

# **Trans-Sexuality: Bisexual Formations and the Limits of Categories** <sup>1</sup>

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*It is a fundamental of taxonomy that nature rarely deals with discrete categories. Only the human mind invents categories and tries to force facts into separated pigeon-holes (Kinsey et. al. 639).*

The trajectory of “bisexuality” as an identity and a movement in the Anglo-American world had been closely entangled in the tension-filled intermingling of gender/sexuality movements and cultural re-significations in the turbulent years between the 1960s and the 1990s. As such, bisexual formations afford an opportunity to observe how gender/sexual categories, and struggles against such categorization, could (if only unwittingly in the latter case) produce some complicated effects that undermine the original activist objective to build a world of inclusion and openness. The contemporary history of bisexuality further cautions against a superficial and oversimplified inclusionary politics that may politely acknowledge the rightful existence of marginal subjects while leaving in tact the gender/sexuality assumptions that constitute prejudiced categorization against them in the first place. For the inimical effect of gender/sexual categorization lies not only in its refusal to acknowledge subjects whose gender/sexuality may be intermediate, ambiguous, indeterminate, or unrecognizable. Even when newly emerged subjectivities have forced their way unto the scene with the help of dramatic social change and movement activism, the newly exonerated categories are always already imbricated by a wide array of existing gender/sexuality prejudices which, if not consciously resisted, would continue to poison the alliance. After all, gender categories and identities are not only deeply implicated in the ways in which individuals experience and present themselves, but are likewise deeply engrained in the ways in which individuals’ sexualities are understood and evaluated. Considering the sex-negativity that still surrounds us, the path to gender/sexuality understanding is bound to be lined with numerous ungrounded assumptions if not age-old prejudices. In the present paper, I hope to trace the emergence of the subject position of

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<sup>1</sup> This paper was first read at the Fifth International Super-Slim Conference on Politics of Gender/Sexuality held by the Center for the Study of Sexualities, National Central University, December 13, 2003. See [http://sex.ncu.edu.tw/conference/slim/slim5/5th\\_SLIM.HTM](http://sex.ncu.edu.tw/conference/slim/slim5/5th_SLIM.HTM)

bisexuality in the Anglo-American context and investigate how this supposedly sexual category is infested with gender/sexual prejudices in all its social interactions, to the extent that the dynamic and power assumptions of “categories” are constantly invoked and applied whenever the presence of the trans-sexual (better-known as the bisexual) or trans-gender subject is felt.

## I

While both homosexual behavior and bisexual behavior had been reported by the Kinsey reports in the 1940s & 1950s as to occupy quite significant percentages in the general population of America,<sup>2</sup> the practice of bisexuality curiously did not arouse any attention or follow-up research, in contrast with the string of researches that immediately followed upon the topic of homosexuality. It was not until the 1960s and 1970s when a general liberalization of sexual mores prepared fertile ground for the emergence of a wide variety of sexual subjectivities that bisexuality became increasingly visible. This visibility, as history would have it, was constituted by a mixture of cultural significations as well as movement activism.

Predecessors of the bisexual movement, most notably the Sexual Freedom League, had surfaced in the sexually liberating late 1960s with members closely connected to heterosexual “swinger” communities and even the San Francisco S/M community, who were experimenting with “bisexual” interactions<sup>3</sup> at the time in order to challenge existing sexual assumptions and restrictions (Donaldson 32; Tucker, “Bay Area Bisexual History” 48-49). Even the early gay liberation movement was once said to be so inclusive as to advocate sexual freedom and the potential for people to be sexual with both genders, thus leaving quite a bit of room for bisexual behavior within the gay movement (Paul 27).<sup>4</sup> Gays and lesbians who maintained

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<sup>2</sup> Kinsey had said in both the *Male and Female* volumes that it was impossible to determine the number of persons who were “homosexual” or “heterosexual.” Still, it was possible to determine sexual behavior at any given time, and the report listed 37% of males had at least one same-sex experience to orgasm (Kinsey et. al. 650). In comparison, 46% of the males surveyed had engaged in bisexual--that is, both heterosexual and homosexual--activities or “reacted to” persons of both sexes in the course of their adult lives (656).

