THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

Interrogating Choice: Bisexual Identity and Politics

by

Carol Ann Berenson

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE

DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY

CALGARY, ALBERTA

JANUARY, 1999

© Carol Ann Berenson

The author has granted a non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of this thesis in microform, paper or electronic formats.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de cette thèse sous la forme de microfiche/film, de reproduction sur papier ou sur format électronique.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

Canada

ABSTRACT

This research project develops a bisexual standpoint which is intended as a tool for social and political critique. Through in-depth interviews with women who identify as bisexual, I have explored the potential for understanding bisexuality to be about choices, and the problematics of such a position. Specifically, choices to define and take up this label, and choices around relationships and being out as bisexual provided the structure for our discussions. Given their strategic placement within the current hetero/homo environment of thinking about sexuality, bisexual women face a unique set of experiences and challenges. The political implications of these women's efforts to create themselves as subjects apart from both heterosexuals and lesbians are twofold. First, the dilemmas inherent in bisexual experience suggest that some new political strategies might be in order in terms of challenging heteronormativity. At the same time however, these new strategies stand to be detrimental to gay and lesbian identity politics work, a compelling problem which this thesis addresses in an effort to contribute to the inclusiveness and sophistication of our analyses around sexualities and oppression.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

This thesis is a theoretical and empirical examination into bisexual identity. The

ultimate purpose of the study is to develop an experientially-based bisexual standpoint

which can be used as a tool for social and political critique. The specific research

question that drives this study is: In what ways do the experiences of bisexual women

challenge hegemonic assumptions about social-sexual relations and ideas about effective

political strategies involving these relations? The study is organized around the idea of

choice which bisexuality seems to unavoidably foreground as an issue. The political and

social implications of seeing sexual identity as an issue of choice-making are drawn out

and explored here. This work is particularly relevant to two areas of sociological study.

First, sociologists are interested in questions about identity and how individuals

come into a sense of who they are. Typically sociological approaches acknowledge an

interplay between psychological and social processes and see individual agents as

actively engaged in producing their own identities. This study of bisexually-identified

women emphasizes choice, so clearly places the actor into a position of agency.

However, the context of dualistic, homo/hetero thinking in which bisexual identity gets

produced also suggests some unique constraints for the individual. Therefore this

research enters into the existing work on identity formation, illuminating the processes

from a nontraditional position which stands to be both interesting and a challenge to

established views.

Sexuality is another area of interest to sociologists which this thesis addresses.

The ways in which sexuality is understood and empirically investigated vary among sociologists, depending upon their individual paradigmatic preferences. This study makes explicit its sociopolitical leanings (Chapter Two, Section One) and attempts empirical inquiry consistent with these leanings. Within this approach, sexuality is seen as an issue of identity, behaviour, meanings and political relevance. The sociology of sexuality problem investigated here is how bisexual women might understand and negotiate their particular sexual choices in the present environment. While the focus is on bisexuality, an outcome of this focus is to illuminate the problems that the heteronormative environment creates for bisexuality. So, the sociological issue of concern here is not only the bisexual woman, but the environment itself is once again called into question. There is considerable room for this kind of interpretive and political empirical research in the sociology of sexuality.

Chapter Two, "What Makes Bisexuality Matter", sets out the foundations for the study and locates it within the relevant literature. This chapter begins with an outline of the sociopolitical assumptions upon which this research project is based. The second section of Chapter Two provides the background needed to fully appreciate the environment in which the study locates itself. The empirical emphasis of this study also suggests a look at the existing empirical research on bisexuality; section three of Chapter Two surveys the literature on bisexual research in the social sciences. This chapter ends with a discussion of standpoint epistemology in general and how a standpoint based upon bisexual choices in particular can provide interesting and unique insight.

Chapter Three, entitled "Choice: How We Talk About It", addresses the issue of

choice which is central to this study. The purpose of the chapter is to get clear about the concept of choice itself and to look at existing discourses that might run parallel to or provide a point of departure for this study. The chapter begins with a brief overview of the discourse analysis approach to research and why it is useful for critical work. In section two of Chapter Three, the work of moral theorists, which provides the philosophical foundations for much of our current thinking about the issue of agency, is presented. The varying discourses of the feminist prochoice movement provide an important example of the use of choice as a political platform and are examined in section three of Chapter Three. The ways in which choice has played out in the political work of gays and lesbians provides the immediate context for this work on bisexuality. The fourth part of Chapter Three outlines this perhaps most important set of background discourses. Finally, the chapter ends with the bisexual standpoint itself theorized. Here the specific ways in which bisexuality might be seen to be about choices are explored and the potential for bisexuality's uniqueness and importance become clear.

Chapter Four, which is entitled "Moving the Standpoint From Theory To Experience: The Narratives of Bisexual Women", describes the methodological aspects of this research project. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a group of self-selected women who identify themselves to be bisexual. The chapter begins with a discussion of who the participants are and the particular challenges that a study of this nature poses for both the researcher and the participants. The second part of Chapter Four describes the interviewing strategy that was used and the final section of this chapter outlines how the data were organized and subsequently analysed. Discussions of political

and ethical concerns are woven throughout Chapter Four as these issues most obviously arise at the time of the interview and carry over into the analysis stages of the project.

In Chapters Five and Six the data are presented and analysed. The theoretical bisexual standpoint involves four specific choices, which did resonate for the women in the interviews, so these chapters are organized according to the four choices. Specifically, Chapter Five deals with the choice to define bisexuality for oneself and the choice to take up the bisexual identity label. In Chapter Six choices around relationships and choices to be out (or not) as bisexual are explored.

The conclusion of the thesis begins with a brief synopsis of this research endeavour and a discussion of the ways in which the women shaped this study and, as a result, my perceptions along the way. Next Chapter Seven summarizes the highlights of the bisexual women's standpoint that has evolved through the course of this project. Finally an attempt is made to see how the issues and insights which arise out of this study might be linked to further research which could make a contribution to the field of oppression studies.

Chapter Two

WHAT MAKES BISEXUALITY MATTER?

Introducing the Sociopolitical Perspective

This research project is about human sexuality, identity and politics. While the fit

between these phenomena might be obvious to some, this configuration certainly does not

represent the only way to approach research of this nature. Given this, it is important to

begin by articulating the assumptions embedded in this particular account and recognize

it to be only one possibility on a list of considerable options. This assumption check is

not only intended for potential dissenters, but also to make clear to myself the tenets

which inform my thinking, interviewing and writing on this project.

A sociopolitical approach to the study of human sexuality is concerned with

meanings and their implications. Social theorists acknowledge that sexualities are made

within a context of social practices and relations (Epstein 1994; Foucault 1990; Freedman

1995; Kinsman 1996; McIntosh 1968; Seidman 1996; Valverde 1985; Warner 1993;

Weeks 1996). Rather than seeing sexuality as a natural, instinctual phenomenon, this

perspective emphasizes that meanings are assigned to sexuality in accordance with many

aspects of social life. Thoughts, desires, inclinations and behaviours are all shaped into

categories according to a larger context where their relevance is then determined.

Lurking under this discussion is an important conceptual debate which is often

implicit (if not explicit) in work on sexuality, the essentialist vs constructionist

controversy (Stein 1992). While these categories are themselves somewhat open to

interpretation, a few basic assumptions can be made about their content. Simply stated,

essentialists believe that there are objective, intrinsic, culture-independent facts about sexual orientation. Essentialists unproblematically assign categories such as homosexual and heterosexual to individuals across societies and ahistorically. On the other hand, for constructionists categories are local and contextual and only meaningful within the culture that constructs them. Constructionists see 'homosexual' and 'heterosexual' as sociohistorical categories, worthy of explanation in their own right, rather than as universally relevant. Where essentialists reify and naturalize sexuality then, constructionists refuse to privilege any form of sexuality as natural, instead emphasizing the processes and environments that create particular sexualities at particular times (Epstein 1987).

In making the claim that sexuality is not a matter of instincts, it is not my intent to delve into the nature vs nurture debate. While concerns about origin are certainly present within the constructionist/essentialist forum, it should not be conflated with the issue of nature vs nurture. Contrary to common wisdom, essentialists are not necessarily married to the nature side of the origin debate; it is possible to think that sexuality is learned and still see it as an intrinsic fact. On the other hand however, given constructionists' emphases on self-identification and meanings, it is less clear that they can be anything other than nurturists (Stein 1992, p.329-30). The point here is that these inconsistencies demonstrate that essentialism and constructionism are not synonymous with nature and nurture, even though some connections seem to apply. The two debates are different.

I situate myself in the constructionist camp and yet do not wish to abolish the genetic, hormonal or biological aspects of human sexual experience. The point above

allows for this possibility, despite the apparent necessity that constructionists be nurturists, since origin issues can fall outside of the essentialist/constructionist forum. In other words, the issue of whether sexuality is innate or learned, biological or environmental is simply not encompassed within this sociopolitical perspective. Furthermore, even if it was a relevant part of this approach, the nature/nurture split is itself a questionable characterization of human experience. Seldom are the effects of nature and nurture distinct and separable from one another in people's lives. Therefore, it is possible to find nature/nurture to be a false distinction and at the same time be a constructionist since sociopolitics does not require that one takes a stand on this debate. What can safely be assumed here is that individual sexual subjects are highly complex psychological, social and physiological entities. Most importantly, these subjects are rarely the final topic of concern within the sociopolitical perspective. Rather this approach views individuals within a larger societal framework which might privilege or regulate their behaviour, or render them invisible.

The point of this discussion is to indicate that my position, while constructionist in character, makes no claims about the content or origins of individual sexual identities. Rather, it seeks to see the ways in which individual sexual subjects are produced and given meaning in a particular place and time. Research that emphasizes content or origins is most often focused on the individual subject which leads to a privatization of the issue of sexuality. My research approach shifts the focus from individuals to meanings in the larger context, moving human sexuality from the private realm of the bedroom into the public realm of institutions. The claim which results from this shift is

that, not only is personal life sexualized, but so are institutions not commonly viewed as such. For instance, sexuality has been shown to operate at the level of the state (Duggan 1994), the economy (Rubin 1974; Zaretsky 1997), education (Gaard 1996; Jeffreys 1994), and also within the underlying ideologies that produce these institutions (Wittig 1992). Sexuality is not merely an issue of what individuals do in the privacy of their homes; rather, by making connections to the public sphere, sex becomes politically relevant beyond the bedroom.

To illustrate the political differences between essentialists and constructionists, the work of Lillian Faderman is useful. In her book entitled, <u>Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers</u> (1992), Faderman articulates a history of twentieth-century lesbian life through the narratives of women she has interviewed. Faderman argues that same-sex relationships between women have existed since the Renaissance in western society, taking the form of what she calls romantic friendships. From an essentialist perspective, Faderman's political point could be to demonstrate that there have always been lesbian couplings, although the word 'lesbian' is a relatively recent development. The intimacies that women have shared throughout history provide evidence that can be seen as countering the apparent inevitability of other-sex couplings. Politically, if homosexual experiences between women become increasingly naturalized and evident, this can serve to denaturalize heterosexuality to a degree. However, while this point is political in nature, it is also limited because it keeps sexuality a private, individualized and personalized matter.

From a constructionist perspective, Faderman takes the evidence a step further by

interrogating the meanings of her romantic friendships in particular periods. The fact that they were benign and unthreatening at a particular point in time speaks to the larger society's views of women in general at that time. The appearance of the word 'lesbian' was no accident; rather it speaks to the increased power and importance of women in a certain context. This analysis moves sexuality out of the bedroom and the realm of 'natural' instincts into the public sphere of structures, institutions and meanings. Through examining meanings, something is learned about the society at large and the types of oppression that may or may not have been present. So, given their contrasting foundational assumptions, essentialists and constructionists are led to having quite different political strategies. While the politics of essentialism are useful in challenging heterosexual privilege, they cannot offer the more radical critique of society of which constructionists are capable.

My project on bisexual identity begins from the assertion that sexuality is socially produced and therefore relevant politically beyond the private sphere of intimate relations. These assumptions shape the goal of my work, which is to determine some of the specific ways in which bisexuality is constructed and can be politically useful in current debates on sexuality and identity. It is from these assumptions that I move forward to study bisexual identity.

A Brief History of Some Categories

The relevant context for the history discussed here is that informed by largely white, western-European systems of philosophy and science, and the discourses which

have evolved out of these foundations. This particular history of work in the area of human sexuality has brought us to a place where bisexual identity is of distinct interest. At present human sexual identity is understood to exist within a dualistic framework of homosexual and heterosexual inclinations. Social historians trace the legacy of the homo/hetero binary back to the end of the 19th century, demonstrating that particular social processes and conditions have not only brought about, but also firmly entrenched this conceptual scheme (Foucault 1990; Freedman 1995; Katz 1995; Weeks 1996). Today the dualism has moved into the realm of assumed knowledge, becoming a part of the "sexual wisdom of our society" (Irvine 1994, p.238). Only recently has theoretical work begun to displace the binary itself. It is in the context of this challenge that I locate my work on bisexual identity. What follows is a brief description of the discourses which have led to the current state of affairs.

The legacy begins in the late 1800's when an important paradigm shift occurred moving sexuality from the realm of actions and behaviours to the realm of identity. In the west, the evolving economic and social conditions of industrialization, along with new systems of knowledge, helped to facilitate this shift in emphasis from acts to subjects. Economically, children became liabilities where once they were viewed as assets. Socially, the separation of the private and public spheres served to shift the focus of the productive, utilitarian family. Without its reproductive function, sexual activity took on a new meaning, moving from procreation to passion and the family became an emotional unit (Irvine 1994, p.237). In this new environment, sexual intimacy came to be viewed as important in terms of one's individual happiness and healthy development as a

human being. Prior to this, connecting individual identity to sexuality would have been unimaginable (Irvine 1994, p.237). Now however, sex was no longer just an issue of particular activities; it had become an integral part of one's sense of self.

The public/private split also opened up new spaces for same-sex interactions (Freedman 1995, p.35; Kinsman 1996, p.49). At the same time, the new and all-powerful medical professionals began characterizing these interactions in terms of particular types of people where once they were merely indicative of isolated acts (Udis-Kessler 1991, p.351). The word 'homosexual' first appeared in English in the 1890's in the work of sexologist Havelock Ellis and subsequently in the U.S. medical literature (Freedman 1995; Kinsman 1996). The homosexual person, as viewed by the early sexologists, was an anomaly, a sexually perverse individual to be studied and understood. Heterosexuality was not to appear until slightly later in the discourses, first as a perversion in its own right, then gradually as the dominant ideal. This is particularly interesting in light of the prevalence and power that heterosexuality was to achieve later. It has been argued that the heterosexual subject followed the homosexual because a nondeviant other was necessary to make clear the boundaries between permissible and unacceptable, those to be policed and those not to be (McIntosh 1968). Ultimately, Viennese sexologist Richard von Krafft-Ebing is credited with normalizing heterosexual erotic desire, hence, entrenching not only the homo/hetero binary but also its hierarchical ordering (Adams 1997, p.8).

By the beginning of the 20th century then two distinct sexual subjects existed where there had been none before. Furthermore, not only was the binary in place, but its

categories were firmly hierarchically ordered with heterosexuality unquestioningly situated above its deviant homosexual other. The 20th century has seen a gradual demedicalization and an increased politicization of the discourses of sexuality, hence, a gradual shift in the meanings of the homosexual and heterosexual categories.

World War II gave rise to the McCarthy era, a time of intense paranoia and subsequent scapegoating of gays and lesbians in both Canada and the U.S.. In Canada this initiative continued into the late 1950's and early 1960's in the national security campaigns against gays and lesbians which were undertaken by the government. During these times, gays and lesbians were defined as a threat to the national security given their inherent 'character weaknesses' which rendered them vulnerable to 'blackmail' (Kinsman 1995). In this highly charged, discriminatory environment the origins of the politicization of gay and lesbian identity can be found.

The extreme regulation and policing of individuals during this time raised the consciousness of groups of gay men and women in Los Angeles and San Francisco. They responded with a 'homophile movement' which was to spread across the entire U.S. by the late 1960's (Faderman 1991, pp.190-94; Freedman 1995, pp.42-43). The first all-woman group, the Daughters of Bilitis, took hold in 1953. The DOB's politics involved declaring themselves to be good citizens, just like their heterosexual counterparts, hence, deserving of similar rights and fair treatment. Here the shift in meanings from homosexual identity as 'spoiled' to an identity worthy of respect and value was clearly taking shape.

As the 1960's progressed, a new category, the lesbian feminist, came into being

and along with it a new political agenda which further contributed to this normalizing shift. Feminism initiated the call for alternative perspectives to be considered in the creation of knowledges. This approach, upon which identity politics rests, argues that individuals situated on the margins of dominant systems are often best able to demonstrate unacknowledged ideologies operating at their centres (Alcoff & Potter 1993; Harding 1991; Hill Collins 1986; Smith 1986). Lesbian feminists have argued that their particular subject position is a useful site from which to reveal the inherent and unavoidable patriarchal nature of heterosexual relations (Kitzinger 1987; Martindale 1995; Rich 1983). So, while the DOB's might have succeeded in raising lesbians to the level of heterosexuals, the lesbian feminist position actually attempts to elevate them to a level beyond that of their heterosexual counterparts.

Along with this status come new discourses which reveal that the category of lesbian is not monolithic, nor do its members necessarily share identical interests (Anzaldua 1990; Fife 1993; Lorde 1984). Inevitable tensions within the lesbian camp have therefore given rise to an emphasis upon difference within lesbian feminist identity politics (DiStefano 1990; Phelan 1993).

This emphasis is taken to its logical extreme by the postmodern-influenced queer theory movement which challenges the very notion of a stable, fixed sexual identity itself (Butler 1990; Fuss 1991; Sedgwick 1990). While queer theory's emphasis upon the fluidity and contingent aspects of identity seems a more accurate way of representing the sexual subject, it also threatens to make a mockery of the important strides which identity politics have achieved. How might this new understanding of identity as shifting and

contextual inform political analysis and action? While queer theory has engaged with this question from a theoretical perspective, little empirical work has been done in this area. Given that bisexuality is presumably more fluid than its homo or hetero counterparts, perhaps empirical investigation of bisexual experiences can offer insight into this question. I turn next to the empirical work that has been done in the social sciences specifically in the area of bisexuality. These discourses provide both the background and the present environment for my research on bisexuality.

Bisexuality in Practice: Social Science Discourses

As in the case of homosexuality, some of the earliest discourses on bisexuality came out of the psychiatric and sexology traditions of the late 19th century. At this time bisexuality was not connected to sex object choice, rather it was defined as the simultaneous presence of both masculine and feminine qualities in one individual (Zaretsky 1997). While such a phenomenon could lead to the simultaneous desiring of both males and females, this erotic desire was separately coined in sexology as 'psychical hermaphroditism'. Krafft-Ebing actually linked the word 'hetero-sexual' to this condition in his early work, leading some to conclude that heterosexuality was actually synonymous with our current usage of bisexuality at one time. However, this is not the case, as the matter at the heart of psychical hermaphroditism/hetero-sexuality was the issue of mental gender within the self rather than the sex of one's desired partner (Katz 1995, p.207). In actuality then, the defining feature of bisexuality was to do with gender identity rather than erotic desire in the early discourses of sexologists such as Krafft-

Ebing.

Freud was perhaps the first social scientist to empirically address the issue of bisexuality as we now understand it. While his earlier work took up the preliminary definition of bisexuality which emphasized gender, a new view of bisexuality becomes apparent in Freud's 1905 text entitled Three Essays on Sexuality. This shift in emphasis to object-choice appears for the first time in Freud's famous case involving an 18 year old woman named Ida Bauer, whom he was to call Dora. According to Freud, Dora suffered from hysteria, a condition he defined as the inability to choose between love objects of different sexes. Dora's bisexual condition had nothing to do with her gender identity, the issue here was explicitly the desiring of both sexes. Here then in the work of Freud we see our current notions of bisexuality for the first time. Unfortunately, we also see Freud equating Dora's condition with the term hysteria. So, as with homosexuality, bisexuality was unquestioningly pathologized in the early psychiatric discourses. This trend continued in Freud's work, as is evidenced by the fact that in later case studies he was to actually use the terms bisexuality and hysteria interchangeably (Zaretsky 1997, p.79).

Following Freud, the next influential figure to inform social science discourses in the area of human sexuality was Alfred Kinsey at The Institute for Sex Research at Indiana University. While Kinsey's work was not explicitly or intentionally about bisexuality, it unavoidably brought the issue into the realm of mainstream quantitative inquiry in the 1940's. Kinsey and his associates undertook a groundbreaking, widespread study of the sexual practices of men and women in the United States. A part of this study involved the creation of a seven-point rating scale upon which individuals situated

themselves in terms of their psychosexual responses and overt sexual experiences. Given that the continuum is flanked on either end by homosexuality and heterosexuality in their exclusive forms, anyone falling within the five midpoints of the scale can theoretically be designated as bisexual. If this designation holds, then Kinsey's results indicated a significant proportion of bisexually inclined individuals in the U.S. population. Remarkably however, the word 'bisexuality' appears only once in Sexual Behavior in the Human Female (1953, p.468). Despite Kinsey's evidence for bisexuality, it seems that the greatest impact of his work was to increase interest in homosexuality. Bisexuality was to remain largely ignored or under-represented in social science research for more than two decades.

Not until the late 1970's did bisexuality become a topic worthy of empirical study in its own right in the U.S. and England (Blumstein & Schwartz 1976a, 1976b, 1977; Klein 1993; Wolff 1977). In keeping with Kinsey's sexology approach, much of this research sought to categorize, establish causation and understand the unique sexuality of the bisexual individual. These discourses typically emphasized the sexual aspect of bisexual experience failing to address or see as relevant the social and political implications of bisexual identity. For example, comparisons between the experiences of bisexual men and women were often made (Blumstein & Schwartz 1976a, 1976b), while connections between sexual orientation and sexism were seldom explored in these early discourses.

The 1970's emphasis on sexual content while limited in scope, did serve two political purposes, whether intended or not. First, it normalized bisexual people's

experiences to a degree, hence undoing Freud's pathological discourses and making

bisexuality visible in a way that Kinsey's work had not done. Second, it provided useful

insight in terms of overall understandings of human sexuality. By making bisexuality

central to the study of sexuality in general, these discourses increased not only the

visibility but also the importance of the bisexual subject position.

For example, as a result of his 1976 study of 135 bisexuals in New York City,

Fritz Klein (1993) developed his Sexual Orientation Grid. Klein's research brought to

light the complexity of human sexual identity unlike any work before had done. Klein

built upon Kinsey's continuum by creating a three-dimensional grid of seven variables

(attraction, behaviour, fantasies, emotional preference, social preference, lifestyle

preference and self-identification) and adding a time line (past, present and ideal). While

Klein's grid revealed the complexity and fluidity of bisexuality in particular, it also

offered a much more sophisticated picture of human sexuality in general than Kinsey's

earlier two-dimensional scale.

Similarly, Blumstein and Schwartz's (1976a, 1976b) in-depth interviews with 156

U.S.-based bisexuals in 1974 provided rich data for new understandings. Most

importantly perhaps, Blumstein and Schwartz's (1977) social-psychological approach

emphasized the idea that bisexual behaviours and desires do not necessarily correspond

with bisexual self-identification. Participating in bisexual activity means something

totally different than choosing to identify oneself as bisexual. Blumstein and Schwartz

concluded that, making sense of sexuality is not merely a matter of attending to

behaviours and responses as in Kinsey's earlier work. Rather, self-perceptions and

understanding must also be considered as a central aspect in the formulation of the sexual subject.

Charlotte Wolff's (1977) major contribution was a British study of 150 bisexually self-identified individuals. Methodologically Wolff utilized a triangulated approach including the use of questionnaires, autobiographical sketches and interviews. Wolff's conceptual framework and subsequent findings were similar to those of her U.S. counterparts. However, unlike Klein who saw the bisexual subject as a separate and unique entity, Wolff sought to bisexualize the world: "Only in a bisexual society can human beings get rid of the sexual compartments in which they are entrenched, and understand that we are all in the same boat, only in different attire" (1977, p. 109). While this statement problematically masks important differences, it is uncharacteristically political for this particular time in the social science research of sexuality. Interestingly, the political implications of the insights brought about by these 1970's discourses were not to be addressed until the 1990's.

A continued emphasis on the sexual aspects of bisexuality is evident in the 1980's discourses. Most of the empirical work done during this time aimed to further understand the intricacies of and variations in bisexuality by examining it within specific contexts such as marriage or cross-culturally (Brownfain 1985; Carrier 1985; Coleman 1985). Unlike their predecessors in the 1970's, these discourses seemed to place bisexuals in opposition to straight, white culture, thus perhaps serving to marginalize rather than normalizing bisexual people. Alongside these discourses however, new perspectives were to enter the picture, gradually shifting the emphasis away from the exclusively

sexual towards the social meanings of bisexuality (Hansen & Evans 1985; Herdt 1984;

MacDonald 1981; Paul 1985; Ross 1984; Zinik 1985). Here the cultural relevance (or

lack thereof) of bisexuality is beginning to be addressed and the seeds of its eventual

politicization are planted.

The continued politicization of bisexual identity in the 1990's is evidenced in the

number of personal narrative anthologies which have appeared in the literature (Acharya

et al. 1995; Hutchins & Kaahumanu 1991; Reba Weise 1992; Tucker et al. 1995). These

important narratives can be seen to be inherently political because they demonstrate a

move from the centrality of the expert's view to one of the bisexual individual creating

the self as a subject. While these first-person accounts are often intentionally anti-

intellectual in tone, it has been argued that the social science discourses which have gone

before have played an instrumental role in opening up spaces for these bisexual voices to

be heard (Plummer 1996). The point here is that there seems to be a blurring of the

authoritative boundaries between the public, systematized, scientific discourses of the

institution and the private, personalized, experiential discourses of the individual. In

addition to these personal stories, the politics of bisexuality has also been examined as a

topic in its own right by a number of authors (Eadie 1993; Firestein 1996; Friedland &

Highleyman 1991; Hall & Pramaggiore 1996; Hemmings 1993; Reba Weise 1992;

Tucker et al. 1995; Udis-Kessler 1991). However, discourses on bisexuality that combine

the empirical voices with theoretical political analysis are less common. Two exceptions

can be found in the research approaches of Amber Ault and Paula Rust.

Ault (1994, 1996a, 1996b) examines the discursive strategies which both bisexual

women and lesbians use to create their respective sexual identities. She emphasizes the unique positioning of the bisexual subject, which "depends upon the contestation between the dominant and the marginalized for its own existence" (1996b, p. 451). Ault concludes that, despite their marginalized status, both lesbians and bisexuals utilize dominant discursive strategies to validate and legitimate their own identities by delegitimating those of each other. While Ault sees bisexual identity as politically promising, she does not develop this potential in terms of a critique of heterosexuality. Rather, her work demonstrates the jockeying for power that takes place among marginalized groups.

Similarly, Paula Rust (1992, 1993, 1995) looks at the relationship between lesbians and bisexual women. Rust's large-scale mid-1980's study surveyed 346 U.S. women who identified themselves as other than heterosexual. Her main emphasis is upon lesbians' attitudes towards bisexuals, although she attempts to present the voices of bisexual women within her study as well. Rust finds that bisexual women have internalized the dominant discourses about themselves and share some of the critical beliefs about bisexuality that lesbians express. This should come as no surprise as Rust's methodology restricts bisexual women's responses to the same questions and categories as those set out for lesbians. The biases operating within these questions serve to give voice to bisexual women, but only through a restricted lens of possibilities. Like Ault, Rust ultimately emphasizes the political struggles between subordinate groups rather than examining what these struggles might suggest about the dominance of heterosexuality.

In summary, social scientists have studied bisexuality, although somewhat sporadically, since the turn of the century. Loosely characterized, the discourses have

evolved as follows: Freud's early 1900's psychiatric condition, Kinsey's 1940's

mysterious erasure, reappearance as an idiosyncratic sexual category in the 1970's, a

cultural category in the 80's, a personal narrative account in the 90's. The political

discourses of bisexuality have simultaneously evolved from essentialist to constructionist

arguments and strategies. At present, as the lines between the experts and the lay people

blur, academics in the constructionist vein are more likely to theorize about the political

usefulness of bisexuality than to conduct empirical work in this area. Those that do

combine the empirical with the political tend to focus on the dynamics within and

between subordinate groups. My research aims to fill in a gap in the discourses by both

theoretically and empirically examining bisexuality as a tool to illuminate the workings

of the institution of heterosexuality. Unlike previous empirical work on the politics of

bisexuality, which locates the analysis in the camp of the marginalized groups only, this

approach represents a shift in emphasis from margin to center.

Bisexuality in Theory: The Beginnings of a Standpoint

In general terms, the purpose of this study is to develop an experientially-based

bisexual standpoint which can be used for social and political critique. Practically

speaking, this means combining the empirical with the theoretical. The theoretical part of

this research comes first, in the form of imagining the potential for what a bisexual

standpoint might look like. The empirical part follows, as the standpoint is challenged,

expanded upon and further developed in discussion with bisexual individuals. I begin by

developing the idea of standpoint itself.

The roots of standpoint can be traced to the work of feminist philosophers who have challenged traditional epistemology's assumptions about knowing agents. Epistemology is concerned with aspects of knowledge, such as how we can know something or what justifies a knowledge claim. While it seems reasonable that the nature of both the subject and the object of knowing would be philosophically interesting, traditional epistemology (Dancy 1985) has tended to emphasize the object while under theorizing the role of the knowing agent. When the agent is addressed, an essential, universal nature is typically sought, which serves to render knowers substitutable for one another (Code 1993, p.16). This generic, interchangeable knowing entity is unproblematically taken as given in traditional philosophical circles.

Feminists and other critical epistemologists have done much to bring the issue of subjectivity into the forefront of epistemology. For them, the disembodied, neutral knowing entity is problematic for a number of reasons. First, it narrowly symbolizes and valorizes white, European, masculine ideals thereby omitting the possibility of other types of knowers. Practically speaking this serves to eliminate women and people of colour (to name a few) from the realm of the knower. This exclusion is achieved at the most fundamental stages of theorizing, as the very range of what counts as relevant for epistemological discussion omits the possibility of examining this flaw:

> Characteristically, then, their concerns will be not the problem of other minds, but the problem of why women were not thought to have minds; not an investigation of the social conditions under which individual memory is reliable, but an investigation of the social conditions under which systematic historical amnesia about the achievements of African civilizations became possible. (Mills 1988, p.239)

A second problem regarding the generic knower for feminist epistemologists is

that the possibility of diversity among knowers and the implications which follow from such diversity is ignored here. Knowers are not abstract, neutral interchangeable entities according to feminists, but rather must be understood as embodied subjects located within very real conditions in the social world (Grosz 1993). In acknowledging the embodiment of the knowing subject, it follows that there must be a multitude of real, material, physical differences between subjects. In other words, gender, class and race differences (to name a few) are reflective of very particular and diverse epistemic positions. Furthermore, implicit in the acknowledgement of different individual knowers is an appreciation that that which is known might also vary from one knower to another. Hence, diversity among knowers makes a difference in that which is known. Traditional positivistic epistemology, which posits one objective, absolutely knowable reality, becomes an impossibility in light of this insight.

So, feminist epistemologists insist upon an acknowledgement of the agent in theories of knowledge. Through this insistence the supposedly neutral knower is revealed to be a sexed, raced and classed entity. Uncovering these hidden assumptions serves to not only shift the emphasis of the epistemological discussion, but also to ensure for individuals other than white, middle class males a place in the high status, privileged position of the knower. Working class, women of colour, for example, must now be seen as qualified epistemic agents.

Standpoint theorists recognize not only that all knowledge comes from somewhere, but also argue that some standpoints are more strategic than others for demonstrating insight (Alcoff & Potter 1993; Harding 1991: Hartsock 1983; Hill Collins

1986; Smith 1986). For instance, Dorothy Smith (1986) argues that it is only by viewing the everyday world through the eyes of those for whom it is not commonsensical or obvious that we truly gain insight. Similarly, here Sandra Harding (1991) describes what being a woman in the so-called everyday world of male science might mean:

> Women are treated as strangers, as aliens - some more so than others - by the dominant social institutions and conceptual schemes, their exclusion alone provides an edge, an advantage, for the generation of causal explanations of our social order from the perspective of their lives (p.125).

Patricia Hill Collins (1986) argues that Black women's outsider-within status is a particularly advantageous vantage point for insight and critique. Being an outsider-within comes from the access that Afro-American women have had to the private lives of their white-elite employers through domestic work. Collins argues that this vantage point has allowed these women unique insights, beyond those of members of their own families or the white families for whom they have worked.

