Since the study described in this book was done in the mid 1980s, bisexuals have made great strides in the process of building a political movement of their own. In the space of a few years, a few isolated bisexual support groups and local resource centers—similar in purpose to the homophile groups of the 1950s that predated gay liberation—have been replaced by an international network of groups ranging from support groups to publishing collectives, archives, and political action groups. Bisexual political activists, once nearly nonexistent, now communicate with each other via electronic mail and conference calls, meet each other at national and international conferences, and elect delegates to represent different geographic regions in a national bisexual organization. In other words, bisexuals have rapidly built the structures and institutions that provide the supporting framework for a political movement. Needless to say, during these few years of rapid structural growth, there has been a great deal of heated discussion about what the ideology of this movement should be. Although, structurally, the bisexual movement already resembles an advanced political movement—largely
because many bisexual activists are experienced veterans of the left, feminist, and lesbian movements who know how to build the framework of a movement—the ideological debates reflect the movement’s infancy.

The ideological problems that bisexuals face are strikingly similar to the ideological problems lesbians in the feminist movement faced in the early 1970s. Like lesbians, the most important task facing bisexuals is politicizing an apolitical sexual identity, so that that identity can provide the basis for political claims-making. But the political arena in which bisexuals are faced with this task differs from the political arena in which lesbians politicized lesbianism in some important ways. When lesbians began to politicize lesbian identity, sexuality was considered a private, not a political, matter. Therefore, lesbians’ first steps in the politicization of lesbianism were the politicization of sexuality and the simultaneous desexualization of lesbianism. They gave to lesbianism a politics that served lesbian interests and that constructed lesbians on one hand and heterosexual (feminists) on the other hand as sexual interest groups. Two decades later, bisexuals are faced with a political arena in which sexuality has already been politicized and these two interest groups have already found their voices and staked out their territories. Bisexuals’ task, then, is to reconstruct the political arena. Bisexuals have to give new political meanings to sexuality that serve their interests as bisexuals, and they have to introduce themselves as an interest group with a voice.

The fact that bisexuals face a context in which sexuality is already politicized is reflected in the greater complexity of the political discourse within which bisexuals must make their voice heard. In the 1970s, lesbians struggled to legitimate themselves within two dominant political traditions, the feminist and the ethnic political traditions. Each tradition offered its own language of political legitimation; feminism offered a language of legitimation based on personal experience and choice whereas ethnic politics offered a language of legitimation based on essential being. To politicize lesbianism, lesbians developed their own political language, the language of lesbian feminism. Today, lesbian feminism—or, more broadly speaking, sexual identity politics—is a third established political tradition, and bisexuals must somehow make their voices heard not only in the languages of feminism and ethnicity, but in the language of sexual identity politics.
In many ways, the arguments bisexuals are using to politicize bisexuality resemble the arguments lesbians used to politicize lesbianism. However, because the context in which bisexuals face this task is different from the context lesbians faced in the 1970s, their arguments must be adapted to their own unique circumstances. Both the similarities and the differences can be illustrated by examining the current debate among bisexuals about the ideological underpinnings of the bisexual movement. The beginnings of this debate were found among the bisexual women who participated in the study described in this book; since then, the debate has exploded on the pages of bisexual publications and the computer screens of bisexual activists. Chapter 1 examined the treatment of bisexuality by the lesbian press; this chapter will bring us full circle by exploring the newly emerging bisexual press.

The Bisexual Press: Forum for the Discussion of Bisexual Identity, Community, and Ideology

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, dozens of bisexual organizations began publishing newsletters, and one organization, the Bay Area Bisexual Network (BABN), began publishing a magazine called *Anything That Moves: Beyond the Myths of Bisexuality*. The number and technical sophistication of bisexual publications is still substantially less than that offered by the lesbian and gay press, but these publications already constitute an identifiable bisexual press that provides a forum for the discussion of bisexual political ideology and a vehicle for the creation of a bisexual identity, community, and political.

Until recently, however, page space in bisexual newsletters was not devoted to ideological discussion. Instead, newsletters focused primarily on items pertaining to the structure of the bisexual movement. Common items included calendars of events, reports about conferences, notes from business meetings, fund raising issues, descriptions of groups' organizational structures, appeals for volunteers to help with organizational tasks, calls for papers to be submitted to forthcoming bisexual anthologies and other publications, and announcements of the results of elections.
in local and national bisexual groups, of the formation of new groups and publications, and of the times and places of upcoming meetings and social events. This emphasis on structural matters was especially characteristic of the late 1980s and the very early 1990s, as illustrated by two newsletters, *Bi Women* and *North Bi Northwest*. For example, the May 1987 issue of *Bi Women* published a one-and-a-half-page long list of bisexual organizations in the U.S. and Europe and the minutes of two coordinating committee meetings that focused on structural items, such as office space, managing the telephone, and financial issues. In January 1989, *Bi Women* encouraged its readers to become involved in a planned U.S.-Canadian (North American) Bisexual Network (named the North American Multicultural Bisexual Network at its inception, the organization was later renamed BiNet USA). The two-column article described the structure of the organization and the networking responsibilities of its delegates in detail but made no mention of the purpose or goals of the organization; readers unfamiliar with the organization were left to infer its purpose from its name and/or structure. In September 1991, *North Bi Northwest* printed a report of the second annual conference of BiNet USA. The report focused on explaining the name change and enumerated the proposed projects of the organization, including the establishment of a newsletter and the appointment of a task force to find a location for the following year's conference. Again, ideological issues were largely absent from the report. During these years, most of the newsletter page space that was not devoted to structural issues was filled with news reports about events of interest to the entire lesbian, gay, and bisexual community, book and movie reviews, poetry, and original fiction, including erotica.

Early in the 1990s, bisexual newsletters began paying more attention to ideological issues. In November 1991, *Bi Women* reported on two bisexual community meetings that had been held in Boston. This time, the report discussed the issues that arose and explicitly stated that bisexuals need to develop a sense of themselves as bisexuals and talk about the goals of the bisexual movement. In May 1993, *North Bi Northwest* printed a report on the first Northwest regional BiNet USA conference, which differed substantially from its 1991 report on the national BiNet conference. The 1993 report described the topics of the workshops at the conference, information that reflected the issues organizers and attendees considered important. In March 1994, *North*
Bi Northwest reported the formation of a new local bisexual group, describing the group’s goals instead of its organizational structure.

Among the ideological issues facing bisexuals are the questions “Who are we?” and “What do we stand for?” The first question is important because a concept of what it means to be bisexual would enhance bisexuals’ sense of identity as individuals and as a community. Also, in the ethnic political tradition, constructing themselves as a definable group would legitimate bisexuals’ political demands. But amid the general lack of attention paid to bisexual ideology in bisexual publications, the question of definition seems to have been intentionally avoided rather than simply overlooked. When the question is raised, the answer is usually that bisexuals come in “all shapes, sizes, and colors,” and that bisexuality therefore defies definition. For example, Beth Reba Weise observed that “every city, every group, has its own identity” and that these identities range from “sex-positive/sex-radical groups to vanilla feminist groups, married bi men’s support groups to Queer Nation activist groups, strongly non-gay identified to queerer than queer.” Kathleen Bennett wrote, “The only thing that bisexual couples have in common among themselves is the fact that every coupling is a unique and individual situation,” and Deborah Anapol discussed polyfidelity and reminded readers that not all bisexual partnerships are two-person “couples.” In other words, bisexuals are a diverse group with no single quality in common.