<sup>3</sup> It is likely that before bisexuality got its media boost and a definite social image in 1974, people were just experimenting with and exploring all kinds of sexual possibilities in group orgies without pinning it down to bisexuality. Bisexual activist David Lourea recalled in an interview: “If you were lying down blindfolded and a number of people were touching you, you couldn’t tell whether they were male or female....Oh! A light bulb goes on! Maybe there isn’t a difference?” (Tucker, “Bay Area Bisexual History” 48) That is to say, the nature of those sexual contexts had made gender and status irrelevant for consideration/satisfaction of desire.

<sup>4</sup> The idea of bisexuality was considered so harmless to the gay crowd that when gay historian Dennis Altman wrote *Homosexual: Oppression and Liberation* in 1971, he even optimistically predicted that a greater acceptance of human sexuality will reduce the stigma associated with unorthodox sexualities and spur an “increase in overt bisexuality” (246). It was of course not clear whether Altman had in mind more heterosexual men finding homosexual sex acceptable and palatable, or more gay men finding heterosexual sex acceptable and palatable.

relationships with opposite-sex partners (esp. spouses) were rarely singled out or criticized, for it was generally understood as a necessity, a way to survive in the heterosexual world, and identity politics had not yet made exclusionary practices popular. There was likewise little need for the subject position of “bisexual” to be highlighted or politicized. It was in fact the media hype of 1974 that helped make “bi” into a stylish, chic, and trendy term,<sup>5</sup> attracting numerous models, celebrities, actresses, pop musicians, and avant-garde artists to tell their individual stories of bisexuality as a proclamation of an adventurous personality or an extra-ordinary lifestyle.<sup>6</sup> The glamour of such visibility did not, though, necessarily transfer unto the ordinary bisexuals; in fact, to bisexual activists, the confirmation of bisexuality as a normal form of human behavior by contemporary scholars such as Kate Millett and Margaret Mead was much more beneficial and affirming (Donaldson 39-41).

As gender/sexuality-oriented liberation movements grew and backlashes embodied in several important setbacks<sup>7</sup> followed in the second half of the 1970s, the urgent need to validate marginal identities and lives made essentialistic and exclusionary notions of identity increasingly appealing and powerful. Tangentially, trans-gender/sexual subjects found it increasingly difficult to maneuver their complicated and diverse gender/sexuality belonging. Or, to put it differently, the fluctuating or transgressing desires and identities of trans and bi subjects became increasingly incompatible with those movements that emphasized single-track identity and loyalty. Bisexual activists who suffered from such essentialism and exclusion were quite understanding of such emotional fixations on identity, for when “people have gone through pain and soul-searching to reach their identities, which provide them with a sense of unity, a social location, and a political commitment; to see those identities fluctuate would be unnerving, and would threaten the meaning of their personal histories” (Udis-Kessler, “Bisexuality in an Essentialist World” 58).<sup>8</sup> Still, as expected, the essentialistic tendency often took the form of exclusionary practices, as bisexual activists of the Off Pink Collective in UK observed:

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<sup>5</sup> In the month of May 1974, two leading US popular magazines, *Newsweek* and *Time*, concurred in featuring bisexuality as the newest chic with symptomatic titles such as “Bisexual Chic: Anyone Goes” and “The New Bisexuals” (Garber 18-19).

<sup>6</sup> Sandra Bernhardt and David Bowie were the most notable examples. More recent listing includes Drew Barrymore and Angelina Jolie.

<sup>7</sup> The Right’s aggressive offensive on abortion rights since the mid-1970s, Anita Bryant’s 1977 effort to “Save the Children” from the “recruitment” of homosexuality, and the stall of the Equal Rights Amendments ratification process in 1974 were some of the most profound cases of setback (cf. Seidman 99).

