

Journal of **Bi**sexuality™

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KEYWORDS. Bisexuality, self-esteem, life satisfaction, self-image, bisexual identity, bisexual behavior

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KEYWORDS. Personals, personal ads, contacts, contact ads, London, UK, bisexuality, bisexual, swinging, swing scene, behavioral bisexuality

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This article describes the coming-out process of a married bisexual man from The Netherlands. He describes his feelings and observes the changes in his life, the reactions from his environment. In the last part of the article, he reflects on the future.

KEYWORDS. Bisexuality, coming-out, open marriage, married bisexual man, non-monogamy

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KEYWORDS. Leather, BDSM, bondage and discipline, dominance and submission, sadomasochism, kinky, vanilla, play party, gay, lesbian, transgender, homosexuality, bisexuality, heterosexuality, pansexuality

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KEYWORDS. Marriage, unmarried, alternatives to marriage, family diversity, bisexuality, Alternatives to Marriage Project, interviews, research, qualitative research, married bisexuals, unmarried bisexuals, same-sex relationships, different-sex relationships

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KEYWORDS. Biphobia, bisexuality, identity, labeling, sexual orientation

BI MEDIA VISIBILITY

The Pleasure and Pain of *Chasing Amy*: Analyzing Reactions
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Jonathan Alexander
Karen Yescavage

Kevin Smith's film Chasing Amy met with a great diversity of response among lesbians, gays, and bisexuals. Some lauded the film as an honest and complex exploration of sexuality, while others castigated it for portraying what they took

to be stereotypical, even homophobic characters. Hoping to understand these diverse reactions better, we collected multiple viewer responses to the film for analysis and interpretation. Ultimately, we argue that the reactions we found bespeak both competing and shifting attitudes about the nature of sexuality and its relationship to identity in our culture. Further, we discuss how reactions to the film cluster around certain identifiable and significant categories; for instance, some responses trouble the gay/straight dichotomy, others reassert that dichotomy, and still others explore possible images of self beyond that dichotomy, such as a bisexual or bi-erotic identity.

KEYWORDS. Bisexuality and film, *Chasing Amy*, film, bisexuality, interpretation of popular culture, interpretation of film, interpretation of *Chasing Amy*

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From the Editor

Fritz Klein, MD

As I write this introduction to Volume 1 Number 4 of the *Journal of Bisexuality*, the first issue of Volume 1 has already appeared. All the people who have read it agree that this journal is most timely and important. They praise its style as well as its content and what I believe is most important is that they enjoyed reading it.

What we are trying to achieve with this journal is to publish some of the latest research on the subjects of bisexuality as well as sexual orientation. These two subjects are being looked at more and more this decade. We have more people doing serious research, writing about it in the popular press, and discovering the complexity, advantages, and disadvantages of bisexuality in our society.

The journal was fortunate in getting two wonderful editors for Volume 1 Number 2/3, namely Brett Beemyn and Erich Steinman, who did such an excellent job in editing "Bisexuality in the Lives of Men: Facts and Fictions."

In Volume 1, Number 4, we once again have a mixture of serious new research as well as a number of fascinating articles on bisexuality. The research articles published in this issue are Carol D. Bronn's "Attitudes and Self-Images of Male and Female Bisexuals" and M. Michele Amestoy's "Research on Sexual Orientation Labels' Relationship to Behavior and Desires."

We have two wonderful articles which were contributed by Europeans, Koen Brand's "Coming Out Successfully in The Netherlands" and from Great Britain, Sue George's "Making Sense of Bisexual Personal Ads."

Two fascinating articles are Steve Lenius's "Bisexuals and BDSM: Bisexual People in a Pansexual Community" and Dorian Solot and Marshall Miller's article, "Unmarried Bisexuals: Distinct Voices on Marriage and Family."

We have our regular Bi Media Visibility column by Karen Yescavage and Jonathan Alexander, which discusses the film *Chasing Amy*; a Bi Film-Video World column called "Blame Canada" by Wayne M. Bryant which reviews a number of films, and a Bi Books column by Heather Macmillan which reviews Jan Clausen's book *Apples & Oranges*. David Van Leer adds short reviews of several books, and there are two cartoons by Dan Clurman.

The *Journal of Bisexuality* will only succeed with a continuation of important and interesting research articles as well as personal narratives. We, therefore, need additional contributors. I ask you once again to get in touch with me if you have an idea for an article or wish to write one for the journal. You can reach me at: 619-542-0088 or at: fritzklein@aol.com.

My thanks again to the hard working people at The Haworth Press, Inc., who make this journal possible, and to my assistant to the editor, Regina Reinhardt.

Fritz Klein, MD

**Attitudes
and
Self-Images
of
Male
and
Female
Bisexuals**

Carol D. Bronn

ABSTRACT. This project investigates the attitudes and perceptions of male and female bisexuals regarding self-image. An Internet survey composed of the *Satisfaction with Life Scale* (SWLS), the Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale, and a multiple-choice opinion section that focuses on sexual orientation is examined from 112 participants. Previous conclusions that bisexuals have low self-esteem and quality of life problems are not duplicated. One-way ANOVA and chi-square tests reveal that bisexual self-identity and behavior images reflect changes and variation within the bisexual orientation. The research concludes that although some bisexuals have conflicts, or are in transition moving up and down a continuum over time, many identify solidly as bisexual over a long, stable period. [Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-342-9678. E-mail address: <getinfo@haworthpressinc.com> Website: <<http://www.HaworthPress.com>> ©2001 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]

KEYWORDS. Bisexuality, self-esteem, life satisfaction, self-image, bisexual identity, bisexual behavior

INTRODUCTION

Bisexuals do not fit into the dichotomous categories in which our society attempts to place people (Firestein, 1996; Klein, 1978; Rust, 1993; Stokes, Damon, & McKirnan, 1997). Western society dictates that a person is either male or female, heterosexual or homosexual. Because of this, bisexuals are stigmatized, rejected, and often misunderstood by both heterosexuals and homosexuals (Klein, 1993; Ochs, 1996; Wayson, 1986). Studies of human sexuality generally ignore bisexuals or include them with homosexuals. Many people are reluctant to admit that bisexuals exist (Ault, 1996; Wayson, 1986; Zinki, 1985). Others disagree about definitions of sexual behavior, orientation, and self-identity. Even the term *bisexual*, for some researchers, is strictly sex-object choice (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1976a). Persons who identify as bisexual are often treated with hostility, considered confused, or accused of “fence sitting” (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1976a; Geller, 1990; Klein, 1993; Lourea, 1985; Zinki, 1985). With such a diverse and complex sexual orientation, the clinical and empirical research concentrating solely on bisexuality is scarce. This research project examines self-images of male and female bisexuals concerning self-esteem, life satisfaction, general well being, and sexual preference disclosure.

The purpose of this study is to expand previous research through data

pertaining to the personal attitudes and reflective self-images of bisexual men and women. Data is gathered through an Internet survey. The research describes self-identified bisexuals by demographic categories of age and gender. The goal of this study is similar to that of many bisexual organizations and networks—that is, to promote the understanding and acceptance of bisexuality as a sexual orientation and identity. It is hoped that the information will be helpful in bringing bisexual men and women into a dynamic, rather than deviant, social context.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sexual Categories

The frequently cited 1940s and 1950s data of Kinsey and his colleagues shocked society with their estimated numbers of same-sex relations. Their studies estimated that 37% of the total male population and approximately 8% to 20% of females took part in at least some overt homosexual experience or contact (Kinsey, Pomeroy, & Martin, 1948; Kinsey, Pomeroy, Martin, & Gebhard, 1953). The shock to society over the number of same-sex relations resulted in an effort to examine only homosexuals. Most of these early studies disregarded a large segment of the population that is not exclusively homosexual and does not fit neatly into a single category. Since then, individuals who have an emotional and physical attraction to both men and women have been researched and written about (Firestein, 1996; Hutchins & Kaahumanu, 1992; Klein, 1978, 1993; Kinsey et al., 1948, 1953; Tucker, 1995).

Dichotomous categories of sexuality do not agree with measuring sexuality on a continuum (Lever, Kanouse, Rogers, Carson, & Hertz, 1992; Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1996). The Kinsey Scale introduced the idea that people are not necessarily divided into two distinct sexual orientation groups, heterosexual and homosexual. Rather, on the 7-point scale, 0 denotes exclusively heterosexual, 3 is an even attraction to males and females, and 6 means exclusively homosexual (Kinsey et al., 1948). Disagreement concerning the parameters of bisexuality exists. For example, is it only those who score three on the scale that are bisexuals, or is it all of those between two and five on the scale (Carolo, 1997)?

Early research linked bisexuality with the gay community, focusing on males only. Many times, the type of same-sex behavior studied is in prisons, public restrooms, rest stops, and among male prostitutes or clients (Lever et

al., 1992). The amount of literature that treats all same-sex relationships, including bisexual ones, as healthy, personal decisions in a community setting is increasing (Klein, 1993; Geller, 1990; Hutchins & Kaahumanu, 1991; Tucker, 1995). In addition, insights into female bisexuality are also now available (Firestein, 1996; Hutchins & Kaahumanu, 1991; Tucker, 1995). The nature of bisexuality has many explanations, theories, and views.

Views on Bisexuality

A number of theories explaining what constitutes bisexuality underpin the debate. The dichotomous theory is that bisexuality is a transitory stage in the route to homosexuality (Klein, 1978; McKirnan, Stokes, & Doll, 1995; Rust, 1993; Stokes et al., 1997). Others view bisexuals as confused, ambivalent, or unable to decide on any one sexual preference (McKirnan et al., 1995; Zinik, 1985). Some groups maintain bisexuality is an androgynous approach, which does not place limitations on sexual experiences (Klein, 1978; Rust, 1993; Zinik, 1985). The continuum viewpoint, held by others, allows for varying degrees of bisexuality. Individual bisexuality is diverse, and many bisexuals remain with unchanged identity and behaviors over time (MacDonald, 1983; Stokes, McKirnan, & Burzette, 1993; Tucker, 1995).

In a study by Zinik, the controversy is condensed into two theories, the conflict model and the flexibility model of bisexuality. The conflict model, which views bisexuality as “the inability to decide one’s sexual preference” (Zinik, 1985: p. 9), portrays individuals as anxious and confused. The foundation of the conflict model is the dichotomy of two sexes; men and women are opposites, and anyone with a simultaneous sexual orientation is a contradiction. Included in the model is the assumption that bisexuality is a way to deny or hide an underlying homosexual orientation (Zinik, 1985).

The flexibility model represents bisexuality with conceptual differences when compared to the conflict model. The flexibility model sees the bisexual orientation as an “attraction to qualities of particular people rather than aspects of gender per se” (Zinik, 1985: p. 11). In addition, there is a “cognitive and interpersonal flexibility and, for some people, the desire for personal growth and fulfillment” (Zinik, 1985: p. 9). The basis for this model is that sexual behavior operates across a spectrum between heterosexual and homosexual desire. The assumption is that ambivalence is not always inevitable and people are capable of sexual flexibility (Zinik, 1985).

A combination of the two theories is the experience for some bisexuals, while others are flexible and some are in conflict (Zinik, 1985). The conflict model could apply to initial bisexuality, due to lack of social support and

dichotomous thinking. Without support and information about the intricacies that encompass more than one gender-attraction, individuals may become confused or conflicted. When a bisexual self-identity is maintained over time, some individuals reach a state of balance. As described in the flexibility model, sexual interests and behavior are integrated into bisexuals' self-concept and lifestyle (Zinik, 1985).

Included in the complexities of bisexuality are stereotypical views of personality traits and behaviors associated with sex roles. The typical stereotypes include male heterosexuals and female homosexuals as masculine, female heterosexuals and male homosexuals as feminine, and male and female bisexuals as androgynous or indifferent (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1996; Stokes, Kilmann, & Wanlass, 1983). Stokes and associates measure mean scores from 186 subjects using a sex role inventory scale. Six sex role groups (male and female heterosexuals, homosexuals, and bisexuals) were tested. The study found that no particular sex-role orientation was significantly associated with any sexual orientation group. This conclusion did not support the popular stereotypes that view non-heterosexuals as deviating from conventional sex roles (Stokes et al., 1983).

Negative stereotypes prevail in society regardless of research findings, theories, and agreed-upon assumptions. The stance that is taken by a researcher does not change the intolerance and pressures applied to bisexuals by society. The view held by the majority of people is that individuals who depart from sexual attitudes and behaviors outside the norm are labeled as deviant (Watson, 1999). Bisexuals were not only without social support, they were viewed as breaking the norms of both heterosexual and homosexual society (Nurius, 1983; Ochs, 1996; Stokes et al., 1983). Groups and specific networks that cater to only bisexuals developed very slowly during the 1970s and 1980s. This decreased social validation has left bisexuals with an additional label, one of being emotionally, psychologically, and morally unstable (Nurius, 1983). The labeling, in turn, affects self-esteem, depression, marital discord, sexual dysfunction, and results in isolation, as well as other related problems (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1977; Engel & Saracino, 1986; Nurius, 1983; Rust, 1993; Wayson, 1986). Negative mental health implications, coupled with adverse effects upon the sense of self in general, are not attributed to a bisexual orientation. Health issues develop from fear of confrontation, anxiety over disclosure, and social isolation (Lourea, 1985).

In her study of four sexual orientation groups, heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, and asexual, Nurius examined clinically relevant mental health problem areas (Nurius, 1983). Both men and women were measured for

relationships between sexual attitudes/activities and depression, self-esteem, marital discord and sexual discord. In the final analysis, background characteristics and sexual conservatism or liberalism were controlled for in order to eliminate effects. "Sexual orientation was not significantly related to self-esteem, marital discord, or sexual discord, but was to depression" (Nurius, 1983: p. 132). Asexuals indicated the most disturbance, followed by homosexuals, bisexuals, and then heterosexuals (Nurius, 1983; Snyder, Weinrich, & Pillard, 1994). Social expectations and social sanctions are potential influences that need to be considered (Nurius, 1983).

For some researchers (e.g., Troiden, 1989), the self-identity of being bisexual is a transition phase to a more homosexual self-identity. Because of social judgements toward homosexuals, the move is stressful for individuals in such a transition (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1976b; Stokes et al., 1993). For those who self-identify as bisexuals, yet do not sexually behave as bisexuals, many tend to exhibit more negative effects including dissonance and discomfort (Stokes et al., 1993). The pattern of higher life quality is self reflected by individuals that are behaviorally bisexual, yet do not self-identify with a sexual orientation of bisexuality (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1977; Nurius, 1983; Lever et al., 1992; Stokes et al., 1993). Speculation is that "non-anxious men with high self-esteem may be more likely to act on their sexual attraction to men or women . . . by expressing both major components of sexuality" (Stokes et al., 1993: p. 211). The study does not have a comparison group of those who both behave and identify as bisexual.

In a comparison of heterosexual, bisexual, and homosexual men, levels of adaptive and non-adaptive functioning based on attentional characteristics and interpersonal dynamics are examined (Wayson, 1986). Some of the characteristics tested are the ability to narrow attention appropriately and the tendency to become anxious and attentionally confused in response to internal and external stimuli (Wayson, 1986). Wayson discusses the competitive factor test results, which includes physical orientation, the need for interpersonal control, and self-esteem. These measures were most identified with heterosexuals and least associated with homosexuals (Wayson, 1986). The bisexual group had slightly higher self-esteem scores than the other two groups. However, bisexuals scored lowest on attentional narrowing, leaving them the least skilled at focusing and concentrating on a task. The loss of these function skills is possible ". . . because they themselves have to compensate for an acute lack of social validation, a dilemma which may create the need to maintain a false persona" (Wayson, 1986: p. 70). Wayson suggests that bisexuals react more quickly and with less anxiety than others because

they may feel their actions are legitimate (Wayson, 1986). The study concludes with an underscore of the many views on bisexuality. "More questions have arisen than have been answered" (Wayson, 1986: p. 71-72).

Characterizing Bisexuality

The question of how to characterize bisexuality is answered by much speculation. If a study was originally designed to investigate homosexuality and the bisexual data is a byproduct, there is often a bias towards homosexuality (Hershberger, 1977; MacDonald, 1983). Self-selection of respondents accounts for another discrepancy in measurement. This occurs when a majority of heterosexuals have sex with both males and females, but do not identify as a bisexual (Lever et al., 1992). Perhaps the biggest debate centers on what to use as an identity criterion. The two methods of distinguishing bisexuals from other sexual orientations are by self-identification and by sexual behavior. Some researchers use respondents that self-identify, others employ sexual behavior patterns, and many use a combination of both.

Some of the behaviors used in research include erotic fantasy or arousal, engaging in sexual activity with both sexes, and length of time between same-sex encounters (Ellis, Burke, & Ames, 1987). For a number of studies, self-accepting or self-identifying as a bisexual is added to the behavioral activities measured. A sexual orientation grid or survey, such as the Bem Sex Role Inventory (Bem, 1981) or the Klein Sexual Orientation Grid (Klein, 1978, 1993), may be used to determine how many applicable behaviors are present in respondents (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1976ab, 1977; Rust, 1993; Zinik, 1985). For some researchers, emotional intimacy is not measured in order to account for impersonal sexual relations that have no emotional attachment (Chung & Katayama, 1996; McKirnan et al., 1995; Stokes et al., 1993). Sexual activity viewed by the respondent as "a diversion" without intimacy is also underrepresented when evaluating sexual preference versus sexual orientation. A combination of behavior and self-identity is usually used in studies that compare heterosexuals, homosexuals, and bisexuals (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1976ab, 1977; Rust, 1993; Zinik, 1985).

The sexual behavior exhibited and acted upon by bisexuals is not always divided equally between males and females. One speculation on behavior is, "A bisexual's proclivities usually lean toward one sex or the other in something of a 60:40 or 30:70 ratio" (Zinik, 1985: p. 8). Besides the length of involvement or significance status of the partner, the actual sex act is the behavior measured. The gender of the partner and descriptive details of exact sexual activity engaged in are also measures of behavior and self-assessment.

Meticulous sexual history for this type of study is obtained from in-depth personal interviews (Dixon, 1985; Goldbaum, Perdue, & Higgins, 1996; Stokes et al., 1993).

In order to avoid assumptions of sexual orientation, multidimensional assessment methods are an option for researchers. These methods combine social and sexual behavior with affective and physical/sexual preference. Social relationships, lifestyle, and sexual activity comprise the behavior categories. Emotional attachment, feelings, social preference, and erotic fantasies make up the preference dimension. At this time, there is no trend being followed by researchers for one method of assessing sexual orientation and determining the characteristics of bisexuality (Chung & Katayama, 1996).

Social structure places increased pressure, stigma, and negative stereotypes upon those individuals who openly disclose as bisexuals. Male and female bisexuals were found to have less life satisfaction and less satisfaction with the disclosure process than gay men or lesbians (Anderson & Randlet, 1994). A bisexual is often regarded as a likeable person or acceptable work partner, but less moral or well-adjusted when compared to either exclusively homosexual or heterosexual persons (Istvan, 1983). Consideration and caution are necessary when deciding how much to disclose and to whom. "Declaring an open, unequivocal bisexual identity in either straight or gay/lesbian communities often results in experiences of discrimination, hostility, and invalidation" (Ochs, 1993: p. 217).

The sparse number of early studies that address the issues of bisexual women offers a limited view into their patterns of disclosure. The amount of disclosure is closely associated with stress, hostility, and pressure from a female's living environment. If the lesbian community has negative stereotypes or is distrusting of bisexuality, women are more likely to disclose as lesbians in order to live within a support system. An appropriate ideological environment for females in many cases is used as support for sexual experimentation (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1976b). The social climate of their personal environment greatly affects the decision to remain known as a heterosexual, disclose as a lesbian, or "come out" as a bisexual (Ochs, 1996). A lack of widespread organizations that offer support to bisexual females adds to the decision to keep their bisexuality hidden. A portion of women feel there is an overemphasis on sexual activity, group sex parties, and promiscuity in segments of female bisexuality. They often choose not to disclose themselves as bisexual or to distance themselves from this particular group of women (Ault, 1996).

Immediate family and friends play a large role in the disclosure decision

for bisexual women. Due to the lack of acknowledgement by society that a bisexual identity exists, and to the cultural belief of impending lesbianism, some women fear family sanctions if they disclose their sexual orientation (Rust, 1993). Reprisals and a stigmatized label leave bisexual females with few disclosure options. Females who identify strongly with heterosexuality, on average, will not disclose a bisexual orientation. In addition to not self-identifying with bisexuality, their view of same-sex encounters is often platonic. When the decision to disclose is made by women, it is done more slowly and at an older age than by men (Rust, 1993).

Women may choose to disclose as bisexual because they view their lives as changing points between male and female preference. Their past relationships and present experiences are more understandable and coherent when they view and identify themselves as bisexual. Many of these women feel encouraged to experiment with homosexual behavior by the sisterhood of the women's movement (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1976b). One study examined women involved with group bisexual activity as swingers. The initial suggestion or request is by the male spouse or partner. These women did not have to worry about limiting sexual behavior or about issues of disclosure to spouses or partners since there was mutual participation. The women involved in bisexual swinging, in this study, commenced this behavior at an older age (Dixon, 1985).

Men also face pressure, hostility and stigma when disclosing a bisexual orientation. Men tend to experience more stress and pressure when incorporating consistent bisexual behavior into their self-identity. The implications of homosexuality or feminization are avoided by the insulation provided when men do not disclose (Stokes et al., 1983). The majority of heterosexuals and homosexuals agree that men risk being labeled more than women. This stems from the view that for males, any small amount of same sex activity makes one totally homosexual (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1976a).

Men who report only casual same-sex experiences retain a heterosexual identity and keep their bisexual behavior hidden. Some men view their bisexuality as motivated by a simple physical urge for engaging in anonymous or "recreational" sex with another male. Other reasons for engaging in this type of sex are marriages with little or no sexual activity, a solution for erotic needs, or a way to satisfy bisexual desires. The use of such rationale makes disclosure for a number of bisexual men unnecessary or not an option (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1976a).

The men that were consistent over time as self-identifying and behaviorally active bisexuals reported little disclosure to family or close friends. Most

men do not disclose their bisexuality to female partners, even in long term relationships. However, when disclosure does occur for men, it is most often to close friends and at an earlier age than for women (McKirman et al., 1995; Rust, 1993; Stokes et al., 1993). Self-identification through disclosure, identification from sexual behavior, and sexual orientation grids are part of the disagreement over measuring techniques and bisexual characterization.

Emerging Patterns

A checklist of behaviors or self-identifying criteria will not produce a “typical” bisexual or explain bisexuality. Amid the controversy surrounding bisexuality, there are some patterns that researchers find, regardless of collection and interpretation variability. The capacity to find erotic desire for both males and females to different degrees by different individuals results in several definitions for bisexuality. Research by Zinik (1985) defined behavior where sexual relations are experienced with at least one partner of the same and opposite sex at the same time as *simultaneous bisexuality*. Having sexual relations separately with males and females during the same time period in one’s life means *concurrent bisexuality*. Alternating male and female sex partners over time refers to *serial bisexuality* (Zinik, 1985).

In addition to a number of differing components to bisexuality, individuals are capable of emergent behavior. The notion of the immutability of adult sexual preference is usually overstated. Issues of behavior include the idea that an individual may not be aware that there is an ability to change. Most importantly, choices of sex object and identity can change many ways and times over the lifecycle (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1977; Rust, 1993; Stokes et al., 1997).

One of the most notable patterns to emerge from the literature is that a valid bisexual orientation exists. Along with the recognition of a variety of characteristics that define bisexuality is a slowly emerging consensus that their sexual preference can change. Since researchers are beginning to acknowledge the pattern of life changes as well as sexual preference changes, enhanced study of bisexuality is becoming an area of interest (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1976b; Rosario, Meyer-Bahlburg, & Hunter, 1996; Rust, 1993).

Clinical and empirical researchers may be willing to recognize bisexuality and accept the concept of a person that is able to relate emotionally and sexually to different genders. Such recognition is not a given to the rest of society. One pattern that becomes evident is the stigma and stereotypes that are applied to bisexuals. Both heterosexuals and homosexuals view bisexuality with misunderstanding, mistrust, hostility, and alienation (Eliason, 1996;

Kaahumanu, 1990; Ochs, 1996). These scenarios do not leave bisexuals in the situation often referred to as “having the best of both worlds,” because “both worlds are closets” (Lourea, 1985: p. 55). The social isolation has begun to change for bisexuals through informative literature, an organized community, and local support groups.

Publications that feature experiences and stories of bisexuals in their own words are increasing the visibility of bisexuality in society (Firestein, 1996; Hutchins & Kaahumanu, 1991; Tucker, 1995). The bisexual movement began in the early 1970s, stagnated for a period of time, and was revived in the 1980s (Hutchins & Kaahumanu, 1991; Tucker, 1995). During the 1980s, bisexual networks and forums were organized along with newsletters, marches, and political activities (Geller, 1990; Tucker, 1995). Several international conferences on bisexuality were held during the 1990s, as well as local, regional, and Internet support groups being established (Tucker, 1995).

The research findings and social stereotypes about the mental health and quality of life of bisexuals spans a wide range. Bisexuals can be well adjusted with adequate self-esteem that is no higher or lower than other sexual orientation groups (Fox, 1996). Others view bisexuals as nonexistent, confused, or deviants that depart from social and sexual norms (Fox, 1996). No single pattern of describing the psychological and sociological issues surrounding bisexuality emerges from previous literature. The agreement for further research and a quest for information that will enable a better understanding of the many aspects of bisexuality is important.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In light of the previous literature and the need for further research of bisexuality, this study examines attitudes and self-images of bisexual males and females. The following research questions are the basis for study and examination:

1. Is there a relationship between the age of the bisexual respondents and their (a) self-esteem? (b) life satisfaction? (c) general well being?
2. Is there a relationship between gender of the bisexual respondents and their (a) self-esteem? (b) life satisfaction? (c) general well being?
3. Is there a relationship between the gender of the bisexual respondents and their disclosure of sexual preferences to (a) others in general? (b) significant others?

