category 'bisexual,' then, constitutes a social category that depends upon the contestation between the dominant and the marginalized for its own existence, while it is populated by social actors who eschew the binary systems of categorization common to Western culture. Does the appearance of such a category, and the discursive agency of its subscribers, disrupt, transcend, or serve to stabilize the dominant paradigm? How do dominant structures constrain the discursive production of bisexual identity and any agency that might appear under the sign of the bisexual? What do the difficulties of bi subjectivity reveal about the relationships between structure and discourse in the production of particular identity categories at particular times and places? Finally, what might the answers mean for those who would subvert the dominant paradigms?

Michel Foucault maintains that 'discourse transmits and produces power: it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile, and makes it possible to thwart it' (1980:100-101). In this essay, I examine bisexual identity as a discursive object ambiguously

located in the sex/gender structure (Lorber 1994; Rubin 1975) in order to explore what bi identity might demonstrate about the capacity of discourse to produce and constrain, 'to undermine and expose,' to resist and retrench the significations of structure and power in the formation of sexual identities.

Framing bisexuals

Lesbians to the left, fundamentalists to the right

Like most sexual identity categories that emerged in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Terry 1990, 1991), the bisexual category was shaped by the medical discourse on sexuality. The category first appeared in the writings of the early sexologists, reappeared in the work of Sigmund Freud (Evans 1993), and seems finally to be undergoing the process of institutionalization, as a result of its appearance in the widespread pathologizing of the bisexual body in the medical and popular discourse on AIDS (Ault 1995; Crimp 1992). Although the bisexual body that appears in medical and popular discourses on AIDS is nearly universally a male body, the politicized bisexual of the 1990s appears almost universally to be female (e.g. Weise 1992 [a]). I argue that feminist women's increased participation in coed queer politics during the course of the AIDS crisis (Whittier 1995) and the resonance of the bisexual category with larger feminist discourses on choice and sexual self-determination have motivated some feminist women to reclaim the bisexual category most dramatically at this particular sociohistorical juncture. Lesbians' antagonism toward bisexual women is long-standing (Blumstein and Schwartz 1974; Rust 1992) and, until recently, relatively culturally contained; the increased general visibility of the bisexual category in the pathologizing discourses around AIDS has provided additional impetus for bisexual women to re-claim the label, in order to destigmatize it in both dominant and nondominant social spaces.

Bisexuals appear as stigmatized others in the sexual discourse of both the Christian right wing and the lesbian feminist community. In 1992, right-wing Christian fundamentalist interests in Colorado sponsored the regressive legislative proposal known as Amendment 2, which recognized 'bisexual orientation' as one of the sexual bases upon which discrimination should be legalized. Spokespeople for the California based Traditional Values Coalition (TVC) call bisexuals the 'ultimate perversion,' reasoning that while one might conceivably be 'born with' an inclination toward sex with either men or women, 'you can't make the case that on Wednesdays and Fridays you like to be with men and on Tuesdays and Thursdays you

like to be with women.’ The TVS assures its audience that ‘The American People just don’t buy that’ (Stephen 1995). Pandering to more than four thousand Christian Coalition conventioners in the fall of 1995, one Presidential hopeful decried the decay of American family values by brandishing a *Newsweek* cover on bisexuality and announcing that the nation’s children sleep with ‘anything that moves’ (author’s notes). Right-wing women’s organizations discouraged the Clinton administration from participating in the fall 1995 UN Fourth World Conference on Women because they understood it as endorsing a ‘left-wing feminist plot’ to recognize ‘bisexuals, homosexuals, and transsexuals’ as ‘three additional genders’ (Collymore 1995). James Dobson, head of the Colorado Springs-based Christian broadcasting organization Focus on the Family, claimed that the real purposes of the UN Conference included promoting bisexuality across the globe (Wilson 1995).

Ironically, such an agenda would certainly find some resistance among many bona fide leftist feminists, including many lesbian feminists who see neither gay male, transsexual, or bisexual ‘concerns’ as advancing a feminist challenge to male dominance. A number of sociologists have documented the resilience of lesbian antipathy toward bisexual women from the beginning of the second wave of the women’s movement in the United States to the present (Blumstein and Schwartz 1974; Gamson 1995; Rust 1992, 1993; Seidman 1993). Paula Rust’s (1992, 1993) extensive survey of lesbian and bi women documents the continuing prevalence of lesbian hostility toward bisexuals. Some lesbians insist that ‘bisexuals simply do not exist’ or they position bisexuals as lesbians who are not yet aware of their lesbian identities, women on a ‘bi now gay later plan.’ Other lesbians unsympathetic to bisexual women acknowledge bisexual existence but consider bisexuals irrelevant to lesbian politics and communities, and cast aspersions upon them for their purported ‘promiscuous,’ ‘disloyal,’ and ‘bed-hopping’ tendencies (Ault 1994). These constructions echo the terms that stigmatize lesbians as deviant relative to heterosexual society, as well as the stereotypes attached to bisexuals by the right wing. Medical and popular discourses on AIDS have exacerbated the virulence of both right wing and lesbian hostility toward the bisexual category and those who populate it.

Increasingly stigmatized and politicized by these discourses, women locating themselves as bisexuals have begun to organize for two competing purposes: to achieve ‘bi rights’ through increased social recognition on the one hand; to subvert the binary identity paradigm, on the other. While some theorists admonish bi activists against solidifying the meaning of ‘bisexual’ if they wish to destabilize the dualistic sex/gender system (Rust 1992; Däumer 1992 [excerpted in this volume]),

bi women's attempts to achieve recognition and resist negative images risk institutionalizing the category, along with the sexual binary that produces it. By failing to resist, bi women risk lapsing back into invisibility and thereby also reinforcing the hetero/homo divide.

In the following sections, I examine bisexual women's discourse on their bi subjectivity and social locations, exploring how the dualistic structures that conspire to erase ambiguous categories reappear in the discourse of those occupying an ambiguous social space. The empirical materials interpreted here through discourse analysis come from face-to-face and electronic interviews that I conducted with thirty-five bisexual women from March through September, 1993. After refining the interview schedule through face-to-face interviews, I posted it to lesbian and bisexual interest lists on the internet. Self-selected participants responded to the interview questions and returned them electronically or through regular mail. This data gathering technique is probably implicated in the demographic profile of the participant group, which is mostly white, middle class, and college educated. Given the history of conflict between lesbians and bisexual women, decisions to participate and participants' responses may also reflect my identification of myself as a lesbian in the preface to the interview guide.

The empirical materials analyzed here indicate that despite bi women's conscious objections to the binary structures of sex, gender, and sexuality, their own discourse on sexual subjectivity is inescapably marked by these discourses. In some instances, bi women's discourse reproduces the foundational female/male and homosexual/hetero-sexual binary; in other instances, it uses binary structures with new terms, so that the fundamental sexual structure appears not as a hetero-sexual/homosexual division but as a bisexual/monosexual or queer/ nonqueer dichotomy. Caught up in the dominant discourse and pummeled by politics against the oppositional terms of the dualistic sexual structure, bi women hoping to 'disrupt the binary' develop multiple strategies for situating themselves within its context.

Bisexual agency and identity within the binary sexual structure

Bifurcated subjectivities

Despite their convictions about smashing dualism, bi women rearticulate and reinforce the dominant hetero/homo system of categorization in their descriptions of bi subjectivity. By portraying the bisexual as 'half and half,' in the context of cultural understandings of heterosexual,

lesbian, and gay selves as unified subjects, bi women construct bi subjectivity as fractured along the conventional lines. Rust (1992) reports bisexual interpretations of the self as ‘half heterosexual’ and ‘half homosexual,’ while the women in this study drew the split around their ‘bi sides’ and ‘lesbian sides.’ They also refer to their ‘masculine and feminine sides.’ At the level of the subject, the figure of bisexual becomes a self divided, a composite self dependent upon the dominant sexual binary for coherence and cultural comprehension: ‘I define as bi because I am and have always been attracted to people of both genders,’ says one bi woman. ‘To identify as either straight or lesbian would mean denying half of my sexuality. Being bi also means honoring both the male and female aspects of myself’

As a function of the broader cultural requirement that individuals locate themselves as either heterosexual or gay/lesbian, those who label themselves bisexual often construct their identities as composed of ‘bi parts,’ ‘straight parts,’ ‘lesbian parts,’ and ‘male and female parts.’ Responding to broader social and discursive pressures, these parts of the bisexual subject are often at odds with each other. One woman in this study, for example, reported that she had ‘hated this bi side’ of herself, while another noted that most of her gay and lesbian friends ‘wouldn’t understand (her) bi side.’