<sup>8</sup> Udis-Kessler also cautions that such essentialistic tendencies might “change bisexuality from a potential-for-either to a requirement-for-both identity, and this, in fact, is what happened. The lore which developed described bisexuals as people who could not be satisfied with either sex, but who had to be involved with both, usually at the same time. Bisexuals then became stereotyped as swingers who eschewed commitment and were promiscuous because there was no other way to categorically describe the bisexual drive that paralleled the homosexual or heterosexual drive” (“Bisexuality in an Essentialistic World” 60).

the Gay and lesbian movement in the 1960s and 1970s emerged in the counterculture as an inclusive movement for sexual liberation, but has gone through a series of narrowing, first splitting up gay men and lesbians, reserving the term gay only to men, and then further delimiting the definition of gay to that of negatively excluding and denouncing any heterosexual attraction or encounter. (Rose 6)

This narrowing tendency was prompted most profoundly by a historically induced and unfortunate equation of sexual orientation with political stance.<sup>9</sup> And it is here that existing gender/sexuality prejudices produced differential effects among the lesbian and gay communities. As the women's movement in the 1970s gradually turned lesbianism into "a political or intellectual concept" (Hollibaugh and Moraga 252), women's political commitment came to be understood as encompassing a sexual desire for women that implicates nothing in relation to men. One of the unfortunate fall-outs of Adrienne Rich's influential essay on "compulsory heterosexuality" was to eliminate heterosexuality as a viable choice for women's erotic fulfillment. For, as a compulsory act, heterosexual intercourse came to be seen as a suspicious act of collusion with patriarchal heterosexuality, and "sleeping with the enemy" was adopted as a graphic description for such collaboration. Along a similar line of thinking, Ti-Grace Atkinson's phrase "Feminism is a theory; lesbianism is a practice" was said to have been narrowed to "Feminism is *the* theory, lesbianism is *the* practice" (Udis-Kessler, "Identity/Politics" 18). As lesbianism became the only viable sexual identity for feminism, "the political aspect of lesbian identity came to be, for some women, even more important than its value as a description of their affectional or erotic preferences" (Ochs 229). Consequently, lesbian identity as an erotically charged subject position was being banished out of sight, not to mention the identity of bisexual women who dared to insist on a double relationship with both women and men: "At the end of the 1970s, rather than being a women-loving woman, a lesbian was a woman who did not sleep with men" (Udis-Kessler, "Identity/Politics" 23).

Significantly, while bisexual women in the lesbian camp were denounced as opportunistic traitors, gay men as a community did not seem to feel the same strength of resentment or sense of betrayal as lesbians did toward the bisexuals among them even at the height of identity politics. Robyn Ochs has noted that due to the "power dynamics associated with a sexist society," the accusation of "sleeping with the enemy" did not seem to carry the same connotation of surrender or disdainfulness for

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<sup>9</sup> Ironically, while lesbians narrowed their self-definition to exclude any contact with patriarchy and its heterosexuality, it was also at this exact historical moment that the predominantly heterosexual women's organization known as National Organization of Women (NOW) began narrowing its definition of women in general by declaring that the "lavender menace" is hindering feminism's effort to recruit more women from the general population (Ochs 230). The exorcism was so deeply felt that lesbians who had already experienced discrimination in the New Left attended the 1970 NOW convention by wearing T-shirts that proudly proclaimed their stigmatized label "Lavender Menace." This was also when Rita Mae Brown and Martha Shelley, known lesbians, were driven out of the women's movement (Adam 97; Echols 213-15).

gay men as for lesbian women (231). In the gay camp, bi men, “re-appropriated as gay, either ceased to exist as a separate and separable category, or else were put down as closeted, self-hating, or self-ignorant—men who were ‘really’ gay if only they had the courage to say so” (Garber 26). In other words, bisexuality was considered an act of betrayal in the lesbian camp but, and not without gender connotations, an act of cowardice in the gay camp. Bisexuality among gays and lesbians were perceived quite differently also because of another important gender/sexuality assumption: under the influence of what Teresa de Lauretis termed “the belief of hom(m)osexuality” (from the root word *hommo*, meaning male), the purpose of all sex tended to be seen as male gratification, and women were never considered agents of sexuality.<sup>10</sup> Consequently, bisexual gays were believed to have the best of both (heterosexual and homosexual) worlds, but bisexual lesbians were said to be sacrificing their lesbian lovers so as to help themselves play into the hands of men.<sup>11</sup> As political infighting spread among the homosexual communities, lesbian- and gay-identified bisexuals were gradually realizing “what shifts in the social institutions, psychic lives, and systems of meaning within the lesbian and gay communities made our identity and our movement not only possible but necessary” (Udis-Kessler, “Identity/Politics”18), thus the politicization of the bisexual identity.<sup>12</sup>