METHODS

Respondents

The respondents for this study were recruited through links posted on various sites throughout the Internet. The national and local sites included those networks specific to bisexuality and bisexual pages that were a part of gay and lesbian organizations.¹ Members of several bisexual chat rooms on the Internet were also contacted and provided with the location of the survey and instructions necessary to participate. Telephone calls were made to several bisexual support groups and information outlets, providing them with the necessary Internet information to pass on to interested members. No compensation was offered for taking the survey and participation was voluntary. A brief introduction at the beginning of the survey explained the amount of time required, the subject matter involved, and an assurance of confidentiality.

The study was open to bisexual males and females. My goal was to solicit participants with an interest in furthering the understanding of bisexuality. The only constraint was the availability of Internet access. Participants needed access in order to find out about the study and to participate in it. The widespread popularity of computers for a growing number of individuals allowed for a range of responses. The possibility of respondent bias in a study using the Internet toward white, middle class, and college educated participants was raised in a previous Internet study (Ault, 1996). Nevertheless, the use of an Internet survey provided an extra amount of privacy for the respondents, given the subject matter. All respondents were able to access and complete the survey with anonymity. Respondents were requested not to reveal their identity and no attempt was made to identify anyone. A contact e-mail address was provided for any questions or concerns on the part of respondents.

Procedure

The online Internet survey was designed to elicit respondents' personal self-images and perceived quality of life. In a preface to the survey, respondents were asked to disclose their personal views about bisexuality and their general outlook on life. The survey itself is comprised of five parts. Three components are scales used in previous research. The remaining two sections are a multiple-choice questionnaire and a demographic form, respectively.

The survey was placed on the Sociology Department web page at a university. The survey was available for this study from April 5, 1999 to April 26, 1999.

Measures

The first scale on the survey is the *Satisfaction with Life Scale* (SWLS), developed by Edward Diener and his colleagues (Diener, 1993). It is designed to measure global cognitive judgement of one's own life. The SWL contains five items in the form of statements. A sample of items are, "The conditions of my life are excellent" and "I am satisfied with my life." Response involves extent of agreement with the statements on a 1 to 7 scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7). A description of properties of the scale can be found in Pavot and Diener, 1993 *Psychological Assessment*.

The second scale was the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1999). A sample of statements are: "I feel that I have a number of good qualities" and "I feel I do not have much to be proud of." The ten statement scale has four possible responses that range in extent of agreement from strongly agree (1) to strongly disagree (4). The one-dimensional scale has been used by researchers in conjunction with other measurements to determine psychological functioning and mental health attitudes (Jordan, Vaughn, & Woodworth, 1997; Stokes, McKirnan, & Burzette, 1993; Stokes, Damon, & McKirnan, 1977).

Part three contains ten multiple-choice questions on a variety of issues related to bisexuality. The survey does not ask in-depth questions, or use sexual behavior grids, to measure bisexual tendencies. This study was interested in self-images and attitudes. Therefore, straightforward self-labeling questions and the amount of time that respondents self-identified as a bisexual were used. I developed the questions and response options. Questions include the respondent's opinion regarding the social acceptance and understanding of bisexuality as a sexual orientation. Self-identifying questions about sexual orientation, sexual preference, and disclosure were also included. The questions were designed to revolve around the categories of bisexual self-identity and self-image bisexual behavior.

Section four is comprised of 16 questions evaluating general well being. The scale is taken from module 67 of a National Evaluation by The Measurement Group (Andrews & Whithey, 1976). The original module contains twenty questions. All questions begin with "How do you feel about." Categories include personal relationships, health issues, and standard of living.

Instructions at the beginning of this part advised respondents to consider their feelings now, while reflecting on the past year and on expectations for the future. The range of responses are measured from delighted (1) to terrible (7), with option N/A (8).²

The fifth and final part of the survey is a demographic request sheet. There are four questions asking sex, age, marital status, and geographic area of residence.

The measures and methods used in this survey have limitations. First, there was no accommodation for transgender bisexuals to participate. Second, commitment questions did not reflect differences between emotional and sexual commitment. Third, there was not a disclosure option for those individuals who are open to many, but not to all. Fourth, behaviors reflected self-images, not specific questions concerning longitudinal dating, attraction, and fantasy.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this survey and the conclusions that are drawn from the findings apply only to those who participated. Therefore, generalizations speak only in reference to this study, not to all bisexual individuals.

The Respondents

There were 120 surveys downloaded. Because of duplication or blank surveys, eight were discarded, leaving 112 valid responses. There were 64 male and 48 female respondents.³ The 14% more males than females follows previous research, which has been predominately male respondents. The use of the Internet, with its wide access and availability of privacy, may have assisted in reaching some bisexual individuals who would not have otherwise responded.

Over 28% of participants did not respond to the question about age. Of those who did respond, the majority is under age 35. Over 23% were in the age group 25-34 years, and 17% were 35 years of age or older. Of those participants that responded to area of residence, over 47% were from the northern part of the United States. Over 12% resided in the east, over 10% in the south, and over 5% in the western section of the United States. Over half of the respondents were unmarried. Almost 36% were not in a committed relationship. There were 31% of the unmarried participants that were in a

committed relationship. Almost 9% of participants responded that they were married, and 24% did not respond to the question. These figures may correlate to the largest percentage of participants being in a group under 25 years of age.

Research Questions

The first question explored a relationship between age and self-reflected quality of life image. One-way analysis of variance was employed to test for differences. Self-esteem scales ranged from 1-4, with all age groups falling toward the lower end of the range. Table 1 displays the one-way ANOVA results for self-esteem. This is equivalent to slightly reduced self-esteem. Age is a factor in only the self-esteem quality of life image. The age group *35 and older* scored the lowest self-esteem, with those *under 25* ranked highest. The

TABLE 1. Self-Image Analysis: Age by Self-Esteem

Source	D.F.	Sum of Squares	Mean Squares	F Ratio	F Prob.
Between Group	2	2.6947	1.3473	5.9116	.0049
Within Group	51	11.6236	.2279		
Total	53	14.3183			
Group	n	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	
Under 25	25	2.1871	.5458	.1092	
25-34	16	1.8009	.3811	.0953	
35 or Older	13	1.6821	.4375	.1213	
Total	54	1.9511	.5198	.0707	
Lavene Test for Homogeneity					
Statistic	Df1	Df2	2-tail Sig.		
1.4936	2	51	.234		

Multiple Range Tests: Modified LSD (Bonferroni) test with significance level .05

(*) Indicates significant differences * < .05 ** < .01 *** < .001

Mean	Age
1.6821	35 or older
1.8009	25-34
2.1871	Under 25**

All age groups fall toward the lower end of the range, equivalent to slightly reduced self-esteem. The group, *under 25*, scored a significant difference when compared to the other age groups, however, not statistically significant.

age group *under 25* scored a significant difference in self esteem compared to the other two age groups. However, this is not a statistical significance; only 23% of the variance is explained. Life satisfaction scales ranged from 1-7, with all age groups falling approximately in the middle. General well being scales ranged from 1-7, with all age groups falling slightly to the lower end of the range, equivalent to a lower sense of general well-being.

Question two explored a relationship between gender and the same three reflected quality of life images used in the first question. T-tests for equality of means were employed. There is no significant difference between gender and self-esteem or between gender and life satisfaction. However, gender differences are present in the general well-being image. Again, all respondents scored slightly toward the low end of the range, having a slightly reduced self-image of their general well-being. Women scored a somewhat higher sense of general well-being. This is a significant difference at the .05 level, for those who participants who responded. Because of the high non-response on this scale, a trend cannot be determined.

Despite a somewhat lower score on self-esteem and general well-being, respondents' satisfaction with life was very close to the middle of the range. Bisexuals did not have any substantially significant low scores on any of the self-reflected quality of life scales. In addition, there is a weak relationship between age and gender in reference to the self-image of quality of life for bisexuals. This means that the quality of life problems and negative effects from pursuing a bisexual "lifestyle" conveyed by previous research were not duplicated in this study (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1997; Engel & Saracino, 1986; Nurius, 1983; Rust, 1993; Wayson, 1986).

The third question examined the area of disclosing a bisexual orientation to persons in general and to specific partners. The chi-square test of differences in disclosure between males and females were used for analysis. There was a high reply to disclosure in general, with 88% of participants responding. Neither males nor females are completely open in their disclosure of bisexuality. Not one participant had disclosed to everyone. Few people are open to *all*, leaving the remaining categories of partial disclosure utilized evenly between males and females. There was no response option for *open to most*. There was no significant difference between gender and disclosure to persons in general at the .05 level of significance.

In the area of specific disclosure, males have a significantly higher level of suspicion in partner awareness at the .01 level of significance. The question on specific partner awareness had 75 missing cases. Of those that did respond, over 35% of males perceived their specific partner was suspicious of

their bisexuality. This was compared to less than 3% of females that responded. The difference between males and females in partner awareness is hard to determine because of those that did not respond. One speculation may be that since over 88% of respondents are unmarried, or have no significant partner, many skipped over this question about partner awareness. The data show that an overwhelming number of males and females do not disclose their bisexuality to most people in their lives. This survey duplicates previous research that concluded bisexuals often do not disclose, even to significant sexual partners (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1976a; McKirnan et al., 1995; Stokes et al., 1993).

Bisexual Identity

A multiple-choice question asked respondents which identity label best described their sexual orientation. Chi-square self-identity results are displayed in Table 2. No participant identified as having the same amount of sexual preference for both males and females. There is a significant difference between male and female bisexuals and their self-identity according to sexual orientation description at the .01 level of significance. There are two interpretations of this identity difference. The first consideration is that more females describe themselves as bi-curious than men do. It is also interesting to take note of the large overall percentage (30.8) of respondents that consider themselves curious. Second, men self identify with an orientation that prefers women, more than women identify with an orientation that prefers men. There are several possibilities from previous research that may apply to either or both observations. Casual relationships are not self-labeled as either behavior or identity. Any perceived stigma that society would apply has been legitimized by those individuals. Another explanation might be the capacity bisexuals have for sexual encounters without emotional attachment (Chung & Katayama, 1996; McKirnan, Stokes, & Doll, 1995; Stokes, McKirnan, & Burzette, 1993).

Another self-image question asked the length of time the respondents were aware of their bisexuality. Almost 80% of those surveyed have known since youth about their bisexual orientation, acted upon or stifled. Yet, over 30% responded they were only bi-curious. There may be a stigma attached if a person identifies with an orientation that is not socially accepted. The stigma could be either set by societal norms or self-imposed. The high percentage of young respondents to this survey may also explain a self-image of bi-curious. These individuals may still be at the exploring stage rather than rejecting an identity. There were 38 missing cases to the question concerning the period of

TABLE 2. Self-Identity Analysis: Gender by Sexual Orientation Description

	Bicurious	Bisexual Female Preference	Bisexual Male Preference	Row Total
Male	13	38	10	61
Row Pct.	21.3	62.3	16.4	58.7
Col. Pct.	40.6	76.0	45.5	
Tot. Pct.	12.5	36.5	9.6	
Female	19	12	12	43
Row Pct.	44.2	27.9	27.9	41.3
Col. Pct.	59.4	24.0	54.5	
Tot. Pct.	18.3	11.5	11.5	
Column Total	32	50	22	104
	30.8	48.1	21.2	100.0
<i>Chi-Square</i>	<i>Value</i>		<i>DF</i>	<i>Significance</i>
Pearson	12.07309		2	.00239**
Likelihood Ratio	12.38935		2	.00204**
Mantel-Haenszel test for linear association	.63219		1	.42655

(*) Indicates significant differences * < .05 ** < .01 *** < .001

There is a significant difference between gender and sexual orientation identity at the .01 level of significance. Females identify as being slightly more bi-curious. Men identify as having a female preference more than females identify as having a male preference.

self-awareness. Perhaps there was uncertainty of when their activity became bisexual. Another possibility for the difference in identification is that an individual does not want to be identified or labeled in reference to a particular point in time. The uncertainty and reluctance, if present in these results, over when to self-identity specific sexual behaviors can also be explained with the conflict model of bisexuality (Zinik, 1985).

Over 58% responded that their bisexual orientation had been known to them since their youth and had not been stifled. This large number of participants that had known and acted on their bisexuality duplicates previous findings and supports the continuum model of bisexuality (MacDonald, 1983; Stokes et al., 1993; Zinik, 1985). These results also support the concept that bisexuality is viewed as a legitimate, healthy, and personal decision (Firestein, 1996; Tucker, 1995; Wayson, 1986). Whether or not respondents are actively engaging in sex with both males and females was not determined.

The results of these self-image questions reflect the multiformity within the

bisexual orientation. There are those who identify solidly as bisexual over a long, stable period. Some are having conflicts, others are in transition, and still others are moving up and down a continuum over time. The theory of a range of behaviors and relationships is supported by these findings (Zinik, 1985).

Acceptance and Understanding

The two multiple-choice questions that ask which group shows the most and the least social acceptance of bisexuals as individuals required one response for each question. The frequencies and percentages for social acceptance of bisexual individuals are shown in Table 3. The group least socially accepting of bisexual individuals is lesbians, followed by gay men, and all other bisexuals. The percentages for the group as the most socially accepting

TABLE 3. Social Acceptance of Bisexuality Frequency and Percentage Distribution

Acceptance Question	Frequency	Percentage	Valid Pct.
Group most accepting			
Straight people	18	16.1	16.7
Bisexual females	12	10.7	11.1
Bisexual males	63	56.3	58.3
All bisexuals	8	7.1	7.4
Gay men	0	0.0	
Lesbians	7	6.3	6.5
Gays & lesbians	0	0.0	
Missing cases	4	3.6	
Total	112	100.0	100.0
Group least accepting			
Straight people	0	0.0	
Bisexual females	0	0.0	
Bisexual males	0	0.0	
All bisexuals	15	13.4	28.8
Gay men	18	16.1	34.6
Lesbians	19	17.0	36.5
Gays & lesbians	0	0.0	
Missing cases	60	53.6	
Total	112	100.0	100.0

Over 58% of respondents reflected on bisexual males as the most socially accepting group. Straight people ranked second, with over 16%. Lesbians ranked the least accepting, followed by gay men and all other bisexuals.

of bisexual individuals were widely varied. Over 58% of respondents ranked bisexual males as being the most socially accepting. Ranked second, with the most social acceptance of bisexual individuals, were straight people with over 16%. The group "bisexual females" followed next with 11%. The perception of individuals with some of the same stigma, as less socially accepting than heterosexuals, is an unexpected finding.

Two additional multiple choice questions asked which group was the best and least understanding of bisexuality as a sexual orientation. The same options for group choice as the previous questions were again available. Lesbians, with over 54%, were also the group that is least understanding of bisexuality as a sexual orientation. Over 30% of participants ranked all bisexuals as the next group with the least understanding. Bisexual males received over 84% as the group best understanding bisexuality as a sexual orientation. Remaining groups were straight persons (8%), bisexual females (4.5%), and all bisexuals (<1%) as the group best understanding bisexuality as a sexual orientation. These findings differ from previous research concerning heterosexuals versus other sexual groups and levels of social acceptance and understanding a bisexual orientation (Eliason, 1996; Kaahumanu, 1990).

An interesting response among bisexuals was their perception of what the bisexual community should be doing to support bisexuals. Over 63% wanted the bisexual community to be a source more protective of bisexuals. What bisexuals need protection from and how to provide it warrants exploration. The increased availability of organizations and individuals in the present bisexual community may not reach everyone. Perhaps not only the bisexual community, but also the larger social community, can work to provide a solution for a feeling of safety for its members.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to study a segment of society that is stigmatized based on its very existence, an approach that provides privacy and ease of recording is most helpful. The Internet based survey provided a way to reach a large numbers of people, receive responses very quickly, and insure confidentiality.

The self-image of bisexual's quality of life scored just slightly below the midrange point in self-esteem, life satisfaction, and general well-being scales. Age and gender do not have a substantially significant relationship to the quality of life reflections of bisexuals. Information obtained in this survey presents bisexuals as having a good self-image of themselves and their quality of life.

Gender does not have a strong relationship to the decision to disclosure as a bisexual. This study found that the majority of males and females keep their

bisexuality hidden from most people, a finding that replicates previous research. The misunderstanding and stigma attached to bisexuality would be a point for continued study in order to shed light on disclosure issues.

Using self-identity and self-images of what constitutes bisexuality, this study reached the same conclusions as previous researchers who used validated behavior and identity scales. There are variations of bisexuality among and between male and female bisexuals, about identity perception and behavior images of bisexuality. In contrast to some studies, over half of those surveyed had known about their bisexuality since their youth and had not proceeded to exclusive homosexuality or changed to exclusive heterosexuality. These findings support previous studies that define bisexuality as having the capacity to change over time. It may be helpful for those who examine bisexuality in the future to take a closer look at Zinik's (1985) theory of exhibiting simultaneous, concurrent, or serial bisexuality.

The findings identified lesbians, as the group least socially accepting of bisexual individuals and the least understanding of bisexuality as a sexual orientation. The results showed respondents perception of heterosexuals as having more social acceptance and more understanding of bisexuality than previous research concluded. The group with the most social acceptance of bisexual individuals and the best understanding of bisexuality is male bisexuals.

This study concludes that there is a need for continued research that has a focus on bisexuality as a valid sexual orientation. Other important issues include the varied aspects of bisexuality, disclosure, and social stigma. A recommendation is to combine both quantitative survey and qualitative interview methods of research to examine and explore the questions surrounding bisexuality. Finally, this study agrees with the work of previous researchers that found bisexuality is multidimensional, diverse, transitional, and surrounded by questions and controversy.

NOTES

1. Sites utilized: Bi.org/~nas/, pridenet.com/biorg.purdue.edu/odos, Open-Mind.org/bitheway/links, BMM chatroom, binetaustin@egroups.com, and linkstooother URLs as they were added by these networks and groups.

2. Due to a transfer error, the available ordering and response options do not appear as in the original scale. The error resulted in an additional positive response, which may bias the overall well-being score.

3. There was no differentiation made between *female* identity versus the *non-response* category in the computer program. Any respondent who did not identify as *male* was recorded as *not identified*. Those responses recorded as *not identified* will be either labeled or referred to as *female*.

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Making
Sense
of
Bisexual
Personal
Ads

Sue George

ABSTRACT. This piece addresses the prevalence of bisexual behavior requested in personal ads in a range of UK publications and examines who is advertising and for what. Through analyzing the ads, and by interviewing some of the people who have used them, I consider how and why people use this method of pursuing recreational sex. I also look at what this tells us about the swing scene and bisexual behavior outside of the politicized bisexual community. *[Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-342-9678. E-mail address: getinfo@haworthpressinc.com Website: <http://www.HaworthPress.com>]* © 2001 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]

KEYWORDS. Personals, personal ads, contacts, contact ads, London, UK, bisexuality, bisexual, swinging, swing scene, behavioral bisexuality

INTRODUCTION

Some time ago I blithely agreed to write a piece for this journal on personal ads. I have been wondering why ever since. Why choose a topic so unwieldy, so hard to research, so potentially controversial? The answer has to be that very little serious, non-sensational, non-moralistic investigation has ever been done into it, particularly by those whose politics and perspective are informed by a queer sensibility, certainly by people writing about the UK. I am interested in the underground, in secrets, in knowing about things which most people don't. That propelled me into this initial piece of investigation; research into this subject could go on and on.

I had to set some boundaries for myself. First, geographically: this piece deals specifically with the UK and, in particular, London. Every country is culturally different in its effect on people's needs or desires to get sex through ads: in the US, an open and organized swinging lifestyle exists, with associations and conventions. And in Paris (France), there are many sex clubs for f/m* couples which advertise quite openly in the city's events magazine. Such clubs as exist in London have to be sought out. Secondly, the ads are specifically those for "adult fun and friendship" and not ongoing emotional relationships. Nor am I looking closely at ads where the advertisers seem to be heterosexual partners- which, it should be noted, far outnumber any which mention same-sex contact.

Although I had not particularly intended this to be the case, this piece deals mainly with people who don't relate to the bi community. The bi community (certainly in the UK) comprises a relatively small number of people who in

the main are young, middle-class, and educated, with fairly progressive politics. Swingers-which, for the sake of simplicity, if not absolute accuracy (for the term seems to mean different things to different people), I am going to call the people involved with these ads-clearly cover a much wider range of people.

In the process of writing it, this article became a piece as much about swinging as personal ads. That is partly a question of context: discussing other methods of getting casual sex is necessary in order to put personal ads in context. Also it seems clear-because of what both the ads and my interviewers say-that people who place or answer ads probably also go to sex clubs/parties (where they exist). But it is also the case that the pursuit of recreational sex raises interesting questions about certain sorts of bisexuality.

Throughout the bisexual community, there has, historically, been a reluctance to look at apolitical bisexuality, or swinging, because there was a danger it would pander to stereotypes. Certainly, in my 1993 book, *Women and Bisexuality*, I largely avoided the subject-partly for that reason and also because I had no idea how I would research it. No swingers came forward to answer my questionnaire; I didn't know where I could find any. Respondents from *Forum* magazine, the nearest to a swingers' magazine I could find, had no more sexual partners than respondents from feminist groups. However, my own experience of the bi community tells me that there is not a hermetically sealed division between politicised bis and swingers-some people do move between one group and the other.

In researching this article, I examined ads in printed media (*Loot*, *Desire*, *Connect4Fun*, and the *Pink Paper*) and on the Internet. I concentrated on print media rather than the Net because of the many drawbacks associated with researching the Net. To start with, many sites require you to pay or register first. For instance, www.Bicafe, a private commercial bisexual site which contains personal ads, requires that you register your own ad and pay US\$14.95 for a month's membership. They rightly assume that, by having to register-and writing a detailed ad-they will deter teenagers and timewasters. Unfortunately, from that perspective, I was a timewaster, not wanting to participate myself. From the advertisers' point of view, these strictures are sensible: it is easy to be a timewaster if all you have to do is press the reply button on your keyboard.

There is also the issue of access to the Internet. Although numbers with web access are growing fast, not everyone will have the sort of access which enables involvement with personal ads. For those who are on the Internet through work or college, many organisations operate a Firewall which bars

sex sites. And some people now receive the Net through their television-which effectively walls off sites it deems unacceptable. I did not want to focus primarily on middle-class, educated people, which might happen with the Net.

I also intended to find a significant number of people who would admit to having ever used these ads. Without embarking on a huge and expensive research project, they seemed elusive. In addition, I was anxious to avoid either doing a tabloid-style expose of the subject, or attracting people who were particularly exhibitionistic. This set up a conflict between the researcher in me (need lots of interviewees, standard questionnaires which need pre-testing) and the journalist (interview a couple of people-but at least you'll be able to offer the world some theories to accept, reject, or move on from). The journalist won. I interviewed one f/m couple, a mainly gay man, a mainly straight man, and a bisexual woman-briefly for the two single men, at greater length for the others-for their thoughts about why they answered personal ads/advertised, and what their experiences had been. None of my interviewees were closely connected to the bi* (see Appendix for definitions of asterisked terms) community; all appear under pseudonyms.

WHAT'S IN THE ADS

The first publication I looked at was *Loot*: a London-based paper, available on newsstands, with lots of free small ads on everything from second-hand clothes to furniture. It has a large personals section. Interested parties telephone advertisers, ringing a premium rate number for the personals section.

Loot divides its personal ads into categories: women seeking men, men seeking women, men seeking men, women seeking women, and other relationships. In the 5/6 May 2000 issue, there was a total of 285 advertisers. Twenty advertisers in the "Men seeking Men" category specified that they were bi: 13 of them were bi men seeking other bi men and 5 said they were bi without specifying sexuality of a partner.

Analysis of the "other relationships" was as follows:

- A. Single men seeking couples or single females (probably straight)
- B. Straight m/bi f couples seeking single bi females or couples with bi women
- C. Bi men seeking bi men or couples
- D. F/m couples of unspecified sexuality seeking similar
- E. Bi couples seeking other bi couples

- F. TS* seeking men
- G. Men seeking TS
- H. Men seeking TV*
- I. Other TV (TV seeking TV 1; TV seeking man 1; TV seeking woman 1)
- J. Bi women seeking bi women or couples with bi women

This is a huge decline from June 1997, when I wrote a short piece on *Loot's* contact ads for the UK's bi-community newsletter *BCN*. Then the numbers were: 63 he straight/she bi couples (now 16), 143 bi men looking for bi men or couples (11), 15 for other bi couples (4).

The most obvious explanation for this decline is the recent (in the UK) growth of the Internet. For instance, the personals on *Loot's* Website are similar in type to those in the paper, but there are many more of them, a total of 1459 ads. However, these large numbers are at least in part because ads stay on the site for over a week, rather than just one day, and cover other parts of the UK as well as London. The sheer quantity of ads precluded my analyzing them.

It is also possible that some of these advertisers have turned their attentions to *Desire*. This magazine, which says it offers "erotic inspiration for women and men," is a reasonably progressive sex magazine available on subscription. It seems to be predominantly, but not exclusively, geared towards people who are heterosexual, with a substantial female readership. *Desire* has interesting and well-written features, as well as fiction, book, and video reviews, and the inevitable sexist porn ads. I analyzed the personals in two issues-30 and 31, March to April and June to July 2000. In *Desire*, people write to the advertisers via the magazine. It costs 16 pounds to advertise but replies are free.

Desire divides its ads into three sections: couples, women, and men. In issue 30, there were 387 advertisers.

- A. Heterosexual couples
- B. Women bi/bi-curious,* man straight
- C. Bi/bi-curious f/m couple
- D. Straight woman, bi man
- E. Other

Ninety-two single women advertised (24% of total):

Seeking men 69 (75%/18%)

Bi/bi-curious 23 (25%/6%)

Seven of these bi women wanted a single woman, the rest a single woman or couple with bi female.

138 advertisers were single men (36%), the vast majority of whom were seeking heterosexual sex, with a single woman, women, or f/m couple:

Seeking women 120 (87%/31%)

Bi/bi-curious 15 (11%/4%)

TVs wanting men 3

I did a similar analysis on issue 31. There were a total of 303 advertisers. There were 151 couples, advertising as follows:

- A. Heterosexual couples
- B. Women bi/bi-curious, man straight
- C. Bi f/m couple 12
- D. Straight woman, bi-curious man

Seventy-four single women (24%) advertised:

Seeking men 46

Bi/bi-curious 26

Ten of these bi women wanted a single woman, the rest a single woman or couple with bi female.

