Bisexuality and the Challenge to Lesbian Politics

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Published by NYU Press

Rust, Paula C.
Bisexuality and the Challenge to Lesbian Politics: Sex, Loyalty, and Revolution.
Project MUSE. muse.jhu.edu/book/15738.

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INTRODUCTION

1. This organization has since been renamed the “Bisexual Network of the USA” or “BiNet USA.”

CHAPTER 1


2. Subscription and other circulation information was obtained from Karen Troshynski-Thomas and Deborah M. Burek, eds., The Gale Directory of Publications and Broadcast Media (Detroit, MI: Gale Research, Inc., 1994).

3. Debra Chasnoff (outgoing executive editor), Out/Look (Fall 1990).

4. 10 Percent, no. 6.

5. 10 Percent, no. 5.

6. 10 Percent, no. 2.

7. Readers’ genders and biological sexes are assumed on the basis of their first names and any pertinent references made in their letters to the editor. In many cases, these assumptions were confirmed with independent information.


13. The Advocate, no. 564.
23. *10 Percent*, no. 2.
30. Letters by Dashu, Murphy, Louise, *Lesbian Contradiction*, no. 28 (Fall 1989).

CHAPTER 2

1. Although Benkert, who wrote under the pseudonym "Kertbeny," coined the word "homosexual" in 1869, historians debate the origins of the concept of a type of person who is sexually oriented toward members of her or his own sex. The concept is at least a few years older; Ulrichs named the "Uranian," later "urning," in 1864, and Trumbach (1977) argued that the 18th-century concept of the "sodomite" as a man who has a preference for members of his own sex was also an essentialist concept akin to the modern concept of the "homosexual." See also Bullough (1990).
2. The debate between essentialism and constructionism is not the same as the debate over whether sexual orientation is a result of biology, socialization, or choice. Even if our desires have a biological basis, constructionists would argue that we give meaning to these desires in a cultural context. Conversely, even if we become lesbian/gay or heterosexual as a result of life experiences, this does not mean that our lesbianism/gayness or heterosexuality cannot be essential. For discussion of essentialism and/or constructionism as applied to sexuality, see Boswell (1990), Caplan (1987), Epstein (1987), Foucault (1978), Hart (1984), Kitzinger (1987), Richardson (1983/84), Rust (1993a), Trumbach (1977), and Weeks (1986).

3. Other authors have written comprehensive and detailed accounts of the history of sexology. See, for example, Irvine (1990), Kitzinger (1987), and Weeks (1981, 1986).

4. The dichotomous model of sexuality has been discussed in detail by Ross (1984). Several authors have traced the historical origins and development of this model, including Bullough and Bullough (1977), DeCecco and Shively (1983/84), Foucault (1979), Hoffman (1983/84), Paul (1985), and Richardson (1983/84). In her own review of the literature, Richardson cites the historical treatments of McIntosh (1968), Plummer (1975, 1981a, 1981b), and Weeks (1981, 1982).

5. The Kinsey et al. data are the source of the oft-quoted figure, “ten percent of the population is gay.” The ten-percent figure was not reported in the original 1948 and 1953 volumes; it resulted from a later calculation. People who use the ten-percent figure should keep in mind that Kinsey et al. studied erotic experiences and responsiveness, not identity. Many people engage in homosexual sex without considering themselves homosexual. The ten-percent figure is often used to impress heterosexuals with the size of the gay constituency, but in truth the figure tells us nothing about the percentage of people who consider themselves gay, nor about the percentage of people who are politically aligned with the gay movement.


7. These figures refer to articles listed under the indicated headings only; there were additional articles during these years whose abstracts included the words “homosexual” or “lesbian” but which were not listed under these headings.

8. For example, this suggestion was made by Blumstein and Schwartz (1977b), Kaplan and Rogers (1984), Money (1987), Ross (1984), and Zinik (1985).
2. The self-administered questionnaire was based on the results of preliminary pilot and pre-test studies. I began the research with a pilot study of nine unstructured face-to-face interviews with self-identified lesbian and bisexual women. The purpose of the pilot study was to find out what issues were important to lesbian and bisexual women and what the ranges of opinion on these issues were. A rough draft of the questionnaire in partially self-administered form was written based on these interviews, and the questionnaire was pre-tested during face-to-face interviews with 26 more women. The questionnaire was then converted to an entirely self-administered instrument and pre-tested on a new sample of 10 women. Six trained lesbian and bisexual female interviewers and I conducted the interviews during the first pre-test, and comments from these interviewers and from the women who participated in the second pre-test were solicited and used to revise the questionnaire once more.

3. In social psychology, "self-identity" is the way a person perceives herself. Presented identity is the way she presents herself to others, and perceived identity is how others perceive her. Many of us think of ourselves one way, but sometimes present ourselves differently to different people depending on how comfortable we are with them and how much we want to reveal about our sexuality. For the purpose of this study, it was important to know how women perceived themselves, without the filters they might use for other people. If I had asked simply, "Are you a lesbian, or bisexual, or ..." I might have gotten answers that reflected presented or perceived identity, rather than self-identity.

4. In other publications based on this study, I have included as lesbians some respondents who initially hesitated to identify themselves as lesbians, but did so when asked a second time. Hence, the sample size varies slightly from that reported elsewhere.


6. Respondents' feelings of sexual attraction were measured by asking respondents to place themselves on a single 11-point scale ranging from "100% sexually attracted to women/0% attracted to men" through "0% attracted to women/100% attracted to men." The use of a single bipolar scale was not meant to imply that homosexual and heterosexual feelings are opposite or contrary experiences, nor that gender is the sole criterion of sexual attraction, nor that respondents do not differ on other dimensions of sexual feeling, such as libido strength. Ideally, gender-directed sexual feelings should be measured with separate scales representing homosexual and heterosexual feelings as suggested by Shively and DeCecco (1977), and by separate scales representing past, present, and ideal feelings as suggested by Klein, Sepkoff, and Wolf (1985). However, I was primarily interested in participants' feelings at the time of the survey, and given constraints on questionnaire length, I judged the single scale sufficient for the purposes of the current research. This
compromise was made with respect to the measurement of sexual feelings only; participants' past and present sexual and romantic behaviors were assessed more extensively.