## II

The invalidation or denunciation of bisexuals in the gay and lesbian communities was much more than a political vendetta; in fact, the resenting labels heaped upon the bisexuals reflected a massive emotional force behind such indictments. For the discontent directed at bisexuality was significantly and deeply intertwined with other culturally-induced sexual discontents—against multiple partners, against promiscuity, against sexual openness, etc. The occasional or habitual promiscuity of gays could be relegated to a defect of individual conduct, an acceptable reality; but the structural multiplicity of bisexuals, even when it was only a potential instead of a reality, was beyond acceptance. For the bi identity itself announced a rejection of one gender, one sexual partner, one choice, one love—a rejection of all that is highly treasured by a monogamy-minded culture.

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<sup>10</sup> Teresa de Lauretis, “Sexual Indifference and Lesbian Repression”, *Theatre Journal* 40.2 (1980): 155-77.

<sup>11</sup> Such a view, heavily laden with a gender-only power analyses frequently associated with cultural feminism, finds an interesting parallel characterization in Janice Raymond’s vendetta against transsexuals.

<sup>12</sup> The first bisexual groups then developed in the 1970s in large U.S. cities. The National Bisexual Liberation Group was originally founded in New York in 1972 and claimed a large membership in the U.S. and abroad by 1975 with its publication “*The Bisexual Expression*,” probably the earliest bi newsletter. New York City’s Bi Forum began in 1975, San Francisco Bay Area’s Bi Center opened its door in 1976, and Chicago’s BiWays formed in 1978.

As identity politics transformed lesbian and gay politics, and as exclusionary definitions replaced inclusionary practices in the gay and lesbian movement, bisexuals came to be cast as “indiscriminate, disease-ridden, unwilling to commit, promiscuous, opportunistic, apolitical, cowardly, in a phase, and deceitful” (Young 53). Worse, they were also referred to as “fence-sitters, traitors, cop-outs, closet cases, people whose primary goal in life is to retain ‘heterosexual privilege,’ power-hungry cold-hearted seducers who use and discard their same-sex lovers like so many Kleenex” (Udis-Kessler, “Bisexuality in an Essentialist World” 51).<sup>13</sup> The labels themselves bespoke of a profound resentment that could not be adequately explained by mere political estrangement. Judging from the prevalence of such labels in the lesbian community in particular, the resentment stemmed not only from a sense of forlorn bitterness toward occurrences of personal erotic/emotional infidelity. It also reflected a poignant recognition of the harsh realities of existing gender inequality--expressed as legitimate and “profitable” patriarchal heterosexuality--that made any possible inclusion of a different-gender object-choice a predetermined and inevitable tragedy. Whether bisexuals chose to act upon their bi potential or not, the mere insistence of their bisexual identity affirmed a structural openness that presaged an imminent threat for their lovers. Suspected of disloyalty in personal relationships and alienated as traitors to the homosexual cause, it was little wonder that bisexuals frequently experienced “a feeling of political and personal homelessness” (Schuster 267).

If the gay and lesbian community suffered from gender/sexuality assumptions in its evaluation of bisexual gays and lesbians, the confusions and complexities in maneuvering personal erotic relationships as well as bisexual identities likewise did not escape the impact of the same assumptions. Just as other sexual minorities who had to do without social and cultural support, bisexuals often had great difficulties explaining their identity to their lovers in the looming melancholy of potential insincerity, promiscuity, and infidelity—all poisonous for the construction and maintenance of intimate relationships within highly monogamy-minded culture. A strong sense of guilt might also result for the bisexual because mainstream culture looked negatively upon individuals (of any sexual orientation) who chose to live a seemingly poly-amorous lifestyle, exemplified by many of the morally condemning labels attached to bisexuals. In addition to such pressure from a sex-negative culture, bisexual lesbians and bisexual gays who chose to take action on their bisexual