78 advertisers were single men (26%):

Seeking women 58

Bi/bi-curious 17

TVs 3

Four of these bi men were looking for single men.

One of my interviewees suggested I analyze another small ads contact magazine, *Connect4Fun*. It is a 44-page pamphlet “by swingers for swingers” which is available on subscription and contains only ads—some with small photos. The issue (south east 4, spring 2000) contains about 1144 ads; I concentrated on the 399 London advertisers. These ads contained a higher proportion of bisexual men, and a much small number of heterosexual men, advertising than either *Loot* or *Desire*. It’s free to advertise, but there’s a small fee for forwarding replies. *Connect4Fun* does not divide its advertisers other than geographically.

Couples advertising were as follows:

- A. Heterosexual couples
- B. Women bi/bi-curious, man straight
- C. Straight woman, bi man
- D. Bi/bi-curious f/m couple
- E. Other

Single women comprised 46 or 12% of the advertisers:

Women seeking women 23

Women seeking men 19

Other 4

Single men comprised 28 or 7% of the advertisers:

Men seeking women/couples 25

Bi-curious/TV 3

I also looked at the *Pink Paper* (issue May 29, 2000), Britain's nationwide free paper for gay men and lesbians . . . and bisexuals-up to a point. The paper has a contact ads section in the back, divided into sections for men, women, and bisexuals, and sub-divided into three sections for men and women: relationships, friends, and "adult fun." Bisexuals are not subdivided-and as a result, some of these ads are from people seeking long-term relationships. Advertisers who want letter replies pay (from four pounds up) for an ad; for phone replies, the caller pays by credit card. There were many fewer ads: Bisexuals by phone 19/by letter 9; lesbians wanting adult fun by phone 11/by letter 4; gay men wanting adult fun by phone 8/by letter 3.

So there was a total of 28 bisexual advertisers, of whom:

Bisexual men wanting bisexual women 11

Bisexual women wanting bisexual women 6

Bisexual men wanting bisexual men 4

Women wanting FtM* transsexuals 2

TV wanting woman 1

TV wanting TV 1

Bisexual woman wanting bisexual man 1

F/M couple wanting bi woman 1

Bisexual man wanting either man or woman 1

Of the lesbian "fun" ads, three were from female couples wanting additional women partners; the same figure applied to the slightly smaller gay men's section.

It was far harder to make any sense of the contact ads on the Internet. There are countless (literally) personal ads sites on the Net. Through my own surfing, and through pointers from interviewees, I looked at a variety of sites, including *swingers and roundabouts*, *UK swingers*, *21st century contact*, *Couples UK*, *egroups.com/group/alt-personals/* and *onelist.com/community/Bisexual*. I made a preliminary analysis of *UK swingers*. Its advertisers are divided into nine different groupings: couples for couples, couples for women, couples for men, couples for groups, women for couples, etc. As

some advertisers appear in more than one of these sections, it is hard to tell how many people are really advertising. However, so many couples were advertising for other couples that they were divided again by the month they first advertised (May had 82 couples). There were also 13 women for couples, 60 couples for women, 20 women for women, nine men for men. All the latter men appeared to be bi, but the women advertising for women were not necessarily seeking single women. At this point, I lost patience with Internet advertisers! On *UK swingers* (and other sites too), there are often very explicit photos, sometimes with disguised faces, sometimes not. Photographs of women are semi- or totally naked; men, if they are not displaying their erections, are often fully clothed.

WHAT WAS IN THESE ADS

It is difficult to make an exact comparison between the numbers and types of ads in each publication, as they divide themselves differently- for instance, *Loot* puts singles who want couples and couples who want singles together in the “other relationships” category. The ads were fairly similar in tone, no matter where they came from, but varied in degrees of explicitness.

As *Loot* is available on newsstands, its ads are quite circumspect. Here are some examples:

1. Bi-male, 34, 6ft, medium build, short brown hair, blue eyes, wltm bi-male/tv/ts/bi-female/couple.
2. Black bi-female, very attractive, seeks couples/males/females for adult fun/friendship.
3. Couple, early 40s, she is attractive, 5ft 4ins, bi-curious, he is 6ft, straight, good-looking, seek younger couple/bi-female for daytime fun.

Desire ads are more sexually explicit and often longer, as well as including photographs. Faces are disguised.

1. 24 years female, seeks bi/lesbian female to kiss, caress me all over. Male partner to watch/film only. Only female willing to meet after corresponding should reply. Can accommodate/travel. Please enclose recent photo. Video exchange welcome. 100% genuine.
2. Attractive bi couple, late 40s, NS,* VHSOL,* seek similar. We enjoy fitness, food, wine, lingerie, O & A.* Accommodate or travel. Same room only. Letter and photo please.
3. Attractive professional couple 40s, she AC/DC,* he WE.* Seek couple where lady is bi-sexual for same room fun. WE single male also con-

sidered. We enjoy massage, videos, DIY,* toys, oral, safe ultimate.*
Photo, phone number please.

Connect4Fun has some very explicit ads, although others are more vague. Any photos are so small and unclear as to disguise the identity of advertisers.

1. London couple seek couple/single male. E (27, blonde, tall, slim) is mildly sub* and has a fantasy of seeking L (47) giving O to another guy.
2. London couple seek Bi-females. Jane (40) is bi and Dave (43) is straight. Looking for bi-female of any age, colour or creed for sexy fun. Can travel and accommodate.
3. Couple seek bi-female. Tess (32, 42DD, shaven, bi-curious) and Kevin (47, tall, WE, straight) want a female to take Tess while Kevin DIYs. She enjoys bondage, spanking, pvc and rubber.

The *Pink Paper*'s ads are short, with no pictures:

1. I am 29, well-built man, and WLTm women and couples of any age for fun/relationship.
2. Bisexual, boyish, inexperienced woman, late 30s, many interests. Seeks muscular, sensitive, clean man for no-strings fun.

The Internet site *UK swingers* contained ads far more explicit than those in print media, although most are shorter than this one.

Couple Needs Knowing Bi-Fem. Teacher

I'm about 5'3, with chestnut, naturally curly hair, reaching just below my shoulders. I am slim, with 34B chest, and my pubic hair is waxed to half its usual width, so is very smooth, no stubble, and totally strokable. It feels nice against a cheek or a tongue. I have a small tattoo halfway between my hair and my navel (which goes in, not out), on the right hand side. It is a Chinese symbol meaning 'Woman' and makes me feel very sexy. I am formerly straight, but very curious about the lifestyle. I really feel the need to try sex with a woman, as I'm positive it can be very special. I would ideally like to meet a Bi woman who is happy to let my husband watch us and maybe join in, but he would have no contact with her unless she wanted that to happen. I currently enjoy all kinds of sex, with blindfolds, vibrators (sometimes multiple!), and love to be tied up. I have a willing mouth and a very soft probing tongue, which I love to use to please my partner. I also am practiced in the art of

massage, and can use my tongue in very clever ways! I believe that there is not a part of the body that is not an erogenous zone, as long as you know what to do with it! I also like to suck, presently cock, but would love to find out what another pussy tastes like. Would you like your nipples sucked by a willing novice? Please get in touch and let me try!

WHAT TO MAKE OF THESE ADS?

First of all, it is clear that there are many people who are interested in recreational sex. It may be surprising to some quite how many people are advertising; certainly, simply in the places where I looked, they run into the thousands. However, even a cursory examination tells you that many people are or have advertised in all of these places, including the Internet; after a while, you recognize their photos. Most, perhaps, will not be surprised at the number of men advertising, but will be at the women. Any assumption that most are sex workers must be quashed because the vast majority who want men specify “no fees.” I will discuss the various gender imbalances later.

There are obvious ways in which advertisers specify what they are after in a general, non-sexual sense, particularly in terms of class (professional, Good Standard of Living, educated). Many white couples seek Black men, often using the words “Coloureds welcome”-phraseology which is racist and archaic. The whole issue of race and recreational sex deserves exploration in much more depth elsewhere.

I had intended to take a close look at transgender ads, but there were too few of them advertising, or being advertised for (24 in all media). Those there were covered everything: TVs/TSs wanting men, women, couples. Men/couples wanting the same. The most ads were in *Loot* (15 in total). Elsewhere, the occasional brave TV, often as part of an f/m couple, advertised. Perhaps the recent inclusion of a feature in *Desire* on “Chicks with Dicks,”* complete with glamorous photos, will encourage future advertisers. Proportionally, the highest number appeared in the *Pink Paper*, which was the only place with ads from FtM transsexuals or from women specifically asking for them. When an ad from a TV appeared in *Desire*, *Connect4Fun* or *UK Swingers*, it was from a TV man within a heterosexual couple.

To some extent, there are different constituencies of people for different publications. *Loot*, for instance, offers quick replies, with little information about the advertisers. But you can buy *Loot* easily, and there’s nothing intrinsically sexual about it—a purchaser might just as easily be wanting a second-

hand car or wardrobe. So there's no commitment to pursuing sex. People who buy *Desire* (which offers much slower replies, but more information and pictures of the advertisers) have expressed enough interest in sex to subscribe to a magazine about it. *Connect4Fun* also offers slower replies. It's also for people already into the swing scene—at least in fantasy. Ads are the only reason you'd buy it, whereas *Desire* is only around a third ads, with features and fiction too. The *Pink Paper*, obviously, is picked up by people with some level of affiliation to the queer community.

People who access ads through the Internet can do it in total privacy, with no commitment to doing anything, and with no need for pre-planning—unless they want to scan some photographs to send or post to advertisers. They may be sexually aroused when they are looking at the Net—thus making it less likely that they will take matters further in the cold light of day.

A different proportion of ads from men/women/couples appeared in each of these places. Ads from couples were a far lower proportion in *Loot* (9% of total) than in *Desire* (41% or 50% of total) and *Connect4Fun* (81%). On the other hand, 170 (63%) of *Loot*'s advertisers were single men wanting other singles (40% women, 23% men), and another 57 (20%) were men/TVs (not TSs) in "other relationships." A total of 83% of all ads in *Loot*, therefore, were placed by single men. This compares with 36%/36% in *Desire* and 7% in *Connect4Fun*. (I have not looked at the *Pink Paper* or *UK Swingers* here, as they are not directly comparable.)

Very few women advertised in *Loot*—a total of 13 of 285 (around 5%). However, in *Connect4Fun* and, particularly, *Desire*, there were more—92 and 74 (both 24%) in *Desire*, 46 (12%) in *Connect4Fun*. That is in addition to all the women in couples who advertise. *Desire* also had a fair number of single men advertising—138/78 (36% and 26%). *Connect4Fun* had by far the lowest—28 or 7%.

Why is there this difference? My hypothesis is that *Loot* is for men who are not connected to the swing scene. Perhaps they are "living in hope"—that women who are not sex workers will see their ad and respond. However, men do respond to ads from other men placed there. Those women, on the other hand, who are connected to the swing scene may be less wary of advertising for people who already know what the unwritten rules are, and so will go to those publications. As to why there are so few ads from couples in *Loot*, perhaps those who know the score go to publications where others will too.

What proportion of these ads were bisexual, or from people in a heterosexual lifestyle wanting a MOTSS? *Loot* had by far the most men advertising for other men. Two of my interviewees had met male sex partners that way. A

total of 31 bi men advertised for men or couples with bi men (11% of all advertisers). There were seven single bi women and 20 bi women in couples advertising (9%). In *Desire*, there were 23/26 (6%/9% of total) single bi women and 77/74 (25%/19%) bi women in couples; 15/17 (5%/4%) single bi men and 18/4 (6%/.02%) bi men in couples. *Connect4Fun* had the most bisexuals: 23 single bi women (6% of total) and 128 bi women in couples (40% of total), as well as 3 single bi men and 33 bi men in couples (10%). This is nearly as high as *Loot*-which has an overall higher number of men advertising. The *Pink Paper* has too few ads to analyze in depth.

One obvious question is: do people actually respond to these ads? Or is it more that they are taking baby-steps towards their fantasies, which they do not really intend to act upon? This question has been vexing the readers of *Desire* in the two issues I examined. Debbie and Martin, whose letter appeared in issue 30, complained of the difficulty of getting a good man to join them (for strictly heterosexual “action”). According to them, potential playmates rule themselves out every step of the way by everything from living at the other end of the UK, to being unable to hold a simple conversation, to simply not turning up.

Many people wrote to second them. As one correspondent said, “it does take a lot of work.” Letter-writers complained that “less than 50% of people bother to reply at all,” and “When I have had responses they have always come to nothing-not through any fault of mine, but because the moment a possibility shows any signs of becoming a probability, some people run a mile. It’s not just single men who are to blame.”

These problems are certainly no better on the Internet. One of my interviewees, David, had tried that route unsuccessfully. “After spending hours on the internet trying to find contacts, I’m back again with clubs and parties. This last weekend, I emailed six people and got nothing back. Tina [my partner] and I emailed a couple who lived across the other side of London, we exchanged emails every day for about a week, and they said they’d call on a particular day. They didn’t. Then there are those people who suddenly block your email address as a way of letting you know they’re not interested.”

WHY USE PERSONALS?

The obvious answer is to find sex partners-and because it’s fun, whether or not you ever get anywhere. It’s a way of seeking sex without leaving the house. Both parties know they want recreational sex, rather than an affair or a relationship. In addition, although I concentrated on London-based ads, in fact, many more are from outside, particularly from rural or suburban areas.

Logically, in urban areas there are more opportunities to get all types of sexual partners.

Another reason for answering or placing ads is because you want something very specific—for instance, a sub TV looking for a dominant couple, people who are particularly into hair, and so on. Ads that are very specific are more likely to increase your chances of getting what you want: respondents are more likely to be interested in what you are. However, it increases the likelihood that people who fantasize about this, but are too nervous to act on it, will respond up to a point but will be timewasters. The *UK Swingers* advertiser, whose lengthy ad appears above, has clearly thought at length about what she wants, although the role of her boyfriend remains unclear. It seems to me that it is her fantasy she's talking about: it's a woman, not a couple, who needs a bi-fem teacher.

Then, of course, there is the fact that many people actively want to be secretive about a part of their sexuality. The fact of its being underground is part of the attraction. They don't want to be out and proud as bisexuals, or to have open, polyamorous relationships: they want to be transgressive in private and live the rest of their lives as they wish—which needn't necessarily be as suburbia-dwelling homophobes. None of my interviewees fell into that category. Indeed, people need not even be particularly secretive about it—they simply see recreational sex as an easily boxed-off part of their lives.

For women, ads in swing scene media can be the easiest way of getting uncomplicated sex with other women—23 of 46 single female advertisers in *Connect4Fun*. It tends to be hard for women, bi or lesbian, to get casual sex with other women. Although there are always ads in the *Pink Paper*, only a few of them are for lesbian sex as distinct from relationships. To underline this, a recent article in the *Guardian* newspaper by Stephanie Theobald reports on lesbian hedonism (June 1, 2000). She writes of going to a lesbian sauna where a young woman asks her if she can have a “quick one,” before sitting on her lap and kissing her “to the count of ten.” “By now, you figure, there would have been an orgiastic pile-up in a gayboy sauna.” They kiss and part. It doesn't sound all that hedonistic at all.

I asked my interviewees why they had used ads:

Francis, 29, is a predominantly straight man, currently single, who has had sex with men. He says: “It's just another way of trying to get sex. I've met a couple of men through *Loot*. You can get single men easily enough anywhere. It's harder when women are involved, I've never had much luck there.”

Martin, 40, is mainly gay. He too has met men through *Loot*, as well as most other cruising methods. “Through going to clubs on the mixed fetish

scene, I started wondering about having sex with women. Not women who are straight-straight, but those who are kind of pervy. I answered an ad for a couple with a bi man, and I've seen them a few times, sometimes going to sex parties with them too. Yeah . . . I wouldn't have missed it for the world!"

Jackie, 35, an openly bisexual woman who is not currently in a relationship, says: "I've both placed and answered ads because I want to have casual sex with women. It hardly ever happens though. I advertised in the *Pink Paper* once for me and my then-boyfriend, but I got cold feet, I'm afraid. I thought I'd meet women who were more like me through the gay press but maybe I had too much time to think about what I was doing. It's easier to meet women at sex parties-but their boyfriends are always there of course-whether you want to them to be or not."

That's not to say that women are necessarily more reluctant than men. David and Tina have been together for five years; they are in their late 30s. "Tina got me into all this. I had never thought about it before, but she had been involved in the lifestyle to an extent. We thought we might meet some 'sex friends,' but have had better luck in clubs and parties." Tina continues: "I've gone to various fetish and then swinging events over the years. If I've been going out with someone who didn't like the idea then I stopped. No big deal. But it is fun with someone who you really love and trust. It adds to your relationship."

Another reason why bisexually active women may choose this route to find sex partners is because they actively want people who conform to a more mainstream stereotype in terms of appearance than those they'd find on the queer scene. Jackie: "I have mixed feelings about getting women through the swing scene. Everyone is always very very feminine in appearance. At first, I liked that, I like women who look femme, but I'm not remotely butch myself. In fact, I suppose I look straight and I like women who look straight too. But after a while I started to be a bit fed up with the uniformity of the women. Once, I saw a woman who looked really butch, like you'd see in a lesbian club, but she didn't seem to be doing anything sexual. I really wanted to have sex with her then. In a lesbian club, I wouldn't have fancied her at all!" Tina makes another point: "You'd have to be really stupid to go to a lesbian club to get a woman for a threesome. It would never work. Those women are lesbians, they don't want a man involved."

ADS AND IDENTITY

It is clear that very many more people describe themselves as bi than ever connect to the bisexual community. Most of these advertisers-I would sur-

mise-publicly identify as heterosexual, and outsiders would presume this to be the whole truth. However, there is no shortage of advertisers who maintain they are bisexual—at least for the purposes of advertising. “Bi-man seeks similar,” or “Happy couple, she bi, he straight,” are calling themselves bi. If they were asked point blank if they were bisexual, they might respond differently. They are relating to the “sexual” part of bisexual—exactly what many people who identify as bisexual for emotional and/or political reasons fight against. These are the bisexuals who are criticized by all sides—gay and straight. However, sexual bisexuality is obviously a personal truth for many people: they may well be aware that they could identify as bisexual in a wider sense, but they don’t want to. This underlines the fact that firstly, the term “bisexual” means very different things to different people, and secondly, two people who behave in the same way may identify totally differently.

It is also probable that more people than those who describe themselves as bi act bisexually. For instance, when the women in these ads are described as bi, but the men are not given a sexual identity, what does that mean? We assume he is straight, but is he? And those couples who do not give an identity (e.g., Married couple seeks similar) may not necessarily be heterosexual either.

About a quarter of the people who I have included in the bisexual category actually described themselves as bi-curious. But what does this term actually mean? It implies that people so describing themselves are tentative, don’t know whether they’re interested, and, indeed, may be curious about bisexuality. It implies lack of experience and certainly no strong, overpowering desire. I suspect that there are two schools of thought in the bisexual community about bicuriosity: on the one hand, many people actively support experimentation; on the other, there is disparagement of such people as being uncommitted to their sexuality, perhaps denying or repressing their sexuality. I believe some people are simply curious and think they may be interested in MOTSS* but don’t know.

Bi-curiosity connects to something which has had a lot of media hype in Britain recently: bi-try. This term appeared in a series of articles in newspapers and glossy women’s magazines and refers to women (never men) who allegedly meet in night clubs and—when there are no suitable men around—are quite happy to get off with each other. As this has only been reported as happening in glitzy, supermodel-type arenas, it is hard to know what bearing it has on anyone else. The articles themselves, however, present bisexuality as inherently trivial, as opposed to the real, oppressed sexuality of lesbians.

The three men I interviewed all-from different perspectives-admit, if pushed, that they are “bi-curious.” This is particularly true of David:

I’ve always had sex with women, loved women, gone out with women. I’ve never felt like that about men. But I’ve always liked cum shots in porn. And when I’ve seen men cumming at sex parties it’s driven me crazy. Maybe that’s when I started thinking about men sexually. I’m not bisexual. I’m not denying anything, or being repressed. The things I’ve done with men when Tina’s been around, and there haven’t been many, started because I wanted to excite Tina. That’s still the main reason.

He touches on something suggested by cultural theorist Jonathan Dollimore, who describes a scenario in which a bisexual man is having a threesome with a woman and another man. He watches the man and woman fuck, and his identifications are multiple: he identifies with the man, wanting to be him, fucking her, but he also wants to be her being fucked (as a woman) by him. Maybe he desires the man through her too.¹

After some years of being with Tina, and having gone to sex parties with her at her instigation, David felt more inclined to experiment with men:

It was pure fluke. I was next to a man at a sex party-usual, het stuff, with some of the women playing with each other. I was standing by some men and I suddenly realized they were wanking each other. Then one of them got down and started sucking me. Tina was next to me all the time, cuddling me, but looking at what other people were doing. I whispered to her: ‘a man’s sucking me off’ and she went wild. I think it was because we were all in the pitch dark-so if a man touched another man and he didn’t like the idea, the other man could always pretend it was a mistake.

The majority of swinging men-as opposed to women-seem not to take the opportunity to expand their sexual horizons and explore sex with men. Tina:

It drives me up the wall that at sex clubs the women are all presumed to be bi and the men straight. I know that logically that just can’t be true, so why do so many men pretend it is? And of course, some of those straight men who are gagging for their wives to go down on other women would feel like murdering another man who tried to do it to them.

Perhaps that is because straight men, stereotypically, are unable or unwilling to relate to men on an affectionate or emotional level. And perhaps that is especially true of those who assume their female partners will do just that. Stereotypical swinging, after all, involves straight men, bi women.

Some men though, who are in a highly sexualized environment, or who see themselves as being particularly highly sexed and adventurous, and who are comparatively free of homophobia, may expand their sexual horizons to include men—which is not the same as feeling a burning attraction to them. This reflects what Alan Sinfield points out. In the days of gay liberation, he says, gay activists assumed that the opportunity to be openly gay would mean that gay husbands would be “rescued” from their marriages and younger men would not have to make that mistake themselves. Instead, what he thinks is happening is different:

. . . while the majority of men who are now leading an openly gay life would once have been married and covert, a further cohort that would once have scarcely allowed themselves gay fantasies is having covert sex with men. And, beyond that, there are men who are thinking, but as yet hardly doing anything, about it . . . the gay movement has allowed everyone to move one space across.²

Martin agrees with him: “All gay men know that many so-called straight men are up for it. I might have thought they were really gay once, but now I know they aren’t. They like things as they are.”

There may also be some tension between very out bisexual men and those who behave bisexually but have a different perspective on identity or being out. Francis: “I was at a mainly heterosexual party once where a man went on and on about how he was bisexual, and why weren’t there any bi men there, or bi men on the swing scene. It really got on my nerves. We were there to have a laugh, not talk about that kind of stuff.”

The most substantial piece of research ever done to touch on this subject was published by England’s Health Education Authority in 1996 as *Behaviourally Bisexual Men in the UK*³—hereafter called *Behaviourally Bi*. This shamefully (and, on the face of it, mysteriously) underpublicized work looks at the behavior of men who have sex with men and women. Apart from the implications for HIV prevention, the authors of this report did not hypothesize about the meaning of their findings.

The researchers advertised for men who ever “got off with” men as well as women. They conducted telephone interviews with 745 men gathered from a variety of non-gay print media, including tabloid newspapers. Theirs was a highly sexually active sample, with 87% having sex with both men and women in the year preceding interview. Less than half (43.9%) of the men defined themselves as bisexual—even though all had had sex with both men and women over the past five years. Next often were none/don’t know (16.9)

and heterosexual (13.2). A few others identified themselves with attitude (e.g., broad-minded) or through their sexual prowess (horny, randy, high sex drive, etc).

Francis is one such man. “For myself, I don’t really see things as hetero/bi/gay. I’ve just got a high sex drive. I’m adventurous. I don’t see the point in saying ‘I won’t do that.’ You don’t know what you like until you’ve tried it!”

Many of the report’s respondents had used contact ads: 67.1% of respondents had ever answered a contact ad; 28.9% had placed one. Of those who had answered one, 48.8% had met both men and women, 23.1 male not female, 12.9 female not male, 15.2 neither. Of placers, 21.5% met neither, 33.2 both, 30.3 male not female, 14.7 female not male.⁴ They were not asked whether they had met couples. Clearly, they were either very persistent, or just luckier than the people I spoke to.

GENDER DIFFERENCES

Firstly, everywhere I looked, with the exception of *Connect4Fun*, there were simply more men advertising and-from what my interviewees have told me-more men replying too. It is scarcely necessary to say that more men than women are interested in recreational sex. To generalize, women tend to value sex connected to emotion rather than disconnected from it. They also have more to lose, in terms of their reputations, if people discover what they are doing, potential danger and exposure to men who are weird, creepy, and unpleasant. Of course, women can be all those things too; just not so often. So, because of their relative scarcity, and because all of the men and some of the women are interested in them, women on the swing scene are far more highly valued than men. Single men, on the other hand, are often let in on sufferance.

A presumption around recreational sex in general is that men are really running the show, that women have somehow to be persuaded, particularly when it comes to FFM threesomes. In some cases this is no doubt true, as a recent post to the *iVillage.com* bisexual bulletin board attests:⁵

I have agreed to help fulfill a fantasy for my boyfriend, the 3-some. I am not bi, I never even thought about having sexual anything with a woman, and I am terrified about engaging in this. I mean, when the night comes when we do this, how do I know what to do, how do I know I can even do anything with another female, how can I even watch the man I love make love to another woman??? How do you

know if this is the right thing, should I even do this and try it or just tell my boyfriend that I change my mind . . . Please help me.