7. One might expect that women with more "radical" lesbian identities (e.g., Dyke or Lesbian as opposed to Gay or Homosexual) would be more exclusive in their attractions to women. This was not the case; there were no differences in the degree of heterosexual attraction expressed by Lesbians, Dykes, Gay women, and Homosexual women.

8. Many lesbians who had never identified themselves as bisexual had wondered if they were bisexual. For a detailed discussion of the identity histories and coming out experiences of the lesbian and bisexual women in this study, including the ages at which they experienced various milestone events, see Rust (1993a).

CHAPTER 4

1. Throughout this book, all respondents' names are pseudonyms. When a respondent is quoted more than once, the same pseudonym is used each time.

2. Lesbians who defined bisexuality in terms of feelings were 20% more likely than lesbians who defined it in terms of behavior to answer the question "What is your opinion about bisexuality?" by stating explicitly that bisexuality exists.

3. Because the magnitudes of the increments in this seven-point scale are neither known nor quantifiable, subtracting one score from the other produces a rough estimate of the degree of difference perceived, not an exact measure of this degree.

CHAPTER 5

1. Because respondents' definitions of bisexuality and conceptualizations of sexuality were inferred from their answers to the question "What is your opinion of bisexuality?" and inference was not possible in all cases, the number of Lesbians of Color on which these findings are based is only 15. The finding that there are no racial differences is, therefore, suggestive at best. Findings about the prevalence of different conceptions of sexuality among lesbians are not presented because of space limitations. The interested reader is referred to Rust (1992a).

2. In addition to comparing the attitudes of lesbians of different chronological ages, I compared the attitudes of lesbians who came out during different historical periods, regardless of their age at the time they came out. No differences in attitudes were found. This finding suggests that lesbians' attitudes reflect the historical circumstances that existed at the time most of their age peers came out, rather than the historical circumstances that existed at the time they themselves came out. This might be explained by the fact that most women, when they begin to come out, seek lesbians of their own age
CHAPTER 5

for support. They therefore learn the attitudes and definitions that are pertinent to lesbians of their own age cohort, even though the historical circumstances that were originally responsible for the formation of these attitudes and definitions have since changed, and even though younger lesbians coming out at the same time might be learning very different attitudes and definitions.

3. There is no evidence that the difference in beliefs about the existence of bisexuality stems from a difference in the way lesbians with varying degrees of heterosexual attraction define bisexuality. Lesbians with varying degrees of heterosexual attraction are equally likely to define bisexuality in terms of attractions as opposed to behaviors.

CHAPTER 6

1. The phrase “Pink and Blue Herring” combines two subcultural symbols. “Pink and blue” refers to the colors in a popular “bisexual pride” button that displays overlapping pink and blue triangles. The area of overlap is lavender, the color that symbolizes the “Lesbian and Gay” movement. “Herring” is taken from “lavender herring,” a term that was applied to the lesbian issue within the feminist movement in 1970 to indicate that it was a trivial issue that would distract feminists from the real issues (Radicalesbians 1970). Marotta (1981:236n) attributed the phrase “lavender herring” to Susan Brownmiller, who referred to lesbians as “a lavender herring, perhaps, but surely no clear and present danger” in “Sisterhood is Powerful!” New York Times Magazine, March 15, 1970, p. 140.

2. This story, which assumes the perspective of lesbians within the feminist movement, is told in greater detail by many authors including Abbott and Love (1971, 1972), Adam (1987), Brown (1976), Dixon (1988), Goodman et al. (1983), and Penelope (1984/1991). See also Weitz (1984), who uses the Daughters of Bilitis publication The Ladder to tell the story of the growth of lesbian feminism from a different perspective.

3. I use the term “Black” instead of “African-American” here because it is the term these activists chose to use themselves, and because it reflects the politics of the time period. The term is not synonymous with African-American, either politically or demographically.

4. These works include Adam (1987), Cant and Hemmings (1988), Echols (1984), Faderman (1991), Goodman et al. (1983), King (1986), and Marotta (1981). In this chapter, I use the term “lesbian feminism” broadly to refer to all these strains of thought collectively, i.e., to identify any ideology that includes both lesbian and feminist elements, or any feminist argument made on behalf of or by lesbians. This is similar to the post-mid-1970s meaning of the term as described by Hess et al. (1981/1991).

5. The group adopted the name Radicalesbians after the presentation of “The Woman-Identified Woman” (Abbott and Love 1972) but the paper is usually attributed to the Radicalesbians and sometimes erroneously to Rita Mae Brown individually.
6. See also Abbott and Love (1971).
7. See also Goodman et al. (1983).
8. See also Berson's 1972 essay articulating The Furies' ideology. For an articulation of the Leeds Revolutionary Feminist Group's position, see their essay "Political lesbianism: The case against heterosexuality" in Love Your Enemy? In this essay, they wrote "The heterosexual couple is the basic unit of the political structure of male supremacy. In it each individual woman comes under the control of an individual man" (Leeds 1979/1981:6). A more recent statement of the argument that heterosexuality is a political institution is Rich's "Compulsory heterosexuality and lesbian existence" (1980/1983). Compare to Jones' analysis of marriage as an institution that oppresses and divides women (1970) and Millett's analysis of the politics of "patriarchal marriage" (1970).
9. Lillian Faderman, who characterized lesbian feminists as hoping that they will change the social structure through having personal relationships with women (1981), observed that the seeds of this idea appeared in The Ladder before the advent of modern lesbian feminism. Commenting on Betty Friedan's The Feminine Mystique, an author in The Ladder wrote that the book suggested that lesbianism permits "an escape from being cast into a social stereotype which degrades their individuality and limits their activity to the point where it may begin to make an impact on the world outside the home" (Faderman 1981:381, quoted from a "Review of The Feminine Mystique," in The Ladder, vol. 7, no. 6, p. 9, March 1963).
11. Atkinson's own attitudes illustrate this change. In a speech given in February 1969, Atkinson said, "The lesbian solution to the problem of women is to evade it, that is, to opt for an apolitical solution. Feminism is, of course, a political position" (1969/1974:25).
13. Faderman found this argument in The Ladder as early as 1965. She quoted a letter from pp. 25–26 of The Ladder, vol. 9, no. 9 (June 1965), in which a reader commented that many women would "like to find the kind of emotional satisfaction that is possible only on a sustained basis between equal partners" but that "[i]n today's world this kind of life is open only to the lesbian" (1981:381). Johnston (1973) and Abbott and Love (1971) also characterized lesbian relationships as egalitarian.
16. Shelley's invitation to lesbians to be proud of their lesbianism should be compared to the sentiment expressed by the staff of *Purple September,* who wrote, "since we ourselves reject the straight norm we are able to experience our lesbianism as a (relative) given that integrates our feminism with our personal experience" (1975:83). In this sentence, the authors manage to pat themselves on the back for the feminism of their lifestyle without asserting that they chose this lifestyle. They do this by congratulating themselves for rejecting the straight norm, not for choosing lesbianism. Their rejection of the straight norm allows them to appreciate the compatibility of their lesbian lifestyle, which they did not choose, with their feminism.

