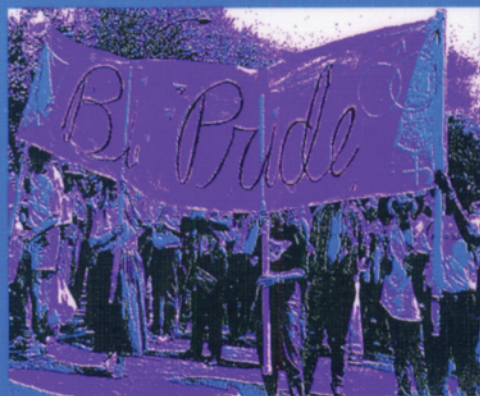


Bisexual Politics Theories, Queries, & Visions



Edited by
Naomi Tucker
with Liz Highleyman
and Rebecca Kaplan



Bisexual Politics

Theories, Queries, and Visions

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Theories, Queries, and Visions

Naomi Tucker
Editor

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Production/Editorial Staff

This book was dreamed, compiled, edited, and woven together by names too numerous to fit on its cover. These miracle-makers include:

Associate Editors

Rebecca Kaplan
Liz A. Highleyman

Assistant Editors

Judi Addelston
Dajenya
Rachel Kaplan
Susanna Trnka

Technical Assistants

Jill Nagle
Gerard Palmeri
Terri Rochelle

Advisors

Jane Felder
Lani Ka'ahumanu
Loraine Hutchins
Jill Nagle

Conception

Brad Robinson

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... to the memory of David Lourea,
who inspired the revolutionary
in so many of us ...

... and to all those who have struggled
and put their lives on the line
so that we could come out
and be free ...

With pride, rage, sisterhood, and love

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ABOUT THE EDITOR

Naomi Tucker is a bilingual, bicoastal, bisexual activist, writer, public speaker, and workshop leader. She has been instrumental in organizing bisexual groups and events since 1985, including BiFocal, BiPOL, BiNet USA, the Bay Area Bisexual Speakers' Bureau, the 1990 National Bisexual Conference, and the Jewish Bisexual Caucus. Naomi's published works appear in *Anything That Moves: Beyond the Myths of Bisexuality*; *Bi Any Other Name: Bisexual People Speak Out*; *Looking Queer: Body Image and Identity in the Lesbian, Bisexual, and Gay Community(ies)*; and *Bisexual Horizons: Politics, Histories, Lives*. She works in San Francisco as an elementary school teacher and counselor/advocate for battered women.

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Contributors

Judi Addelston is a doctoral candidate in social psychology at the City University of New York Graduate School.

Elizabeth Armstrong is currently a PhD candidate in Sociology at U.C. Berkeley. She is working on a dissertation on the organizational history of the San Francisco queer community.

Freddie Baer is best known for her exquisitely detailed, surrealistic collages. Her illustrations are renowned throughout the small press and alternative communities. A book of her work, *Ecstatic Incisions: The Collages of Freddie Baer*, was published in 1992 by AK Press. Freddie lives in San Francisco where she works full-time as an administrative assistant; the rest of this stuff she fits in during her spare time.

Brenda Blasingame is an African-American, Jewish, Bisexual woman who works in the field of health education and prevention and is a consultant in the area of multicultural and organizational development. She lives in California with her life partner and their dog in the 'burbs. She is a community activist and committed to the pursuit of a joy-filled conscious existence.

Nishanga Bliss (aka Susan Carlton) taught the first university course on bisexuality at U.C. Berkeley. She is a writer, bodyworker, performance artist, and indiscriminate genital worshipper. She appreciates the help of Laura Weide and Paul Dalton on her piece, originally written for a reading at A Different Light Bookstore.

Mykel Board has been a controversial columnist for *Maximum Rock'n'Roll* for more than ten years. He has contributed freelance

writings on sex, music, and travel to other publications. He also is a spoken/sung word performer.

Tamara Bower is a visual artist, radical feminist, and founder of the New York Bisexual Women's Support Group (January 1991). She also founded the New York Bisexual Women's Network (1982-1984).