This logic underlies my choice of bisexual women's experiences as a useful and distinctive place from which a standpoint might be created. In view of the current homo/hetero symbolic system with its essentialist assumptions about identity and heteropatriarchal normative ethos, bisexual women are uniquely situated to provide particular insights and information. Not only might they find the everyday world of fixed and stable either/or sexual options problematic, they also can be seen to hold a sort of outsider-within status in terms of the workings of heterosexuality. As women, their experiences are distinguishable from those of their heterosexual and lesbian counterparts; and as bisexuals they are different from their male counterparts. So, the standpoint from which bisexual women experience the world is both strategic and unlike any other.

It is important to emphasize at this time the limitations of the standpoint being proposed here. I do not purport to be creating THE bisexual standpoint, but merely A bisexual standpoint, one among many alternatives. This standpoint is intended to reveal my own thinking on the sociopolitical meaning of bisexual identity, as developed in the course of undertaking and analysing interviews with a small number of bisexually identified women. Needless to say, the standpoint does not 'empirically represent' the views of the women interviewed, let alone the views of bisexual women as a whole.

The specific purpose of the standpoint to is challenge hegemonic assumptions about social-sexual relations and ideas about effective political strategies involving these relations. My primary goal is to gain insight from this interesting location into how heteronormativity operates. However, this particular locale also places bisexual women in a privileged position to reveal hegemony operating in both the heterosexual and homosexual camps. I expect that problematics regarding how both hetero and homo sensibilities operate might be revealed from this bisexual standpoint. So, a critique of gay and lesbian culture might also arise here, although this line of thinking will remain a secondary goal in this project which places its main emphasis upon heteronormativity.

I have chosen to construct the bisexual standpoint around the problematic of choice since this is a thread which runs through the discourses on bisexuality (Daumer 1992; Firestone 1997; Rust 1995; Shuster 1987) but has not been developed to its potential in my view. Given its placement within (or perhaps outside of) the binary, bisexuality is arguably the sexual orientation category that is most obviously about choices. Bisexuality, by definition, means being able to engage in relationships with

either men or women. It seems then that standing in a bisexual identity must mean making explicit the fact that one can choose, yet this theme of choice is strikingly under examined in the literature. Perhaps this absence exists because foregrounding the choice aspect of bisexuality stands to make it politically problematic. As will be expanded upon in the next chapter, the discourses of the feminist prochoice movement demonstrate how political organizing around a platform of choice can be limited (Petchesky 1984). Although the feminist call for the right to choose was basically a call to acknowledge women as capable moral agents (Weddington 1992; Wilson 1992), not all women saw choice as a political priority. Within the movement conflicts arose as women on the margins pointed out the inherent privileges in the very idea of choice itself. To talk about some women's rights to 'choose' when others were struggling to survive seemed less than politically useful for many women (Davis 1983). The point here is that choice-making is always undertaken within a context that privileges some individuals and some choices over others. So, to unproblematically speak of 'choice' is to lack political awareness of environments of oppression which affect and impede individual agency (Card 1995; Hoagland 1988).

This logic carries over into some aspects of sexual orientation politics which will also be further discussed in Chapter Three. Those for whom their sexuality is not experienced as a choice find an emphasis on choice useless at best and offensive at worst (Penelope 1992). Much political work on the part of gays and lesbians rests upon the very idea that they have not chosen their sexuality. The exceptions here are some lesbian feminists who embrace their women-focussed lives as chosen and as a conscious rejection

of heteropatriarchy (Trebilcot 1994). In stark contrast, on the other side of the coin,

heterosexuals are seldom called upon to even consider whether their sexuality is chosen

or otherwise (Rich 1983).

Into this mix comes the bisexual woman who is outwardly claiming her capacity

to choose either men or women. The same-sex aspect of her identity might serve to make

her more political than her heterosexual counterpart (who might be less aware of her

heterosexual privilege), and yet, she is typically seen as an apolitical creature. The

bisexual woman's preparedness to acknowledge her potential for same-sex relationships

seems to almost make her more suspect than her heterosexual counterpart. A lesbian

feminist might argue that the bisexual woman would make same-sex choices exclusively

if she was aware of her own oppression. Or perhaps the lure of heterosexual privilege

keeps her from making the commitment to a lesbian identity. Whatever her personal

motivation, there is a sense that the bisexual woman has not somehow reached a

sufficient level of political awareness.

With a full awareness of this important critique, I am choosing to ask the question

of what it would mean to explore bisexual women's choices as politically important.

Presumably bisexual women are in a position to choose their relationships, communities

and outings. Depending upon where and with whom they choose to align themselves in a

given time or place, their experiences of oppression and privilege stand to be very

different. They are not only potentially continuously faced with choices regarding their

alignments, but are also likely to be very tuned into the contexts and consequences of

these choices. Furthermore, the very act of constructing this standpoint as one of choices

is, in effect, a call for accountability. Surely there is something to be learned from this unique, agent-driven subject position.

So, while the idea of creating a bisexual women's standpoint focused on choices makes sense theoretically and likely empirically, its political consequences stand to be a problem. However, there is also political potential to be found in a position that stands in awareness of and accountability for its choices. This project therefore intends to theorize about and subsequently empirically explore bisexual women's experiences of choice and the political implications to be found in these unique experiences. However, before I fill in the details of the theoretical standpoint, I turn to look at the issue of choice itself, expanding upon the ways in which it has been discursively constructed in philosophy, the women's movement and gay & lesbian politics. These particular discourses have been chosen because they combine to provide a background for our current thinking about choice, both practically and politically.

Chapter Three

CHOICE: HOW WE TALK ABOUT IT

The Relevance of Discourse

Implicit within an approach that emphasizes discourse is a recognition that

language both produces and is produced by a society's social order and values. Through

the mastering of language, individuals do not merely achieve the ability to communicate,

they also become competent members of their society, cognizant of its values and order

(Davies 1989). A focus on language is not merely a concern with abstractions then. By

recognizing that the social structure is embedded within language, the abstract world of

talk becomes directly connected to real material consequences for real people. Monique

Wittig (1992) stresses the importance of this connection as follows:

> I would like to insist on the material oppression of individuals by
> discourses...There is nothing abstract about the power that sciences and
> theories have to act materially and actually upon our bodies and our
> minds, even if the discourse that produces it is abstract" (p. 25-26).

Wittig goes on to argue that the specific way in which discourses oppress is by providing

the rules which render particular types of talk more relevant than others: "you do not have

the right to speech because your discourse is not scientific and not theoretical" (p.26).

Not only do certain styles of discourse restrict individual speakers, discourses also

shape how experience itself gets talked about by providing the very categories that define

which particular experiences get to count. Marjorie Devault (1990) points out "that the

language itself reflects male experiences, and that its categories are often incongruent

with women's lives" (p.96). When an individual's experiences are not represented within

the discursive terrain, she is either pathologized, silenced, ignored or rendered invisible.

Dale Spender (1993) not only sees language as 'man-made', but also constructs the situation as one of linguistic hegemony. Spender's point is that all players, both privileged and oppressed, unwittingly participate in dominant discourses because they are so powerful and pervasive.

In summary, a critical perspective argues that layers of assumptions which serve to privilege certain speakers over others are embedded within discourses (van Dijk 1993; Bergvall & Remlinger 1996). Individual discursive actors are often unaware of these assumptions even though they frequently function as oppressive. Ultimately these unarticulated tenets serve to produce and reproduce very real situations of inequality for individual agents. Critical discourse analysis aims to peel away the layers of assumptions operating within language in order to get to the political implications of what is being said.

Choice, as a discursive category, is produced through language, text and communication of two kinds. First, since choosing entails the existence of a range of alternatives, it is through discourses that individuals come to create and understand their particular menus of available options. Critically speaking, discourses about choice create inequalities in that, without the words to discuss possibilities, it is unlikely that they can even be imagined let alone realized. Conversely, opportunities made readily available are seldom seen as choices by those who benefit from them. Rather, they are taken for granted as necessities which must be available to all. The taken for grantedness of some so-called common sense knowledge is particularly important as it renders choices invisible to certain groups of people. Talk about choice then is embedded within social

and cultural contexts which afford differently located individuals different menus of possibilities. Revealing these discursive restrictions and the ways in which they structure inequalities is one way to see choice as political.

The act of decision-making itself is also discursively produced and can be understood as political as well. Choosing implies a proactive agent engaged in a decision-making process towards a solution. The language used to justify and account for decisions constructs in specific ways, not only the process of choosing, but also the choosing agent herself. Here the issue shifts from a focus on the range of available choices to a concern for agency and control. From a critical perspective, dominant norms of decision-making privilege certain processes and actors over others. The roots of this concern can be traced to the work of feminist philosophers who perhaps best illuminate the relevant issues in the realm of agency. As discussed in Chapter Two, rather than completely ignoring the agent or falsely assuming agents to be interchangeable entities, feminist epistemologists have emphasized the implications of an embodied knower. By insisting upon situating the discussion in the lived realities of people's lives, feminists have contributed substantially to an understanding of what having knowledge and acting upon it, hence, choosing, actually entails. It is in the area of moral philosophy that the act of choosing is brought into the forefront and it is to these discourses that I now turn. I begin here because epistemological and moral philosophies provide the foundational assumptions which underlie many of our currently available discourses of choice.

Choice as Moral Agency

Much like their epistemological counterparts, feminist ethicists have ensured for women a place among the ranks of worthy moral agents. The critiques in ethics can be seen to both flow from and overlap with those found in the area of epistemology. Looking at the discourses in ethics is useful because they reveal in specific and concrete terms the ways in which the traditional philosophical agent is masculinized. Traditional moral theories can be broadly categorized in three ways. What follows is a brief description and a feminist critique of each of these categories.

Utilitarianism is a theory of ethical decision making attributed to the 18th century philosopher, John Stuart Mill (1957) and his 17th century predecessor, Jeremy Bentham (Rachels 1986). Utilitarianism is based on the notion of consequentialism. For consequentialists, right action is that which brings about the best outcome (Rachels 1986, p.80). Utilitarians make decisions by considering the interests of all individuals and choosing the option which will bring about the greatest good for the largest number of people. Inevitably some individuals will be sacrificed here, but this is accepted as ethical as long as a greater number are seen to benefit (Mill 1957, pp.15-16). Fairness is achieved through the equal weighting of each individual's interests, so preferential treatment is avoided at all costs. In this system, impartiality is emphasized as the ideal moral stance; "As between his own happiness and that of others, utilitarianism requires him to be as strictly impartial as a disinterested and benevolent spectator" (Mill 1957, p. 22). Ultimately, for utilitarians, costs and benefits must be weighed and right actions are seen to cause the greatest amount of gain over loss, each person's benefit being equally

important. Although Bentham and Mill emphasized happiness as the measure of utility, later utilitarians have avoided explicit moral content, although implicitly there must be an agreed upon notion of what is good (happiness, money, health) in order for this system to work (O'Neill 1994, p. 202).

Within the utilitarian decision-making situation, moral agents are constructed as disconnected, autonomous individuals concerned only with ends. Feminists argue that this view reduces moral agents to merely consequential creatures. Furthermore, there is a failure here to account for people's relationships with one another and the moral content that these relations entail (Hankinson Nelson 1993). For instance, there is no room for consideration of familial connections or responsibilities here. Feminists contend that the norm of impartiality is often not only impossible, it is actually undesirable in some moral situations (Sherwin 1992, p.40). So, moral agents are neither separate and isolated from each other, nor merely concerned with outcomes. For feminists, to construct the subject in this classic utilitarian way is to greatly oversimplify the complexity of the choosing ethical agent.

In stark contrast, 18th century philosopher Immanuel Kant's (1990) deontological position judges right or wrong acts based upon motives and intentions rather than outcomes. For Kant, moral acts are only those performed out of a sense of duty: "The first proposition of morality is that to have genuine moral worth, an action must be done from duty" (pp. 15-16). Unlike utilitarians, deontologists insist upon a basic respect for persons which means that there must always be restrictions on how to treat people. No one is allowed to be sacrificed for the greater good here: "Every rational being exists as

an end in himself and not merely as a means to be arbitrarily used by this or that will" (p. 45). In this rights-based system, moral decision making is based upon whether the rule underlying a particular duty could be universally binding. Fairness is achieved through the universalizability of the duties, in other words, what is good for you is good for me. Hence, an abstract process of reasoning, separate from particular circumstances, gets one to a decision in Kant's moral system.

For deontologists, the practical outcome of the situation is unimportant, what matters is the imperative to act (or not act). The problem here is that a set of rules or rights can seldom capture all moral situations. This position lacks sensitivity in terms of the details of people's lived experiences. Not surprisingly feminists point out, it is traditionally women's lived experiences which have been left out of the rights-based moral theories. Rosalind Petchesky (1984) criticizes rights-based systems as follows:

> The concept of 'rights' in general, [is] a concept that is inherently static and abstracted from social conditions. Rights...do not challenge the social structure, the social relations of production and reproduction.. In real-life struggles, this limitation exacts a price, for it lets men and society neatly off the hook. (p.7)

Along with the notion that traditional rights-based systems have been sufficiently abstract as to erase the concerns of women, we also see a tremendous emphasis on rationality in Kant's work. Feminists have pointed out that the devaluing of emotion is a sign of traditional philosophy's masculine bias (Jaggar 1992) which operates to exclude women as potential moral agents.

Finally, the social contractarian provides a decision making model which replaces moral duty and conceptions of the good with self-interest and rationality. This view is

less attributable to one individual but its proponents include individuals such as John

Rawls (1971) and Alasdair MacIntyre (1981). Here right actions are those agreed upon

by self-interested, rational agents engaged in a hypothetical bargain. Moral content is

irrelevant here, rather right and wrong is a matter of good deal making. The system

requires an overseer, since it makes sense to keep the deal only if no one cheats.

Ultimately, the social contractarian believes that individuals are motivated solely by their

own needs and wants, therefore sees contract-making as the best way to mediate between

conflicting interests and ensure a smoothly functional system.

From a feminist point of view, the contractarian once again oversimplifies the

plight of the decision-making agent. Feminists argue that, the describing of people as

unproblematically self-interested presupposes a certain moral picture based upon valuing

of the masculine. What happens to people who choose to or have to put others (e.g.: a

child) ahead of themselves in a given situation? Often women's moral problems are not

about self interest, but rather about a lack thereof. It seems then that self-interested and

nonself-interested people might want different moral theories. Social contractarians miss

this possibility.

So, entrenched within traditional models of ethics is a particular picture of the

choice-making agent. While each model offers something different, they all share an

emphasis on impartiality, autonomy, self-interest and rationality. Feminists have argued

that these emphases favour the masculine over the feminine and therefore exclude women

from the position of choice-making moral agent. In response, they have put forth

alternatives which value the moral content of women's experiences and the feminine

symbolic. While this is an important critique, it is necessary to offer a word of caution regarding this particular line of attack. To provide a framework for this discussion Susan Sherwin (1992) offers a distinction between feminine and feminist ethics which will be outlined here.

Feminine ethics takes the experiences of women or the traditional feminine virtues and applies them as the basis of an ethic. There is a body of work in the area of feminist ethics that can best be characterized in this way (Baier 1985; Gilligan 1982; Noddings 1984; Ruddick 1980). Here the aim is to reframe the differences between the sexes as social rather than biologically-based. The intent of these works is to demonstrate that women typically have different experiences which lead to different concerns and qualities which are being left out of traditional, masculine ethical models. While these approaches vary in the degree to which they problematize the differences between women and men, they all ultimately hold these essential differences to exist.

For example, the ethic of care put forth by Carol Gilligan (1982), represents an attempt to offer an account of caring relationships as an alternative paradigm to the rational model for moral relationships. Gilligan argues that, based on their experiences, girls and women have different moral development than their male counterparts. Rather than achieving moral maturity through autonomy as the traditional trajectory suggests (Kohlberg & Kramer 1969), for Gilligan, women's moral maturity is more accurately described as based on principles of care and relationship. She offers this alternative to demonstrate the problematic assumptions operating in Kohlberg's model.

Gilligan's insistence that women are not morally inferior to men because they

value nurturing and caring is important for feminists. However, while Gilligan's intent is admirable, the consequences of her position and others like her, can be extremely problematic for women's emancipation. Entrenched in feminine ethics are traditional stereotypes about women and femininity which can serve to reinforce women's subordination to men (Anderson 1995; Pyne Addelson 1993; Sherwin 1992; Tuana 1992). Even though they succeed in shifting the focus away from biology and towards socialization, these approaches are still limited. They take the connection of women's work with nurturing and caring as unproblematic, and their failure to interrogate this connection serves to justify the status quo which includes the patriarchal gendered division of labour (both paid and unpaid).[1] By appearing to glorify women as nurturers, an unintended consequence of feminine ethics is a celebration of the traditional patriarchal view of women which supports their continued oppression. Having said this, it is also important to recognize that, despite their shortcomings, the feminine approaches have made an important contribution to the analysis which feminists enjoy today. Without this crucial theorizing around difference, further critiques and theories of difference would not have been possible.

While a feminine ethics, such as that put forth by Gilligan, is committed to replacing traditional norms with care-oriented norms, feminist ethics wants to replace oppressive relations with nonoppressive ones (Sherwin 1992). This latter position means seeing the moral agent in broader terms, as a complex, relational creature; a creature who

---

[1]Of the positions cited, those of Ruddick and Baier are less vulnerable to co-optation because these authors more persistently interrogate the assumptions underlying the differences between men and women than Gilligan and Noddings.

also values rationality and impartiality. These feminists argue that, while logic,

impartiality and independence are not to be undervalued as crucial aspects of ethical

decision making, they are also often only part of the moral agent's dilemma. Feelings,

emotions, connections and responsibilities between human actors are also important

pieces of the human puzzle. Traditional ethical theories ignore and devalue these aspects

of human experience, which are typically connected to the experiences of women.

Furthermore, to insist that different sets of qualities, be they masculine or feminine, are

necessarily applicable to men and women separately, is to contribute to the further

dichotomization of the sexes. Given that the male\female dualism is hierarchically

ordered, feminine approaches can inadvertently ultimately serve the interests of the

mainstream, keeping women in their place. On the other hand, feminist approaches work

to alter oppressive relations by more radically challenging the need for the separation

itself.

A final important point comes out of the work of lesbians ethicists such as Sarah

Hoagland (1988) and Claudia Card (1995). These philosophers make choice explicit in

their work on moral agency. For instance, Hoagland proposes a lesbian ethics based upon

a recognition that individual moral agents operate within a set of constraints and limits

that informs their choice-making activities. For her, intelligible choice-making is at the

very heart of moral agency:

> It is not because we are free and moral agents that we are able to make
> moral choices. Rather, it is because we make choices, choose from among
> alternatives, act in the face of limits, that we declare ourselves to be moral
> beings. That is what it means to be a moral being. (p.231)

The issue here is not so much that individual choice-makers differ, but rather that

individuals exist within contexts, and contexts differ. Hoagland argues that, lesbians under oppression act within situations beyond their control, however, act they must: "Whatever limits we face, our power lies in understanding that, and so in choice" (p.284). Morality here does not involve avoiding decisions by blindly following sets of rules or duties for right action. Rather, in Hoagland's discourse morality means being fully cognizant of and accountable for the choices one makes.

So, embedded within traditional epistemologies and moral theories are accounts of the subject which feminists have revealed to be problematic. First, it is necessary to acknowledge the existence of an embodied, materially constrained, unique knower. Second, it is important to include a diverse range of experiences in considering the possible lines along which knowers or moral agents might make ethical decisions. Feminist critiques reveal the assumptions embedded within traditional epistemology and ethics to be representative of male experience and the masculine symbolic. The implications of these unarticulated assumptions have been to exclude women and anything connected with the feminine symbolic from the realm of knower or moral agent. Rather than simply replacing the masculine with an equally narrow feminine solution, truly emancipatory feminist critiques call for a context-sensitive knowledge and ethic that accounts for the complexity and uniqueness of individual choice-makers.

These philosophical discussions serve to inform our present day ideas about choice and agency. Many of the available discourses of choice in contemporary western society can be traced to these philosophical underpinnings. One such discourse can be found in the feminist prochoice position and it is to this set of debates that I now turn.

The various strains of argument within the prochoice women's movement provide an ideal example of a contemporary discourse of choice.

The Politicization and Depoliticization of Choice: Discourses of the Prochoice Movement

The contributions of feminist epistemologists and ethicists are present in the prochoice discourses which have evolved out of the second wave, western women's movement of the 1960's. Here we have an excellent example of the discursive production of choice as a political platform. While choices are certainly not restricted to the realm of female reproduction with which the prochoice dialogue is concerned, given its explicit emphasis on choice and politics, this dialogue is useful for my purposes.

In order to characterize and understand the discourses of the prochoice movement, another distinction is helpful. This distinction is somewhat analogous to the earlier discussed separation between feminine and feminist ethics. Whether referred to as a split between the women's movement and the feminist movement (Pyne-Addelson 1993) or between the women's rights movement and the women's liberation movement (Nicholson 1997), this separation represents two distinct political projects. According to Linda Nicholson, the women's rights movement evolved in the early 1960's out of the largely white, middle-class, professional population of U.S. women. Here the emphasis was placed upon ending discrimination in the paid work force, a project based on a liberal philosophy which supported the 'just add women' solution. Conversely, the women's liberation movement arose from the New Left of the late 1960's and here women's

oppression was the issue. This shift in perspective called for a more radical solution, one which challenged the structures themselves. Given its emphasis on oppressive structures, Nicholson characterizes this latter project as largely engaged in responding to the theoretical work of Marx. The historical legacy of these two projects is played out in the prochoice discourses of the feminist/women's movement which can also be characterized in two ways: 1) liberal/rights-based 2) neo-Marxist/context-based. I begin this section with a discussion of the liberal/rights based discourses of the prochoice movement.

With the legalization of birth control in the 1960's in Canada and the U.S., the potential for women to have power and control over their reproduction was greater than ever before. Discourses regarding choice around having children moved into a place of prominence in the public sphere. It was argued that, in order for women to truly have control of their bodies, an adequate range of reproductive choices must be made available. Given its roots in the white middle-class, the option of concern here was primarily abortion. Hence, the early prochoice project was largely invested in ensuring access to safe and legal abortion procedures.

In 1969 abortion became legal in Canada although women's access to the procedure was mediated through a committee of doctors, and hospitals were merely requested (not obligated) to provide this service. Given the distribution of power here, abortion was clearly viewed as a medical issue at this time. As the work of feminist ethicists discussed earlier in this chapter reveals, this situation was less than empowering for women. While this set up paid lip service to increasing women's options, hence control, it kept doctors, most of whom were men, in the ultimately powerful decision-

making positions. Although abortion was now seen as a viable option, it seems that women were not to be deemed capable of ethical decisionmaking on their own behalf when it came to this particularly controversial choice. Furthermore, women's groups pointed out that certain women (rural, the poor) were clearly underprivileged when it came to accessing abortion under this law. This critique provided the beginnings of a shift in the discourses, from the medical to the political arena.

Dr. Henry Morgentaler responded to this problematic situation by opening a private abortion clinic in Montreal where women could access abortions without the approval or permission of an outside committee. Morgentaler was charged with performing an illegal abortion and found guilty on appeal. Morgentaler continued to battle with the courts throughout the 1970's until a significant shift in the Canadian political scene altered the issue considerably. When the Charter of Rights and Freedoms became a part of the Canadian constitution in 1982, new discourses in the abortion debate became evident. Influenced by the Charter, these discourses explicitly placed human rights at the centre of the choice issue.

In light of the Charter's emphasis on human rights, the Supreme Court of Canada acquitted Henry Morgentaler in 1988, finding the existing abortion law to be unconstitutional with regard to women. An underlying assumption here is that the right to make one's own decisions is a fundamental right of personhood: "A person, to be a person, must have control over himself or herself, in body as well as in mind" (Petchesky 1984, p.3). In order to ensure and respect all human beings' rights then, a more open system of access to abortion procedures was required. Supreme Court Justice Bertha

Wilson's (1992) arguments to overrule the existing law were entirely based on this right

to personal liberty. The following passage from Wilson's judgement provides a classic

example of a liberal discourse around choice:

> Individuals are afforded the right to choose their own religion and their
> own philosophy of life, the right to choose with whom they will associate
> and how they will express themselves, the right to choose where they will
> live and what occupation they will pursue. These are all examples of the
> basic theory underlying the Charter, namely that the state will respect
> choices made by individuals and, to the greatest extent possible, will avoid
> subordinating these choices to any one conception of the good (p. 49)

Within Wilson's argument the basic assumptions of liberal theory can be found.

The first aspect of this liberal position is its emphasis on individualism. Here the inherent

dignity and worth of the individual is demonstrated through the fact that she is clearly her

own moral agent. Liberal individualism goes a step further by insisting upon the freedom

and equality of individual decision makers. Therefore, the individual's right to unfettered

decisionmaking is a key to the argument. Liberal discourses of choice invariably take up

this individualistic position, insisting upon freedom and autonomy as the ideal conditions

in which choosing should occur.

Similarly, the prochoice view typically asserts that women must be free to

consider their options regarding an unintended pregnancy without coercion or influence

from outside sources. This freedom from coercion is particularly salient in regard to the

abortion decision it seems. For instance, many abortion clinics insist that all women,

without exception, must make their own appointments rather than accepting a booking

from a partner, parent or friend. The underlying assumption here seems to be that women

are somehow being forced into having abortions against their wills, hence, must prove

otherwise by demonstrating individual agency at every step of the process. This practise

supports the notion of the woman as a discrete, atomic, self-contained choosing agent and

anything that suggests otherwise in the woman's decisionmaking process is seen as

deficient or coercive decision making. So, the discourse here supports the individual's

right to 'do what she wants', ideally regardless of what anyone else in her life wants her to

do.

There is a problem however with this autonomous model of decisionmaking.

Carole Pateman (1979) articulates this concern with the liberal insistence upon

individualism as follows:

> If individuals are 'naturally' free and equal to each other, then there is a
> potential problem about all their social relationships, because any of these
> might be seen as compromising that freedom and equality. (p. 13)

In view of the stigma attached to the abortion choice, a woman having an abortion might

be expected to need support from others. This statement reveals how such support could

be misconstrued as coercion by the well-meaning liberal.

A second dominant theme in liberal discourses of choice is the notion of choice

being a private issue. We see in Bertha Wilson's statement the fundamental liberal

concern with how and when the state should be given the authority to undermine the

choices of individual women and men. As Celia Kitzinger (1987) points out, liberal

theory itself rests upon a distinction between the public and private spheres of social life:

> a separation between the 'public' or 'political' domain (in which the state
> has a legitimate interest) and the 'private' or 'personal' area of an
> individual's life, in which the state should have no power to intervene
> (except in certain unusual and heavily circumscribed situations). (p. 36)

That which counts as public or private can be a matter of debate; critics argue that, rather

than reflective of any kind of reality, the distinction itself is merely a construct of liberal

ideology (McCallum 1992; O'Brien 1981, p.93-115). Despite challenges such as this

however, the public/private dichotomy remains powerful in western-influenced cultures.[2]

Clearly a woman's right to choose an abortion is constructed as a very private event in

liberal discourses. The following quote by then governor of Arkansas, Bill Clinton,

illustrates this point:

> As a husband and as a father of a daughter, I am moved by Sarah
> Weddington's eloquent reminder of what Roe truly means -that our most
> private decisions can be made behind the closed doors of our homes, with
> our families, and in private conversations with our hearts. (back cover,
> Weddington 1992)

In this statement we see the decisionmaking discourse itself increasingly privatized. Not

only is the decision talk best relegated to the private realm of the home, it can further be

privatized to exclude all but family members, and finally banished to a state of total

isolation in which the individual need consult only with her own heart. It seems then that

liberal discourses which function to make choice a private-sphere, autonomous,

individualized issue ultimately serve to depoliticize the choice-making process.

Prochoice discourses of the women's rights movement, which were intended to be

political, were characteristically liberal in their understanding of choice and the choosing

agent. With an emphasis on individual human rights, these discourses, which continue

today, serve to individualize, privatize and decontextualize choices. While this early

---

[2]The private/public distinction has actually been internalized as a part of the structure
of this thesis as I have chosen to discuss the choices of bisexual women (Chapters Five and
Six) within a framework that gradually moves them from the 'private' to the 'public'
domains.

prochoice movement was not intended to be synonymous with a pro-abortion position, given the emphasis of these privileged white women on abortion, it was often not surprisingly mistaken as such. In its favour however, without this fight for abortion rights, which necessarily continues today, an appropriate playing field of viable choices would not be available for all women. However, all women did not find the abortion emphasis of the early prochoice feminist movement to be acceptable. I turn now to an alternative set of prochoice discourses coming out of the women's liberation movement and placing emphasis on inequality, oppression and structural barriers to choice-making.

Working class women, women of colour, and women with disabilities entered the prochoice dialogue, pointing out that reproductive choice for them meant something different. In the face of poverty and racism, the right to have a family, the support to carry a pregnancy to term and parent is seldom there. As Angela Davis (1983) points out, the early women's rights movement "failed to provide a voice for women who wanted the right to legal abortions while deploring the social conditions that prohibited them from bearing more children" (p.205-6). Hence, the privileges enjoyed by middle class white women blinded them to the issues of those from different class and racial experiences.

From the perspective of the women's liberation movement, reproductive choices needed to be understood in the context of the social and material conditions which inform them. Certain choices are deemed to be viable in light of particular conditions, while different circumstances render new choices meaningful. Racism, ableism and class bias often keep privileged individuals from comprehending the lives of others. For instance, the reproductive decisions of women in developing countries must be placed within the

economic realities of their lives in order to be understood:

> One of the most compelling reasons for having children, shared by many
> Third World people, is that children represent a source of economic
> security against an ever precarious and uncertain future....In short, Third
> World women often have children because they can't afford not to. (Inter
> Pares 1995, p.26)

Population control rhetoric typically constructs Third World women as unable or

unwilling to limit their family sizes, when in actuality the 'choice' to bear children in this

environment is an issue of the very survival of families. Conversely, in Canada and the

U.S., women who are disadvantaged economically seem to be almost ethically obligated

not to have children. Here the proabortion discourses of the women's rights movement

have taken on a certain moral imperative in the lives of the less advantaged: "What was

demanded as a 'right' for the privileged came to be interpreted as a 'duty' for the poor"

(Davis 1983, p.210).

Another reproductive choice which is brought into relief by women's liberation

discourses is the choice around permanent sterilization. There is a long history of the

involuntary sterilization of poor and disabled women in Canada and the U.S. Ironically,

white able-bodied, middle class women are often denied access to this same procedure by

the very forces that insist upon it for their less privileged counterparts. Without the

perspectives of the outsiders-within here, the issue of sterilization might never have made

the political agenda of the feminist movement.

So, when context is invoked as a relevant aspect of choice-making, a less

individualized, privatized and privileged perspective on choice is produced. The Neo-

Marxist, women's liberation movement discourses on choice are typically conscious of

the environmental barriers and privileges that inform choices. Here then, choice is not eliminated, but more fully appreciated as taking place within a set of social, political and economic relations. Choices are not freely and equally made, but rather they are made within the constraints of particular conditions which are not always controllable by the choosing agent. This position shares some of the emphasis of Sarah Hoagland's earlier discussed work. The point in both cases is that what gets to count as a choice is context-dependent and this makes the act of choosing a political act.

Ultimately the women's liberation discourses reveal the liberal view of choice to be narrow, privileged, and therefore incomplete. Perhaps the most problematic aspect of this view is that, counter to its intent, it actually depoliticizes women's lives by constructing their choices as private, individual matters. The liberation alternative, on the other hand, seems to call for a shift away from choice altogether: "we have to focus less on 'choice' and more on how to transform the social conditions of choosing, working, and reproducing" (Petchesky 1984, p.11). The tension between these two sets of discourses about choice reveals both its strengths and weaknesses as a political platform. It seems that choice-making might be politically useful as long as the individual is aware of and able to articulate the social conditions in which particular choices are preferable to others. Perhaps social change actually comes out of this awareness and the ability to subsequently envision new choices for the self (Card 1995). What might it mean to take this position to a different environment, one in which choice has typically been consciously rejected as a political platform? While the prochoice debates deal with sexuality in a sense, the issue of sexual orientation brings with it some new challenges in

terms of choice-making. I turn next to these discourses, while attempting to retain what has been learned about the politics of choice from the prochoice movement.

Choice and Sexual Identity: A Dangerous Politics?