But what of those women who really are interested in pursuing recreational sex? The authors of *Behaviourally Bi* make a perceptive point about this:

Missing from this discussion . . . is the perspective of the women who have sex with partners of both genders. The image of the dutiful and faithful wife betrayed by the base desires and deceitful behavior of her 'bisexual' husband is central to the discourse of bisexuality and AIDS. While it would be facile to deny that such a figure exists in reality, it is equally clear that many of the women involved with these men are themselves sexually sophisticated and adventurous. Very little is known of these women, but it is likely that their participation in this market will be informed by different imperatives..and they will perceive their activities differently.^{6,7}

Tina is one such woman. "It's a walk on the wild side, isn't it? An adventure. Gay men do it all the time, don't they? Everyone just assumes they will. Well, why shouldn't I?"

The second observation is that there are far more f/m couples advertising for other women (or couples with bi women) than for men. This is for two reasons. The first is that men often compartmentalize their sex lives, so that a bisexual man may be far more likely than a bisexual woman to operate two completely separate sex lives (one with a female partner, one with other men). You can see this by the number of men in *Behaviourally Bi* who are out to their female partners: roughly a third (32.9%) of female partners knew the man was having sex with men too. A slightly higher proportion (35.1%) knew he had ever done so. These figures are very low compared with 85 of 97 (88%) of partnered women in *Women and Bisexuality*, whose partners knew they were bisexual.⁷

The other is caused by the different ways homophobia applies to men and women: women's sexuality is trivialized, men's demonized. Perhaps the bi men in this report believe—and many of them are no doubt right—that they will be rejected if they "confess" their desire for men. For many het women, a bisexual man means a partner who is unfaithful, who may put her at risk of HIV. For many het men, a bisexual woman means someone very sexy, who will want a threesome, not someone whose sexuality is in any sense threatening. Another common presumption is that while bi men will feel compelled to act on their desires, women can keep them as fantasies. In fact, of course,

what a bisexual partner's sexuality means for a het partner depends on their individual sexualities, beliefs, and relationship.

For this reason, perhaps men also assume that women won't be interested in mmf threesomes, whereas women assume that men will be interested in ffm. About a quarter of the *Behaviourally Bi* men had regular threesomes with their regular female partner and other women. However, 24.3% had threesomes with a regular female partner and other men, and 13.5% had discussed activities involving men with their female partner.⁸ It would seem that this mmf behavior starts from sources other than personal ads or the straight-man predominating swing scene. It is interesting to conjecture the extent to which the couples who had threesomes with another woman are the same as those who had them with an additional man.

If the previously mentioned bi-try articles are correct, it would seem that when women are "bi-curious"-and not in an f/m couple-they "try" with friends and acquaintances. If they are in an f/m couple, they may try with their partners present. Men, however, may "try" with strangers. They want something which will be distant from their own lives, which won't have an impact on them in any other way. Men who want sex with other single men, who in my survey only appeared in significant numbers in the *Loot* ads, are presumably looking for them through other men-only sites or publications-or getting sex through methods such as clubs, cruising grounds, etc. Of my interviewees, Francis and Martin-but not David-had followed that route.

David's experience raises some further points:

I had a lot of misgivings about doing an ad describing me as bi-curious. I really don't fancy men-and I think if Tina was there, she might try and persuade me to do that kissing and stroking stuff. I get off on cock, if I'm turned on enough. It's all to do with intimacy. I don't want to be intimate with men. I reckon that with other men, if we were on our own, we could just play with each other and that would be fine. No intimacy. Anyway, we put in an ad for a bi/bi-curious couple eventually, but haven't had any replies.

Does this desire to keep other men at a distance simply amount to male homophobia, to female sexuality being much more able to include affection? Or is it more about masculinity in general? I cannot forget two friends of mine, very openly gay men, telling me that they would find it "too risky" to send a postcard to a man with whom they had had casual sex.

COUPLES SEEKING . . .

The majority of people seeking sexual contacts through any of these ads were f/m couples, particularly as compared to singles (men or women) advertising for couples. Perhaps this is because many people involved in this scene are paired off: most are in their 30s and 40s. This is also because adding extra people into your sex life when you are coupled up is not that easy-unless sex clubs are readily available, which they aren't in London.

A presumption might be that this is "wife-swapping." However, advertisers often differentiate between "same room fun"-some kind of group sex-and swapping. This latter may take place more between couples where everyone is heterosexual-my interviewees had only participated in "same room fun." However, many advertisers also specify restrictions against actual swapping, such as "ultimate with own partner only."

The vast majority of f/m couples seeking one or more others to join them were f/m seeking f. An immediate reaction to this might be that the male partner was seeking another woman to fulfill his fantasy. No doubt this is sometimes true (see previous discussion). However, many women do enjoy this: both female interviewees had actively sought out such threesomes. Tina:

Before I was with David, I answered ads, a lot of which never came to anything, for couples wanting another woman. I had a few great experiences and one horrible one where a man was clearly trying to get both me and his wife to do what he, and not we, wanted to do. I also had group sex without ads: once with a boyfriend and a friend, another time with a couple of women. I never advertised because there was no need. It's a lot harder now, being in a couple. But everyone-men, women, couples-wants single women.

Even when it is not directly a fantasy of the woman's, there may be other reasons why she would be involved with a threesome. Tina:

I have been with other women in a group scene where I could tell she wasn't that interested. But I don't think that's because her bloke was "making" her, I think it's more complicated than that. Like a woman will reach out and touch you just because she's being friendly, or because she knows it really turns him on, or because the situation's really wild and she wants to go with the flow. At swing clubs, I should think maybe a third of the women are really bi. It's easy to tell!

As I state earlier, women often want intimacy-even in situations which from the outside look purely sexual. Tina: "It's nice to have David there

when I'm with a woman at a sex party. It's like bringing all sides of myself together. It's sharing my fantasies with him. It's an adventure we're having together. Maybe that's partly why I get so turned on when he does things with men. It's our secret."

And Jackie: "I am bisexual, I've had relationships with women before, but when I've been in a long-term relationship with a man, I don't want to do that. I have no interest whatsoever in open relationships and I consider myself monogamous. But . . . you can incorporate having threesomes into monogamy, I think. I've often wondered about all these other women at sex parties: did they ever do more than just have sex with women? I'm sure some of them are like me."

There are, however, many things that can go awry when four, rather than two, people come to choose sexual partners. It can be hard enough for two people to agree that they fancy each other, can carry on a conversation, will meet, want to have sex. Add in another two people, and it is not surprising that many foursomes never happen. Remember David's experience with the Internet mentioned above. He has also used the print media: "We advertised in *Desire*, but nobody suitable answered. Several straight single men when we asked for couples. And we replied to some ads, but just got 'no thanks' back." Tina continues: "I have answered several *Loot* ads. Women have to do it really; we're the ones whose voice appears on the voicemail. If a man was to respond to a message left by a bi female, I don't think she'd believe his partner was really interested. We've never met anyone through *Loot*, though."

They will carry on looking though. David: "We'll keep answering ads from time to time even though I don't really believe we'll meet anyone. It's a laugh. And we want to have as many of those as we can."

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Simply by looking at the numbers of ads in a few publications, it is clear that many people in Britain seem to be interested in recreational sex, and a significant proportion of them are behaviorally bisexual. The relative lack-compared to the US and many other European countries-of easily accessible sex clubs and parties may add to the numbers advertising.

It is very important to state that simply because some promiscuous (or adventurous) people are bisexual is not the same as saying that bisexuals are

promiscuous. There is no intrinsic reason why people who are attracted to people of both/either sex need necessarily have more partners over their lifetime than people who are interested in just one. A majority of those who advertise and who answer ads are male and/or heterosexual.

On the other hand, to attack people who seek recreational sex is empty moralism. Of course, to many, bisexual-identified people included, the whole idea of recreational sex and organized swinging is reprehensible. To me, however, it is entirely a matter of personal choice. Where the swing scene is sexist or exploitative, obviously this needs challenging. And it does pose a problem for politicized people: there is an overwhelming supposition of the primacy of heterosexuality, and, in particular, “the couple” as a stable entity, a building block of existence, as much as in the most conservative society. This begs the question: what do bisexual people in the UK who are affiliated to the lesbian community do for recreational sex? My hypothesis is that they will do what people who are not so affiliated do: some (men) will go cruising, some will have recreational sex with friends and acquaintances, or through the more queer-friendly fetish scene, while others will try some sort of swinging.

Looking at the content of the ads, I was surprised at how many women were advertising. In *Desire*, for instance, single women were around a quarter of all advertisers. Although not all these single women will necessarily be really single (a male partner with, say, a video camera, is sometimes mentioned in passing), that is still many more than stereotype would suggest. Just because more men than women are interested in recreational sex doesn't mean that no women are. Other assumptions also need to be dissected: for instance, just because fewer f/m couples advertise for an extra man than a woman for a threesome, that doesn't mean that none do.

People (particularly women) who advertise as bisexual in contact ads outnumber those who have ever, or probably will ever, join a bisexual group or go along to a conference. Perhaps, for those who want to be mainly monogamous with a long-term partner, it can be a relatively straightforward way of trying to incorporate some sort of bisexuality into your life. If you want bisexual sex-and not emotional or political involvement-then advertising may be a good way of trying to get it. Whether you'll succeed is another matter altogether.

NOTES

1. Jonathan Dollimore, *Bisexuality*, p. 256, in *Lesbian and Gay Studies A Critical Introduction*, eds Andy Medhurst and Sally R Munt, Cassell, London, 1997.

2. Alan Sinfield, *Identity and Subculture*, p. 210, in Medhurst and Munt, *ibid.*
3. *Behaviourally Bisexual Men in the UK (Identifying needs for HIV prevention)*, Peter Weatherburn, David S. Reid et al., HEA/Project Sigma, London, 1996.
4. *Ibid.*, pages 24-5.
5. iVillage.com is a feminist-oriented women's Internet site.
6. *Behaviourally Bi*, page 73.
7. *Women and Bisexuality*, Scarlet Press, Sue George, London, 1993, page 81.
8. *Behaviourally Bi*, pages 42-43.

APPENDIX

Glossary of terms/abbreviations (marked * on first mention in the text): **F/m** female/male couple; **Bi** bisexual; **Bi-curious** (see page 48); **TS** transsexual; **TV** transvestite; **FtM** female to male transsexual; **NS** non-smoker; **VHSOL** very high standard of living; **O** oral sex; **A** anal sex; **AC/DC** bisexual; **WE** well-endowed; **Safe ultimate** heterosexual intercourse with condom; **DIY** do-it-yourself, i.e., masturbate; **sub** submissive **Chicks with Dicks** pre-operative male to female transsexuals; **MOTSS** member of the same sex; **mmf** male/male/female; **ffm** female/female/male

Coming
Out
Successfully
in the
Netherlands

Koen Brand

ABSTRACT. This article describes the coming-out process of a married bisexual man from The Netherlands. He describes his feelings and observes the changes in his life, the reactions from his environment. In the last part of the article, he reflects on the future. *[Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-342-9678. E-mail address: <getinfo@haworthpressinc.com> Website: <http://www.HaworthPress.com> © 2001 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]*

KEYWORDS. Bisexuality, coming-out, open marriage, married bisexual man, non-monogamy

INTRODUCTION

My name is Koen Brand, and I live in The Netherlands, a country that you might know of in various ways: A country of polders and dikes, tulips and windmills, or as the country of Amsterdam with its red-light district, or even the country where soft drugs can be legally bought for one's own use.

In February 1999, I acknowledged to myself that I am bisexual.

I wish to offer in this article a glimpse of the way I handled my coming out, a coming out that till now seems to have gone quite smoothly as compared to other people's stories that I have heard and read about. First, I want to relate something about the country I live in and then describe my family and myself. Lastly, I will describe something about the process my family and I have gone through since February 1999.

THE NETHERLANDS

The Netherlands, or Holland as it is quite often incorrectly called abroad, is a small country. The longest distance from North to South is about 200 miles and from East to West some 120 miles. The lowest point of the country is 7 meters below sea level, and the highest point is only 322 meters above it. It is densely populated, as we have over 16 million inhabitants in this small area.

We are known for our windmills, some of which are still in existence. A lot of them were used in the past for our struggle against the water. They pumped the water out from the low parts of our country. When you fly to the Netherlands and land at Schiphol Airport, you actually land several meters below sea level and our famous dikes keep the water out.

The Dutch people have a way of dealing with drugs that is frowned upon in quite a number of other countries. The main feature of that drug policy is that we do not look upon drug use as a criminal problem but rather as a health problem. From that it follows that soft drugs like cannabis are quasi legal. However, we do deal harshly with hard drug dealers-but with the hard drug addicts themselves, we treat them from a medical perspective.

The Netherlands is a constitutional monarchy. A democratic country that, since 1898, has been reigned by queens. It is also a country that has a lot of openness about sex. I already mentioned Amsterdam's Red-light district, but that's not what I mean here. Our children are usually well-informed on the facts of life. Condoms are easily found. In addition to a low level of abortions, it seems we have the lowest number of teenage pregnancies in the world. We are also very liberal with respect to people of diverse sexual orientation.

MY LIFE AND FAMILY

I was born in Amsterdam in July 1953. Right now I am 47 years old. I am the oldest of four children. *Both* sisters divorced this past year. *My brother* is still in his first marriage. My mother died in 1998 at the age of 70, and my father is 75 years old. His hair has just grown back after chemotherapy. Because my father changed careers a number of times, I lived in several parts of the country. But for over 30 years now, I have lived in the southeastern part near Helmond.

My wife Annette is one month younger than I am. Fortunately, I am the older one because she had said she would not have married someone younger than herself. We were married young, at the age of 21. In November 1999, we celebrated our 25th anniversary.

I have been working in Information Technology since 1974. I entered that field in the traditional way: learning your profession as an apprentice while you work. But some years ago I decided that I also wanted a formal degree, so I started studying again and successfully completed it in July 1999.

In 1998, my wife decided that she also wanted to go back to school. She started a four year program to be a sign language interpreter.

We have two sons, Roel, 23 years old, and Jaap, 22. They are both studying in universities (Information Technology and Mechanical Engineering). Roel, the older one, has been together with his girlfriend, Inge, since April 1998. Jaap, the younger one, has had a girlfriend since May 1999. We live in

a small community with less than 6000 people. The nearest larger town is called Helmond and has 70,000 inhabitants.

HOW MY COMING OUT BEGAN

My attraction to other men surfaced in my late twenties. I had one experience 17 years ago where my wife and I had a sexual relationship with another couple. In this experience, I found out how it feels to sexually touch another man. When I was singing in a choir over 10 years ago, there was a gay man with whom I flirted. This continued for some months until I left the choir (not because of the gay man but because of a new director whose style of music I didn't like). From time to time, these feelings of attraction to men surfaced, but I never acted on them. However, my wife and I openly discussed these feelings.

In February 1999, I stayed home from work because I thought I had caught the flu. When I didn't get better, I went to my doctor for some tests. These turned out negative. Nothing was wrong with me physically. My wife raised the possibility that my illness might be psychological in nature and specifically caused by my struggles with my bisexuality. She is a doctor's assistant and some weeks before had told me a story about a patient of hers who had come there for a medical check-up. During the tests, he started talking to her about the fact that he had been severely ill for a long time until he accepted his own gayness. After that time, his health had remarkably improved.

After a lot of talking with my wonderful wife, I came to terms with my own bisexuality and decided that I had to integrate that side of myself into our lives. Another reason that I love my wife dearly is for her bringing up this subject, a subject that has brought a lot of uncertainty about the future into her own life. But from the start, I was absolutely certain that our bond was and is strong enough to integrate this change into our lives.

THE DIFFICULTIES AND FEARS

In retrospect, it seems that the main difficulty regarding my bisexuality was the fact that I did not want to acknowledge it to myself. One reason may have been out of fear of not being accepted. I think that is also why I was always better able to communicate with women than with men. I subconsciously held my distance from men because I was afraid that I might be attracted to them and that it might develop into something I did not want: a sexual liaison.

THE ROAD TRAVELED SO FAR

From the time I acknowledged to myself that I am bisexual, many developments have occurred. The first thing I did was to begin getting information on bisexuality. Initially, the Internet was my main source of information. When you type in bisexuality on one of the search engines, you end up with many Web sites. Of course, part of it is X-rated, but you also find a number of serious sites on the subject, such as www.bisexual.org and www.binetusa.org from the USA and www.bi.org from the UK. I also joined the SSML mailing list, which I discovered on the Straight Spouse Network pages. On this mailing list you can find posts from both straight spouses and their gay, lesbian, or bisexual partners. Every day one can read posts from a number of compassionate men and women. Their posts really helped me develop my own way of dealing with my bisexuality.

You learn about people who are still fresh from the shock of their spouses coming out. There are those people that have dealt successfully with their spouses' gay or bi side either by integrating it into their lives or separating in a positive way. The comparison between the process after revealing this to the spouse and a roller coaster comes up regularly. I even began to contribute my two cents' worth to the discussions. The sharing of ideas and experiences on this list has really helped me, and I gleaned many things to think about—thoughts and ideas that entered into the talks with my wife about the way our relationship was developing. One thing became very clear from the mailing list: each of us has to find his/her own way of dealing with his/her bi side.

Besides the Internet, I also tried other ways of becoming informed about bisexuality. One evening I visited at a gay group in Helmond that was discussing the subject of bisexuality. Because it is difficult to find other bisexuals, I visited two different bisexual support groups and joined one of them. The first group, called GoBi, meets in Nijmegen. The one I joined has a name that is untranslatable into English (Bi-kring De Samenkomst, which means Bi-circle The Gathering) and is situated in Tilburg. Both support groups are situated about 40 miles from where I live. The support group meets once a month. It is a mixed group of bisexual men and women that talk about subjects related to bisexuality. We also meet socially once a month in a gay disco. In addition, I also became a member of the Dutch National Network for Bisexuality.

THE CHANGES IN MY RELATIONSHIP

The relationship with my wife has essentially not changed. We are still a loving, caring couple that can and do show affection to each other. Sometimes when we walk together, we talk about what people might think when they see us. Do they see us as a couple married for almost 26 years? Or do they think that we are newlyweds? What has changed is the fact that I am consciously expanding my bi side. This also means that we are dealing with integrating my bisexuality into our life together. We keep working on our relationship and communicate more in order to be able to absorb these changes.

One major change has been that I have developed my bisexual side to the point that, with the consent of our respective wives, I have begun dating another bisexual married man. I met Henk at the bisexual support group that I talked about earlier. The four of us met and talked several evenings before my friend and I spent our first evening together. At the request of his wife, we both were tested for HIV before we had our first date.

The relationship with Henk is not just a sexual one. We also share time being intimate without being sexual. In talking together, we get to know our present feelings as well as our past history. We enjoy just spending time together, whether it is going on a hike, visiting a bar, or sometimes we share an evening eating, drinking, and talking about the road we are traveling together with our wives.

In the past year, I have also made a number of new friends in the bisexual community. I volunteered to be on the committee that will organize the first European Bisexual Conference in June 2001.

REACTIONS TO MY COMING OUT

After I admitted to myself that I am bisexual and at the same time came out to my wife, we then decided to tell our family and friends. I must admit that the first few times I told the story it was quite stressful to me. This was especially true when I told my sons and their girlfriends. Some of the people we told voiced their concern about our marriage. However, since we both showed that we love each other and intended to go on together, none of them reacted in a negative way. The last ones we told were my parents-in-law. We both feared they would worry unnecessarily about our marriage and us. We decided to tell them at last, because we did not feel easy with the lack of

openness about situations when I was not home because of activities for the bisexual organizations. My parents-in-law still accept me for who I am, but my father-in-law remarked, "I could have expected this from anybody but you." It seems my pedestal has been lowered a bit.

I did not get negative reactions when I came out at work. I told a female colleague in the early stage of my coming-out, and she was very understanding and supportive. Over the past year, I have also told my story to my direct superior as well as a number of other colleagues: all reacted in a most positive way. In my opinion, the reactions I got are characteristic for the country I live in, a country where the majority of the people are tolerant of sexual and ethnic minorities. I realize that in other countries I could have met with very different and probably negative reactions.

SEX LIFE

Essentially, the major aspects of my sex life have not changed. My wife and I still enjoy each other very much sexually. It is true that we have had our periods where one or the other did not need sex as often as the other. However, on the whole, we feel that over the years, as we got to know each other better and better, our sex life has become deeper, more varied, and more enjoyable. Probably, those periods of less interest will reoccur in future, but we have learned that they will also alternate with honeymoon-like periods of intense interest and satisfaction.

Besides the sex life I have with my wife, I have now developed a sexual relationship with another man. This is new to Henk as well as to me. I have found it very different to be with a man: how we touch each other, how it feels to be touched, and having sexual intercourse with another man. It is exciting to travel into unknown territory (pun intended). I have learned to make love to my wife over the past 25 years. With my boyfriend, we are just starting to get to know each other's likes and dislikes and the way we react to each other. But it satisfies something in me that I have never been able to satisfy before. It is different from sex with my wife, and it feels complementary.

One of the fantasies I have had for a long time is that the three of us are in bed at the same time and where both my wife and my boyfriend pamper me. I do not think this will happen in the near future. I think my wife might want to try it, but his wife has a lot more difficulties with integrating his bisexuality.

HOPES FOR THE FUTURE

It is always difficult to predict what the future has in store for you. When you look around in nature you will find diversity wherever you look. Every niche in ecology is taken. Personally, I feel that every man, woman, and couple has to find out for him/her/themselves what is the best way to live their lives. What element of the diversity they fit in: whether it is single, married, living together with a partner of either sex, living together with a partner of both sexes, monogamous, polyamorous, etc. Of course-in my humble opinion-when you are in a committed relationship, you have to take the other(s) into consideration. That can very well mean that an open relationship might be the superior alternative to serial monogamy. I also think that in heterosexual relationships, monogamy is not as common as some people (want to) believe. The specter of diversity also exists there. And as long as we are able to integrate that diversity into our lives, I would say: "So what?" An evolutionary rule over the millions of years of our past has been "Adapt or become extinct." That's about adaptation on a macro level, but on my own personal micro level, adaptation has also been essential to me. Adapting to moving to another town. Adapting to being married. Adapting to being a father. Adapting to a new working environment. Adapting to bisexuality.

I think that my wife and I realize this rule of nature and are indeed able to adapt. From the time I admitted to myself that I am indeed a bisexual man, I have been able to draw from an enormous reservoir of energy. From that energy we are working on our relationship and I am working on discovering myself.

We confidently look to the future where we continue with our ability to adapt and expect still to be together in another 25 years.

**Bisexuals
and
BDSM:
Bisexual
People
in a
Pansexual
Community**

Steve Lenius

ABSTRACT. While the developments of the GLBT and the leather/BDSM communities have been somewhat parallel, the pansexual leather/BDSM community has in many ways become the cutting edge in its acceptance of bisexuals. This article traces the parallel development of the GLBT and leather communities from the pre-WWII era to today and describes the widening of society's paradigm of sexual orientation from unipolar (heterosexuality only) to bipolar (either straight or gay) and the increasing acceptance of alternative sexualities such as BDSM and leathersex. The era following the onset of the AIDS crisis has brought to the leather/BDSM community a pansexual trend toward increasing inclusiveness, changing it from a predominantly gay-male phenomenon to a community that also includes lesbians, transgendered people, heterosexuals, and bisexuals. *[Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service 1-800-342-9678 E-mail address: getinfo@haworthpressinc.com Website: <http://www.HaworthPress.com> >©2001 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]*

KEYWORDS. Leather, BDSM, bondage and discipline, dominance and submission, sadomasochism, kinky, vanilla, play party, gay, lesbian, transgender, homosexuality, bisexuality, heterosexuality, pansexuality

INTRODUCTION

For many gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered (GLBT) people, the Holy Grail and the New Jerusalem of sexuality will be a world where it's okay for everyone to be who they are and to love whomever they choose. This applies both to one's gender (male, female, or anywhere in between) and to one's sexual orientation (homo, hetero, or anywhere else on Dr. Kinsey's scale).

Is it possible that such a wondrous community already exists? Well, sort of. In recent years the pansexual leather/BDSM community has been formed by the alliance of elements from the gay male leather/SM community, the lesbian (and/or lesbian/feminist) leather/SM community, and predominantly heterosexual BDSM/fetish groups. This new community describes itself as "pansexual," meaning it's okay for everyone to play with everyone else. That's the premise, but is it the reality? This article will examine that question and also explore the history of the leather/BDSM community and bisexuals' place (or lack thereof) in it throughout that history.

TERMS

BDSM: a four-letter acronym that stands for six words. BD stands for "bondage and discipline"; DS stands for "dominance and submission"; and

SM stands for “sadism and masochism.” The BDSM community encompasses all of these interests, but not every member of the community is into all of them.

Leather: Predominantly a gay male (and to a lesser extent lesbian) term which names one fetish but which can stand for many more. A member of the gay male leather community may wear motorcycle leathers (think of Marlon Brando and James Dean, or even The Fonz) and/or may be attracted to men wearing motorcycle leathers. But denimwear, uniforms (military, police, fire, etc.), rubber clothing, boots, or cowboy and western wear are also seen at gay male leather bars. Although leather and BDSM are seen by many as two parts of one whole, it should be noted that not everyone who self-identifies with the “leather community” is into BDSM. It should also be noted that if someone is not into BDSM, they are not looked down upon by those who are, and vice versa.

Kinky: Formerly a derogatory term that is being reclaimed by the leather/BDSM community in much the same way as “queer” is being reclaimed by some members of the GLBT community.

Vanilla: The opposite of kinky. When used by someone who is kinky it may or may not be a derogatory term.

Play: People outside the leather/BDSM community would say that “play” is a BDSM synonym for “having sex,” but the community’s use of the word goes far beyond that simple concept. Nonsexual play may involve many different activities, but it will not include oral, anal, or vaginal intercourse—if it did, it would be sexual play. Some people use non-sexual BDSM play as foreplay; for other people, BDSM play is satisfying enough that sex afterward would be anticlimactic. Bonus definition: a play party is a party held for the purpose of BDSM and other erotic play, either sexual or nonsexual.