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<sup>13</sup> In response, a whole array of names has been developed by bisexuals to resist the weight of stigma and to describe their identity and existence. Some of the bi-affirmative buttons photographed in *Bi Any Other Name* include: “Happy Bi Nature,” “Bi-phobia Shield,” “Bisexual and Proud to be Lesbian,” “Unity is our Bi Word,” “Blatantly Bisexual,” “Bi the way, don’t assume I’m gay,” “Safe Sex Bi All Means,” “Bisexual and Proud to be Gay,” “Stop, this is insulting to bisexual power” (Hutchins & Kaahumanu, 214). When Liz Nania wrote about the 1987 National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights, she was also thrilled to find “glittery signs proclaiming: ‘We’re Not Fence Sitters, We’re Bridge Builders,’ ‘Bisexuality is a Viable Option,’ and ‘Equal Opportunity Lover’” (366).

potentials might also be seen as fulfilling the cultural stereotype that the bisexual “social-climber” would always forsake his/her lover of a sexual minority for another lover who belonged to mainstream heterosexuality.<sup>14</sup> Of course, such valuations reflected nothing of the soul-searching and painful struggling that many bisexual subjects themselves were going through, groping in uncharted territory to understand their own inclusive emotions and infatuations within the restricted binary system of gender as well as the equally restricted monogamous system of sexuality.

Even within the lesbian community of the 1970s and 1980s, gender/sexuality coloring exerted very different effects on bisexual lesbians with different gender images. As femininity came to equal desire for men within the lesbian camp, and as femme’s femininity came to be seen by some lesbians as the embodiment of patriarchal oppression, bisexual femmes were viewed in an even more unfavorable light than bisexual butches. A butch may be doing it out of a moment’s weakness or for some undisclosed purpose, but a femme must be doing it because she was plotting to jilt her lesbian lover and to throw herself into the arms of men at the most opportune moment. Little attention was paid to the fact that the femme could be “aggressively flirting with dominant cultures in order to secure her own legibility as lesbian, as queer, as a subject in her own right” (Hemmings 95). Gender/Sexuality prejudices seemed to have always exacerbated the tension and complexities already present in individual erotic relationships.

It should be mentioned here that some lesbians—in particular, femmes—have always insisted on keeping a much closer and complicated relationship with bisexuality. In spite of being suspected by their butches of harboring a heterosexual object-choice,<sup>15</sup> many lesbian femmes maintained a strong commitment to their bisexual inclinations and invented a wide variety of names to express their identify both as lesbians and bisexuals,: *bi-dyke*, *bi-lesbians*, *bi-feminist*, *lesbian-identified bisexual*, *bisexual*, *bi-affectional*, *formerly-lesbian bisexual*, *bisexual lesbian*, and *bisexual femmes*.<sup>16</sup> The insistence has not only striven to keep lesbianness and bisexuality connected but also maintained the possibility of a feminism that is both sensitive toward alternative erotic choices and clear-headed in object choices:

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<sup>14</sup> Ironically, in the lesbian world, a proclamation of being bi is read as surrendering to heterosexuality; yet in the heterosexual world, the same proclamation of being bi is read as a refusal to abide by the heterosexual norm. Dvora Zipkin once retorted defiantly: “Bisexuality says, ‘even if I am sleeping with men, do not assume that I am heterosexual, for I am gay too. I, too, live, affirm and validate a lesbian lifestyle. After all, I’m gay too’” (63).

<sup>15</sup> Many lesbians who came out in the 1970s’ atmosphere of political identities turned toward heterosexuality in the 1980s. They were bitterly resented and were awarded the hateful terms of “hasbians” or “ex-lesbians” (Young 77-79).

<sup>16</sup> In contrast to such efforts to recognize the coexistence of the lesbian and the bisexual in the same subject, others labels have been read as deliberate efforts to avoid the ‘bi’ word: “gay married men, lesbians who sleep with men, heterodyke, heterosexually married gay men, queer hetero-sex, heterosexual women who swing with women, lesbians with ‘boy-toys,’ lesbians and gay men who sports-fuck with the opposite sex,” etc. (Hutchins & Kaahumanu 216)

The plurality of names, and the combinations used, are all attempts, in our clumsy and woman-wordless language, to create this identity, to make ourselves recognizable. To indicate that we, as feminists and women who recognize the realities of sexism and heterosexism, embrace our queerness, our lesbianism, our woman-loving, and also claim and embrace our openness to men. (Weise xv)

### III

What needs to be stressed is that the openness of bisexuality envisioned here is to be understood not only as a long-perceived openness to possible object choices,<sup>17</sup> but more importantly as an openness to the unknown and undetermined courses of development for identities as well as erotic desires. And it is in this re-conceptualization and re-characterization of bisexuality that recent theorists and activists attempt to tackle some of the afore-mentioned gender/sexuality assumptions and prejudices at their root.