Greta Christina is a white female lesbian-and-gay-identified bisexual pervert. Her writing has appeared in *On Our Backs* magazine, the *San Francisco Bay Times*, and the 1992 anthology *The Erotic Impulse*. Her fetishes include books, films, weird music, reference materials, baseball, and sex. She lives in San Francisco.

Michèle T. Clinton, award-winning feminist poet/performance artist, has most recently published *Good Sense & The Faithless* (1994, West End Press), and *black sage: The Womb & The Water* (1995, Penny Whistle Press). "I believe in the ultimate transformative power of the word: I aim for an artistic vision that is a synthesis of radical politics and experimental spirituality."

Dajenya is a 40-year-old African-American/Jewish poet/writer and social worker-to-be. She lives in Richmond, CA with her two wonderful sons Bakari and Jelani. She does volunteer work with various agencies and is currently studying Spanish. She hopes someday to meet the woman of her dreams.

Stephen Donaldson founded the gay student movement (as an openly bisexual sophomore at Columbia University in 1966) and the Committee of Friends on Bisexuality, a pioneering bi Quaker group, in 1972-73. He is an activist on prisoner and male rape issues, editor (*Encyclopedia of Homosexuality*, 1990), writer, punk, and swami.

Elias Farajajé-Jones (aka Manuel Kalidas Congo) is a tenured Associate Professor at Howard University School of Divinity. Spanish-speaking African Native American queer theorist, AIDS terrorist, guerilla theologian, and performance artist, he has been involved since 1981 in the struggle against heterosexism, HIV/AIDS, and aparthaIDS, first in Switzerland and then in DC.

Sharon Gonsalves is an awesome woman who just keeps getting better. A member of the lesbian/gay/bisexual speakers' bureau at Lotus Development Corporation, her writing has appeared in *Sojourner*, *Gay Community News*, *Closer to Home*, and *The Femme Mystique*. She lives with her cat, Ida, in a limited equity co-op in Cambridge, MA.

Liz A. Highleyman is a writer, activist, and public health worker. She has been involved in bisexual organizing, AIDS activism, anarchist politics, sex worker empowerment, and various leather-s/m communities and organizations. She lives in San Francisco with her lover Jan and enjoys computer networking, travel, and photography in her nearly nonexistent free time.

Loraine Hutchins, co-editor of *Bi Any Other Name: Bisexual People Speak Out*, is one of six national coordinators of BiNet USA and co-founder of AMBi (the Alliance of Multicultural Bisexuals) in Washington, DC.

Orna Izakson is a nice Jewish girl who works at a small-town newspaper and has a passion for walking into political lions' dens. She thinks objectivity is outdated, sex is radical, and people need to recognize the interconnections among their issues and get down to business.

Lani Ka'ahumanu is a multi-ethnic indigenous queer mother who celebrates the complexities of her 51 years of life by cherishing the simple truth of her experience. A visionary who dances to the beat of different revolutionary drummers, she co-edited *Bi Any Other Name* and posed for *Women En Large: images of fat nudes*.

Rachel Kaplan is a dancer and a writer whose work frequently takes as its theme the relationships between the personal and social worlds. She is a pre-backlash feminist, published author, community organizer, critic, and teacher.

Rebecca Kaplan is a radical ashkenazi jewish reconstructionist ambi-sinister bi-dyke bi-national bi-lingual feminist eco-socialist

postmodern brazen theory hussy. She is currently studying at Stanford Law School, striving to live happily and communally.

David Lourea was a therapist, preschool teacher, animal lover, and activist known for his pioneering community education efforts on bisexuality, s/m, HIV/AIDS, the Jewish community, safer sex, and human sexuality. His academic work appeared in the *Journal of Homosexuality* and *Medical Anthropology*. David dedicated much of his life to liberation struggles. He died on November 10, 1992.

Kory Martin-Damon is a Cuban-Venezuelan, female-to-male bisexual transsexual, aspiring to live in San Francisco one day. Kory hopes never to stop being challenged on matters of gender, sex, body, and other relevant realities.