GLBT AND LEATHER COMMUNITY HISTORIES

There was a time in American history when the only valid gender identity was either male or female and the only valid kind of couple contained one male and one female. Any deviation from this standard was so threatening to the rest of society that it was looked upon as “sick” or “perverted” and was considered something to be stamped out by any means necessary. This could mean locking up the perverts in prison or sending them to hospitals for the mentally ill and administering electroshock therapy or other “cures.” This view was so prevalent that people who knew they were “different”—attracted to people of their own sex—also knew it was best not to be open about that

fact. It was better to keep that part of themselves “in the closet.” Many men and women grew up thinking they were the only person in the world who had ever had feelings like these.

Then along came World War II. Suddenly men (and, to a lesser but still significant extent, women) found themselves in the armed forces—in same-sex barracks. And they found that there were other men (or women) who shared their “difference.” They weren’t so alone in the world, after all. Suddenly, the closet door wasn’t completely shut anymore. And suddenly, the military, which was supposed to extinguish a man’s individual spirit and turn him into one impersonal cog in a fighting machine, paradoxically became the setting where countless homosexual men’s and women’s spirits were set at least partially free.

Even when the war had ended, once these soldiers had tasted life among their homosexual peers, they didn’t want to give it up. Homosexual men and women tended to congregate in larger cities, such as New York, Chicago, San Francisco, and Los Angeles, and staked out their territory: bars and coffeehouses, restaurants, bathhouses, and other spaces for cruising (looking for sex or romantic partners) and public sex. Some people (who would later be referred to as “vanilla”) wanted to get as far away as possible from reminders of their military past. But, especially among men, the rough-and-tumble, almost hyper-masculine comradeship of their military days held a romantic and even a sexual attraction.

This was the genesis of the gay male leather community, and many of the traditions of today’s gay male leather community have their roots in WWII-era military traditions. Leather clubs were formed; some were bike clubs and required a motorcycle for membership, while others were simply fraternal social, service, or charity fundraising organizations. Towards the end of the 1970s, the male beauty contests that had become entertainment staples at leather bars evolved into an elaborate system of leather title contests, culminating in the establishment of both the International Mr. Leather Contest in Chicago and the International Mr. Drummer Contest in San Francisco. (The International Mr. Drummer contest grew out of *Drummer Magazine*, one of the first visible published voices of the gay male leather community. It took its name from the famous Thoreau quote, which appeared on the table of contents page of every issue: “If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured or far away.”)

Many of the men who formed the gay male leather community, or who joined it later, seemed to be attracted to extreme forms of sexuality (such as

bondage, sadomasochism, and fisting-to name a few) which found their fullest expression in the pre-AIDS 1970s. The community even evolved a “hanky code” in which the color of a hanky (or hankies), and whether the hanky was worn in the right or left pocket, signals what kind of sexual action the wearer is looking for. (This is a convenience which has yet to be adopted by other communities.)

The Stonewall riots of 1969 are considered by many the breakthrough event for the modern “gay-liberation” movement. Suddenly gay men and lesbians were marching in the streets, saying there was nothing wrong with them just because they loved someone of the same gender, and they demanded an end to being treated as “sick” or “perverted.” Because of the efforts of the early gay-liberation movement, American society went from the unipolar view of heterosexuality being the only valid sexual orientation to the bipolar view that a person is heterosexual or homosexual, EITHER one OR the other. Black or white only, no shades of gray allowed.

Bisexuals now found themselves in the awkward position of having to choose sides in this debate; they had to be on one side of the fence or the other. Any bisexuals who let it be known that they could be quite comfortable on both sides of that fence soon found themselves distrusted and considered traitors by both heterosexuals and homosexuals. In spite of the fact that the gay-and-lesbian movement was subsequently altered to include both bisexuals and transgendered people, becoming the GLBT movement, bisexuals still too often feel oppressed by society’s bipolar view of sexual orientation. Bisexuality was still something that had to be kept in the closet.

In the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s, the increasing visibility and solidarity of the gay-liberation movement coincided with (and probably contributed to) increasing visibility and solidarity of the gay male leather community. But the situation for bisexuals was no better in the leather bars and the newly-forming gay leather/levi/motorcycle clubs than it was elsewhere in society. Bisexual leathermen have told me stories of how they kept quiet about their bisexuality when they were in the bars because they knew they’d be shunned if it became known they occasionally played with women. The attitude of many in the gay male leather community at the time was that they didn’t want to even interact socially with lesbians, or male or female “breeders” (a derogatory term for heterosexuals), much less play with them in a BDSM context. For some gay male leathermen, this attitude continues today; one leatherwoman likens it to a club portrayed in an old Little Rascals film, the “He-Man Woman-Haters Club.” Their dungeons are male-only space, and quickly empty if a leatherwoman should happen to walk in.

In the early 1980s, lesbians in leather joined the leathermen as a recognizable element of the gay leather community. The women's leather community resembled the men's leather community in some ways (they formed leather clubs and chose leather titleholders), but in other ways it was different (as far as I know there has never been a leatherwomen's bar anywhere). The AIDS epidemic seems to have been a major catalyst in bringing gay leathermen and leatherwomen together. Many gay leathermen were among the first people infected with HIV. When AIDS devastated the fabric of the men's leather community, the women were there to help, both by becoming caregivers for men stricken with HIV and by raising funds for AIDS research and care. (This is starting to be reciprocated; leathermen now commonly raise funds for breast cancer research.)

By the 1990s, the gay men's and women's leather communities were, for the most part, no longer underground; in 1992, International Mr. Leather Lenny Broberg was even a guest on a daytime television talk show (although in the end it turned out he was there only to be mocked). And another group was being added to the community: kinky heterosexuals, who were coming to the realization that even though they were heterosexual, their sexual preferences made them anything but "straight." They had been forced to keep their kinky predilections underground to avoid consequences such as losing their jobs or having their children taken from them. They realized that in certain ways they were just as much "in the closet" now as gay leathermen and leatherwomen had been. If the sexual practices of the gay leather community were now becoming known and somewhat accepted, maybe it was time for kinky heterosexuals to follow the example set by the gay leather community and stop hiding.

Suddenly what had once been unthinkable for many kinky people, both gay and heterosexual, was becoming commonplace: Heterosexuals and gay people were talking to each other, getting to know each other, attending each other's parties. And they were finding that the dynamics were moving from "us" and "them" to just "us." The thinking behind this joining was that some of us are gay and some of us are straight, but we're all kinky, and it's in our best interest to fight society's oppression of kinky sex practices of all kinds.

In sexual matters, members of the kink community tend to be more adventurous and less judgmental. This mindset creates sexual spaces where it's safe to experiment with and stretch personal boundaries, and to experience forms of sexuality and intimacy that have heretofore been kept off-limits. A self-identified gay man, for whom sex with a woman would be anathema, might

suddenly find himself flogging a woman's back-and enjoying it. One of the boundaries with which a person can experiment is their sexual orientation-experiencing sex and/or intimacy with people of varying gender identities. Such a "pansexual" atmosphere, where it truly doesn't matter to anyone what the gender of one's play partner is, could be just the thing a bisexual or bi-curious person is looking for.

BISEXUALS IN TODAY'S LEATHER/BDSM COMMUNITY

Does a bisexual orientation mean a person will also be interested in BDSM? Not necessarily, although my own personal experience has been that many of the people I've seen at bisexual conferences are also people I see at pansexual BDSM gatherings. And perhaps this stands to reason, because when one throws away society's rulebook and roles in one area, it's easier to do it in others. Freed of the man-on-top-woman-on-bottom rule, it's easier to explore different types of relationships, different ways of relating, different styles of intimacy-and this can be a gateway to BDSM.

But how pansexual is the BDSM community in reality? How accepting is it of bisexuals? I asked those questions of several community members. Jerry (not his real name) considers himself a 2 on Kinsey's 0-6 scale for coming to orgasm. But for BDSM play, "It really doesn't matter. Well, there's one way it matters-it gives a particular flavor to the scene. The same scene with a man or with a woman will be different scenes, but they both can be wonderful."

There are many reasons why Jerry finds BDSM play interesting and fulfilling:

The thing about BDSM that excites me is becoming aware of my body. You become involved and intimate with it in ways that go far beyond plain sex. We've been so hung up about sex in our society-sex is something you do in a dark room, preferably wearing blinders. Now we're getting more acquainted with our bodies through things like massage or tai chi. BDSM is another way of accomplishing this. It may not always lead to orgasm but it's still pretty terrific. It's dealing with parts of the body that are highly sensitive and eroticized, it just doesn't always have the same outcome as what we think of when we think of sex.

Jerry also likes the way BDSM blurs the boundaries and definitions of what's sexual, what's erotic, and what constitutes intimacy. And, he continues:

There's a political dimension to this, too. Large portions of the country are moving to the political right, and the moralists are telling us basically to reject our bodies, except where they want us to—excuse the hyperbole—adorn them with output from the capitalist system. The autonomous knowledge of who we are gets erased in the process. But it's interesting that there's this countertrend of BDSM. It opens up the consciousness of who we are through role playing, costume, or sensation. You have the opportunity to do all sorts of things that bring awareness and consciousness of your body out into the foreground—you have the opportunity to try new things. Bisexuality is the same—you can switch top and bottom roles, you can switch the gender of your partner.

Jerry says he has never felt any disrespect or rejection in the BDSM groups he's been a part of. He cites as an example his membership in a men-only BDSM club which holds annual retreats. At the retreat grounds, the heterosexual men (10%) post a banner outside their cabin proclaiming it the "Het Ghetto." But they still have no problem engaging in BDSM play with the other 90% of the attendees who are gay. This seems pretty typical of Jerry's experience with the pansexual BDSM community: "There's a lot of goodwill toward me as a bisexual person. The attitude is 'We're here to have a good time playing, and the expectation is that you ought to have as good a scene as possible, whoever you are.' The measure is in the quality of the scene, not the orientation of the people in it."

A VISIT TO TWO PLAY PARTIES

An examination of the action at two recent play parties is a good indication of how pansexual the leather/BDSM community really is. One party was staged by a gay men's leather club, and all of the 150 people attending were male. Many of these men are still squeamish about having lesbian leather-women or kinky heterosexuals in their dungeon. But others are grudgingly accepting and some enthusiastically accepting of pansexual play. Some of these men have had bisexual leanings, but it hasn't been okay to express them until recently.

Two weeks earlier, a predominantly-heterosexual group threw a play party in the same space, and the energy was quite different. Men were topping women, women were topping men, and women were playing with other women. But the only male-male play at the party was by two self-identified gay men.

Even among people who self-identify with the pansexual label, it's still apparently a bit too much of a stretch for supposedly "straight" men to play with other supposedly "straight" men in public at a play party. When asked about this, Jerry's analysis is that man-to-man play is still taboo for the same political reasons as drag is taboo—because it's seen as a bit embarrassing. Heterosexual men are uncomfortable watching men play together, because "to admit interest in that is to give up that position of privilege which is accorded to the heterosexual man." It's okay for women to wear men's clothes, but when men wear women's clothes we have to make fun of it—if it's taken seriously it's too threatening. For the same reason, while BDSM play has recently become a staple feature of advertising and the media, all the media presence for BDSM is very heterosexual—it would be too threatening otherwise.

Jerry notes that among the men attending this party, man-to-man play has been known to happen in private. "BDSM opens people up to exploration, but more on a local level, one couple at a time. In a club setting or a gay leather bar the roles are fixed already, so it's harder to bend them. But in private it's easier to get people to drop their roles and expectations, and to experiment."

CONCLUSION

So, is the pansexual BDSM community the first harbinger of a world where gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and heterosexuals all respect each other, and maybe even feel free to play with each other? My assessment of the situation: Champions of pansexual BDSM may be on the cutting edge, but, to date, that edge is still a small one. While people in the BDSM community are willing to talk about the concept of pansexuality and to explore it intellectually, personal issues and biases mean that for many people the label "pansexual" is probably a bit ahead of reality. But the leather/BDSM community must be given credit for at least seeing the possibility of the concept, and for being further ahead than anyone else in making it a reality.



Unmarried Bisexuals: Distinct Voices

on
Marriage
and
Family

Dorian Solot
Marshall Miller

ABSTRACT. Because some bisexuals can marry their partners while others are legally unable to do so, marriage plays a unique role in the bisexual community. This article discusses qualitative research findings about how bisexuals in unmarried relationships think about marriage. It explores differences between the perspectives of bisexuals in same-sex relationships compared with those in different-sex relationships, and how the experience of having been in both kinds of relationships can affect people. It also considers ways that married bisexuals can be allies with unmarried people in a world that continues to discriminate on the basis of marital status. *[Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-342-9678. E-mail address: <getinfo@haworthpressinc.com> Website: <<http://www.HaworthPress.com>> ©2001 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]*

KEYWORDS. Marriage, unmarried, alternatives to marriage, family diversity, bisexuality, Alternatives to Marriage Project, interviews, research, qualitative research, married bisexuals, unmarried bisexuals, same-sex relationships, different-sex relationships

The landscape of marriage is shifting in seemingly contradictory ways. While the divorce rate hovers around the 50% mark, the wedding industry's annual profits continue to climb beyond \$35 billion in its relentless marketing of everything from bridal gowns to chinaware.¹ As growing numbers of different-sex couples choose not to marry, an increasing amount of activist energy is directed toward legalizing same-sex marriage. While a handful of states² create "covenant marriage" to allow couples the choice of biblical-based commitment with fewer divorce options, employers recognize the increased family diversity in the workplace by offering health benefits to the unmarried domestic partners of employees.³ And while families in every shape and size—single parents, stepfamilies, gay and lesbian families, unmarried couples, adoptive and foster families—find increasing acceptance, a "marriage-only" backlash movement has sprung up, wielding misrepresented social science research to back their cause.⁴

In the midst of it all, bisexuals defy categorization. Many bisexuals are married; many others can't marry because same-sex marriage is not legal anywhere in the United States. Marriage can be a sensitive subject in the bi community, where people tend to be acutely aware of the arbitrary nature of laws that create vastly different options, rights, and responsibilities (or lack thereof depending on the gender of one's partner. While some bisexuals in different-sex⁵ relationships feel a responsibility not to get married in order to avoid taking advantage of a privilege not available to all, others in the same

situation believe that getting married can be part of a strategy to redefine the institution and work to change it “from the inside.” Still others get married for the same reasons most Americans marry: because it is expected of them; because marriage offers community legitimacy, social status, legal protections, and sometimes health insurance; or because it is way to demonstrate love and commitment to a partner.

As a long-term unmarried bi couple, we were fascinated by the sturm und drang about marriage that seemed to surround us. With each passing year, the external forces that nudge young male-female couples toward the altar took on more strength, and we found ourselves having to exert greater effort simply to remain as we were: happily unmarried. Relatives and friends dropped hints or asked outright when they would hear the news of our engagement. Dorian’s employer refused to allow Marshall to receive health benefits as her domestic partner, even though we’d been together longer than one of Dorian’s married co-workers whose husband was eligible for benefits. We faced discrimination on the basis of our marital status when we searched for an apartment, bought tenants’ insurance, rented a car. We were surprised to realize that except for a handful of legal guides for unmarried couples, there were few resources and no community for those of us with bare wedding ring fingers.

After several years of dreaming and planning, we decided to take action. In 1998, we launched our new national organization, the Alternatives to Marriage Project, at a workshop at the Fifth International Conference on Bisexuality. Two years later, the organization has 1500 people representing 48 states across the country, has been cited in the media nearly 100 times, and continues to grow rapidly. The Alternatives to Marriage Project provides support, resources, and public education about unmarried relationships.

As part of our ongoing research, we conducted in-depth interviews with 85 people in long-term unmarried relationships, including 27 who identified as bisexual. The themes that emerged in these interviews have been confirmed in the conversations we continue to have as we speak about our work at bisexual conferences, at community events, and in the daily contact we have with our constituents.

We found that bi people in different-sex relationships are much more likely to have an awareness of their “heterosexual privilege” than many heterosexual-identified people. Bisexuals frequently mentioned this as one reason in a list of several when we asked them why they’d chosen not to get married:

Being bisexual, I just do not think that I could conscientiously get married to a man, unless people of the same sex could get married in this country.

-Amy Lesen⁶

Being queer, it just seemed like, why would I get married to a partner of one gender when if I had a partner of another gender, I couldn't legally marry them? It just didn't make sense to me.

-Kathy Labriola

Some of these different-sex couples said that they might re-think their decision to marry if same-sex marriage were legalized. Others said that since their solidarity with same-sex couples was only one of several reasons they didn't want to get married, a change in the laws about same-sex marriage wouldn't change their minds. Still others acknowledged that the "I refuse to take advantage of a privilege not available to my gay friends" argument works well in casual conversation, but wasn't at the root of their personal decision-making about marriage.

The experience of having been in a same-sex relationship-either currently or in the past-has a major impact on some bisexuals' marital status. Those whose present partner is the same sex now can't legally marry. But even some of those currently in a male-female relationship say that their past experiences had an effect on the current relationship. Myra, for example, said that marriage wasn't a priority for her now that she was in a relationship with a man, since it hadn't been available to her in the past:

I had never been married. I had never even given it a lot of thought. I'd been in long-term relationships with women-it wasn't an option.

-Myra

Similarly, Lyn Freudlich said that the experience of identifying as a lesbian previously forced her to question the traditional assumptions about relationships:

I came out as a lesbian before I knew Billy. I think that kind of forced me to completely reevaluate the future that I had originally seen for myself growing up a little girl. You know, (the idea that I should) get married to a nice man and have a family. Once I had to start re-thinking

it I realized I could make up all the rules. That's when I started thinking marriage doesn't make any sense. . . . When [Billy and I] moved in together, that was when I said, "Oh my God, I made a commitment to this man." Like either I made a bad decision and I have to get out of it, or I have to figure out what it means. I [finally concluded] OK, if I happen to be with a man, I'm not going to do it the old-fashioned way.

-Lyn Freudlich

Other people do like the old-fashioned joy of marriage (not to be confused with the Joy of Sex or the Joy of Cooking). Most of the unmarried bisexuals we interviewed, believe, as we do, that it's OK if other people choose to marry.

If it works for them, cool. I'm very relaxed about it. As long as they don't expect me to [marry], they can do whatever they like. I'm very supportive of all my married friends. I've gone to all my friend's weddings and said, "Yay, congratulations, you're getting married!" I don't sneer or snicker at them. The institution of marriage works for some people; it just doesn't work for me.

-Michaela Hutfles

Being a married bisexual-and plenty of them exist-doesn't make you a bad person. But it does put you in a position of privilege, in the way that men are privileged in this culture. Feminism asks of men what they personally are going to do to change the sexism and misogyny that exists in the world and build gender equity. Marriage raises that same challenge: If you as a bisexual want to and can get married, great. Now what are you going to do about everybody else? The challenge is to practice responsible ownership of the privilege society accords with marital status. Below are five of our thoughts on how one might do that.

1. Stay visible.

Despite what the Religious Right would have its followers believe, getting married need not "cure" you of bisexuality. In fact, though they certainly wouldn't admit it, the most famous bisexual married couple in the country may be John and Anne Paulk. The Paulks, who work for Focus on the Family, made their debut as "exgays" in homophobic newspaper ads and went on to national media fame. Since bisexuality encompasses an ability to love differ-

ent-sex as well as same-sex partners, the Paulks' marriage may, indeed, be as happy as they claim it is.

But there's no need to become an ex-gay-or an ex-bisexual-when you get married. Too many married bisexuals fade from the community, no longer feel the need to fight biphobia and homophobia, and even check the "heterosexual" box on forms ("I'm monogamous," they say, "so my sexual orientation doesn't really matter to anyone"). One way to avoid taking advantage of heterosexual privilege is to maintain your bisexual visibility (or visibility) even if you're married.

The debate over same-sex marriage often erases the experiences of bisexual people. When same-sex marriage is talked about as "gay or lesbian marriage" vs. "heterosexual marriage" that language fails to recognize the bisexual people in both same-sex relationships and marriages. Relationships don't have sexual orientations, people do. If people assume your marriage is a heterosexual one, use that opportunity as an "educable moment" about sexuality and relationships.

2. Fight for all relationships and families to be treated equally in your workplace.

Under the current system of health care where citizens are not guaranteed health insurance, many people receive health benefits through their job or their spouse's job. These employment benefits (health insurance and others) are worth a lot: on average, they make up 40% of a worker's compensation. Growing numbers of employers are recognizing that offering health benefits to some employees' families but not others violates the basic tenet of equal pay for equal work. Competition for skilled employees has helped advance the cause for domestic partner benefits, in which employees unmarried partners and children can receive benefits equivalent to those given to married spouses.

If your employer isn't among those who have implemented plans that treat all employees' families equally (domestic partner benefits, a cafeteria-style plan in which all employees receive a set amount they can "spend" on the benefits they want, or another innovative system), take the steps you can to change things. Work for plans that don't discriminate on the basis of sex or sexual orientation. While same-sex-only plans take the important step of recognizing same-sex gay, lesbian, and bi couples, they're usually seen as a second-best option until same-sex marriage is legalized, not a fundamental shift in how we define families. Same-sex-only plans also affect transgender and transsexual people (and employees with trans partners) in unintended

ways, bestowing and revoking benefits based on how the state defines one's legal sex. Although costs are frequently cited as a reason not to design inclusive plans, domestic partner plans that include both same-sex and different-sex couples increase the employer's costs an average of only 1%.⁷

3. Brush up on your marital status etiquette.

Wedding guests know to follow protocol and be tasteful and tactful. Unmarried relationships also deserve such respect, but, alas, you're unlikely to find an etiquette guide on this subject in your local chain bookstore. Here are a few handy tips: Don't ask unmarried people when they're going to get married. (Hint: if they are planning a wedding, you'll find out.) Instead, do the harder work of understanding what their relationship means to them. What do they call each other? How do they want to fit into each other's circles of friends and family? Do they celebrate an anniversary?

Also, in a world divided into often-outdated single/married/widowed/divorced categories, many people make the mistake of thinking unmarried people are "available" even when they're in happily monogamous relationships. Case in point: insensitive remarks about the imagined breakup of the relationship, like (citing from real-life experiences) "Your girlfriend is really cute! Let me know if you break up so I can ask her out," or "I think you and John would stay on really good terms if you ever broke up." You wouldn't tell your married friends, "Your husband is so hot! Let me know if you get divorced so I can date him," or "I think you and Leah could have a really amicable divorce."

4. See yourself as part of the family diversity movement.

When we created our "Affirmation of Family Diversity" and posted it on the Web⁸ for others to sign, we had no idea how popular it would turn out to be. The fact is, people of all sexual orientations understand family diversity because they see it in their own lives. Despite the stereotypical "family" image of a man, a woman, children, and a picket fence, only one quarter of American households actually consist of a married couple and their children⁹—we haven't been able to find any statistics on white picket fences. The challenge before us is to make the connections between all the people whose lives *don't* resemble a 1950s sitcom: the single people and stepfamilies, cohabitators and polyamorous families, single parents and childfree couples, adoptive and foster families, and bisexual, transgendered, lesbian, and gay relationships and families. Question the political marriage-only movement by

pointing out that even if marriage works well for some people, “one size fits all” family structures are unrealistic and discriminatory.

5. Think outside the box.

Some people, upon hearing about our organization, suggest that the solution is to legally marry, but also to have “alternative marriages” that challenge the conventional norm. Although that isn’t our choice, the idea is an interesting prospect for married people mulling this issue. Through the Alternatives to Marriage Project, we frequently meet married people who are challenging the conventional notions of marriage. For some, that means carefully dividing up household chores equitably and not based on gender roles or having a wedding ceremony that challenges some of the guests’ expectations and assumptions. For others, it means choosing to have an honestly, openly non-monogamous relationship or co-parenting children with other adults or living in a co-housing community of extended friends and family. For others it’s donating the dollars saved from tax break that some married couples receive to a worthy cause. Of course, how to implement an “alternative marriage” depends on the individual relationship, but it opens the door to many possibilities.

Just as we have done with our culture’s understanding of sexual orientation, bisexuals will no doubt continue to push society to think in more complex ways about how we understand family. The invisibility of bisexuals in debates about “gay and lesbian marriage” versus traditional “heterosexual marriage” reveals that like false understandings of sexual orientation as dichotomous, perhaps marital status is unnecessarily dichotomous as well. A critical consciousness of the choices and privileges associated with marriage is an important part of the current process of defining “family.”

NOTES

1. For an overview of the wedding industry, see Ingraham, Chrys. *White Weddings: Romancing Heterosexuality in Popular Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1999.

2. As of June 2000, Louisiana and Arizona are the two states offering covenant marriage, though other states have considered covenant marriage legislation.

3. The Human Rights Campaign maintains a comprehensive list of employers offering domestic partner benefits at www.hrc.org/worknet/data.html.

4. At the Alternatives to Marriage Project, we counter this backlash with press releases and reports available on our webpage, www.unmarried.org.

5. We use the phrase “different-sex” instead of “opposite-sex” as part of an effort to be inclusive of transgender and intersex people. While “opposite-sex” implies

that there are two sexes (and that male and female are somehow "opposites"), "different-sex" creates space for a more complex understanding of sex and gender.

6. Some interviewees gave us permission to use their full names, while others requested that we use only their first names.

7. For more information about organizing for domestic partner benefits, we highly recommend *The Domestic Partnership Organizing Manual for Employee Benefits*, published by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. The manual can be downloaded for free from www.nglftf.org or purchased in paper form from NGLTF or the Alternatives to Marriage Project (www.unmarried.org/books.html).

8. The Affirmation of Family Diversity can be found at <http://www.unmarried.org/family.html>.

9. Smith, Tom (1999). "The Emerging Twentieth Century Family." *GSS Social Change Report No. 42*. Chicago: National Opinion Research Center, University of Chicago.