17. Frye cited Hoagland as a source of the idea that the category lesbian does not exist in phallocratic conceptual schemes. Hoagland had argued that the lesbian exists outside a reality that does not include her, and that she is therefore free from the constraints of this reality and has "access to knowledge which is inaccessible to those whose existence is countenanced by the system" (Hoagland 1978, cited by Frye 1983c:152–153).

18. See also Marotta (1981) and Faderman for a discussion of the process by which lesbianism "came to be regarded as the quintessence of feminism" (1991:206).

19. The success of this transformation is demonstrated by a quote from a heterosexual woman approximately one decade later. Apparently oblivious to the debates that occurred in the early 1970s over the feminist privatization of lesbianism, Angela Hamblin wrote that heterosexual feminists have to "grapple with male definitions, male assumptions and male power in one of the most intimate areas of our lives" and that "over the past decade an increasing number of feminist women have been involved in transforming the basis upon which we are prepared to share our sexuality with men. It has been, for the most part, a very private struggle which, despite the support which many individual women have given each other, has not as yet been validated by the women's liberation movement as a whole." She felt that heterosexual feminists were "thrown back into defining our relationships with men as belonging to the 'personal' sphere of our lives, cut off from our 'political' concerns," exactly the same complaint voiced by lesbians a decade earlier (1983:105).

20. On this point, the Leeds Revolutionary Feminist Group and the Gorgons agreed with The Furies. The Leeds group wrote that women in heterosexual couples help support male supremacy by strengthening its foundation, and analogized heterosexual feminists to resistors in Nazi-occupied Europe who blow up bridges in the daytime and then repair them at night (1979/1981). In other words, heterosexual feminists undermine their own feminist work. The Gorgons argued that heterosexual women "collaborate with patriarchy by putting time and energy into men" (1978/1991:395). Alice, Gordon, Debbie, and Mary, whose essay appeared in the same lesbian separatist anthology as the Gorgons', were less condemnatory but equally exclusive of heterosexual women: "While we do not see straight women as our oppres-
sors or as our enemy, their interests are often opposite to ours, and, as the agents of men, their behavior is sometimes oppressive to us. Therefore, our primary work and group associations will be with other lesbians” (1973/1991a:33).

The Leeds group also agreed with Solomon that heterosexual women drain lesbians’ feminist energy by diverting it to needs created by their heterosexual relationships.

21. The transformation of the meaning of the phrase “the personal is political” is explored by Echols (1984), who points out that the phrase’s original descriptive meaning evolved into a prescriptive meaning. In fact, the phrase underwent many transformations. The arguments presented in this chapter alone illustrate the following meanings: The personal reflects the political status quo (with the implication that the personal should be examined to provide insight into the political); the personal serves the political status quo; one can make personal choices in response to or protest against the political status quo; one’s personal life influences one’s personal politics or determines the limits of one’s understanding of the political status quo; the personal is a personal political statement; personal choices can influence the political status quo; one’s personal choices reveal or reflect one’s personal politics; one should make personal choices that are consistent with one’s personal politics; personal life and personal politics are indistinguishable; personal life and personal politics are unrelated. The transformation of the relationship between the personal and the political is partially illustrated by the history of the phrase, “Feminism is the theory, lesbianism is the practice,” recounted by King (1986).

22. Compare Dixon’s opinion that lesbianism and feminism are synonymous by definition to the opinion expressed by Shelley, who perceived a causal relationship in which Lesbianism allowed or encouraged a woman to become feminist, “I have met many, many feminists who were not Lesbians—but I have never met a Lesbian who was not a feminist . . . . Lesbians, because they are not afraid of being abandoned by men, are less reluctant to express hostility toward the male class” (1969/1970:345–6).

23. Similarly, Mary Daly (1978) distinguished between “lesbians,” who are woman-identified, and “gay women,” who relate to women sexually but are male-identified and collaborate with gay men.

24. These include letters written to the Leeds feminists themselves, to Wires, the internal national newsletter of the women’s liberation movement in which the “Political lesbianism” essay had been published originally, and to Onlywomen Press, which published Love Your Enemy?, as well as statements from the members of Onlywomen Press.

25. See also Koedt (1971/1973) and Ferguson (1981), neither of whom were responding directly to the Leeds’ “Political lesbianism” paper, for more extensive arguments criticizing the idea that women can undermine male supremacy simply by having sex with women instead of men. For example, pointing out that it is a personal solution to a political problem, Koedt
argued that the moral imperative to be a lesbian was a perversion of the phrase “the personal is political” and that advocating exclusive heterosexuality is antithetical to the lesbian and gay movement’s original argument that with whom one sleeps does not matter.