By whose side? The politics of invisibility

As a result of the structural pressures aligned against the formation of a unified bi subjectivity, bisexual women often must choose which features of their structurally fractured identities to emphasize and deny in a social world organized by oppositional categories. The following account illustrates the consequences of staking a claim on an identity-label not clearly located on either side of the sexual divide:

I used to identify as ‘confused,’ then I figured out I was bi internally, it was joyous. I was fairly uncomfortable with ‘confused’ as an identity. Externally, well, someone tried to kill me because I am attracted to women, and all my lesbian friends dumped me when I came out as bi. Seems like, to me, they thought ‘confused’ was better.

Not surprisingly, their awareness of negative stereotypes of bisexuals discourages bi women from marking themselves as bisexual from ‘fear of reprisal,’ loss of legitimacy or efficacy, and from feelings of shame in both lesbian and ‘straight’ social spaces. Two heterosexually

married women in this study, for example, reported denying their bisexual identities from fear of negative sanctions and concern over their husbands' masculinity. Both women established themselves as heterosexual simply by allowing friends, family, and colleagues to interpret them through the assumptions of the dominant system, although both expressed great frustration over the structural limitations that prevented them from identifying themselves as bisexual. In other instances, however, bi women in various relationship situations reported denying aspects of their sexual identities in proactive efforts to establish solidarity with lesbians and with gay, lesbian, and queer projects, or to challenge heterosexist assumptions among heterosexuals:

I do not see being bi as that much of an affront to the straight world. In general, I find that the dominant straight culture finds bi women much easier to accept than being a lesbian. After all, when one says they are bi, there is always hope we will 'come to our senses' and become 'straight.' When I am in the straight world with my woman lover, we receive poorer service than men/women couples. Overall, I feel devalued in the straight world when I am with my woman significant other. I hate this type of attitude. This is one reason I often do not feel the need to express my bi side within the straight world.

Functionally, once the discordant feature of a woman's sexual subjectivity has been suppressed, it becomes possible for her to assimilate into a broader cultural community. Some women in this study denied features of bi identity in order to reside comfortably in heterosexually oriented families, but the majority use assimilation to reduce the social distance between lesbians and bisexuals. In addition to simply allowing themselves to be 'read as' lesbian within the codes of the dominant sexual discourse, these bi women use labeling strategies to demonstrate their affinity with those marked, in ascending categorical breadth, by the terms 'lesbian,' 'dyke,' and 'queer.' By locating themselves under these signs, bisexuals seek to participate in larger political and discursive formations and to assure gay and lesbian critics that the subject's primary interest is not in the promotion of a 'bi agenda.'

I asked women who participated in this research to supply the terms with which they refer to their sexual identities. The following responses are representative of those from women attached to lesbian politics and/or communities:

When I first came out, about 6 years ago, I identified as bi. Unfortunately, this gave many people the wrong impression of my life...So I took to calling myself a dyke...to try to avoid explicitly coming out. In the context of my life, people assumed I was a lesbian, and I let them.

I use 'dyke' to proclaim my alliance with lesbians and bisexual women—it's got more of an edge than 'bisexual woman.'

Many women in this study define a dyke as 'anyone who is not heterosexual,' and lesbian-aligned bisexual women often use the term to describe themselves. This move allows bisexual women to participate in lesbian contexts without either the onus of deception, since 'dykes' includes bisexuals, or the burden of the bisexual stigma. These bisexual women pass as lesbian in lesbian and gay contexts until they are pronounced bisexual, much as the dominant cultural code encourages a normative interpretation of all bi subjects in heterosexual contexts until they are otherwise revealed.

Some bisexual women opt for a compromise label, one that appends 'bi' to another, more culturally salient category:

I have had a lot of label stress and used to change my identification on a weekly, if not daily, basis. I find that I wander up and down the Kinsey scale, depending on many variables in my life. Although bi-dyke has been consistent for about a year.

Both the lesbian identified bisexual and her companion, the bi-dyke, move out from fractured sexual identity with its 'bi parts' and 'lesbian parts' at the level of the subject, to a fractured community, one with dykes and hyphenated dykes, (real) lesbians and bi-identified/bi-modified lesbians at the level of the collective. While these constructions allow bisexual women to participate in lesbian culture, they erase the specificity of bi women's experiences, identities, and social locations.

In addition, these hyphenated identity labels reinforce the power of lesbian discourse to define bisexuals as marginal to lesbian communities. Despite bi women's belief that any woman who is not exclusively heterosexual is a dyke, some dykes remain more legitimate than others in practice. This is most strikingly revealed through accounts of situations in which bisexual women receive validation from women they identify as lesbians. One respondent, for example, offered an account of support she'd received for her work as a bi-activist that concluded with a grand

compliment: 'I even had women with DYKE stickers want to kiss me at a kiss-in!!!' Here, the bisexual woman positions 'women with DYKE stickers' as other-than-bisexual and confers upon them the power to legitimize her as a bi member of the community .

Examples like this dignify lesbians' claim on dyke territory and legitimize lesbian collective identity requirements that bisexual women assimilate in order to participate in lesbian communities. In their cooperation in the suppression of bi identity, either from fear of lesbian or straight reprisal, or from an interest in enhancing 'lesbian visibility,' bi women reify the bisexual as absent, nonexistent, outside, and 'other' to both lesbian and heterosexual identities, communities, and cultures. Structural and social pressure to validate the unitary subject is a product of a broader discursive regime that defines, codifies, and stig-matizes the category lesbian as an other against which heterosexual femininity may be defined. Bi women's suppression of the features of their identities that violate the dominant system of categorization makes 'the bisexual' invisible and reinforces the visibility—and the viability – of the heterosexual/homosexual divide.

The queer cloaking mechanism

The dualistic structures of the dominant sexual code appear in bi women's constructions of their subjectivity as organized around 'straight and gay parts,' and in their subtle reification of the sexual world as split between straight and gay cultures. Other strategies used by bi women to position themselves within the sexual structure—or outside of it—involve new configurations of the system of sexual categorization. While the use of 'lesbian,' 'dyke,' and even 'gay' offers bi women the possibility of incorporation/assimilation into women's communities, the term 'queer,' generally enthusiastically embraced by these research participants, allows their assimilation into a broader domain and reconfigures the sexual binary. Long an English epithet for 'gay' or 'lesbian,' the term 'queer' underwent a process of reclamation in the early 1990s. Following feminist activists who had worked in the 1970s and 1980s to reclaim various epithets used against women, radical lesbian and gay activists collaborated in the early 1990s to organize Queer Nation, in a move that initiated the reinvigoration of the term in lesbian and gay communities (Gamson 1995; Whittier 1995).

In its latest incarnation, and as it is deployed by queer activists and queer theorists, 'queer' signifies not only those who mark themselves as gay or lesbian but, indeed, anyone whose proclivities, practices, or sympathies defy the strictures of the dominant sex/

gender/sexual identity system (de Lauretis 1991; Gamson 1995; Seidman 1993; Stein and Plummer 1994; Warner 1993). Consequently, in a discursive strategy designed to disrupt heterosexist systems of sexual marking, a significant number of the bisexual women who participated in this research embraced the queer label queer. Ostensibly, they adopt the term for its appeal to polymorphous perversity, its signification of solidarity with lesbians and with gay men simultaneously, and because, as one woman said, 'it feels more confrontational.' Bisexual women label themselves queer for other reasons, too. While in an overtly heterosexist context, the label marks bisexuals as critically nonheterosexual, within gay and lesbian contexts, bi women's use of this identity marker works as a queer cloaking mechanism: queerness offers both a sense of sexual multiplicity and the capacity to elide differences in the construction of a binary world populated by queers and nonqueers. In describing the constitutive factions of the category, respondents demonstrate how the queer label glosses distinctions among sexual identity categories and differences between men and women (or constructs them as 'degrees of gayness'), collapses stigmatized sexual identity categories with the category 'transgenders,' and, consequently, constructs a safe, if often anonymous, space for bisexual women:

Recently, I also began using the word queer. What that word denotes to me is the labeling of all of us nonstraights as one community with one name. In other words, an end to the constant bickering and infighting that separates mainstream gays and lesbians from bisexuals, transgenders, and other subgroups. I have had to defend myself from biphobic separatists so many times, and I have met with so much hostility because I dared to identify openly as bi when I am married to a man...so when I heard about the movement to label us all 'queers' and forget the distinctions between the various degrees of gayness, I was immediately in favor of it.

This particular account expresses simultaneously the desire for an elision of categories, a homogenization that would make bisexual women more difficult to single out or categorically marginalize, and the reinscription of bisexuals, transgenders, and others as subgroups marginal to mainstream members of lesbian and gay communities. Efforts to establish bisexual women as 'equally queer with lesbians and gay men ironically undermine the perverse diversity associated with the deployment of queerness in the 1990s, and allow the sexual

world to reconstitute itself along a new axis that divides the queer from the nonqueer.