As the politicization of lesbian and gay identity has evolved in the 1980's and 90's, sexual identity politics discourses have flowed out of two distinct streams. These streams are best characterized as concerned with the basis upon which individuals claim their gay or lesbian identity rights. On one hand, the ethnic model approach supports the notion of lesbians and gays as minority groups, hence, entitled to the same rights and protection that any oppressed group might enjoy. Underlying the ethnic model is an essentialism which suggests that sexuality, like race, is a fundamental, genuine, underlying and unchanging aspect of one's person. Added to this is an origin story in which one's sexuality is presumably present at birth (Epstein 1987). Here then sexual orientation is a concrete feature of identity which is predetermined and enduring. This has been a useful position from which gays and lesbians have argued for rights equal to those of their supposedly heterosexual-born counterparts. The insistence by many activists that sexual 'orientation' rather than sexual 'preference' be spoken of emphasizes an ethnic model approach. The implied choice-making that is encompassed in the term 'preference' is problematic from this position, hence, its insistence upon 'orientation'.

While the ethnic model has been argued to more accurately describe the experiences of gay men than lesbians (Whisman 1996), there are lesbian feminists who support this approach. For example, Julia Penelope (1992) expresses extreme caution

when discussing choice, which she sees as relevant only in a limited sense: "Being Lesbian isn't a 'choice.' We choose whether or not we'll live as who we are. Naming ourselves Lesbian is a decision to act on our truest feelings" (p.42). Here the issue of being lesbian is not an issue of choice, however, leading a lesbian life is. The ethnic model is evidenced here in that the 'truth' of who one is is taken as given. What is chosen here is whether or not to act upon this truth.

Penelope's larger and perhaps more important point is that, "heterosexuals don't have to question the assumptions on which they construct their lives and then defend them to a hostile society" (p.42). Not only are heterosexuals never asked to look at the assumptions underlying their sexuality, they also never find themselves in the position of having to justify them. An offshoot of Penelope's argument might be to point out that although neither heterosexuals nor homosexuals choose their orientations, it seems that the ethnic model simply operates without question for heterosexuals. In other words, even though both heterosexuality and homosexuality are beyond the control of individuals, only homosexuals are required to justify their sexuality, while the essentialism of heterosexuality merely gets assumed.

Ethnic narratives are powerful and often necessary in a world of right-wing backlash and anti-gay sentiments. The ethnic model serves a legitimating function in the face of threats to one's entitlement to rights. For instance, "Focus on the Family", a far-right Christian organization that lobbied against gay rights legislation in Colorado, argues that gays and lesbians constitute "a group that has no reason for calling itself a group, apart from their chosen behaviour" (Rabey quoted in Whisman 1996, p.3). We see here

that invoking the idea of choice serves not only to delegitimate, but to actually erase gays and lesbians from existence. In the face of this challenge, the ethnic model response is perhaps the only mode of recourse. It seems that taking up a position from choice would be extremely dangerous in this environment, yet this is precisely what some lesbian feminists have chosen to do.

The position from choice, typically equated with lesbian feminism, does not disagree with the enduring and relevant aspect of sexual orientation encompassed within the ethnic model. However, the basis here for claiming lesbian identity is quite different than that found in the ethnic discourses. For lesbian feminists, lesbianism is seen as a political choice, a choice to reject compulsory heterosexuality and the oppression of women for which it stands. The origins of this choice-making model are found in Adrienne Rich's (1983) now famous lesbian continuum. Rich offered all women a self-appointed position on a lesbian scale ranging from same-sex friendship to intensely intimate same-sex relations. In redefining lesbianism so broadly, she undoubtedly made this option less threatening and perhaps more palatable to a greater number of women. However, she has been criticized for desexualizing lesbian relationships in the process. Whatever one concludes about Rich's work, her challenge to the assumed 'naturalness' of heterosexuality and her proposal of a woman-identified-woman kind of lesbianism certainly opened up many minds to the possibility of this choice.

Along similar lines, Joyce Trebilcot (1994) contends that, "others find, as I do, that a biological account is inconsistent with their sense of having chosen and continuing to choose wimmin [sic] and with their commitment to defining their own identities"

(p.133).[3] As with Rich, choosing women is what makes lesbian identity powerful and

important for Trebilcot. In addition, she expresses an awareness of the political strength

of the ethnic model which suggests that innate features (like sexual orientation) cannot be

changed, hence, should not be penalized. In spite of this argument, which she allows may

be useful in some contexts, Trebilcott sees the position of having chosen one's alliances

and relationships as a far more empowering basis for rights-seeking than the ethnic model

which places sexuality beyond one's control.

Although the lesbian feminist position appears at first glance to be a more agent-

driven basis for rights seeking than the ethnic model, underlying both approaches is an

essentialism that has become problematic in the late 1990's[4]. Whether chosen or

predetermined, both of these models support the idea of sexual orientation as fixed and

stable once established. For the ethnic model proponents, there is no choice about being

gay, while the lesbian feminist position would argue that once lesbianism is seen as a

viable choice, no woman would return to heterosexuality. While their origin stories differ

then, ultimately both of these accounts support an either/or, essentialist model of

sexuality in which individuals choose or are assigned as either lesbian/gay or straight on a

permanent basis.

---

[3]Trebilcot uses the term 'biological' in the same sense that I am using ethnic, both implying present at birth.

[4]The essentialism of the position from choice is less obvious, but can be defended in view of the distinction in Chapter Two between essentialism/constructionism and nature/nurture. As argued by Stein (1990) essentialism posits intrinsic and fixed facts about sexuality, it does not address the nature/nurture debate. It is according to this criterion that the choice position can be seen as essentialist.

In keeping with my fundamental assumptions (Chapter Two), this emphasis on choice is not intended to address issues of origin. The idea of settling the nature/nurture debate in terms of sexuality seems insurmountable, and I would contend, is a red-herring with regard to the politics of queer rights. A focus on origins keeps queers on the defence and lets heterosexuals off the hook. Since the issue of origin is ultimately unresolvable, I propose that the emphasis be adjusted to looking at the problematic essentialist assumptions operating in discourses of sexuality in general. Queer theory is quick to point out that the essentialist insistence that sexuality is fixed and stable flies in the face of the actual experiences of many individuals (Butler 1990; Fuss 1991). Queer requires an acknowledgement of fluidity, context and diversity, and a recognition of the conservativism of the identity politics approaches. In taking up essentialism as a problem then, particular choices can be seen as highly relevant.

Rather than debating about which story or epistemology of lesbianism might be the right one (which tends to be the focus of identity politics debates), many lesbian feminist discourses have come to a place where the relevant question is one of why such justificatory stories are necessary in the first place. Beginning with the work of Adrienne Rich (1983), we see a gradual shift in focus. Rather than arguing, speculating and ruminating about the homosexual subject position, Rich would have us turn our microscopes to the heterosexual position. Heterosexuality has been naturalized, socialized and reified to the degree that until recently it has not been seen as a worthy focus of attention. Politically this means that, as long as our attention is turned to the margins, the centre goes unchallenged. In an argument not unlike that made earlier by

Julia Penelope (1992), Shane Phelan (1993) states that: "I do not need epistemology to justify my desire, my life, my love. I need politics: I need to build a world that does not require such justifications" (p.77).

The essentialism of both the ethnic identity and choice models is problematic, however; to see sexuality as fluid, changing and an issue of choice-making is to shake up the solid basis for rights of the identity politics advocates. As addressed earlier, in the current right-wing environment such a declaration could be dangerous. Lisa Duggan (1994) suggests using a sort of strategic essentialism when engaging the far-right while at the same time critiquing essentialism in appropriate circumstances and environments. Although Duggan recognizes this political strategy as pragmatic she also acknowledges it to be problematically fragmented. Like Duggan, it is not my intent to discard the usefulness of identity politics, however, it seems that bisexuality might be an important site from which a politics based on fluidity and choices might be examined. An emphasis on choice here does not deal with origin issues, rather it means avoiding restrictive, essentialist identity categories and the limited political agendas for which they allow.

The queer project not only alters essentialist notions of identity, it has also taken up the feminist agenda of shifting the political focus from those on the margins to the heteronormative centre. Rather than assuming that all sexualities are fixed at birth, what about entertaining the notion of choice for everyone, gays and straights alike? Michael Warner (1993) demonstrates the hegemonic power of the institution of heterosexuality as follows:

> Het culture thinks of itself as the elemental form of human association, as the very model of intergender relations, as the indivisible basis of all

community, and as the means of reproduction without which society wouldn't exist...a totalized view of the social. (p.xxi)

The idea of introducing choice into this powerful heteronormative thinking is potentially tremendously challenging. What if all sexualities, including heterosexuality, are constructed as a matter of choices? While a politics of choice in terms of sexuality can be dangerous, it might be the most transformative political agenda that queers can take up at the end of the 20th century. If the old ethnic model no longer provides a convincing basis for unity, perhaps a platform for choice can unite us:

> • Perhaps we can unite across categories of sexual orientation and identity to advocate for the simple right to love whom we choose and to actualize any or all potential for sexual and affectional expression. (Firestein 1997, p.110)

Bisexual Choices: A Standpoint Theorized

Understanding the specific ways in which choice does or does not play out in the actual experiences and perceptions of bisexual women will contribute to an understanding of the complexity of both sexual and political identity in the face of current postmodern challenges to identity. On a practical basis, the specific issues to be investigated in this study are those dealing with the dimensions along which bisexuality might be constructed to be about choices. Some of the possibilities here include:

-choice regarding what bisexuality means
-the choice to self-identify as bisexual
-choices in terms of partners/relationships
-choice regarding being out as bisexual

Each of these potential choices has meaning for the politics of bisexuality.

The choice to define bisexuality for oneself seems to be particularly relevant for

individuals who situate themselves in this somewhat ambiguous identity category.

Rebecca Shuster (1987) emphasizes that, by virtue of the realm of possibilities

encompassed within the bisexual category, there is no one model or prototype upon

which to base this identity (p.57). Similarly, Paula Rust (1995) has argued that one

political strategy utilized by bisexuals is the refusal to embrace a unified, monolithic

definition of what the bisexual category itself means. Presumably this allows bisexuals to

avoid the essentialism of traditional identity politics models, and hence to situate

themselves in a truly emancipatory place. In reviewing bisexual publications, Rust has

found a decided avoidance of the topic of defining bisexuality:

> The question of definition seems to have been intentionally avoided rather
> than 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. (p.234)

Pushing individual self-identified bisexual women to define their bisexuality and

examining how these accounts differ (or not) will contribute to an understanding of how

bisexual identity politics might look different than traditional identity politics approaches.

Perhaps the only aspect of bisexuality which can safely be assumed to be a choice,

is the decision to self-identify as bisexual. In keeping with Blumstein & Schwartz's

(1977) insight that sexual identity does not necessarily reflect sexual experience, it seems

that taking up a particular identity is an agent-driven practice. Paula Rust's (1992) study

of attraction and behaviour among lesbian and bisexual women found marked overlap

between the actual experiences of these two supposedly different groups. In light of this

evidence, Rust concludes that the homo and hetero categories are more accurately ideal

types rather than realistic categories into which people actually fall.

Assuming Rust's insight to be accurate and given that bisexuals are potentially

stigmatized by both the dominant heterosexual group and the resistant lesbian camp, why

take up this title? It seems that naming oneself to be bisexual could be construed as a

political act in and of itself. As Clare Hemmings (1995) indicates, "bisexuality's

exclusion by others, and its self-conscious exclusion, are both immensely political"

(p.51).

The issue of determining one's relationships or partners is perhaps the most

obvious way that bisexuality can be seen to be about choices. This particular dimension

of choice suggests a level of freedom for bisexuals which might surpass both their hetero

and homo counterparts. However, bisexual relationship choices are also most likely to

illuminate issues of both access and restraint in terms of particular types of relationships

and communities. While bisexuality might mean the elimination of a concern for gender

in relationship decision-making for some (Litwoman in Hutchins & Kaahumanu 1991,

p.5), it also represents a vantage point from which the differences and similarities

between same and other-sex relations can be illuminated. This suggests that interesting

assumptions might be uncovered regarding how these relations are typically seen to

operate by those involved in them. The implications for choice here are that more

awareness of privileges and constraints lead to more informed choices, hence, not only

greater agency but also more accountability in the choice-making process. This connects

to Sarah Hoagland's (1988) point about choice-making being an issue of full awareness

and accountability. Specifically, seldom are other-sex relations seen as chosen and

therefore required to stand in accountability for the privileges bestowed upon them.

Bisexual women who choose to be in other-sex relations are in a position to demonstrate what heterosexual accountability might look like.

Finally, choices regarding being 'out' or not are particularly salient in terms of bisexual identity. Being out is assumed here to mean presenting oneself as bisexual to an audience and therefore as a context-specific event rather than as a developmental stage in one's 'coming out' process (Harry 1993). While issues of being out are certainly not exclusive to bisexual identity, the bisexual closet is a truly unique place. First, while gays & lesbians grapple with one closet door, bisexuals have to deal with two:

> Because our society is polarized between homosexuals and heterosexuals, the bisexual closet has two doors. Both need to be opened. Coming out to the straight world and coming out to the gay world are not the same. (Hutchins & Kaahumanu 1991, p.4)

So, here the issue is one of who the bisexual comes out to and how this might differ depending upon one's audience. Given it's unique configuration, the epistemology of this closet must include an awareness of both homophobia and biphobia.

Second, being out is often connected to visibility. Issues of bisexual visibility are arguably more difficult than those surrounding gay and lesbian identity. In light of a lack of visual stereotypes, bisexuals cannot choose to publicly display their particular brand of queer, even if they want to. At least lesbian identity has some stereotypical markers which might make being out possible for some women, although there are many problems with achieving these stereotypes for lots of lesbian women who criticize them as narrowly white, middle-class and able-bodied (Bryan 1996; Harris & Crocker 1997; Pottie 1996). The issue then of how one outs oneself in the absence of stereotypes is compelling. Further issues to be explored regarding being out as bisexual include why or

why not come out, and when it matters to be out. Since being out visibly is often directly

connected to being politicized, this dimension of bisexual choice is perhaps the most

politically problematic. However, it has to be assumed that bisexual identity is politically

meaningful, in spite of the bisexual dilemma about visibility. Amber Ault (1996b) has

referred to bisexual politics as a politics of invisibility. The dilemma of visibility

certainly places the bisexual woman in an interesting position from which hegemonic

assumptions can be revealed regarding what it means to be out and the problematics of

equating radical appearance with radical consciousness (Walker 1993).

Ki Namaste (1996) argues that the whole notion of inside/outside inherent in

discourses about being out, is dependent upon the existence of the homo/hetero binary.

Namaste argues that it is impossible to locate oneself outside of the dominant discourse

when discussing coming out of the closet. This might provide another insight into why

the issue of bisexuality and being out is a complicated one. Once again bisexuality seems

to be an ideal place to reveal the limitations of this dominant talk:

> If heterosexuality is something which is taken for granted, and if the
> adoption of a homosexual identity only serves to bolster the strength of
> heterosexuality, then perhaps the most effective sites of resistance are
> those created by people who refuse both options. A critical sexual
> politics, in other words, struggles to move beyond the confines of an
> inside/outside model. (Namaste 1996, p.206)

In conclusion, a bisexual standpoint based on choice stands to repoliticize choice

as a call for accountability, context sensitivity and an acknowledgement of privilege and

oppression. Through the bisexual lens, other-sex relations can be viewed as chosen rather

than as natural, inevitable and instinctual as the heteronormative view sees them. The

bisexual woman also stands outside of the norms of lesbian culture which often depends

upon essentialist, identity-politics strategies of resistance. Choosing to take up this label and define for oneself what it means suggests a politics of its own. Bisexuality, as a matter of choice, is not only a standpoint from which new layers of assumptions can be uncovered, it also suggests fresh alternatives for thinking about and acting upon social inequalities.

Chapter Four

MOVING THE STANDPOINT FROM THEORY TO EXPERIENCE: THE

NARRATIVES OF BISEXUAL WOMEN

The Participants

The data sources for the empirical piece of this research are women who identify themselves to be bisexual. The discourses they use to construct and understand the choices that they have made provide the relevant ontological units here. Given that the theoretical construct of choice drives this study, a purposive sampling strategy was used. An emphasis on diversity in the sample was desired, as it was expected that different women would put together their respective choice decisions differently, according to their own unique experiences. Through exposure to a range of views on choice, it was expected that a broad, in-depth, insightful standpoint could better be produced.

In a study of this nature, the practicality of securing participants can be challenging. Since gays and lesbians have only recently gained protection under Alberta's human rights legislation, it should come as no surprise that many are isolated or closeted. Often it is not wise or safe to identify oneself as anything other than heterosexual in such an environment. Asking individuals to come forward, first and foremost as bisexual, is asking them to out themselves, at least to the researcher. Obviously, either only very 'out' women would come forward, or a degree of safety had to be somehow communicated in the call for research subjects.

Given these barriers, I thought it important to make as much personal contact as possible with potential resource people, so I began by informally spreading the word

about my research within local agencies to which I am connected. I chose to sample in stages, since I had no idea what kind of a response to expect. Specifically, I spoke with representatives of the following organizations in approximately this order: Biversity, GLCSA (Gay & Lesbian Community Services Association), AIDS Calgary, the Calgary Birth Control Association, Dykes of Colour, Planned Parenthood Alberta, the Women of Colour Collective, GLASS (Gay & Lesbian Academic Students & Staff, U of C), Women in Action (Mount Royal College), and I-Dentity Gay & Lesbian Youth Group. Finally, I placed notices in the June and July issues of the Women Looking Forward Newsletter, and submitted a p.s.a. to Dykes on Mykes which they read during their July program. I also spoke directly with women that I anticipated would be under-represented in the sample as well as utilizing a snowball strategy by asking the women I interviewed to refer potential participants to me.

A total of 11 women volunteered to be interviewed for this research. Despite my efforts at securing a diverse sample, the group's profile is distinctly white, educated and middle class. Specifically, the participants range in age from 23 to 43 and all have some post-secondary education, from a minimum of 2 years to a maximum of 8. With the exception of one woman who sees herself as working class, all identify as somewhere within the middle class, from lower to upper range. In terms of ethnicity, race or culture, of the women for whom this category was relevant (9 of the 11), identity descriptions included white, German heritage, French Canadian parents, Mennonite, liberal, witch, farmer, Wicca, Celtic, gypsy and Latina. Only the Latina woman mentioned the category

of 'woman of colour' and explicitly rejected it for herself.[5] With the exception of one woman, all the participants grew up in homes where Christian religions were practised to varying degrees (Catholic, United, Mennonite). None actively participate in organized religion any longer, and one Catholic woman referred to herself as 'in recovery' from the effects of her religious upbringing. Two of the 11 women live outside of a major urban centre, with one of these two operating a farm.

The final and perhaps most relevant demographic point is relationship status. One of the participants is married and another has recently begun a relationship with a man. Two are in same-sex relationships with women and the rest are either 'just dating' or not involved with anyone. Of the single group of 7, one sees herself as 'woman-identified' and one dates mostly men. The remaining five see themselves as either dating both men and women or not dating.

The lack of racial and class diversity in this sample is likely due in part to my identity as a white, middle-class woman which makes certain participants more comfortable talking to me than others. I also think that participating in research as a bisexual woman might be easier for more privileged women than those in less privileged positions. If race or class already set up formidable barriers, then adding to that potentially more stigma in terms of sexual orientation might be unacceptable for some women. For example, bisexual women of colour who already deal with racism, might

---

[5]Her choice not to take up this identity stems from a comparison between herself and her dark-skinned cousins. Given the whiteness of her skin in comparison to theirs, this woman feels neither entitled nor inclined to invoke 'woman of colour' as an identity category for herself.

have more to risk and lose by participating in this research than white bisexual women. I think that research by a woman of colour or a working class woman would possibly make a project of this nature safer for multiply marginalized women.[6]

Ultimately, given that the sample is relatively homogeneous, the discourses became somewhat repetitive quite quickly. While I do not contend that saturation was reached, I do defend the sample size as adequate given that its purpose is to provide an empirical referent by which the standpoint can be explored, challenged and expanded upon. With regard to the specific choices explored, obvious themes did emerge from the data and considerable insight was provided to flesh out and enhance the strength of the proposed standpoint.

Interviewing Strategy

In keeping with Jennifer Mason's (1996) research priorities, I have attempted to achieve consistency between the epistemological, ontological, political and ethical aspects of this research project. It is at the stage of the interview itself, the human interaction part of the research, that the political and ethical issues seem most obvious. As with many feminist researchers, my approach to the research subjects is guided, first and foremost, by a concern for power and accountability in the relationship between the researcher and the participant (Reinharz 1992, pp.263-67). Given the personal nature of

---

[6] This is not to say that sensitive research across lines such as race, class and ability is impossible. However, although I am committed to attempting to do antiracist research, without a contact person through which to gain access to a given community, my whiteness is a fact about me that can operate as a barrier.

this research topic, not only is coming forward to participate in this study potentially risky. In addition, a considerable level of safety and trust is necessary to ensure a successful interview and a positive experience for participants. In order to produce a sense of trust and ensure genuine results the power between researchers and subjects must be somewhat equalized in the interview itself. However, while redistributing power during the interview is an admirable goal, it is important to acknowledge that the researcher is ultimately left with the power to interpret, analyse and write up the research document. Therefore, politically and ethically aware research recognizes and holds the researcher accountable for this power imbalance at all stages of the project.

Ann Oakley (1981) argues that the best way to equalize power during the interview is through researcher self-disclosure. I have some concerns about this strategy in the context of interviewing for the purposes of research (see discussion regarding coercion on page 67), so prefer to find alternative ways to share power. One way that I attempted to equalize power was to share information about the research project itself with the participant. In initial contact conversations over the phone, I told the women that I was interested in exploring the ways in which bisexuality might be understood to be about choices. I also indicated that I was open to being challenged on this, and that the idea of choice might not fit for everyone. I did not expand in any way on specific choices I had in mind, rather merely planted the seed so that the women could think a bit about this prior to our interview. I explained that the ultimate purpose of this research was to examine the political potential of bisexuality.

The interviews began with a brief discussion of the consent form which I used as

a tool through which to contract with the participant (for a copy of the consent form see Appendix A). The consent form was designed to facilitate discussions around confidentiality, to set the stage for the interview in terms of both safety and boundaries, and to give the participant an initial sense of how power would be handled in the interview itself. Here the parameters of the interaction were set, what she could expect from me and what I, in turn, hoped to receive from her.

Confidentiality is a complex issue generally in research and in a study focused on sexual orientation, it is particularly salient. As stated earlier, in the current political environment identifying oneself as other than heterosexual is often neither safe nor wise. In light of the risks here, it was important to be realistic with the participants regarding the level of confidentiality that could be guaranteed to them. Participants were warned that anonymity might be difficult to guarantee in a small distinctive sample and that someone they know might be able to recognize them in this research. This allowed them to set boundaries regarding what they shared during the interview if they wished.

Conversely, I was also conscious that confidentiality might be a nonissue for some participants in this study. It is inappropriate to automatically assume the participants to be uncomfortable speaking explicitly as bisexuals. Pushing the confidentiality issue could be akin to forcing individuals into the closet in this research, whether or not they desire this (politically such a move keeps heteronormativity operating by shrouding nonheterosexual alternatives in secrecy). I openly addressed this by saying that it was not my automatic assumption that they were closeted, however, there is a norm in social science research that honours confidentiality and so I would operate according to

this norm unless they wished otherwise. As I anticipated, a desire to be out as bisexual meant that some of the women refused confidentiality in this research.[7] It is also important to note however, that some women who consider themselves to be very 'out' chose confidentiality because of the personal nature of our discussions rather than fear of being outed as bisexual. Ultimately, regardless of their decisions here, I felt that offering this choice up front was appropriate in light of the research topic and also in keeping with the theme of choice which drives this study.

In order to get to a level of authenticity and depth, it is necessary to achieve a sense of safety and trust in the interview. However, although the interview setting may feel safe and comfortable, it is also important to reiterate that this is a research interview which the researcher ultimately has the power to interpret and make public. The potential to reveal too much is an issue of ethical concern here (Mason 1996, p.56). The researcher has a responsibility not to coerce the participant into a false sense of safety and closeness, leading her to share more than she might otherwise deem appropriate. This concern was addressed in the contracting stage of the interview through discussions about voluntary participation.

Voluntary participation was defined in three ways. First, the participant could refuse to pursue a particular line of discussion or questioning. Second, she could end the interview completely at any time if deemed necessary. Finally, she was offered the option of withdrawing any or all information at a later time should she have second

---

[7]Specifically Monika and Tracy requested that their real names be used in this research. Both identified a desire to consistently work at being out as bisexual as their reason to waive confidentiality.

thoughts about anything after the fact. By making these options explicit at the time of consent, it was intended that the stage would be set for the participant to feel safe both in sharing personal information and withholding information when desired. This somewhat formal description of participation options also served as a reminder that we were embarking upon an interview for research purposes, regardless of how informal and engaging the mood might become. So, recognizing the need for safety and boundaries is not only useful for creating a comfortable environment for the interview itself, but also ethically necessary.

Given that this study has a specific theme in mind, a degree of structure in the interview was required. However, an interest in the discourses, as they unfold uninterrupted was also foremost in this project. Therefore, the interview involved balancing researcher questions and probes with encouraging each woman to tell parts of her personal story (see Appendix B for the interview guide). Underlying the narrative aspect of this approach to the interview is the following assertion put forth by Clandin & Connelly (1994):

> In effect, stories are the closest we can come to experience as we and others tell of our experience. A story has a sense of being full, a sense of coming out of personal and social history. (p.415)

In order to get to the level of practical experience then, story-telling is a useful tool. At the same time, direct questions ensure that the interview stays on track and encourages reflection and analysis on the part of the interviewee.

Once the consent form was signed and the tape recorder turned on I reiterated the fact that I had no expectations or agenda regarding the answers I was to receive or the

outcome of the interview. My interest was purely in gathering a variety of perspectives. I began each interview with the same question, the issue of choosing one's own definition of bisexuality. From this point on, each interview took on a life of its own, as the women led me through the process. Typically, many of the questions that I had planned were dealt with before they were asked. Some women took me in directions not congruent with my agenda, and I made on the spot decisions about when and if to pull them back. Each of my four choices were covered in each interview, however, how these were addressed differed according to the individual women. I completed the interview by making explicit the four choices which we had discussed and recapping what I thought I had heard them say about each as a final validity check. I then asked if they had anticipated discussing any choices beyond those we had covered. In other words, did I miss anything or was there anything that they wished to add? In general, my four choices did seem cover the realm of possibilities for these women. Any additions that they made could usually be seen to fall into one or more of the choice categories already theorized.

Some women were more forthcoming with anecdotes and stories than others, and at times I felt inadequate as a facilitator for story-telling. I think that this comes out of my attempt to combine a semi-structured format with a narrative approach. I began the interviews with a question, hence, possibly setting up expectations of a question and answer format from the participants. I was reluctant however to begin with the woman's story, since this is often intensely personal and requires a level of trust and safety before the telling. Also, I did bring an agenda to the interview which I wanted to keep up front, so did not think it useful or particularly honest to begin with too open a question. As I

recognized the challenges here, I adjusted my approach after the first three interviews in an effort to better set the stage for storytelling. I altered my preliminary comments to include the idea that I would be actively participating in the interview, so that we could have a conversation rather than sitting back and expecting them to provide all of the answers. This seemed to help the participants to relax and made the drawing out of stories somewhat easier. However, my concern that the participants have a positive experience kept me from repeatedly probing if I sensed that this was not appropriate. It seems that the individual woman's level of comfort and inclination to share stories is a crucial element to the success of the narrative approach. Ultimately, it is important to note that the facilitating of storytelling can be challenging and requires skill on the interviewer's part (Gluck & Patai 1991).

I approached the interviews using Holstein & Gubrium's (1997) active interviewing strategy. In the active interview the researcher is seen to be engaged with the participant in an act of social construction and interpretation. Here the interviewer directively participates, offering alternatives in an attempt to provide an environment in which the respondent can shift positions, exploring multiple possibilities and interpretations. Rather than passively waiting or indirectively probing for responses, "the active interview's role is to incite respondents' answers, virtually activating narrative production" (Holstein & Gubrium, 1997; p.123). This approach recognizes the interview as a collaborative meaning making event in which all players are implicated, hence, is in keeping with my political and ethical agenda.

Active interviewing also enhances the quality and authenticity of the data

collected since the researcher is constantly reflecting back and checking in with the participant regarding what has been said and how it is understood. By regularly checking on the accuracy of my perspective and developing interpretations of what was going on, I was able to find out if I had understood something correctly. Implicit here is a sharing of power, since the participant only feels comfortable in correcting me if she perceives herself to be a competent and authoritative voice. Some contend that these active listening skills create a high level of reactivity in the interview, actually leading the participant in the researcher's desired direction (McCracken 1988). However, Guba and Lincoln (1994) would see this as an issue of 'educative authenticity', or a desire to fully grasp the constructions of others. Rather than aiming towards any kind of objective standard of truth then, this approach emphasizes meaning-making processes. Furthermore, providing that the researcher is aware of her own biases and genuinely values the participant as the expert, the active listening interview strategy is a means to achieve rich and authentic data. This approach also represents a truly responsible way to handle power in the interview, since it is my ethical imperative to 'get it as right as possible' during the data collection stage of the research if I am going to respectfully interpret and analyse the data at a later time.

Although I cannot say for certain that the active approach was nondirective, it seemed to me that the women felt quite comfortable in correcting what I said if it missed the mark. While their individual styles differed, there were many instances in which the women did not hesitate in correcting me. This suggests that they saw my comments as possibilities or alternatives rather than as attempts to instill my views. For instance, here

Tracy and I are discussing the increased potential for vulnerability that she experiences in

relationships with women:

**I think there's more vulnerability there because this person is potentially at the
same place as you are, they might know how to get inside you in ways that it might
be more difficult for a man to do. And if you're like at this place almost
immediately because of gender, and again it comes down to an individual person, if
you're alike with this person, then there's fear around that. But that also allows for
a level of intimacy that is, that can be amazing. Not that you can't find that with
someone of the opposite gender, but there are more factors that prevent that--I
mean just social conditioning, right?**
So the potential is there to have this kind of amazing intimacy with a woman, and that
also sets up the potential for lots of women to be walking around with these walls in place
because it is a bit scary, isn't it?
**It depends, that's not exactly what I'm saying. If you're with somebody of the same
gender who's alike to you, you come to a point that is just closer right from the very
beginning.**

While Tracy's approach is quite direct, the following passage demonstrates a more subtle

exchange between Camille and I. Here we are talking about her process of coming out to

a best friend from her childhood:

So, do you remember actually your coming out to her, do you remember what it was like?
Was there a specific time when you sat down and talked?
**I don't remember because the part about my story that might be different from
other people's, I'm not sure, is that I was in a long term relationship with a male
while this was happening. So, I think it was one thing to talk about things
theoretically, she's had to deal with me differently now that I'm single. Cause it
MEANS different things, a lot more different things now.**
And for your relationship itself you mean it means different things, is that right? Do you
think you pose a threat to her now, do you think you could be a bit scary to her?
I don't know if it's scary as much as--there's different activities.
OK, just real practical stuff about where do we go and what do we do?
Yeah.

This give and take in the interview also represents an invitation to the participant

to be a part of the analysis. Here sense-making becomes a joint project and a part of the

interview itself, rather than the sole work of the researcher after the fact. Opportunities

for analysis during the interview were somewhat limited however, because it was often not until the transcripts could be studied that interesting connections and insights became apparent to me. However, whenever I had an insight or idea, I presented it to the participant to get her feedback and any alternative thoughts she might have on the subject. In this way, whenever possible I shared what I was thinking, offering it as food for thought, rather than keeping my analysis to myself. This served to both involve the subject in the analysis, and to move the interview to a deeper level of interpretive work.

Finally, an attempt was made to incorporate critical listening strategies into the interview itself. A basic assumption behind the critical approach is that individuals are limited in their storytelling and interpretive capacities by the narratives available to them. Acknowledging this assumption means that women might struggle to find the right words when telling their stories. Given the linguistic hegemony of the hetero/homo dualism, presumably bisexual women would be particularly vulnerable to this lack of available narrative structure.

Anderson & Jack (1991) suggest that critical interviewers listen for three things: 1) moral language (which suggests struggling with dominant meanings) 2) meta statements (self-reflective moments when the narrator recognizes inconsistencies in her own account) 3) the logic of the narrative itself (in which the interviewer can recognize internal contradictions). It is suggested that the critical listener sees these occurrences as opportunities to further explore rather than as deficiencies in the accounts of the subjects. My interviews were rife with such instances, which could demonstrate the lack of narrative alternatives regarding bisexual identity. However, I came to realize that

exploring the possibilities behind these limitations was often impractical, requiring a great deal of time and ultimately beyond the realm of my research goals. So, although this awareness helped me to understand what might be going on in the interviews, I only took the opportunity to further explore this avenue of critique when I came to recognize a distinct pattern among the subjects. Readdressing the interview data in detail with this specific goal in mind would be illuminating and a worthwhile project in future.

