Bisexuality and the Challenge to Lesbian Politics

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What does The Lesbian Community think about bisexuality? Before we can answer that question, we have to determine who The Lesbian Community is, and who speaks for it. The truth is that there is no single, monolithic Lesbian Community. At the very least, there are many different lesbian communities. Lesbian communities exist in many towns and cities. Even within a single town or city, there are often several lesbian communities. There might be communities of African-American lesbians, Euro-American lesbians, Asian-American lesbians, and Latina lesbians. Younger and older lesbians, lesbians who are politically active and lesbians who are closeted, working class, middle class, and upper class lesbians, temporarily able-bodied and physically challenged lesbians, softball players, lesbians in 12-step programs, and computer jocks might have separate communities of their own. Within our communities, each one of us experiences community differently, and many of us belong to more than one lesbian community. If you asked two of your lesbian friends to draw pictures of the lesbian community you share, they would probably draw pictures that were very different from each
other and different from the picture you would draw. We are all individ-
uals. We have different needs, and we have different ideas about what
lesbian community should be and what it is.

The Lesbian Community as a monolithic entity does not exist. But
even if we recognize it as a fiction, most of us probably have a concept
of The Lesbian Community and an image of what this Community is
like. Intellectually, we know that lesbians have a variety of different
opinions and experiences, but we still find ourselves saying, “the lesbian
community thinks . . .” or “the lesbian community is . . . .” Intellectu-
ally, we know that there is no Lesbian Goddess of Political Correctness,
but we still find ourselves engaged in a struggle over the rules She has set
down. Intellectually, we know that lesbians who live in different parts of
the country or whose skins are different colors might have different
experiences as lesbians, but many of us feel a kinship across these
differences because we are all lesbians. None of us can know every
lesbian personally, and yet when we travel to a city we have never visited
before, we feel at home. The women at the Center and the women at the
bar look familiar, and we know how to talk to them.

Where do our images of The Lesbian Community come from? For
most of us, our actual experience of lesbian community consists of our
experiences within our local lesbian communities, which might be more
or less homogeneous with regard to race, age, and class. But we don’t
need to have personal contact with other lesbians to know something
about them. We read about them in lesbian and gay newsletters, newspa-
pers, and magazines. The Lesbian and Gay Press tells us what lesbians in
other places are doing and thinking, what is happening to them, and
what their concerns are. This information has a profound effect on our
images of The Lesbian Community, especially for those of us who live in
rural areas or towns where there are few other lesbians and little local
lesbian community. The Lesbian and Gay Press is our means of commu-
nication with each other.

The printed word also defines and creates reality. If an event is
reported in lesbian and gay publications, then it is an important event
and we can all find out about it. If it is not reported, then as far as The
Lesbian Community is concerned, it might as well not have happened. If
a lesbian publication runs an article about a particular issue, it sparks
discussion among us. It might not have been more important than
another issue that was not covered, but it soon becomes more important
because it is the issue that “everyone is talking about.” Soon, because we have been talking about this issue, we form opinions about it. Then we discover that we have different opinions. Then we discover that it is an issue because we are disagreeing with each other. We might even think to ourselves that before we read about it in our favorite lesbian magazine, we did not realize what a controversial issue it was. The Lesbian and Gay Press does not merely inform us about our Lesbian Community, it also plays an important role in creating our image of that Community, and in creating the Community itself.

But The Lesbian and Gay Press is not a monolithic entity any more than The Lesbian Community is a monolithic entity. We have a variety of different publications, each produced by a different group of people who have their own visions of The Lesbian Community. Each publication reaches a different audience, and each gives its audience the vision of its producers. If you were a rural lesbian whose only access to knowledge was a subscription to The Advocate, what would your impression of The Lesbian Community’s attitude toward bisexuality be? Would you even think it was an issue at all? What if the nearest lesbian, ten miles away, subscribed to Lesbian Contradiction instead of The Advocate? How would her impression of The Lesbian Community’s attitude toward bisexuality differ from yours?