Bisexual discourse works to legitimize bisexual identity and bisexuality as ‘queer enough’ by introducing evidence from the effects of institutionalized social control. This line of argument echoes mainstream gay activism centered on civil rights and uses bi women’s experiences of oppression within the dominant system as the basis of bids for recognition, particularly within the queer community. Two women in this study, for example, drew upon the Religious Right’s recognition of bisexuals as a ‘suspect category’ as the basis for their claim to queer community membership. By using Colorado’s proposed Amendment 2 as a reference point, these participants actually redeploy the moral authority of the ‘moral majority,’ whose acknowledgment of bisexuals as a discrete category of people targeted for discrimination becomes grounds for some bi claims on queerness.

In this example, legal discourse offers the bisexual independent standing while positioning the category as a significant companion to the lesbian and homosexual categories, thereby relegating bisexuals to the homosexual side of the hetero/homo divide. The bisexual subject, now positioned as other to normative heterosexuality, uses the appearance of bisexual identity in juridical discourse as a sign of both legitimation and stigmatization. Both of these are necessary to bisexual bids for membership in a queer community full of subjects eager to challenge bi existence and to criticize bisexuals’ access to heterosexual privilege.

Another participant uses the example of homophobic violence affecting bi women to argue that bi’s ‘are just as queer as other gays and lesbians. We are not half-gay bashed.’ This participant goes on to make the undoubtedly true claim that gay bashers do not stop to ask whether a woman whom they perceive as lesbian might really be bi instead. Like bisexuals’ pleasure over recognition from ‘real dykes, this move ironically undermines the claim that bisexuals as a class or category are ‘just as queer as other gays and lesbians’ by suggesting that bisexuals encounter trouble only as they are read as lesbians within the dominant cultural codes. Nonetheless, as bi women who are interpreted as lesbians face homo-hatred, they build an experiential base that supports the statement that they are ‘not half-gay bashed.’ Like their representation in juridical texts that would authorize their official persecution, bi women’s experience with homophobic violence creates the grounds for their legitimacy as bisexual women within queer communities. Once legitimately queer, bi women’s momentarily specific sexual subjectivity again becomes

invisible as the queer/nonqueer binary displaces the hetero/homo divide. Through the deployment of the queer cloaking mechanism, the binary system is reconstructed, and the new boundary consists of the line between queers and nonqueers.

***'Double the pleasure, double the fun?' Bi centrality
and the limits of monosexuality***

Bi women engage in a second kind of identity talk that inscribes an alternative binary system; unlike the queer assimilationist strategy, which marks bisexuals as more like gay and lesbian people than like heterosexuals, the essentialization and universalization of bisexuality privileges bisexuals against a differently constituted sexual other: the monosexual. This discourse moves bisexuals from the margin to the center, where bisexuality and bi identity become normative and gay and heterosexual people are constructed as relatively deprived.

This model posits lesbians, gays, and heterosexual men and women as a monolithic 'semisexual' collective composed of those sexually limited by a pathological preference for intimacy with members of only one sex. Establishing bisexuals as a dominant category necessitates denying categorical differences between men and women and, again, uses liberal humanist discourse to position 'everyone' as a potential object of sexual or personal interest. One woman expressed the desire to elide categorical differences by reporting that she finds 'relationships with men and women to be quite similar—the differences are in the individuals, not in their sex.' Others expressed their ideal as choosing partners 'regardless of gender,' a strategy that positions heterosexual men and women, gay men, and lesbians as collectively 'other' to bi women in a sexual cosmology oddly oblivious to feminist criticisms of the categorical differences in power and privilege between women and men in this society.

The construction also reflects the understanding of some women who participated in this study that heterosexuals and lesbians are in collusion against bisexuals. For instance, one participant in this study wishes that 'monosexuals (lesbians and straights) were more tolerant of bisexuals' and playfully ponders 'how they would feel, knowing that in my mind these diverse groups can be lumped together as monosexuals, that is, people who choose to limit their sexuality.'

The world lapses again into polarization, divided now between bisexuals and monosexuals. This social group, despite its vocal opposition to sexual dualism, reverts to the claim that each sexual subject is one or the other: for them or against them. In other features of bi women's

discourse on sexual identity, we see marginalization internalized and employed to describe the bisexual self, the bisexual subject located on the edge of lesbian community, the bisexual passing in lesbian and heterosexual territories, and the bisexual queer located in opposition to nonqueers. In all of these constructions, the bisexual woman is reinscribed as fractional or marginal, or she completely disappears. The alternative 'resistance' discourse produces the *monosexual* as a marginalized other. While both heterosexual and lesbian discourse create the bisexual as other, bisexual discourse critical of the hetero/homo binary wedges the bisexual body between 'heterosexual' and 'lesbian' and moves these categories to a common margin, establishing the bisexual as legitimate, normal, and central against a newly constructed and now stigmatized collective other, the monosexual.

Bisexuals true and trendy

Once the sexual system is reoriented along a bisexual/monosexual divide, it becomes incumbent upon bi women to establish the terms of bisexual legitimacy. Given the similarities between the objections of the Religious Right and lesbian feminist communities to bisexual women, it is not surprising that the criteria that establish the legitimate bisexual resemble those that define the legitimate heterosexual woman and the legitimate lesbian. They constitute the amplification to a classificatory or categorical level [of] those values and strategies that individual bi women have used as guidelines for personal conduct as stigmatized women in lesbian and heterosexual contexts. By elevating the already politicized personally correct to a standard for binormativity, bi women deploy the terms of the dominant system to construct a deviant bisexual other. The outlines of the dominant cultural code and its lesbian interpretations in these interviews are evident: honesty, fidelity, sexual responsibility, and commitments to the unitary and empirically demonstrable sexual subject; even so-called traditional conservative values emerge as constitutive features of the true, proper, really real bisexual. For example, this discourse castigates bisexuals who are 'promiscuous,' unpoliticized, or too weak to 'take the heat' society directs at lesbians and gays:

There is a bi community in this city, but I don't participate in it anymore. I used to go to the events and it felt very sleazy. There were a lot of people there who were totally obsessed with sex, some who were very promiscuous and held group sex parties, and others who had chosen to make their livings in sex-related ways, ranging from sex therapists to porno telephone call women.

People like me, who just wanted to organize mainstream bis into a community, got disgusted and left.

On a local [computer] bulletin board, we created gay rooms and almost all of the women in them identified as bi. These women were extremely irritating in that the fact that they found men attractive was exceedingly important to their sexual identity and they made sure to differentiate themselves from lesbians. Many of them were in het relationships and had never had a gay affair, simply had found women attractive in the past, had maybe kissed a woman once. To me, these women were hets who simply were able to acknowledge that all of us are bi in some respect. However, when one said, 'I am attracted to women but I could never fall in love with one,' most of my gay male friends and I were disgusted that this person chose to label herself bi.

The process through which bi women's discourse constructs a deviant bi other is articulated in claims that 'not all bi women are alike,' claims that inadvertently give credence to negative stereotypes of bisexuals. Bi women do not unequivocally deny the veracity of negative stereotypes of themselves. Instead, they legitimate the stereotypes by delimiting a subgroup of bisexuals about whom these beliefs are accepted as true. One woman, for instance, notes that 'not all bi women are flaky, into women when convenient, and cannot commit to long-term same sex relationships.'

Constructions of the illegitimate bisexual within bi women's discourse anchor bi women's claims to legitimacy and add momentum to the category's institutionalization. By establishing criteria that distinguish the 'true bisexuals' from the 'trendy,' bi women's discourse reduces the ambiguities of the category within the binary system of sexual categorization. Stigmatized as the ultimate in perversion by the Right, and as faddish or traitorous by lesbians on the Left, bi women resort to legitimizing bi subjectivity within the terms of the dominant discourse. Caught in the call and response between structure and discourse, bi women rescue their subjectivity by defending it as something other than the ultimate perversion. The stabilization of the category makes it possible for the real bisexual finally to stand up.

Conclusion

In the United States, the AIDS crisis has served to destabilize modern notions of the congruence between sexual behaviors and sexual

identities. The concurrent institutionalization of the bisexual category, which serves to contain those who exceed the confines of the hetero/homo typology, seems at first glance more likely to function as a discursive stabilizing device than as a means of sex/gender transgression. Lesbian feminist and right-wing resistance to the bisexual category may be read as a means of retrenching both dominant and deviant subjects as they are encoded in the modern binary sex/gender system. Such an interpretation positions this particular ambiguous category as a wedge between the binary terms of the dominant structure, a discursive product that renaturalizes the more stable oppositions of gay/lesbian and heterosexual identities.

Still, 'deviant subjects' also exercise agency, often appropriating and deploying the discourses that have been used to construct and stigmatize deviant subjectivity (Terry 1991). The bisexual women studied here bring feminist and queer ideologies to bi subjectivity and use these to recode the bi category as a destabilizing and denaturalizing influence on the dominant discourse on sex and gender. Sharply critical of the sexual dualisms that structure the bisexual category, bi women refuse to locate themselves on either side of the hetero/homo divide, expressing commitments, instead, to a sexual ideology they believe capable of undermining egregious hierarchical systems of sexual difference.