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Bi Media Visibility

The
Pleasure and Pain
of

Chasing Amy:

Analyzing
Reactions

to

Blurred Identities

and

Sexualities

Jonathan Alexander
Karen Vescavage

ABSTRACT. Kevin Smith's film *Chasing Amy* met with a great diversity of response among lesbians, gays, and bisexuals. Some lauded the film as an honest and complex exploration of sexuality, while others castigated it for portraying what they took to be stereotypical, even homophobic characters. Hoping to understand these diverse reactions better, we collected multiple viewer responses to the film for analysis and interpretation. Ultimately, we argue that the reactions we found bespeak both competing and shifting attitudes about the nature of sexuality and its relationship to identity in our culture. Further, we discuss how reactions to the film cluster around certain identifiable and significant categories; for instance, some responses trouble the gay/straight dichotomy, others reassert that dichotomy, and still others explore possible images of self beyond that dichotomy, such as a bisexual or bi-erotic identity. [Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service 1-800-342-9678 E-mail address: getinfo@haworthpressinc.com Website: <http://www.HaworthPress.com> > ©2001 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]

KEYWORDS. Bisexuality and film, *Chasing Amy*, film, bisexuality, interpretation of popular culture, interpretation of film, interpretation of *Chasing Amy*

When we first heard about the film *Chasing Amy* (1997), with its strong female lead unashamedly engaging in relationships with both men and women, we were intrigued and excited. With *Chasing Amy*, Kevin Smith, the director of the film, demonstrates that love and sexuality exist and thrive in many more complex forms than our culture and society want to acknowledge. Moreover, in our view at least, the film presented a healthy, complex, non-psychopathic (remember *Basic Instinct*?) bisexual character. To summarize briefly, a self-identified "gay" woman, Alyssa, falls in love with a straight man, Holden; their relationship arouses jealousy in Holden's best friend, Banky, and the three characters must negotiate—at times comically, movingly, and tragically—their various desires for and misgivings about each other. Ultimately, in the film's climactic scene, the three hash it out, discussing the complexities of Alyssa's desires for Holden, Holden's inability to deal with Alyssa's past as a sexual agent with both women and men, and Banky's unarticulated desire for Holden.

While Smith (1997) never laid claim to a queer or bisexual agenda in making the film, he was, nonetheless, clear about his willingness to explore the fluid and, hence, bi-erotic possibilities of sexuality and love; he says:

I wanted to make a film to further explore how two people's love for one another can alter their own perceptions about themselves. What and

who we think we and others are changes all the time. Points of view, obsessions, insecurities, everything shapes our self-image. (<http://www.viewaskew.com/chasingamy/synopsis.html>)

Considering Smith's comments, *Chasing Amy* seemed to us to be an important film in two ways. First, it seemed it was finally time for the bisexuals. We had seen the lives of the straights, and, increasingly, we were starting to see the lives of lesbians and gays. Now it was time for bi-visibility . . . perhaps.¹ Second, the film was important to us not just because of its representation of bisexuality, but also because of its *questioning* of sexuality in general and sexual *identity* in particular. For in many ways, *Chasing Amy* asks us to reconsider some of our culture's basic assumptions about sexuality and identity. As the film's accompanying Web site maintains, "It's not who you love, but how" (<http://www.viewaskew.com/chasingamy/index.html>). We should not allow ourselves to be pinned in by the categories that mercilessly determine who it is acceptable to love and who it is not. This is a beautiful thesis for a film, and one which echoes much of the talking and debating occurring in many segments of our society, from the lofty enclaves of academe to les-bi-gay street activists. In fact, the early '90s "queer movement," which radically questioned the labels through which we identify ourselves, could serve as an intellectual backdrop for the film's examination of what happens when a self-identified "gay" female character falls in love with a man, whose best male straight-talking and straight-acting friend reveals at the end of the film that he is willing to sleep with him. This sounded pretty queer-and bi-erotic-to us.

And indeed, after seeing this film for the first time, we both wanted to talk about it with as many different people as possible, to see if others were as excited as we were about what Smith was doing in his film. But instead of the accolades we assumed would be heaped on the film, we found a mixed bag of responses. Some people liked the film. Others hated it. And, upon further investigation, the responses became more varied, more extreme. Some didn't want to talk about the film at all. For instance, when we approached one of our university's les-bi-gay student groups with the idea of watching the film and discussing it, we were flatly refused. The film had so angered some that they never wanted to see it again. We had assumed that the les-bi-gay community would greet this film, by a very popular filmmaker, with open arms. After all, here was a major motion picture grappling, fairly positively we thought, with alternative sexualities. But that, as it turns out, was where we were wrong. *Chasing Amy* was a hotbed (pardon the pun) of controversy.

What could cause such a diverse reaction? How could one film evoke such

divergent, even hostile oppositions? Intrigued, we decided to survey reactions to the film, asking questions about how and why viewers responded to the film. In an attempt to collect and interpret divergent reactions to the film, we constructed a questionnaire and distributed it in several different ways.² Even before we set out to collect responses about this film, we knew that analyzing *Chasing Amy*, as well as viewers' various reactions to it, was going to be a challenging task. The number of questions and issues one could study with regard to this provocative film are legion. But we knew that our different scholarly backgrounds—one in literary and textual analysis and the other in social psychology and women's studies—would provide us an interdisciplinary approach to thinking about this film and the contradictory responses that it provokes; specifically, we felt confident that we could collect useful data and analyze it textually, and, to a smaller extent, quantitatively. As is always the case with provocative and timely research topics, though, many questions are left unanswered and even more questions arise as a consequence of initial findings, perhaps especially because of the interdisciplinary methods we deploy here. What follows, then, can only be an exploratory discussion of our interpretations of mostly qualitative data, but it is a discussion that we think nonetheless informative, provocative, and useful.

A significant portion of our survey encouraged participants to free write about their reactions to the film by asking a variety of open ended questions, such as "the things I didn't like about this movie were . . . ," "the things I related to in this movie were . . . ," "this movie made me feel . . . ," and "the character I trusted the most was . . . the least was. . . ." What we ultimately found is that *Chasing Amy* highlights key issues and questions being posed by both the bisexual community and the larger LGBT community about the nature and purposes of sexuality and identity. More specifically, the film enabled many to take a closer look at the intersection between the two—and this examination prompted a number of responses: joy, hesitancy, fear, and curiosity, to name just a few. Ultimately, we found ourselves agreeing with cultural critic Alan Sinfield (1998), who says films are "useful not as transcendent truths or documentary evidence, but as [. . .] reservoir[s] of significant and complex representations through which we think ourselves" (101). *Chasing Amy* was a film that several different communities were using to "think themselves" in a variety of ways—in some cases to trouble the gay/straight dichotomy, in other cases to reassert that dichotomy, and still in other cases to explore possible images of self beyond that dichotomy, such as a bisexual or bi-erotic identity. For ease of discussion, we have divided

viewer reactions into *four* significant emotional and critical responses to the film as a representation of bi-eroticism.

IDENTIFICATION WITH BI FEMALE REPRESENTATION (EXCITEMENT)

The *first* is a feeling of validation, of pleasure in seeing oneself represented. Indeed, some viewers were simply pleased to see bisexuality represented at all; one person commented that “bisexuality had been very substantially validated by the script.” Another participant elaborated on this, saying that she was “excited that queers were presented in a more positive way than in other mainstream movies where queers are mentally disturbed serial killers.” Many others felt personally- and even *communally*-validated as well. For example, one person felt “as though someone had finally made a movie talking about how I have been feeling.” Another said this movie made her feel “like there were others like me out there and I wasn’t alone in my views on certain things.”

Certainly, such responses were not surprising to us, as we felt similarly. Further, in a century in which one’s sexuality has become all but equivalent to one’s identity, the telling of sexual stories is tied into the construction of identities, and the people who tell similar stories can potentially create a shared identity and community. For Ken Plummer (1995), author of *Telling Sexual Stories: Power, Change, and Social Worlds*, sexual stories are often stories about our lives that “feed upon and into community” (174); they “may provide a history, a unity and difference, and a motive for the future” (173). And especially in telling a *sexual* story, and in particular a story about alternative, non-hetero-sexualities and lives, the stakes are raised. Again, Plummer, who has studied such stories in depth, makes a salient point here:

People tell sexual stories to assemble a sense of self and identity. *Sexual stories lay down routes to a coherent past, mark off boundaries and contrasts in the present, and provide both a channel and a shelter for the future.* If they do their work well, sexual stories will give us a sense of our histories—partly of our own life and where we’ve come from, but no less a sense of a collective past and shared memories. (172; emphasis in original)

For Plummer, as for many of us, stories about our lives, especially “coming out stories,” “feed upon and into community” (174), and we think that many

people identified in this way with the representation of bisexuality in *Chasing Amy*, perhaps thinking of the film as a “coming out” story about bisexuality.

IDENTIFICATION WITH LESBIAN COMMUNITY REPRESENTATION (FRUSTRATION/ANGER/FEAR?)

Of course, not everyone saw Alyssa, or this movie in general, very positively, bringing us to our *second* set of responses. Those who saw it more negatively used words like “frustrated,” “irritated,” and “annoyed” to express how this movie made them feel. For example, one respondent felt “dismayed by the shallow thinking that a lesbian could readily, easily transform herself.” Another reiterated that what they didn’t like about the movie was that it “gives lots of people the impression that if a lesbian finds the right man she can be ‘converted.’” Ironically, in the next statement, this same individual revealed that one of the things that she liked about the movie was that she *could* relate to “falling in love with a boy while at the same time identifying as a lesbian.”

When respondents were asked if they agreed with an interpretation of the movie as coming from a “stereotypical, straight male, convert-the-lesbian perspective,” almost all of those who didn’t like the film, namely most of the lesbian sample, answered a resounding “yes.” One said, “I totally agree, and it was offensive in that regard.” Another elaborated on this, saying, “I agree, because it is a straight man’s fantasy to turn a lesbian straight. To make her realize being fucked by a man is better. It’s bull.” One particularly perturbed participant wrote, “Yeah right, the gay girl who is ‘really’ straight pissed me off. Also, I thought the premise that women who are gay just need the right man to bring them out quite offensive.” This became such a recurrent thread for some respondents that we ultimately labeled such comments as the “lesbian confusion/conversion dismay” theme.

Other viewers viewed this theme from a different angle, in which the bisexual individual feels the pain of others’ anger and dismay directed at her bisexuality. One particular scene, in which Alyssa reveals to a group of lesbian friends that she is dating a man, drew very different responses from different groups; a gay woman said that she identified with “the friends who didn’t like her [Alyssa] because she was with a man,” while the other responses, from bi/queer women, attested to “experiencing [this type of] bi-phobia in the lesbian community.” One bi woman mentioned being familiar with “the lesbian anti-guy-dating sentiment,” and another mentioned relating

to “the sense of condemnation by the dyke community for sleeping with men.”

Clearly, the film unsettled many members of the lesbian and gay community—a feeling reflected in the gay press’s rather precarious and ambiguous response to the film. While most queer-themed films (such as *Object of My Affection* and *In & Out*) have garnered cover stories, *Chasing Amy* did not. Instead, the *Advocate* (1997) published a feature article, with Anne Heche on the cover, attempting to *explain* bisexuality to a confused community; *Chasing Amy* is mentioned as a film muddying the waters of sexual orientation clarity. In an interview with David A. Keeps for *Out* magazine (1998), Anne Heche and Ellen Degeneres discuss the film—in ambiguous terms. When asked what she thinks about the film, Heche responds, “Look at the message: ‘I was a lesbian, but now I found the right guy.’” The interviewer labels the film “a straight-male fantasy,” and Ellen chimes in by saying that straight men think “I’d like to see them [the female characters] kiss—as long as she still needs my penis.” Interestingly, Heche, after a moment’s thought, offers an alternative view: “But you know . . . I could say the same thing, like I was straight and then I found the right girl. So it’s all blurry, it doesn’t matter” (159). Clearly, though, for her partner and the interviewer for *Out*, it *does* matter. And for still other members of the queer press, it mattered even more; Elizabeth Pincus (1997), writing for *PlanetOut*, is positively hostile in her commentary: “*Chasing Amy* is a humorless, dour, dreary dick-fantasy about the kind of cartoon lipstick lesbian that spoiled gen-X men think will fuck them if they just trim their goatees properly” (<http://www.planetout.com/pno/popcornq/db/getfilm.html?2180>).

Such contradictions in the reading of this film are fascinating. Essentially, some felt validated, while others seemingly felt threatened by the type of story being told—particularly with regard to the story of Alyssa’s fluid romantic interest, especially from women to men. In many ways, such divergent views should not be surprising. As Daniel Halperin notes, “The struggle for interpretative authority and for control of representation . . . acquires an absolutely irreducible political specificity when it is waged over a gay life” (136). Indeed, Ken Plummer (1995) maintains that “Not all stories are preservative [of community]. Some are threatening [. . .] They do not return to ritualised, conventionalised, habitualised forms of story telling: instead they seek to break asunder, to challenge dominant narratives, to be a threat. Such stories harbour change” (175). Such stories question our worldviews; they query how we live and understand our lives. And ultimately, the representations that ask us to consider change or alternatives often elicit feelings of

anxiety, even hostility. So, one could read our lesbian respondents' anger and frustration as defensive posturing in reaction to feeling threatened by a media representation that questions their world view; this may especially be true since anger is often a cover-up for fear.

Other anxiety-inducing issues may be at play here. One individual commented, "I didn't see it as a 'convert the lesbian' story at all, in fact, I find that insulting." This person went on to point out that "Alyssa was quite capable of knowing her own feelings and she acted on them in spite of considerable discomfort on her part." Perhaps that is exactly what is threatening for some-the representation of sexuality in motion despite the emotional difficulties that may accompany that motion. Compounding this discomfort may be the fact that this portrayal of sexual fluidity is doubled with another rarely represented image-that of a woman who is in control of her own sexuality. Regardless of the root cause, reactions to the film demonstrate that the sexual story told in it about bisexuality was simultaneously validating and threatening, especially as it may have queried some respondents' "world view" of sexuality and identity and asked them to consider other alternatives for thinking about identity. Further, this anxiety-provoking aspect of *Chasing Amy* might signal not just the fear of change but also the *presence* of that change as it is starting to take place in our culture. Alan Sinfield (1994) explains the accompanying disequilibrium thusly:

Sexuality is an unstable construct in our societies, and hence produces endless textual work. Such an awkward issue has continually to be revisited, disavowed, rediscovered, reaffirmed. Closure, by definition, is always potentially unsatisfactory; even conservative texts are often to be found pushing representation to a breaking point where contradiction cannot plausibly be contained. In the face of such a performance, some audience members will retreat into conformity, while others will entertain more radical possibilities. These texts were, and are, sites of struggle; and their varying re-presentations are that struggle. (56)

Clearly, we have seen how *Chasing Amy* can be a "site of struggle" for viewers, with some "retreat[ing] into conformity" (i.e., the identities they are already comfortable with), while others "entertain more radical possibilities." And it is this willingness to see *Chasing Amy* as broaching more "radical possibilities" that brings us to our *third* set of viewer responses.

**IDENTIFICATION WITH REPRESENTATIONS
OF FLUID SEXUALITY AND SEXUAL AGENCY
(AFFIRMATION)**

In analyzing participants' responses, two other related themes emerged: specifically, some viewers grappled with (1) how someone might experience the fluidity of sexuality while (2) also having to contend with the social forces that shape, and at times constrain, experiences of sexual fluidity and its interpretation by others. We identified the first theme as the "it's not who you love, but how" theme, borrowing directly from the words of Director Kevin Smith about this film; he goes on to say, "We should not allow ourselves to be pinned in by the categories that mercilessly determine who it is acceptable to love and who it is not" (online interview no longer available). Many viewers agreed. For example, one respondent reported relating to "Alyssa's description of wanting to love without regard to gender." Another reported relating to "the confusion of Alyssa. I have always loved people, not their genitals." Several commented in a similar vein on the forces that might constrain Alyssa's "sexual" questioning, and they claimed that they could identify with Alyssa's struggle to resist the various pressures to present one's self in a given way, whether that be as a lesbian to the lesbian community, or as a hetero-virgin to her boyfriend. One respondent related to "being a sexually adventurous teenager and not having support from a peer group." Another wove most of these themes together by saying that she related to "[Alyssa] knowing that it was OK to be with a guy because at least she had come to that point on her own terms, not because society expected her to." In other words, biphobia in the lesbian community didn't prevent Alyssa from following her heart, nor did society's hetero-normativity prevent her from exploring the full range of her sexual feelings and desires—in general, as a woman, and specifically, as a woman attracted to other women. Many respondents saw Alyssa as a "strong" female, portrayed as a sexual agent and not a sexual object. According to many in our sample, a woman who enjoys sex on her own terms, and not necessarily in the terms licensed by hetero-normative social expectations, is a novel concept whose time has arrived.

Still others wanted the film to go further in its exploration of "alternative" sexualities. For example, one participant said, "The thing I didn't like about this movie was the negative attitude toward threesomes." Another conferred: "It's a very monogamous movie, saying that one person and one person only can fulfill all of your desires." For these individuals, the film's pushing of boundaries of sexual identity through its exploration of bisexuality consti-

tutes only a small step in the right direction. And for some, it is a step that urgently needs to be followed by another; one distressed individual claimed, “[the film] never discussed, or even mentioned that bisexuality was a real live orientation, that sexual orientation could be fluid, that in ignoring that reality, people’s lives are hurt and communities are shattered.”

Such reactions seem reminiscent of or even parallel to ideas explored in Marjorie Garber’s (1995) understanding of bisexuality as she discusses it in *Vice Versa: Bisexuality and the Eroticism of Everyday Life*. Garber’s overarching thesis is that bisexuality “puts in question the very concept of sexual identity” (15), and *Vice Versa* offers numerous examples from several centuries of representations of bi-eroticism to demonstrate that the presence of the bi-erotic often prompts questioning about the stability of identity based on sexuality. And clearly, for some viewers of *Chasing Amy*, images of bisexuality opened up this discussion; several enjoyed seeing depictions of a character who doesn’t want to think of her sexuality as fixed or static. And, indeed, this particular appreciation of the film parallels Kevin Smith’s (1997) own understanding of his characters; as he puts it:

Although Alyssa says she is gay, she doesn’t feel constrained by her sexual orientation. So, is she by definition gay? My gay friends say no. She couldn’t fall in love with Holden if she were. OK, then what is she? Is she what she thinks she is or what Holden thinks she is, or none of the above? [. . .] You can’t judge her. She’s still experimenting with her life, making up her mind who she is. She’s made her choices and will make others. I can empathize with both of them but Alyssa is the stronger of the two. She walks into the situation with her eyes open while Holden’s vision is narrowed by his limited perspectives and experiences. [. . .] Holden hasn’t figured it all out yet. Alyssa is in the process of learning it. (<http://www.viewaskew.com/chasingamy/synopsis.html>)

In recounting discussions he had with his “gay friends,” Smith suggests that he wanted, at least in part, to explore movement beyond the “constraints” of “sexual orientation”; and many of the bisexuals whom we surveyed responded positively to this.

Interestingly, though, the film’s engagement with a discourse of sexual fluidity and experimentation doesn’t necessarily translate into a viewer’s willingness to trouble more “traditional” concepts of sexual orientation. For while the images of bisexuality in that film are often couched in a rhetoric that queries and even seeks to transcend sexual orientation identity, some of our participants’ responses tended to ignore such discourse, and instead, they

suggest an understanding of the characters that reifies them along the straight/gay axis, often ignoring the “bisexual option.” We have come to this conclusion from analyzing data drawn from straight, gay/lesbian, and bisexual viewers’ responses to how they would “label” or “identify” the three main characters, allowing survey participants to choose from a number of different options, including “gay,” “straight,” “bisexual,” “queer”; we also left a blank open for them to write in their own “identifying” label if they so chose. Despite the variety of possibilities for identifying the characters, several straights and gays/lesbians we sampled chose to utilize the binary pairings “gay” and “straight,” while generally only the self-identified bisexuals and queers were open to considering other identity alternatives for the characters.

In general, the majority of those we polled were equally likely to label Alyssa as “bisexual.” However, of those that didn’t label her as “bisexual,” heterosexual respondents were four times more likely to label Alyssa as “gay” or “lesbian” than the bi respondents. Thus, more heterosexual than bi/queer respondents utilized Alyssa’s own self-identification label; she calls herself “gay” in the film, not lesbian or bisexual. When looking at explanations of why she was labeled as such, one straight respondent commented, “Because that’s who she was, she was a lesbian that just fell in love with a man.” In comparison, the bi-sample was more inclined not to identify her as “gay,” which left open the bi-option for her. While we would have expected significantly more bisexuals and queers to label her as bisexual than the heterosexual sample, the bi/queer sample marked her as “other” more often than not. So, while the bisexuals in general were not necessarily more likely to identify her specifically as bisexual, they were not as inclined to “fix” her sexual orientation either. In doing this, we contend, they were allowing space for sexual identity alternatives, envisioning more than a simplistic, binary sexual paradigm.

This trend became more noticeable for responses about the other two characters. For instance, while almost all of the self-identified heterosexual respondents labeled Holden as “straight,” only half of the bisexuals and queers labeled him as such. Labeling Banky seemed the most problematic for both samples. As was found with Holden, more hetero respondents saw Banky as straight than the bi/queers, 44% vs. 13%, respectively. However, as with Alyssa, the hetero sample was more likely to label Banky as gay than the bi/queer sample. While there was no majority opinion in either the hetero or the bi/queer sample, the highest agreement for the hetero sample, 44%, labeled Banky as “straight,” while the highest agreement for the bi/queer

sample, 44% as well, labeled him as “other.” Comments made by the bi/queers to explain this “other” label included attributes like “repressed” and “confused.” Clearly, both straights and bi’s experienced a bit of confusion as to how to label Banky. Nonetheless, we did note that the hetero sample seemed more comfortable with (or at least more inclined to utilize) the gay/straight dichotomy, whereas the bi sample more often saw a bi option for all of the characters. This may stem from a strong desire on behalf of the bisexuals, a very underrepresented group on film, to create bi-visibility.

One final piece of this discussion needs mentioning. While the bisexuals we sampled seemed very keen to identify, and identify with, Alyssa as a bisexual, it is important to keep in mind that the word “bisexual” is never used in the film. Perhaps Smith’s interest in moving beyond the constraints of sexual orientation prompted him not to have Alyssa take on another label or move into another identity category, even one as potentially fluid as that suggested by the term “bisexual.” However, names and labels carry significant social weight and power, even in this film. For example, Alyssa and Holden’s relationship begins to break down when Holden discovers Alyssa’s former widely-circulated nickname, “fingercuffs,” which cryptically refers to Alyssa’s sexual experimentation with two men simultaneously; Holden has difficulty thinking of Alyssa beyond those “terms,” and their relationship dissolves. The irony here is that labeling seems to haunt a film that otherwise seeks to explore psychic and social territory beyond it. Speaking of double binds, Diana Fuss (1994) suggests that “we are always engaged in a ‘double reading’ . . . in the sense that we are continually caught within and between *at least* two constantly shifting subject-positions (old and new, constructed and constructing) and these positions may often stand in complete contradiction to each other” (108). In a sense, both the characters and the viewers of *Chasing Amy* seem engaged in a “double reading” of their lives, caught between older terms through which to narrate and understand identity and newer ways of articulating self and possibility.

DISIDENTIFICATION (BOREDOM/BITTERNESS?)

While we have seen a variety of responses to *Chasing Amy* from a number of different, even contradictory, perspectives, there remains a *fourth* and final way in which some viewers critically approached the film—from the perspective of what is *left out* or still missing in the representations. In approaching media representations, people will often ask why certain images are being

shown, and, perhaps even more significantly, why something is not being represented. While many find films validating because they see their lives represented, like the many bi women viewers of this film, others bemoan the fact that their lives are not depicted, that they do not share in the realities they are being asked to accept as plausible and persuasive.

We come to this point based on an interpretation of several perplexing comments made by a small number of self-identified bisexual or queer males. Indeed, closer examination of the responses from self-identified bisexuals reveals a curious, even decisive split along gender lines. Most of those who reacted positively to the film and who professed strong identification with Alyssa (most often construed as bisexual by our respondents) were bisexual women. Self-identified bisexual or queer men, however, were far more ambivalent, and sometimes downright hostile about the film; their responses often seemed to parallel those of the self-identified lesbians. Specifically, half of the gay/bi/queer men who participated in the study felt negatively about the film. While we can understand a certain amount of distaste for the movie from biphobic lesbians, it is more difficult to understand why the film troubled these men. But they were, and their remarks were among the most pointed and critical of all the ones we received. For example, one respondent summarized, "I found the film frustrating, unrealistic, and yet another disappointing straight take on a gay issue. For a real gay film, watch *When Darkness Falls* where the girl is (shock, horror) not converted to heterosexuality."³

Perhaps part of the men's negative reaction to the film lies in the director's rather negative portrayal of men in the film—a feature not lost on several of our respondents who referred to the male characters as very adolescent and juvenile; one reported not liking the "annoying manly mannerisms of the two men." Smith's (1997) intent here is very conscious; he claims to want to critique male emotional immaturity when dealing with complex and intimate relationships; as he says:

And then there are all those horrible, ingrained mistruths we're brought up to believe about men and sex (we're dominant, we should go to bed with whores but wake up with virgins . . . those things that we're not necessarily taught, but still become part of our consciousness, regardless). (<http://www.viewaskew.com/chasingamy/howwhy.html>)

Several female respondents picked up on Smith's critique, referring to Holden, the character based on Smith, as among the film's most immature characters; he was often the one women trusted the least. Considering, then, Smith's avowedly harsh portrayal of men, the bi and queer men we sampled

might have felt a bit male-bashed; we must acknowledge though that this can only be an *interpretation* of their responses since “male-bashing” was not mentioned as a cause for disliking the film.

In an effort to further understand why half of the men we surveyed may not have appreciated this film, we looked to see if any other patterns emerged. One more did: respondents tended to trust Banky the most, a commonality shared with our earlier lesbian respondents. This is particularly salient given that, between the bi’s and queers we sampled, there was no real consensus about who should be trusted the most. The focus on Banky among the bi/queer men, however, suggests that they may have identified with him more than the other characters. Why? Part of the answer could lie in thinking critically about what male characters a male viewer could possibly identify with. The film does have an openly gay male character, Hooper, but he is, for several reasons, potentially unacceptable. First, he is obviously gay, not queer. In no way does he “queery” or question his own sexuality; he seems rather a content mono-sexual. Further, Hooper is closeted to his racial community, which makes him less empowering and attractive as a character with which to identify. Holden is a possibility, but for most of the film, he expresses complete ignorance about LGB/queer sexuality. Granted, he is willing to learn, but, at the same moment when he opens himself up to a really queer/bi possibility (the sexual tryst he proposes between himself, Alyssa, and Banky), he’s shot down and made to look even more immature than he already was—not an emotionally empowering or attractive character either.