Annie S. Murray is a 29-year-old graduate student in cognitive science and language acquisition at MIT who seems to be spending most of her mental energy discussing politics and feminism. She lives in Boston, where she is a not-active-enough member of GLIB (The Irish-American Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Pride Committee of Boston) and an active member of LABIA (Lesbians and Biwomen in Alliance) and BBWN (Boston Bisexual Women's Network). She can wiggle her nose.

Jill Nagle currently does Queer Jewishness, sex radical feminism, independent scholarship, poetry, and subversive philosophy. Hse (chosen pronoun) likes instigating inter- and intra-cultural education and love, justice, pleasure, and many other processes grounded in conscious, authentic presence. Hse enjoys writing, sexual pioneering, genderfuck, cooking, and just being fabulous.

Robyn Ochs, EdM, is a teacher, writer, activist, and speaker who has taught courses on bisexuality at MIT and Tufts University. She is a co-founder of the Boston Bisexual Women's Network and the East Coast Bisexual Network. Editor of the *International Directory of Bisexual Groups* and the *Bisexual Resource Guide*, her writings have appeared in several anthologies.

Laura M. Perez was born in Callao, Peru and raised in the U.S. She is a proud bisexual Latina who values self-identification and dislikes labels. Her passions are politics, chocolate, sex, sushi, motorcycles, and human liberation.

Mark Pritchard, co-editor of *Frighten the Horses*, is also a member of the Street Patrol, a group of queers who patrol San Francisco's Castro District and intervene in gay bashings. He is working on a collection of essays and stories about sex.

Carol Queen is a San Francisco writer, sex educator, sex worker, and sex radical/activist. She works at Good Vibrations and is on the training staff of San Francisco Sex Information. Her writing has appeared in *OUT/LOOK*, *On Our Backs*, *Taste of Latex*, *Frighten the Horses*, *Spectator*, *The Realist*, and other periodicals, as well as in *Bi Any Other Name*, *The Best American Erotica 1993*, *Madonnarama*, and *The Erotic Impulse*. She is working on a novel . . . or two. No, she never gets tired of it.

Dannielle Raymond is the founder of BLUR, a supportive social group for young bisexuals. Her contributions to this anthology are part of a national press kit she developed as a project of BiNet USA. Dannielle lives in San Francisco with her life partner and her two pet rats.

Indigo Chih-Lien Som is a garlic-chopping ABC born, raised & planning to die in the San Francisco Bay Area. Under the name *bitchy buddha press*, she makes one-of-a-kind, altered, letterpress & photocopy edition artist's books. Her poetry has appeared in numerous journals & anthologies including *APA Journal* and *The Very Inside: An Anthology of Writing by Asian and Pacific Islander Lesbian and Bisexual Women*.

Starhawk is the author of *The Spiral Dance*, *Dreaming the Dark*, *Truth or Dare*, and *The Fifth Sacred Thing*. A feminist and peace activist, she is one of the foremost voices of ecofeminism. She contributed to the films *Goddess Remembered*, *The Burning Times*, and *Full Circle*. She works with the Reclaiming collective in San

Francisco which offers classes, workshops, and public rituals in earth-based spirituality.

Sunfrog is a polymorphous pervert, poetic terrorist, anarchist critic, drag queen, journalist & activist. He lives on the road in a motorhome with bi-artist & poet Lisa Lust, & their daughter Ruby Jazz.

Robin Sweeney is a San Francisco writer. When her life isn't being derailed by CFIDS, she is a pervert, troublemaker, and business manager of *Venus Inferis*. She has published work in *Doing it for Daddy*, *Leatherwomen 2*, and *Dagger* and is co-editing an anthology of work by S/M dykes with Pat Califia.

Cecilia Tan knew she was bi in the 70s, came out to her parents (and the world) in the 80s, but didn't get a date with a woman until the 90s. She is a freelance writer specializing in alternative sexuality, science fiction, and erotica. She is the founder and publisher of Circlet Press, Inc. erotic science fiction book publishers, Boston, MA.

Susanna Trnka is a Czech-American, bisexual writer and poet. A former student in anthropology and women studies, she now works (temporarily) in the computer industry and spends her free time looking for more socially relevant things to do. She is the founder of a women's erotic writing group. Her writing has appeared in *Closer to Home*, *Anything That Moves*, *Socialist Review*, *off our backs*, and the Czech gay monthly *SOHO/Revue*.