26. Political lesbianism met with the approval of many lesbian feminists outside the Leeds Revolutionary Feminist Group. For example, Atkinson wrote, “There are women in the Movement who engage in sexual relations with other women, but who are married to men; these women are not lesbians in the political sense. These women claim the right to private lives; they are collaborators. There are other women who have never had sexual relations with other women, but who have made and live a total commitment to this Movement; these women are lesbians in the political sense” (1972/1973:12). Emphasizing the importance of politics over sexual behavior, she declared at the opening of the new headquarters of DOB-New York that “I’m enormously less interested in whom you sleep with than I am in with whom you’re prepared to die” (quoted in Marotta 1981:262). Julia Penelope agreed with Atkinson that real allies were defined by their political, not their sexual, loyalties, but argued that “[u]nfortunately, we frequently choose what we’re willing to die for on the basis of who we sleep with, and that’s the ‘grain of truth’ that makes the reduction to ‘sexual preference’ sound plausible” (Penelope 1984/1991:527).

27. The woman was an interviewee quoted on p. 140 of Angela Stewart-Park and Jules Cassidy, We’re Here: Conversations with Lesbian Women (London: Quartet Books, 1977).

28. Echols tied the reconciliation between heterosexual and lesbian feminists to the rise of cultural feminism, which packaged female separatism in a form that could appeal to a broader (read: heterosexual) audience. She also pointed out that the reconciliation was superficial because heterosexual women’s feminism was still perceived as inferior. Heterosexual women were no longer perceived as traitors, but in exchange they had been given the role of victim (Echols 1984).

29. As early as 1972, Abbott and Love described “Lesbians’” wariness of “Political Lesbians.” See Gay Revolution Party Women’s Caucus (1971/1972) for a discussion of feminist realesbians’ moral and political concerns about politicallesbianism. The Caucus argued that politicallesbians should become realesbians by having sex with women but that politicallesbians who seek sex with realesbians lay a “male trip” on realesbians by sexually objectifying them. Therefore, politicallesbians should bring each other out. Snitow, Stansell, and Thompson (1983) discussed the fact that the advent of the desexualized, or political, lesbian seemed to erase the differences between heterosexual and lesbian feminists, but that in reality it merely suppressed rather than eliminated the tensions that existed between them.

30. The members of the Gutter Dyke Collective found “celibate straight women” burdensome even when they did acknowledge the difficulties real lesbians had to face. In their experience, heterosexual women who chose to
be celibate for feminist reasons and accepted "the fact that true feminism should ultimately lead to lesbianism" (1973/1991:28) tended to view real lesbians as more perfect than themselves. This imposed the burden of responsibility on the lesbian and allowed celibate heterosexual women to use lesbians as confessors for the purpose of unburdening themselves of their own failings as feminists.

31. This process has been constructed by historians of lesbianism as a process of "desexualization," but Rich offered an alternative construction. She argued that lesbians were discovering "the erotic in female terms: as that which is unconfined to any single part of the body or solely to the body itself, as an energy not only diffuse but, as Audre Lorde has described it, omnipresent" (Rich 1980/1983:193, citing Lorde 1979). In other words, it is not a process of desexualization, but a process of the demasculinization of sexuality. See Richardson (1992) for a critique of the language of "sex" as male-defined and an analysis of the 1970s "desexualization" of the lesbian within feminist discourse and of the "resexualization" of the lesbian in the 1980s.

32. See Vicinus (1992) for a discussion of the problems of constructing lesbian history based on modern concepts of the lesbian. See Ferguson (1981) for a critique of efforts to create a transhistorical definition of lesbianism as ignoring the historical specificity of modern lesbian consciousness.

33. Vicinus (1982:147–148) cites Cook (1977:48) as the source of the quote, "Women who love women, who choose women to nurture and support and to create a living environment in which to work creatively and independently are lesbians."

34. Strong women in history could also be claimed as lesbian ancestors even in spite of evidence of heterosexual behavior, which could always be explained away as the result of the social constraints of the time or dismissed as irrelevant to the definition of lesbianism. An example of this is Rich (1980/1983), who refers to the "double life" of ancestral lesbians, by which she means the fact that they (also) had heterosexual relationships.

A more recent example of the reconstruction of women to create lesbian ancestors via the dismissal of contrary evidence is the story of Kate Millet. An article in Time magazine on Dec. 8, 1970, reported statements Millet had made regarding her own sexuality. In subsequent retellings of the story, Millett is sometimes reported as having revealed her bisexuality, and oftentimes reported as having revealed her lesbianism. See Abbott and Love (1972) for an account of the actual events.

35. "Gene Damon" also claimed spinsters as the ancestors of the modern lesbian. She argued that "In this same male-oriented society, with its double standards waving proudly in every arena, we still 'accept' the erroneous premise that there are millions of women who have no sexual interests in life. These are the women who make up our vast sea of lifelong spinsters whose outward mannerisms and behavior quite rightly lead to the erroneous assumption that they are 'sexless' beings. Most of the leaders of the DOB
agree that countless hundreds of thousands of women who can never con-
form to Kinsey statistics, are still, whether expressed or not, Lesbians.
We are also quick to agree that most of these women, faced with this
announcement, would die of shock on the spot" (1970:337). In other
words, these spinsters are the ancestors of the modern Lesbian even though
they might never have had lesbian sex, and even though they would have
been shocked at the thought. Their apparent sexlessness was a result of the
male-oriented society in which they lived; they were, regardless of the lack
of evidence, "really" lesbians. Here, "Damon" is arguing that to be an
ancestor of the modern lesbian, a woman need not only not have had
lesbian sex; she also need not even be aware of her feelings for women. The
lesbian is an essential, historical creature who existed even though she did
not know she existed; the task for the modern lesbian is merely to look
back at history to find her. "Gene Damon" is an alias of Barbara Grier
(Weitz 1984).

36. For additional discussion of nineteenth-century romantic friendships and
their construction as the predecessors of modern lesbian relationships, see
Smith-Rosenberg (1975) and Jeffreys (1985).

37. It was this "fundamental departure" from original lesbian feminist prin-
ciples that motivated Alice Echols to distinguish the new philosophy by
renaming it "cultural feminism" (Echols 1984). The transformation of radical
feminism into cultural feminism is illustrated in the personal story of
Liza Cowan. In an essay written in 1978, she explained that "[w]hen I first
became a feminist, I rejected the notion that there was any basic difference
between men and women" (1978/1991:223). But later, she came to believe
that the notion of "humanism" kept men in control and that men were
responsible for the creation of pollution, racism, and other evils that had
developed during their domination.