Sexologists who had been quite unhappy about describing bisexuality with a uni-dimensional definition based merely on genital-oriented object-choice have long preferred a more complicated understanding of sexual orientation. The Klein Sexual Orientation Grid (KSOG), for one, recognizes that people's sexuality may change over time.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, in reference to the bisexual orientation, Klein et. al. proclaim: "sexual orientation cannot be reduced to a bipolar or even tripolar process, but must be recognized within a dynamic and multivariate framework" (64). After all, some people may experience their sexuality as a lifelong constant, others as a series of stages, some as a choice, and many as a constant flux. And more often than not, the biological sex of the object choice is not the final determining factor in sexual orientation; a whole host of other factors involved in a dynamic relationship must be taken into consideration. Some sexologists have even suggested that those who study bisexuality begin their research by identifying the sexual aim variations involved, as well as observing the modes of emotional erotic interaction with both genders (Hansen & Evans 5).<sup>19</sup> In short, an individual's sexual orientation is

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<sup>17</sup> Along with the gay-affirmative adoption of the term "queer" as an in-your-face self-description by gays, lesbians, and other sexual minorities, the San Francisco-based bi publication of *Anything That Moves* also adopts the negative stereotype, anything that moves, as a label of self-pride in 1991.

<sup>18</sup> As to the changes in sexual orientation, they may come about "because of personal choices, circumstance, meeting a particular person or persons, or, simply, because of one's most basic sense of self" (Zipkin 62).

<sup>19</sup> Feminists such as Esther Newton and Shirley Walton have likewise expressed their discontent with existing sexual vocabulary, claiming that we need at least four different concepts to "communicate with each other about sex": sexual preference, erotic identity, erotic role, and erotic acts (244-248). Existing sexual identities such as heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual obviously say very little beyond the biological sex of a person's object choice. In fact, such terms reflect what has been termed the "genitalization of human sexuality" (De Cecco xiii).



composed of sexual and non-sexual variables which differ over time and may include special preferences in attraction, behavior, fantasy, lifestyle, emotional preference, social preference, self-identification (Klein et. al. 67-68).

Such a more complicated view toward bisexuality has been confirmed by the realities of many bisexual lives. Bisexual confessionals often tell of experiences in learning about one's sexual orientation only after one has gone through a number of erotic twists and turns in life, of falling in and out of love and falling in love again with people of varied gender/sex affiliations, of affirming one sexual identity only to find other erotic impulses at variance with that chosen identity. "The erotic discovery of bisexuality is the fact that it reveals sexuality to be a process of growth, transformation, and surprise, not a stable and knowable state of being" (Garber 66). In her lead essay for the volume *Closer to Home: Bisexuality & Feminism* (1992), Ruth Gibian proposes that it is because our culture defines sexual orientation in terms of "sexual stasis"--in terms of finding a true self (and a true love) and settling there--that it often encourages an invalidation of our emotional history and an erasure of conflicting feelings, paradoxes, and ambiguities (5), thus turning bisexual lives into lives built upon nothing but bad faith. Gibian thus challenges: "If, in other parts of our lives, we don't strive to be static beings, but value growth, development and change, why should our sexual beings be any different?" (4). The fact of the matter is, many bisexuals have already demonstrated with the full, complex, and often contradictory stories of their life histories that "sexuality is a narrative, not a fixed label" (Garber 74).