In between interviews, the tapes were reviewed and detailed notes taken as to the content of each interview in its entirety. Decisions were then made regarding which parts of interview would be transcribed, and transcription was carried out by the researcher. This provided two opportunities to listen completely through the tapes and begin analytic work as the data moved from oral to written text. On average, each interview's transcript was eight single-spaced pages, making for a total of approximately 90 pages of text. Along with this verbatim account, the original notes are also available as a source of referral.

An additional methodological tool that I utilized was a research diary. Journalling allowed me to document my thought processes as the research progressed as well as keeping my commitment to doing reflexive, self-aware, accountable work (Kirby & McKenna, 1989). Here I recorded initial assumptions, neat ideas, fears, feelings, reflections, methodological concerns, things to improve upon, highlights, assumption updates, contradictions, insights, and interesting points. As interviewing progressed I began my analytic work in this document by highlighting themes within individual interviews and commonalities across interviews as they became apparent to me. I

continued journalling throughout the transcribing process as well, allowing me to move into comparisons and points of contrast as I became increasingly familiar with the data. This journal provided me with a basis from which to begin my formal analysis once the interviews were completed. I continued to make journal entries (although less frequently) throughout the writing stages of this project as well to keep in touch with any resistances or blocks in the writing process. The journal has proven invaluable both as a source of data in its own right and as a tool for processing and moving through this research.

Analysis

The data were analysed with two somewhat conflicting goals in mind. First, I wanted to capture a reasonably representative picture of the women in the study. Although the aim of the research was not to represent the participants in any sort of quantitative fashion, obviously it was important to attempt to grasp what mattered most to them. As mentioned earlier, my originally theorized four choices did seem to ring true for the participants so this structure was maintained in the analysis phase of the research project. However, within each choice category many specific and varied themes presented themselves. In order to characterize the women's accounts thematically the transcripts were coded with an eye towards generating categories for cross-sectional indexing purposes. The transcripts were repeatedly reviewed (along with the research journal) as themes became evident and the data were then grouped according to the categories as much as possible. Those themes that were most prevalent became a part of the analysis piece of the research project.

Second, I wanted to deepen and expand upon the standpoint which meant looking

for particularly interesting insights and experiences which might be unique to a given

woman. This goal does not suggest cross-sectional indexing, but rather a more

qualitative look at the data. Here the research diary proved useful as my general

impressions of each particular woman's insights and emphases were recorded following

both the interview itself and the transcription of it. Readdressing my impressions of a

given interview at least twice and over a period of time allowed me to recognize

particularly important or unique elements. I was able to flag significant passages through

the coding process as well and these were grouped separately. The final decisions about

what got included and left out here were based upon my judgement calls about what

would most contribute to an understanding of bisexual women's choices.

Having established the strengths and limitations of my methodological approach, I

now turn to a presentation of the empirical aspect of this research study. The next two

chapters involve looking at and analysing the data collected as they relate to the bisexual

standpoint.

Chapter Five

PRIVATE CHOICES: DEFINING AND TAKING UP A BISEXUAL LABEL

This chapter begins the process of interpreting the empirical data collected in the interviews in terms of a bisexual woman's standpoint. Here the words of the participants themselves are presented, interpreted and analysed in order to deepen and flesh out the standpoint. As discussed in Chapter Four, the particular passages presented here have been selected either because they convey prevalent themes or because they reveal important insights. In other words, this presentation is not intended as empirically representative of the women interviewed, although some of the themes discussed are. Although the active interviewing strategy allowed for some joint interpretation and analysis between the participants and myself, the analytic aspects of this chapter are best described as exclusively my own.

The chapter is divided into two sections corresponding with the first two choices theorized in the bisexual standpoint outlined in Chapter Three. The act of choosing one's own definition of bisexuality is explored first, as was the case in the actual interviews. The second section of this chapter deals with the choice to call oneself bisexual, exploring reasons for and against this decision. As stated in Chapter Four, the flow of the interviews was established by the participants themselves, so a uniform progression and clearcut divisions between topics was neither desired nor achieved. Despite the uniqueness of each interview however, all eventually addressed and expanded upon each of the four theorized choices. Therefore I have chosen to organize and discuss the data according to these choices since they did ultimately resonate with the research

participants.

Choosing a Definition That Fits

The first choice explored in the interviews was the choice to define for oneself

what the bisexual designation means. Bisexuality, by definition, suggests having to do

with both males and females. For the women in this study, instead of seeing bisexuality

as the inclusion of both men and women in the realm of their possible attractions,

bisexuality seemed to be more about a refusal to exclude. This subtle but important shift

in emphasis was achieved through talk which typically constructed bisexuality as the

removal of some sort of a barrier or boundary. Domino, who has been involved as an

activist in bisexual community politics for a number of years, expresses this view as

follows:

**I think, in my mind, bisexuality in reference to how you develop relationships with
other people, is um a way of relating to people that doesn't really depend primarily
on gender. And it doesn't really fit with the term bisexuality, um but in my mind
what distinguishes it from heterosexuality or homosexuality is that for a person
who's either homosexual or heterosexual, the gender of their partners is of primary
importance to them. For a bisexual person, it's not the most important criterion,
it's one of the criterion. So, it's a different way of relating that doesn't put gender
first before everything else....It's a removal of a barrier that gender might otherwise
be.[3]**

Jane, who has come into her bisexual identity in the past year after identifying as lesbian

since she was a young adult, further develops this idea of barrier removal. For her the

---

[3] For the purposes of the distinctions to be made in this study, 'sex' will be used to
describe the biological categories of male and female. The participants often refer to
these categories as 'gender', as is common in everyday language. While this usage is not
incorrect, it fails to separate the categories of sex and gender; a separation that is
necessary in this research.

wall is kept in place by fears which serve to limit people:

I think when people label themselves as heterosexual or homosexual what they're doing is, they're sort of putting up a barrier and saying with this gender I'm not going to have erotic behaviours and also I think you go further than that--I think it's more of, "I'm afraid to feel erotic for this gender". And so I think there's a whole lot of shutting down and repression comes as a result of that.

It is important to note that the lifting of the barrier here is not synonymous with an inability to distinguish men from women, or same-sex from other-sex relationships. These women are not suggesting that sex is invisible to bisexual people, rather, they emphasize that it is merely one of many relevant characteristics upon which they base their assessments. In other words, they refuse to be restricted based upon the category of sex; they allow themselves to be open to individuals, regardless of whether they are male or female.

These narratives about barriers demonstrate the production of the female bisexual subject as other than heterosexual or lesbian. The subtext here is that heterosexuals and homosexuals do have barriers in place keeping them from the kind of openness which bisexuals experience. The difference between bisexuals and the others is therefore marked by the presence or absence of a barrier based on sex. Interestingly, the women in this study varied considerably in their views regarding what the most relevant barrier might be (that blocking same-sex or other-sex possibilities). Regardless of individual leanings however, both homosexual cultures and dominant heterosexual groups were understood as barrier-bound, while bisexuality represented the lifting of a wall of sorts.

Although the individual women differed regarding their assumptions about which specific boundary might be the most formidable, they did not differ in commonly tying

lesbians to the barrier talk. Sahara has spent considerable time in lesbian community, and received this message from them:

In the gay and lesbian community there's a really strong culture to um, to be lesbian to be gay to not uh...to be separate from the straight world and not have anything, you know, to not cross to not mix the boundaries....There's a whole wishy washy get off the fence kind of thing, you know, what are you doing? Like who are you betraying or which group do you belong to? Well, I don't think it should be seen that way but I think it is.

The fence-sitting metaphor was frequently called up in these interviews as a stereotype commonly assigned to bisexuals by lesbians made uncomfortable by their apparent lack of respect for the boundaries. The bisexual potential to cross over the 'line' was seen as a big problem in lesbian culture. In return, lesbians were described as 'hardliners', insistent upon maintaining clearcut divisions and separations.

There is an interesting mix of incompatible metaphors going on here. While these bisexual women see themselves as removing walls, dominant lesbian discourses insist that they are sitting atop them. The fact that it is impossible to be sitting on a fence that does not exist demonstrates that these two groups of women are talking past each other here. To clarify, the lesbian 'line' likely refers to the dividing line between men and women, and it seems that these bisexual women would also see the necessity for this distinction. However, the bisexual barrier-removal narrative is intended to challenge the purpose of the line which operates to restrict individuals to one category only in terms of potential pairings. So, even though they might be working from the same assumptions here, the lesbian fence-sitting narrative clearly contradicts the bisexual barrier-removal talk. These contradictory discourses speak to the level of distance and the potential for

rifts that might exist between these two groups of women.[9]

The boundary talk not only involved barriers, lines and fences, it also operated as a restraint, confining individuals metaphorically within tight, claustrophobic spaces. From being locked up, hemmed in, forced in, caged in and amputated, language which graphically described this sense of being restricted or confined was evident throughout the interviews. Kelly, who has quite recently come into a sense of her own bisexuality, says it this way:

Desire is forced into this little box, right? You know, kicking and screaming. (we laugh together)

Kelly spent time as a participant in a fundamentalist religious group where she observed extreme examples of being role-bound which she likened to some of the lesbian norms to which she had been exposed. Here the restrictive function of these roles is made painfully evident:

They couldn't let go of the, I don't know, the role. And it kept sort of growing tighter and tighter around them and squeezing them you know, squeezing the life out of them. So they were becoming more and more of an icon instead of a person?

Domino mirrors Kelly's sentiments, although expresses them using different metaphors in this discussion of her bisexual activism:

I think one of the reasons why I try to be very active and get information out and contact people, is that I've come across an awful lot of people who've been very unhappy because they've been uh stuck in a role, a very tightly defined role either as a heterosexual or homosexual person, and have felt that it's just not complete for them. And I have a sense that a lot of people cut off pieces of themselves to fit into a role. And I feel that being bisexual is the way I am and having lived the way I did I've had a chance to express all the parts of myself. And have gained something that

---

[9]This theme of dissension between bisexual women and lesbians became increasingly prevalent and will be gradually developed and discussed throughout the remaining chapters of this thesis, as it unfolded in the interviewing process.

I think more people need to have access to. And that sort of falls in the category of choices, to broaden your possibility of different kinds of experiences, to find what is complete for you and to feel complete in the way you relate to other people.

Underneath this narrative is a critique of the limitations of either/or thinking, a critique

which Monika makes explicit here:

I guess male/female stuff, god/goddess, heterosexual--it's all just so so black and white. And for me for me things aren't black and white, there's like rainbows right? That makes sense, and it's not just salt and pepper, there's a bizillion spices out there. You know what I mean? I hate when people do that ying/yang thing, it's like that's not true. That's so--I think if people were all fully themselves they would be everything, they wouldn't be--I don't know--

So, in general there is an awareness here of the dominant discourses around

sexuality, while at the same time an acknowledgement of the problems which these

discourses create for individual agency. The main theme is that bisexuality means getting

out from behind walls and constraining places. In particular, there was a rejection of

'hardline' thinking due to its restrictive function. The boundary talk that was evident

throughout the interviews revealed both the hegemony of and problems with either/or,

homo/hetero discourses. For these women, a preparedness to be open to attractions,

wherever they arose, was synonymous with lifting a wall; a wall that keeps heterosexuals

and homosexuals closed off and confined. The hegemony of the fence-sitting narrative

suggests that the bisexual talk of removing barriers has yet to catch on, however,

particularly in the lesbian community.

While the category of sex was de-emphasized, gender moved into a prominent

position in many of the women's discourses. It seems that sex may be a secondary

category, however, gender is an important consideration in terms of considering one's

attractions. For the purposes of this discussion, gender can be understood as the social

and cultural meanings attached to male and female bodies and is assigned the categories

of masculine and feminine (Mackie 1991, p. 7).[10] Gender is connected to both the

physical presentation of the self and particular behaviours or roles. Where sex is assumed

to be fixed, dichotomous and stable (for present purposes), gender is understood as agent-

driven, continuous and fluid (Lipman-Blumen 1984, p.3).

Gender played out in a number of the interviews as an issue of androgyny. While

androgyny is often understood as the expression of both masculine and feminine traits

simultaneously, in these discourses it suggested choosing if and when to express the male

or female sides of oneself. Androgyny is also distinguishable from asexual, neutral,

nonmasculine or nonfeminine displays:

I think androgyny can go with bisexuality quite, I think it can fit quite nicely actually. Um, and not in terms of having to be asexual, but choosing. Choosing which parts of the roles and which things you want to be. And I think, ultimately in society I'd like to see all women and men, regardless of sexual orientation, to have those choices. But I think people in a bisexual position have more opportunities for that for some reason. (Rebecca)

Here androgyny represents a freedom to express oneself fully in relationships, to be free

to take up whatever parts of the masculine or feminine gender script seem to fit at the

time. Rebecca, who is married to a male partner, goes on to emphasize the importance of

androgyny not only for herself but also in her choice of mate:

I chose to select a mate who had the best of both female and male characteristics. And that's how I see myself also. And I think there's a bit of a connection, and this might be a leap, but I think there's a bit of a connection in terms of um--letting go of

---

[10]A more accurate representation of these concepts might be 'masculinities' and 'femininities' since they are far from uniform and agreed upon. The glue that holds the variations together however is their consistently dichotomous structure and their inevitable connection to the categories of male and female in heteropatriarchal society.

sexual stereotypes when you're bisexual. Because you are not dressing and you're not trying to go for just one group of people. And I think that's coming through stronger to me because I can be both, I can be whatever I want.

This statement speaks clearly to the desireability and autonomy that being androgynous represents for Rebecca. Along with her, other women in this study expressed an attraction to distinctly androgynous individuals, particularly men. Given the emphasis on men in terms of androgyny, it seems safe to assume that it is macho masculinity that is being rejected here. For example, Jane describes how androgyny played out as a rejection of masculine norms of behaviour on the part of a male partner she once had:

I remember I had a wonderful boyfriend when I was 17. He was very gentle, nurturing, supportive--um he never sort of of his own volition tried to tell me what to do, but he had a lot of pressure around him. A lot of people saying, "can't you control your girlfriend?"....And so he didn't particularly want to control me, or at least endeavour in the struggle, but people made him feel like less of a man because he couldn't.

It seems that a lack of masculinity does not come without a price for men. Being able to express both the masculine and feminine ranges of behaviours and appearances is something of a privilege. Here Jane makes the point that women have a lot more freedom of expression in this realm than men:

I find women are easier that way, culturally we're allowed to be androgynous. I can put on my hiking boots and play with the chain saw in the morning and put on stilettos and a dress and perfume and go out at night. And no one comments. But if men do that we start questioning their sexuality.

Jane is describing an important link here between homophobia and gender. Suzanne Pharr (1988) argues that, in a sexist society homophobia operates as a form of social control. For Pharr, sexism implicitly links sexual orientation to gender by setting up masculine men and feminine women as representative of the heterosexual ideal.

Conversely, individuals that deviate in any way from these gender norms are typically assumed to be homosexuals. Given that the sanctions for homosexuality can be severe (particularly in the case of males), it makes sense that individuals might avoid behaviours and people that would align them here. Whether or not one is homosexual, this framework of assumptions serves to keep all males and females restricted to traditional gender roles and the narrow range of behaviours that go along with them. Hence, homophobia operates to keep all individuals, both gay and straight, in line.[11]

The bisexual emphasis on androgyny seems to suggest that alternative gender arrangements might be not only acceptable but actually desireable. There was a general sense that the women in this study had not internalized the societal value of connecting gender behaviour to sexual orientation. This meant that they found somewhat feminized men attractive and saw them to be within the realm of potential mates. They also refused the narrowly defined gender stereotypes for their own behaviours and appearances.

While bisexuality might not obviously seem to be about gender, these narratives around androgyny brought the gender issue to the forefront. In connecting bisexuality with androgyny, these women continued the theme of bisexuality being an agent-driven, self-realizing, nonrestrictive place to be. In general, androgyny meant being free to be

---

[11]This argument also has implications for the transgendered individual whose gender identity deviates from the norms laid out in sexism and heterosexism, and for whom there is questionable choice regarding this aspect of their identity. Particularly masculinized women or feminized men face unique (and quite different) challenges in heteronormativity. Not only are such individuals assumed to be gay, hence, subjected to homophobia, but also the potential to be mistaken for another sex arises here. The challenges these situations bring might lead an individual to 'pass' as the other sex rather than facing the sanctions of deviating from the sex-gender system of norms (Feinberg 1993).

complete, to celebrate both masculine and feminine aspects of oneself or to reject either at particular times as well. There was a desire to let go of sexual stereotypes in relationships and an attraction to androgynous others. There was also a recognition that androgyny is easier for women, as homophobia operates to keep men, in particular, tied into the masculine script (perhaps this had something to do with their attractions to men who reject extreme displays of masculinity). Throughout this talk there was a strong sense of choice and agency regarding which roles one might take up and the granting of permission to try on many different hats. Along with wholeness and completion, these discourses captured the ambiguity and fluidity that androgyny, hence, bisexuality entails.

Underlying all of these discussions about defining bisexuality is the idea of attraction or desire; a key aspect of sexual identity for most of the women interviewed. Desire is a difficult concept to capture and it is typically not connected to political agendas. Given that desire suggests a state attributable to individual psyches, an emphasis here typically individualizes, privatizes and depoliticizes sexuality.[12] Given this, it was not my intent to pursue the idea of desire in the interviews. However, although we did not explicitly discuss what it meant, the idea of desire or attraction was at the heart of bisexuality for most of these women and therefore, unavoidable.

Implicit within the discourses was a range of perspectives in terms of understanding attraction. Attraction was seen as a broad, encompassing phenomenon

---

[12]Gary Kinsman (1996) makes this same point with regard to homophobia, which also gets constructed as private and attitudinal. He argues that an emphasis on homophobia, "individualizes and privatizes gay and lesbian oppression and obscures the social relations that organize it" (p. 33).

which the women variously described as emotional, physical, sexual, erotic, feeling,

thinking, wanting, love, affinity, desire and connection. In addition, the sort of

uncapturable aspect of this notion of desire was evident throughout as can be seen in this

example. Here Nadine attempts to articulate her experience of attraction:

It just happens because there's the chemistry, regardless of who it is that you're with, the chemistry is there.

Similarly, while Caroline is able to utilize some specific descriptors, attraction also holds

a somewhat vague and unnameable quality for her:

I think you can always have some sort of physical attraction to somebody, but it has to be completely--has to be--it's not even mental it has to be something that totally clicks for you. And for me it has to be something that I found intriguing about that person.

Beyond the physical and mental, there is something else which draws her in and makes

certain people more appealing than others. While it seems that a concern with attraction

is hardly unique to bisexuality, Caroline makes an interesting connection here. Not only

has she clearly thought at length about the nature of her desires and attractions, she

attributes this contemplation, at least in part, to her bisexual identity:

But I think in a sense maybe--maybe we as bisexuals understand attraction to other people a lot more than other people do. You know, we can really open our eyes to somebody you know, a little bit more for who they are. And not have that gender in the way.

So, the idea of contemplating one's attractions, attempting to describe what they

entail and understand them for oneself is for Caroline a part of what bisexuality means.

Lifting the veil that the category of sex might otherwise represent, as only bisexuals do,

could be a call for a conscious interrogation of exactly what it is that attracts one to some

people and not to others. Although no one in these interviews had a definitive answer to

this question, the attempt itself suggests a willingness to be accountable for one's attractions. Whether intended as such or not, this attempt can be interpreted as politically useful. Accountability, as suggested here, is never required and seldom deemed necessary in the heterosexual system. Conversely, not surprisingly gays and lesbians typically de-emphasize their desires given the homophobia to which they are subjected in heteronormativity. An emphasis on attraction has not been politically useful in the quest for gay and lesbian rights.

The idea that bisexuality seems to demand that desire be brought to the forefront can have interesting political implications however. Not only might accountability and reflexivity be increased, but homophobia itself could be challenged in a new way. Given its outsider-within status in relationship to heterosexuality, the bisexual acknowledgement of same-sex desire stands to challenge homophobia from a place closer to heterosexuality than the lesbian and gay position. When lesbians and gays challenge homophobia they are vulnerable to invalidation and dismissal on the grounds of their homosexuality. Homophobic responses function to deflect the message and keep heterosexuals from hearing it. A bisexual challenge, on the other hand, might be less dismissable (right or wrong) because it comes from someone who shares some aspects of the dominant group's identity (at least in their eyes). So, perhaps resistances can be reduced if the challenge is seen to come from a more likeminded position. Of course, bisexuals are also susceptible to dismissal based upon a multitude of stereotypes which serve to invalidate them, however, at least some of the pressure to address homophobia can be removed from the shoulders of gays and lesbians. So, given the bisexual

proximity to heterosexuality, there is the potential here to challenge homophobia from a slightly different place, hence, perhaps having a somewhat different impact. Whether or not this challenge is more effective, at least it suggests a sharing of the work.

Along with investigating what attraction means to them, a number of the women then connected attraction to the issue of choice (something else I did not have planned as a part of my agenda). With the exception of one individual, all had the sense that their attractions were not chosen, however the decision about acting upon them was. Sahara sums it up in this way:

I wonder about, I mean how much do we choose the people we're attracted to? You know like that's sort of a step backward question because that's a more broader question but, is that a conscious choice? Is that a subconscious choice? Are we just attracted to the people we're attracted to for reasons that are beyond our control?....Inevitably my emotions have already decided for me. Either not interested, no matter how compatible we may or may not be, or I am interested, no matter how compatible we may or may not be.

While Monika acknowledges her uninterrogated, unquestioned responses, she is also somewhat unique in the group in seeing her attractions as within her control:

There's still attraction of course, certain people turn me off physically and certain people turn me on. But the overriding thing is I can be completely sexually attracted to someone and if they say anything that offends me, it's like OOF!, it's like nothing....So the choice thing, that connects back to choice right? That I can turn off sexuality by choice, you know what I mean?....And so, in that it is more political or whatever you want to call it.
So we're not kinda just victims of our attractions then?
I don't think so I don't think so.

Whether one's attractions are believed to be beyond one's conscious control or not, the underlying issue here is the question about the origin aspect of attraction. As stated in Chapter Two, this question is not particularly relevant to the sociopolitical perspective. However, it was quite relevant to the women in this study. For instance, at the end of her

interview, Nadine wanted to talk about the origin question as a final choice that was not

covered in the course of our time together. Here she contemplates the issue:

I know the big thing for me was origin, that was the big thing for everybody. Like are you born like this or is it genetic or what is it?
And what do you think about that, have you got that worked out for yourself?
Yeah, I don't know if it's genetic but um, you either have something in you, you either are attracted or you're not. And I don't know if that's genetics or not. I don't know. I think it's more how comfortable people are with themselves.
So, correct me if I'm wrong, do I hear you saying you're not so sure that we do choose our attractions in the end. Is that right? You're saying it could be genetic, right, we just ARE attracted, so perhaps those attractions aren't really a choice?
Yeah, exactly. Like I don't know if the attraction is a choice. I think it's a choice who you decide...to follow through with your attraction.

Nadine is working through the nature vs nurture debate here; thinking about genes vs

comfort zone in terms of what forms and informs her attractions. Her inclination to

assign nurture or comfort zone does not make her attractions a matter of choice, they still

operate outside of her own agency. As with most of the participants, Nadine attributes

agency to her actions rather than her attractions. Kelly also mentions genes as a possible

explanation for the source of attractions which she similarly sees as beyond her control:

What is out of my control is who I fall in love with, like I can't control the fact that I'm drawn to a man or a woman. I just fall in love. I'm attracted. So, that's out of my control. And I don't know which gene you want to, you want to tack that one onto (chuckles), but anyways that's just the way it is.

This line of thinking is in keeping with Vera Whisman's (1996) work on sexual

orientation and choice. As in Whisman's study, these women for the most part provided

'mixed accounts' (p. 82), seeing the origins of their attractions as determined but their

actions as chosen.

The relevance of these attempts to assign origins and to make sense of feelings is

twofold. First, it speaks to the power and hegemony of the origin discourses that

typically dominate discussions of sexuality in the political realm. The need for gay and lesbian groups to emphasize fixed origins in their human rights campaigns in recent years speaks to the prevalence of this narrative. Although I did not include origin as a topic of discussion, virtually all of the women alluded to it and needed to address it for themselves in the context of the choice discussion. As discussed in Chapter Three, the usefulness of this line of inquiry is questionable given the likelihood of coming up with definitive answers. Politically a focus on origins can keep the concern at the level of theory rather than looking at the real conditions of people's lives. Despite its shortcomings however, the cultural dominance of the origin narrative is evidenced in the women's need to address this issue in the interviews.

The other point regarding the origins discourses is that they do serve a sense-making function in the face of hegemonic either/or thinking. Not only does heteronormativity embrace this imperative, but the normative climate in lesbian and gay cultures also reinforces an either/or mentality. The bisexual experience is unique in that it flies in the face of both of these powerful and prevailing stories. Given the strength of the either/or imperative, it should come as no surprise that these women need to make sense of their 'deviant' attractions. It stands to reason that one would wonder about how one got to a bisexual place in view of the dominance of either/or thinking. Underlying the concern with origins then is both an acknowledgement of the 'difference' of bisexuality and an effort to make sense of it for oneself since it is so contrary to the dominant view. This sense-making function also has a political usefulness as it subsequently turns into a justificatory story which the world must hear. Ultimately then,

although a concern with origins is both limited and limiting, it also seems to be a

compulsory discourse in the current environment.

Another trend in these discourses about the meaning of bisexuality was to discuss

attraction in terms of a continuum. All of the women I talked to referred to the

continuum, either as evidence for the prevalence of bisexuality or as a way to understand

their own desires and those of others. In some narratives the continuum was explicit

while for others it operated at the level of assumptions. Monika, like many others, uses

the continuum to normalize her own sexuality:

Cause I see sexuality as a continuum, right? And some people are just more hetero or more homo and the middle ground would be bi, not a confused person being bi like some of the biphobia people treat--so, yeah, but I see it as a continuum and we're socialized to be at one extreme.

Unlike the imagery of the hardline or the claustrophobic confining categories, the

continuum offers a fluid and relatively unrestrained place to locate the self. While its

ends are flanked by static and fixed categories, there is a considerable range of

possibilities encompassed within the middle ground here. Furthermore, within this grey

bisexual area there is room to move around and shift over time:

I think that most bisexual people are not sitting smack in the middle. For myself, I've gone through almost phases. There've been times when I've wanted, I've been more interested in having same-sex partners and there's been times when I've been more interested in having opposite-sex partners. (Domino)

The continuum not only allows bisexual individuals a degree of freedom and

fluidity, it also accommodates those for whom bisexuality does not fit. Rebecca

describes the range of possibilities which the continuum accommodates as follows:

It still allows for people that want to dig their heels in and say absolutely I am straight no matter what, if I am the last person on the planet and the other person

**on the planet is the same sex as me we will never have a relationship other than
friendship, that is IT! Um, you know it allows for that, because I imagine there will
always be people who want to be in that either end. But it also I think allows for a
lot more freedom.**

The continuum does not eliminate the monosexual ends (homosexuality and

heterosexuality), rather they remain necessary to allow for, in Rebecca's terms, those who

refuse to embrace the idea of fluidity and freedom represented by the bisexual centre.

The inclusiveness of the continuum is appealing, particularly in light of the fact that gay

and lesbian discourses tend to render bisexuality nonexistent. In contrast to these views,

the continuum more graciously allows a position for everyone.

However, although it appears to be inclusive of all positions, this continuum

narrative also represent a new hierarchical ordering. In some ways the continuum serves

to reverse the discourse so that those at the extreme ends are the 'deviants', while the

bisexual centre represents the norm. Although she is interested in emphasizing that

bisexuality does not have to mean a static position at the exact midway point, in

Rebecca's explanation we see this discursive strategy of centralizing bisexuality:

**And then I see that people can identify on the scale from the end of the straight
straights and the straight gays to anywhere on the scale. So somebody could say
plop I'm right dab in the middle, you know--I am completely easy either way. And
I've met people that truly live that way and seem to honestly--that is exactly where
they're coming from. I've met a lot more that are leaning one way of the other, so
there might be like 60/40, or some may be going well, right now my tendency is to go
right here.**

Not only does bisexuality get expanded as a category, but it is also shifted to the

centre here. The fixed ends themselves, representing heterosexuality and homosexuality,

have not only become peripheral to the bisexual centre, but they are now somehow

equally balanced. The implications of this shift for heterosexuality are quite remarkable.

Heterosexuality is both marginalized in relationship to bisexuality here, and the het category itself has been shrunk to a size comparable to that of its homosexual counterpart. Given the hegemonic position that heteronormativity holds and the power of heterosexist assumptions, this is an impressive discursive accomplishment.

So, the continuum narrative offers the bisexual woman freedom and agency to place herself along a considerable range of attraction options; it also provides the opportunity to shift this placement over time. Bisexuality gets expanded as a category since it does not represent the middle 'line', rather it is fluid and flows between the two static ends. Discourses which take up the continuum imagery serve to diminish the power of the heterosexual category; both in terms of its size and centrality. In view of the power of heterosexuality such talk is politically subversive.

A final and related point about desire is the question of what is to be done about it. Is bisexuality an ontological position, based primarily on a knowledge of one's capacity to be attracted to both sexes? Or, is it necessary to act in some way in order to count as bisexual? In these interviews the very notion of what counted as acting on a attraction was open to a broad range of possibilities. Furthermore and more importantly, the decision of whether or not to act at all was left up to the individual.

For Monika, bisexuality was emphasized as an issue of knowing rather than something requiring experience:

I guess in the definition it has to do with orientation and when I told people, when I started to tell people I was bisexual they, some people define that as you've had the experiences kind of thing?
Right, right.
So, and I disagree with that. So that it's more like yeah for a long time I was never with a woman and I always called myself bisexual so some people can understand

that.

Along similar lines, Sahara's definition does not require action:

I think to me it's about desire and attraction um, and not necessarily acting on them um but, yeah I guess--and it's also about being attracted to individuals as opposed to being attracted to genders. So that I think that for me, what I'm attracted to is the person and it's sort of regardless of their sex.

In contrast, Nadine connects bisexuality to experience for herself, however she is more than willing to let everyone make their own decisions about this:

For me it was, yes, I have been to both camps, so yes I would say, like that's been my experience. So that's why I see myself shifting from one to the other, like along that scale. But I wouldn't say that it would have to be experience for somebody, cause even if you're thinking about it maybe you just haven't acted upon what it is that you're thinking about.

As discussed earlier, an emphasis on desire and potential can depoliticize sexuality by constructing it as a matter of private, personal and individual preferences. From the perspective of gay and lesbian identity politics, this emphasis is politically problematic since it does not address oppression or the inequalities inherent in patriarchy and heteronormativity. Not having to act on one's same-sex attractions means never having to risk one's heterosexual privilege. This can make the bisexual position less than politically critical or experientially insightful in terms of understanding issues related to structured inequality. The lesbian and gay critique of bisexuality is important. If bisexuality is merely an issue of attraction and potential and never requires practical action, then its ability to see, understand and challenge regimes of privilege and oppression is limited.

However, the distinct lack of rules for behaviour found in the bisexual definition might also be seen as politically useful, although in a different sense than lesbian and gay

identity politics would demand. First, this emphasis demonstrates a sensitivity to the

constraints of the environment upon one's activities. Rebecca sums it up this way in a

discussion about why bisexuality cannot be restricted to experiential knowledge only.

Here she talks about the Kinsey scale:

Yeah, it wasn't based just on activity which I think actually is better because quite frankly activity is controlled so much by society and norms and by ourselves anyway right? So of course activity is going to give us skewed results, it's not really going to tell us exactly what people are feeling and thinking and wanting.

She goes on to specifically articulate how activity is controlled and what this might mean

for same-sex activity:

I mean we all, I think want to belong, and I mean our society only works if people do try to fit into the norms to a certain point. And I mean, um, certainly the norms in our North American society have been very strongly heterosexual. So that if you were growing up bisexual you are going to perhaps have feelings for both genders but you're going to probably only act on one. You know, because of the environment, because of the cost involved. The potential damage that you could have to yourself. I mean everything from physical violence to--you know, from being ostracized to you name it.