A few authors have made isolated attempts to propose definitions. In general, these definitions are broad in an effort to encompass bisexual diversity, and they reflect ideological concerns about self-determination and gender that I will discuss later. For example, Paul Smith argued that “[h]ow we self-identify is all the justification we need” to be considered “really” bisexual. Although this definition has met little to no resistance in the printed bisexual media, some bisexual activists privately express concerns about even this libertarian definition. Other authors offer their own definitions of bisexuality, usually emphasizing that they are personal definitions that might not work for everyone or in every situation. For example, during an interview with Newsweek, Robyn Ochs defined bisexuality as “the potential for being sexually and/or romantically involved with members of either gender,” hoping to dispel stereotypes of bisexuals as promiscuous. Finally, some authors have attempted to identify “types” of bisexuals, but these typologies are
usually offered with the intention of demonstrating the variety of ways to be bisexual rather than nailing down definitions.

Bisexuals are not unaware of the advantages of developing a definition of bisexuality that might form the basis for an ethnic bisexual identity. For example, Sharon Gonsalves wrote that "[l]abels are important for members of oppressed groups. They create an in-group and out-group, a minority culture from which we derive strength." Naomi Tucker also pointed out that labels facilitate visibility and provide support (1991). But, nevertheless, Gonsalves, Tucker, and other bisexual activists shy away from specifying the substance of what those labels should mean and warn that labels can be limiting.

Besides resisting the question of definition, bisexual activists generally spend little effort constructing a historical sense of "who we are" as bisexuals. Occasionally, there are attempts to identify bisexuals in history; for example, the September 1991 issue of *North Bi Northwest* included a list of "[p]eople who had relations with both sexes." But by and large, bisexuals are constructing a history not by reclaiming bisexuality in the past, but by documenting the activities of the contemporary bisexual movement. For example, *Anything That Moves* #4 published a detailed account of the history of the struggle to get "bi" included in the title of the 1993 March on Washington, and *BiNet Newsletter* 1(1), published in August 1991, documented the founding and development of BiNet USA. Bisexual conferences are often videotaped as a way of recording history. This emphasis on the contemporary is not accidental. Amanda Udis-Kessler warned bisexuals not to make the same mistake lesbians and gays did by attempting to reconstruct history in order to create a heritage for themselves. She pointed out that doing so would involve identifying as bisexual people who had not identified themselves as bisexual, thus violating individuals' rights to self-definition and trivializing the specific historical circumstances that had led to the development of a bisexual identity in contemporary society.

Compared to the question of what bisexuality is, the question of what bisexuals stand for receives a great deal of attention in the bisexual press and, although there are controversial issues, has produced some basic ideological groundwork. Three dominant themes have emerged that apparently enjoy widespread acceptance as tenets of the bisexual politic. The first theme is the emphasis on diversity. Of course, one aspect of this diversity is the very sexual diversity that renders a defini-
tion of bisexuality problematic—not only differences in relationship status and views of bisexuality, but also differences in sexual practices. But bisexuals also encourage each other to celebrate other types of diversity, particularly racial/ethnic and cultural diversity. Bennett described diversity as “one of the major rallying cries of the bisexual movement,” and Autumn Courtney wrote about her realization that “all oppressions are linked together.” Courtney’s comment implies that this linkage is one reason for taking diversity seriously, but ideological justifications or explanations given for the celebration of diversity are rare. Instead, the importance of acknowledging diversity is usually taken as self-evident and the emphasis on diversity is found throughout bisexual organizing and writing; it is not ghettoized as a “special issue.”

The celebration of sexual diversity is reflected in the pervasiveness of sex-positive or sex-radical philosophies which eschew political constraints on sexuality in favor of sexual open-mindedness. For example, BiNet USA held a focus group on sex positivism to ensure that BiNet represents the interests of a variety of people, including sex workers and sadomasochists as well as celibates. Anything That Moves published an issue called “The Joy of Bi Sex,” and North Bi Northwest also devoted an issue to the discussion and celebration of sex. Not all bisexuals ascribe to sex positivism, but for those who don’t it exists as a philosophy to be reckoned with. For example, Erica Avery recounted an incident in which a woman at a workshop on sex positivism at a BiNet conference asked “What is sex positivism?” and was soundly rebuked; apparently, she was expected not only to be familiar with the philosophy, but supportive of it.

Attention to racial/ethnic diversity is also fairly pervasive. Bisexual organizations typically include references to race and other social differences in their statements of purpose. The Bay Area Bisexual Network describes itself as “supporting the rights of all women and men to develop as whole beings without oppression because of age, race, religion, color, class or different abilities” in addition to differences of “sexual preference, gender, gender preference, and/or responsible consensual sexual behavior practices.” Issue #2 of the magazine published by BABN, Anything That Moves, was devoted to the topic of community, including a discussion of the diversity of that community. The issue included articles by Peggy Krouskoff about being an Arab-American bisexual woman, and by Thyme S. Siegel on anti-Jewish op-
pression. The Seattle Bisexual Women’s Network (SBWN) held a workshop on racism for itself because White members wanted to learn how to make SBWN a “more inviting and safe place for women of color.”

A few months later, Emily Susan Manning, a European-American woman, suggested that the low turn-out of Women of Color might be due to SBWN’s primary focus on gender—a consequence of its feminist ideology—which tends to exclude issues important to Women of Color. Some organizations describe or name themselves as “multicultural”; the removal of this term when NAMBN changed its name to BiNet USA was very controversial.

Despite the change in name, the organization reaffirmed its commitment to multiculturalism, and the Fall 1991 issue of BiNet Newsletter, the newsletter of BiNet USA, included an article entitled “Tips for organizers: Multi-cultural/multi-ethnic outreach” by Cianna Stewart, which was later reprinted in North Bi Northwest, the newsletter of SBWN.

A commonly expressed sentiment is that the bisexual community derives strength, and perhaps even unity, from its diversity. But even more ideologically promising is the idea that the bisexual community derives its uniqueness and its political nature from its diversity. Smith suggested that an appreciation of the strength in diversity could be “the unique contribution of the bisexual community to other communities,” i.e., that which the bisexual community is in a unique position to develop and offer. Elias Farajajé-Jones also sees a special relationship between bisexuality and multiculturalism; he argued that both are “rooted in challenging monodimensional structures of thinking and acting (monoculturalism and monosexuality).” In other words, the very diversity that prevents bisexuals from identifying their common characteristic and thereby defining themselves as a political group in the ethnic tradition nevertheless provides bisexuals with an ideological purpose; the diversity itself becomes the basis for the political meaning of bisexuality.