Naomi Tucker is a teacher, public speaker, and community organizer with New York attitude and San Francisco politics. Heading into her second decade of bisexual activism, she writes and edits for *Anything That Moves*, surrounds herself with other progressive Jewish feminists, and devotes her soul to the battered women's movement.

Amanda Udis-Kessler is a writer, musician, sociologist, anti-homophobia/biphobia educator, and all-purpose queer nerd. She can be found in the Arlington Street Church choir, at video games in finer arcades everywhere, biking around Boston, and admiring her cat. She hopes to be a minister someday.

Stacey Young has been active in feminist and queer politics since 1981. Her other articles on bisexuality appear in *Closer to Home: Bisexuality and Feminism* (Weise, 1992) and Shane Phelan's forthcoming collection on queer political theory (Routledge).

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Preface

WHY THIS BOOK?

It was a crisp March morning in San Francisco. I was milling about the registration area of the OutWrite '91 Lesbian and Gay Writers' Conference, clinging to my coffee as I nervously eyed the crowds of my literary idols. Although largely out of place amongst these famous writers from across the country, most of whom took comfort in their polite dismissal of bisexuality, I felt certain that some force had drawn me to this gathering for a reason. Amidst the crowd of famous faces I spotted my friend Brad Robinson, a comrade in bi-queer struggle. Bubbling with enthusiasm, he told me that he thought the time had come for a book addressing the politics of bisexuality—and that we should create it together. Certainly it was a book I longed to read myself. And so, taking a deep breath, not certain what I was getting myself into, I impulsively said yes. Thus this anthology was born.

Bisexual activists were craving a book that moved beyond the “bisexuality 101” level of discourse. Anthologies such as *Bi Any Other Name* (Hutchins and Ka'ahumanu, 1991) validated our experiences. Empowered by that support, out bisexuals were now ready for a body of literature that would challenge our thinking, formulate new bisexual political theory, document our activism in print, analyze our different organizing strategies, and provide a vision of future directions. We were outraged at the constant, intentional omission of bisexuality in gay/lesbian communities, HIV education, and hip hetero hangouts. We vowed to give voice to the theorists and political thinkers of the bisexual movement, to enrich the blossoming arena of bisexual writing.

As editors, Brad and I complemented each other well. He provided fearless initiative while I played the role of cautious, linear-thinking Virgo, and we grew tremendously. But in January 1993

Brad withdrew from the project, and I couldn't fathom carrying on by myself. The success of the anthology was a product of our partnership; it seemed impossible for me to fill that gap alone.

Ironically, the contract offer from The Haworth Press came during this time of uncertainty, perhaps one of the many signs indicating my path. Bi folks everywhere told me in no uncertain terms that the book had to go on; that there was a world of people waiting for it to appear on the bookshelves. So easy for them to say! The weight of that responsibility sat like lead on my shoulders. Yet their words hit home. Like it or not, the book was bigger than just my life and would outweigh this narrow little time of crisis.

Weeks before the March on Washington (for Lesbian, Gay, and Bi Equal Rights and Liberation) in April 1993, I spent a pensive weekend on retreat with other Bay Area bi activists. I looked to the fearless waves of the Pacific Ocean for guidance, and returned to anthologyland with a new plan. If the community wanted this book so badly, then the community would have to help piece it together. In this spirit came the idea for our editorial staff—a team of authors and other community members who would each be responsible for a part of the work. The astounding community effort that followed has carried the book through to its current incarnation.

COLLECTIVE VISIONS

This collection of essays represents many visions: my own, which flowed into the editing of each piece and formulated the initial structure of the book; the individual visions of each writer; the collective visions of the associate and assistant editors and production staff who formed a most amazing bisexual thinktank; the contributions of many bisexual activists and friends who gave me endless feedback and suggestions; and the web of communication amongst contributors who shared their writing and ideas with one another.