Put this way, it is possible to see how the only rational choice for a bisexual person might

be other-sex relations. This logic was very clear to Mabel who is presently involved in a

same-sex relationship. She anticipated that I might have pursued this line of questioning

in the interview:

Well, a question that I suppose I may have anticipated would have been, why would anyone ever choose, if you feel like you're open to both genders, why would you ever choose the uphill battle? Do you know what I mean? Like--if you feel like you're bisexual and you could be equally attracted to either, then, and you FEEL like it's not acceptable--then why wouldn't you--
Choose men?
Yeah. Yeah.

Mabel's answer to her own question spoke to her desire to place her own values above

those of society, even though she acknowledged the powerful lure of societal acceptance.

More relevant for the present discussion is the fact that she, along with the other women,

were definitely non-judgemental regarding the choices of others in terms of acting on

same-sex desires in the face of heteronormative sanctions. So, allowing bisexuality to be

an issue of potential ensures a respect for the ability of individuals to know and assess

their own environments, deciding for themselves what counts as risk-taking and whether

or not such behaviour is acceptable to them. This attitude stands to make bisexuality a

reasonably inviting category in which to place the self, perhaps more-so than the lesbian

alternative.

The political implications of this talk of potential are not unlike those that arise

from the continuum discourses. The notion that bisexuality needs to be about potential

ensures a place within the bisexual category for those who cannot afford the risks

connected with action. Politically this serves to keep the category considerably larger

than if activity was demanded. Once again, this expansion in size of the bisexual

category serves also to expand its power and subsequently its political importance.

In summary, although the women's narratives produced the bisexual category

itself in similar ways, bisexuality was not a confining, rule-bound place to be. Rather,

this characterization ensured for the individual a considerable range of choices within the

confines of the category. Their definitions typically emphasized fluidity, freedom and

individual agency, as well as a desire to create bisexuality as a unique category.

Metaphors such as lifting a barrier or removing a wall operated to create a sense of

opening up and freedom. Similarly, their continuum talk further enhanced this capacity

for fluidity as well as expanding and centralizing the bisexual category in relationship to

the homosexual and heterosexual positions (a political consequence, whether intended as

such or not). In contrast, the women rejected hardliner positions that insist upon

maintaining boundaries and consequently construct them as fence-sitters and

opportunistic line-crossers. These positions were typically seen as confining, restraining

and claustrophobic, in contrast to the openness and individual agency which their own

ideas of bisexuality allowed them.

Androgyny meant choicemaking around expressing both masculine and feminine

aspects of the self and honouring this in others as well. Androgyny not only enhanced the

theme of freedom and fluidity, but also added an emphasis on both wholeness and

ambiguity within the bisexual category. Along with a rejection of enforced restricted

gender roles, there was a recognition that women are privileged over men in terms of

permission to express both masculine and feminine traits and appearances. This line of

discussion served to illuminate the issue of homophobia, and how it connects to macro

concerns such as sexism and heterosexism.

Finally, desire played a key role here and was broadly defined among the women.

However, while their ideas about attraction varied, their sense that it was central to their

identity typically did not. A particularly interesting narrative involved connecting

bisexuality directly to accountability around attraction, something that other identity

categories are not necessarily as well equipped or positioned to do. While an emphasis

on attraction is often not seen as politically expedient, the politics of this particular story

suggest a new location from which homophobic attitudes might be understood and

challenged.

The sense that attractions are somewhat beyond the realm of individual control was prevalent along with the view that choices to act on attractions were a matter of agency. Decisions about acting upon attractions were left up to individuals and there was a marked lack of judgement regarding such decisions. Here then the bisexual designation proved to be not only liberating for the individual but also decidedly accepting of her.

Attraction and potential are politically useful criteria for defining bisexuality in that they allow the category to be significant in size and importance. However, they do remain problematic given that they are private and virtually invisible indicators. It seems that in order to move bisexuality out of the private realm of the bedroom, something else is required. Here the issue of identity becomes relevant. There is a distinction to be made between people who may experience bisexual desires and those who choose to take up the bisexual identity label for themselves. This study is driven by a recognition of this distinction and therefore only women who choose to identify as bisexual have been included. It is through the choice to identify oneself as bisexual that the private can be moved towards the public. I turn next to the category of identity to further understand bisexual choices and their political implications.

The Choice to Self-Identify as Bisexual

The issue of taking up the bisexual identity for oneself was dealt with through two lines of questioning in the interviews. First, the participants were asked to consider the question of why one might choose not to take up the bisexual label, even if certain so-

called bisexual characteristics were evident. The intent of this question was not to invoke speculation regarding 'the other', rather, it was meant to provide an opportunity for these women to think about and name the difficulties and challenges involved in identifying as bisexual.

Through their talk about reasons not to take up the bisexual label, the participants displayed an astute awareness of the cultural forces which operate to render bisexual identity either impossible, implausible or undesirable. The discourses basically laid out three forces to be dealt with, each emphasizing a different set of power relations and messages. First the women dealt with homophobic reactions to the same-sex aspect of their bisexual identity. The heteropatriarchal environment from which these reactions evolve sets up monogamous heterosexual relationships as unquestioningly central, crucial and as morally superior. A second set of messages came from an environment which Jane characterized as "the homosexual cultural ethic". While the powerholders here have far less societal power and privilege, they had a tremendous impact upon the women in this study. The messages implicit here are less easily articulated, however an attempt will be made to develop this discourse in the pages that follow.

A final force that overlaps both environments is the idea of biphobia which is a reaction to the particularly 'bi' aspect of bisexual identity. Biphobia is best characterized as a response to the bisexual resistance to embrace either/or views of sexual identity. While biphobia operates in both of the monosexual environments (heteronormativity and homosexual culture), it does so differently between the two. Furthermore, biphobic responses differ across males and females within both environments. While the women

in this study all faced biphobia, they varied considerably in their views regarding the

relative salience in their lives of both the environments, and the men and women within

them.

In heteropatriarchal society, socialization into a heterosexual identity begins early.

While some heteronormative messages are more explicit than others, all point to the

importance of being so-called 'normal', which means being heterosexual. Here Rebecca

describes the dominance of the heteronormative view to which she recalls being subjected

from an early age:

**And the message is very clear, you know Rebecca, get in order--get into the line--
pull in, be normal, be like the rest of us.**
Which is heterosexual.
Which is heterosexual, yeah.

Not only is there a push to be heterosexual, but incentive comes in the form of

privileges which are rewarded to individuals who take up this identity and not similarly

allocated to other groups. Rebecca goes on to demonstrate how an awareness of this

arrangement serves a social control function which might keep bisexually-inclined people

from embracing this identity for themselves:

**OK, so I'm attracted to both men and women and I'm adolescent or a teenager and
I say OK--well this is how society's going to treat me, so I'm going to go this way.
And you choose a way.**

In a world where gays and lesbians receive a very particular kind of treatment and

privileges are strategically rewarded and removed, taking up an alternative identity means

choosing a less privileged route. If one is able to be attracted to both men and women,

then it might make sense to ignore or suppress one's same-sex attractions and simply

identify as heterosexual. While this logic was apparent to the women in this study, it did

not seem to carry much weight as a justification to deny one's bisexual identity.

While a recognition of heterosexual privilege was seen to provide some incentive not to call oneself bisexual, the greater impact for these women came from individual attitudes. As discussed earlier, Suzanne Pharr (1988) demonstrates how homophobia supports patriarchy and disadvantages heterosexuals by keeping individuals limited to restricted gender roles. This argument that homophobia hurts heterosexuals is powerful and important. However, beyond limiting heterosexual men and women in their expression of self, homophobia can also render homosexual people immobile. Homophobic fear of same-sex feelings is not only directed towards others, but this attitude can also be internalized within the self. Internalized homophobia, which is an internalization of the damaging stereotypes created by society about homosexuality, results in a fear of recognizing one's own same-sex attractions (Margolies, Becker & Brewer 1987). This force, according to the women in this study, provides a major deterrent in identifying oneself as bisexual. As Camille puts it, identifying as bisexual means standing in one's own fear of same-sex attractions:

I think another part of it is that certainly you know we do live in a really homophobic society, so if people are afraid of same-sex encounters then they're not going to own being bisexual, right?

While a phobia is typically defined as an irrational, ungrounded fear, Camille is quick to point out that fear of one's own same-sex attractions makes perfect sense in a heterosexist environment:

Cause I mean even in our own province right?--until very recently you could be fired from your job, lose your home, you know--all kinds of things. So, fears that are grounded in reality I guess.

Camille's talk of reality shifts the discussion back to the environment. This shift is important because it ties homophobia into the social structure, hence, connecting individual attitudes to systemic practices. Her connection emphasizes that both homophobia and internalized homophobia make perfect sense once they are located within the heteronormative environment. An awareness of the differential treatment that nonheterosexuals receive in heteronormativity, and the realm of privileges to be sacrificed here, can certainly account for a fear of acknowledging one's own same-sex desires.

So, these discourses expose the heteropatriarchal environment of institutional favouritism and individual attitudes of homophobia to be powerful forces. For a bisexual individual, these forces can make coming to a sense of the same-sex aspect of one's identity unwise at best, and impossible at worst. For some of the women interviewed, these forces represented the largest hurdle to be overcome in identifying as bisexual. However, while all of the women demonstrated an awareness of these forces, they were by no means the entire story. For some of the participants, the responses of lesbians (in particular) and gay men (to a lesser degree) provided an even more powerful set of discourses to be dealt with.

Bisexual people are the targets of messages from all sides, both the heteronormative environment and the gay and lesbian world. Bisexuality means different things to the individuals within these environments and therefore biphobia is expressed in different ways. Sometimes stereotypes about bisexual women actually almost seem to

operate in their favour.[13] However, in terms of biphobia which is undoubtedly negative, it

seems that gay and lesbian culture provides the main source of this attitude. Rebecca

recalls her experience as a sort of progression from homophobic messages to biphobic

ones:

Then as soon as you've got a couple [of out gay youth], then you have a couple of things happen. You have, yeah--there's the potential for that [homosexuality] to be an option. But then you've got to measure up to whatever their norms are. And their norms are "you're gay and with us or you're straight and against us, but you don't get to be both." I didn't get that message until later in life. I got the message about being straight when I was younger....And then I started to get that message, the either/or, yeah, you had to be either/or. And I remember thinking that that was rather amazing.

As will be further discussed later in this chapter, the either/or message needs to be most

salient in terms of gay and lesbian community because this group has the most to lose if

the boundaries get too blurred. The imbalance of power between lesbians and

heterosexuals means that biphobia might be stronger and more obviously negative in

lesbian community than in the straight world. Here Nadine contemplates the necessity

for some lesbians that she has befriended to keep the categories pure:

You know, when I lived in London I was in a circle of women who were women-only women. And I don't know what it was....I'm trying to understand why it was such an issue for them....They would have a fling or they would have a boyfriend in high school or whatever and they wouldn't talk about it. Women only, period. That's the way it is and if you date men then I don't want to be friends with you or you to be in our circle. And I have no idea, I don't know what that is. It's almost like they're--homophobic in the other sense--like you know what I mean?

Conversely, Jane recalls a group of lesbians in her life that did not feel the need

for this stringent sort of boundary maintenance work:

---

[13]This idea is further developed in the next chapter's discussion of bisexual women's access to relationships.

I grew up on the west side of Vancouver in Point Grey which was a very liberal place to be. Whatever was fine. But I noticed then, you know, a lot of my lesbian friends were having bisexual experiences and we'd mutter and gossip about them but it really wasn't um, a problem.

In contrast however, she feels she experiences intense exclusionary practices from the lesbian community to which she is presently exposed. Jane is unique in this study as someone who has gone from identifying as lesbian to quite recently taking up the bisexual title for herself. Here her discourse reflects this experience as well as paralleling that of Nadine in her characterization of the lesbian response:

You know I've had to deal with some homophobia but what I find is eventually they come around. Whereas with the heterophobia the homosexuals don't come around.

These latter statements represent attempts to capture a phenomenon that is somewhat different than biphobia. While lesbians certainly conveyed biphobic attitudes towards these women, it seems that biphobia was not the only lesbian attitude of note for these bisexual women. An equally relevant force at play in lesbian community seemed to be a reaction to another aspect of bisexuality. Specifically, bisexual women's alliances or potential alliances with men and heterosexuality were also seen as a problem in some lesbian circles. The political issue here for lesbians might be that bisexual women are either unaware of their own oppression in patriarchy or unprepared to totally give up the privileges that conferring with the enemy provide. Therefore, if both sexes are an option, then lesbians might challenge bisexual women to be politically expedient by rejecting choices involving men and heterosexuality in favour of lesbianism. The fact that bisexuality seems to mean opening the self up and removing barriers rather than aligning oneself with camps of either/or thinkers again speaks to the ways in which these groups

are not speaking the same language.

Despite their differences, this sentiment on the part of lesbians was somewhat understandable to the women interviewed. As Jane articulates here, the attitude makes sense in light of lesbians' experiences of homophobia:

And I think that's because we have a culture that actively feeds and supports that-- that [heterophobic] hatred.
What do you think that's about?
I think its probably about homophobia and living with it, part of that. I think it's also, I find people in Alberta are much more afraid of what other people think.

Jane's comment about Alberta speaks to the relevance of context in terms of the women's experiences with lesbian community. This study might have looked quite different if located elsewhere. Alberta provides a particularly reactionary environment in which to be other than heterosexual these days. The backlash of responses to the recent Delwin Vriend case demonstrated the incredible homophobia and heterosexism within the right-wing ranks in this province. Similarly, a recent ruling against gays and lesbians foster parenting and a present court case involving a lesbian couple's right to adopt further demonstrate the present climate in Alberta. Within this context, it comes as no surprise that gays and lesbian groups fighting for human rights need to be ever-vigilant and clear about who they are and what their battles entail. This type of clarity is undoubtedly best achieved, at least in part, through drawing lines between in and out groups. However, having said this, and even though this lesbian attitude was somewhat understandable to the women in this study, it nevertheless remained tremendously problematic for these interviewees.

Perhaps more interesting than the existence of the phenomenon is the lack of

appropriate language with which to describe it. Obviously no available discourse exists,

since the women shared no common language to articulate this negative reaction of

lesbians towards bisexual women's preparedness to embrace men and other-sex

relationships. The discursive options available to these women were to characterize this

lesbian response as heterophobia or as a sort of reverse homophobia. The implication

here seems to be that, individuals who experience the brunt of homophobic attitudes

might respond by reciprocating with similar attitudes of their own, directed towards the

homophobes. Hence, a sort of reversal takes place whereby gays and lesbians challenge

heterosexuality by reproducing homophobia, but in the reverse direction. One of the

main factors that makes talking about this issue difficult is that power relations come into

play which make certain characterizations less representative than others.[14] It might be

useful to invoke a macro/micro distinction here to frame the discussion and better

understand the issues.

Heterophobia, like its counterpart homophobia, places the issue at the micro level

of individual attitudes and feelings. Just as individual people express homophobic

attitudes, so it seems reasonable to assign to individuals heterophobic views. As long as

the emphasis remains psychological and individualized, then the heterophobic discourse

---

[14]A parallel set of discourses in the area of antiracism informs this discussion (Estable, Meyer & Pon 1997; Kivel 1996; Omi & Winant 1994). Antiracist theory defines racism as requiring two conditions: personal prejudice plus power. While all individuals in white supremacist society are capable of attitudes of personal prejudice, all do not have the power to be racists. Calling up a charge of reverse racism effectively ignores the power differences between white people and people of colour in white supremacy. Antiracists argue that the reverse racism discourses depoliticize the talk by de-emphasizing issues of injustice and systemic racial inequality.

seems to hold. However, this conceptualization of heterophobia fails to make connections between individual attitudes and the larger environment; connections which uncover important power relations to be operating here.

When the analysis is moved to a macro level, there is an insistence that individual attitudes be seen, at least in part, as a product of institutions and larger structural arrangements. What does this context-sensitive approach suggest for a concept like heterophobia? As stated earlier, an awareness of the preferential treatment of men and heterosexuals in a heteropatriarchal world certainly makes a reaction to these groups logical. Once the overprivileged position of heterosexuals and men is recognized in relationship to one's own position, it becomes possible to see how a negative affect towards them on the part of lesbians makes sense.

The issue of whether calling this affect heterophobia works is not really answered here however. There still seems to be something different about the experience of heterosexuals compared with that of gays and lesbians that makes using the 'heterophobia' word somewhat misleading. Describing lesbians as engaging in reverse homophobia is akin to equating their experiences to those of heterosexuals. This alignment of homo and hetero experiences is problematic in that it masks important differences between these groups. The issue here is one of privilege and power. To equate the homophobia of privileged heterosexuals with the negative feelings of oppressed gays and lesbians towards their oppressors is to erase the differences between these groups. The concept of heterophobia ignores the privilege that makes homophobia unacceptable. Homophobia results from the poor treatment of gays and lesbians in society. The counter discourse

here, which can be characterized as a choice to rebel against one's oppression, hence, oppressors, is clearly not the same thing. We do not, after all, live in a homonormative world.

Another problem with the term 'heterophobia' is revealed when the notion of internalized heterophobia is considered. While internalized homophobia certainly makes sense as a force in the lives of gays and lesbians in heteronormativity, what might internalized heterophobia mean for straight folks? Here the logic breaks down again, as power relations make internalized heterophobia a nonsensical impossibility. There is nothing to fear in having other-sex attractions because there is nothing to be lost by identifying as heterosexual.

These arguments are not meant to diminish the impact of lesbians' negative attitudes towards men and other-sex relations upon these bisexual women. They are merely intended to illuminate the difficulties with even conceptualizing this problem using available language. The attempt to capture this sentiment using terms such as heterophobia and reverse homophobia are likely the best that can be done at present in light of the existing discursive structure of binaries. However, there are problems with these discursive options that make them less than fully adequate to the task. What is clear is that the present either/or environment of ideas does not accommodate the issues adequately.

Once reasons not to identify as bisexual were discussed, a second line of questioning regarding the choice to take up the bisexual label was pursued. Here participants were asked why they choose to identify as bisexual, in light of all of these

reasons not to. Two themes were prevalent in these discourses. First there were resistance discourses that set bisexuality up in opposition to these earlier articulated problematic forces and assumptions. These discourses represent a sort of negative project; an exercise in articulating that which one is not. Second came the idea of bisexuality somehow reflecting an inner truth about oneself. Here the positive project of constructing and embracing what one is took place. Embedded within both of these discourses was a subtext which asserted that I am OK and, therefore, so is my bisexuality.

Here Caroline demonstrates both the importance of resistance in her choice to call herself bisexual and her sense that it has to be all right to be bisexual:

Um, I think I choose the label because it's such an outcast label, you know, it's such a deviant label. I'm going to be a deviant I guess. Because I don't think there's anything wrong with it.

Similarly, Jane sees her bisexuality as an act of resistance. When asked why she identifies as bisexual she responded as follows:

I think rebellion in terms of, I woke up one day and realized what I was missing. That I like men in my life, I like being friends with them, I like to flirt with them and they flirt with me. It makes me feel good....I guess I felt like I needed to call myself bisexual to not get sort of overwhelmed and buried in by sort of the homosexual cultural ethic in Calgary which I think is very unhealthy.

Interestingly, while Jane and Caroline are placing themselves in opposition to the previously discussed, difficult to name, lesbian normative condition, Monika's resistance is clearly in relationship to heteronormativity. This illuminates the point that different women see different environments and forces as relevant in their lives. Here Monika, who has recently begun a relationship with a man, describes her feelings about the heteronormative practice of assuming that everyone must be heterosexual:

Part of saying I'm bi and being out about it is because it really...maybe I'm a heterophobic (chuckles), like I do not, I get really pissed off and personally offended when people assume that I'm heterosexual. Like my blood boils, I hate it, just the assumptions, you know?

Monika's self-conscious aside about being heterophobic might be construed as an awareness of the irony of calling herself anti-het while having a relationship with a man. Yet, she seems prepared to stand in this potential contradiction, in view of the barrage of heterosexist assumptions to which she is constantly exposed. Regardless of the fact that she has repeatedly attempted to display her same-sex relationships in public, her world refuses to see her as anything other than heterosexual. Here she describes her frustration with the differential treatment she has experienced since she began dating her present partner:

I've been with women for two years now and no one's noticed. I've had girlfriends coming in and out of my office, taking me out for lunch. We'd go to the same restaurant just up the street, I'm ALWAYS in there with a DATE so to speak, female dates. And just last week I went in there with my partner, my mate Mark, and the waitress came up to me and said, "is that your boyfriend?". And I was just astonished because I'd gone there for two years with female partners. And I just looked at her and I said, "NO", like I was--I mean I was that offended.

So, taking up the bisexual label is, in part, an act of resistance for these women. Whether opposing heteronormativity or a homosexual cultural ethic, these discourses do represent the sort of self-conscious exclusionary practice of which Clare Hemmings (1995) speaks. As Hemmings argues, this positioning has to be seen as political by virtue of its insistence upon standing outside of dominant systems of assumptions.

A subtheme presented itself in the resistance discourses. For both Mabel and Tracy, the need to stand apart from what one is not was important, however, the bisexual category itself was not necessarily the ideal alternative. Mabel frames this issue as a sort

of default position:

> I think it's a process of elimination. You know, I mean because it just feels like where else can you go. Like when--I think in my last relationship that there were times when I would stop and think OK, if I'm with a woman for X number of years and we're happy and we want to spend our lives together, then--am I a lesbian? But, that never fits, because of the contentedness that I've found in relationships with men. Like sexually and otherwise. Because of the attraction that I have for men, then lesbian doesn't fit as a label. And because I'm with a woman or because I have been with a woman, and that fits for me, then you know het doesn't fit. So, I think--yeah very much, it's by default.

Although she doesn't state it explicitly, somehow there is a sense that identifying as

bisexual is more about rejecting categories than embracing something else here. Tracy,

however, does state this point explicitly in the following passage:

> It's kind of a strange thing because I don't really like the [bisexual] label, you know? Because it puts me in this box that I don't necessarily want to be in. But at this point in my life, well and for many years now, it's been the closest thing that I identify with. Um...and I think that it does distinguish me from being lesbian or being heterosexual, but it doesn't actually encompass who I am. So it's sort of--it works, it works for now.

Tracy's dissatisfaction with the bisexual label suggests once again the lack of available

language to describe the possible ways for people to think about their sexual identity.

She also alludes here to Judith Butler's (1990) idea that any category or label might

represent a problematic constraint in terms of individual agency around identity.

However, Tracy also recognizes the political value of naming differences and labelling

ourselves:

> When I look at the queer community, we're still in a position of having to say, "I am this" and identity is important and I think that we need to be comfortable in doing that. But at the same time I really wish that we didn't have to, that there wasn't a question of you fit in this box and you fit in this one.....So labels in general, I wish we didn't have to have, but at this point I recognize the value of using words to identify ourselves.

Sort of um for political purposes?

Um hmmm
Cause some people have more privilege than others and some identity groups get more than others, right?
Exactly, exactly. If it wasn't like that, then we wouldn't need to.

So, the bisexual category is less than perfect, however functions to separate her from that

which she is not.

Alongside the discourses of resistance came talk about standing in one's own

truth. Camille looks back on her early same-sex experiences as indicative of her

bisexuality unfolding into adulthood. She frames this as a process of remembering which

she talks about as follows:

I think some people resist, I think people my age though--it was really a process of conditioning out of that [the capability to love both males and females], and then of remembering.
Do you want to talk a little more about that remembering?
Sure, yeah. For me, I think it started with being a feminist, right? And getting more involved in that whole area and doing a lot of reading around choice, around sexuality. Um--working with lots of lesbian women, that kind of thing...even some of the reading that I did around spirituality sort of tended to confirm that. So it was sort of when I was working in an all-female agency that defined itself as feminist, that for me I was able to say "well yeah, I feel that way and um, that, that's OK". And then sort of from THAT vantage point looking back, over childhood and you know--I think that most people have had same-sex encounters or whatever growing up.

A number of the interviews included this kind of narrative of reassessing early

experiences and feelings in light of presently understanding oneself to be bisexual. What

would likely be constructed as meaningless play in heterosexism has been readdressed in

such a way that it contributes to one's sense of identity. This kind of remembering

narrative, that connects the past to the present and produces a consistent historical story,

is an important aspect of producing oneself as a subject of any kind and is particularly

relevant in the case of the creation of alternative sexual identities (Garfinkel 1967;

Plummer 1996).

There is another point to be made about Camille's story. Under the surface here lurks the idea that we are actually all bisexual. This subtle yet compelling narrative threaded its way through many of the interviews. In this particular passage, taking up a bisexual identity suggests an unlearning of the things that socialization has taught; things which have pulled Camille away from her true self. Although not evident in this quotation, there were times when a sense of elitism was present here, in that heterosexuals and lesbians had not been as successful at resisting the dominant powers of socialization. The political usefulness of the 'we're all bisexual' narrative is not unlike that of the continuum and the talk of attraction and potential. However, not only does the 'we're all bi' narrative normalize, expand and centralize bisexuality, it actually moves it into a place of superiority.

A sense of self-acceptance can also seen as important in Camille's account. Similarly for Rebecca, who has had a sense of her bisexuality from a young age, a large part of her positioning is about self-esteem:

Well I think one of the biggest things, to be quite frank, goes back to the messages my parents gave me when I was young. And the messages my parents gave me when I was young were very strongly, "you are OK, whoever you are, however you are, wherever you go, whatever you do, you are OK--we love you, you're a great person". So the confidence that comes from that, even as a teenager, not to buckle.

This statement speaks to the power of the forces at play which make taking up a bisexual identity difficult. For Rebecca, support from her family has helped her to be true to herself despite these constraining messages, messages which presumably come from both straight and gay cultures. While Sahara does not articulate the source of her confidence,

she clearly displays a need for it in the face of lesbian pressure in particular:

I felt really devastated by all of this and by this opinion that I was lacking this thing [gaydar] that would make me be able to be with women, that that's why I wasn't meeting any women or I would never meet any women. Um...I would never get involved in a relationship with a woman because I was somehow deficient right? And, I eventually decided that was bullshit....Just because they weren't getting something from me didn't mean that they could decide who I was, right? You know, like it's still up to me.

In the face of negative messages from both the heterosexual world and lesbian culture, this powerful a stand seems almost necessary. Just as the early homophile movement was based upon such an assertion, so these bisexual women might need to support themselves and each other in the face of their exclusion by others. Given this context, it comes as no surprise that discourses asserting one's OK-ness might be necessary.

In conclusion, the taking up of a bisexual identity means moving bisexual desire from the realm of the private towards the public sphere. A large part of the project of creating the self as bisexual seems to involve distinguishing what one is not. This requires not only cultural expertise but also a sense of independence and rebellion. Given the many forces at play here, coming up with a bisexual identity is no easy feat. The women's discourses can be summarized as follows.

The choice to take up the bisexual label is, first, a choice to face one's own homophobia and that of others. Second, bisexuality means resisting the power of heteronormative assumptions and arguably the privileges that come with these assumptions (even if only in theory). Third, choosing bisexuality involves standing outside of certain aspects of lesbian counterculture which enforce problematic constraints upon these women. Finally, bisexuality means a refusal to embrace the dominant

either/or notion of sexual identity to which both gays and straights subscribe. Here biphobia operates to stereotype bisexual women in different ways and with different implications, depending upon the context. Envisioning an alternative that allows for openness and a more holistic view is not easy within this culture of biphobia; the bisexual word itself was less than adequate to this task for some women. The bisexual label is the only option available, yet it also seems to problematically embrace the binary. However, despite its shortcomings, the women accepted it as their best alternative for locating the self outside of this dualistic structure of constraining possibilities.

Having examined what it means to identify oneself as bisexual I turn now to the next two choices. Chapter Six examines the issue of relationships and the complexities of presenting oneself as bisexual to the world. This progression through the choices continues shifting bisexuality more and more explicitly out of the private realm and into the public sphere. While understanding bisexuality and choosing to take up the label are somewhat personal choices, having relationships and deciding to be out as bisexual can be seen as more public activities given that they require the involvement of others. Presumably then, such a progression from private to public also serves to illuminate the increasingly political aspects of bisexual choices.

Chapter Six

FROM PRIVATE TO PUBLIC: RELATIONSHIPS AND CHOICES TO BE OUT

This chapter looks at the final two choices theorized in the bisexual standpoint in

Chapter Three. First, the women's views and experiences regarding relationships are

examined and discussed. It is here that bisexual identity is particularly unique and most

explicitly about choices. Relationships took on a variety of forms for these women and,

most particularly, an awareness of unequal access to relationships prevailed throughout

their discourses. Finally, the extremely complex choice to be out as bisexual is explored.

The women in this study shared many of the challenges and privileges of the closet faced

by their gay and lesbian counterparts, however, some unique aspects of bisexual identity

shone through here as well. I begin with a look at relationships.

Choices Around Relationship

As with the identity discourses, discourses about relationship also serve to move

bisexuality more prominently into the public sphere given that questions about

relationship choices shift the discussion from attraction to action. As with attraction, the

issue of relationship itself is quite complex. While bisexual identity suggests the capacity

to have both same-sex and other-sex relationships, what gets to count as a relationship is

open to debate. However, presumably the choice to do something about one's attractions,

whatever that something may be, brings with it insight into similarities and differences

between same-sex and other-sex relationships as well as an awareness regarding relative

ease of access to these relationships. Whatever type of relationship is assumed here, the

ability to make comparisons between same and other sex experiences is a unique aspect of bisexual identity.

The women that I spoke to included a wide range of possibilities in their discourses about relationship. The options for relationship were variously described as dating, friendships, sexual relations, short term/long term, marriage, coparenting, affairs, threesomes, flirting, partnerships, 'intimacy in other ways than sexual', and 'looking for something different'.

There is a tension within bisexual identity, between its defining feature which means being able to choose either male or female partners, and the actual role of relationships to this identity. Whether or not a particular participant in this study was involved in a relationship (whatever she might understand that to be), the connection between relationship and her sense of identity was less than straightforward. Relationships in general were an important topic of discussion in the interviews, yet, at the same time there was a reluctance to define the self merely in terms of relationship status. While sexual relationships were frequently held up as the marker for sexual identity, there was also some resistance to this connection. Here Tracy discusses her views on this issue:

I don't think bisexuality is about sexual practise as much as it is about identity and choices and all these other things....I choose to identify as bisexual because I recognize my personal capabilities and meanings and, just part of who I am....I mean somebody can be bisexual and be celibate, somebody can be gay and have never had a relationship in their life--in the sexual sense. It's about so much more than who you sleep with--to me.

Along similar lines, here Rebecca discusses an aunt who she describes as having lived a celibate life:

Now to say to her, you can't say she's not sexual as a person. And yet how would you identify someone like that, was she gay or was she straight? She's not had a relationship....Sexuality to me is also, you know, that whole feeling of yourself and personal image and self image and how you feel about yourself and present yourself. And she certainly has those feelings, no matter what.

Both of these passages demonstrate the tension between not wanting to define the self in

terms of sexual relationships and the fact that such relationships seem to be unavoidably

the marker for sexual identity. This dependence on relationships to define the sexual self

makes for some particularly unique challenges in the case of bisexual identity. For

monogamous bisexuals, relationship is always in contradiction to identity. They thus

face an entirely unique set of stereotypes not faced by either heterosexuals or gays &

lesbians.

If one's sexual orientation is, by definition, an issue of one's relationships, then the

pressure to be involved in such relationships must be great. This might be particularly

the case for less powerful groups, such as those involved in lesbian communities. Kelly

talks here about lesbian relationship addiction, something often attributed as a main

feature of lesbian community:

And I find that there are a lot of lesbians that they think that their sexual orientation is what defines them. So, if they don't have a relationship...they become like relationship addicts. You know, there's this huge hole in their life. And you kind of want to say, "well what about all of those wonderful things that women are known for, what about their skills at being people without relationships all the time?". Like we can have relationships with friends and just really help ourselves that way. I don't know--it's like romance is so idealized.

Explicitly this statement is a challenge to the lesbian emphasis on sexual identity as a

primary defining feature of the self.[15] Implicit here is the notion that one's sexual identity

is solely defined by and sustained through relationships. This idea that relationship status

is the primary defining feature of sexual orientation is an important one that the bisexual

standpoint destabilizes. Interestingly, it was not only through observing lesbian cultural

norms that the women in this study came to see the connection of relationship and

identity as problematic.