Farajajé-Jones’s comment also illustrates the second ideological theme that has emerged from discussions in the bisexual press. This theme is the conceptualization of bisexuality as a challenge to traditional Western thinking, particularly categorical thinking, and the argument that the political goal of bisexuals should be to break down dichotomous classification systems. This includes not only the dichotomous conceptualization of sexuality in which people are divided into homosexuals and
heterosexuals, but also dichotomous gender in which people are classified as either women or men.\textsuperscript{27}

In keeping with the ideological emphasis on diversity, the argument that bisexuality challenges categorical thinking usually begins with the assertion that there is unlimited variation and fluidity in human sexual desires and behaviors. Often, this point is supported by scientific research, particularly the Kinsey reports, and sometimes, it borders on pure essentialism.\textsuperscript{28} This unlimited sexual variety is forced into a certain number of categories constructed by society—namely, homosexuality and heterosexuality—thus limiting people's sexual expression and abridging their right to sexual self-determination. Bisexuals, by refusing to classify their sexuality as either homosexual or heterosexual and by refusing to limit their sexual expressions to the patterns sanctioned by society, present a challenge to these restrictive categories and in so doing strike a blow for sexual liberation and sexual self-determination.\textsuperscript{29} For example, Ellen Brenner wrote that her self "steadfastly refuses to fit in any of the boxes society has created," and Betty Aubut said in an interview that she identifies politically as a bisexual because, to her, bisexual means "opposing restrictive categories."\textsuperscript{30} Raven Gildea wrote that when bisexuals refuse to "fit into one of two mutually exclusive categories," they "challenge the either/or thinking on which Western civilization is based."\textsuperscript{31} Bisexuality can be co-opted into the sexual dichotomy if it is conceptualized as a hybrid form of sexuality. Smith rejected the concept of bisexuality as "half-homosexual and half-heterosexual" precisely to preserve bisexuals' status as outsiders to the homosexual and heterosexual categories.\textsuperscript{32} By existing outside the categories homosexual and heterosexual, bisexuals challenge the existence of those categories and further the "real goal of the bi movement," which is "to widen the options" because "people should be free to love whomever they choose in whatever manner that works best for them."\textsuperscript{33}

Bisexuality is a challenge to categorical thinking about sexuality not only because it does not fit into either of the two existing categories, but because it is itself difficult to define in categorical terms. If bisexuals had a common characteristic by which they could be defined and distinguished from homosexuals and heterosexuals, bisexuality could be constructed as a third category, thereby preserving categorical thought if not dichotomous sexuality. But we have already seen that bisexuals are in no hurry to develop a simple definition of bisexuality by which they
could reconstruct themselves as a group in the ethnic tradition. In addition to celebrating the diversity of the bisexual community, many bisexuals feel that the concept of bisexuality itself should "embrace fluidity, subtle shading, ambiguity, wide variance, and flexibility in sexual experience and response." Such a concept is difficult to express in categorical language. Other individuals recognize that labels lead to categorization and therefore reject labels; Tucker "refuse[s] to limit myself by squeezing my sexuality into a one-word definition" (1991:245). Lucy Friedland and Liz A. Highleyman (1991) acknowledge that categories are useful tools but caution that they are not ends in themselves and must be open to change when they become limiting. Thus, bisexuality and bisexuals resist being co-opted into categorical thinking and in doing so, remain a challenge to dichotomous sexuality. Again, the very diversity of the bisexual community that makes it difficult for bisexuals to agree on a definition of bisexuality provides bisexuals with a political purpose and an ideological position.

Some bisexuals embrace the concept of a sexual continuum as an alternative to the dichotomous model of sexuality. The continuum model represents the viewpoint that sexuality is not categorical; that is, that there is variety in human sexuality and that there are no clear dividing lines amid this variety. It also has the advantage of permitting the modeling of sexual fluidity, which can be expressed in terms of movement along the continuum. On this continuum, bisexuality exists between homosexuality and heterosexuality, and connects them. As such, bisexuality is a "bridge" between homosexuality and heterosexuality, and promises to serve as the mediator in the sexual identity wars. As attractive as this concept might be, Avery asserted that the concept of a continuum—on which people are generally assumed to "progress" from heterosexuality to "full-fledged queerness"—merely reflects the split between homosexuality and heterosexuality that bisexuals should be challenging. Responding to Avery, Pat Cattolico suggested that the continuum should have asexuality ("that is, not at all sexual") and sexuality ("that is, what we today call bisexual") as its endpoints, with monosexuality "somewhere in the middle." Ideally, however, both women preferred to simply acknowledge that all people are "just sexual beings," thus rejecting all methods of modeling sexual variation.

If bisexuality challenges dichotomous sexuality, it also challenges the dichotomous distinction between women and men. Different authors
have offered slightly different explanations of how bisexuality subverts gender. Smith perceives bisexuals as in "revolt against gender-based roles" because bisexuals do not conform to gender roles in "deciding with whom we have sex." 38 In other words, for a bisexual, choice of sexual partners is not an aspect of one's own gender role. Karin Baker and Helen Harrison argued that "[b]isexuality works to subvert the gender system and everything it upholds because it is not based on gender. In addition, bisexual identity and struggle lend themselves in a special way to exploring the possibility that women and men are 'more alike than different,' and that variations in human character bear no intrinsic connection to biological sex." 39 In other words, bisexuality diminishes the importance and the size of the difference between women and men. Tucker agreed with Baker and Harrison that "[s]ome of us are bisexual because we do not pay much attention to the gender of our attractions," but she argued that other people are bisexual because "we do see tremendous gender differences and want to experience them all." No matter what the mechanism—whether by disentangling erotic choice from gender role, by reducing the importance of partner gender in erotic choice, by minimizing gender differences, or by adding the option "both" to "either/or" gendered thinking—all of these theorists agree that bisexuality contributes to the breakdown of dichotomous gender.

Furthermore, as gender dichotomies break down, hierarchies based on gender—for example, male domination and compulsory heterosexuality—will weaken. There is, therefore, an intimate connection between bisexuality and both women's and lesbian/gay liberation. Some bisexuals hope that the bisexual movement will exceed the accomplishments of the feminist and lesbian/gay movements. For example, Sarah Listerud hopes that bisexuals can penetrate the "heterosexual hegemony" farther than lesbians and gays have been able to do, by creating spaces within heterosexual society where it is OK to be queer. 40 As Gildea put it, "The bisexual movement has the potential to take queer liberation to new heights." 41 With regard to feminism, Ellen Barnett argued that "[b]isexuals are also in the best position to make a real difference in the way men and women relate to each other. We have to learn how to create and maintain truly equitable relationships with our partners regardless of their gender." She conceded that "there are bisexuals who are not feminists as there are feminists that are not bi or lesbian," but her argument establishes bisexuality itself as not only feminist, but more
feminist than lesbianism. Other bisexuals make the more modest claim that "a politicized bisexual movement can play a significant role in the struggle to end women's oppression and for lesbian and gay liberation" and caution against the temptation of thinking that bisexuality is a superior form of sexuality, a trap that would thwart the liberatory goals of the bisexual movement as it did the lesbian movement.

It should be noted that a decline in the significance of gender does not imply the elimination of gender; although some activists privately advocate the erasure of gender differences, this viewpoint is expressed only rarely in bisexual publications. On the contrary, the viewpoint expressed most often is that gender differences should be appreciated and celebrated, as any other form of diversity should be celebrated. Androgyny is a gender variation that, like any other gender variation, should be enjoyed; it is not an ideal toward which all bisexuals should strive. What needs to be eliminated is not gender, but oppression based on gender. That is, gender should not be prescribed on the basis of biological sex, it should not dictate one's opportunities or choices in life, and it need not be a determining factor in the choice of sexual partners. Gender should be liberating, not limiting.