By no means is this book a definitive work. It is at best a starting point, scratching the surface of our movement. Its limitations are vast. Its composition underscores a shortcoming of the bisexual movement itself: in particular, that the majority of players are white, middle-class women. Many people with valuable ideas to contrib-

ute never found out about this anthology, or couldn't express their views in writing, or couldn't be included in this limited number of pages, or did not feel empowered to speak up, or could not afford the time to write.

No editor can deny the shaping of a project according to her own vision and experience. While I have tried to be as inclusive as possible in the variety of perspectives represented in the book, the overall flavor reflects my view of bisexual politics. My guiding principles are feminist, multicultural, inclusionary politics that embrace all forms of consensual sexuality and relationships—a bisexual movement whose mission is to fight for social justice and liberation for all. My experience is that of a second-generation American Jewish woman raised with a New York tongue and a San Francisco view of the world. White skin and upper middle-class resources have often afforded me privileges that shape my ability to be an in-your-face bisexual activist.

I grew up confronting dualities: sensing my cultural “difference” as a Jew yet passing for “white”; growing up with working-class parents who moved up into middle-class money. Even as a child I understood what it meant to be excluded from both sides, oppressed by one and not fitting in to the other . . . to live simultaneously with power and powerlessness. Perhaps because of those early experiences, it was not difficult for me to extrapolate to the realm of bisexual politics, where I again walked in more than one world.

Identifying as bisexual in a heterosexist, dichotomous, unfriendly world, shapes my politics. Conversely, my vision of social justice shapes the way I see bisexuality in the world. This book explores such symbiotic relationships between our experiences and the concept we call “bisexual politics.”

Yet the anthology stands alone, beyond my personal perspective. From the time this baby was born it had a life of its own: a rebellious child with the tenacity to challenge me on my thinking.

The visions of the associate and assistant editors, who took on responsibility for specific sections, helped shape the final form of the book. Some of the essays were chosen because they captured the essence of our beliefs; others because they explained basic tenets of the bisexual movement; still others precisely because of how vastly they differed from our own viewpoints. I don't agree

with everything said in these pages. But I do believe that for each idea expressed here, there is a larger constituency of bisexual people who hold those beliefs. And I also believe there are as many theories of bisexuality as there are bisexual people.

I intend this to be a politically progressive work, as well as a work-in-progress. I aim to reflect an agenda of social change, and to leave open more avenues for dialogue and opinion. I like to think of this anthology as a small section of a tapestry. Woven together are mini-treatises on particular aspects of bisexual political thought, personal experiences from underrepresented segments of bisexual people, and bite-size samplings from a wide range of topics within the rubric of bisexual politics.

By no means is everyone included in this tapestry. As the book goes to press, I cannot get my mind off all the queries, theories, visions, and pieces of history not touched on within these pages. In the book and in the bi movement, we need more analysis of issues of class, multiculturalism, and HIV/AIDS, more rural outreach and youth organizing. Yet one has to start somewhere. Comfort comes only from knowing that someone else will pick up the loom, continue to weave, embellish the tapestry with more colors and images.

Most of all, I am proud of the process by which this book has come into being. That process has confirmed the power of community and renewed my faith in collective spirit. From beginning to end, this project has been an act of bisexual politics itself.

Naomi Tucker
San Francisco, CA

Acknowledgments

When the time came within the bisexual movement to gather our political voices in print, people held hands from far and wide and breathed life into the center of an intangible circle, called community. They came bearing gifts, each offering what they could. Some brought the unseeable gifts of the wind, like knowledge, love, confidence. Others contributed their fiery talents—in writing, editing, organizing, managing the mysteries of technology. Still others came to the circle with gifts of the earth, sharing their food, flowers, phone, fax, photocopying, or finance. Some danced on the water in celebration, bearing the gifts of joy and laughter in times of need.