To find out how The Lesbian Community is represented in The Lesbian and Gay Press on the issue of bisexuality, I selected a variety of different lesbian and gay publications. Because I wanted to find out how The Lesbian Community is portrayed in publications that reach a large number of lesbians and that appear to speak for all lesbians rather than for particular locales or constituencies, I favored national magazines but included a few newspapers and newsletters with large circulations. I chose to concentrate my attention on The Advocate, Out/Look, 10 Percent, and Lesbian Contradiction. But before we examine the ways in which each of these publications portrays The Lesbian Community’s opinions about bisexuality, we have to know something about the population each publication appears or claims to represent. Who reads each publication, and whose view of The Lesbian Community is portrayed by each publication?
THE PUBLICATIONS

The Advocate, Out/Look, 10 Percent, and Lesbian Contradiction claim national readerships. But each of these publications represents a particular segment of the lesbian and gay community and fulfills particular needs for its readers.

The cover of The Advocate proclaims the magazine to be “The National Gay and Lesbian Newsmagazine.” “The” implies that The Advocate not only represents the gay and lesbian community, but that it is the only newsmagazine that does so. In short, it proclaims itself the quintessential representation of newsworthy happenings in the national gay and lesbian community. It is, in fact, a magazine with 58,000 paid subscribers\(^2\), which celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary in October 1992. The word “Lesbian” is a recent addition to the cover of The Advocate, which said “The National Gay Newsmagazine” until September 1990. As a Gay Newsmagazine, The Advocate’s focus was primarily gay male. Since 1990, coverage of lesbian issues has increased, and by the end of 1993, the editorial staff was one-third female, up from one-fifth a year earlier. To a large extent, the magazine fulfills its promise to represent both gay men and lesbians by focusing on news stories that are of interest to both sexes because they pertain to lesbian and gay rights in heterosexual society, and by including cover and feature stories on prominent lesbians and lesbian issues. Nevertheless, gay men and gay male issues still receive greater coverage. In 1994, seventy percent of the regular columnists and contributing writers were male. The magazine has a slick, supermarket checkout stand look; it is printed in color on glossy paper with photos or artwork on every two-page spread and commercial advertisements covering one-third of the page space.

The banner on the cover of Out/Look described the magazine as a “National Lesbian & Gay Quarterly.” The first issue of the magazine was published in Spring 1988. In Spring 1992, Managing Editor Robin Stevens announced that the magazine was in financial trouble and needed contributions. In the following issue, Stevens announced that contributions had exceeded the amount necessary to bring the magazine back to financial health and that it was no longer in danger of folding. It was the last issue of Out/Look ever published. Out/Look focused on lesbian and gay male culture and ran cover and feature stories about
political and cultural issues that arose within the lesbian and gay communities rather than news about our gains and losses vis-à-vis heterosexual society. The fact that Out/Look called itself a “Lesbian and Gay” magazine, whereas The Advocate calls itself a “Gay and Lesbian” magazine is symbolic; Out/Look achieved a greater balance in its coverage of lesbian and gay male topics. Gender balance had been a goal of the magazine since its inception, and this goal was reflected in the magazine’s editorial staff, which ranged from forty to sixty percent female. With a circulation of 17,000, Out/Look was not as glitzy as The Advocate. The front and back covers displayed color artwork, but the inside pages were printed in black and white on non-glossy paper and had far fewer commercial advertisements than The Advocate.

When Out/Look folded, subscribers received issues of the new magazine 10 Percent. The masthead of the first anniversary issue described the magazine as “The magazine of people, arts, and culture for lesbians and gay men.” The magazine is less narrowly focused on gayness than some other “lesbian and gay” magazines; although most articles concern specifically gay-related topics, others take gayness for granted as they focus primarily on topics of more “general” interest. For example, some articles in the “Environments” department would fit well in Homes magazine except for the respective genders of the people who own the gorgeous homes pictured in the large, full-color photographs. 10 Percent caters to the reader who can afford to take ski vacations and start small businesses. It provides some political information, but 10 Percent is most accurately described as overtly apolitical with a subtle leaning toward the conservative end of the gay spectrum. While other lesbian and gay magazines reported on the March on Washington, 10 Percent gave readers tips about which gay historical sites to visit after the March.

Lesbian Contradiction boldly proclaims itself “A Journal of Irreverent Feminism.” The name says it all. Whereas 10 Percent avoids controversy, Lesbian Contradiction has rushed headlong toward controversy since the very first issue, dated Winter 1982/83. Whereas Out/Look attempted to balance representation of women and men, Lesbian Contradiction is exclusively for women. Whereas The Advocate represents the gay mainstream, Lesbian Contradiction takes lesbian feminism as thesis and antithesis. Lesbian Contradiction is a forum for the debate of the “issues” that are so plentiful in lesbian feminism. Published on
newsprint four times a year, *Lesbian Contradiction* does not accept commercial advertising and reports 1,000 paying subscribers.