Thus, queer or bi men might have felt that Banky was the only real “queer” or potentially bi character in the film. After all, Banky talks openly about past heterosexual encounters, and he is willing to engage Holden sexually. Even though Banky, like Holden, doesn’t get to follow through on the proposed “tryst,” he ironically seems the character most changed, and more “open,” by the end of the film. In contrast, Alyssa and Holden, in the final scenes, still look at each other longingly; they haven’t resolved their relationship, even though both appear to be moving on with their lives. Thus, only Banky has started something of a brand new life, represented by the solo comic book he’s promoting at the end, *Baby Dave*. We don’t know if he’s gay, straight, bi, or whatever. And it is that openness that might have attracted queer men—especially in a film with few male characters with whom a queer/bi man could be asked to relate. One could read our participants’ trust of Banky as an appreciation of him as one of the few really queer or potentially bi *male* characters in the film. Again, however, this can only be speculative conjecture, and more data is needed to bolster this interpretation.

This is perhaps one of the only points where we, the two bi/queer authors, tend to interpret the film and the viewers' responses differently. The bi woman author fails to imagine Banky in nearly such a positive light as the bi man author has just speculated about him. As a psychologist, the woman author questions any possible identification with Banky based on earlier "pre-gay" experiences. Another speculation is that even though gay/bi/queer men trust Banky more frequently, it is possible that this does not, in this case, translate to identification and/or respect as well. For instance, one can "trust" an overtly (old school) racist more than a covert (new school), subtle racist; while neither racist is respected, the blatant one is to be "trusted" more due to the fact you know what to expect from them. It is unfortunate that there are not several other bi male representations that could be used to compare reactions.

Further, it is important to note the relative paucity of representations of bisexual men in the media, a fact not unnoticed in the queer media. The cover story of the May 13, 1997 issue of *The Advocate* asks, "Lesbian celebrities are leading the way out of the show business closet . . . so where are the men?" Perhaps even more tellingly, an article in the Spring 1998 issue of *Anything That Moves*, a publication for and by bisexuals, wonders "Where Are the Boys?" The article explores the "invisibility" of bisexual men, ultimately encouraging bi-men to come out: "We need strong, pro-feminist men who understand that love and lust can cross any line we may draw" (Silver, 27). Clearly, such articles point out a conspicuous absence in the larger LGBT community: the lack of role models for gay and, more specifically, bi men. Indeed, this may be the crux of the matter, explaining why the film which bi women found so empowering leaves almost all of the queer or bi men we sampled cold. Of course, this is problematic, because if "queer," at least in part, signifies the de-categorization of attraction based on gender, then why can't queer or bi men find a female bi-erotic character empowering? Or is gender identity, even among bisexuals, still vitally important, as it is to the larger, dominant society? These are questions raised by *Chasing Amy* and our viewers' responses to it, and, unfortunately, they will be left unanswered for now.

CONCLUSIONS

At this point, we think it important that additional research be conducted into *all* viewers' responses to this film and others that represent bisexuality or bi-erotic options and possibilities. As is evident in our research, *Chasing Amy*

provided the catalyst for deeper and more probing questions than merely what are Alyssa's, Holden's, and Banky's "real" sexual identities. An examination of viewers' responses to this mainstream film provides a barometer for where we are with respect to identity politics, and future media depictions in the 21st century will both illuminate and reflect where we are headed.

Bruce R. Smith (2000) eloquently summarizes the significance of examining such representations of sexuality:

. . . sexuality has proved to be a strategically important object of study, for two reasons. First, because it seems to be one of the most natural, most universal, of human traits, sexuality provides an exemplary case of how identity is in fact a function of cultural history. Second, sexuality presents a particularly striking intersection between external forces and internal consciousness, between society and the individual. (319)

Certainly, the responses to *Chasing Amy* that we have been discussing reveal how representations of sexual identity can simultaneously reinforce and trouble larger cultural and social constructions of identity/identities. The strength and divergence of our respondents' various reactions, as well as the unwillingness of some to react (or offer reactions), position this film at a pressure point, where our society, and especially the LGB community, is "thinking" itself-and is unsure about how it wants to be "thought," i.e., represented. On the one hand, we want to open up the closet door just a little bit more and see what kind of love, intimacy, and connection has been hiding-or has been hidden-inside. On the other hand, we perhaps fear what might come out and how it might threaten the significant gains in representation-and self-representation-we have already accomplished by working as a larger, queer community. Will the promulgation of images of bisexuality, as our lesbian and gay male respondents suggested, dampen the effect of identity politics to construct lesbians and gays as a legitimate minority? Or will such images foster the creation of a new identity, a bisexual identity, which will compete for attention in the already overcrowded marketplace of identity politics? Indeed, some responses to *Chasing Amy* suggest an (stubborn?) unwillingness to let go of the straight/gay binary-by both straights and gays. There is much to question here. At the very least, *Chasing Amy* demonstrates how, in the words of Alan Sinfield (1998), ". . . our readings are partly where we work through our differences" (99-100). We think this film can be highly useful for helping gays, straights, and bisexuals to enter into conversation with one another to "read" our lives, our "differences," and discuss what it means to have a sexuality and an identity-both personally and politically.

Further, teachers could use it as a pedagogical tool for launching a discussion as to the complexities of sexualities and identities.

Indeed, *Chasing Amy* seems to strike deeply for many people at the heart of how we currently understand and configure our identities (and our lives) by provoking alternative kinds of questions about identity: specifically, will images of complex and fluid relationships promote a way of thinking-and living-beyond identity? Alyssa, after all, figures herself as her own agent, attempting to live beyond the identity categories assigned to her and through which others interpret her and her behavior; and, despite the animosity and even condemnation of friends and lovers, she never relinquishes her right to choose how she lives and loves, as well as what she names her love. Interestingly, she never uses the word "bisexual" to describe herself; it is as though she wants to step beyond her gay identity-but not into another category.

Ultimately, after much more debate about films like *Chasing Amy*, we (as bi/queers) will have to decide what kind of world we want to fight for-and live in. Are we fighting to see an identity represented? Or are we fighting for people's right to love and self determine? And, most provocatively, must the two always be at odds with each other?

NOTES

1. And the struggle for bi-visibility has been (and continues to be) no small undertaking. Shawna Hudson (1997), who has recently studied a "full range of sexual topics present on television," has noted that bisexuality is one of the least mentioned of all sexual topics currently discussed on TV. Further, an important source book for representations of alternative sexualities, Raymond Murray's (1996) *Images in the Dark: An Encyclopedia of Gay and Lesbian Film and Video* has separate chapters entitled "Of Gay Male Interest," "Of Lesbian Interest," "Of Queer (combined gay and lesbian) Interest," and even "Of Transgender Interest"; the list of bisexual-themed films, however, comprises a short section in one of the book's indices. And when you do find a film with bisexuals, the bi-characters are often depicted as selfish, immature, or pathological; they are often the movies' ethical foils.

2. For a more thorough discussion of our data collection procedures, please see the concluding Notes.

3. Bi-people's experience, not unlike bi-racial and trans-people's experiences, are often challenged as not being "real" enough, or legitimate enough to "story tell" for their particular community (sex, race, gender). Bi-people may be accused of not being "gay" enough, while bi-racial/ethnic people may be accused of not being "Black" enough, etc., and trans individuals may be accused of not being woman or man enough to "really" experience from a gendered perspective.

APPENDIX

For those interested in the details of our quantitative analyses of reactions to *Chasing Amy*, below you will find a “methods” section. From the start, our sample was plagued with an inability to find willing queer respondents, a difficulty, as we discuss in the essay, that we found both frustrating and illuminating.

SURVEY INSTRUMENT: The original survey posed several questions about the sexual orientations of the characters as well as other “personality” assessments, like, who would you trust the most, etc. The second survey was slightly revised to address some additional questions that arose from the initial survey. We asked both samples to label the sexual orientations of each of the three main characters: Alyssa, Holden, and Banky. We also asked them the open-ended question, “Why did you label this character the way you did?” They answered this question after labeling each character. We also asked them: of the three characters, who would you trust the most, and why? Who would you trust the least, and why? In the second survey, we also asked some open-ended questions regarding whether or not they thought the film was from the stereotypical straight male perspective. That is, we asked them if they agreed with a “convert the lesbian” story line reading of the movie. Additionally, given the range of emotional reactions we had encountered in simply trying to solicit opinions, we asked respondents to complete the following: “This movie made me feel . . .,” “The things I liked about this movie were . . .,” as well as “The things I didn’t like about this movie were . . .” in an attempt to further explain their various emotional reactions. Unfortunately, no comparisons can be made with the first sample with respect to these and other similar questions posed.

PROCEDURE: The procedure and survey varied for the samples. In the first sample, we offered students extra credit to come in and view the movie, then fill out the survey. With the second sample, we revised the questionnaire, asking a few new questions, throwing out some questions that were not very informative or were vague, and sent it to an established email discussion list of LBG scholars as well as to an email list of participants at a 1997 international conference on bisexuality. In the third sample, a small class of students in an LBG literature course were asked to participate.

PARTICIPANTS/SAMPLE ONE (HETERO): Twenty-seven students, 8 males and 17 females, from a southwestern university showed up to watch the film and respond to the survey. Eighty-eight percent marked the category straight; one person marked bisexual; and two marked “I don’t label myself.” The average age of respondents in this sample was 24 years of age. The range was ages 18 to 44. Forty-eight percent of participants self-identified as Hispanic, Latina/o or Spanish, and 44% of participants referred to themselves as white, Anglo, or Caucasian.

PARTICIPANTS/SAMPLE TWO (LGBT): In the second sample, we specifically sought out more sexually diverse respondents. As we mentioned, we attempted to gather data from lesbians and gays but had minimal success. We approached three local sources, one of our student les-bi-gay groups, which flatly refused us, and two

neighboring schools' student groups, who never returned any surveys. So, we sent a revised survey out to two listservs. Both lists have numerous members; however, we received only 16 usable surveys. Twenty-five percent ($n=4$) of the sample self-identified as male, 69% ($n=11$) identified as female, and one individual identified as MtF (male to female transsexual- we think). Eight of the eleven females self-identified as bisexual, one female identified as gay, another as queer, and one said she doesn't label herself with respect to sexual orientation. The T person also said, "I don't label myself." Two of the men identified as bisexual and the other two identified as queer. The average age of respondents was 33 years old; this is a bit older than the first sample, which was 24 years. The age range was comparable to the first sample, however, going from 20 years of age to 51 years of age. Not surprisingly but unfortunately nonetheless, there was much less ethnic variability with the online sample. Almost all respondents could be classified as Caucasian (94%), with two respondents mentioning they were not from the U.S.; additionally, 19% identified also as Jewish. With respect to socioeconomic status, 25% of the second sample identified as upper middle class, 38% as middle class, 19% as lower middle class, and 19% as working class.

PARTICIPANTS/SAMPLE THREE (LGB): In the third sample, an LGBT literature class from a midwestern university was asked to fill out the revised version of the survey. Six students provided responses, 3 men and three women. The three women self-identified as "lesbian," and two of the three men identified as "gay." The remaining participant identified as a "queer" male. Two of the six identified as white; one identified as Jewish/white, while another identified as Caucasian/Native American; one identified as Black; and one participant opted to not self-identify. The average age of this sample was 21 years old. The age range was from 18 to 26, a more traditional age range for a college setting. One-half of the respondents in this sample identified belonging to the "upper middle class," while one respondent identified as "middle class" and the remaining two identified as "lower middle class."

NOTE: There are several descriptive statistics that were not detailed in this article. For additional findings in more quantitative form, see Yescavage and Alexander (1998a; 1998b).

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**Research
on
Sexual
Orientation
Labels'
Relationship
to
Behaviors
and
Desires**

M. Michele Amestoy

ABSTRACT. This exploratory study of 62 Master's of Social Work students looked for discrepancies between sexual orientation self-labeling and their sexual behaviors/desires. Respondents completed the Klein Sexual Orientation Grid. Results showed some inconsistencies in correspondence rates between the two. Most respondents displayed a consistent sexual orientation category in three of the aspects studied (attraction, behavior, and present self-identification) but inconsistencies were found between past and ideal indications of orientation and between emotional and social preferences and fantasies. Further research with a larger, more diverse sample is recommended. Incorporation of diverse conceptualizations of the meaning of bisexuality into mental health practice is recommended. [Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-342-9678. E-mail address: <getinfo@haworthpressinc.com> Website: <<http://www.HaworthPress.com>> ©2001 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]

KEYWORDS. Biphobia, bisexuality, identity, labeling, sexual orientation

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to examine the potential discrepancy between sexual orientation self-labeling and corresponding erotic preferences and behaviors. The widespread inconsistent usage of labels along with a narrow view of sexual orientation has led to a prevalent confusion and ambiguity in this area. By separating distinct aspects of sexuality and comparing them with respondents' orientation label, I hoped to clarify some of these issues.

The term *sexuality* refers to the biological aspects of sexual functioning, including anatomy and physiology, as well as to such aspects as gender role, sexual orientation, intimacy, sensuality, and sexual self-concept (Byer & Shainberg, 1994). In this way, sexuality goes beyond reproduction, genital function, and sexual intercourse and includes many interrelated components, one or more of which must be considered when examining sexuality from an individual, family, community, and/or societal perspective (Harrison, 1995). Sexuality encompasses not only physiology and reproduction but also expressions of emotion and identity issues. Sexual orientation, therefore, is not limited to whom one is sexual with and how one self-identifies. A person's desire and behavior, as well as elements of fantasy, emotional, and social preference encompass the concept of sexual orientation.

Aspects of sexuality that are of concern to clients are present in almost

every milieu in which mental health practitioners practice. Adequate understanding of sexual orientation must consider the developmental, interpersonal, experiential, and cultural dimensions of sexuality, as well as any biological contributions to sexual attraction, behavior, and identity (Stein, 1997). Yet, homophobia and biphobia still exist in the helping profession (DeCrescenzo, 1983/1984). It is, therefore, crucial that helping professionals maintain a current and accurate foundation of knowledge and skills pertaining to sexual issues (Hunter & Schaecher, 1995; Slater, 1988).

Homophobia and biphobia are configurations of sexual oppression (Gochros, 1977) in which negative attitudes, prejudice, discrimination, and "gay-bashing" occur on institutional, individual, and internal levels (Herek, 1990; Tully, 1995; Gochros, 1995). Female bisexuals are particularly affected by biphobia from the lesbian community (Stone, 1996; Rust, 1992). Although Paula Rust (1992) reported that only one-third of lesbian-identified respondents stated that they were 100% attracted to women, many lesbians and lesbian feminists, in particular, continue to vilify bisexual women (Stone, 1996).

The identification of those who are potential targets of this type of mistreatment, however, has become more difficult as the realization that inconsistent definitions of sexual orientation and categories are widespread (Hansen & Evans, 1985; Klein, 1985; Berkey, Perelman-Hall, & Kurdek, 1990; Coleman, 1990; Weinrich et al., 1993; Firestein, 1996; Eliason, 1997; Livia & Hall, 1997). Estimates of the prevalence of homosexuality and bisexuality range from 1-20% depending on which study is referenced (Raymond, 1998). The estimation of prevalence, however, is hampered by the following: a disinclination to self-identify on the part of those who call themselves gay, bisexual, or lesbian; the effects of homophobia, biphobia; and lack of uniform definitions and labels that encompass all the aspects of sexual orientation (De Cecco & Parker, 1995; Sell, 1997).

Historically, the usual method of categorizing sexual orientation has been a strict dichotomization (Klein, 1985). In 1948, Kinsey developed the Kinsey Heterosexuality-Homosexuality Scale (KHHS) to better reflect a less polarized view of sexual orientation by conceptualizing sexuality as a continuum. While the use of this scale was an improvement, it did not take into account life situations that occurred over time nor true bisexuals (Klein, 1985).

Research on sexuality has been hampered by research designs that failed to solidify definitions of sexual orientation and to account for variations over time. A paradigm shift in the social sciences' view of sexual orientation is ongoing due to an increase in the recognition of the bisexual experience

(Firestein, 1996). The Klein Sexual Orientation Grid is an example of a result of such a shift. The new paradigm views sexual orientation as multidimensional, fluid, and continuous in nature as reflected in Klein's instrument in which a variety of sexual aspects are included and measured over time as well (Klein, 1985). This study, therefore, utilized the Klein Sexual Orientation Grid (KSOG) (Klein, 1980) to capture the complexity of sexual orientation.

THE KLEIN SEXUAL ORIENTATION GRID

A more complete and accurate assessment tool increases the information and understanding available to both professionals and lay people. A more uniform usage of consistent definitions and labels will increase awareness and decrease oppression when acceptable and obtainable from such studies utilizing a more accurate instrument. The present study utilizes the KSOG in an attempt to examine the relationship between sexual orientation and corresponding sexual behaviors and desires.

The KSOG was developed to better categorize the complexities of human sexual attitudes, emotions, and behavior (Klein, 1985). The grid was designed to extend the scope of the Kinsey scale by including the variables of attraction, behavior, fantasy, social and emotional preferences, self-identification, and lifestyle. These characteristics are also measured in the past, present, and as an ideal (Klein, 1985). This scale allows researchers to see sexual orientation as a dynamic multivariable process in time (Raymond, 1998).

METHODOLOGY

Design

This study used an exploratory, quantitative survey design. A cross-sectional design was chosen due to the constraints of time and finances inherent in a student thesis. A questionnaire format was selected with these limits in mind also, as well as for the added benefits of anonymity and the increase of returns likely with the sensitive matter of sexuality. This study is exploratory in nature in that the findings are preliminary and limited in validity due to those likely to be willing to fill out the survey.

Sampling

The sampling method used for this study was non-random. Two hundred and fifty female Master's of Social Work students attending California State University at Long Beach received the survey in their school mailboxes. The respondents ages ranged from 22 years to 52 years with a mean of 31.8 years. Only female respondents were sought to narrow the focus and findings. Approximately 70 surveys were anonymously returned via U.S. mail. The response rate was 28%.

Data Collection Procedure

Upon receiving the survey with an attached cover letter and a consent form, those students who chose to respond completed the survey and mailed it to the researcher's home in a provided self-addressed stamped envelope. Two envelopes were provided to insure confidentiality: one for the consent form and another for the completed survey.

Instrument

The instrument utilized for this research consisted of two parts (Appendix A). A demographic section, developed by the researcher, elicited information about participants' backgrounds. The demographics included age, gender, ethnicity, marital status, education level, political affiliation, religious background, and sexual orientation. The added demographics and the focused study of MSW students made this study an exploratory one. The other part of the instrument, the questionnaire, was originally developed by Fritz Klein, M.D. to ascertain a more complete description of participants' sexual orientation preferences than earlier instruments provided. The Klein Sexual Orientation Grid asked participants to rate aspects of sexuality, including attraction, behavior, fantasies, emotional preference, social preference, self-identification, and lifestyle for the past, present, and ideal in a range of possibilities from "other sex only" to "same sex only."

Data Analysis

Variables in the survey were summarized and tabulated using standard summary statistics (means, standard deviations, frequencies, percentages, etc.). Cross-tabulations on the following pairs of variables were conducted:

TABLE 1. Klein Sexual Orientation Grid-Past ($N = 62$)

	1		2		3		4		5		6		7	
KSOG Variable	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
A. Sexual Attraction	50	82.0	6	9.8	1	1.6	-	-	2	3.3	1	1.6	1	1.6
B. Sexual Behavior	53	86.9	2	3.3	-	-	1	1.6	-	-	2	3.3	3	4.9
C. Sexual Fantasies	35	57.4	17	27.9	2	3.3	2	3.3	-	-	4	6.6	1	1.6
D. Emotional Preference	21	34.4	4	4.4	4	6.6	14	22.9	8	13.1	6	9.8	5	8.2
E. Social Preference	5	8.1	7	11.3	5	8.1	18	29.0	10	16.1	14	22.6	3	4.8
F. Self-Identification	53	85.8	4	6.5	1	1.6	-	-	-	-	1	1.6	3	4.8
G. Lifestyle	31	50.0	16	25.8	5	8.1	6	9.7	-	-	2	3.2	2	3.2

*Key for Variables A-E: 1 = Other sex only, 2 = Other sex mostly, 3 = Other sex somewhat more, 4 = Both sexes equally, 5 = Same sex somewhat more, 6 = Same sex mostly, 7 = Same sex only.

*Key for Variables F-G: 1 = Hetero only, 2 = Hetero mostly, 3 = Hetero somewhat more, 4 = Hetero/gay equally, 5 = Gay somewhat more, 6 = Gay mostly, 7 = Gay only.

sexual orientation label and age, present self-identification and religion, present self-identification and ethnicity, past self-identification and sexual orientation label, and ideal self-identification and sexual orientation label. This was done using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

RESULTS

Demographics

The sample consisted of 62 women. All of the participants were California State University, Long Beach, Master's of Social Work students. Participant ages' ranged from 22 to 52 years, with a mean of 31.8 years. Thirty-eight respondents (61.3%) were White/European-American. Eleven Latina/Hispanics represented 17.7%, 7 Asian-American/Pacific Islanders made up 11.3%, and 6 African-American/Blacks were 9.7% of those surveyed.

Thirty-three of those surveyed (53.3%) were single and never married, while 10 (16.1%) were married currently. Those separated consisted of 3 (4.8%), and 9 (14.5%) were divorced. Seven (11.3%) co-habitated at the time of the survey. Most of the sample, 46 (74.2%), indicated Democrat for their political affiliation, with 5 (8.1%) responding Republican. Three (4.8%) were

TABLE 2. Klein Sexual Orientation Grid-Present ($N = 62$)

	1		2		3		4		5		6		7	
KSOG Variable	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
A. Sexual Attraction	46	75.4	9	14.7	1	1.6	-	-	1	1.6	1	1.6	3	4.9
B. Sexual Behavior	55	91.7	-	-	1	1.6	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	6.6
C. Sexual Fantasies	28	45.9	23	37.7	3	4.9	2	3.3	-	-	1	1.6	4	6.6
D. Emotional Preference	19	30.6	4	6.5	4	6.5	13	21.0	10	16.1	8	12.9	4	6.5
E. Social Preference	4	6.5	3	4.8	4	6.5	21	33.9	16	25.8	11	12.9	3	4.8
F. Self-Identification	49	79.0	7	11.3	1	1.6	1	1.6	-	-	1	1.6	3	4.8
G. Lifestyle	16	25.8	29	46.7	11	17.7	5	8.1	-	-	-	-	1	1.6

*Key for Variables A-E: 1 = Othersex only, 2 = Othersex mostly, 3 = Othersex somewhat more, 4 = Both sexes equally, 5 = Same sex somewhat more, 6 = Same sex mostly, 7 = Same sex only.

*Key for Variables F-G: 1 = Hetero only, 2 = Hetero mostly, 3 = Hetero somewhat more, 4 = Hetero/gay equally, 5 = Gay somewhat more, 6 = Gay mostly, 7 = Gay only.

TABLE 3. Klein Sexual Orientation Grid-Ideal ($N = 62$)

	1		2		3		4		5		6		7	
KSOG Variable	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
A. Sexual Attraction	43	70.5	7	11.5	2	3.3	5	8.2	-	-	2	3.3	2	3.3
B. Sexual Behavior	47	78.3	3	5.0	2	3.3	4	6.6	-	-	1	1.6	3	5.0
C. Sexual Fantasies	32	52.4	15	24.6	4	6.6	6	9.8	-	-	-	-	4	6.6
D. Emotional Preference	18	29.0	4	6.5	3	4.8	30	48.4	2	3.2	1	1.6	4	6.5
E. Social Preference	4	6.5	3	4.8	1	1.6	44	70.9	4	6.5	4	6.5	2	3.2
F. Self-Identification	44	70.9	6	9.7	3	4.8	6	9.7	-	-	-	-	3	4.8
G. Lifestyle	14	22.6	14	22.6	10	16.1	20	32.2	1	1.6	-	-	2	3.2

*Key for Variables A-E: 1 = Othersex only, 2 = Othersex mostly, 3 = Othersex somewhat more, 4 = Both sexes equally, 5 = Same sex somewhat more, 6 = Same sex mostly, 7 = Same sex only.

*Key for Variables F-G: 1 = Hetero only, 2 = Hetero mostly, 3 = Hetero somewhat more, 4 = Hetero/gay equally, 5 = Gay somewhat more, 6 = Gay mostly, 7 = Gay only.

TABLE 4. Self-Identification: Past and Sexual Orientation (*N* = 62)

	1		2		3		4		5		6		7	
Label	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
<i>Sexual Orientation</i>														
Exclusively hetero	51	82.2	4	6.4	1	1.6	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Mostly hetero	1	1.6	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Mostly gay/lesbian	1	1.6	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1.6	-	-
Exclusively g/l	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	4.8

*Key for Variables F-G: 1 = Hetero only, 2 = Hetero mostly, 3 = Hetero somewhat more, 4 = Hetero/gay equally, 5 = Gay somewhat more, 6 = Gay mostly, 7 = Gay only.

TABLE 5. Self-Identification: Ideal and Sexual Orientation (*N* = 62)

	1		2		3		4		5		6		7	
Label	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
<i>Sexual Orientation</i>														
Exclusively hetero	44	71.0	6	9.7	3	4.8	3	4.8	-	-	-	-	-	-
Mostly hetero	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1.6	-	-	-	-	-	-
Mostly gay/lesbian	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	3.2	-	-	-	-	-	-
Exclusively g/l	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	4.8

*Key for Variables F-G: 1 = Hetero only, 2 = Hetero mostly, 3 = Hetero somewhat more, 4 = Hetero/gay equally, 5 = Gay somewhat more, 6 = Gay mostly, 7 = Gay only.