Testimony to the powers of a consensus-building process in a sea of widely divergent philosophies, our collective breath produced this offspring as a contribution to the bisexual movement. My deepest thanks to all whose breath created that circle. In particular, I thank the following people for their gifts:

- Editrix goddesses Liz and Rebecca, my muses and mentors: for their supreme wisdom, commitment, prophetic vision, eternal patience with me, and damn hard work. They devoted endless hours and resources to this book, and deserve more credit than can ever be given.
- All the authors, including those whose work is not in the final manuscript, who edited each other's essays, offered me immeasurable insight, and participated in a marvelous group process.
- The ones who danced with me: Dajenya, Judi, Liz, Rachel, Rebecca, Susanna, Jill, Gerard, and Terri Rochelle, the best staff one could ask for; Lani Ka'ahumanu, who saved me from existential hell; bodyworker supreme Ann McGinnis, who helped me through the worst of times and taught me to live in the land of "I don't know"; Karen Barnes, Josh, and my beautiful, fab-

ulous housemates Lydia, Ann, and Amanda, who probably hope I never edit another book again, but who put up with me nonetheless.

- My family, who believed in me always, and whose unconditional love is my cornerstone: my parents Harriet and Harvey, my brother Jeff, wondercousins Susan and Ilene (the West Coast crew), and the New York relatives, who never judged.
- The advice and technical support team: Pat Califia, Beth Eliott, Loraine Hutchins, Lani Ka'ahumanu, and Beth Weise were the voices of experience; Greta Christina, Autumn Courtney, Amanda Udis-Kessler, Ann Whidden, and Joe Wright lent me their sharp intellect; Gerard Palmeri, computer queen extraordinaire, transcribed and typed and converted disks for days without complaint; Amanda Tear and Rebecca Kaplan organized my office and therefore my life; Linda Hoagland graciously offered her copier and fax machine; Liz Echt sorted my finances and did the administrative work that no one else would touch; my father insisted that every good book editor deserves a computer; Jane Felder and the angels at Farella, Braun, and Martel reviewed my contract; and Bill Palmer, Dawn Krisko, and John DeCecco at The Haworth Press encouraged me at every turn.
- Lastly, I am grateful to everyone at the August 1991 Bi Writers Retreat (Pt. Reyes, CA); to the Jewish goddesses and faeries of Queer Minyan in San Francisco; to all the bi community members and allies whose input and encouragement were invaluable; and to Brad, for pursuing the dream.

Introduction

Naomi Tucker

It requires something more than personal experience to gain a philosophy or point of view from any specific event. It is the quality of our response to the event and our capacity to enter into the lives of others that help us to make their lives and experiences our own.

—Emma Goldman, 1934¹

DID YOU SAY POLITICS?

Perhaps the greatest battle bisexual people have had to face is our invisibility and the pernicious invalidating of our identity. The bisexual movement of the 1970s to early 1980s therefore organized around the principles of visibility and support. But by the mid-to late 1980s bisexuals were seeking more than just the validation of our identity: we were defining political agendas, building a movement, participating in other social change movements as out bisexuals. In the mid-1990s we are beginning to shed the layer of identity politics altogether, seeking new organizing principles to guide us.

Ten years ago, when I came out to people, the word “bisexual” got stuck in their throat. Today, when I let the subject of my work slip into conversation with non-bi friends, a common response is: “Bisexual *politics*?” Hardly anyone bats an eyelash at the “b” word. But *politics*?

In 1989 Autumn Courtney and Lani Ka’ahumanu presented a workshop entitled “Bisexual Politics: What It Is” at an East Coast Bisexual Network Conference. Today, though the politicization of

our identities is common knowledge within bisexual communities, we are still seeking a definition of bisexual politics.

WRITING OUR OWN HISTORY

Opinions about bisexuality are not difficult to find—from psychologists, talk show hosts, sex researchers, and right-wing fundamentalists; from lesbians, gays, and heterosexuals who compare our experiences to theirs; from non-bisexuals who attempt to define the social, political, or emotional contexts of bisexual experience. But how do bisexuals define our own place in the world?

This collection represents an effort by bisexuals to forge our own politics, from the inside. All the contributors self-define as bisexual, though that label may carry vastly different meaning for each individual. Together, their voices attempt to eke out a niche in the schema of sexual politics and progressive social movements. The writers examine the points of convergence between sexuality and politics. They explore the history, strategies, and philosophy of bisexual politics in the U.S. Their diversity presents a multi-faceted approach to defining bisexual politics.