To facilitate the decline of the significance of gender, some bisexuals define bisexuality as a form of sexuality independent of gender, or assert that they fall in love with the "person," not the "gender." For example, Weise wrote that she and her friends fall in love with the person first; the fact that that person is either male or female has social and political consequences for the relationship that follows but is irrelevant to the process of falling in love. BABN's statement of purpose reinforces the insignificance of gender: "We support relationships among people regardless of gender" (italics mine). Other bisexuals do not see gender as completely irrelevant, but assert that—unlike homosexuals and heterosexuals—gender is not a determinative factor in their choice of partners.

To emphasize the distinction between bisexuals, for whom gender might be an irrelevant or relatively unimportant factor in choosing partners, and homosexuals and heterosexuals who practice gender exclusivity, some bisexuals refer to homosexuals and heterosexuals as "monosexuals." This terminology has the effect of creating a unifying definition of bisexuality by constructing bisexuals as people whose common characteristic is their refusal to practice gender exclusivity. As such,
it is a definition that has the potential to create an ethnic bisexual identity. But, as I mentioned earlier, some bisexual activists warn against constructing bisexuals as a minority group in the ethnic political tradition. To do so would reproduce the type of dichotomous thinking that is gradually becoming the antithesis of bisexual ideology, and it would impose on lesbians and gay men a construction of themselves that is not of their own choosing, thereby violating their right to self-definition.

If bisexuality poses a challenge to dichotomous gender, then it follows that one might adopt a bisexual identity as a way to protest dichotomous gender and the oppressions that are based on gender. In other words, bisexuality can be seen not only as consistent with the political goal of dismantling gender, but as a means toward that goal. Lenore Norrgard reported that this is already happening. She wrote, “Some bisexuals feel very strongly that they have made a philosophical or even a political choice: they believe that everyone can and should be capable of loving both genders both emotionally and sexually, and favor neither over the other in any way.” She underscored the political nature of this choice by asserting that although for some people this choice is “directly supported by their own personal experience,” others find that their philosophy “doesn’t work out for them in practice.” In other words, they identify as bisexual for political, not personal reasons. Kaplan is among those whose bisexual identity is at least in part a political, rather than a sexual, statement; her bisexual identity is her way of saying “no to a world where gender determines my desire and my behavior.” Here lies the beginnings of a “political bisexuality” analogous to the “political lesbianism” of the 1970s. Tucker warned bisexuals not to follow lesbians too far on this path, because “we must be careful not to make the mistakes of some of our lesbian sisters who profess sexual acceptance” but whose efforts to validate lesbianism led them to “invalidate bisexuality as an orientation” (1991:246). Bisexuals must keep their sights on the goal of promoting sexual self-definition for everyone.

The third ideological theme developing in the bisexual press pertains to the form of bisexual oppression and the appropriate responses to this oppression. Any political movement needs to be motivated by an understanding of that which it seeks to change; in the case of liberation movements, this means an understanding of the nature and source of the oppression that prevents liberty. One of the forms of bisexual oppression
that bisexuals have identified is a general misunderstanding of bisexuality. This misunderstanding is often described in terms of “myths” about bisexuality. In the absence of a clear sense of what does constitute bisexuality, it might seem difficult to identify any beliefs about bisexuality as “myths,” but there is in fact considerable agreement among bisexuals in this area. Most of this agreement revolves not around the stance that particular beliefs about bisexuality are untrue, but around the position that they are overgeneralizations.

For example, one frequently mentioned myth is that bisexuals are not monogamous. The name of the magazine Anything That Moves is controversial because, critics say, it promotes this myth. Authors who mention the nonmonogamy myth in order to challenge it are usually careful to say that it is untrue not because all bisexuals are monogamous, but because not all bisexuals are nonmonogamous. For example, after describing her own varied sexual history, Bettykay told readers not to generalize from her behavior to all bisexuals because, regarding promiscuity, “some are, and some aren’t.” Here, the issue of diversity arises; some bisexuals are monogamous, some are duogamous, some are polyfidelitous, and some are not fidelitous. What is offensive about the image of bisexuals as nonmonogamous is the assumption that nonmonogamy is by definition or by fact necessarily a characteristic shared by all bisexuals. Authors who dispute the “myth of nonmonogamy” are also usually careful to distance themselves from any implication that nonmonogamy is undesirable, thus conforming to the tenet that bisexuals should celebrate diversity. A notable exception to this position is taken by Robin Margolis, whose BiCentrist Alliance (BCA) does not welcome members who are interested in “unconventional” sexual practices such as threesomes, heavy S & M, or swinging.

Another myth frequently discussed by authors in bisexual publications is the image of bisexuals as AIDS carriers. Bisexuality came to popular and scientific attention in the mid 1980s largely because heterosexuals and epidemiologists began to fear that bisexuals would be the gateway through which AIDS would spread from the gay population to the heterosexual population. Ironically, the ensuing condemnation of bisexuality helped create bisexuality as a recognizable form of sexuality and is in large part responsible for the rapid growth of the bisexual movement in the late 1980s. But now that this movement is taking shape, one of its goals is to counteract the negative publicity. As part of
this effort, bisexual newsletters monitor coverage of bisexuality in the mainstream media, where bisexuality is almost invariably presented in the context of AIDS. For example, the July 13, 1987, issue of *Newsweek* included the article "Bisexuals and AIDS," and the September 1987 issue of *Bi Women* printed two letters that were written by bisexuals in response to that article. In keeping with the bisexual tenet of acknowledging diversity, both letters pointed out that some bisexuals are, indeed, irresponsible in their sexual behavior. But both letters also pointed out that most bisexuals are practicing safer sex and, along with gays and lesbians, are taking the lead in educating others about AIDS.

Perhaps the most oppressive myth identified in the bisexual press is the myth that bisexuality does not exist, a myth that results from the dichotomization of sexuality. The myth of nonexistence is a circumstance that few oppressed groups have had to confront; because of it, before bisexuals can claim to be oppressed and begin to protest this oppression, they must prove their own existence. Thus, Smith felt the need to assert, after pointing out that gays and lesbians regard bisexuals as confused, that "[w]e are 'really' bisexual."55 The fact that such an assertion needed to be made in a publication by and for bisexuals is as telling as the statement itself; apparently bisexuals, as well as non-bisexuals, need to have the existence of bisexuality affirmed. On a more positive note, Brenner pointed out that "since we supposedly didn't exist, nobody has made up any rules for us and we can make up our own rules."56 In other words, not existing gives bisexuals a great deal of freedom.

If bisexuals are oppressed by myths, then what should bisexuals' response to this oppression be? The primary, and perhaps the only, strategy suggested so far in the bisexual press is visibility. By appearing, on talk shows and operating speakers' bureaus, bisexuals can provide non-bisexuals with examples of monogamous and duogamous bisexuals, thereby disproving the nonmonogamy myth.57 By writing letters to mainstream publications that portray bisexuals as AIDS risks, bisexuals can present themselves as responsible people who practice safer sex and educate others about AIDS. By coming out as bisexual, bisexuals disprove the myth that bisexuality does not exist.58 To help bisexuals make themselves visible, ads in bisexual publications encourage bisexual readers to buy bisexual buttons and t-shirts. To give bisexuals an opportunity to be visible, BiNet USA—whose statement of purpose lists the
facilitation of “bisexual visibility” as one of its primary goals—declared Valentine’s Day, 1992, to be the First Bisexual Visibility Day. This event was repeated in 1993 and 1994 with kiss-ins and other demonstrations.