**COVERAGE OF BISEXUALITY IN THE LESBIAN AND GAY PRESS**

The treatment of bisexuality in The Lesbian and Gay Press in the 1980s and 1990s shows several patterns. The most dramatic pattern is a historical one. In the 1980s, the issue was constructed in terms of lesbians or gay men having heterosex. Not until the late 1980s or early 1990s did bisexuality per se emerge as an issue. Some lesbian and gay publications made this transition earlier than others. Publications also differed from each other in the degree to which they presented the issue as important or controversial. Some portrayed bisexuality as an issue with important implications for lesbian and gay politics in general, devoting a great deal of space to articles about bisexuality and subsequent letters from readers. Other publications gave bisexuality little more than passing mention or treated it as an uncontentious news item. Finally, once bisexuality per se became an issue, different publications identified the source of controversy differently and gave voice to different interest groups.

With its long publishing history, *The Advocate* provides a rare opportunity to observe the construction of bisexuality as an issue through the 1980s and early 1990s. In the 1980s, *The Advocate* published articles bearing titles like “Gay Men, Lesbians and Sex” by Pat Califia (July, 1983), “Yes, I’m Still a Lesbian—Even Though I Love a Man” by Harriet Laine (July, 1986), and “Unresolved Harmonies: The Ups and Downs of Not Quite Coming Out” by Mark Chaim Evans (November, 1989). None of these authors felt that the term “bisexual” described their experiences, although the theme of each article was the fact that the author had sexual desire or actual sex with members of both sexes. Califia acknowledged the possibility that her behavior might appear bisexual to others and explained why she could not identify herself as bisexual. In the same article, she offered an analysis of the social construction of sexuality and identity politics that placed bisexual identity on a par with other sexual identities. Laine did not mention bisexuality once. On the contrary, Laine considered herself no less a
lesbian because she was having sex with a man and would "like to think that the definition of lesbian is not so constrained" that it excludes sex with men. Likewise, Evans referred to bisexuality only once, commenting that "I find it hard to believe in bisexuality."

The articles by Califia, Laine, and Evans represent the opinions of Califia, Laine, and Evans, but the letters to the editor that followed these articles represent the opinions of The Advocate's readers. These letters indicate that, to the extent that The Advocate's readers felt there was an issue at all in the 1980s, they accepted the authors' construction of the issue as one of heterosex among lesbians and gays; none reconstructed the issue in terms of bisexuality.

For example, subsequent to Califia's article, The Advocate printed one brief letter to the editor in which a male reader expressed his appreciation of Califia’s ability to "share bodies with other-gender partners without suffering identity crisis." The letter did not use the term bisexual, but implicitly applauded Califia’s ability to resist such a classification. Three years later, Laine's article generated a more lively response. Two male readers applauded Laine for her humanity and humanism and chastised those who would demand that she conform to narrow sexual scripts, and one female reader reproached Laine for presuming to call herself a lesbian and expending her energy on a man instead of using it to support womyn and the lesbian community—exactly the attitude the male readers had condemned. None of these readers used the word "bisexual;" the male readers complimented Laine's "humanity," and the female reader informed Laine that she was "at least during the act, a heterosexual. Not a lesbian." Evans's article generated no controversy, possibly because as a man, Evans was not subject to lesbian identity rules and because, unlike Laine, he did not seek to defend his choices as informed and intentional. Instead, Evans invited readers to understand his story as an unfinished process of coming out, a familiar and politically unthreatening construction of his experience. Regardless of what accounts for the differences in the vigor of readers' responses to these three articles, one thing is clear: the issue for all three authors and their readers was not bisexuality; the issue was people who identify as lesbian/gay having sex with members of the other sex.