The contributors address questions looming in the minds of many bisexual activists. How do our politics affect our sexual identity? Conversely, how does our bisexuality affect our politics? How does bisexual identity challenge our thinking? What are the sociopolitical roots of biphobia? How have the Black civil rights movement, the women's movement, gay liberation, lesbian feminism, and the HIV/AIDS movement influenced the evolution of bisexual politics? How is the "bisexual movement" similar to and different from other movements? Should we be a part of the lesbian/gay movement? How do we organize around our diversity?

Many of the essays emphasize a politics of inclusion, breaking down divisions and classifications. Other common themes include sexual liberation for all, combatting heterosexism and monosexism, and understanding the connections among all oppressions. The theories develop from each writer's personal history, as well as an intellectual knowledge of what has come before us.

BIRTHING A MOVEMENT

The face of bisexual politics has evolved tremendously in the last decade. Though pockets of bisexual organizing were visible as early as the 1970s, local groups did not begin connecting regionally and nationally until the mid-1980s. The 1987 March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights [sic] brought bi activists together from across the country, leading us to ask the question: "Are we ready for a national bisexual movement?"² In 1990 BiPOL³ in San Francisco hosted the first National Bisexual Conference, which changed the lives of many bisexuals from Houston to Hamburg who were hungering for a community and a movement. Energized from that momentum, pockets of local organizing crystallized across the country. The conference also paved the way for the first International Bisexual Conference in Amsterdam the following year.

And the crescendo continues: The 1993 March on Washington for Lesbian, Gay, and *Bi* [emphasis mine] Equal Rights and Liberation brought us into a new era of visibility. The victorious inclusion of bisexuals in the march title was actively supported by an unprecedented number of lesbian and gay leaders across the country (Braindrop, 1992). (See also Appendix A, this volume.)

Quietly, in the intervals between these milestone events, bisexuals have been busy organizing at home. College campuses have led the struggle for inclusion within the lesbian and gay community, with scores of queer campus groups adding the "b" word to their names. Bisexual movement hubs such as Seattle, Boston, Minneapolis/St. Paul, Washington, DC, and San Francisco now host dozens of bisexual groups where once there were one or two. Bisexual people are in high demand for speaking engagements, writing projects, and political campaigns. We are the subject of national media attention. In some contexts our presence is even considered a welcome diversity rather than the embarrassment it used to be.

WHY A U.S. FOCUS?

Bisexual groups are flourishing around the globe, with a growing sense of international community. Yet as Liz Highleyman notes,

bisexuals in many other countries do not base their politics so much on identity, instead forming political affiliations according to ideologies. What is political in one culture cannot be assumed to carry equal weight in another. Many cultures do not politicize their bisexuality. For these reasons, and for the sake of focus, I have limited this book to bisexual politics within the U.S.

A NOTE ON QUEER

Several essays explore the use of the inclusive label “queer” in answer to the problematic, ever-growing laundry list of terms required to describe the sexual minority community. Despite its virtues, however, the word “queer” is not entirely interchangeable with “bisexual, lesbian, gay, and transgender.” Moreover, some people use “queer” to hide their biphobia or discomfort with the word “bisexual.” Can we embrace the notion of queer community without supporting its use to downplay the term bisexual? While all sexual minorities may have some political and identity issues in common, it is equally important to recognize our differences. There is a value inherent in both: collapsing the labels to seize the power of our unity, as well as appreciating the qualities that distinguish us from one another.

Language is powerful, and even those of us who don’t choose the bisexual label have a responsibility to ensure that the world is safe for those who do. One way to accomplish that goal is to practice saying the word “bisexual.” Say it again, “bisexual.” Paint it on the walls; wear it on a t-shirt. Write it in toothpaste on your bathroom mirror; notice it as you stare at your beautiful self. Bisexual. Say it louder; say it in public; say it to someone who might not be comfortable hearing it. Let them begin to get over their discomfort. Begin to get over your own. Ask yourself: what *is* it about that word that is so frightening to people? How can we lower the fear content, undo the negative associations, create new meaning, open possibilities?