38. See Echols (1983, 1984) for a discussion of the transformation of feminist
thinking about gender with the rise of cultural feminism and the differences
between radical feminism and cultural feminism, particularly the differences
in the ways in which radical feminists and cultural feminists thought about
sexuality and the relationship between sexual liberation and women's liber-
ation.

39. See also Katz (1983) for a discussion of the use of the concept of innate
differences between men and women by feminists of the early 1900s.

40. See Faderman (1991) for a discussion of the conflict between lesbian cul-
tural feminists and lesbian sex radicals. See Richardson (1992) for documen-
tation of the growth of lesbian sex culture.

41. The contrast between pleasure and danger is taken from the title of the book

42. For other discussions of the role of gender in various feminist, lesbian, and
gay ideologies, see Adam (1987), Echols (1984), Evans (1993), Faderman
(1991), and Seidman (1993).
43. Shelley wrote, "Maybe after the revolution, people will be able to love each other regardless of skin color, ethnic origin, occupation, or type of genitals. But if that's going to happen, it will only happen because we make it happen—starting right now" (1969/1970:348).

44. Some theorists, including Johnston and Brown who are cited in the text, did not refer to a "bisexual potential" per se, but rather to a homosexual or lesbian potential that exists in all women, including those whose behavior is heterosexual. Their arguments were similar to those of lesbians who did posit a bisexual potential. For example, Abbott and Love invoked Simone de Beauvoir to argue that "all women are naturally homosexual" (Abbott and Love 1971:609, quoting from Simone de Beauvoir, The Second Sex, New York: Bantam Books, 1961: 382).

45. This idea was put forth very early in the formation of lesbian feminist ideology by the Radicalesbians, who wrote in the first paragraph of "The Woman-Identified Woman" that the lesbian "may not be fully conscious of the political implications of what for her began as personal necessity, but on some level she has not been able to accept the limitations and oppression laid on her by the most basic role of her society—the female role" (1970:49).


47. Marotta described the Redstockings and The Feminists as cultural radicals, and the New York Radical Women and WITCH as interested in a combination of revolutionary and radical ideologies (1981). WITCH and the Redstockings were offshoots of New York Radical Women, and The Feminists was an offshoot of NOW.

48. As noted by Marotta (1981) and Adam (1987), the consciousness raising group is a strategy that was borrowed by feminists from the New Left movement. The cultural radical perspective of the New Left viewed oppression as the result of cultural sexism, racism, classism, etc., rather than a simple consequence of prejudice and discrimination. The solution, therefore, was to transform the culture itself. Consciousness raising groups were the technique used to develop visions of the new nonracist, nonexist, nonclassist culture. But despite the radical origins of the consciousness raising group, the consequence of its use in the feminist movement was the development of women's culture that transformed women into an ethnic group and ultimately permitted feminists to avail themselves of nationalistic strategies.

49. Weitz (1984), in her examination of etiological views expressed in The Ladder, suggests that lesbians accepted the medical model in which lesbianism was seen as a process of development, not a choice, because they could thereby construct themselves as victims deserving toleration instead of evil people deserving condemnation. The argument that essentialism is consistent with the interests of sexual minorities is also supported by the fact that, unlike the lesbian feminist movement and despite the strides made in pride and autonomy in the 1980s and 1990s, the contemporary gay men's movement retains a primarily essentialist ideology. Contemporary
essentialist views among gay men cannot be attributed to internalized heterosexism; 1990s gay ideology clearly reflects the experiences and interests of gay men themselves. The reaction to research on the biological correlates of sexual orientation, for example, LeVay's (1991) study of the hypothalamus and more recent genetic studies, clearly demonstrates that the gay movement has an interest in promoting the opinion that sexual orientation is biologically determined. See Adam (1987) and Epstein (1987) for a discussion of gay ethnicity and the fact that the gay movement borrowed concepts and strategies from racial and ethnic political movements. For a discussion of the essentialism of "gay women" versus the lesbian feminist argument that lesbianism is chosen, see also Faderman (1991).

50. Faderman provided evidence that lesbian and gay activists consciously borrowed ethnic political tactics. For example, she reported that articles in The Ladder in the mid to late 1960s compared lesbians to other oppressed minorities, and that the Homophile League explicitly advocated copying the tactics used by other protesting minorities (1991). Also, Abbott and Love observed in 1971 that lesbians were emulating the tactics of women's liberation, which in turn had emulated Black liberation. "Gene Damon" noted that lesbians' efforts to construct themselves as an ethnic group were not welcomed by traditional ethnic minorities, and described some of the differences between lesbians and traditional ethnic minorities: "We have an unusual minority position. Some of the 'true' ethnic minorities resent our considering ourselves a minority. For example, we do not share a common racial or a common religious background, nor, indeed, any common background except our one difference: we prefer our own sex, sexually and in every other way" (1970:335–336).


52. The quote is from Marotta (1981:259), who reported that Kennedy made this argument to DOB-New York at its August, 1970 membership meetings.

53. Johnston also saw sexism as the most basic form of oppression. She focused in particular on the relationship of sexism to heterosexism, arguing that prejudice against gay men is based on prejudice against women because gay men are perceived as being like women. Sexism is, therefore, the direct parent of heterosexism, and the lesbian, as the figure who unites these two forms of oppression, is the "key figure in the social revolution to end the sexual caste system" (1973:183).

54. See also Alice et al. (1973/1991a,b).

55. Although Brown argued that sexism is the most basic form of oppression, she and Shelley felt that actively fighting racism and classism is just as important as fighting sexism and heterosexism. They criticized more moderate lesbian activists for focussing exclusively on sexism and heterosexism, and for incorporating middle class values into their goals and strategies. See, for example, Adam (1987) and Marotta (1981).

56. Some lesbian feminist theorists discussed the implications of their own arguments for bisexuality. Usually these discussions were brief (e.g., Abbott

57. As the Leeds Revolutionary Feminist Group put it, “the value of calling yourself a political lesbian is to state that you are not sexually available to men” (1981:68).