Although heterosexuals were never constructed as relationship-addicted in these

interviews, the het emphasis on relationship was revealed through talk of institutions. For

example, here Camille takes apart the assumptions upon which institutions such as

marriage and family are based in capitalism:

Sometimes I think of it in terms of patriarchy and how marriages kind of started as that economic, as well as "I'm going to guarantee my paternity" arrangement between men and women. Because I think in other cultures and what I've heard people tell me is those things are more fluid in terms of who you love, who you're attracted to, and some of it seems to be because there's not that big contract around marriage or who parents children. I'm thinking of some native people I know where children ARE truly children of the community and so they would have many people in their lives that would take on different roles with them--helping them develop so then it doesn't sort of become as important as to who these two people were that birthed you (laughs), right?

Camille's analysis demonstrates how other-sex relationships are kept central in

---

[15]It makes sense that individuals who are oppressed as lesbians might see this feature of their identity as central. However, bell hooks (1995) might see this response as attributable to the dominant culture's power to name that which is salient for everyone. Here she articulates this insight in terms of race: "A fundamental characteristic of being black in white supremacist capitalist patriarchy is that we are all socialized to believe that only race matters" (p. 248). hooks concludes that leaving issues like class, sex and sexual orientation out of constructions of the self serves to reinforce the existing power structure by making black folks' lives relevant only in opposition to white supremacy.

mainstream, white culture through connecting private property with inheritance and paternity. Monika adds another dimension to this analysis by stirring enforced monogamy into the formula:

I don't know why I'm so resistant to even using that word [heterosexual] for myself--I think it comes, it relates to monogamy too. Yeah, to me it's like when I see a couple like that [stereotypically heterosexual] I automatically think Christian, ownership, marriage, monogamy um, she loses her identity, name, that kind of stuff. She marries into his family, um, what else--she's not allowed to look at anyone else, but he can, cause that's my experience of heterosexuals. Um and she has to look after his emotional needs and he's just there to have sex. That's heterosexual to me and yuck yuck yuck yuck yuck, on all those points I just said. That's what it is to me.
That's really powerful.
Her world revolves around him--and that's gross I think.

Monika's strong sentiments result, in part, from her frustration with being assumed to be heterosexual and the kinds of problematic heteropatriarchal values she is resisting through identifying as bisexual. Her account shows how monogamy is often differently enforced between the sexes in heterosexual relationships; she is subsumed into his family and held responsible for all of his needs, emotional and sexual. The implication here is that the situation is not reciprocal in terms of his experience and commitment. Monika's perspective also opens up the possibility of seeing monogamy as operating on levels other than merely sexual. Ultimately, for her, this unquestioned norm of enforced monogamy is something which her bisexual identity allows her to resist, at least in theory.[16]

So, relationships seem to be every bit as important to heterosexuals as they are to lesbians; the means of enforcing this norm of coupledom merely differ between the two

---

[16]Being able to challenge unquestioned assumptions about monogamy was important for a number of the women in this study. At the same time, they stressed the importance of honesty and communication on issues of monogamy in the relationships they had had.

environments. For lesbians there is explicit pressure from the community to be in a couple, while heterosexual couplings are more subtly enforced through institutional assumptions and practices. Furthermore, while lesbian relationships seem to be necessary to reinforce individual identities, heterosexual couplings are both produced by and serve to reproduce an entire system of institutions and practices. Therefore, heterosexual relationships are less needed for identity clarification because the system itself supports heterosexual identity. When bisexuality enters the picture a concern for relationships is not eliminated. However, bisexual assumptions do shed light on the tremendously important role that relationships play in maintaining both the heterosexual and lesbian monosexual systems (although for different reasons).

This line of thinking makes another point of clarification regarding categories necessary. Given that both heterosexual and lesbian relationships are fraught with assumptions that the women in this study frequently found problematic, it might be inaccurate to call their relationships either lesbian or heterosexual. However, the issue of what then to call these relationships is not easily solved. For instance, here Tracy struggles with me in attempting to get clear about the categories:

Even if I'm in a heterosexual relationship, um on surface...because it isn't a heterosexual relationship if I'm in it!
So what is a heterosexual relationship?
I guess when two people who are heterosexual are in a relationship, yeah (chuckles). They'd have to be a man and a woman also I guess (laughs), YIKES!
(more laughter) **When two heterosexual people of the opposite gender are in a relationship...that would be a heterosexual relationship!**

For Tracy identity is key, therefore, two heterosexual people make a heterosexual relationship. My point about sex is also of primary importance however. The

heterosexuals in question here must be a man and woman, rather than two heterosexually-identified women for instance, in order for this to work. The result of this conversation is an awareness about the importance of clarity regarding the categories used to talk about relationships and the assumptions underlying them.

What assumptions shape the categories for bisexual women? It seems that in order to avoid the normative implications that both heterosexual and lesbian relationships seem to entail for these women, their relationships might best be referred to as same-sex or other-sex. This makes the relevant category for defining the relationship the biological body. While this is a somewhat dangerous position to take given that this argument runs the risk of essentialism, reducing men and women to biology is not my intent. Rather, the use of biological categories is meant as a way to situate the relational subject in a material reality, a reality which differs for each of the categories (male and female) assigned. While the categories of male and female can be argued to be as value-laden as 'heterosexual' and 'lesbian', the biological categories work better here since they do not immediately bring to mind relational assumptions. So, while the use of biological categories is not perfect, it emphasizes the desire here to get outside of the assumptions of heteropatriarchy and a lesbian cultural ethic which these participants found problematic. In discussing bisexual relationships then, the descriptors 'same-sex' and 'other-sex' will be used to avoid falling into the assumptions of heterosexuality and lesbianism, a fall to which the participants in this research were clearly opposed.

Having discussed the theoretical implications of examining bisexuality and relationships, I turn now to the relationships themselves. Issues of access were a primary

theme in the women's discourses. Not surprisingly perhaps, the challenges for these women were most often associated with gaining access to same-sex relationships. Access itself can be seen as operating on a number of levels given that barriers can be practical/geographic/physical, emotional (homophobia) and cognitive (beyond the realm of imagining). Furthermore, the barriers can operate differently for the different players in the relational dance.

Presumably women who choose to identify as bisexual have overcome the cognitive barrier, but the emotional and physical are another matter. For Sahara, being able to negotiate and actually engage in a same-sex activity required a particularly creative solution. Here she describes the situation that facilitated her overcoming of her own discomfort with initiating a same-sex encounter:

I had one experience with this woman where we had a threesome and really we wanted to be sexual with each other but we didn't want to--weren't comfortable being explicit about that. So the workaround was to have a threesome with a man. So, it's like, the choice and exploration isn't necessarily as straightforward as the reason at the time.
So again, and I don't know if I'm getting this right but it just sounds to me like again there are some real kind of barriers to that same-sex stuff. You know, for women to deal with, in terms of being able to have, whether it's sex or relationships or whatever, you wouldn't have to do a threesome to be with a man, you wouldn't have to do that right? And what I hear you saying is that you were more interested, both of you? or you particularly? in a twosome with her probably than a threesome.
Yeah.

It is likely not any more difficult to practically pull off a same-sex encounter as it is a threesome. The purpose of the threesome here though was not to overcome a practical barrier. Rather, Sahara's creative solution for gaining access to another woman was about overcoming an emotional barrier. Where this relationship could not be explicitly negotiated, the threesome provided access to another woman.

Stereotypes about bisexual women, that operate at the level of cognition, represent another barrier or, conversely, an avenue of access to relationships. Not surprisingly, stereotyping which emphasizes bisexual women as highly sexualized often works in their favour in accessing relations with heterosexual men. Here Domino describes what the practice of sexualizing women in heterosexist society generally, and in straight male pornography specifically, means for bisexual women:

I think it's much easier for a woman to discuss bisexuality because the idea of two women having sex together is so prevalent and so much a part of the sexual fantasy life of a lot of men, and represented in so many places that it's something that's not as difficult for heterosexual people to swallow.

Given that men hold the power in a sexist society, it makes sense that relationships among women pose less of a threat than heterosexual relations. Here Caroline speaks about a double standard around monogamy that seems to operate for the men that she has been involved with. This passage is somewhat reminiscent of Monika's earlier description of how monogamy typically operates in heterosexual relationships:

I've always found it very strange though that the men that I've been with have no problem with me being with other women but they have a problem with me being with other men.
Yeah, so what's that about?
I think that for them it's a total--uh--it's a comparison. They think we're going to, oh you know, it's really sexy that we're having sex with another girl, oo, maybe I can get some action out of that. Um, but then once you have sex with another guy it's like, uh oh, now they're going to compare me and that other person can be a better lover or a better relationship and all of those issues.

It is not surprising that Caroline's male partners' standards around monogamy have allowed for sex with women but not other men. What is surprising about Caroline's account is the way she, in turn, sexualizes men, seeing the value of relationships here to be about sex:

They never think you're going to leave them for a woman.
Because you get too much out of the heterosexual relationship?
Yeah, I think that that's what they think, "well, she doesn't have a penis, she can't provide you with that".

Not only are heterosexual relationships privileged in practical ways, there is also this idea that heterosexual sex is somehow better. Straight men need to hold onto this narrative in order to maintain their sense of themselves as powerful in a culture that so explicitly produces females as sexual beings. Through sexualizing her account, Caroline not only points out the importance of the 'het sex is best' male narrative, she also challenges exclusive male entitlement to this type of relationship story which emphasizes sex. Here she engages in a sort of reverse strategy by taking up the 'bisexual woman as oversexed' discourse and embracing it for herself:

I think bisexuality is a very sexual thing. Um--and I think in a sense it's really taking control of your sexual being and saying that I can have sex with anybody who I want, or I can have a RELATIONSHIP with anybody who I want. And I can be OK with that.[17]

A final point about bisexual women's stereotyping in heterosexuality speaks to the issue of what this might mean for friendships between straight men and bi women. Caroline describes her experience with her straight male friends as follows:

---

[17]Other instances of embracing the bisexual stereotypes occurred periodically throughout the interviews. For instance, Kelly admitted to finding sexuality 'confusing' (not however her bisexual attractions), Domino talked about the challenges she faces in being monogamous (whereas nonmonogamy fits better for her), and Rebecca questioned what might be wrong with bisexuality offering a safe place for people to 'just experiment'. Standing in the so-called myths about bisexuality is perhaps the most radical political agenda possible. Embracing confusion, nonmonogamy and experimentation poses a threat to not only conservative values, but also neo-liberal ideas about right and wrong. While society might not be ready for this challenge, a truly radical bisexual critique might be one that has bisexuals actually stand in the myths (rather than debunking them, the current preferred political strategy) and justify their position from that place.

My guy friends all think it's great, they're like, we can sit at a table with you, we can all check out the girls together. You know, they think that's so much fun, right? Uh..but that's not good if they're going to say, "oh that guy's good looking, no I'm not a homo!" I find that a lot of the guys feel really comfortable with it. Sometimes they're kind of like, "so, what's it like sleeping with a woman?" I'm like, "I don't know, what's it like for you sleeping with a woman?"

On one level this sort of male-bonding kind of buddy talk might reflect an avenue of

nonsexualized connection between Caroline and the guys. However, their voyeuristic

curiosity also comes through clearly. Furthermore, they are quick to point out that they

do not share her attraction for men. The bottom line here is that while accepting a

bisexual woman is not a problem for heterosexual men, neither does it challenge their

homophobia in any way.

In contrast to their heterosexual male experiences, in lesbian communities

stereotypes about bisexuals as wishy-washy, confused, dishonest or fence-sitters often act

as barriers. The bisexual women in these interviews faced a plethora of negative

stereotypes about themselves, most of which originated in gay and lesbian circles. A

knowledge of the stereotypes was pervasive throughout the interviews. For example, this

somewhat extensive list seemed to flow from Domino with little thought on her part:

If you wanted to meet people who could understand your same-sex attraction, before there were bisexual groups, you had to get involved with gay men, lesbian women and uh...and then of course you would encounter the "you're in a phase, you're going to pass through this and then you'll be one of us" and, you know, all those kinds of messages. "You're just working through transition and you're not being honest with yourself". All those arguments that people make about bisexuality.
And those arguments, it sounds like you're saying, are much more likely to come from homosexual people than the heterosexual world.
Yeah, I don't think I ever had that presented to me from a heterosexual person.

Here Caroline describes how stereotypes can close off avenues of access in both

directions:

> But I've dated some gay women, and I've honestly actually not dated very many,
> like maybe a couple of gay women. And I think it was a lot because of those inner
> stereotypes. And it's inner stereotypes for me too. Um, as well, like I'm not sure
> how they're gonna take it. And I get really grilled about "why are you with men?
> What do men have to give you that I can't give you?" And I'm like, well it's nothing
> to do with what men have to give me, it's what a certain person gave me.
> So, with a heterosexual woman there would be none of that, none of that questioning
> about..
> Uh, I think there would, like there still is. Um, it's just that they don't--they don't
> ask me as much about it. For them it's not such an issue.

The issue for lesbians here is one of group membership status and the drawing of lines
between in and out group members. The threat that lesbians feel in the face of bisexuality
is evidenced in this concern that a bisexual woman will leave you for a man because she
can. This concern was frequently cited in this study as a problem for access to
relationships with lesbians. It seems that relationships with women who identify as
lesbian come with stereotypes and assumptions that are a problem for both parties. It also
seems that sexual orientation itself does not necessarily represent improved access to
same-sex relationships for bisexual women.

Although it was acknowledged that same-sex relationships were likely most easily
accessed through lesbian community, there was also a strong sentiment expressed that
this was not the only possibility. Here Sahara grapples with the dilemma:

> I don't think I fit into the lesbian community completely, I don't feel entirely
> comfortable with lesbians and sometimes I think I don't even know if I'm attracted
> to lesbians.

Sahara is not questioning her attraction to women here, however she does distinguish
lesbians as a particular group of women with whom she struggles. We can recall in
Chapter Five Sahara discussing the message she has received from lesbians about not

sending out the proper 'vibes' to attract women. No wonder she questions her ability, and more importantly, her desire to fit into this community which has been so invalidating for her.

Caroline's experience suggests that some so-called heterosexual women might have less cognitive barriers around her bisexuality per se, than lesbians. This means for her that these women typically prove to be more accessible, given that they do not seem to be as concerned about this particular stereotype:

Most of my relationships generally are short-term. But uh--well I went out with this one girl from school last year for six months. And she never really labelled herself bisexual. She'd actually never had a relationship with a girl before, and a lot of that has happened with me, I've had a lot of relationships with women that have never had a relationship with a woman before.

Interestingly, no mention was made here about a heterosexual woman feeling threatened by the possibility of being left by her bisexual female partner for another woman. The absence of a reverse narrative brings to the forefront the glaring power imbalance between the sexes and the relationships between and within them. In terms of cognitive barriers then, it seems that stereotypes about bisexual women typically opened up avenues of access for relationships with heterosexual men while they often limited access to lesbians. For Caroline, heterosexual women seemed to be the least aware of and concerned about the stereotypes, which made them more accessible.

In contrast to Caroline's experience, Rebecca identifies some heterosexual women in her experience as having tremendous cognitive barriers that keep them from reciprocating her attractions:

Quite often when I would have romantic feelings or be very attracted to a woman or passionately in love with her, there was NO interest returned. You know, there was

not a chance in the world....That was a continual storyline for me. It was always, um, you know--who I was attracted to--there wasn't the return.

Although the emphasis here is cognitive, Rebecca speaks of a sort of trajectory of access

on a practical level, whereby she experienced a lot of exposure to same-sex opportunities

in her early adolescent years. As time progressed however, this exposure shifted so that

other-sex relationships became the prevalent norm and same-sex opportunities took on a

forbidden dimension:

But actually to me the falling in love with females as an adolescent, a little girl, was easier. You could sleep with them! You could cuddle with them! You could be with them you could touch them you could giggle with them you could spend time with them. And as an adolescent girl you're getting all the warnings about "watch out for those boys! Boys only want one thing!" (laughs) My father did give me that message, he was quite concerned (chuckles)....I didn't want sex as in terms of intercourse at 13 years of age. I wanted closeness and cuddling and acceptance and the relationship and the flirting and the fun, and I could get all that from girls. But if I went to boys, they wanted more....It was safer, it was much safer I found right away to love the women and to love the girls because the boys always pushed for more.

Rebecca's early ease of access to same-sex relationships was not only a practical issue,

but emotionally she found them more accessible in terms of a level of safety that was

absent with other-sex possibilities. Mary Louise Adams (1997) would argue that her

father's message to her about teenage boys represents a hegemonic cultural discourse

which constructs adolescents as not only sexualized but specifically heterosexualized

creatures. On one hand, her father's message is ironic in that its emphasis on other-sex

pairings seems to inadvertently encourage 'harmless' same-sex activities. However, on

the other hand, implicit here is the heteropatriarchal assumption that all boys are straight,

want intercourse and therefore must aggressively go after it. The fact that the boys in

Rebecca's life seemed to have themselves internalized this message demonstrates its

prevalence. So, while her father's discouragement of other-sex experiences might have inadvertently been encouraging same-sex activities, the dominant message here is that heterosexual pairings are the norm, are pursued in a particular way and ultimately deserve the bulk of one's attention.

The issue of physical or geographic barriers to same-sex relationships of any nature was huge for these women. Not only does heteronormativity assume that everyone is interested in only other-sex pairings, it also means that the physical environment is set up to support heterosexuality exclusively. The daily world is heterosexualized to such a degree that this is seldom recognized as a bias, hence, basically invisible to the majority of individuals. What this means for the women in this study is that accessing women who might be interested in same-sex relationships requires a great deal of effort. As Sahara puts it in this discussion about meeting women:

Need to be more proactive. I thought about running a personal ad aimed at women. I would never have thought about running a personal ad aimed at men.
So why is that?
Because I think it is harder for me to meet women, so that would be a helper, or whatever.

Another way to potentially meet interested women is to enter lesbian spaces, such as bars, where the heteronormative assumptions can somewhat safely be reversed. However, aside from the fact that bars are often problematic environments for meeting people (this is not restricted to bisexual preferences), bisexual presence in a lesbian bar can be a problem. Here again the issue of the bisexual threat becomes evident. The threat not only operates on the cognitive level of stereotypes, but it is also a practical, geographic concern. Tracy articulates this as an issue of ownership and protection of

space:

It's about space. And I understand that at the same time, at the same time I understand how they, uh--the heterosexual standard in front of me all the time, that there should be places where I don't have to be subjected to that all the time?

Tracy goes on to talk about how she has been told that she does not belong in lesbian bars

unless she restricts her behaviour to same-sex norms. Despite her frequent presence at

the bar and lesbian events, she still does not warrant a right to community membership if

she presents herself as someone who dates men. While appreciating the need for lesbians

to protect and nurture same-sex spaces in the heteronormative world, she also feels

disappointed at the superficiality of this reaction. Ultimately, for Tracy this lack of

acceptance of her in particular reflects a bigger issue about accepting diversity in general:

I also think there's a lack of understanding that it [my behaviour] might appear so [heterosexual] on the surface but that isn't the reality. And people are so, many people are so afraid and not understanding of bisexuality and not willing to accept it--at all. I mean there are people who aren't willing to accept different kinds of diversity. You know, if you don't fit in, if you don't look like a lesbian then you don't belong here...and I've had that experience too, and it's compounded when it's like well you're not EVEN a dyke so you don't belong here. That kind of thing.

In keeping with the earlier discussion about stereotypes, Tracy experiences a different

response entirely in heterosexual environments when she presents herself with a woman:

It's not the protectiveness of space--if I'm in a so-called straight space. I mean there's problems with that too, but it's usually other things and usually it's the porn factor, that's what I call it. You know, people are like, mmmm check that out, which makes me really uncomfortable too.
So that's the straight male response to women together. It's quite titillating for them, isn't it? (chuckles)
Yeah, and I don't want to see that, and I'm not going to hide who I am. But that's more, if there is a reaction that's the kind of reaction. Whereas in a lesbian space or a women's space, it's the, you know, ownership--do you have a right to be here?

A final interesting point about straight space can be gleaned from Tracy's

description. Clearly this is an environment that is dominated by men, given the response she typically experiences here. Straight women's reactions to her same-sex activities are either invisible or seen as inconsequential in this environment. While this may speak to a lack of concern for heterosexual women on Tracy's part, it might also indicate the inherent maleness of heterosexual spaces. This line of reasoning makes the emphasis on protection in lesbian spaces even more understandable, given that they are unabashedly female-dominated and women are diminished in heteropatriarchy.

Despite the power of the environmental barriers, there remained a certain sense of choice regarding whether or not and what kind of a relationship might be pursued or was happening at present. Sometimes the perspective actually flew in the face of heteronormativity, as is evidenced in this statement by Camille. When asked if sex was a relevant category of concern in her choice of partners, here is how she responded:

Yeah, that's kind of a hard one, cause I'd like to think--my belief is it's about being attracted to whomever. But, when you look at reality--where do I choose to spend my time? Well I tend to spend my time in the queer community, so therefore, I mean, who is there?....Um, so I guess logistically where I spend my time is in that community.

She alludes to bisexual men as a possibility for relationships, however, observes that they are decidedly absent from the queer community.[18] Therefore, the implication here for relationships is that same-sex possibilities dominate Camille's reality. This is interesting in view of the prevalence of heteronormativity and what that means for bisexual women. There is a level of agency and choice-making on Camille's part which demonstrates her to

---

[18]Talk of bisexual men was generally absent in these interviews presumably because they did not play an important role in the focus on choices in these discussions.

be active and in control of managing the various environmental options open to her. As opposed to being a victim within a particular set of circumstances, she is aware of choosing the environment of her preference. In choosing the nonheterosexual alternative, she has made a choice for less privilege and is also presumably aware of the implications of this decision.

In light of the barriers for bisexual women to actually engage in same-sex relations and the remarkable avenues of access available for other-sex activities, it seems amazing that they ever have same-sex relationships. Given that their identity could allow them to simply opt for the ease and privilege of other-sex relations, then why would they ever choose the less-privileged route? Although the women in this study expressed an acute awareness of issues of access, they also demonstrated a clear desire to pursue same-sex relationships in spite of the odds. Surely this level of awareness makes their relationship choices not only well-informed, but also political.

There is a final political point to be gleaned from these women's experiences with attraction and relationship. As clarified earlier, bisexuality recognizes 'male' and 'female' as relevant categories for attraction, however, the question also arises here of how identity or sexual orientation fits into the attraction equation. The institution of heteronormativity operates in such a way that individuals can usually assume that they are interacting with heterosexual folks. Conversely, for homosexuals it is necessary to actively seek one another out through creating symbols of recognition and gay and lesbian spaces where the assumptions are reversed.

What this means for connecting with others is that, given the power of

heteronormativity, nonheterosexuals might need to determine a person's sexual

orientation before acknowledging an attraction towards them.   Simply noting one's sex

is not enough; one's sexual orientation becomes equally relevant to the equation. It is

after all only safe to assume that a woman is a lesbian in very particular environments or

situations. For bisexual women, the world is complicated enough as they move through

gay and straight spaces with an openness to both men and women. When sexual

orientation is also added into the mix, it seems that the situation could become

overwhelming. Contrary to popular wisdom that implies twice the opportunity for

bisexuals, in light of this complexity the prospect of finding a relationship might be

overly complicated, hence, actually diminished.

For the most part, the bisexual women in this study chose to handle this

complicated situation by ignoring the category of sexual orientation and simply

remaining open to attractions wherever they arose. While this did not necessarily lead to

successful pairings, it does suggest an openness that is quite striking. Furthermore,

eliminating a concern for the homosexual/heterosexual boundary might create more

possibilities for same-sex relationships to occur, particularly for individuals who assume

themselves to be straight. Here Jane speculates about having a relationship with a

heterosexual woman and what that might mean for both of them:

What I find about being bisexual is there's a possibility, there's an opening up of...you know, I mean I can have an affair with a woman that calls herself a heterosexual and is married and has three kids....And I don't have a vested interest in her changing how she identifies.

At the least, even if the heterosexual woman here chooses to never again have a same-sex

encounter, surely this experience means something in terms of her own private

homophobia. On the other hand, at the most this experience might serve to open her up to a level of comfort with same-sex relationships in general and subsequently to challenging heteronormativity more publicly.[19]

So, within these narratives, not only did bisexuality mean a removal of the barrier that sex typically represents, it also implied a disregard for the primacy of sexual orientation as a relevant category. This allows one to be open to one's attractions without needing to filter them through knowledge about the other's sexual identity. It also means something politically. As this discussion has indicated, there is subversive potential to an identity category that not only refuses to be restricted to either/or sexuality, but also that ignores the meaning of heterosexuality and homosexuality. The full impact of this potential has yet to even be considered.

A final topic in the area of relationships concerns comparisons between same-sex and other-sex relationships. The most interesting insight here for me was that there was no consensus regarding what was positive or negative. For instance, when pushed to think of an advantage to being with men over women, Camille came up with this conclusion:

Hmmm, I don't know...the only thing I can think of is, I have more experience growing up in a culture that tells me how I can interact and what I can expect [with men]. So it seems like, um...it's less unknown somehow? Yeah. So, that way it seems easier, just because, it's kind of scripted (chuckles), right? You know, by the culture.

---

[19]There is also a glimmer of the notion of recruitment here. This particularly radical political strategy is explicitly embraced by groups such as Queer Nation (Berlant & Freeman 1993) and the Lesbian Avengers (Schulman 1994). While Jane's goal is not to shift this woman's sense of her self as heterosexual, surely creating a safe environment in which to actualize same-sex activity facilitates the possibility of this outcome.

On the other hand, Domino finds the very same thing to be detrimental in relationships

with men:

**You also have to struggle with societal expectations in heterosexual relationships,
whereas I find there's a lot more freedom of...um, deciding what your relationship's
going to be if you're in a lesbian relationship. There's a lot less rules.**
And that's better.
**Oh yeah, that makes it a lot easier to just be who you feel you are, and you don't feel
other people expecting you to say things in a certain way or behave in a certain way.**

In general, an awareness of the environment was once again demonstrated in a

general agreement among the women that other-sex relationships are more supported and

accepted in society and as a result, less draining. On the other side of the coin however,

there was also consensus on the idea that shared experience made for a level of

connecting in same-sex relationships which potentially led to more intimacy and

vulnerability here. Also, the possibility (at least in theory) for power-sharing and trust

was greater in same-sex than in other-sex relationships. Ultimately, it seemed to me that

the women spoke more positively about same-sex possibilities and could only name

advantages to relationships with men in vague terms. Heterosexual privilege would

suggest that specifics about the benefits of other-sex relationships might have been more

forthcoming. This implies that assessments about relationships and decisions to enter

them were not governed exclusively by a cost-benefit analysis on the part of these

women.

In summary, through their talk about relationships the participants in this study

demonstrated a number of key points about the uniqueness of bisexual identity. First, the

dominant practice of connecting sexual identity to sexual relationships proved

problematic here. Monogamous relationships with members of either sex stand to render

bisexual identity impossible if relationship is its defining feature. Therefore, in identifying as bisexual and at the same time attempting to negotiate relationships, these women faced the difficulties of a unique set of stereotypes to be overcome. Furthermore, their discourses revealed the absolute centrality of relationship to identity in both of the monosexual systems.

Second, access to relationships was frequently mediated through the stereotypes. This made relations with straight men particularly accessible while lesbians were the least likely category for relationship potential for these women. The role of the stereotypes here was to demonstrate that barriers to same-sex relations are not only physical and geographical, but also cognitive and emotional. What is particularly interesting is the ongoing desire on the part of the women to pursue same-sex relationships despite the odds against them happening. A creative strategy to improve access was to ignore the role of sexual orientation when considering the playing field of potential same-sex attractions. This not only increased the odds, but also has the potential to provide a particularly subversive politics in the form of 'recruiting' supposedly naive straight women into the world of same-sex experiences. While such an experience does not guarantee politicization, it surely creates a possibility where previously there was little. Furthermore, bisexuality perhaps offers a safer place for such experiences to occur than lesbianism, which is fraught with rules for membership.

In keeping with the topic of politics, I move now to the issue of being out. Here identity politics are most explicitly played out and bisexuality has the potential to be moved yet further into the public sphere.

Making Choices to Be Out

The final choice addressed in the interviews was the decision to 'out' oneself to someone else. The theme of being out as bisexual threaded its way through the interviews and was often indistinguishable from talk about choosing to identify as bisexual. Perhaps these two narratives were so closely linked because of the importance of social interaction for identity formation. When asked if the process of coming out to others was inseparable from coming out to the self, Mabel responded as follows:

Well, I think to me that makes a lot of sense, I don't know that it works the same way for everybody. I mean for me, I have an incredible capacity to deny things, so I think that--it seems possible [to deny it] until I've shared it with somebody else and then it becomes a reality--in my own mind.

In contrast, here Nadine replies to the same question:

I don't find by saying it it does anything to define me, like seriously, with the first [girlfriend] in high school it wasn't like I went around telling everybody, it was--I'm with this person and that's the way it is. I didn't need to say it to define myself, for me.

At the same time, Nadine responded to the question of why someone might not take up the bisexual label by relating a story about homophobia and how it is not always safe to out oneself as bisexual. So, although she does not seem to require being out to others to know who she is, she also definitely connects the idea of taking up an identity label with telling others. The fuzziness of the line between being out to oneself and being out to others does speak to the need to have oneself reflected back by society and the need to exist outside of the self (Cooley 1993; Fitzgerald 1993). This requires coming out to others, telling others who you are, and subsequently taking in the feedback you receive. So, in some ways being out to others is equivalent to bringing the self into existence.

In heteronormativity, heterosexuality is on display at all times. This means that heterosexual individuals simply get to be out in their lives, all of the time. As stated before, heteronormativity is so prevalent that it is virtually invisible to those ensconced within its workings. The norms are so deeply entrenched that seldom are heterosexuals even aware that they are displaying heterosexuality, rather they wonder why gays and lesbians need to talk about their sexuality since this topic should be a 'private and personal' matter. Heterosexual privilege means, in part, taking for granted being out. There is no risk involved in telling, no need to even tell, because heterosexuality is getting fed back constantly.

The issue of being out has been extremely important in gay and lesbian identity politics movements. Similarly, queer identity politics strategies typically embrace an 'in your face' kind of presence as the best way to challenge what Michael Warner (1993) calls "regimes of the normal". The logic here says that, if queers remain in the closet, then the institution of heteronormativity stays firmly entrenched. The best way to challenge this myth of heterosexuality then is to make alternative identities visible and demonstrate how nonheterosexuals are underprivileged and oppressed in comparison to their overprivileged het counterparts. This logic has provided and continues to provide the basis of a useful political strategy for sexual orientation identity rights movements. However, the logic also forces nonheterosexuals to give up privilege by outing themselves while it does not require anything in return from heterosexuals. The paradox here is that the only way to end oppression is by having more out queers, and yet being out often means giving up privilege and being more oppressed than one might be if she

remained silent and was believed to be straight. As many gays and lesbians would rightfully argue however, the gains to be realized by being out in terms of personal esteem often (although not always) outweigh the losses. Furthermore, as the earlier discussion suggests, being out is in some ways essential in order to feel that one exists at all. However, in spite of these compelling arguments, the fact remains that heterosexuals need only observe from the sidelines here, nothing concrete is required of them, while gays and lesbians do all of the work.

Into this environment comes the bisexual woman with some unique issues of her own to contend with regarding being out. As with her lesbian counterpart, the motivation to be out is not always political. The women in this study differed on their views about why and to whom coming out mattered and I found it necessary to continuously check what assumptions were operating in these discussions. Here Jane describes her criteria for when being out matters:

I guess I come out uh, a therapist I know put it really well, she said, "you need to come out to people when not coming out will somehow affect the relationship....That's when you start lying a lot". Lies separate us from other people and they separate us from ourselves. And the people you don't know very well, you probably don't have to lie very much because they don't ask questions.

The connection between being out and being able to be genuine, honest and intimate was a prevalent theme in the women's discourses. Jane's statement speaks to the importance of recognizing when the closet is damaging rather than a safe place to be. The issue of being out often comes down to assessing the situation in terms of safety, risk, potential loss and gain, etc., and then making the choice that best fits at the time. This reinforces the idea that being out is fragmented and situational rather than a

coherent, evolutionary process (Harry 1993). The energy that goes into this kind of

ongoing assessment and decision making can be tremendous. While all nonheterosexuals

deal with this daily, it is something that heterosexuals need never concern themselves

with. Being able to be fully who you are with the people in your life in terms of your

sexuality is a privilege of which heterosexuals are seldom aware.