But some of The Advocate's readers were beginning to think about bisexuality as an issue and to communicate this view to the magazine. In
1985, two letters to the editor criticized the magazine’s previous year-in-review issue for missing opportunities to refer respectfully to bisexuality. One female reader asked why the word bisexual was put in quotation marks in a paragraph about Elton John and asked the magazine’s gay readers not to trivialize bisexuality. In a similar vein, a male reader pointed out that an article on Jacob Holdt referred to him as heterosexual and then quoted him talking about the experience of sex with a man. This reader challenged the magazine to tell the truth, which, in his opinion, is that Holdt must therefore be bisexual. In 1989, Brian Miller wrote an article that bore a title similar to those published earlier in the decade, “Women Who Marry Gay Men.” Two issues later, a letter from reader William Wedin, Executive Director of the Bisexual Information and Counseling Service in New York City, criticized Miller for failing to acknowledge bisexuality as an authentic orientation. Wedin explained why this particular criticism came in 1989 but no earlier by commenting that Miller’s “bi bashing” had come “at a time when bisexuals and their partners are just beginning to find a measure of self-respect.” Miller defended himself by pointing out that the men he had interviewed were self-identified as gay, not bisexual. But apparently Wedin was not the only reader who perceived the men in Miller’s article as unacknowledged bisexuals. In the next issue, a female reader offered her marriage to a bisexual man as an example that, contrary to the message given by Miller’s article, such marriages can work.

Pat Califia was the first regular contributor to The Advocate to identify bisexuality as an issue and focus an article on it. In November 1990, she published a letter in her “Advisor” column from a reader married to a bisexual man, and although bisexuality was not the central issue in the letter, Califia took the opportunity to assert that there is such a thing as bisexuality. She gently dismissed the narrow definition of a bisexual as someone who “is always equally attracted to men and women and has exactly equal numbers of male and female sex partners” in favor of a broader definition of bisexuals as “men and women who have strong sexual or romantic feelings about members of both genders, who are capable of having sex or relationships with either men or women.”

Thereafter, bisexuality per se made infrequent appearances in The Advocate. In June 1991, the magazine printed a one-page article written by bisexual activists Lani Kaahumanu and Loraine Hutchins entitled
“Do bisexuals have a place in the gay movement?”

Kaahumanu and Hutchins, who had just published the anthology *Bi Any Other Name*, argued that bisexuals had always been involved in the “gay rights movement.” They demanded the recognition of bisexual existence and the end of intolerance on the part of gays and lesbians in the movement. In July 1992, Lily Braindrop documented the growth of the bisexual movement and community and the push for explicit bisexual inclusion in the lesbian and gay movement, and challenged lesbian and gay attitudes about bisexuality in “Bi and Beyond.” *The Advocate’s* letters to the editor column gave no indication that readers noticed the striking contrast between these articles’ intentionally political approach to bisexuality and the approach that marked the 1980s, nor that readers had much of a reaction to the articles at all.

Meanwhile, *The Advocate* continued to publish articles about people who had sex with both sexes that referred tangentially if at all to bisexuality. For example, in 1990, Sandra Bernhard discussed her relationship with a straight man; the word “bisexual” did not appear in the article. In 1992, Chunovic quoted Dack Rambo as saying, “I think a lot of people don’t believe in a thing called bisexuality,” implying that he believes that it exists but he doesn’t apply that term—or any term—to himself. In the next issue, Nona Hendryx’s interviewer used the word “bisexual,” and Hendryx did not reject the word but said, “I try to think of myself as asexual.” None of these articles gave any hint that bisexuality per se might be an issue in the lesbian and gay community, an impression that was reinforced by the lack of letters to the editor about these articles in subsequent issues of *The Advocate*.

In the Lesbian and Gay Community represented by *The Advocate*, bisexuality is only one issue among many, and it is not a particularly controversial one at that. The issue of bisexuality did not supplant the issue of lesbians and gays having heterosex; instead, it simply joined an ongoing lesbian and gay discourse that was otherwise left unchanged. To the extent that bisexuality is an issue at all in *The Advocate*, the issue is whether bisexuals should be included in the lesbian and gay movement, and the weight of public opinion is in favor of inclusion. Lesbian feminists who object to bisexuality on political grounds are rarely heard from and marginalized as narrow-minded political extremists, whereas bisexuals themselves are applauded for their humanism and liberated thinking.
In contrast, *Out/Look* presented bisexuality as a controversial issue with important implications for lesbian and gay discourse. During its brief life, *Out/Look* published two articles relevant to the issue of bisexuality. In 1990, the cover announced an article by Jan Clausen entitled “My Interesting Condition” with the caption “When Lesbians Fall for Men” and a drawing of Cupid aiming an arrow into the breast of a woman wearing double women’s symbol and “DYKE” buttons. In Spring 1992, the cover of *Out/Look* asked “What do bisexuals want?” The headline graced a drawing of a woman in a short tight skirt holding the arm of a man and looking over her shoulder at a butch lesbian. She looked startled, and the thought bubble above her head was filled with exclamation points and question marks.