Theorizing hybrid identity as subversive proves simpler than enacting it, as these empirical materials indicate. Responding to right-wing and lesbian feminist censure of the bisexual imaginary, women identifying themselves as bi face difficult choices for negotiating sexual subjectivity in everyday life. To avoid the difficulties of bi subjectivity, they must allow themselves to be positioned as heterosexual or lesbian, thereby supporting bisexual invisibility; to identify themselves as bisexual, they must negotiate with the stigmatizing terms of the dominant discourse and, in the process, risk contributing to the reification of bisexual identity that serves to restabilize the binary sex/gender structure.

The Religious Right's reading of the bisexual category as an identity formulation into which one 'cannot be born' simultaneously enacts and undermines a social constructionist vision of sexuality. The bisexual imaginary of the Right momentarily notices sexuality as a social construction through its assertion that bisexuals choose their sexual experiences; the possibility of acknowledging the ubiquitous social construction of sexual identities is foreclosed upon as the discourse codes bisexuals as the 'ultimate perversion.' The hetero/homo divide is reinstated in the discourse as gays and lesbians suddenly appear as less depraved subjects who might, relative to bisexuals, now 'make the case'

for legitimacy through sexual essentialism. Some may regard as a sign of social progress the bisexual category's functioning to legitimize gay and lesbian subjectivity in the eyes of the Religious Right. I see this victory as a Pyrrhic one, dependent as it is on continued sexual social control, biological essentialism as a claim to legitimacy, and the further reification of the hetero/homo opposition.

Like Fanon (1969), who sees the colonial context's native bourgeoisie as a stabilizing feature of colonization, unsympathetic lesbian feminist interpretations of bisexual women position them as heterosexual infiltrators or fallen lesbians, women unable to sustain lesbian subjectivity or to live a lesbian feminist critique of normative heterosexuality. Unlike the Religious Right's insistence that one does or should not choose one's sexuality, the lesbian feminist critique of bisexuals pragmatically insists that one must, privileging the reinforcement of a lesbian cultural position over the bisexual project of destabilizing the sex/gender system. Ironically, those bisexual women who live as lesbians support this strategy, and their invisibility in lesbian communities reinforces the lesbian positioning of bi women as 'other.'

Foucault (1980:101) argues that 'discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling block, a point of resistance, and a starting point for an opposing strategy.' Politicized bisexual women's refusal of the confines of both heterosexual and lesbian sexual identities suggests a starting point for an opposing strategy, even as bi discourse appears often to operate as an 'instrument and effect' of power, marked as it is by the binary structures and sexually conservative features of the dominant discourse. In those moments when bi discourse resists refuting the claims made against bi identity, bisexuals may be seen as a 'stumbling block' to sexual essentialism and the simple sexual binary; in those moments when women marked by the sign of the bisexual begin to establish the terms of legitimate bi identity, they participate in the discursive reinforcement of the sex/gender structure. The construction and definition of categories is an exercise in imposing order, not an exercise in disrupting it.

As part of their response to stigmatization, bisexual women offer visions of alternative sexual orders, albeit systems of sexual organization still predicated on binary structures. Through the queer cloaking mechanism, bi women assimilate into a community composed of diverse queer subjects situated as 'other to' nonqueers. By privileging bisexual identity, bi discourse reconstitutes the sexual world as composed of bisexuals and their 'other,' the monosexual. Although dualistic structures clearly undergird these constellations, the queer/nonqueer and bisexual/monosexual configurations displace the hetero/

homo binary. While the women in this study usually privilege one term over the other in such alternative dualities, the reframing suggests the possibility of conceptually isolating the critique of binary structures and the deconstruction of the hetero/homo opposition. Does dualistic difference always imply hierarchy? Do alternative forms of difference offer prospects for the redistribution of privilege?

The study of the bisexual category and the experiences of those who inhabit it offers us the prospect of studying discourse in motion, before its final reification in structure. Despite bi women's sincere commitment to breaking binary patriarchal sexual codes, bi discourse often recreates them. While these constructions seem odd in the context of bi women's ideological convictions, they correspond to external discursive pressure to position oneself at one location or the other within the dominant framework for organizing sex, gender, and sexuality. At present, a great deal of tension exists between the emergence of a visible but ambiguous space in our sexual culture and the impetus for the construction of a well-bounded, highly defined bisexual subjectivity that might be simply and neatly added to the existing structure as an easily identifiable hybrid between the familiar oppositional categories. In the contested space of the bisexual body, the ultimate conflict is not between categories but about them, and the move to define and defend the bisexual subject paradoxically seems the move most likely to undermine the radical, transformative potential of its indeterminacy.

Part IV

DIFFERENCES

HÉLÈNE CIXOUS

Extract from *The Laugh of the Medusa*
(1975)

This translation by K. and P.Cohen originally published in *Signs: A Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 1, 4:875–893. This is a revised version of 'Le rire de la méduse', which appeared in *L'arc* (1975), 39–45. Reproduced by permission of University of Chicago Press with the consent of K.Cohen and the author.

In this extract from one of her most celebrated essays, Cixous insists that *difference* must be at the heart of our understanding of bisexuality. The difference to which she is alluding is sexual difference: that is, in the psychoanalytic tradition (with which Cixous is explicitly engaging here, referring to both Freud and Lacan), with the difference between masculinity and femininity, rather than that between heterosexuality and homosexuality. Cixous' larger argument (Sellers 1994) is that psychoanalytic accounts of bisexuality, in the sense of masculinity and femininity, actually obscure and neutralize sexual difference, because they privilege the masculine over the feminine and insist that the latter may only be defined or understood in relation to the former — in other words, that femininity only exists in so far as it is the opposite or negative of masculinity. Against this 'neuter' bisexuality which represents difference only in negative terms, Cixous posits what she calls the 'other bisexuality' — a dynamic bisexuality in which masculinity and femininity are *positively* different from each other, so that femininity can be seen to exist in its own right rather than solely in relation to masculinity. This 'other bisexuality' finds its expression, according to Cixous, in 'feminine writing': a form of writing which either male or female authors may develop (the example she cites here is from James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1992 [1922])), and which affirms sexual difference as difference. Bisexuality in this sense is neither static nor neutral, but is dynamic, in process, and vibrantly alive.

Hence the necessity to affirm the flourishes of this writing, to give form to its movement, its near and distant byways. Bear in mind to begin with (1) that sexual opposition, which has always worked for man's profit to the point of reducing writing, too, to his laws, is only a historico-cultural limit. There is, there will be more and more rapidly pervasive now, a fiction that produces irreducible effects of femininity. (2) That it is through ignorance that most readers, critics, and writers of both sexes hesitate to admit or deny outright the possibility or the pertinence of a distinction between feminine and masculine writing. It will usually be said, thus disposing of sexual difference: either that all writing, to the extent that it materializes, is feminine; or, inversely—but it comes to the same thing—that the act of writing is equivalent to masculine masturbation (and so the woman who writes cuts herself out a paper penis); or that writing is bisexual, hence neuter, which again does away with differentiation. To admit that writing is precisely working (in) the in-between, inspecting the process of the same and of the other without which nothing can live, undoing the work of death—to admit this is first to want the two, as well as both, the ensemble of the one and the other, not fixed in sequences of struggle and expulsion or some other form of death but infinitely dynamized by an incessant process of exchange from one subject to another. A process of different subjects knowing one another and beginning one another anew only from the living boundaries of the other: a multiple and inexhaustible course with millions of encounters and transformations of the same into the other and into the in-between, from which woman takes her forms (and man, in his turn; but that's his other history).

In saying 'bisexual, hence neuter,' I am referring to the classic conception of bisexuality which, squashed under the emblem of castration fear and along with the fantasy of a 'total' being (though composed of two halves), would do away with the difference experienced as an operation incurring loss, as the mark of dreaded secularity.

To this selfeffacing, merger-type bisexuality, which would conjure away castration (the writer who puts up his sign: 'bisexual written here, come and see,' when the odds are good that it's neither one nor the other), I oppose the other bisexuality on which every subject not enclosed in the false theater of phallogentric representationalism has founded his/her erotic universe. Bisexuality: that is, each one's location in self (*répérage en soi*) of the presence—variously manifest and insistent according to each person, male or female—of both sexes, nonexclusion either of the difference or of one sex, and, from this 'selfpermission,' multiplication of the effects of the inscription of desire, over all parts of my body and the other body.

Now it happens that at present, for historico-cultural reasons, it is women who are opening up to and benefiting from this vatic bisexuality which doesn't annul differences but stirs them up, pursues them, increases their number. In a certain way, 'woman is bisexual'; man—it's a secret to no one—being poised to keep glorious phallic monosexuality in view. By virtue of affirming the primacy of the phallus and of bringing it into play, phallogocentric ideology has claimed more than one victim. As a woman, I've been clouded over by the great shadow of the scepter and been told: idolize it, that which you cannot brandish. But at the same time, man has been handed that grotesque and scarcely envi-able destiny (just imagine) of being reduced to a single idol with clay balls. And consumed, as Freud and his followers note, by a fear of being a woman! For, if psychoanalysis was constituted from woman, to repress femininity (and not so successful a repression at that—men have made it clear), its account of masculine sexuality is now hardly refutable; as with all the 'human' sciences, it reproduces the masculine view, of which it is one of the effects.