In addition to general myths about bisexuality, bisexuals also perceive themselves as being oppressed by lesbians and gay men. Like AIDS, the hostility bisexuals experience in lesbian/gay communities is one of the factors that motivated bisexuals to turn their attention toward forming a bisexual movement. In the bisexual press, discussion of the lack of acceptance bisexuals find in the lesbian and gay communities often arises in connection with news events, such as controversies over the nominal and actual inclusion of bisexuals in Lesbian and Gay Pride Marches. For example, Holly L. Danyliw wrote to Bi Women to express her surprise at being heckled by lesbian onlookers as she marched with a bisexual sign in the Boston Pride march. In August/September 1991, North Bi Northwest devoted several pages to stories about “Encounters with lesbians” that explored the topic of bisexual-lesbian relations. Some bisexuals attempt to explain lesbians’ hostility as “misdirected anger” borne of their own oppression, or fear of their own bisexuality. The latter idea is expressed in the acronym “BLAS,” which stands for “Bisexual Label Avoidance Syndrome.” Bisexuals respond to lesbians’ and gays’ intolerance by criticizing their political narrow-mindedness, which stands in stark contrast to the celebration of diversity that characterizes the developing bisexual politic. In 1991, a guerrilla street theater group parodied rigid lesbian/gay exclusivity by administering the “Acme Bi Detector” test to passersby in the Castro district of San Francisco.

The lesbian/gay community is not presented as uniformly hostile to bisexuals, however. Stories about pleasant encounters and bisexual inclusion in lesbian/gay events are as numerous as negative reports. There is also acknowledgment that increasing bisexual visibility is successfully changing lesbians’ and gays’ attitudes. In 1989, Gonsalves recounted an incident in which a lesbian stood up for bisexual inclusion, and noted that such acceptance had been lacking only five years earlier when she came out as bisexual after identifying herself as a lesbian. Ganapati Durgahdas made a similar observation about growing acceptance in the gay men’s community in 1992.

The bisexual press keeps tabs on the treatment of bisexuality in the lesbian/gay press. In the Spring of 1991, Anything That Moves reviewed Outweek’s article “The Bisexual Revolution.” It described the article as
“well-balanced,” in contrast to the “bi-bashing article” more characteristic of the lesbian/gay press. In 1992, Carol A. Queen criticized Out/Look magazine for its treatment of bisexuality in the cover story “What do bisexuals want?” and for suppressing the issue of bisexuality at the annual Out/Write ’92 conference that occurred shortly after the article appeared. In November 1992, North Bi Northwest’s own cover story was a reprint of the follow-up article that Out/Look published after “What do bisexuals want?”

Bisexuals are divided over how to respond to lesbian/gay hostility. Some feel that they are being excluded from a movement that represents their interests as much as it represents lesbian/gay interests. This sentiment is summarized in the slogan, “Bi liberation is gay liberation.” In other words, bisexuals “share the same issues with gays and lesbians in the content (sic) of the dominant heterosexist culture.” Kaahumanu argued that right-wing defenders of heterosexism lump all non-heterosexuals together as queers; for example, Amendment 2 in Colorado listed “bisexuals” along with lesbians and gays as undesirables. Bisexuals are not “half-homosexuals” whose suffering is thereby diminished; when bisexuals are oppressed, they are oppressed in the same ways and as much as lesbians/gays. “As bisexuals, we do not get half-bashed or only partly discriminated against, we don’t lose half our children or half our jobs.” In other words, bisexual oppression is gay oppression, and bisexuals rightfully belong to the same movement as lesbians and gays.

Bisexuals who take the position that bi liberation is gay liberation argue that bisexuals should be part of the lesbian/gay movement, and that lesbians/gays should acknowledge the place of bisexuals in that movement by adding the “b-word” to lesbian/gay organizations and events. Some lesbians/gays respond to this demand by chastising bisexuals for trying to reap the benefits of gay liberation now that the real lesbians and gay men have done all the hard work. But bisexuals respond that they have been in the so-called lesbian/gay movement all along. As Smith put it, “It isn’t as though we just showed up on the scene and are the ‘Me Too Generation’ of queer liberation. Bisexuals have been there all along and in significant numbers.” Bisexuals have been invisible because they “have not publicly identified themselves as bisexuals for fear of the community’s rejection,” but they are no longer willing to stay in the closet. Other lesbians/gays respond to bisexuals’ demands for nominal inclusion by arguing that “lesbian/gay” already includes
bisexuals; after all, “bi liberation is gay liberation.” Robyn Ochs and Pam Ellis responded to this by analogizing the position of bisexuals in the early 1990s to the position of lesbians in the early gay movement, or to the position of women in a sexist society; i.e., “bisexual” is included in “lesbian/gay” the same way “lesbian” is included in “gay,” or “she” is included in the generic “he.”

A great deal of page space in bisexual publications is devoted to monitoring the inclusion of bisexuality in lesbian/gay events and organizations. For example, in July 1989, Bi Women reported that bisexuals were included in the title of the 1989 Annual Pride March in Northampton; in July 1990, Bi Women reported that the word “bisexual” had once again been removed from the name of the Northampton March. Similar sporadic inclusion occurred at the annual Lesbian, (Bisexual) & Gay Studies Conference, a history documented in North Bi Northwest, which also analyzed the degree to which bisexuality was included in the content of the conference. In 1990, North Bi Northwest proudly reported that bisexual speakers had been invited to address the members of P-FLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) and, while there, had helped to dispel several myths about bisexuality. In 1992, Seattle became the first major city in the U.S. to include the word “bisexual” in the name of its pride march. In 1993, after a long lobbying effort, bisexuals celebrated the inclusion of bisexuals in the name of the third March on Washington (MOW). This celebration was slightly dampened, however, by the fact that the word included in the name was “bi,” not “bisexual,” which bisexuals took as an attempt to desexualize both bisexuality and the March.

Not all bisexuals agree that the bisexual movement should be part of the lesbian/gay movement. Robin Margolis of the BiCentrist Alliance, for example, rejects the “LesBiGay” model of bisexual organizing because she argues that bisexual culture is diluted when bisexuals are included among lesbians and gays. Bisexuals have different interests than lesbians/gays do, and therefore bisexuals need to organize their own separate movement. This is a minority view, however; other bisexual activists tend to reject the BiCentrist position as divisive and separatist.

Another issue on which bisexuals disagree is the relationship between women and men. In a movement dedicated to reducing the significance of gender, one might expect that women and men would engage in mutual cooperation. But complete cooperation is prevented by
several factors, most notably the fact that gender is still a very real phenomenon. Women and men have been socialized differently, and attempts to create a truly non-gendered movement are often frustrated by this reality. For example, some bisexual women complain that in mixed-gender bisexual groups they encounter men whose interest lies in finding women for sexual partners. Bisexual women, who are sexually socialized as women, motivated in part by the antipathy toward bisexuality of lesbian feminism, and trained in political ideology by feminism, are less interested in finding sexual partners and more interested in developing a bisexual community and discussing ideological issues. In cities where separate organizations are founded for bisexual women and men, the men’s groups often fold while the women’s groups continue meeting and publishing newsletters. Many cities have bisexual women’s groups and mixed-gender groups, but no bisexual men’s groups. Some bisexual activists attribute the greater stability of bisexual women’s groups to women’s greater political training as veterans of feminism; others attribute it to gender socialization that prevents men from expressing their feelings and performing facilitating tasks in group discussions. In contrast to most political movements, which are led by men, in the bisexual movement women activists tend to outnumber men activists.