Similar to the approach used by 1980s *Advocate* articles, the issue in the autobiographical article “My Interesting Condition” was a lesbian-identified woman who became involved with a man, not bisexuality. But unlike the authors of *The Advocate* articles, Clausen dealt directly with the question of bisexuality. She explained that she did not identify as bisexual because she was reluctant to become invested in a new identity and because she did “not know what ‘bisexual’ desire would be, since my desire is always for a specifically sexed and gendered individual.” Clausen characterized lesbian feminism as a way of life that is “very hard on women,” and asked lesbian feminists to be more gentle with each other by relaxing their demands that the personal conform to narrow political prescripts.

Clausen’s article was like a footstep in a minefield. The Spring issue included four letters from readers about Clausen’s article. Two thanked Clausen for the article, one threatened to cancel her subscription to *Out/Look*, and the fourth blasted Clausen for claiming to be a lesbian. All four letters were from women. But this was not the end of the furor. Reader response increased with the next issue of *Out/Look*, which included no less than seven letters: four applauding, three condemning. The four positive letters were from a bisexual activist woman, two men, and an anonymous reader, whereas the three negative letters were from two women and an anonymous reader. The debate continued through the next two issues. In Fall 1990 and Winter 1991—a full year after the publication of the Clausen article—two female readers defended Clausen against the critical letters published the previous Spring and Summer.
The flurry of letters following Clausen’s article clearly presented bisexuality as a controversial issue, particularly among women. But what was the issue, as reflected in these letters? On the positive side, Clausen was applauded for encouraging the acceptance of difference within the lesbian community, for speaking on behalf of those who feel alienated from the lesbian community because of their attractions to or relationships with men, for her courage in bucking the lesbian feminist paradigm, for her intelligence and freedom, and for writing honestly about a very human situation. On the negative side, she was criticized for writing about the wonders of heterosexual fucking in a magazine whose readers were looking for affirmation of their lesbianism and gayness, for using patriarchal arguments to attempt to excuse her “failures as a woman-identified-woman,” for not having realized yet that only another woman can offer her true freedom, and for reaping “the benefits of the heterosexual world while homosexual women continue to struggle for legal and social advancement.” She was also accused of posing a greater threat to the lesbian community than homophobes pose because women like her “dilute and pollute the very definition and essence of lesbianism” by calling themselves lesbians. One reader wrote, “I don’t consider any woman a ‘dyke’ who sleeps with a man. Period.” Clausen’s Fall 1990 defender pointed out that some of the points made in readers’ letters were not responsive to Clausen’s article at all. She wrote that “the letters ignored what for me was the most significant point: that Clausen no longer feels she can attach a label to her sexuality. This point was made quite clearly, and I am confused by the letters condemning her for continuing to call herself lesbian.”

The fact that letters ostensibly written in response to Clausen’s article were less than completely responsive to the article itself suggests that Clausen’s article was only a trigger. Most of the women who wrote to the editor were obviously engaged in a much larger ongoing debate with a rather complicated history. The two men who wrote brief complimentary letters were apparently not party to the same discourse. Whether they were actually unaware of the heavy political debate within which Clausen’s experiences took place, or whether, as men, they could not participate in this debate, their letters gave the impression that they were peacefully oblivious to the bullets flying past their ears.

*Out/Look’s* Spring 1992 issue on bisexuality included fifteen pages of cartoons and a selection of articles titled “What do bisexuals want?”
“Just add water: Searching for the Bisexual politic,” “Strangers at home: Bisexuals in the queer movement,” and “Love and rockets.” Under the titles, the authors explored the debate about bisexuality, analyzing the political sources of lesbians’ concerns—and secondarily, the concerns of gays in general—about bisexuality and outlining the strategic and ideological difficulties facing the bisexual movement.