58. By this logic, the celibate non-lesbian, on the other hand, is politically acceptable because she refuses to relate to men, even though she does not relate to women. This position was expressed by the lesbian separatist Gutter Dyke Collective, which wrote in 1973, “women who consider themselves celibate, not lesbian, fighting for a loving female world and recognizing that there is no reconciliation with men, are our allies” (1973/1991:28–29). The operative condition here is “no reconciliation;” The Gutter Dyke Collective was not sanctioning women who would abstain from relations with men simply as a means toward an end, after which they would return to men. They were welcoming women who, like lesbians, had forsworn relations with men forever. Alice et al. also expressed their willingness to form alliances with non-lesbian “feminist separatists” (1973/1991a:37). Not all lesbian separatists who placed the emphasis on a refusal of relations with men welcomed non-lesbian celibates, however, a position that was acknowledged by The Gutter Dyke Collective even as they argued its untenability in light of the fact that many lesbians are themselves often celibate and that therefore the difference between the non-lesbian celibate and the lesbian was of no political import.

59. Myron and Bunch wrote “Some new bonds are beginning to emerge between lesbians and single women. We share a common economic and psychological reality: we are solely responsible for our lives—all of our lifetime. . . . We must provide for ourselves . . . This economic and psychological reality develops more strength and spirit in individual women” (1975:13).

60. This position is also described by Faderman (1991), who presents it as the lesbian feminist position on bisexuality.

61. See Koedt (1971/1973) for an articulation of this position.


64. Other authors have also constructed bisexuality as a threat to lesbian and gay ethnicity. See, for example, Seidman (1993) and Udis-Kessler (1990).

1. Although a total of 59 respondents classified themselves as bisexual, only 40 of these women did so unhesitatingly and unqualifiedly and also provided an answer to the question “What is your opinion of bisexuality?” The quotes in
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this chapter are all drawn from these latter 40 women, and all percentages are calculated on a base that includes only these 40 women.

2. These numbers represent fifteen bisexual respondents or 37.5% of bisexual respondents, and forty-seven lesbian respondents or 15.2% of lesbian respondents.

3. This 28% is based on the 25 bisexual women who provided implicit or explicit definitions of bisexuality in their answers to the question “What is your opinion of bisexuality?”

4. The negative images that were not spontaneously mentioned by any bisexual respondents are: Bisexuals are in a transition phase to lesbianism; bisexuals spread diseases to lesbians; bisexuals are oversexed; bisexuals are merely experimenting with lesbian sexuality; and bisexuals are unaware of or undecided about (as opposed to confused about) their sexuality. Except for the first, all of these images were fairly rare among lesbians, so their complete absence among bisexual respondents—who are much fewer in number than lesbian respondents—might be a matter of chance, and does not negate the statement that most of lesbians’ negative attitudes about bisexuals were echoed by bisexuals themselves.

5. Some patterns were found, although they were not consistent or significant enough to report in the text, they are reported in this footnote in the interest of completeness.

Bisexuals who identified themselves as lesbians in the past—particularly if they switched back and forth between bisexual and lesbian identities two or more times—tend to agree more strongly that some bisexuals are really lesbians than bisexuals who never identified themselves as lesbians do. This makes sense; those who previously identified themselves as lesbians are more likely to have associated with lesbians and thereby adopted lesbians’ belief that women who call themselves bisexual are really lesbians who are afraid to admit it. However, this is the only belief that is significantly correlated with bisexuals’ identity histories, and it is therefore probably a false positive.

Bisexuals who never identified themselves as lesbians show consistently stronger social preferences for bisexual women over lesbians than bisexuals with a history of lesbian identification, and bisexuals who switched identities two or more times show no preference for bisexuals at all. The largest difference is in the context of dating; bisexuals who never identified themselves as lesbian are more likely to prefer to date bisexual women (60% of those with a preference), whereas bisexuals who identified themselves as lesbian in the past are more likely to prefer to date lesbians (57% of those with a preference). None of these relationships are statistically significant, but this might be due to the small number of bisexuals who have never identified themselves as lesbian (n = 7). In a larger sample, this pattern might achieve statistical significance.

6. There was one bisexual woman who was a notable exception to this pattern; she described herself as 80% attracted to men, but unlike other bisexuals with predominantly heterosexual feelings, she reported that she strongly
preferred to associate with lesbians. She came out as a lesbian in the mid 1970s and retains a strong political identification with lesbians, saying that she expects whatever happens to lesbians to affect her “a lot,” whereas whatever happens to bisexuals will affect her “just a little.” If this one woman is excluded from the bisexual subsample, correlations between bisexuals’ feelings of heterosexual attraction and the four measures of social preference range from \( r = .347 \) to \( r = .553 \), with p-values ranging from .01 to .0001, indicating a moderately strong and significant correlation between the strength of bisexual women’s heterosexual feelings and their preferences for associating with other bisexual women.

7. Findings regarding the impact of the seriousness of bisexuals’ relationships with women and with men on their preferences for association are not presented because few are statistically significant. The relationship mentioned in the text is significant, with \( p = .03 \).

8. This specific finding is not statistically significant; all others reported in the text are.

9. Keep in mind that these findings are based on cross-sectional data; neither actual changes in respondents’ relationship statuses nor the effects of such changes on bisexuals’ social and political preferences have been observed. There might well be some individuals in the study whose social and political preferences would not change if their relationship statuses changed. However, the fact that individuals with different relationship statuses have different social and political preferences suggests that, in the aggregate, bisexuals’ preferences are based on their current relationship status rather than their bisexual identity.