LOOKING INWARD, OUTWARD, AND FORWARD

The organization of this book follows a principle of self-examination. We begin by looking inward—reflecting on the history

and present state of bisexual activism in the United States. Next we look outward, seeking to understand connections between bisexual organizing and that of other communities, and to locate our place within or alongside these movements. Finally, we look forward, creating bisexual political theory that will propel us into a new era of sexual politics.

Section one, *Reflections*, focuses on different segments of our movement in the U.S. The first four essays touch on the recent history and development of a bisexual political movement. The following eight contributors critically examine the ideological trends and political strategies of bisexual activism as we know it.

Section two, *Connections*, gives voice to those bisexuals who are invisible even within our own bisexual communities, or who often find themselves at a crossroads between two or more communities. They are bisexuals, but they are also lesbians, sex workers, people of color, SM dykes, transgendered people, swingers, anarchists, artists. Together, these writers explore the interconnections between bisexual identity and sexual choices, uncover the roots of the painful bisexuality debates within the lesbian community, examine how bisexuals exist within and alongside other communities, and suggest coalition-building strategies.

In Section three, *Directions*, contributors present their visions for the future expansion of sexual and gender politics and for locating bisexuality within the schema of broad-based liberation movements. They propel us beyond identity politics, beyond binary and categorical thinking. Without these old frameworks, we are compelled to invent new models of social, sexual, and political relationships. These essays are testimony to the many ways in which bisexual identity and experience serve as a springboard to cultivate political theory.

ONLY A BEGINNING

This is not a research book. It is a collection of opinions that paints a conceptual picture of bisexual politics, offering insights into various national, local, and individual political agendas for bisexuals. That is why you are holding before you an anthology of ideas that both complement and contradict one another. In this great

entity we call our “movement,” there is plenty of room for different philosophies and tactics. We do not all share the same goals. We do not even share the same definitions of bisexuality!

How, then, can we define bisexual politics? Not a simple question. Each potential contributor to this anthology submitted a brief “definition” of bisexual politics. It came as no surprise that those 70 people conceived of bisexual politics in 70 uniquely different ways.

Just as we are not a homogenous group of people, we are not a monolithic movement. This book will have accomplished its mission if it incites critical thinking, inspires dialogue and action. As you read through these pages, you may be challenged, joyful, angry. You may find words that move you, ideas that sing to your experience, stories that resonate deeply in your soul. You may also find words that do not speak to you, that offend you, that upset the balance of your visions, that are in opposition to your strongest beliefs. Revel in what nourishes you; seriously question what doesn't. Let your passions move you to action.

NOTES

1. Emma Goldman was one of the first 20th-century women to advocate for freedom of sexuality for all, and to critique the institution of marriage as a form of women's sexual slavery. She is quoted here in Alix Kates Shulman's “Was My Life Worth Living?” (1972).

2. National Bisexual Network flyer, designed by Boston Bisexual Women's Network activists Lucy Friedland and Liz Nania (See Hutchins and Ka'ahumanu, p. 364).

3. BiPOL, the first bisexual political action group, formed in 1983 in the San Francisco Bay Area.



Reflections

A Look

in the Mirror

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OVERVIEW

Susanna Trnka with Naomi Tucker

Spirituality which inspires activism and, similarly, politics which move the spirit—which draw from the deep-seated place of our greatest longings for freedom—give meaning to our lives.

—Cherríe Moraga, 1983

Wandering through a bookstore the other day, I came across a book that chronicles images of “life rituals” from around the world. Overflowing with photographs of various “rites of passage”—births, deaths, weddings, and even a few divorces—it included a single shot of a “gay wedding”: two young white men kissing on the steps of San Francisco’s City Hall. Obviously these two men don’t *represent* homosexuality; many other images could do just as well or better. But this photo is at least *recognizable* as a “gay couple.”

Could the photographer have captured a “bisexual wedding” on film? A “bisexual family,” or a “bisexual political movement”? Or is bisexuality too young an identity to elicit such cultural images? Perhaps bisexuality is simply too complex to be portrayed by a single image? Bisexuality challenges our monosexual culture’s assumption that sexuality can be identified by appearance, or by the gender of one’s partners. So what kinds of images can we create for ourselves?

We begin our exploration of bisexual politics with reflections on