In the next issue, the editors wrote that they had “received a striking number of responses” to the issue on bisexuality, and that “Curiously enough, the last time we received this much mail was in response to Jan Clausen’s ‘My Interesting Condition’.” “Tender spot?” they rhetorically questioned their readers. According to the editors, most of the letters they had received were from “bisexuals who felt uncomfortable with the constraints of a ‘debate’ around bisexuality as we had posited it.” They included excerpts from these letters in a sidebar that spanned the length of a printed dialogue among three bisexual writer/activists who presented their views of what the issues really were. Amanda Udis-Kessler, Elizabeth Reba Weise, and Sarah Murray explained that bisexuals are diverse people with a variety of personal needs and political goals. Weise pinpointed the growth of the lesbian and gay movement during the 1970s and 1980s—especially the emergence of a political lesbian identity—as the source of the current antipathy toward bisexuality, and Udis-Kessler attributed the recent growth of a political bisexual identity to this antipathy. Weise also pointed out that some of the most active leaders in the lesbian movement were really bisexual women who either repressed part of themselves in the name of lesbian purity or remained quiet about their involvements with men, and who had recently begun to show “a little more of the reality of their lives.” Bisexuals were not outsiders seeking to ride lesbian and gay coat-tails, but insiders who were finally being honest about themselves.

In the Lesbian and Gay Community represented by Out/Look, bisexuality is a very controversial issue with important implications for lesbian and gay discourse. In 1990, Clausen established a connection between “lesbians who sleep with men” and “bisexuality,” thereby constructing bisexuality not as a new issue to be added to an existing repertoire, but as a challenge to ongoing lesbian and gay discourse. Lesbians’ objections to bisexuality were aired generously and taken seriously, not marginalized and dismissed as they were in The Advocate. But by 1992, these objections were replaced by the voices of bisexuals
themselves. The debate among lesbians about the place of bisexuals in the lesbian community had become a debate in which bisexuals themselves were an interested party and had an active voice. Bisexuality as an issue had been replaced by bisexual issues, for example, the development of a bisexual politic and the relationship between bisexual politics and lesbian and gay politics. Whereas The Advocate’s “Bi and Beyond” had framed the issue as one of bisexual inclusion in the lesbian and gay movement, Out/Look had gone one step farther to construct not only bisexuals, but a political bisexual voice.

Meanwhile, in the conservative world of 10 Percent, the issue of bisexuality—let alone bisexual issues or the bisexual voice—barely exists at all. 10 Percent came closest to tackling the issue of bisexuality in its second issue, published in Spring 1993. “My girlfriend is becoming the man of my dreams” was written by Kate Bornstein, a “bisexual heterosexual lesbian gay male transsexual woman who is in a committed relationship with a lesbian man named David.” She pointed out that bisexuals gained recognition by inclusion in the name of the 1993 March on Washington but transgendered people did not, thereby portraying bisexuals as members of the gay establishment that excluded transgendered people. Judging from the lack of letters to the editor in the next issue, readers had no opinion on the subject. The word “bisexual” appeared again a few issues later when Eric Marcus wrote, “I’m not even all that comfortable being grouped with bisexuals, let alone transsexuals, transvestites, and queer straights” because “we have different lives, face different challenges.” Two letters to the editor in the next issue disagreed, arguing that Marcus’s attitude was divisive and phobic. Neither reader mentioned bisexuality except when quoting Marcus; the issue constructed was a general one concerning appreciation of diversity.

In lesbian and gay publications, the issue of bisexuality—which is primarily of interest to lesbians—competes for space with gay issues such as AIDS. In lesbian publications, more time and energy can be devoted to hashing out the details of lesbian ideology, including the political meaning of bisexuality. Dedicated to the discussion of issues that are relevant within lesbian feminism, Lesbian Contradiction provides a receptive audience for discussions of lesbians who have sex with men and bisexuality.

Like general lesbian and gay publications, Lesbian Contradiction initially constructed the issue as one of lesbians who have sex with men.
In issue number 2, "Many Lesbians Are Going Straight Now . . .—A Conversation" consisted of thirteen comments written on a wall in a women's bathroom, one in response to the other. The women had thirteen very different opinions and perspectives. Some discussed their feelings about lovers who leave them for men or offered opinions about whether lesbians who "go straight" are capitulating to compulsory heterosexuality or whether they were never lesbians to begin with. Others acknowledged their own attractions to men and wrote about the isolation they felt because they feared censure by lesbians. Voice #11 mentioned that she was just beginning to find support from other bisexuals and asked others not to judge her. Voice #12 agreed that "We should all be free to be who we are," but Voice #13 revealed that liberal views are not always accompanied by understanding, "[e]ven if some people can't make up their minds who they are!” A year later, Gwen Fay expressed her exasperation over the fact that lesbians can be as prejudiced as anyone else, and deplored the fact that there are so few opportunities for us to air our differences that the conversation had had to take place on a bathroom wall.