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4. ben e factory, “Bi’s are out and loud at first northwest regional conference,” *North Bi Northwest*, vol. 6, no. 2, pp. 1, 8 (April/May 1993).
8. Kathleen Bennett, “The sweet bi and bi: Male-female couples in the bisexual
world,” *North Bi Northwest*, vol. 4, no. 5, p. 13 (October/November 1991).
12. For example, the March 1987 issue of *Bi Women* (vol. 5, no. 1, p. 8) reprinted an article entitled “Paths to integration” by Roger from *Bi and Large*, newsletter of the Seattle Bisexual Support Network, vol. 4, which distinguished between “proportional bisexuality,” “physical-attraction-based bisexuality,” “gender or political-centered bisexuality,” and three other types of bisexuality. At the end of the list, the author emphasized that the purpose of the list was descriptive, not definitive, and that the types described were ideal, not real: “This non-exhaustive listing is set down to aid our ever-growing awareness of the varied ways we can positively integrate our sexuality with the rest of our lives. Do you find elements of more than one of these ways in yourself?”
15. Kathleen E. Bennett, “Parade name change: Reality or rhetoric,” *North Bi Northwest*, vol. 5, no. 3 (June 1992).
16. Autumn Courtney, “The only thing constant . . . is change,” *Anything That Moves*, no. 4, p. 31 (1992). Laura M. Perez and Victor Raymond also assert that the struggle for sexual freedom is inherently linked to the struggles against “sexism, racism, classism, ableism, ageism and all other isms” (“Bisexuals included in the March on Washington,” *Bi Women*, vol. 11, no. 1, p. 6 (February/March 1993).
17. This focus group met at the 1992 BiNet Annual Meeting, the notes of which are reported in *BiNet News*, December 15, 1992.
18. Erica Avery, “Big group and big fun at BiNet National Conference,” *North Bi Northwest*, vol. 6, no. 3 (June/July 1993).
19. This statement appears on the inside cover of each issue of *Anything That Moves*.
22. The reasons given both for and against the name change reflect the organizations’ general concern about diversity. Supporters of the change argued that including “multicultural” in the name of the organization implied that it was not also interested in nonracial/ethnic forms of diversity. Elias Farajajé-
Jones, who did not perceive "multiculturalism" in solely racial/ethnic terms, argued that eliminating "multicultural" from the name was an example of the powerful making decisions that reflect their own reality. (See Elias Farajajé-Jones, "Multikulti feminist bis no more?" Anything That Moves, no. 5, pp. 18–19, 1993.) The issue was extremely controversial, and deadlocked the 1993 national BiNet USA meeting.


24. For example, in her keynote address to the Fifth Annual East Coast Bisexual Network Conference on Bisexuality, Lani Kaahumanu identified diversity as the source of bisexuals' strength. Excerpts of this speech were printed in Bi Women, vol. 7, no. 3, pp. 1, 4, 7 (June/July 1989). The full title of the conference was "The Fifth Annual East Coast Bisexual Network Conference on Bisexuality: Culture, Community, Coalition-Building." Kaahumanu also expressed this same sentiment in Lani Kaahumanu, "March on Washington," BiNet Newsletter, vol. 1, no. 3, p. 1 (February 1992).


27. For detailed theoretical discussions of the challenge posed by bisexuality to dichotomous thinking, and to oppressions based on dichotomous thinking, see Bennett (1992), Friedland and Highleyman (1991), and Rust (1992a).

28. For example, Rachel Kaplan rejected all social categories, even those created by people attempting to challenge the traditional dichotomy, by arguing that "[t]he problem with all sexual politics is its reliance on language to create reality when the only real truth about sexuality is in the body." ("Another coming out manifesto disguised as a letter to my mother," North Bi Northwest, vol. 3, no. 5, p. 3, October/November 1990.)

29. An example of this argument is Natalie Bacon's "Who am I?" originally printed in Bi-Lines, November 1986, and later reprinted in Bi Women, vol. 5, no. 1 (February/March 1987).

30. The Ellen Brenner quote is from "The article I have been threatening to write ever since I joined the network, or My life as a lesbian-identified bisexual fag hag," Bi Women, vol. 7, no. 3, p. 1 (June/July 1989). The Betty Aubut statement is quoted by Robyn Ochs in "Bi of the month: Betty Aubut," Bi Women, vol. 5, no. 2, p. 2 (April/May 1987). Other bisexuals have described the type of thinking challenged by bisexuality as "binary thinking" or "either/or thinking." Lenore Norrgard uses the term "binary computer-think" ("What is 'bisexual'? Am I? Are you?" North Bi Northwest, vol. 4, no. 6, p. 16 (December 1991/January 1992), and Erica Avery refers to "split thinking" ("SBWN: The personal and the political," North Bi Northwest, vol. 5, no. 6, p. 1 (December/January 1993).
32. Paul Smith, “The straight poop: A political opinion column. Are we a movement yet?” *Anything That Moves*, no. 4, p. 11 (1992). Sara Liebe attempted to provide an alternative to the half-gay, half-straight concept of bisexuality by analogizing bisexuals and sassafras trees. Through a fictional character, she said that “[p]eople don’t criticize a sassafras tree for inconsistency” because it has three different leaf shapes; instead, people consider all three leaf shapes to be “three manifestations of [the sassafras’s] treeness.” In other words, everything bisexuals do they do as bisexuals, not as heterosexuals or homosexuals depending on the gender of their partners (Sara Liebe, “The three leaves of the sassafras,” *North Bi Northwest*, vol. 3, no. 5, p. 6 (October/November 1990).
33. Ellen Barnett, “Which came first, the bisexual or the feminist?” *North Bi Northwest*, vol. 4, no. 6, p. 8 (December 1991/January 1992).
35. The idea that bisexuality can serve as a bridge between heterosexuals and lesbians/gays is expressed by Marcia Deihl and Betty Aubut, although neither woman links this idea to the concept of a sexual continuum (Marcia Deihl, Letter to *Gay Community News* reprinted in *Bi Women*, vol. 8, no. 3, pp. 7–8 (June/July 1990); Aubut is quoted in Robyn Ochs, “Bi of the month: Betty Aubut,” *Bi Women*, vol. 5, no. 2, p. 2 (April/May 1987).
37. Pat Cattolico, “Opinion: Reader responds to personal/political,” *North Bi Northwest*, vol. 6, no. 1, p. 6 (February/March 1993).
42. Ellen Barnett, “Which came first, the bisexual or the feminist?” *North Bi Northwest*, vol. 4, no. 6, p. 8 (December 1991/January 1992).
44. See, for example, Shuster (1991).
45. Paul Talbert’s article “Dancing for the androgynous god” is rare in its mention of androgyny. Talbert does not hold androgyny up as an ideal because it is genderless per se, however; instead, he values it because it represents the overthrow of imbalanced “gender roles and gender power”
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(North Bi Northwest, vol. 6, no. 6, pp. 9, 11, December/January 1993). Liz Highleyman contrasted the opinion of a European bisexual theorist who felt that androgynous bisexuality is the ideal of the future with the views of most American bisexual activists whom she characterized as thinking "of bisexuality as part of a continuum of valid options," rather than a superior form of sexuality (Liz Highleyman, "First International Bisexual Conference," North Bi Northwest, vol. 5, no. 1, p. 5, February 1992).