This understanding of bisexual formations as fluidity and complexity reflects the recent efforts of bisexuals and theorists to navigate the pitfalls of identity politics. When one of the earliest bi anthologies, *Bi Any Other Name: Bisexual People Speak Out*, was published in 1991, the editors, Loraine Hutchings and Lani Ka'ahumanu, had provided a glossary that defined "bisexual" as "people who have erotic, affectionate, romantic feelings for, fantasies of, and experiences with women and men, and/or who self-identify as bisexual" (369). When the Off Pink Collective published *Bisexual Horizons: Politics, Histories, Lives* in 1996, bisexuality is no longer to be understood in terms of "two," because validation of "all of the components of social/sexual complexity" is said to have already been gradually recognized (Jordan 15). Only one year later, another volume on bisexuality clearly states that the important dividing line is that bisexuality transcends the rigidity of "one," moving beyond what Marjorie Garbers refers to as "monosexual restrictiveness" (18) and toward multiplicity: "Moving across sexes, across genders, across sexualities, bi-ness warmly embraces multiple desires and identifications while repudiating all 'monosexual' imperatives" (Bristow 225). As the self-definition of bisexuals moves beyond the two-gender/two-sex system, a much more complicated vision that seems to extend beyond traditionally-conceived "bi"-sexuality also emerges. Naomi Tucker claims: "I relate bisexuality to openness. It is, for me, a willingness to acknowledge feelings, despite prevailing taboos, and to break down the prefabricated

barriers that our culture instills within us” (Tucker, “What’s in a Name” 246).

When openness and complexity again characterize the bisexual, as it did once before in the 1960s, other old concepts suddenly regained new currency. Writing about bisexuality in the mid-1990s, Marjorie Garber proclaims: “This is the new bisexuality, which is to say, the old bisexuality—bisexuality as eroticism, ‘un-pigeonholed sexual identity,’ *not* bisexuality as the ‘third’ choice between, or beyond, hetero- or homo-sex” (Garber 18). The ideas of Freud and Marcuse are returning with a new vengeance. As Garber puts it, it is exactly in “the positive impulse toward perverseness, the erotic appeal of transgression, the desire that itself comes from crossing a boundary that bisexuality structures its essential being (29).<sup>20</sup> As such, the bisexual imperative, and its challenge to mainstream notions of “mono”-sexuality is “to insist upon complexity, to insist upon the validity of all of the components of social/sexual complexity, to insist upon the equal validity of all the components of social/sexual complexity” (Jordan 15).

Such a new and liberated vision of bi-sexuality has also tended to highlight the subversive potential of bisexuality. A typical example reads:

Bisexuality unsettles certainties: straight, gay, lesbian. It has affinities with all of these, and is delimited by none. It is, then, an identity that is also *not* an identity, a sign of the certainty of ambiguity, the stability of instability, a category that defies and defeats categorization. (Garber 70)

Jo Eadie has even proposed that we embrace the idea of a “tactical identity” since “all identities, attributes, personality traits, beliefs and desires are negotiated differently in different conditions” (18). In other words, an identification is an identity that we hold unto only within particular circumstances. In case questions are raised concerning the utility and validity of such an extremely fluid notion of identity, advocates assure that “The ambiguous nature of our sexuality needn’t imply any ambiguity in our politics” (Orlando 230). After all, as they say, we can always follow Klein et. al. in distinguishing “between *sexual orientation* (the entire complexity and multiplicity of our experience, including attraction, behavior, fantasies, emotional preference, social preference) and *sexual identity* (the name we give to best fit that experience at any given time)” (Gibian 8-9). A further distinction may even be suggested between sexual desires and sexual relationships so that subjects could validate their feelings while also validate the monogamous relationship that is being maintained as long as it lasts.

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<sup>20</sup> Not all theorists of bisexuality are as upbeat as Garber. Young cautions that “we need to recognize that bisexuality is imbricated in the homo/hetero binarism that structures the rest of society—it does not transcend that dichotomy, though it may in some cases work to subvert it. Our task should be to interrogate this imbrication with an eye to how it might be transformed—not to circumvent that difficult work as if by fiat” (69). Gayle Rubin has likewise cautioned against crudely equating sexual orientation with sexual identities and political positions (480n).

#### IV

*Individuals should be allowed to navigate their own trails through the possibilities, complexities, and difficulties of life in postmodern times. Each strategy and each set of categories has its capabilities, accomplishments, and drawbacks....Categories...are all imperfect, historical, temporary, and arbitrary...We use them to construct meaningful lives, and they mold us into historically specific forms of personhood. (Rubin 477)*

The emphasis on openness and complexity in bisexuality is much more than a simple theoretical feat. It has found echoes in the life stories of many who can now confess and discuss the realities of their differently-constructed sexual lives--realities that have always already transgressed beyond the hegemonic, exclusive, two-gender-oriented system of comprehension.<sup>21</sup> In fact, with the rigid compartmentalization of binary systems loosened, a wide variety of alternative sexual encounters and experiences have now become both thinkable and speakable.