Here we encounter the inevitable man-with-rock, standing erect in his old Freudian realm, in the way that, to take the figure back to the point where linguistics is conceptualizing it 'anew,' Lacan preserves it in the sanctuary of the phallos (?) 'sheltered' from *castration's lack!* Their 'symbolic' exists, it holds power—we, the sowers of disorder, know it only too well. But we are in no way obliged to deposit our lives in their banks of lack, to consider the constitution of the subject in terms of a drama manglingly restaged, to reinstate again and again the religion of the father. Because we don't want that. We don't fawn around the supreme hole. We have no womanly reason to pledge allegiance to the negative. The feminine (as the poets suspected) affirms: '...And yes,' says Molly, carrying *Ulysses* off beyond any book and toward the new writing; 'I said yes, I will Yes.'

The Dark Continent is neither dark nor unexplorable. —It is still unexplored only because we've been made to believe that it was too dark to be explorable. And because they want to make us believe that what interests us is the white continent, with its monuments to Lack. And we believed. They riveted us between two horrifying myths: between the Medusa and the abyss. That would be enough to set half the world laughing, except that it's still going on. For the phallogocentric subla-tion¹ is with us, and it's militant, regenerating the old patterns, anchored in the dogma of castration. They haven't changed a thing: they've theorized their desire for reality! Let the priests tremble, we're going to show them our sexts!

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Too bad for them if they fall apart upon discovering that women aren't men, or that the mother doesn't have one. But isn't this fear convenient for them? Wouldn't the worst be, isn't the worst, in truth, that women aren't castrated, that they have only to stop listening to the Sirens (for the Sirens were men) for history to change its meaning? You only have to look at the Medusa straight on to see her. And she's not deadly. She's beautiful and she's laughing.

Notes

- 1 Standard English term for the Hegelian *Aufhebung*, the French *la relève*.

CLARE HEMMINGS

Extract from *Locating Bisexual Identities:
Discourses of Bisexuality and
Contemporary Feminist Theory* (1995)

Originally published in Bell, D. and Valentine, G. (eds) (1995) *Mapping Desire: Geographies of Sexualities*, London and New York: Routledge. Reproduced by permission of the author.

This extract echoes some of the themes that have already been discussed in Part III, particularly in Chapters 17 and 19: how to negotiate the tension between bisexuality as an identity, and bisexuality as an instance of difference. Hemmings reflects on the importance of the concept of difference in feminist and queer theory and politics, and concludes that the tension between identity and difference in these fields is endemic to them: any theory of difference is also, *ipso facto*, a theory of identity, and the identity/difference binary (like the other binaries encountered by Ault's respondents in Chapter 19) is inescapable. Hemmings suggests that, rather than seeing it as a cause for alarm, bisexual theorists should use this seeming contradiction as a starting point for their enquiries into sexual subjectivity, power relations, and a 'politics of location'. As Hemmings points out, this must include an honest examination on the part of bisexuals themselves of their own personal and rhetorical investments in reifying binary structures, and in presenting themselves as radical subjects or living embodiments of 'difference', merely by virtue of being bisexual.

Discourses of bisexuality

Theories of difference(s)

Feminist theories of differences between women have been greatly influenced by poststructuralist and postmodern theories of the fragmentation of the self. It would seem that if early feminism may be accused of reproducing models of masculinity in its emphasis on

a univocal identity, this could not be levelled at recent feminist theories of the ‘poststructuralist school’. So does a contemporary focus on difference provide enough space for a ‘bisexual home’? Here ‘queer theory’ is also relevant, though this is more often seen as emerging from within the lesbian and gay movement rather than the feminist movement. Queer focuses on fragmentation and difference within lesbian and gay communities. Such a development is interwoven with a feminist progression of ideas about what constitutes identity, in particular through the figure of the lesbian feminist. As a bisexual feminist my ‘home’ could perhaps be found through either or both sets of theories. Postmodern feminist/ queer theorists such as Judith Butler and Teresa de Lauretis challenge the notion of power as repressive. Instead they argue that our identities are formed in and through negotiation with a *network* of power, not opposite to or outside of power (Butler 1990, 1993; de Lauretis 1991). There is much to be said for this approach, not least the extent to which it opens up the possibility of ‘non-fixed’ deviant identities that are opposed to heterosexism but are not univocal or static in themselves.

The first question is whether or not postmodern theories actually do challenge the sameness/difference oppositions that underlie fixed notions of identity. If we look at the concept of *transgression*, which is one that I have mentioned as being part of the construction of bisexuality within lesbian feminist discourses—and also one that is frequently used by postmodern theorists as a positive idea—some of the problems with an exclusive focus on difference emerge. Transgression is a mutable term taken up by fascists and left-wing militants alike (Wilson 1993). Its primary function, however, seems to be the crossing of existing boundaries, the deliberate reversal of the status quo. Transgression is, of course, also associated with the avant-garde, and often with decadence. But does transgression really challenge dominant discourses? Elizabeth Wilson paraphrases Michel Foucault, who defines transgression as a ‘going further’ which then sets up new boundaries that need to be transgressed in their turn:

What you then have is a transgressive spiral which at least in theory is interminable. From that point of view, transgression can define no final goal and there can never be any final mastery; it is rather a process of continuously shifting boundaries, the boundaries of acceptable behaviour, the boundaries of what may be shown in terms of sexually explicit representations for example.

(Wilson 1993:110)

Continually shifting boundaries do not necessarily denote new territories or new discourses. Transgression of the status quo can, in fact, *consolidate* the dominant discourse rather than undermining it. Dominant discourses rely on the presence of an ‘other’. defining what is dominant through what is not. There is no guarantee that a post-modern focus on difference within sexual politics (queer, SM, etc.) is not simply setting up an alternative opposition that equates difference with the post-oedipal, the rejection of the mother—and hence sameness/difference dichotomies are maintained. Difference can end up being privileged for its own sake, and the necessity for analyses of power and possibilities of community or coalition may frequently be ignored. Unless transgression actually disrupts the underlying *forms* of the discourses being challenged, the attempt runs the risk of becoming yet another partner in the endless spiral of binary oppositions.

It does not seem accidental that bisexuality is occasionally mentioned within queer and postmodern theories, but never engaged with in a serious theoretical way. For example, Teresa de Lauretis questions the boundaries of the category ‘lesbians and gay men’ but merely in an additive way, noting rather scornfully that the trend on her campus is to speak of “‘Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Questioning’” (de Lauretis 1991:vi). Yet de Lauretis never actually considers the implications for lesbian and gay studies of engaging with bisexuality, and in fact she refrains from mentioning it again. Within queer politics the role of the bisexual in Britain and the US has been similarly marginalised, partly because many of the meetings have taken place in Lesbian and Gay Centres that do not extend access to bisexuals. Cherry Smyth, in *Lesbians Talk Queer Notions* (1992) —a bold attempt to link feminism and queer politics by tracing the reinvention of the ‘lesbian’ —mentions the importance of bisexuality in contemporary queer politics. Yet like de Lauretis, Smyth does not take bisexuality seriously enough to discuss it in any depth. Bisexuality, or the presence in one body of same-sex desire and opposite-sex desire, might be said to be the epitome of identity as temporary and shifting location. Yet attempts to deconstruct the univocal identity of the lesbian are, it appears, only possible if we retain the fixed categories of lesbian and gay: difference from a position of sameness in other words.

It would seem that binary oppositions structure both identity politics and politics of difference within feminism. The ‘other’ in question may change, but the paradigm does not. Otherisation is a profoundly complex process: you need the very thing that you are unable to accept. It seems to me that this necessity for the Other also manifests itself within the *terms* of the debates that constitute the ‘crisis’ in feminism. For example, the lesbian SM and pornography debates are represented as clear-cut

issues of pornography and violence against women on the one hand, and as censorship of material, behaviour and fantasy on the other. Again, the issue of 'race' cannot be adequately discussed within such frameworks. Jasbir Puar, in a paper presented at a conference in Utrecht in June 1993, discussed the taboo within both white Western and black feminism against black women considering the effects of their own 'whiteness'. Puar argued that 'whiteness' is not simply a category of 'race' or being. She used the example of second-generation Asian women born and brought up in Britain who may 'use' whiteness strategically—e.g. adopting 'white' clothing, attitudes, lovers, education—as a means of self-defence against racism. Hence the notion that 'whiteness' can be analysed only as an external or oppositional category of oppression by black feminists is problematised. She also raised the point that western feminism has a vested interest in understanding South Asian cultures as different (but equal) in order to maintain the relationship between sameness and difference within an overall structure of female sameness (Puar 1993). At my most pessimistic I would be tempted to say that theories of difference are often only new and mutable forms of the old argument (the more things change the more they stay the same).