Relations between the genders are not only problematic in mixed gender settings. The issue also arises in bisexual women’s groups. For example, Bi Women is published by a bisexual women’s group, the Boston Bisexual Women’s Network (BBWN). In September 1987, Bi Women announced that it was considering adopting a more liberal policy that would make it easier for men to subscribe and invited readers to comment. Several readers’ comments were published in March 1988, most of which favored allowing men to subscribe but restricting their contributions. The editors continued to solicit readers’ comments, and finally, in July 1989, the editors announced that 63% of readers had voted to allow men on the mailing list. In November 1991, Stephanie Berger reported that attendees at a bisexual community meeting in Boston had generally agreed that there needed to be more communication between the bisexual women’s and the bisexual men’s networks in Boston; less than two years later, the Boston Bisexual Men’s Network folded.

Transgender issues are also problematic in the bisexual movement,
particularly in some bisexual women’s groups. In the bisexual movement as a whole, transgendered individuals are celebrated not only as an aspect of the diversity of the bisexual community, but because, like bisexuals, they do not fit neatly into dichotomous categories. Jim Frazin wrote that “the construction and deconstruction of gender” is a subject of mutual interest to bisexuals and transsexuals who are, therefore, natural allies.78 Tucker argued that the bisexual movement should include transgender politics on its agenda “because we as a bisexual movement are visionary in our need and desire to break down dichotomies, creating a powerful and diverse body of queers to smash the heterosexual monolith.”79 At BiNet USA’s Third Annual Meeting, the organization adopted a statement that the organization would “acknowledge and support transgender bisexuals in the organization itself and the broader bisexual community.”80

But many bisexual women’s groups are actively feminist, and as such, they attempt to combine feminism with bisexual ideology. The cultural feminists who defined feminism during the 1980s—the decade during which many bisexual women’s groups were formed—were generally hostile toward transgenderists, whom they perceived as male intruders in women’s space. Bisexual women must, therefore, reconcile feminist distrust of transgenderists with the bisexual celebration of gender diversity. This issue arose for the Seattle Bisexual Women’s Network, which publishes North Bi Northwest. In January 1991, SBWN held a meeting to “resolve the question of whether male-to-female transsexuals would be welcome as full members in the group,” but the issue proved to be too controversial for consensus. Ironically, the report of this meeting in North Bi Northwest was placed directly above an article that reported that the Ingersoll Gender Center, a center for transgendered individuals, had invited bisexuals to come speak to them so that they could further understand bisexuality. An article by Lenore Norrgard in the same issue of North Bi Northwest argued against including transsexuals because “[m]ale-to-female transsexuals are not women” and if they are admitted, “we will no longer be a women’s group.”81 In May 1991, after a year of “heated”82 debate, North Bi Northwest reported a provisional policy of partial membership for transsexuals; if they had been living full-time for at least a year as women, they would be allowed to attend large meetings and mixed-gender meetings, but not the Newcomers Group and social gatherings
defined as “women-born-women only.” One year later, discussion was
reopened and, in May 1994, transgender and transsexual women who
had been living as women for one year were welcomed without further
restrictions.83

In summary, ideological discourse in the bisexual press has intensi-

fied in recent years, and some themes have emerged. In general, bisexual
ideology celebrates diversity and challenges categorical thinking, particu-
larly the dichotomous construction of gender and sexuality. By challeng-
ing dichotomous gender and sexuality, the bisexual movement under-
mines sexism and heterosexism and aligns itself with feminism and
lesbian/gay liberation. Bisexuals struggle to convince others of their
feminism and their gayness; to do so, they must reconcile feminism with
the celebration of gender diversity and gain recognition as part of the
lesbian/gay movement. Among the bisexual movement’s goals are the
education of others to dispel myths about bisexuality and sexual liber-

ation for everyone; it aims to achieve these goals primarily through
visibility. Bisexual activists generally decline to establish a single defin-
tion for bisexuality and spend little energy on constructing a bisexual
history; to do so would construct a bisexual ethnicity, thereby un-
dermining the celebration of diversity and the challenge to traditional
categorical thinking.

DÉJÀ VU?

Many of the arguments that bisexuals are using to politicize bisexuality
are very similar to arguments that lesbians used in the 1970s to politicize
lesbianism. But there are also some important differences between the
two movements, because the political arena in which bisexuals are strug-
gling for recognition is substantially different from the one lesbians faced
two decades ago. To a large extent, therefore, the bisexual movement is
another revolution on the same political wheel, but perhaps the bisexual
movement is also a revolution, period. To understand both possibilities,
we have to look at the similarities and the differences between the
lesbian movement of the early 1970s and the bisexual movement of the
early 1990s.

The bisexual movement’s roots in the lesbian/gay movement are
analogous to the lesbian movement's roots in the feminist and gay movements. Contemporary bisexual activists concentrate much of their energy on building a home within the lesbian/gay movement by arguing that “bi liberation is gay liberation” and demanding that lesbian/gay organizations and events nominally and actually include bisexuals. Similarly, early lesbian feminists initially struggled to find a home within the feminist and gay movements. Like early lesbian feminists who argued that lesbians had been in the feminist movement all along but remained hidden because of feminists' homophobia, bisexuals argue that bisexuals have been in the lesbian/gay movement all along but remained hidden because of biphobia.

Lesbian feminists eventually lost patience with the homophobia of feminists and the sexism of gay men, and established an independent lesbian feminist movement. Among bisexuals, the vision of an independent bisexual movement is a minority opinion; the separatist BiCentrist Alliance is considered outside the mainstream of bisexual political thought. But at the same time, despite most activists' insistence that bisexuals rightfully belong in the lesbian/gay movement, they are building the structure of a separate bisexual movement complete with a national bisexual network and international conferences. Moreover, ideology is beginning to follow suit; most of the bisexual women who participated in my study in 1986 saw their interests as flowing from their genders and their “gayness,” not from their bisexuality, whereas the bisexual activists whose opinions appeared in bisexual publications of the late 1980s and early 1990s identified unique bisexual interests. Whether the LesBiGay model of political organizing will continue to dominate bisexual political strategy, or whether bisexual ideology will continue to develop in an independent direction to be followed eventually by a shift in political strategy as occurred in the lesbian movement, remains to be seen.