In addition to personal reasons, these women also resembled their lesbian

counterparts in seeing being out as a political issue. Here Rebecca discusses her reasons

to be out:

**I'm finding as I get older, I want to base my friendships and my relationships on
more honesty. And I'm also finding that bisexuality...is something that I want
people to have better understanding of. I want there to be more acceptance of it and
I'm certainly not going to help that cause if I sit back all the time and say, "oh I'm
married", and let people take their assumptions from that.**

In general, challenging assumptions was a big issue for these women and could, in fact,

be characterized as their main political agenda. Like Rebecca, Monika is in an other-sex

relationship and so her concerns mainly lie with challenging people's assumptions that

she is heterosexual. Here she talks about what this means for her interactions with her

partner in 'public', hence, heteronormative spaces:

**Sometimes in public it's like...for some reason I'm uncomfortable about showing
affection in public and I'm trying to get over that cause he's totally worth it, but it's
that I don't want people to assume that I'm heterosexual, it just comes back to that.**

Bisexual women are unique in that what counts as relevant politically about their

identity depends upon the environment in which they are outing themselves. The

homophobia inherent in the heteronormative world makes the same-sex aspect of

bisexuality salient here. Mabel has experienced this to such a degree that she finds that

coming out to straight people as bisexual can be equivalent to coming out as a lesbian.

She makes this point through the following story:

My best friend runs into somebody that we both knew, and the first question out of that third person's mouth is, "so is it true that she's gay?", and my best friend answers that by saying yes, and comes back to me and says, "is that OK?". And I said, "yeah, it's fine, but I'm more comfortable with the term bisexual than gay or lesbian." So is it relevant? [being specifically bisexual], it doesn't feel very relevant. Because I don't think many people want to concern themselves with the particulars. You know, you're not straight you're not straight. So, I don't know that it's that relevant.

Here Mabel is talking about heterosexual women's responses to her bisexuality. As

mentioned earlier in this chapter, heterosexual males have no need to experience

homophobia in the case of bisexual women, rather they are likely to sexualize the issue

and have no problem with bisexual women. However, heterosexual women often

represent a difficult group to come out to because of the potential to lose friendships and

closeness. The larger point here is that, for both heterosexual men and women, the same-

sex aspect of bisexual identity is the issue, although they are likely to see the implications

of this completely differently.

Building on Mabel's point, Tracy feels that being out as bisexual specifically is

important as a way to make bisexuality visible. When asked if the main thing is to be out

as nonheterosexual, she responded as follows:

It depends, it depends on the context. That's a starting point. But I also feel, I'm very out as bisexual specifically in every community that I kind of travel to, because I think that is equally important because bisexual people are important.

In spite of a recognition that different contexts make different things salient, Tracy

emphasizes the value in insisting upon providing all of the details, even if they are not

seemingly significant. This connects back to bell hooks' point about the inclination to let

the dominant group decide what matters. Even if her same-sex inclinations are all that count in a particular context, she will represent her entire person to the dominant group. By insisting upon giving voice to her bisexual identity in all contexts, Tracy is choosing to not only create herself fully, but also to encourage a specifically bisexual politic. However, as Mabel's experience indicates, there is reluctance on the part of the dominant group to hear this specifically bisexual voice.

Furthermore, and perhaps more importantly, the dominant heterosexual group is not the only place where bisexuality must be heard. The bisexual closet has a second door that opens into a gay and lesbian world; a world that is much less dominant and pervasive but every bit as important as its heterosexual counterpart. Given that bisexuals share same-sex attraction with gays and lesbians, this is a community of potential support for them. Dealing with experiences such as oppression, homophobia, and internalized homophobia is particularly beneficial with others that have had similar experiences. Given that bisexual women and lesbians also share the experience of sexism as women, they are even more likely to share common ground for support.

As stated repeatedly here, lesbians in particular were a main area of concern for the women in this study. Not only do they provide potential systems of support for bisexual women, but also potential partners. The lesbian response to bisexuality was an important narrative in the interviews and there was a general consciousness among the participants that bisexual women are typically not OK for lesbians. Camille has had negative experiences in the lesbian community and has actually been advised to keep her bisexuality to herself by well-meaning friends. Here she describes one particular

experience:

I have a support group of people that are great, but the larger community just doesn't seem to necessarily want to get it....I remember being at some function and I was joking with this person that had jewellery and I said, "well NOW you're going to have to have like a bisexual one!", cause they had the little female symbols and the two males. And she just went AARGHH PULEASE! right? And then I thought OK, this person doesn't want to have to deal with that. You know their whole reaction was like, "oh give me a break".

In the face of such harsh lesbian responses, the option of staying ensconced in the closet is sometimes best.[20] For Nadine this is necessary in order for her to get a sense of belonging to lesbian community:

You just go there under the presumption that yes, you're women-only. Because that's how you fit into this group and if not then--
Yeah, how sad eh?
I had no idea it was such a big issue for people, like I didn't know.

On the other hand, Caroline refuses to push down who she is in lesbian circles:

I would never, you know, even if they got offended by it, that's their issue, that's not my issue. No, I don't have to tone down who I am because they have a problem with it.

Caroline recognizes that an outcome of her attitude is a reluctance on the part of lesbians to get involved with her. In turn, she chooses to spend time outside of lesbian circles and tends to have relationships with women who do not identify as lesbian. So, it seems then that the choice to be out or not in lesbian community does have an impact on relationships and the ability to belong. In recognizing oneself to be other than heterosexual and needing a support community, this impact can be devastating.

---

[20]The one time that remaining closeted was generally not an option for the participants was when someone was embarking upon an intimate relationship. Here the general consensus was that being out was important so that the person could 'deal with it' or not. If things did not work out, it was better to have told immediately rather than leading someone on who ended up being biphobic.

Another reason why lesbian responses might be particularly devastating was alluded to in this comment from Kelly: **"I thought the lesbian world would be this utopia--and it's not been that way"**. In other words, the fact that lesbian's reactions were so salient for these women might also be a case of unmet expectations. Since lesbian culture has the potential to be utopian in theory (where heteropatriarchy is expected to be a rule-bound, restraining place for women), when lesbian reality is also oppressive, it can be devastating. So, perhaps the lesbian voice is more important than that of the heterosexual, in part, because it represents hope for an alternative.

Having considered why one might come out and to whom, the issue of how to come out seems particularly challenging for bisexual women. Coming out narratives were a part of every woman's story, and in the case of family and friends, being able to orchestrate and control the telling generally made it OK in terms of handling the response received. However, there is also the issue of being out in the world in general, presenting oneself in such a way that misassumptions are not made. Once again, heterosexuals seldom have to worry about this since seldom are they misconstrued in heteronormativity. For gays and lesbians there are specific symbols and stereotypes that might suffice to make their identities explicit.[21] However, the breadth and flexibility of the bisexual category makes for a distinct lack of stereotypes in terms of what a bisexual woman looks like. Given that there are no specifically bisexual markers, visibility is a problem here. While a lack of visibility means that bisexual women never have to be out if they do not

---

[21] As mentioned in Chapter Three, these stereotypes are problematic for many gays and lesbians however, as they represent an extremely narrow white, middle class, ablebodied norm.

want to, it also makes being out difficult should one wish to be.

Some women chose to take up the gay and lesbian markers in order to locate themselves as other than heterosexual. Camille sees herself as part of a larger queer community so feels entitled to take up their mainstream symbols:

What I've tended to do is just say OK, well if I'm bisexual then it means that I'm part of this larger community, which they may or may not agree with (laughs), um...of gays and lesbians and transgendered and and whatever....I'm thinking of some young women I know that talk about being queer, and that's been kind of a fun label. So I think of myself as kind of part of that larger community. So then the symbols become things like the rainbow, the idea behind that is diversity right? And there's more than two colours in the rainbow! Um...so, those are the markers I guess.

Within this statement Camille displays her awareness about bisexual stigma in the larger (presumably lesbian) community. However, she also insists upon her entitlement to membership here by calling their markers her own.

For Sahara however, taking up the rainbow feeds into a whole new set of problems:

I have a rainbow necklace but I feel really uncomfortable wearing it because then I think that people are going to assume that I'm lesbian.

It seems that being misconstrued as heterosexual is only one possible difficulty that bisexual women face. On the other side of the coin, there is also the potential to be mistaken as a lesbian. Sahara's experiences have been such that the main assumptions which are problematic for her are those of the lesbian community. She finds that when she presents herself in lesbian spaces, there is tremendous potential for her to be misunderstood. Here she relates the story of her experience at the Michigan Women's Music Festival:

I was friendly with these people that I camped with and I had talked quite a bit to them and stuff and said that I'd gone to these bi workshops, and not specifically said I was bi, but sort of assumed that because I was going to these bi workshops, that that was understood. And one of the women was like, "oh yeah, I was thinking about going to one of those too". And then, later on in the week, I had this lantern and she asked, "where did you get this lantern?", and I'm like, "oh, it's my boyfriend's." And she just FREAKED, she was like, "WHAT?"
Oh, it was like you'd deceived them.
Yeah.
And so how was that for you?
Well I was really puzzled by it cause I thought that she seemed pretty open to it...
So would a reaction like that make you feel like, "gee, I'd better be careful around here"? Or not particularly?
Um, a little bit. I think it also served to politicize me as well--that I don't have anything to be ashamed of and that I shouldn't be passing as lesbian. Like I felt ashamed of sort of keeping my mouth shut, that I should be speaking up and saying, "No, I'm bi--yes, there are bi women you know and here's one. And we can be involved in the lesbian community as well".

A number of important things are going on in this story. First, there is the issue of the kinds of assumptions that it might be safe to make about the people who enter a particular space. In the case of Michigan, a women-only stipulation holds. At a first glance, it seems interesting that along with this restriction comes a common assumption that the women present are lesbians. However, perhaps this is not that unusual an assumption, but rather merely a parallel to the common assumption that everyone is heterosexual in hegemonic male-dominated space. The more interesting point here may be found in the relative intensity of the reactions bisexual women receive between these different environments. Perhaps the strength of the woman's reaction to Sahara comes out of the importance of creating and protecting alternative spaces in a heteropatriarchal society. Heterosexuals, in contrast, need not react so strongly given that they are not on the defence, they merely assume ownership of all space. Regardless of the justifications for them, the intense reactions of lesbians (combined with their considerable level of

importance) typically made them the most frightening and risky group to come out to for

the women in this study.

A second point to be gleaned from Sahara's story is the idea of what it takes to be

out in a given environment. A common theme among the women as a whole was the idea

that it seemed necessary to repeatedly come out to the same people since they were

reluctant to hear in the first place or were quick to forget. Sahara feels like she is

constantly misunderstood regardless of what she does to out herself:

There was someone the other day that I said I'm bisexual to--who I thought I had made it perfectly clear to, and there was still that kind of....So even when I think I'm being obviously bisexual, I guess it's not being taken as that.

In a slightly different sense Domino is also invalidated and must continuously remind

people of who she is:

Even though I've told everyone at work and my family, my friends that I'm bisexual AND that I'm in a relationship with Diane, everyone assumes now that I'm lesbian. And they always refer to me and my interests and the way I think in terms of lesbianism. And assume that I have no more attraction for men, that I don't want to talk about men--or about their involvement with men. It's not exactly overt but it just communicates itself a lot in what they say that, well I'm lesbian now so that's that. They don't get that I'm still bisexual.

The previously discussed notion that identity is determined by relationships

creates unique problems for bisexual women in terms of being out. The easiest way to be

out for these women seemed to involve strategically presenting oneself with a particular

partner in a specific environment. Although this might not have been successful beyond

the moment, at least it worked for some temporarily. The notion that assumptions about

identity are made based on who one is with at the moment makes for a potentially

overwhelmingly fragmented experience for bisexual women. Here Nadine describes

what it has been like for her:

If you're dating a woman at this time then you slip into their world and then when you're dating a man you slip into the heterosexual world. You go on a heterosexual date, right?

In response to this dilemma, one can either remain closeted or attempt to fix people's misassumptions. One way to make this correction is to refuse monogamy. To consistently display bisexual identity through behaviours means moving between same-sex and other-sex relationships. For some of the women in this group, nonmonogamy was a tool for correcting misassumptions. In the course of our time together Monika reached the conclusion that she strategically uses both nonmonogamy and monogamy to counter the powerful heterosexual assumptions to which she is constantly subjected:

I think I'm resistant to monogamy because I'm in a seemingly heterosexual relationship and I don't want people to think that....And being with Mark, I'm not feeling the need to have a bunch of other men on the side. And so maybe that's a political choice, making sure I'm close to women still being with him. But I could be in a monogamous relationship with a woman and not have anything to prove otherwise.

Monika's double standard about monogamy makes the point that, given the power of heteropatriarchy, it is heterosexist assumptions that her bisexual identity most need to challenge. She therefore displays bisexual behaviour in her other-sex relationship, where there would be no need to make this kind of a political point in a same-sex relationship.

The stereotype of the nonmonogamous bisexual is typically to do with an overzealous sex-drive and an uncontrollable desire to be with both sexes. It can be argued that an overzealous sex-drive and lack of control is hardly the exclusive terrain of

bisexuals[22]. Bisexuality does not suggest nonmonogamy, or monogamy for that matter, any more than heterosexuality or homosexuality. However, bisexuality does link to monogamy in terms of the stability of the category. In other words, expressing nonmonogamy is the most obvious strategy for displaying a consistent bisexual identity in the present environment which emphasizes relationships and sees either/or options as the most feasible ones. So, the issue of nonmonogamy is more salient for bisexuals, not because of an inherently uncontrollable sex-drive, but because it represents the only vehicle through which to display their identity to the monosexual world.

This leads to another important point about Sahara's Michigan story. She brings up the idea of 'passing' as something that she might have been doing in the lesbian community when she allowed their misassumptions to go unaddressed. As is evidenced in Sahara's self-talk, inherent in the notion of passing is the suggestion of lying and deception which can lead to guilt and shame. As with Sahara, many of the women in this study felt as though they were passing when misassumptions were made about them. The passing narrative carries with it interesting implications in terms of who is meant to carry the final responsibility for the situation.

Paula Rust (1993, p. 218) makes a distinction between the ability to pass and the desire to pass in an effort to clarify the responsible parties. While an ability to pass is presumably beyond the control of an actor, a desire to pass suggests motivation and agency on the actor's part. Implicit here is an ethic which excuses an ability to pass while

---

[22]It was also pointed out earlier in this chapter that the embracing of an active and aggressive sexuality can be a strong political stance, particularly for women in heteropatriarchy.

condemning a desire to pass. Rust's distinction is useful when examining bisexual experience. However, she fails to place the concept of passing into the larger context where the 'outee' might become relevant to the situation. In view of the notion that bisexual women always have the capacity to pass, what does this mean for their responsibility? As is obvious in Sahara's case and Monika's earlier struggles with heterosexual assumptions, regardless of the actor's desire to be out, some outees simply cannot take in the information. In light of these bisexual women's experiences, it becomes necessary to question whose problem this might ultimately be.

In actuality, passing might have a lot to do with other people's assumptions and very little to do with these women's actual behaviours. It seems impossible for bisexual women not to be passing in many situations in their lives. There is an unresolveable tension in the bisexual experience. The clash between the desire to be out and the practicalities of actually pulling this off sets bisexuals up to be particularly unsuccessful. This tension is evident in Domino's account. Here she talks about her commitment to altering others' misassumptions about her:

I know that the slipping into part is easier in the short run and harder in the long run. I know that's a big pitfall. So I prefer to take the harder route and always correct people--not always but I try as often as I feel comfortable to adjust what people say or what they're thinking so it more accurately reflects who I am and what I'm feeling and thinking about.

One might feel compelled to ask how much responsibility should be taken for reading other people's minds so that thoughts can be straightened out. Demonstrating the inherent contradiction in the bisexual experience, here Sahara goes on to describe her coming out style:

I tend to discuss it if it comes up in some natural context. I'm not big on formal comings out. I don't like to paste it on my forehead.

On one hand it matters to correct misassumptions whenever possible, while on the other bringing up one's bisexuality out of context does not fit. Given that bisexuality is potentially always eliminated from the realm of possible assumptions, this makes finding natural contexts a bit tricky. Short of pasting bisexuality on one's forehead (which is not even possible given that there is no representative symbol), it seems that being out is not feasible. Framing bisexual women's experiences as an issue of passing means putting the responsibiity on their shoulders exclusively. This is arguably an unreasonable allocation of the blame.

In conclusion, the women in this study encountered issues similar to their gay and lesbian counterparts regarding coming out to others. In addition however, they also faced a unique set of problems. The unique difficulties that they face in being out provide some of their biggest political challenges. However, these difficulties also demonstrate their greatest political potential, in my view. The bisexual experience stands to reveal problems with both the inclusivity and usefulness of present identity politics strategies.

Identity politics approaches that require visibility assume a fixed and stable identity position from which to come out. While coming out itself is a risky proposition from whatever position one holds (stable or fluid), at least the likelihood of the outing 'taking' from a stable position is good. However, the fluidity of the bisexual position and a lack of understanding and acceptance of such fluidity made being out a tremendously challenging imperative for these women. In the existing set of either/or assumptions, they appear confused and inconsistent, which they are not. These resistances to hearing

bisexual voices suggest that a shift in focus might be politically expedient. Perhaps the 'problem' is more accurately framed as belonging to those who cannot hear.

The imperative to be out in environments in which one is oppressed and misunderstood (which seems to be all environments for bisexual women) might only serve to reinforce the status quo of essentialist, monosexual thinking. In challenging the essentialist assumptions of identity politics approaches, bisexual women are not only challenging heteronormative institutions and practices, but also those of resistant groups. Through this sensibility, that insists upon resisting the resistors, new and more inclusive political agendas will be developed. I turn now to the concluding chapter of this thesis which includes a discussion of the political implications of a bisexual standpoint based on choice.

Chapter Seven

CONCLUSION

The concluding chapter of this thesis is intended to leave both the researcher and the reader with a feeling of completion and closure. This has been such a huge undertaking for me that I am unsure as to how to achieve this goal for such a large project. However, I think that I need to have a sense that loose ends have been tied up, some interesting links have been made, and that there is somewhere to go from here. To this end, this chapter will include the following discussions: I begin with a brief recap of the purpose and process of the research project followed by a discussion of how my ideas have been challenged and reshaped along the way. The 'findings', or the main insights and themes that have evolved to constitute the bisexual women's standpoint will then be summarized in point form. Some ideas about the implications of these insights for political work are then discussed. Finally, I return to the issue of choice and its usefulness and limitations as a framework for a study such as this. I conclude with some thoughts about future links that might be of interest to researchers in the area of sexuality, identity, politics and oppression studies in general.

The Project Summarized

This project has been about attempting to produce a bisexual standpoint that is informed by the experiences and insights of women who identify themselves to be bisexual. The main purpose of the study is to look at bisexuality as a unique position from which dominant ways of understanding identity, sexuality and politics might be

challenged. The project began with theoretical work on my part in which a bisexual standpoint focused on the idea of choice was imagined. I recognized the political danger of emphasizing choice, yet felt that, of the sexual orientation categories presently available, bisexuality seems to be most explicitly about choice-making. I also saw the possibility of seeing sexuality as a matter of choices to be a strength politically rather than a weakness. Specifically four choices were theorized; choosing a definition, choosing to take up the bisexual title, relationship choices and choices to be out. It was speculated that each of these choices might be both salient and uniquely configured for bisexual women.

Once theorized, the standpoint was taken to the women for them to fill in, challenge and alter through interactive discussions with me. Through a narrative approach, the participants' experiences and insights were foregrounded in the interviews. The participants self-selected for inclusion in this study, so presumably they were somewhat comfortable with and had reflected upon their bisexual identities. Given their preparedness to come forward, it is also possible to conclude that they might be more politicized than the general population of bisexual women. However, it is crucial to recognize that many politicized bisexual women were potentially left out of this study. For instance, since I included a mention of choice in my call for subjects, it is possible that those for whom choice is not salient merely selected themselves out. Also, race and class barriers likely operated to make this study inaccessible to a diverse group of women. While too much diversity would have been beyond the realm of a study of this size, it is important to recognize its limitations given the homogeneity of the sample

group. So, given their interest in coming forward, these women presumably represented a somewhat sophisticated point of view, although clearly not the only or most reflexive position available.

My Ideas Challenged

My intent at the outset was to create a bisexual critique of heteronormativity in particular. However, the women shaped this study in ways that I could not have anticipated. Most obviously, they insisted upon repeatedly pushing me to examine the lines and conflicts between themselves and lesbians. Their negative experiences with lesbians had led them to analyze and critique this culture extensively. I found myself being agitated and uneasy as the interviewing progressed and recognized the reason for my discomfort through journalling. It eventually became clear to me that I had wanted the women to share my politics which meant focusing on heteronormativity, not lesbians. Politically I feared that creating lesbians in a negative light would only contribute to the already substantial list of stereotypes that the homophobic right wing has created about homosexuals. As a critical researcher, the idea of adding fuel to the right-wing fire through my research was inexcusable for me.

In hindsight it occurs to me that context is of primary importance here, not only in terms of the women's experiences with lesbians, but also in terms of my own politics. As discussed in Chapter Six, the homophobic, right-wing element in Alberta makes particular political strategies absolutely crucial. Identity politics approaches which rest upon essentialist ideas about sexual identity are no doubt most effective in this

environment. I was prepared to take the risk of discussing choice around sexual orientation in this climate because I intended to focus upon heterosexual choices and accountability. I recognized that bisexual women would be qualified to illuminate heterosexuality as choice, so felt that my risk was somewhat calculated if I could place emphasis here. When the women shifted the focus to lesbians, I could see my research project moving into scary political territory. It makes sense that I would be extremely nervous about undermining gay and lesbian political work in an environment such as Alberta. It also strikes me that I might have had a totally different political agenda in a less reactionary climate.

My commitment to listening to and learning from these women's experiences as a researcher meant that I had to reconcile my political concerns with what they were telling me. This pushed me to realize that there could be no unchallengeable, untouchable positions here and, even though this line of thinking was politically risky for me, it had to be acknowledged as relevant given its prevalence in the interviews. Ultimately, the fact remained that for these women, lesbians as a group were often a problem. The issue of whether or not lesbians are oppressed was quite separate from their impact upon these bisexual women. If I wanted to truly honour the interviewees' experiences, I had to hear this narrative even if it made me uncomfortable at the time. I have come to see that, even though in Alberta there are not very many safe places to engage in the kind of critique that bisexuality seems to open up, still the importance of this critique to the field of oppression studies is not to be denied.

I realize now that, had I been prepared for this shift on the part of the participants

I might have been able to more readily see it as useful and important. It strikes me as ironic that I was so resistant to this particular line of critique given my preparedness take the risk of talking about choice in this research project. This experience serves as a reminder that the researcher is absolutely entrenched within the research project and that reflexive research is neither easy nor always comfortable to do. Being pushed on one's own assumptions and commitments is a necessary and painful part of the process.

An interesting point regarding the women in this study's emphasis upon lesbians is worth noting. The power and importance of lesbian messages in these women's lives stands to place bisexual women into a somewhat unique ontological position. Resistance on their part here means reacting to a counterculture which already turns mainstream norms on its head. So, the dominant forces in these bisexual women's lives were often in direct opposition to those typically experienced by most individuals. This is not to say that they did not appreciate the impact of heteronormativity on their lives, but rather they often paid more attention to the lesbian cultural ethic which most seemed to influence them. This played out in the interviews as an issue of assumptions. Often I was surprised by the assumptions operating when, for instance, a participant would speak of a friend's reluctance to acknowledge an attraction to men and I would then learn that the friend was female. The assumptions operating in narratives such as these, which occurred throughout the interviews, served to turn the mainstream on its head time and time again. When something goes without saying, that suggests a certain mainstreaming. Perhaps this bisexual emphasis on lesbians and concern about 'heterophobia' speaks to the breaking down of heterosexual power and the political success that lesbians have

achieved. While there is no doubt that gay and lesbian human rights battles are far from over, the very existence of a discourse that so readily takes for granted homosexual assumptions suggests that some gains (at least in terms of visibility) have been made.

There were two other specific places where the women directed me, somewhat against my will. First, the origin narratives had to be heard, even though I had predetermined that the nature/nurture debate would be irrelevant to the sociopolitical framework. My position here came from a realization that my chosen emphasis on choice might immediately bring origin issues to mind, while I felt that other choices could be more productive to pursue. While the women certainly shared my interest in the other choices, they also insisted upon bringing up issues of origin. I realize now that it would have been almost impossible for them not to have engaged in this particular narrative, given its prevalence in the public arena of sexual orientation identity politics. Since bisexuality is often rendered invisible, impossible or deviant in this realm, of course they needed to legitimate themselves through this type of a story. Their need to engage in the dominant discourse here speaks to an almost intuitive awareness of the importance of being a part of identity politics even though their bisexual identity frequently puts them at odds with this political approach.

Secondly, and on a somewhat related note, an emphasis on desire was also subtly but powerfully present throughout the interviews. While not necessarily explicit, this emphasis was clearly underlying the continuum talk and the 'we're all bisexual' narrative that ran throughout the women's interviews. At the heart of these narratives is an essentialism that makes sense given the discursive terrain in which bisexual women are

required to engage. My reluctance to emphasize desire was not about avoiding

essentialism (which I now understand these discourses to be about), rather it came from

an awareness that constructing sexuality as an issue of choice around desire tends to

reduce it to the depoliticized realm of the private and personal. I felt that connecting

desire to identity would serve to move bisexual choices into the political realm, hence my

emphasis upon women who make this connection explicit by choosing to identify as

bisexual.[23]

While the women clearly did locate themselves in a bisexual subject position, for

them, bisexual desire was actually more relevant politically than bisexual identity. Given

the multitude of barriers in place to keep people from identifying as bisexual, for them

desire and potential had to become the criteria for inclusion in the category. While they

differed regarding their views on the importance of choosing to embrace a bisexual

identity, they all shared (through the continuum particularly) a belief in the prevalence of

bisexual desire. This belief legitimated bisexuality as a category; if not an identity

category then one based on desire.

Finally, my overall intent in the interviews was to offer bisexual women an

opportunity to create themselves apart from what lesbians and heterosexuals might think

of them. This intent came out of an emphasis in the bisexual literature on inter-relations

between oppressed groups, rather than letting such groups (particularly bisexuals) stand

---

[23]I was also cognizant of the work of Blumstein and Schwartz (1977) discussed in Chapter Two that emphasizes the need to separate desire from identity. They argue that having an attraction or participating in an activity does not necessarily equate with taking up a particular identity label.

alone. I realized however, through the course of our discussions, that such a project is practically impossible given that we do create ourselves through interactions with others. Furthermore, the theme of resistance which was prevalent throughout the interviews suggests that locating the self apart from other groups is also an aspect of creating the self as a subject. So, bisexuality depends upon both homosexuality and heterosexuality to exist apart from. (In contrast, the monosexual options seem only to require each other as 'other').

A Bisexual Standpoint Revisited

In brief, the bisexual standpoint itself evolved through the interviews and subsequent analysis as follows:

1. Defining the bisexual category (Chapter Five, Section One):

-getting out from behind walls and constraining places
-rejecting 'hardline', claustrophobic, rule-bound categories
-expressing both masculine and feminine aspects of the self at will and appreciating this in others
-experiencing desire and attraction along a continuum which facilitates fluidity and freedom

This definition produces bisexuality as a potentially huge category where lots of diverse people are welcome and there is plenty of room to move around. Politically, the category is not only large and inclusive, but also discursively centralized through the continuum talk, and subsequently heterosexuality is actually marginalized here.

2. Taking up the bisexual label (Chapter Five, Section Two):

-facing one's own homophobia and that of others
-challenging heteronormative assumptions
-rejecting a homosexual cultural ethic
-refusing a dualistic either/or structure of constraining possibilities

-embracing a truth about one's own essential self

The act of calling oneself bisexual seems to be largely about resisting the power and dominance of either/or socialization. While the 'we're all bisexual' narrative suggests that most of us are 'essentially' bisexual, the tremendous emphasis on homo/hetero thinking makes embracing one's bisexual tendencies through identifying as such tremendously difficult. Therefore, politically, taking a stance as a bisexual woman in the current context of binaries has to be understood as an act of resistance.

3. Choices involving relationships (Chapter Six, Section One):

-both heterosexual/heteropatriarchal/heteronormative and lesbian relationships are rife with problematic assumptions from a bisexual perspective, hence, 'same-sex' and 'other-sex' provide more appropriate descriptors for relationship options here

-barriers to relationships come in various forms; geographic, emotional and cognitive

-access is mediated through a unique set of stereotypes regarding bisexual women (hindering access to lesbians and enhancing potential with heterosexual men)

-ignoring sexual orientation when considering potential partners proved to be a common sensibility

-connecting sexual identity to sexual relationships was revealed to be problematic from a bisexual subject position (unlike for either heterosexuality or gay and lesbian identity)

Bisexual experiences and insights about relationships suggest that avenues of access to other-sex relationships are privileged in every way compared to those leading to same-sex pairings. Despite this, a valuing of and a desire to engage in same-sex relationships prevails, suggesting more than a cost-benefit analysis is relevant here. Furthermore, not only is there a refusal to be restricted to either/or sexual choices, but the ignoring of sexual orientation in considering one's choices is undoubtedly politically subversive (whether intended as such or not).

4. Choices regarding being out (Chapter Six, Section Two):

-that which counts as relevant about bisexual identity depends upon the environment in which one is outing oneself

-lesbians provide the most difficult, risky group to come out to

-there are no specific symbols, visible markers or 'natural contexts' which facilitate a recognition or assumption of bisexuality

-bisexuals are frequently not heard or easily forgotten in monosexual

systems
-a tension exists between a desire to be out as bisexual and an ability to
practically pull this off in the face of monosexual assumptions

The challenges faced in being out as bisexual suggest the need for new political
strategies to challenge heteronormativity. Framing bisexual women's experiences as an
issue of 'passing' means putting the responsibility for others' assumptions on bisexuals'
shoulders exclusively. A shift in political focus is needed here, as the resistances of the
dominant groups towards bisexuality might more appropriately be called into question.

So, while these bisexual women seem to share some aspects of both lesbianism

and heterosexuality, the unique aspects of their bisexual experiences are highlighted in

the standpoint. In general, they were interested in producing themselves as outside of

what they perceived to be dominant ways of being. The lesbian community's rulebound

ethic and political strategy of exclusion did not fit for these women and they self-

consciously chose to locate themselves outside of this identity and politic. However,

their resistance to lesbian norms does not mean that they embraced the mainstream.

Rather they needed to produce themselves as neither heterosexual nor lesbian. This

meant that they saw themselves as unique and different from both groups; their

bisexuality placed them within another identity category to be considered and understood.

How might this other category be characterized in relationship to heterosexuality

and homosexuality? Is this a third sexual orientation category; to be reified and added to

the homosexual and heterosexual list? If so, then the 'just add bisexuals' solution to

identity politics should work.[24] However, given the difficulties that arise for these women

---

[24]This solution brings to mind the classic liberal feminist position which would end
women's oppression by simply inserting women into positions at all levels of the social
structure. In contrast, a more radical position argues for change at the level of the structure
itself in order to revalue and equalize women in a society.

when they attempt to slip into a lesbian or heterosexual sensibility, it seems that bisexuality requires more than just an addendum to the list. There were simply too many contradictions and paradoxes operating in bisexuality to see it as running parallel to heterosexuality or homosexuality. Bisexuality seems to require a more fundamental rethinking of sexual identity itself and this has to mean some different political strategies as well.

It seems that these women embraced what could be described as a counterstrategy of inclusion, both in terms of identity and politics. As mentioned earlier, the continuum talk, an emphasis on desire and potential, and the 'we're all bi' narrative all serve to embrace a broad range of individuals within the bisexual category. By insisting upon new rules for inclusion and therefore bisexuality's dominance, the possibility arises here for some new options on the existing buffet of sexual identity choices. This strategy of inclusion brings to mind the work of Charlotte Wolff (1977) outlined in Chapter Two in which she called for a bisexualization of the world. As stated then, such a strategy seeks to unite and universalize human beings, but at the same time it threatens to erase a plethora of important differences in the ways in which individuals experience their lives. The political usefulness of a category that collapses very real differences in terms of privilege and oppression is questionable.[25] If too many rules for inclusion are eliminated, the category itself stands to become meaningless or swallow up and erase the less powerful. Does these bisexual women's distinct lack of concern for policing the

---

[25]This has been an important critique put forward by lesbian feminists specifically towards the strategies of queer theorists who organize around an umbrella politic they label 'queer' (Jeffreys 1994).

boundaries of their identity category make a specific bisexual politic implausible? Perhaps a politic in the sense that identity politics operate is out of the question here, however another strategy does present itself.