Bisexual positioning

I have suggested that bisexuality cannot be understood through existing feminist structures, and that, in fact, an analysis of bisexuality in relation to feminist models highlights the very difficulties that result in a bisexual exclusion. So what of my own positioning in relation to the structures I have described? In critiquing feminist structures of sameness and difference, am I trying to create myself as somehow not implicated in those structures? If bisexuality is not adequately accounted for, where could it be located? From what position(s) could a bisexual feminist theory be explored?

Claiming outsider status

I realised as I was writing that while I profess not to be prioritising bisexual identities over and above lesbian and gay identities, I often am, and not just in terms of voicing what has been silent either. Of course this is something unmentionable, given the extent to which bisexuals have had to defend themselves against charges from the lesbian and gay communities that they are fragmenting lesbian and gay communities and detracting from the 'real issue'—homophobia. I certainly don't believe that bisexuals are freer or better than lesbians

or gay men, yet in using my positioning as the entry point into a critique of, in my case, lesbianism and feminism, is this implicitly what I *am* saying?

Using bisexuality (*my* bisexuality) as a way of highlighting the binarisms of sameness and difference within theories of identity can be a way of privileging outsider status. Yet can being ‘outside’ of something be used automatically as a mark of having ‘inside’ information about or on something? Such status seems to have replaced status through power (or lack of it); a hierarchy of suffering replaced by a hierarchy of exclu-sion.¹ To maintain a sense of my (privileged) outsider position, I must invest heavily in reproducing those binarisms, particularly as having ‘nothing to do with me’. So I rail against the dualisms that I claim are ‘keeping me down’, preventing an adequate theory of my own *marvellous fluidity* from emerging triumphant. But of course, those ‘dreadful binaries’ are scarcely somewhere ‘out there’, they inform and produce my identity as much as anyone else’s. The conversations I have with myself, the operation of binaries within my psyche, the way I see the world, etc., all reconstruct what I claim to deconstruct.

According to Elizabeth Wilson, bisexuality is either the same as homosexuality, but weaker, or different from it, in which case it must [lie] in the sphere of heterosexuality (Wilson 1993). Within this framework it is not difficult to see why bisexuals have embraced notions of ‘outsider’ status, or entered into the competition for exclusionary honours. Traditional identity politics have to go out of the window to be replaced with notions of transgression and gender-play. But in fact, I do *not* ally myself with Elizabeth Wilson’s indictment of bisexuality as just another apolitical fuck. The attempt to exclude bisexuality often occurs *because* of the structures of power, of opposition politics. One response is to claim that it is better to be outside and visible, than inside and invisible. In that sense bisexuality’s exclusion by others, *and* its self-conscious exclusion, are both immensely political.

Bisexual theorising

One of the major difficulties—as well as pleasures—of theorising bisexuality is precisely the lack of foundational categories to work with. Whatever the shortcomings (and there are many) of structures of lesbian or gay male desire, there are at least assumed meanings and identities to kick against.² So while a bisexual theory may be critiquing sameness and difference classifications, there are at present

no alternative structures that have been fully theorised—no home other than the ones I carry on my back.³ Bisexuality, then, is both produced and not produced within sameness and difference. It is given meaning through those structures (as they are the only ones we have), yet there is no sense of an identity from which bisexual subjects might position themselves. Writing as a bisexual would seem to be a contradiction in terms. Yet paradoxically this ‘writing of oneself’ is one of the things that marks out contemporary theorising about bisexuality, or bisexual theorising. There is a tension between the bisexual self one knows oneself to be at a given time, and the positive desire not to label bisexuality as one particular set of desires, choices or behaviours.

More work needs to be done on examining the differences between bisexual as an ontological category and bisexuality as an empirical category.⁴ The differences between sexuality as a set of acts and sexuality as identity is, of course, a central issue here. This has been discussed in relation to homosexuality, but not in relation to bisexuality. The fact that bisexuality has not been pathologised as a sexual identity *per se* may be one reason for the contemporary claims that bisexuality *does not exist*. It is still considered (problematically) as a set of acts. Yet there is a danger that in claiming an identity *per se*, bisexuals will be categorised and contained in a similar way to homosexuals at the end of the nineteenth century. Does recognition of other sexual subjectivities outside of homosexuality and heterosexuality necessitate the assumption of a particular identity? Yet if I reject the notion of ‘identity’, I cannot ignore my desire to articulate positions from which bisexuality might be theorised.

Perhaps a way of ensuring against (i) the privileging of a specific bisexual identity, or (ii) the privileging of difference for its own sake in the search for methodologies and homes, is to emphasise the relationships between particular locations at particular times (e.g. lesbian-bisexual; bisexual-bisexual, *ad infinitum*). In this way different bisexual acts or subjectivities might be theorised in conjunction, not as if in a vacuum. Perhaps we might try and understand location in terms of the ways in which people’s individuality is formed through power (so that we are both unique and similar to others): a move towards a politics of location that actually does take into account the relationships *between* individuals.

What particularly interests me is how individuals make sense of their own locations. For example I would say that I am closer to a lesbian feminist than to a male bisexual ‘swinger’ in many cases, yet

at times I might ally myself with that swinger in response to biphobia from lesbian and gay communities. I am simultaneously located in terms of class, 'race', education and age. Hence I am able to speak in less dangerous places, within the academy for example, where the risks of declaring oneself bisexual and feminist are minimised. Postmodernism has, of course, addressed these issues in terms of 'specificity', but it can still feel terribly lonely. The difficulty is whether one can form any sense of belonging on the basis of temporary identifications and alliances. The burning question is how one can become a *subject of dislocation* that is able to recognise other such subjects.

The problem may also be the way forward, may be the impetus to explore new ways of theorising not just bisexuality, but all forms of sexual location. Maybe reading the personal is about finding new ways to talk about yourself, re-examining the relationship between insider and outsider status. The problems are worked with not before engaging or writing, but *in the process of writing*. Becoming a subject of dislocation is a two-fold enterprise. Firstly, it involves the use of the personal—the bisexual—in highlighting the difficulties of existing structures. Secondly, it may be in reading the contradictions within oneself, as well as within 'the world'. To read oneself may be to read culture, from within.

Notes

- 1 Simply being 'outside' of a particular identity does not necessarily mean that that position is oppressive. For example, black and white women could be said to be 'outside' one another's experiences, yet, as Maria C. Lugones and Elizabeth Spelman (1984) argue, those positions are not equal. Black women actually have extensive knowledge about white women and their communities as they have been exposed to white education, theories, lifestyles, yet white women do not automatically have that knowledge about black women's lives.
- 2 It might be possible to argue that meanings of bisexuality articulated by nineteenth-century sexologists and psychoanalysts serve as 'foundational categories' to kick against. I would argue, however, that such categories do not function in their own right, but as a 'fall-out zone' for those cases that cannot be understood as heterosexual or homosexual. A bisexual *identity* is not a possibility, unlike a homosexual identity—however pathologised.

I must add that it would of course be wrong to suggest that theorists have not looked at other ways of understanding sameness/difference relationships, while not necessarily speaking of a bisexual subject. Melanie Klein (1900), for example, develops her concept of the mother's good and bad breast, that the child has ambivalent feelings towards before the differentiation through the oedipus complex is said to occur. Hence pre-oedipal

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sameness is challenged. Jessica Benjamin's work on intersubjectivity foregrounds the need for the differentiated subject to acknowledge others as subjects in their own right, again challenging the assumption that a subject needs its other to survive (Benjamin 1980, 1986). Yet notably these theorists are hardly part of the dominant canon of psychoanalytic or feminist criticism.

- 3 I am drawing on Ann Kaloski's use of Gloria Anzaldúa's term in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The new mestiza* (1987) (Kaloski 1994).
- 4 Thanks to Derek McKiernan (Trinity and All Saints' College, University of Leeds), for suggesting this difference to me.

ANN KALOSKI

Extracts from *Bisexuals Making Out with
Cyborgs: Politics, Pleasure, Confusion*
(1997)

Originally published in the *Journal of Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Identity* 2, 1:47–64. Reproduced by permission of the *Journal of Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Identity* and the author.

This article draws on the work of Donna Haraway (1990) to invoke the figure of the 'cyborg', a reconfiguration of humanity as a fusion of flesh and machine. In this case, the cyborg subjects under discussion are the players of role-playing interactive games on the Internet. Kaloski provocatively argues that the sexual interactions taking place during these games are in the process of reinventing both gender and sexuality—not just during the Internet interactions themselves, but also in real life. In the extracts below, Kaloski explains how on one such Internet site, although the players willingly restrict themselves (despite a choice of ten available genders) to male and female roles during sexual encounters, the ways in which these roles are inhabited, and in which they sexually combine with both the other participants and the player's real-life self, have potentially significant effects on the meanings of (bi)sexuality and sexual difference. While Kaloski does not know for sure what these new meanings will be, she argues suggestively that, at least for the relatively privileged people who are able to participate in these interactions, the shape-shifting fictions created on the Internet are already infecting real-life identities and desires. The ways in which these infections might spread are impossible to predict; the futures of (bi)sexuality are still uncharted.