These opinions were echoed in 1989 after Lesbian Contradiction published "Desire and Consequences: Sleeping with a Strange Man" by Juana Maria Paz, "A Second Coming Out" by Stephanie Sugars, and "I'm Still a Lesbian" by Jane Dwinell. One reader blasted the magazine for printing Paz's description of "women and men fucking each other." She did not "[condemn] Juana for having heterosexual sex" but she resented Juana's claim to lesbian identity and Lesbian Contradiction's decision to give space to heterosexuality when space for lesbian expression was so limited already. The editors defended their decision by reiterating the newspaper's mission to serve as a broad forum for discussion of feminism by all women, not only lesbians. Dwinell wrote about her life as a lesbian-identified woman in a long-term committed relationship with a man. The response to Dwinell was even more vehement than the response to Paz had been. Lesbian Contradiction printed three letters from readers who denounced Dwinell for calling herself a lesbian, denying heterosexual privilege, trivializing the importance lesbians attach to the genders of women's sexual partners, and comparing lesbians' criticism of heterosexuality to society's condemnation of lesbianism. The editors expressed their gratitude for a fourth letter, an "anonymous response from a woman whose way of relating to men and
to lesbians reminds us how many more variations there are in these matters than we might think." The gratitude of the editors suggests that this was the only letter sympathetic to Dwinell received; this fact, and the anonymity of the letter’s author, say as much as her letter itself does. Whereas the readers of The Advocate applauded humanism and characterized lesbian feminist objections to bisexuality as intolerant and outdated, the letter-writing readers of Lesbian Contradiction were almost universally antagonistic toward bisexuality. As much as the editors of Lesbian Contradiction wanted to present the other side of the debate, they could not because their readers apparently did not share the liberal humanist attitudes that dominated the pages of other lesbian and gay publications.

Although Lesbian Contradiction’s readers continued to debate “lesbians who sleep with men” through 1989, they also began discussing “bisexuality” in 1987, sooner than the more mainstream lesbian and gay publications. In “Thinking about Bisexuality” Marilyn Murphy and Irene Weiss argued that “non-lesbian” is a more appropriate term than “heterosexual” for women who live heterosexual lives, because “heterosexual” cannot be considered a sexual preference in a heterosexist society. Lesbians are lesbians because they have chosen to live lesbian lives and identify as lesbians; most women who live heterosexual lives never chose to be heterosexual. The argument has interesting implications for bisexuals. The authors rejected the concept of bisexuality as a sexual/affectional preference. They argued that when a bisexual is with a man, she is heterosexual because she enjoys heterosexual privileges. But when she is with a woman, she is not lesbian because heterosexual privilege remains an option for her. She is, in fact, the only woman who consciously chooses heterosexuality because she is the only woman who ever lives a heterosexual life with full knowledge of the other option; the bisexual woman is, therefore, the only true “heterosexual.”

The next issue of Lesbian Contradiction carried two letters from readers. One thanked Murphy and Weiss for giving her a good laugh by exemplifying the absurdity of the identity debates. The other documented her own journey from political lesbian feminist dykedom, through her politically correct dismay as she realized she was attracted to men, to her current opinion that “[b]eing attracted to one sex or the other is not good or bad, it just is what it is. Political integrity is not based on whether we sleep with men or with women, but on how we
live our lives.” Again, the fact that this reader chose to remain anonymous says as much as her letter does.\textsuperscript{33} Although these two letters were critical of lesbian feminist antagonism toward bisexuals, neither letter conveyed a strong bisexual voice. The former dismissed the debate as trivial; the latter was a plea for tolerance.