One strategy used by both lesbians and bisexuals to politicize themselves is to present their movements as challenges to established ways of thinking. Lesbian feminists argued that heterosexuality is a political institution that upholds patriarchy and that lesbianism, as an alternative to heterosexuality, is therefore political and feminist. Early lesbian feminists also argued that lesbianism is feminist because it challenges gender—specifically, the male definition of feminine gender that defines a “real woman” as a female who has sex with men. Contrary to the feeling
of feminists at the time that lesbians were marginal constituents of the feminist movement and that the movement should focus on the needs of "women," not "lesbians," lesbians argued that they were the quintessential women and that the movement should not only address lesbians' needs but recognize lesbians as the true feminists. Thus, lesbianism was initially constructed as a challenge to gender. But once "woman" was reconstructed to include "lesbian," lesbians became part of the prevailing gender structure. In effect, lesbianism was co-opted into gender and ceased to be a challenge to it. Furthermore, the rise of cultural feminism reified rather than challenged gender, maximized rather than minimized the differences between women and men, and created a concept of lesbianism that was dependent on the preservation of gender.

Similarly, bisexual activists argue that categorical Western thinking is oppressive because it limits people's options, and that bisexuality is political because it challenges categorical thinking. Specifically, bisexuality is a challenge to dichotomous thinking about both gender and sexuality. Because bisexuality challenges these dichotomies, it undermines oppression based on them, i.e., sexism and heterosexism. Therefore, if lesbianism is political and feminist, bisexuality is political, feminist, and queer. If lesbianism undermines the heteropatriarchy, bisexuality undermines not only the heteropatriarchy but the fundamental structure of Western thought.

Given lesbians' initial challenge to gender, one might expect bisexuals' efforts to break down gender to be well received among lesbians. But because of the change in the relationship of lesbianism to gender that occurred with the reconstruction of womanhood and the rise of cultural lesbian feminism, bisexuals' contemporary challenge to gender is also a threat to lesbianism. Lesbianism is now part of the gender establishment that bisexuals seek to break down. Bisexuals' challenge to gender is no less than a challenge to the very existence of lesbianism, because of the dependence of lesbianism on gender for definition. Instead of being allies in the struggle against gender, because of the course taken by lesbian feminism in the two decades before the inception of the bisexual movement, lesbians and bisexuals have emerged with contrary political goals in reference to gender.

Bisexuality's challenge to dichotomous sexuality poses a threat to lesbianism that is even more direct. Lesbians contributed to the construction of dichotomous sexuality, primarily through their efforts to con-
struct lesbians as an ethnic group. To become an ethnic group, lesbians had to distinguish themselves from non-lesbians and create the appearance of clear and fixed boundaries between themselves as the oppressed and heterosexuals as the oppressor. Lesbians are now part of the society that is based on dichotomous ways of thinking. If bisexuals are a threat to sexual dichotomy, they are a threat to lesbians.

This threat is multiple. At the very least, bisexuals are a material threat to lesbians because as the new category “bisexual” becomes available as an alternative to the homosexual/heterosexual dichotomy, some women who would otherwise have placed themselves in the lesbian category will place themselves in the new bisexual category. Lesbians will therefore lose numbers. However, the real threat is not to the size of the lesbian population, but to the ethnicity of lesbianism. By challenging and ultimately destroying the sexual dichotomy, bisexuals threaten to undermine the clarity of the distinction between lesbians and heterosexuals. If some people are bisexual—particularly if that bisexuality is conceptualized in hybrid terms—then the distinction between homosexuality and heterosexuality is not clear at all. If some people are both homosexual and heterosexual, then lesbians cannot be clearly distinguished from heterosexuals. If lesbians cannot be clearly distinguished from heterosexuals, then how can they claim to be oppressed by heterosexuals, and how can they struggle to win their liberation from heterosexuals? If the sexual dichotomy is destroyed, lesbians are deprived of their ethnicity, and of the strategies for liberation that flow from ethnicity.

If bisexuals were to construct themselves as an ethnic group, then the threat to lesbianism would be alleviated. The sexual dichotomy would be replaced by a sexual trichotomy, and the clarity of the category “lesbian” could be restored. But bisexuals show little indication that they will take this path, at least not in the near future. One might argue that the bisexual movement is simply too young to have yet constructed itself as an ethnic movement, but the lack of attention bisexuals are giving to the question of defining bisexuality stands in sharp contrast to the lively debates that occurred among lesbians on this issue in the early 1970s. The prevailing message in the bisexual press is that bisexuals should avoid establishing a single definition of bisexuality based on identifiable common characteristics, and little effort is being made to create bisexual ancestors or a bisexual heritage. Bisexuals are not con-
structing themselves as an ethnic group, precisely because they wish to remain a challenge to dichotomous gender and dichotomous sexuality. In so doing, they are not only refusing to place themselves into the ethnic political tradition; they are threatening to remove all of sexual identity politics from the realm of ethnic political discourse, thereby destroying other sexual minorities’ abilities to utilize the language of ethnic politics to make their political claims.

Another strategy lesbian feminists used to politicize lesbianism was the desexualization of lesbianism. Because they were struggling to find a political voice in a period when sexuality was not recognized as political, to present themselves as political they had to distance themselves from sexuality. The rise of cultural feminism facilitated this effort by recalling the ideal of asexual womanly purity. But lesbians’ efforts to politicize lesbianism contributed to the development of a sexual politics, and lesbians’ efforts to dessexualize lesbianism was one impetus for the rise of sex positivism. When bisexual activists appeared in the arena, sexuality was already politicized and sex positivism was in full swing. Because sex positivism is consistent with the bisexual emphasis on diversity, it was easily incorporated into the developing bisexual ideology, and because sexuality was politicized, this move was not antithetical to the process of bisexual politicization. Because of the historical period in which the bisexual movement has emerged, bisexuals can present themselves as both sexual and political; they can and do celebrate sexuality while simultaneously demanding recognition of their political voice.

Although they have largely escaped the desexualizing influence of lesbian feminism, bisexuals, especially bisexual women, cannot ignore the relationship that lesbian feminism constructed between lesbianism and feminism. In chapter 6, we saw how lesbian feminists first constructed lesbianism as consistent with feminism, and then argued that lesbians are the best feminists because they are independent of men and have the vision and resources to create women’s space. According to this analysis, bisexual women collaborate with the enemy (men) and are, in some senses, even more detrimental to the feminist movement than heterosexual women are. Contemporary bisexual activists, having claimed that bisexuality is feminist, have to reconstruct the relationship between feminism and sexuality to support their claim. Among the specific problems they face are how to build a mixed-gender movement
that is feminist, and whether to welcome transgenderists to women's space within that movement. Building a feminist mixed-gender movement means challenging the argument that feminism depends on women's space and refuting the charge that by associating with men bisexuals are collaborating with the enemy. Welcoming transgenderists requires that bisexual women reject the reification of gender that took place with the growth of cultural feminism. Neither task will be easy, but their importance to bisexual women is evident in the number of authors who have addressed the task of constructing a feminist bisexuality.84