Virtual bisexuality

In the [next] part of the article I turn to a particular form of cyborg identity which is being developed in the virtual cities of cyberspace. Throughout this article, I deliberately introduce and use some common virtual reality terms: (i) as an illustrative device to draw in readers who haven't yet encountered virtuality, and (ii) to open up

the new terminology to a wider audience. The virtual cities function rather like a computer-based dungeons and dragons game, but instead of characters and objects coming ready packaged, they are designed by players (or their own use. The dungeon-and-dragon type spaces are called **MUDs** (Multi-User Domain), while the virtual cities I concentrate on in this article are referred to as **MOOs** (MUDs, Object Oriented). Unlike the graphic virtual reality (vr) of popular imagination (and of films such as *Lawnmower Man*, 1991) this vr is generated through text. That is, all the interactions take place through words scrolling down the screen. In these environments bodies, genders, sex-acts, and sexualities can be reformulated through language. I am therefore looking at real time interactions between two, three or more computer users who have taken on a virtual body, to which they have attributed characteristics and personality.

It might be assumed that in such a supposedly flesh-free environment that sex would be the last thing on people's minds: not so! Sex is the principal, and often the first, way that people communicate with each other on MOOs. There are many public and private sex rooms, and the conversation may not always be as crass as 'Hi...fancy being fucked up your ass...' but it sometimes is. Bearing in mind that people choose their own characters, their own gender (there's a choice of 10) and can change these at will—what is happening here to ideas of sex with more than one gender? What does bisexuality signify in a space where sex/gender is mutable, and your female lover might be a man in real life? Is vr bisexual heaven?

My interest here is in the ways that text-based vr can be read as a place—a laboratory, even—where bisexual cyborg subjectivity can be experimented with. To date there is hardly any research on the changing meanings of bisexuality occurring because of this new technology and form of communication, although there is a disproportionate interest in 'sex on the net' from both popularist and academic writers (Winder 1995; Butterworth 1990; McRae 1996). It's as if bisexuality is too restrictive a term to use in such a 'wild zone'. My reading of the narratives of cyberspace insists on the mapping of vr onto wider understandings of sexuality, gender and corporeality. It is precisely that connection between the asserting of identity and its simultaneous destabilising which makes the bisexual cyborg such an incisive and political image to work with.

[...]

The recombinant bisexual

One of the pessimistic gurus of virtuality, Arthur Kroker, writing with Michael Weinstein, recently coined the term 'the recombinant body' (Kroker and Weinstein 1994). In some ways this offers a different metaphorical and electronic syntax from that of the cyborg: whereas the cyborg is a fusing of flesh and machine (cybernetic organism), the recombinant body is one composed of flesh and data, existing not irl (in real life, in cyberspeak) but in the somewhere/nowhere of cyberspace. Nevertheless, the connections I'm making in this article position the recombinant body as a type of cyborg, rather than as a discrete species. I'm not interested in the purity of this categorisation; instead I am making connections which start from the location of my fleshy body, insofar as I can locate it, and will attempt to consider bisexual cyborg subjectivity as created in the virtual cities (MOOs) of cyberspace.

As a prelude, I shall introduce Julie M. Albright's article 'The Emergence of Bisexual Identity in Text-Based Virtual Reality' (Albright undated, 1996?). Despite the similarity of her title to the aims of my own project, Albright's research isn't based in the role-playing locations of vr. Instead, she is interested in the way bisexual identity is constructed by the (probably) all women participants of an on-line bisexual discussion group, 'Bi-Wimmin'. This is a moderated list under the automated system 'LISTSERV' (a monitored network of like-minded people brought together via e.mail). Albright conducted her research as a participant observer; that is, as a bisexual woman herself, Albright 'subscribed' to the list and took part in the discussions, as well as recording the results over a 6 month period. Although these lists operate in a different form of virtuality to that of the MOOs, there are some similarities: the participants are likely to be fairly privileged in order to have access to computers and modems, they are often students at prestigious Universities in which the technology is more likely to be available, the participants rarely know each other irl, and users need some level of computer literacy and word literacy to take part. This 'required' criteria in turn produces a majority profile of white, middle-class, educated, 'western' (mostly US), male, youth: though at least one of these criteria (the rl gender of the subscribers) is modified by the female focus of this particular list.

In what sense are these women cyborgs? On the one hand, they are combining flesh and technology to develop a bisexual identity, which shifts them into the realm of cyborg bisexuality. On the second

hand, the list is for self-identified bisexual women: both the sexuality and gender categories have thus been established outside of virtual reality. On the third hand (for cyborgs don't have to be formed exactly like humanoids) those sexual and gender identities are being continually developed, as the participants 'recycle' their identities between vr and rl (Turkle 1995). Does it matter which identity came first? –let's no longer search for origins, but concentrate on present connections and effects. Regardless of how the participants of Bi-Wimmin identified before joining the list, through engaging in virtual discussions their (bi)sexual identity became one which was cultivated by flesh, machines and data.

Albright utilises theories which emphasise the formation of identity through the narratives we tell of our lives. She argues that the bi-wimmin experienced new forms of identity narratives through their participation in virtual reality; that it wasn't just coming together as bisexual women which generated ideas about their sexuality, but that the particularities of cyberspace produce specific effects. Firstly, the relative anonymity of vr enables many of the women to be open about their sexuality in ways that are not available to them irl. Secondly, this virtual space prompts ideas of non-monogamy which are taboo irl. Thirdly, the primacy of words in this text-based vr challenges the lack of vocabulary for, and encourages the linguistic visibility of, a bisexual identity. And fourthly—and this is where Albright becomes fanciful, so I shall quote her quoting Tomas, quoting Turner, in the manner of cyborg con/fusion:

The anti-structure (of cyberspace) ...can generate and store a plurality of alternative models of living, from utopias to programs, which are capable of influencing the behaviour of those in mainstream social and political roles...in the direction of radical change.

(Albright 1996)

Is this science or fiction? The (usually) invisible junction between the two [...] here becomes a roller-coaster of possibilities: seducing and modifying the body. If, as Haraway suggests, science fiction writers 'are the theorists for cyborgs' [1991b:173] then what of fanciful science writers? Are we all monsters now?

The participants of Bi-Wimmin assume some kind of bisexual identity, however negotiable. They (mostly) use their rl names, and the purpose of the list is, in some sense, to make 'real' a sexual identity. The people who log onto MOOs have some connecting interests—

not just the signifiers I listed above, but, for the themed MOOs, a particular fantasy (e.g. creating animal characters) or concern (e.g. postmodernism). Yet on the whole, these players don't attempt to clarify their identity but to confuse and confound the performance of their self. The Moo-site I shall focus on—LambdaMoo¹—is one of the most famous and, as such, fairly well populated. Lambda supports a pool of thousands of players, of whom approximately 80–200 might be logged in simultaneously (US afternoon and eveningtime tend to be the busiest). Each registered player is allowed a certain number of bytes with which to create objects: rooms, items to use or give to friends, and subsidiary characters (known as morphs). The programming for basic objects is fairly simple, as well as being, for many of us, enormous fun. The 'play' involved in designing and using such objects can seem both cloying and disturbing to outsiders: they are often embarrassed by, I think, the palpability of the fantasies in this place where 'words become as flesh'. It's happening to us all: '[n]ot only hackers, computer addicts, adolescents and children, but even ostensibly sober adults with "serious" commitments in the REAL WORLD are learning to play in new ways' (Danet and Rosenbaum-Tamari 1994).

Back to sex and gender

How is cyborg bisexuality formulated in vr? Two of the common concerns of both virtuality and bisexuality are sex and gender. I've already mentioned the interest in net sex. Most of this is not about the virtual reality, but concentrates on the Internet sites where men (mostly) can act out supposedly pornographic fantasies with interactive computer programmes. This is not my concern here. The sex I am interested in is that which occurs between two or more consenting computer users, in character, in real time.

It's at this point that people who are not used to vr ask: 'but what is computer sex?' One answer could be 'whatever you make it': in this world where text is all, sex is as wild or as staid as your words. Think of a fantasy, teleport into one of the sex rooms, and start cruising (or change this chronology and do it anyway). The problem with virtualsex (or 'tinysex', as it's also termed), as with any reciprocal encounter, is that you also need to negotiate the other person(s') fantasies and ability with language. (This interactivity is, of course, also the pleasure of MOOsex.) A second answer, then, might well be: computer sex is typing with one part of the body (usually the fingers of one hand) and allowing the words on the screen, and other

parts of your fleshy body, to give you sexual pleasure. This is also known as ‘wanking on the net’ (Butterworth 1996).