But a self-conscious and political bisexual voice did begin appearing in \textit{Lesbian Contradiction} in 1990, after Murphy’s views were aired once again in “The Gay-Straight Split Revisited.” Dajenya deplored the tendency of oppressed groups to argue over who’s more oppressed, rejected the accusation that as a bisexual she was “consorting with the enemy,” and presented her bisexuality as a source of political awareness and action.\textsuperscript{34} In the same issue, Jane Litwoman wrote that “gender is just not what I care about,” and analyzed the sources of her privilege and oppression as a person who, in this “gender-fetishic culture,” is usually labeled “bisexual.”\textsuperscript{35} Three years later, Alena Smith wrote about her ability to enjoy making love with both genders, and rejected the stereotypes that as a bisexual woman she was “going through a phase” or avoiding serious relationships.\textsuperscript{36} Although self-consciously bisexual voices appeared in \textit{Lesbian Contradiction} two years earlier than they did in \textit{Out/Look}, they were individual voices that spoke of the personal, sometimes in political terms but largely in reaction to lesbians’ criticisms of bisexuality; there was little evidence of the growing bisexual community with issues and interests of its own. In \textit{Lesbian Contradiction}, the “bisexual issue” is still a “lesbian controversy.”

In summary, different lesbian and/or gay publications present the issue of bisexuality differently, and some, like \textit{10 Percent}, don’t present it as an issue at all. In the mainstream and traditionally male-dominated pages of \textit{The Advocate}, bisexuality is merely a topic for conversation. Bisexuals came into existence when \textit{The Advocate} wasn’t looking and when bisexuals wrote to \textit{The Advocate} to announce themselves, \textit{The Advocate} duly reported their existence and then went on with business as usual. Insofar as bisexuality is an issue, the issue is bisexual inclusion and the predominant liberal humanist opinion favors inclusion. In contrast, in the Lesbian and Gay Community represented by \textit{Out/Look}, bisexuality is a controversial issue. Lesbian feminist concerns about bisexuality were serious, but they belonged to an earlier era and their merit is fading as the lesbian and gay mainstream returns to its humanist origins. The bisexual movement is the wave of the future. Bisexuals not
only exist and belong in the lesbian and gay movement, but they have interests, issues, and a voice of their own. Bisexuals are no longer asking to be included in the lesbian and gay movement; they are in the lesbian and gay movement and they are also forming a separate community and movement. Finally, if one reads about The Lesbian Community in *Lesbian Contradiction*, one finds that lesbian feminist concerns about bisexuality are alive and well, and that they drown out the few anonymous humanists who dare dissent. There are a few political lesbians who ask not to be condemned for their heterosexual feelings, and a few bisexuals who reject lesbians' negative stereotypes about bisexuality and describe bisexuality in political terms, but there is little evidence of a collective bisexual voice or of a bisexual movement with issues defined by bisexuals.

Lesbians who read these different publications receive very different images of what The Lesbian Community thinks about bisexuality. Which image is accurate? Is bisexuality an issue, or not? If it is, what is the issue? Are objections to bisexuality limited to a few extremists whose politics are stuck in the 1970s as *Out/Look* suggested, or are they alive and well and dominating lesbians' opinions about bisexuality, as shown in *Lesbian Contradiction*? Are bisexuals visible, vocal, and independent political activists, or apologetic hangers-on? The truth is that none of these images are entirely accurate, because each reflects the opinions of only a segment of the Community. More importantly, however, articles and letters to the editor reflect only the opinions of those individuals who bother to express their opinions in writing and have the means to get them published. The vast majority of lesbians—and bisexual women—lack either the time or the inclination to write articles or letters to the editor. They might not even read the articles and letters written by others. What do they think?

To find out what lesbians and bisexual women think, we have to find the voices that are not represented in The Lesbian and Gay Press. This book represents those voices and demonstrates that both lesbians and bisexual women have strong and varied opinions on the subject. Most of this book focuses on the opinions of lesbians, among whom the issue of bisexuality is alive and well and very controversial. The intensity of lesbians' opinions about bisexuality suggests that the issue has very deep political implications. It is the argument of this book that these implications cut right to the heart of the meaning of lesbianism itself. As
lesbians, we have fought long and hard for our lesbian identities and communities, and bisexuality constitutes a psychological, social, and political threat to these hard-won victories. It forces us to confront our own differences of opinion over what lesbianism is and what its political implications are; that is, who we are and what we stand for. In the early 1970s, we debated these issues openly as we laid the groundwork for the lesbian movement. Since then, the “who” and “what” debates have faded into the background, but the issues were never resolved. We still disagree about who we are and what we stand for. The topic of bisexuality uncovers these dormant issues and brings our differences to the surface. The energy with which we debate bisexuality today is none other than the energy with which we struggled to define ourselves two decades ago.