For these women, politics do not appear to require agreeing on the terms for membership in their category or policing its boundaries. Rather, their project is more about using the category as a place of resistance, a place from which to challenge. Rather than worrying about credentials for inclusion in the bisexual category, what one chooses to do with the category itself becomes the issue. Sometimes the category is called up to challenge heterosexuals and push their comfort levels with same-sex relations. At other times the category challenges a constraining set of norms, whether they are operating in a heterosexual world or a resistant lesbian camp. In addition, as is evidenced by these women's experiences with attempting to be out, virtually anytime bisexuality is used it stands to challenge the hegemony of either/or discourses. Therefore, to invoke bisexuality as a category is to automatically challenge. While identity politics tend to focus on and require specific qualifications, here the politics are not dependent upon credentials. Regardless of one's qualifications in terms of relationship status or level of oppression or privilege, the capacity of the bisexual category itself to pose a challenge makes it inherently political.

It seems to me that the bisexual universalizing, essentializing claim particularly threatens heterosexuality. In a sense, the 'we're all bi' narrative and an emphasis on Kinsey's science stand to shift the focus from the margins to the heteronormative centre. These discourses suggest that 'pure' heterosexuality is decidedly uncommon. In its place,

a bisexual category that allows for flexibility and shifting over time might better describe the sexual terrain of human beings. So, the universalizing discourses threaten to destabilize heterosexuality by pushing heterosexuals to consider the 'purity' of their identity positions. This does open up a possible avenue for shifting the power. What it does not do is insist that gays and lesbians do all of the work.

Whether or not heterosexuals choose to reconsider their identities, the location of the bisexual individual also potentially shakes up heterosexuality's dominance. The idea here, which was touched upon in Chapter Five, is that bisexual individuals enjoy a certain proximity to heterosexuals which might allow them to infiltrate the heterosexual category and almost dismantle it from within. This is a more subtle and subversive political move than overt attack from the outside. Given their location in relationship to heterosexuals, bisexuals are in a position to undertake this tactic, more than gays and lesbians who might have less perceived common ground upon which to build a critique.

Finally, it is necessary to return to the question of the usefulness of conceptualizing sexuality in general as an issue of choice. As the discourses of the prochoice women's movement (Chapter Three) emphasized, choosing suggests having some control, power and therefore, an inherent level of privilege. For some individuals, characterizing their sexuality in this way is not only inaccurate but actually offensive. In terms of origin stories, it seems that the bisexual women in this study, like many of their lesbian counterparts, did not experience their sexual attractions as choices. They merely eliminated a wall between the sexes in terms of their playing field of potential attractions. However, choice-making around sexuality beyond this level did seem to make sense for

these bisexual women and it brought some interesting issues to the forefront.

Standing in accountability for one's choices can be a double-edged sword. First, it positively empowers the individual to see her life as somewhat within her control and qualifies her to direct it wisely. The work of feminist epistemologists (Chapter Two) and ethicists (Chapter Three) illuminates the sense of capability and awareness that comes with taking up a position as a knowing, choosing moral agent. Rather than perceiving one's life as at the whim of forces beyond individual control, this position allows for personal power and agency. However, on the other side of the coin, standing in choices also means being held responsible and accountable. The moral agent must also provide reasons, both to herself and her world, for her particular choices. This requires work, awareness, research and energy. It also means that she can be held responsible for 'bad' choices.

Bad choices in heteronormativity are same-sex choices. Despite the gains that gays and lesbians have made, this ethic continues to underlie our culture and accounts for the response of many homosexuals to the idea of their sexuality being about choice. Bisexuals stand to shake up this ethic by standing in accountability for their capacity to 'choose' both same and other-sex relationships. Being bisexual means refusing to internalize the value that equates same-sex choices with bad choices. While the women in this study clearly illuminated the barriers to accessing same-sex choices in the current heteropatriarchal scene, they never questioned their commitment to valuing these choices, despite the barriers.

On the other hand, it is other-sex choices in a gay and lesbian cultural ethic that

are bad. Given the dominance of heterosexuality, heterosexuals are seldom constructed

as 'choosing' their other-sex preferences. However, bisexuals are clearly placed into this

problematic position given their capacities to choose. Ironically, this means that

heterosexuals are let off the hook, while bisexuals must be held in accountability for their

other-sex 'choices'. The challenge gays and lesbians pose is, if one is capable of choosing

same-sex relations, then one should make this choice for political reasons. The women in

this study were aware of this challenge, yet puzzled by it at the same time. For them, the

attaching of rules to their sexuality by any group was a problem, both from a personal and

a political perspective. They were more interested in standing in accountability for all of

their possible choices than in disallowing the consideration of any one set of possibilities

based on any overarching, unchallengeable ethic or politic.

Choosing bisexuality seems to mean opening oneself up, both personally and

politically, to new ways of being and thinking. There is a sense here of challenging the

limitations of the existing menu of options. Claudia Card (1995) articulates the potential

for change that comes out of such a challenge as follows:

> The level of picking from among options already defined by existing
> practice is one thing. The levels of creating new options through new
> social practices defined by new rules, or through changed understanding of
> social practices, is another (p. 56).

This is what a bisexual sensibility focused on expanding choices stands to achieve.

This research has merely scratched the surface in terms of the potential of

bisexuality itself. The complex interplay between bisexuality and issues such as race,

class and sex needs much theoretical and empirical development (Wilkerson 1997).

Furthermore, bisexual sensibility is not the only place from which the existing menu of

choices might be challenged and expanded. This work on bisexuality must be situated within a larger queer project which involves many alternative possibilities for human sexuality. It seems to me that exploring choices in the context of some of these alternative identities might illuminate some interesting connections and further enhance analyses around issues of oppression. For instance, there is a tension between choice-making and essentialism in transgendered identity that is particularly compelling and might be useful to explore. In contrast, transsexual identity seems to somehow stand outside of the realm of personal choice, or does it? What, if anything, do bisexual choices have to do with these alternatives, and how might links such as these produce new menus of possibilities and sensibilities? This research has contributed to the larger picture in a very limited sense, however, it has also, more importantly perhaps, opened up lots of new questions and challenges.

Human sexuality provides a rich and fertile field of study from which systemic and structural barriers can be revealed and individual experiences of oppression can be understood. Sexuality is also intensely personal and private and needs to be respected as such, particularly in the lives of women in patriarchal, racist societies. I am privileged to have heard the stories of the women who shared themselves so generously in this research. I hope that my links between their personal and political experiences have done them justice.

References

Acharya L., Chater N., Falconer D., Lewis S., McLennan L., & Nosov S. 1995. Plural Desires: Writing Bisexual Women's Realities. Toronto: Sister Vision: Black Women and Women of Colour Press.

Adams, Mary Louise. 1997. The Trouble With Normal: Postwar Youth and the Making of Heterosexuality. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Alcoff, Linda & Potter, Elizabeth. 1993. Feminist Epistemologies. New York: Routledge.

Anderson, Elizabeth. 1995. "Feminist Epistemology: An Interpretation and a Defense," Hypatia. Vol. 10, no. 3, (summer), pp. 50-84.

Anderson K. & Jack D. 1991. "Learning to Listen: Interview Techniques and Analyses," Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History, (eds. Gluck & Patai). New York: Routledge, pp. 11-26.

Anzaldua, Gloria. 1990. "Bridge, Drawbridge, Sandbar or Island: Lesbians-of-Color Hacienda Alianzas," Bridges of Power: Women's Multicultural Alliances, (ed. L. Albrecht & R. Brewer). Philadelphia: New Society, pp. 216-31.

Ault, Amber. 1994. "Hegemonic Discourse in an Oppositional Community: Lesbian Feminists and Bisexuality," Critical Sociology. Vol. 20, no. 3, pp. 107-122.
_____1996. "The Dilemma of Identity: Bi Women's Negotiations," Queer Theory/Sociology (ed. S. Seidman). Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., pp. 311-30.
_____1996. "Amibguous Identity in an Unambiguous Sex/Gender Structure: The Case of Bisexual Women," The Sociological Quarterly. Vol. 37, no. 3, pp. 449-63.

Baier, Annette. 1985. "What Do Women Want in a Moral Theory?" Nous. Vol. 19, no. 1, pp. 53-63.

Bergvall, V. & Remlinger, K. 1996. "Reproduction, resistance and gender in educational discourse: the role of Critical Discourse Analysis," Discourse & Society. Vol. 7. no. 4, pp. 453-79.

Berlant L. & Freeman E. 1993. "Queer Nationality," Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory (ed. M. Warner). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, pp. 193-229.

Blumstein, Philip W. & Schwartz, Pepper. 1976a. "Bisexual Women," The Social Psychology of Sex, (ed. J.P. Wiseman). New York: Harper & Row, pp. 154-62.

_____1976b. "Bisexuality in Men," Urban Life. Vol. 5, no. 3, (Oct.), pp. 339-58.

_____1977. "Bisexuality: Some Social Psychological Issues," Journal of Social Issues. Vol 33, no. 2, pp. 30-45.

Brownfain, J.J. 1985. "A Study of the Married Bisexual Male: Paradox and Resolution," Journal of Homosexuality. Vol. 11, no. 2, (spring), pp. 173-88.

Bryan, Tonia. 1996. "Uncontrollably and Incorrigibly Yours," Canadian Women's Studies: Lesbians and Politics. Vol. 16, no. 2 (spring), pp. 18-23.

Butler, Judith. 1990. Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity. New York: Routledge.

Card, Claudia. 1995. Lesbian Choices. New York: Columbia University Press.

Carrier, J.M. 1985. "Mexican Male Bisexuality," Journal of Homosexuality. Vol. 11, no. 1/2, (spring), pp. 75-85.

Clandin D.J. & Connelly F.M. 1994. "Personal Experience Methods," Handbook of Qualitative Research, (eds. Denzin & Lincoln). Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, pp. 413-27.

Code, Lorraine. 1993. "Taking Subjectivity into Account," Feminist Epistemologies, (eds. L.Alcoff & E.Potter). New York: Routledge, pp. 15-48.

Coleman, Eli. 1985. "Bisexual Women in Marriages," Journal of Homosexuality. Vol. 11, no. 1/2, (spring), pp. 87-99.

Cooley, Charles H. 1993. "The Social Self," Sociology an Introduction: From the Classics to Contemporary Feminists, (eds. G. Bailey & N. Gayle). Toronto: Oxford University Press, pp. 252-58.

Dancy, Jonathan. 1985. An Introduction to Contemporary Epistemology. Oxford, UK: Blackwell.

Daumer, Elisabeth D. 1992. "Queer Ethics; or, The Challenge of Bisexuality to Lesbian Ethics," Hypatia. Vol. 7, no. 4, (fall), pp. 91-105.

Davies, Bronwyn. 1989. Frogs and Snails and Feminist Tales. St. Leonards, Australia: Allen & Unwin.

Davis, Angela. 1983. Women, Race & Class. New York: Vintage Books.

Devault, M. 1990. "Talking and Listening From Women's Standpoint: Feminist Strategies for Interviewing and Analysis," Social Problems. Vol. 37, no. 1, pp. 96-116.

DiStefano, Christine. 1990. "Dilemmas of Difference: Feminism, Modernity, and Postmodernism," Feminism/Postmodernism, (ed. L. Nicholson). New York: Routledge, pp. 63-82.

Duggan, Lisa. 1994. "Queering the State," Social Text. No.39, (summer), pp. 1-14.

Eadie, Jo. 1993. "Activating Bisexuality: Towards a Bi/Sexual Politics," Activating Theory: Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Politics, (eds. J. Bristow & A. Wilson). London: Lawrence & Wishart, pp. 139-70.

Ellis, Havelock. 1934. Psychology of Sex. London: Heinemann.

Epstein Steven. 1987. "Gay Politics, Ethnic Identity: The Limits of Social Constructionism," Socialist Review. No. 93/94, May-August, pp. 9-54.
_____1994. "A Queer Encounter: Sociology and the Study of Sexuality," Sociological Theory. Vol. 12, no. 2, July, pp. 188-202.

Estable A., Meyer M., Pon,G. 1997. Teach Me To Thunder: A Training Manual for Antiracism Trainers. Canadian Labour Congress Publication.

Faderman, Lillian. 1991. Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America. New York: Columbia University Press.

Feinberg, Leslie. 1993. Stone Butch Blues. Ithaca, N.Y.: Firebrand Books.

Fife, Connie. 1993. The Colour of Resistance: A Contemporary Collection of Writing by Aboriginal Women. Toronto: Sister Vision Press.

Firestein, Beth A. 1996. Bisexuality: The Psychology and Politics of an Invisible Minority. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.
_____ 1997. "The Bisexual Challenge: Is the Issue Bisexuality, or Is It Lesbianism?," The Journal of Sex Research. Vol. 34, no. 1, pp. 107-10.

Fitzgerald, Thomas K. 1993. Metaphors of Identity. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Foucault, Michel. 1990. The History of Sexuality: Volume 1, An Introduction, (translated by Robert Hurley). New York: Vintage Books.

Freedman, Estelle B. 1995. "The Historical Construction of Homosexuality in the U.S.", Socialist Review. Vol. 25, no. 1, pp. 31-46.

Friedland L. & Highleyman L.A. 1991. "The fine art of labeling: The convergence of anarchism, feminism, & bisexuality," Bi Any Other Name, (eds. L. Hutchins & L. Kaahumanu). Boston: Alyson Publications Inc., pp. 285-98.

Freud, Sigmund. 1975. Three essays on the theory of sexuality/Sigmund Freud, (translated and edited by James S. Strachey). New York: Basic Books.

Fuss, Diana. 1991. Introduction to inside/out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories. New York: Routledge, pp. 1-10.

Gaard, Greta. 1996. "Anti-lesbian Intellectual Harassment in the Academy," Anti-Feminism in the Academy, (eds. Clark, Garner, Higonnet & Katrak). New York: Routledge, pp. 115-40.

Garfinkel, Harold. 1967. Studies in Ethnomethodology. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall.

Gilligan, Carol. 1982. In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Moral Development. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Gluck S. & Patai D. 1991. Introduction to Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History, (eds. Gluck & Patai). New York: Routledge, pp. 1-9.

Grosz, Elizabeth. 1993. "Bodies and Knowledges: Feminism and the Crisis of Reason," Feminist Epistemologies, (ed. L. Alcoff & E. Potter). New York: Routledge, pp. 187-216.

Guba E.G. & Lincoln Y.S. 1994. "Competing Paradigms in Qualitative Research," Handbook of Qualitative Research, (eds. Denzin & Lincoln). Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, pp. 105-17.

Hall, Donald E. & Pramaggiore Maria. 1996. RePresenting Bisexualities: Subjects and Cultures of Fluid Desire. New York: New York University Press.

Hankinson Nelson, Lynn. 1993. "Epistemological Communities," Feminist Epistemologies, (eds. Alcoff & Potter). New York: Routledge, pp. 121-60.

Hansen C.E. & Evans A. 1985. "Bisexuality Reconsidered: An Idea in Pursuit of a Definition," Bisexualities: Theory and Research, (eds. Klein & Wolf). New York: The Haworth Press, pp. 1-6.

Harding, Sandra. 1991. Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking From Women's Lives. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press.

Harris, L. & Crocker E. 1997. Femme: Feminist, Lesbians & Bad Girls, (eds. Harris & Crocker). New York: Routledge.

Harry, Joseph. 1993. "Being Out: A General Model," Journal of Homosexuality. Vol. 26, no. 1, pp. 25-39.

Hartsock, Nancy. 1983. "The Feminist Standpoint: Developing the Ground for a Specifically Feminist Historical Materialism," Discovering Reality, (eds. S. Harding & M. Hintikka). D. Reidel Publishing Company.

Hemmings, Clare. 1993. "Resituating the Bisexual Body: From Identity to Difference," Activating Theory: Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Politics, (eds. J. Bristow & A. Wilson). London: Lawrence & Wishart, pp. 118-38.
_____ 1995. "Locating Bisexual Identities: Discourses of Bisexuality and Contemporary Feminist Theory," Mapping Desire: Geographies of Sexualities, (eds. D. Bell and G.Valentine). London: Routledge, pp. 41-55.

Herdt, Gilbert H. 1984. "A Comment on Cultural Attributes and Fluidity of Bisexuality," Journal of Homosexuality. Vol. 10, no. 3/4, (winter), pp. 53-61.

Hill Collins, Patricia. 1986. "Learning From the Outsider Within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought," Social Problems. Vol. 33, no. 6, pp. 14-32.

Hoagland, Sarah. 1988. Lesbian Ethics: Toward New Value. Palo Alto, CA.: Institute of Lesbian Studies.

Holstein J. & Gubruim J. 1997. "Active Interviewing," Qualitative Research: Theory, Method and Practice, (ed. Silverman). London: SAGE Publications, p. 113-29.

Hutchins. Loraine & Kaahumanu, Lani. 1991. Introduction and Overviews to Bi Any Other Name: Bisexual People Speak Out. Boston: Alyson Publications, Inc., pp. xx-xxvi, 2-11, 216-22.

Inter Pares. 1995. In the Name of Development: Exploring Population, Poverty and Development. Ottawa: Inter Pares, 32 pages.

Irvine, Janice M. 1994. "A Place in the Rainbow: Theorizing Lesbian and Gay Culture," Sociological Theory. Vol. 12, no. 1, pp. 232-48.

Jaggar, Alison M. 1992. "Love and Knowledge: Emotion in Feminist Epistemology," Gender/Body/Knowledge, (eds. Jaggar & Bordo). New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press.

Jeffreys, Sheila. 1994. "The Queer Disappearance of Lesbians: Sexuality in the Academy," Women's Studies International Forum. Vol. 17, no. 5, Sept-Oct, pp. 459-72.

Kant, Immanuel. 1990. Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals and What is Enlightenment? Second Edition, Revised. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company.

Katz, Jonathan Ned. 1995. The Invention of Heterosexuality. New York: The Penguin Group.

Kinsey A.C., Pomeroy W.B., Wardell B., Martin C.E. 1948. Sexual Behavior in the Human Male. Philadelphia: W.B. Saunders.

Kinsey A.C., Pomeroy W.B., Martin C.E., Genhara P.H. 1953. Sexual Behavior in the Human Female. Philadelphia: W.B. Saunders.

Kinsman, Gary. 1995. "'Character Weaknesses'and 'Fruit Machines': Towards an Analysis of the Anti-Homosexual Security Campaign in the Canadian Civil Service," Labour/Le Travail. No. 35, (spring), pp. 133-61.
_____ 1996. The Regulation of Desire: Homo and Hetero Sexualities (2nd Edition). Montreal: Black Rose Books.

Kirby S. & McKenna K. 1989. Experience, Research, Social Change: Methods from the Margins. Toronto: Garamond Press.

Kitzinger, Celia. 1987. The Social Construction of Lesbianism. London: SAGE Publications.

Kivel. Paul. 1996. Uprooting Racism: How White People Can Work For Racial Justice. Philadelphia: New Society Publishers.

Klein, Fritz. 1993. The Bisexual Option (Second Edition). New York: The Harrington Park Press.

Kohlberg, L. & Kramer, R. 1969. "Continuities and discontinuities in childhood and adult moral development," Human Development. Vol. 12, pp. 93-120.

Lorde, Audre. 1984. Sister Outsider. Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press.

MacDonald, A.P. 1981. "Bisexuality: Some Comments on Research and Theory," Journal of Homosexuality, p. 21-35.

MacIntyre, Alasdair. 1981. After Virtue. Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press.

Margolies L., Becker M. & Jackson-Brewer K. 1987. "Internalized Homophobia: Identifying and Treating the Oppressor Within," Lesbian Psychologies: Explorations and Challenges, (eds. The Boston Lesbian Psychologies Collective). Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, pp. 229-41.

Martindale, Kathleen. 1995. "What Makes Lesbianism Thinkable?: Theorizing Lesbianism from Adrienne Rich to Queer Theory," Feminist Issues: Race, Class, and Sexuality, (ed. N. Mandell). Scarborough, Ont.: Prentice Hall Canada Inc., pp. 67-94.

Mason, Jennifer. 1996. Qualitative Researching. London: SAGE Publications.

McCallum, Margaret E. 1992. "Men, Women and the Liberal Ideal: An Historian's Reflections on the Morgentaler Case," Contemporary Moral Issues, Third Edition (ed. W. Cragg). Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, pp.98-111.

McCracken, Grant. 1988. The Long Interview. Newbury Park: SAGE Publications.

McIntosh, Mary. 1968. "The Homosexual Role," Social Problems. Vol. 16, no. 2, pp. 182-92.

Mill, John Stuart. 1957. Utilitarianism, (ed. Oskar Piest). New York: Macmillan Publishing Company.

Mills, Charles. 1988. "Alternative Epistemologies," Social Theory and Practice. Vol. 14, no. 3, pp. 237-63.

Namaste, Ki. 1996. "The Politics of Inside/Out: Queer Theory, Poststructuralism, and a Sociological Approach to Sexuality," Queer Theory/Sociology, (ed. Seidman). Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., pp. 194-212.

Nicholson, Linda. 1997. Introduction to The Second Wave: A Reader in Feminist Theory. New York: Routledge, pp. 1-5.

Noddings, Nel. 1984. Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Oakley, Ann. 1981. "Interviewing women: a contradiction in terms," Doing Feminist Research, (ed. Roberts). London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, pp. 30-61.

O'Brien, Mary. 1981. "The Public and Private Realms," The Politics of Reproduction, (ed. O'Brien). London: Routledge, pp. 93-115.

Omi, M. & Winant, H. 1994. "Racial Formation," RACIAL FORMATION in the United States: FROM the 1960's to the 1990's. London: Routledge, pp. 53-73.

O'Neill, John. 1994. "Ethics," The Blackwell Dictionary of Twentieth-Century Social Thought, (eds. Outhwaite & Bottomore). Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., pp. 202-4.

Pateman, Carole. 1979. The Problem of Political Obligation: A Critical Analysis of Liberal Theory. Chichester, New York: John Wiley & Sons.

Paul, Jay P. 1985. " The Bisexual Identity: An Idea Without Social Recognition," Origins of Sexuality and Homosexuality (eds. J.P. Cecco, M.G. Shively). New York: Harrington Park Press, pp. 45-63.

Penelope, Julia. 1992. Call Me Lesbian: Lesbian Lives, Lesbian Theory. Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press.

Petchesky, Rosalind P. 1984. Abortion and Woman's Choice: The State, Sexuality, and Reproductive Freedom. New York: Longman.

Pharr, Suzanne. 1988. Homophobia: A Weapon of Sexism. Inverness, CA.: Chardon Press.

Phelan, Shane. 1993. "(Be)Coming Out: Lesbian Identity and Politics," Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society. Vol. 18, no. 4, (summer), pp. 765-90.

Plummer, Ken. 1996. "Intimate Citizenship and the Culture of Sexual Story Telling," Sexual Cultures: Communities, Values and Intimacy, (eds. J. Weeks & J. Holland). London: MacMillan, pp. 34-52.

Pottie, Lisa. 1996. "Hierarchies of Otherness: The Politics of Lesbian Styles in the 1990's, or, What to Wear?," Canadian Women's Studies: Lesbians and Politics. Vol. 16, no. 2, (spring), pp. 49-52.

Pyne Addelson, Kathryn. 1993. "Knower/Doers and Their Moral Problems," Feminist Epistemologies, (eds. L. Alcoff & E. Potter). New York: Routledge, pp. 265-94.

Rachels, James. 1986. The Elements of Moral Philosophy. New York: McGraw-Hill Publishing Company.

Rawls, John. 1971. A Theory of Justice. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Reba Weise, Elizabeth. 1992. Closer to Home: Bisexuality & Feminism. Seattle: Seal Press.

Reinharz, Shulamit. 1992. Feminist Methods in Social Research. New York: Oxford University Press.

Rich, Adrienne. 1983. "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality, (eds. A. Snitow, C. Stansell, S. Thompson). New York: Monthly Review Press, pp. 177-205.

Ross, Michael W. 1984. "Beyond the Biological Model: New Directions in Bisexual and Homosexual Research," Journal of Homosexuality. Vol. 10, no. 3/4, (winter), pp. 63-70.

Rubin, Gayle. 1974. "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex," Toward an Anthropology of Women, (ed. R. Reiter). New York: Monthly Review Press, pp. 157-210.

Ruddick, S. 1980. "Maternal Thinking," Feminist Studies. Vol. 6, (summer), pp. 342-67.

Rust, Paula. 1992. "The Politics of Sexual Identity: Sexual Attraction and Behavior among Lesbian and Bisexual Women," Social Problems. Vol. 39, no. 4, pp. 366-86.
_____ 1993. "Neutralizing the Political Threat of the Marginal Woman: Lesbians' Beliefs About Bisexual Women," The Journal of Sex Research. Vol. 30, no. 3, pp. 214-28.
_____ 1995. Bisexuality and the Challenge to Lesbian Politics. New York: New York University Press.

Schulman, Sarah. 1994. "Excerpts from the Lesbian Avengers Handbook," My American History: Lesbian and Gay Life During the Reagan/Bush Years. New York: Routledge, pp. 289-319.

Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. 1990. Epistemology of the Closet. Berkeley: U of California Press.

Seidman, Steven. 1996. Introduction to Queer Theory/Sociology. Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., pp. 1-29.

Sherwin, Susan. 1992. No Longer Patient: Feminist Ethics & Health Care. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Shuster, Rebecca. 1987. "Sexuality as a Continuum: The Bisexual Identity," Lesbian Psychologies: Explorations and Challenges, (eds. the Boston Lesbian Psychologies Collective). Chicago: University of Illinois Press, pp. 56-71.

Smith, Dorothy. 1986. "Everyday World as Problematic: A Feminist Methodology," Everyday World as Problematic: A Feminist Sociology. Boston: Northeastern University Press, pp. 105-45.

Spender, Dale. 1993. "Language and Reality: who made the world?," Women's Studies: Essential Readings, (ed. Jackson). New York: New York University Press, pp. 407-10.

Stein, Edward. 1990. "The Essentials of Constructionism and the Construction of Essentialism," Forms of Desire, (ed. E. Stein). New York: Routledge.

Tuana, Nancy. 1992. Woman and the History of Philosophy. New York: Paragon House.

Tucker, Naomi. 1995. Bisexual Politics: Theories, Queries & Visions. New York: Harrington Park Press.

Trebilcot, Joyce. 1994. Dyke Ideas: Process, Politics, Daily Life. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Udis-Kessler, Amanda. 1991. "Present Tense: Biphobia as a crisis of meaning," Bi Any Other Name, (eds. L. Hutchins & L. Kaahumanu). Boston: Alyson Publications, Inc., pp. 350-58.

Valverde, Mariana. 1985. Sex, Power and Pleasure. Toronto: The Women's Press.

Walker, Lisa. 1993. "How to Recognize a Lesbian: The Cultural Politics of Looking Like What You Are," Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society. Vol. 18, no. 4, (summer), pp. 866-90.

Warner, Michael. 1993. Introduction to Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, pp. vii-xxxi.

Weddington, Sarah. 1992. A Question of Choice. New York: Grosset/Putman.

Weeks, Jeffrey. 1996. "The Construction of Homosexuality," Queer Theory/Sociology, (ed. S. Seidman). Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., pp. 41-63.

Whisman, Vera. 1996. queer by choice, Lesbians, Gay Men and the Politics of Identity. New York: Routledge.

Wilkerson, Abby. 1997. "Ending at the Skin: Sexuality and Race in Feminist Theorizing," Hypatia. Vol. 12, no. 3 (summer), pp. 164-73).

Wilson, Madame Justice Bertha. 1992. "Dr. Henry Morgentaler v. Her Majesty the Queen," Contemporary Moral Issues, Third Edition, (ed. W. Cragg). Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, pp. 47-55.

Wittig, Monique. 1992. "The Straight Mind," The Straight Mind. Boston: Beacon Press, pp. 21-32.

Wolff, Charlotte. 1977. Bisexuality: A Study. London: Quartet Books.

Zaretsky, Eli. 1997. "Bisexuality, Capitalism and the Ambivalent Legacy of Psychoanalysis," New Left Review. No. 223, May/June, pp. 61-89.

Zinik, Gary. 1985. "Identity Conflict or Adaptive Flexibility? Bisexuality Reconsidered," Bisexualities: Theory and Research, (eds. Klein & Wolf). New York: The Haworth Press, pp. 7-19.

Appendix A

UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Research Project Title: Interrogating Choice: Bisexual Identity and Politics

Investigator: Carol Berenson

This consent form, a copy of which has been given to you, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here or information not included here, please ask. Please take the time to read this form carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

Purpose of the Research Project

Hello, my name is Carol Berenson and I am a masters student in the department of sociology at the University of Calgary. My research involves developing an understanding of the insights which bisexual identity provides to individuals. Specifically I am interested in the ways in which bisexuality might be understood to be about choices. I am interviewing a variety of women who identify as bisexual in order to gain a range of views on choice. I hope to more fully understand what makes bisexuality unique and political through this research.

Participation

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. This interview will take approximately 2 hours to complete. Should we require more time, and if you are available, an additional interview will be set up. I plan to discuss what bisexuality means to you, your decision to identify as bisexual, relationships, and your views about being out as bisexual. I also want to provide opportunities for you to share anything that you feel is important and would contribute to this study. You can choose not to discuss specific issues during the interview or stop the interview completely at any time if you feel this is necessary. You can also withdraw any information you have provided at a later date, if you wish. Should you do this, all relevant information will be destroyed at your request.

Since this research is about bisexuality, and we live in a biphobic society, there is a chance that this interview will bring up issues that are upsetting for you. If this happens, I will provide you with referrals to counselling agencies or support groups if you would find this helpful.

Anonymity

In order to ensure that your identity is kept confidential, your name will not be used in this study. However, given that I am speaking with a small and diverse group of women, there is a chance that you could be recognized in this research by someone you know. Also, since I am using content from this interview in my master's thesis, there is a possibility that the results may be published. Should this occur, the specific city in which the interviews took place would not be named, although the University of Calgary, which supports this research, may be identified.

I will transfer the interview tapes onto computer discs and printed copies will be made. The audio tapes, computer discs and printed records will be kept under lock and key either at the University or in my office at home and will only be accessible to myself and my supervisor, Dr. Tom Langford. These records will be kept by myself or my supervisor and will be destroyed no later than three years after the interviews have occurred.

INFORMED CONSENT

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the investigators, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation. If you have further questions concerning matters related to this research, please contact Carol Berenson or her supervisor, Tom Langford.

Carol Berenson
Department of Sociology
The University of Calgary
Calgary, Alta.
T2N 1N4
phone: 220-3214
email: caberens@acs.ucalgary.ca

Dr. Tom Langford, PhD
Associate Professor
Department of Sociology
The University of Calgary
Calgary, Alta.
T2N 1N4
phone: 220-5043
email: langford@acs.ucalgary.ca

If you have any questions concerning the ethics review of this project, or the way you have been treated, you may also contact the Department of Sociology Ethics Committee, and ask for the Chairperson, at 220-6501.

_____   _____
Participant   Date

_____   _____
Investigator   Date

A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

Appendix B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. The first choice that I'd like to talk about is the choice to decide on your own definition of bisexuality. There are a lot of different ideas about what bisexuality means, what does it mean to you?

2. There are people who would fit your definition of bisexuality, yet don't identify as bisexual. Why do you think somebody might avoid this label? What are the reasons you have chosen to call yourself bisexual?

3. Now I'd like to spend some time talking about your process of coming into your bisexual identity. How long have you identified as bisexual? Was this a long process of coming out to yourself? Can you tell me about your coming out process? How has it been for you with your family? friends? at work or school? Is there a particularly difficult time you can recall? What has been the most rewarding experience you've had in this coming out process? Any other highlights you'd like to share?

4. The next choice I'd like to talk about is choices around partners. What kinds of things matter to you in choosing a partner? Are they different for men and women? If so, how? Do you have a preference between same-sex or other-sex relationships? How are they different? How are they the same?

5. Finally I'd like to talk about being out as bisexual. Who do bisexuals come out to? How does one 'out' oneself as bisexual? Is it different depending on whether the person or situation is gay or straight? When do you think it matters whether a woman identifies as bisexual? Is being out always a choice for you, or do people sometimes seem to assume that you're bisexual?

6. Before we finish, I have a few general information questions to ask you. I'll remind you that you can choose not to answer if you wish. I'm asking these questions because they suggest something about the experiences which you bring to your particular perspective:

> -What is your educational background?
> -What is your age?
> -How do you identify in terms of ethnicity or race or culture? (if this is a relevant category for you)
> -Do you consider yourself to be working class, middle class, upper class or something else?
> -Is there a particular religion with which you identify yourself, either as an influence when you were growing up or now?

7. I've asked you questions about what I think some of the important choices are for bisexuals. Is there anything that I've missed here? Any choices you expected to discuss but didn't get a chance to?