Another difference between the lesbian and bisexual movements that is attributable to the different contexts in which they developed lies in their willingness to universalize their identities and interests. Many early lesbian feminists declared that "all women are lesbians." This claim served to present the lesbian movement as a movement for all women, and was based either on a concept of universal bisexuality, on arguments about the artificiality of culturally imposed heterosexuality, or on the redefinition of lesbianism as a form of feminist resistance. The concept of a universal bisexuality seems ready-made for a bisexual movement that might also want to emphasize its broad applicability and large constituency, but surprisingly, this idea has not been picked up enthusiastically by activists writing in the bisexual press. It was expressed by many of the bisexual women who took part in my study in 1986, but the fact that it does not appear consistently in the bisexual press suggests that the bisexual women in my study encountered the idea within lesbian feminism and found it personally gratifying. As such, it was evidence of the influence lesbian ideology had on them, not evidence of the beginnings of a bisexual ideology. Instead of proclaiming "everyone is bisexual," activists warn each other to respect the self-identities of those who choose not to identify as bisexual. The fact that bisexuals advocate respect for others' self-identities reflects the fact that the bisexual movement is developing in a context in which sexuality has already been politicized and lesbians and gay men have already constituted themselves as interest groups and invested heavily in their identities. As Tucker pointed out, "If we claim self-definition for ourselves, then we must accord that right to others" (1991:246). In the early 1970s, lesbians did not have to take into account other already established identity-based sexual minorities.
This does not imply that lesbian feminists did not also consider self-identity important. They did, but for very different reasons than bisexuals. At the height of lesbian feminism, identity was considered a political statement, or a means toward an end. Women should, therefore, identify themselves as lesbians for political reasons regardless of what they thought they “really” were sexually. In contrast, bisexuals consider self-identity important because self-determination is important; bisexual identity is not an identity to be adopted for political reasons, but because that is how one wishes to define oneself for whatever reason, and others should respect that self-definition. This might be partially due to the early stage of the bisexual movement; after all, early lesbian feminists also advocated the right of women to sexual self-determination. As bisexual ideology develops and bisexuality acquires specific political meanings, it is quite possible that individuals will begin to adopt bisexual identity for political reasons. In fact, it appears that some individuals already have; Rachel Kaplan is a case in point. Kaplan does not claim that she calls herself bisexual for solely political reasons; i.e., she does not suggest that bisexual identity is imposed or self-imposed on individuals who don’t feel they are “really” bisexual. However, individuals like her might represent the beginning of a new breed of “political bisexuals” analogous to “political lesbians.”

Finally, the role of race and ethnicity within the lesbian and bisexual movements differs, largely because of the different historical time periods in which the two movements developed. Lesbian feminism began, and remained, primarily a white movement. Lesbians who felt that the movement should pay attention to racial and ethnic issues shouldered the burden of calling other lesbians’ attention to the problem and constructing elaborate arguments about the relationships among oppressions in order to convince them of the importance of the issue. Considerable debate occurred over the exact relationships among different oppressions; for example, do all oppressions arise from the same root, or is one oppression fundamental? If one is fundamental, is it classism, racism, or sexism? Contemporary bisexual activists not only inherit these arguments, but have come forth in a historical period in which the celebration of racial/ethnic diversity and efforts to eliminate racial/ethnic oppression need no justification. Therefore, they do not spend a great deal of energy asserting that the bisexual movement should be multicultural. From its inception, bisexuals declared the movement to be
multicultural; the work that remains is the work of making sure that it is in fact multicultural.

In summary, bisexuals, like lesbians, are faced with the task of politicizing a sexual identity, but bisexuals live in a very different political world than early lesbian feminists did. Not only have politics in general changed in the intervening two decades, but the lesbian/gay movement itself has created an entirely new political tradition. As a result of the lesbian/gay movement, sexuality has been politicized, and lesbians and gays are established political interest groups. To establish their own political voice, bisexuals must insert themselves into an ongoing discourse of sexual identity politics. In a very real sense, the lesbian/gay movement created bisexuals as an oppressed group by creating a discourse in which lesbians/gays and heterosexuals, but not bisexuals, were defined into political existence. Thus, the lesbian/gay movement not only altered the political arena by creating a new political tradition; it also created the need for a bisexual movement.

To politicize bisexual identity, bisexuals are using some of the same arguments and strategies that lesbians used to politicize lesbian identity. Just as lesbians initially challenged traditional gender and recognized that the demise of gender would render their own sexual identities meaningless, bisexuals are presenting bisexuality as a challenge to dichotomous gender and dichotomous sexuality. In so doing, both movements challenge established ways of thinking and promise to contribute to the breakdown of oppression based on gender and sexuality. For this reason, both movements envision themselves as sexual liberation movements, and both consider themselves feminist movements.

But beyond these similarities, there are differences that reflect the different political contexts of the two movements. For example, to politicize lesbianism, lesbians had to desexualize it, whereas contemporary bisexuals can claim both their sexuality and their political voice because the sex-positive movement and the politicization of sexuality have made it possible to have both. Lesbians constructed a relationship between lesbianism and feminism that established lesbians as the best feminists and bisexuals as traitors; bisexuals must now reconstruct that relationship to support their claim that the bisexual movement is a feminist movement. Lesbian feminists initially valued sexual self-determination for women, but after developing a clear political ideology they began to see lesbian identity as an identity every woman can and should adopt.
Contemporary bisexual activists advocate respect for individuals’ sexual self-definitions, but they avoid the argument that all people can and should become bisexual-identified because they, unlike early lesbian feminists, face a political arena in which others already have political sexual self-identities that demand respect. Finally, lesbian feminists spent considerable energy discussing the relationships between sexism, heterosexism, racism, and classism to demonstrate the importance of taking race and class into account. Bisexuals take the importance of multiculturalism for granted, because lesbian feminism has already made the necessary connections and because society in general is more cognizant of the pervasive importance of race, class, ability, etc., and the need to actively struggle against all forms of oppression.

Because bisexuals are attempting to assert themselves in an ongoing political discourse in which lesbians have a considerable stake, bisexuals pose a challenge to lesbians. Lesbians have become invested in a gender-based definition of lesbianism. Bisexuals, by challenging both dichotomous gender and dichotomous sexuality, challenge the very existence of lesbianism. By refusing to construct themselves as an ethnic group, bisexuals undermine lesbian ethnicity and threaten the tenuous legitimacy all sexual identity-based minorities have gained in the realm of ethnic political discourse. Defined out of existence by lesbian feminism, bisexuals now threaten the existence of lesbianism and the future of the lesbian movement as we know it.

THE FUTURE OF SEXUAL IDENTITY POLITICS

Both the lesbian and the bisexual movements are part of a historical dialectic process in which each political cycle sets the stage for the next. The feminist and gay movements set the stage for the lesbian movement by providing a context for the politicization of lesbians and eventually the establishment of a separate movement. Likewise, lesbian feminism and gay liberation set the stage for the emergence of a bisexual movement by reifying the concept of dichotomous sexuality and thereby politicizing bisexuals, who are currently in the process of establishing a movement. As lesbian feminism matured, it became independent of its feminist and gay parent movements, passed through the stage of ideolog-
ical coalescence followed by ideological rigidity, and eventually lost sight of its original goals. The contemporary bisexual movement is a younger movement that is still seeking a home in the lesbian/gay movement and has not yet had time to develop and solidify an ideology.

What remains to be seen is whether bisexuals will follow the trajectory of the lesbian movement. Will the bisexual movement, like the lesbian movement, become independent of its political parents, or will it continue to seek a home in the lesbian/gay movement? Will it develop a party line that will then solidify into a new form of political correctness and ideological hegemony? Will it lose track of its focus on diversity and its goal of breaking down limiting gender and sexual categories, allowing itself to be co-opted into the gender system and constructed as a new sexual category? Or, will it keep sight of its current goals and remain a movement for sexual self-determination and liberation? If it does, it might prove to be the final revolution on the wheel of sexual identity politics.