The most naughty example may be the not-so-unusual intimate relations between gays or lesbians with someone of the opposite sex. Pat Califia once recounted when he was still a lesbian, she had stumbled into performing fisting for a gay man. Should this erotic encounter be considered heterosexual or homosexual? Should Califia be considered bisexual? The questions are meaningful only if we limit ourselves to thinking in terms of the genitals. For, as Califia is keen to notice, "Men at handballing parties don't usually cruise each other's dicks. They cruise each other's hands and forearms" (184), and it was Califia's small hands that made the gay men grant her the opportunity to learn. Genitals are hardly the first or the only factor that makes up erotic attraction or arousal after all. Califia is also unequivocal about that: "when I turn on to a man it's because he shares some aspect of my sexuality (like S/M or fisting) that turns me on *despite* his biological sex" (185). In other words, bisexuality becomes a moot term when sexuality is understood beyond genital terms. In another example of the mutual desire and fascination between famous lesbian Joan Nestle and gay man John Preston, the non-genital nature of such an erotic desire between a man and a woman is by no means heterosexual but "utterly queer" (Hemmings 96). Perhaps, as Gayle Rubin reads butch and femme as "ways of

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<sup>21</sup> Andy Plumb, who says he has been a "bisexual-transvestite, a quadrisexual, a male lesbian, and androgyne, a 'Don't label me'/post-modern sexual being," now describes himself as a Bi-Bi Sexual doing the "transgend-dance" (18).

coding identities and behaviors that are both connected to and distinct from standard societal roles for men and women” (467), “bisexual” acts should also be read as both connected and distinct from standard gay and lesbian and heterosexual roles. And if we follow the same line of inquiry, then the seemingly problematic lesbian desire for masculinity in FTMs or for transgendered butches, the seemingly uncharacterizable desire of a pre-op MTF for an effeminate gay, and many other unconventional combinations, desires that have long been subjected to suspicion and questioning, would also acquire some room for breathing.

As such cases continue to surface when brave souls choose to validate and affirm their feelings and experiences despite social and sexual stigma, the community of marginal sexualities is once again reminded of its complacency in regard to the limits of gender/sexuality categories and related assumptions and prejudices. For to view these un-orthodox relations as heterosexual or homosexual would be a gross misrepresentation of what was going on. And to describe these subjects as “bisexual” in the dimorphic sense of the word would be likewise an over-simplification. Gender/sexuality categories are simply unable to arrest the real-life subjects that are said to inhabit them; nor could such categorization comprehend the complex dynamics of gender/sexuality formations.<sup>22</sup> Just when you thought a new category has been installed to adequately describe a certain kind of subjectivity, a closer look reveals other innuendos: “Some butches are psychologically indistinguishable from female-to-male transsexuals....The boundaries between the categories of butch and transsexual are permeable” (Rubin 473). And when a gender subject decides to shift categories, the same exact person falls utterly out of favor overnight: “A woman who has been respected, admired, and loved as a butch may suddenly be despised, rejected, and hounded when she starts a sex change” (Rubin 475).<sup>23</sup>

These and more examples like them have already demonstrated the impact of gender/sexuality categories and their cultural loadings upon marginal sexualities, often resulting in painful bickering and estrangement. As trans-sexuality, a sexuality that transcends and transgresses the biology-oriented categorization, perhaps bisexuality and its ramifications may be better served if we adopt bisexual sexologist and activist David Lourea’s broad vision for bisexuality in the last interview he gave before his death in 1992:

*Of course it’s not just about sex. It’s about a way of being. It’s about he right for us to be different, the right for us to express who we are...The political issues are far greater than just our sexuality; they involve issues*

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<sup>22</sup> Gayle Rubin’s essay on catamites and kings aptly describes such awkwardness.

<sup>23</sup> Rubin further observes, “Obnoxious behavior that would be tolerated in a butch will often be considered intolerable in an FTM. Like other groups of stigmatized individuals, transsexuals are often subjected to particularly stringent standards of conduct” (482n).

*of power and dominance. They involve issues of misogyny...of class struggles...* (Tucker, "Bay Area Bisexual History" 56)

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