47. This statement of purpose is printed on the inside front cover of every issue of Anything That Moves.

48. For example, this idea is expressed by "Robin," who is described by Kathleen Bennett in "The sweet bi and bi: Male-female couples in the bisexual world," North Bi Northwest, vol. 4, no. 5, p. 12 (October/November 1991).


51. Lists of these myths and responses to them appear frequently in the bisexual press. See, for example, Sumpter (1991). Shuster identifies the persistence of myths about bisexuality as one of the "remaining challenges" of the bisexual movement (1991:267).

52. Bettykay, "Politically and socially bi," North Bi Northwest, vol. 3, no. 6, p. 10 (December 1990/January 1991). The fear that others will generalize from some individuals' active sex lives to all bisexuals has kept other bisexuals from writing about their sexual experiences; two years after Bettykay's article, Alison noted that little has been written about group sex because bisexuals are hesitant to use precious bisexual page space to reinforce stereotypes (Alison, "Group sex: Some thoughts and experiences," North Bi Northwest, vol. 6, no. 2, p. 9, April/May 1993). A lengthier example of the "some are, some aren't" argument is provided by Norrgard (1991), who notes that some bisexuals are quick to assure others that bisexuals can be monogamous. She identifies this as a half truth and encourages bisexuals to acknowledge the diversity of the bisexual community, instead of defending bisexuality by buying into the cultural valuation of monogamy.

53. See Beth Reba Weise, "The bisexual community: Viable reality or revolutionary pipe dream?" Anything That Moves, no. 2, p. 23 (Spring 1991), or the newsletter Bisexual Centrist, published by the BiCentrist Alliance.

54. See Autumnn Courtney, "The only thing constant ... is change," Anything That Moves, no. 4, p. 30 (1992), for a brief discussion of the effect of public opinion on bisexuals during the early years of the AIDS crisis.


56. Ellen Brenner, "The article I have been threatening to write ever since I
joined the network, or My life as a lesbian-identified bisexual fag hag,” *Bi Women*, vol. 7, no. 3, p. 6 (June/July 1989).

57. For example, in November 1990, *North Bi Northwest* reported that two bisexual people had spoken to a P-FLAG meeting; in February 1992, the same newsletter reported the appearance of bisexual activists on the *Sonya Live* show; and, in May 1993, it reported that bisexuals had appeared on *Donahue*. Talk shows looking for bisexual guests often contact the best-known bisexual activists, who in turn publicize the request via electronic mail and other media.

58. Lani Kaahumanu made this point in her keynote address to the Fifth Annual East Coast Bisexual Network Conference on Bisexuality. See *Bi Women*, vol. 7, no. 3, p. 4 (June/July 1989).

59. See, for example, Amanda Udis-Kessler, “Culture and community: Thoughts on lesbian-bisexual relations,” *North Bi Northwest*, vol. 4, no. 1, pp. 3–4 (February/March 1991).


61. The first point is from a letter written by Ingrid Sell, *Bi Women*, vol. 8, no. 3, p. 6 (June/July 1990). The second point is suggested by Lani Kaahumanu, who interpreted her own previous biphobia to her suppressed bisexual feelings in her keynote address to the Fifth Annual East Coast Bisexual Network Conference on Bisexuality.


69. This particular quote is taken from Laura M. Perez and Victor Raymond, “Bisexuals included in the March on Washington,” *Anything That Moves*, no. 5, p. 15 (1993). This way of expressing the ludicrousness of the idea that bisexuals are half oppressed because they are only half-homosexual is, however, very common. Its first copyrighted appearance might be Robyn Ochs’ “Gay Liberation is our liberation,” p. 2, in Geller (1990), an altered version of “Gay liberation is our liberation” published in *Bi Women*, vol. 5, no. 4, p. 4 (August/September 1987).

71. Michele Moore, “Notes from all over,” *Bi Women*, vol. 6, no. 1, p. 2 (February/March 1988).


73. The history of the Northampton controversy was also reported in *Anything That Moves*, no. 2 (Spring 1991).

74. Robyn Ochs and Pam Ellis, “The 4th annual lesbian, bisexual and gay studies conference: A call for papers and a call for action,” *North Bi Northwest*, vol. 4, no. 1, pp. 1, 12, 13 (February/March 1991). See also Rebecca Kaplan and Annie Senghas, “... and bisexual (?) conference,” *North Bi Northwest*, vol. 5, no. 1, pp. 4, 7 (February 1992).


81. Lenore Norrgard, “Are we still a women’s group?” *North Bi Northwest*, vol. 4, no. 1, p. 7 (February/March 1991).


84. Among the authors who have addressed the subject of feminist bisexuality or who have written in response to lesbian feminism are Dajenya (1991), Elliot (1991), and Schneider (1991). *Closer to Home: Bisexuality and Feminism* edited by Weise (1992) is entirely devoted to the subject of feminist bisexuality.

85. An example of this is a quote from Weise, in which she suggested that “[p]erhaps in some ways we are in a unique position to challenge yet another patriarchal ideology by being multi-cultural, multi-racial, multi-gendered, multi-experienced, multi-sexual.” Weise provided no explanation of what being multi-everything has to do with challenging patriarchy. She did not have to, because she expected her audience to be cognizant of the connections between oppressions that feminism forged (Beth Reba Weise, “The bisexual community: Viable reality or revolutionary pipe dream?” *Anything That Moves*, no. 2, p. 21, Spring 1991).