A digression into masturbation²

How is wanking being redefined in consensual virtual sex? Unlike rl mutual masturbatory practices, in vr there is one body but two or more sexual partners. Your own skin touches your own skin, but the desires at the tips of your fingers are not yours alone. Wired wanking is the beginnings of cyborg intimacy. What new (bi)sexual practices does technology generate?

The relationship between bisexuality and gender is a prime site of complexity and, indeed, of con/fusion. Among bisexuals there are broadly three positions on gender. First: ‘gender is irrelevant’, or such an insignificant difference between people as to be discountable. Bisexuals who hold this position ‘love people’. Second, bisexuals are precisely that—bisexual—not bigendered, and are critically attracted to both sexes, but to people of similar gender attributes. As Clare Hemmings announced recently on the UK chat show *Kilroy*, ‘when I go out cruising I’m looking for a leather jacket and a butch attitude on either sex’. And third, gender is a mutable, but nevertheless important way of recognising and expressing particular human differences.

It’s gender, Jim, but not as we know it

More basics. Lambda has 10 ‘ready-packaged’ genders available, complete with pronouns. These are male and female (as irl); spivak (gender ambiguous); neutral; splat (hard to translate a kind of ‘thing’); royal (we); egotistical (I); 2nd; either; and plural. The most popular of the special genders is ‘spivak’, named after Michael Spivak who coined the term for his programming book (Spivak 1990). Is this a post-gender locale; an environment so swamped in gender-labels that recognisable definitions of gender become meaningless? Let’s see...

My first trip to Lambda was, like that of most users, as a guest, which meant I could communicate with other users with a reasonable degree of subtlety, though, unlike fully-fledged citizens of Lambda. I was unregistered, and therefore could not create objects, nor ‘store’ my character or ‘home’. (I still sometimes log on as a guest. As other MOOers get to know me, being a guest offers a degree of anonymity which can be refreshing.) I wanted to visit a public sex room, so I gave myself a desc (description). Although it’s possible to visit much of Lambda as an unlabelled guest, visitors are only allowed into the sex

rooms after they have specified a gender for themselves. So, while you can be ‘neuter’ (gender neutral), or ‘we’ (gender royal), you can’t be no gender. I fixed my gender as spivak, and wrote the following:

describe me as a tall, tall, creature, with long limbs. My skin is blue/green and is covered in silvery down. My eyes are deep orange and my lips are gold.

Now I thought this was quite a silly desc, but hardly outrageous, and I teleported into one of the sex rooms. There were two females, ten males, and spivak me. I thought—then—this was just coincidence.

When someone new enters a room two things generally happen: (i) many of the inhabitants say ‘hi’, and (ii) many of the them ‘look’ at the newcomer’s desc, to check them out in a similar way to visual perusal irl. I smiled at everyone (typed in ‘:smiles’, so that ‘Guest smiles’ would appear on the screens of other occupants of the room) and waited. Eventually I received the following messages:

‘Well, you get the prize for the week’s most bizarre desc!’
 ‘Er...what are you?’
 ‘What ya doin’ here?’
 ‘If you want sex, change your gender to female’

The last player was at least trying to be helpful, though I didn’t believe (then) that sexual encounters could be so simple, so crass, so like real life!

A few days later I tried again, still spivak, but this time going for a mainstream image:

describe me as statuesque, leather jacket and trousers, long black hair, wanting wild and risky sex.

Again I was the only spivak in the sex room, and again I waited. There were no pages (private messages to me). No comments. No passes. There was a lot of sex play going on around me, so I spoke to everyone: ‘Anyone fancy a spivak?’ T asked (no shame). Such upfront behaviour finally elicited two responses: ‘No’ and ‘what’s your rl gender?’ So I teleported out, kept the same desc: remember—statuesque, leather, long hair, wanting wild and risky sex (I blush to tell you this, here in a more sober textual world) but I changed my gender to female and teleported back in as a phallic woman:

'hi! nice desc.'
 'what's your idea of wild?'
 'risky...sounds good'
 'join me?'
 'join me?'
 'join me?'

I logged off.

I've set out this fairly detailed narrative of my early travels on Lambda both for the benefit of those who haven't visited, in order to give a flavour of such encounters, and also for Lambda visitors and citizens who may, like me, have difficulty remembering their early experiences. Interactions become much more subtle as MOOers get to know each other, and gender can take on very different meanings in long-term relationships, but my interest here is the 'culture of gender': the ways that MOO gender presents itself and operates in public spaces. According to Anne Balsamo:

[c]yberspace offers white men an enticing retreat from the burdens of their cultural identities. Fictional accounts of cyberspace play out the fantasy of casting off the body as an obsolete piece of meat, but, not surprisingly, these fictions do not eradicate body-based systems of differentiation and domination.

(Balsamo 1995)

There is clearly some mileage in this analysis, as my own early experiences suggest. The only obvious restrictions on body descriptions are the computer users' ability with words, and their imagination; and yet the stock of visible characters on Lambda are depressingly familiar male fantasy figures: the phallic woman, the virgin, the half-undressed whore.... The Lambda joke is that most of the female characters with voluptuous breasts, ripped gowns, and whips are in fact men irl, and given the high ratio of rl males and vr females, this has some foundation (Kendall 1996). Yet I don't want to concentrate on the similarities between vr and rl expressions of gender: given that virtuality is coming out of the meat world, how could it operate, suddenly, through totally different codes of meaning? Instead, I want to focus on the particular ways in which vr is shifting the meanings of gender. As Haskel implies [...], it is not that computer mediated communications allow us to 'act out any social role', but, rather that technology affects our experiences of ourselves—technology changes human subjectivity (Haskel 1996).

I want to end by briefly identifying three specific aspects of cyborg gender in vr which infect meanings of bisexuality. First, the possibilities that choosing gender open up. Sherry Turkle's research into vr identity looks at length at the experiences of gender play (Turkle 1995). According to Turkle, gender swopping is not as easy as programming a character as one gender or another:

Taking a virtual role may involve you in ongoing relationships. In this process you may discover things about yourself that you never knew before. You may discover things about other people's response to you.

(213)

Turkle is a psychologist, and is clearly taking an individualist stance here, but her observations have wider implications. Gender, her analysis suggests, is both authentic and mutable: that is, virtual drag affects subjectivity. As MOOsex is a common activity, and many rl straight participants change gender for the purpose of having virtual homosex, how are understandings of bisexuality being influenced? Rudy reveals his feelings about his (now-ex) rl girlfriend's virtual sex as a man:

It's not the infidelity. It's the gnawing feeling that my girlfriend – I mean I was thinking of marrying her – is a dyke. I know that everyone is bisexual, I know, I know...but that is one of those things that I knew but it never had anything to do with me...it was just intellectual.

What I hate [about tinysex] is that it makes it so easy for this sort of thing to become real. Well, in the sense that the rooms are real. I mean the rooms, real or not, make it too easy for people to explore these things. If she had explored in real life, well, it would be hard on me, but it would have been hard for her. If she really wanted to do it, she would do it, but it would have meant her going out and doing it. It seems like more of a statement. And if she had really done it, I would know what to make of it. Now I hate her for what she does online, but I don't know if I'm being crazy to break up with her about something that after all, is only words.

(Turkle 1995:225)

Like Rudy, I want to suggest that machinesex encourages sexual identity confusion, and, again like Rudy, I think it's not clear quite what this means.

Second: the importance among participants of establishing the rl gender of other players. ‘Are you male or female?’, or ‘are you really female?’ are standard opening lines, however much one genderises oneself as neuter, or spivak, or splat. But is this obsession with categorising (only) a reactionary response? It could also suggest the establishing of different meanings of gender: gender as expression of identity in vr, in contrast to, and in conflict with the supposedly ‘authentic’ expressions irl. Here Haraway’s ‘illegitimate fusions’ are truly everyday occurrences, and the MOOers strive desperately to establish fixed gender in this monstrous world. The very act of attempting to fix gender demonstrates its mutability.

My third point is connected with the prevalence of gender stereotypes on the MOOs. The very extremes of the stereotypes (Pamela Anderson meets Sylvester Stallone) is evidence to me not of the whole-sale shifting into virtuality of rl genders, but rather of the creation of new gender connections, in the mode of lesbian butch-femmes, or gay queens. It’s possible to read this super-genderising as a form of camp play, with the potential of being as creative or as banal as rl camp gender expressions. [...W]hat can it possibly mean to say ‘I fuck/desire both sexes?’ What can bisexuality mean when latex and phonesex and cybersex are displacing sexual difference and producing new erogenous zones?

Logging off...

...but come and meet me on LambdaMoo—page me, or leave a message for myx.

Notes

- 1 LambdaM00 is a telnet site; address: lambda.parc.xerox.com 8888.
- 2 Thanks to Sue Thomas for an insightful discussion on this topic.

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