Independent party members, and 1 (1.6%) was Libertarian. Six (9.7%) chose the other category to indicate another party or a lack of political party membership.

The religion variable yielded 25 (40.3%) Protestants, 23 (37.1%) Catholics, 5 (8.1%) Jews, 5 (8.1%) Other/New Age, and 4 (6.4%) were Atheist/Agnostic. The vast majority 56 (90.4%) were exclusively heterosexual, and 1 (1.6%) indicated that they considered themselves mostly heterosexual. The remainder were 3 (4.8%) exclusively gay/lesbian and 2 (3.2%) mostly gay/lesbian.

Sexual Attraction

For this category, the majority of respondents, 50 (82.0%), indicated “other sex only” as their source of attraction in the past. “Other sex mostly” was

chosen by 6 (9.8%) and "other sex somewhat more" by 1 (1.6%) of the subjects. No respondents chose the "both sexes equally" category. Two (3.3%) said "same sex somewhat more" and 1 (1.6%) marked "same sex mostly." The category "same sex only" was chosen by 1 (1.6%) respondent (Appendix B).

In regard to present sexual orientation, 46 (75.4%) chose "other sex only," 9 (14.7%) "other sex mostly," 1 (1.6%) "other sex somewhat more," 1 (1.6%) "same sex somewhat more," 1 (1.6%) "same sex mostly," and 3 (4.9%) indicated "same sex only." No one chose "both sexes equally" for the present level of sexual attraction.

To indicate their ideal sexual attraction, 43 (70.5%) chose "other sex only," 7 (11.5%) "other sex mostly," 2 (3.3%) "other sex somewhat more," 2 (3.3%) "same sex mostly," and 2 (3.3%) "same sex only." Five (8.2%) of subjects chose "both sexes equally."

Sexual Behavior

The majority 53 (86.9%) indicated that their past sexual behavior was with the "other sex only." "Other sex mostly" garnered 2 (3.3%), "same sex mostly" 1 (1.6%), and "same sex only" 2 (3.3%). Only 1 (1.6%) of the survey respondents indicated that their past sexual behavior involved "both sexes equally" (Appendix B).

Respondents answered in only three of the six possible categories in the present category. Fifty-five (91.7%) marked "other sex only," 1 (1.6%) "other sex somewhat more," and 4 (6.6%) "same sex only."

In the ideal category of sexual behavior, 5 of the categories were utilized by the respondents. "Other sex only" was chosen by 47 (78.3%), "other sex mostly" 3 (5.0%), "other sex somewhat more" 2 (3.3%), "same sex mostly" 1 (1.6%), and "same sex only" 3 (5.0%). Four (6.6%) responded to "both sexes equally" as their ideal behavior.

Sexual Fantasies

The history of respondents' fantasies comprised 35 (57.4%) "other sex only," 17 (27.9%) "other sex mostly," 2 (3.3%) "other sex somewhat more," 1 (1.6%) "same sex mostly," 4 (6.6%) "same sex only," and 2 (3.3%) "both sexes equally" (Appendix B).

Current sexual fantasies were displayed by 28 (45.9%) "other sex only," 23 (37.7%) "other sex mostly," 3 (4.9%) "other sex somewhat more," 1 (1.6%) "same sex mostly," and 4 (6.6%) "same sex only." Two (3.3%) chose "both sexes equally."

The ideal fantasies were almost half, 32 (52.4%), “other sex only.” Fifteen (24.6%) indicated “other sex mostly.” The “other sex somewhat more” category was chosen by 4 (6.6%), “same sex only” 4 (6.6%), and 6 (9.8%) “both sexes equally.”

Emotional Preference

Past preferences were “other sex only” 21 (34.4%), “other sex mostly” 4 (6.6%), “other sex somewhat more” 4 (6.6%), “same sex somewhat more” 8 (13.1%), “same sex mostly” 6 (9.8%), and “same sex only” 5 (8.2%). “Both sexes equally” was indicated by 14 (22.9%) (Appendix B).

Present preferences in the emotional realm yielded 19 (30.6%) “other sex only,” 4 (6.5%) “other sex mostly,” and 4 (6.5%) “other sex somewhat more.” “Same sex somewhat more” numbered 10 (16.1%), “same sex mostly” 8 (12.9%), and “same sex only” 4 (6.5%). Thirteen (21.0%) claimed “both sexes equally” as their preference.

Ideal preferences ranged from 18 (29.0%) for “other sex only,” 4 (6.5%) “other sex mostly,” 3 (4.8%) “other sex somewhat more,” 2 (3.2%) “same sex somewhat more,” 1 (1.6%) “same sex mostly,” and 4 (6.5%) “same sex only.” The “both sexes equally” category was chosen by 30 (48.4%).

Social Preference

Past social preferences were spread across the categories, denoted by “other sex only” 5 (8.1%), “other sex mostly” 7 (11.3%), “other sex somewhat more” 5 (8.1%), “same sex somewhat more” 10 (16.1%), “same sex mostly” 14 (22.6%), and “same sex only” at 4 (4.8%). Eighteen (29.0%) opted for the “both sexes equally” category (Appendix B).

Present selections for social preference were 4 (6.5%) “other sex only,” 3 (4.8%) “other sex mostly,” 4 (6.5%) “other sex somewhat more,” 16 (25.8%) “same sex somewhat more,” 11 (17.7%) “same sex mostly,” and 4 (4.8%) “same sex only.” The choice “both sexes equally” was chosen by 21 (33.9%) respondents.

The ideal social preferences were 4 (6.5%) “other sex only,” 3 (4.8%) “other sex mostly,” 1 (1.6%) “other sex somewhat more,” 4 (6.5%) “same sex somewhat more,” 4 (6.5%) “same sex mostly,” and 2 (3.2%) “same sex only.” “Both sexes equally” was elected by 44 (70.9%) of the subjects.

Self-Identification

Past self-labeling of sexual orientation categories were mostly “hetero only” at 55 (85.5%). “Hetero mostly” was 4 (6.5%), “hetero somewhat

more" 1 (1.6%), "gay mostly" 1 (1.6%), and "gay only" 3 (4.8%). No respondents indicated "hetero/gay equally" on this question (Appendix B).

Current self-identification was 49 (79.0%) "hetero only," 7 (11.3%) "hetero mostly," and 1 (1.6%) "hetero somewhat more." One respondent (1.6%) said "gay mostly," 3 (4.8%) said "gay only," and 1 (1.6%) said "hetero/gay equally."

Ideally, respondents rated self-identification as 44 (70.9%) "hetero only," 6 (9.7%) "hetero mostly," 3 (4.8%) "hetero somewhat more," and 3 (4.8%) "gay only." Six (9.7%) expressed an ideal self-identification of "hetero/gay equally."

Lifestyle

Past lifestyle choices were 31 (50.0%) "hetero only," 16 (25.8%) "hetero mostly," 5 (8.1%) "hetero somewhat more," 2 (3.2%) "gay mostly," and 2 (3.2%) "gay only." "Hetero/gay equally" was selected by 6 (9.7%) respondents (Appendix B).

Present lifestyles were recorded as 16 (25.8%) "hetero only," 29 (46.8%) "hetero mostly," 11 (17.7%) "hetero somewhat more," and 1 (1.6%) "gay only." Five (8.1%) chose "hetero/gay equally" as their current lifestyle category.

The ideal lifestyle was represented by 14 (22.6%) "hetero only," 14 (22.6%) "hetero mostly," 10 (16.1%) "hetero somewhat more," 1 (1.6%) "gay somewhat more," and 2 (3.2%) "gay only." "Hetero/gay equally" was designated by 20 (32.3%) respondents as their ideal lifestyle.

DISCUSSION

Major Findings

The findings of this study indicate both consistency and inconsistency, in different areas, between sexual orientation labeling and corresponding behaviors and desires. While statistical tests were run with this data, no statistical significance was found due to the large concentration of responses in only a portion of the 21 possible response cells. Clinical significance, however, was found with these results. For the most part, respondents' labels corresponded with their sexual attraction, sexual behavior, and self-identification selections in the present category. Past and ideal indications and other sexual orientation variables, however, were less consistent. Similarly, Klein's (1985)

research showed that “for the sample as a whole there was a significant difference between the respondents’ past, present, and ideal sexual orientation” (p. 75).

Although the majority indicated “1” to signify their sexual orientation as “exclusively heterosexual,” in less than 5% were there consistent selections across all sexual orientation variables, nor across all three time periods. Only three respondents of 62 had totally consistent numbers (“1”) in all categories of the KSOG. Of note, those three respondents were all single and of Asian-American ethnicity. No studies found indicated either prevalence rates of Asian Americans nor a higher reported incidence of homophobia, which might explain this finding. The other 59 subjects answered using variation in their category responses.

The most variance was noted in the emotional and social preference categories. Most self-identified heterosexuals had a same sex preference, to one degree or another, in these areas. Those who self-identified as “exclusively heterosexual,” for example, had a sum of 55.4% responding in categories 4, 5, and 6 (“both sexes equally,” “same sex somewhat more,” and “same sex mostly”) on the ideal emotional preference. Forty-eight percent chose options 4-7 (“7” being same sex only) on the past version of the same category, and over half (51.8%) of exclusively heterosexuals presently have an emotional preference in the 4-6 category. Klein’s (1985) research also suggested that “a person’s social preference was somewhat different from the other aspects of his or her sexual orientation” (p. 73).

Similarly, the social preference variable had inconsistent findings. Of exclusive heterosexuals, 71.4% chose to indicate categories 4-7 for the past, 80.4% for the present, and 85.7% for ideal social preferences in the 4-7 range of options. While preferring one’s own gender in an emotional and social context may not be unusual for heterosexuals, nor necessarily a sign of inconsistency with one’s sexual orientation, it is significant to note that the gay/lesbian respondents had similar preferences in these categories of social and emotional preference as the heterosexuals did. Weinrich et al. (1993) had similar findings as well.

Interestingly, those who self-identified as “exclusively gay/lesbian,” albeit only 3 respondents (4.8%), indicated almost 100% consistency by marking “7” in virtually all categories. When there was variance within this group, it was either in a past category or the social or lifestyle variable.

Of possibly more significance in assessing sexual orientation than emotional or social preference is the variable of sexual fantasy. Even though it may never be acted upon, sexual fantasies can manifest as a sexual prefer-

ence, if only a mental one. In all three time zones of the KSOG (past, present, and ideal), there was more variance among all respondents than in the attraction and behavior categories. Just more than half (56%) of those who filled out the survey fantasized exclusively about the opposite sex. Slightly less (45%) do so currently, and, in the ideal situation, almost exactly half (51%) would limit their sexual fantasies to the opposite gender exclusively. No literature was found for the consistency of sexual fantasy.

The effects of homophobia, biphobia, and inadequate definitions may have affected the consistency of these responses. There is largely a lack of any agreed upon definition of bisexuality contributing as well (Berkey et al., 1990). As defined by "negative attitudes toward homosexual persons and homosexuality" (Herek, 1990, p. 552), homophobia seems to be present in the inconsistency of responses received in this study. Biphobia, an irrational fear of bisexuality (Gochros, 1995), is a possibility here as well, as indicated by the inconsistent self-identifications with a more varied response to the sexual orientation variables.

The literature states that prevalence of both homosexuality and bisexuality can range from 1-20% depending on the study (Raymond, 1998). Of the 62 surveyed, none labeled herself bisexual, and only 3 (4.8%) claimed to be exclusively gay/lesbian in orientation. These statistics are lower than prior prevalence estimates of bisexuals and about average for homosexual prevalence. A common figure among lay literature is that 10% of any given population, throughout the world and across time periods, is gay or lesbian. Research specifies a range from 1.4% (Raymond, 1998) to slightly over 10% (men and women combined) by a recent large-scale survey (Raymond, 1998).

All of the respondents combined showed more variance in answering the sexual orientation variables in the past and ideal categories than was observed in the present category. By age, the most variance was found in the 20-29 year age group. Only 1 of 13 in the 40+ age group did not label as "exclusively heterosexual." Whether this is due to experimentation and/or confusion on the part of the younger respondents or a surety or settlement on the part of the older ones is not clear. Contrary to the theoretical notion that one becomes fixated in childhood (Klein, 1985), however, the sexual orientations contained some movement in this study. "Until recently, the factor of change in sexual orientation has been generally ignored . . . many are potentially capable of traveling over a large segment of the sexual orientation continuum" (Klein, 1985, p. 45). The data in this survey cannot conclusively echo this idea. While there is more diversity of orientation in the younger

respondents, the reason for those over 40 responding as they did cannot be known without further exploration.

Religious background was not particularly associated with self-identification in this study except for the finding that the only category with no labeling beyond “hetero mostly” was in the Atheist/Agnostic one. This is ironic given that most religions adhere to fixed categories of sexual orientation and many consider non-heterosexuality to be a moral concern. Each of the other religious categories contained at least one entry in “hetero/gay equally,” “gay mostly,” or “gay only” when self labeling. Of note, all of those who currently label themselves as “gay only” come from either Catholic or Protestant backgrounds.

Ethnically, the Asian/Pacific Islanders had the least variance in present self-identification with 100% in this category responding with “hetero only.” The White/European-Americans, however, had the most variance with 10% self-labeling as either “gay mostly” or “gay only.” African-Americans and Latina/Hispanics fell in between these two extremes, with most claiming “hetero only” and 5 others, in both categories, labeling “hetero mostly” or “hetero somewhat more.” While lesbians and gay men are members of all racial and ethnic groups (Berger & Kelly, 1995), Whites may have higher incidence numbers. This does not necessarily reflect a true higher incidence (although it may), as racism impacts majority gay institutions (Berger & Kelly, 1995), which may affect self-labeling. Additionally, “minority communities may be homophobic because of a traditional cultural emphasis on machismo and because being gay is seen as capitulating to the white oppression” (Berger & Kelly, 1995, p. 1073).

Perhaps the most interesting finding of this study was the lack of variance of mostly and exclusively gay/lesbians on their ideal self-identification and the only categorical variance evident on the part of those labeling themselves “exclusively heterosexual.” Three of 56 exclusive heterosexuals chose “hetero/gay equally” as their ideal self-identification, and 9 others indicated “hetero mostly” and “hetero somewhat more” as ideal for them. Given the institutionalized, individualized, and internalized homophobia and biphobia many lesbians and bisexuals experience (Tully, 1995), it is surprising both that those currently in that category would want to stay in that category in an ideal world, and more so, that those not yet experiencing this oppression would, in theory, embrace it as part of their ideal sexuality.

The difference in the significance of sexual orientation labeling surveys can be illustrated by two people with an overall average of “4” for the present categories of sexual orientation variables. One may have the consis-

tent configuration of "4-4-4-4-4-4" while another's could be reflected as "2-1-3-6-7-5-4," which averages to a "4." With respect to labeling their sexual orientation, both would be considered bisexual and would be numbered as a "4" on the Kinsey scale. Although "we are talking about two people with extremely different outlooks, lifestyles, sexualities, and social and emotional preferences . . . both persons would surely have had very different pasts and very different orientation ideals" (Klein, 1985, p. 47). This example also indicates why the previous dichotomization scales, pioneered by Kinsey, are limited in their scope to assess sexual orientation. The two examples would be in the same category by behavior alone and yet be miles apart in overall orientation.

The data analysis encompassed several important considerations:

1. the importance of viewing sexual orientation as a process which often changes over time;
2. the importance of all seven variables on the KSOG in describing sexual orientation; and
3. the simplicity and inadequacy of the labels: heterosexual, bisexual, and homosexual in describing a person's sexual orientation. (Klein, 1985, p. 45)

Study Limitations

The sample was of a homogeneous group and, therefore, not necessarily representative of the general population. The questions were very personal and required a high-level of self-disclosure. Self-selection of respondents, therefore, could have skewed the data. The size of the sample was small. The non-random format decreases the validity of the findings. The sample lacked a wide range of diversity in several demographic variables.

The study may also have been limited by misconceptions of the respondents to the KSOG. The sexual aspects named "emotional and social preference" may have been perceived as pertaining to friendships rather than romantic orientation. Additionally, using the term "hetero/gay equally" as a possible self-identification may have deterred those who label themselves "bisexual" instead. Both terms have been stigmatized at various times.

Implications for Further Research

Studies with larger samples would have more representative findings. Studies with less homogeneous groups would yield more diversity possibly.

Studies with a random format would increase the generalizability of the findings. Studies with a wider range of diversity in demographic variables would be more representative and generalizable. Studies that explore populations whose fantasies are bisexual yet do not label themselves accordingly, possibly due to biphobia, would also be enlightening.

Implications for Mental Health Practice

An unclear view of sexual orientation categories hinders assessments, research, and practice. The habit of operating from a viewpoint of fixed categories excludes the realities of many clients (and others). A fluid view of human sexuality, encompassing both behavior and desire, and the prolific use of a wide variety of definitions may assist deeper understanding of human sexuality.

Since sexuality is an important aspect of human behavior, further research in this area will benefit mental health practitioners with access to expanded and recent findings. Increasing the available body of knowledge with further like-minded research would contribute toward a better understanding of homophobia as well. Educational opportunities would increase and become more effective with an increase in awareness.

In terms of assessment, mental health practitioners would better be able to help clients to understand the differences between behavior/desire and sexual orientation categories if they incorporated the KSOG into their assessment and intervention procedures. The concept of a common fluidity of sexuality would also minimize client anxiety, normalize their experience, and aid in assessment and treatment planning efforts. Treatment planning would be assisted in treating clients who are bisexual in attitude and behavior but not self-identified by helping them with identity integration.

Mental health practitioners will need to be able to confront their own value conflicts and to be willing to learn from their clients. Mental health practitioners will also need to help individuals, couples, families, and communities cope with evolving sexual attitudes and options.

A future goal is to increase the visibility and acceptance of those not currently accounted for in the traditional dichotomization model and to decrease the oppression with which they and others currently live.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this survey exhibited a fair consistency in the traditionally defined sexual orientation focus on behavior in the current period. Inconsis-

tency was noted in the other, more recent areas of sexual orientation and in the past and ideal selections. Most of the findings were reflected in the available literature. The limitations of the study were mainly in the small and homogenous sample utilized as well as scale limitations. Implications for further research would best focus on a larger and more diverse sample. The implications for mental health practice encourage further study and a better understanding of the fluidity of sexual orientation. A realization and practice of using a wide variety of definitions as uniform (correct ones are still not known) is suggested as well. Indicators for assessment, treatment planning, and further research are noted. The need for mental health practitioners to be aware of and able to confront their own existing homophobia and biphobia is key to helping clients with these issues. Increasing visibility while decreasing oppression is sought in further research and practice.

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APPENDIX A

Questionnaire

Your participation in this survey will further needed research in the area of sexuality. Your responses will be kept confidential. Your time and effort in completing this brief survey are greatly appreciated!

Age _____ years

For the following questions, please circle the most appropriate number that corresponds closest to your response.

Gender	1 ... Female	2 ... Male
Ethnicity	1 ... African-American/Black	2 ... Asian-American
Indian	3 ... Latina/Hispanic	4 ... Native-American/American
	5 ... Pacific Islander	6 ... White/European-American
	7 ... Biracial	8 ... I don't know ethnicity
	9 ... Decline to state	10 ... Other
		(specify) _____
Marital Status	1 ... Single, never married	2 ... Married
	3 ... Separated	4 ... Divorced
	5 ... Widowed	6 ... Co-habiting with ...
		____ a man ____ a woman
Education Completed	1 ... Grade school	2 ... High school
	3 ... Some college	4 ... College graduate
	5 ... Master's	6 ... Doctorate
Political Affiliation	1 ... Democrat	2 ... Republican
	3 ... Independent	4 ... Libertarian
	5 ... Other (specify) _____	
Religious Background	1 ... Atheist	2 ... Buddhist
	3 ... Catholic	4 ... Hindu
	5 ... Jewish	6 ... Muslim
	7 ... Protestant	8 ... Other specify) _____
Sexual Orientation	1 .. Exclusively heterosexual	2 ... Exclusively gay/lesbian
	3 .. Mostly heterosexual	4 ... Mostly gay/lesbian
	5 .. Bisexual	6 ... Unsure
	7 .. Other (specify) _____	8 ... Decline to state

By M. Michele Amestoy

APPENDIX B

Klein Sexual Orientation Grid

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Other sex only	Other sex mostly	Other sex somewhat more	Both sexes equally	Same sex somewhat more	Same sex mostly	Same sex only

Figure 2

A. Sexual Attraction

Here you (in Figure 2) will be choosing three numbers, one for each of three aspects of your life: your past, your present, and your ideal. Beginning with your past, ask yourself where you fit on this scale and select the number that best describes you. Write this number in the corresponding box marked past on the line for Variable A (Sexual Attraction) on the grid. Now, looking at Figure 2 again, select a number that describes your present sexual attraction using one year as the time period you examine. For a number of people it is the same number; for others it is different. Write this number in the box marked present on the line for Variable A. Now ask yourself which number you would choose to be if it were a matter of volition. Remember there are no right or wrong numbers. When you finish writing this last number in the box marked Ideal for Variable A on the grid you should have completed the three boxes for Variable A.

Variable	Past	Present	Ideal
A. Sexual Attraction			

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Other sex only	Other sex mostly	Other sex somewhat more	Both sexes equally	Same sex somewhat more	Same sex mostly	Same sex only

B. Sexual Behavior

Here we look at actual behavior as opposed to sexual attraction. With whom do you have sex? Use the scale in Figure 2 to rate yourself. As with the previous scale, choose a number for past, present, and ideal sexual behavior, then enter the numbers on the grid, this time under Variable B.

Variable	Past	Present	Ideal
B. Sexual Behavior			

APPENDIX B (continued)

C. Sexual Fantasies

The third variable is sexual fantasy. Whether they occur during masturbation, while daydreaming, as part of our real lives or purely in our imaginations, fantasies provide insight. Rate yourself on the scale, then enter the numbers on the grid.

Variable	Past	Present	Ideal
C. Sexual Fantasies			

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Other sex only	Other sex mostly	Other sex somewhat more	Both sexes equally	Same sex somewhat more	Same sex mostly	Same sex only

D. Emotional Preference

Our emotions directly influence, if not define, the actual physical act of love. Ask yourself if you love and like only the opposite sex or if you are also emotionally close to the same sex. Find out where you fit on the scale; rate yourself as with the other scales. Enter the numbers on the grid.

Variable	Past	Present	Ideal
D. Emotional Preference			

E. Social Preference

Though closely allied to emotional preference, social preference is often different. You may love only women but spend most of your social life with men. Some people, of all orientations, only socialize with their own sex, while others socialize with the opposite gender exclusively. Where are you on the scale? Choose three numbers as you have on the other scales.

Variable	Past	Present	Ideal
E. Social Preference			

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Hetero only	Hetero mostly	Hetero somewhat more	Hetero/gay equally	Gay somewhat more	Gay mostly	Gay only

Figure 3

F. Self-Identification

Your sexual self-definition is a strong variable since self-image strongly affects our thoughts and actions. In several cases, a person's present and past self-identification differs markedly from their ideal. Choose three numbers on the scale marked Figure 3 and fill in the numbers on the grid.

Variable	Past	Present	Ideal
F. Self Identification			

G. Heterosexual/Homosexual Lifestyle

Some heterosexuals only have sex with the opposite sex but prefer to spend the majority of their time with gay people. On the other hand, homosexual or bisexual persons may prefer to live exclusively in the gay world, the heterosexual world, or even to live in both worlds. Lifestyle is the seventh variable of sexual orientation. Where do you tend to spend time and with whom? Choose three numbers in Figure 3 as you have on the other scales and enter them on the grid.

Variable	Past	Present	Ideal
G. Straight/Gay Lifestyle			

Bi Film-Video World

Blame
Canada

Wayne M. Bryant

Bicycling trips have often been among the most popular events in the busy summer calendar of the bisexual social group to which I belong. Sheeri and Arthur are two avid cyclists who organize day trips throughout the area for Biversity Boston. It is not surprising that most years Biversity fields one or more riders in the Boston to New York AIDS ride.

I was pleased, therefore, to discover at the Boston Gay and Lesbian Film Festival (where the b-word is never used) a film about a bisexual cyclist. Of course, in the program book she was a lesbian cyclist because in the dichotomous either/or world of the 1980s, in which this particular festival was spawned and has never progressed, one's sexuality is defined by who you slept with last.

The film, *2 Seconds*, is the fictional story of a bicycle racer named Laurie (Charlotte Laurier) making the difficult transition from professional athlete to life in the real world. Her fame until now had been based on being the best at going downhill fast. On this particular day, however, she gets psyched out by a group of younger cyclists and loses two precious seconds at the starting gate while she gets her mind back into the race. This mistake causes her career to go downhill even faster than her bike. By the end of the day, she is dismissed from the team and on her way back to Montreal to begin her life anew.

As with many low-budget independent films, the acting in *2 Seconds* ranges from very good to just short of hideous. In addition to Laurier, who is quite charming and excellent in her role, Dino Tavarone, as Lorenzo the gruff bicycle shop owner, is outstanding. Her fellow bicycle couriers play their roles convincingly, for the most part. With the exception of the leads, however, most of the characters are very one-dimensional and the males in particular are not people you would trust to feed your hamster for the weekend.

What we learn about Laurie's love life is that, as a professional athlete, it was nearly non-existent. She was more interested in winning than in sex, and she didn't have time in her training schedule for a real relationship anyway. This was reinforced by the fact that long hours on a hard bicycle seat made sex with men and women either painful or non-stimulating.

Director Manon Briand said, "I wish I could introduce my film in the same way that a physicist explains the universe-with a couple of clear cut mathematical formulas. I have always envied how scientists derive satisfaction from a series of well-ordered rational calculations. Yet a film is a world of irrational subjective elements and things often exist for no other reason than one's desire to see them on the screen." Indeed, Laurie's bisexuality is not central to the plot. If she had never been attracted to men, it would have

made little difference to the film. It was, apparently, something this writer/director just wanted to see on the screen.

Indeed, bisexuality is a subject that interests a growing number of Canadian directors. One of the best is Patricia Rozema, who first attracted international attention with *I've Heard the Mermaids Singing*. A young and inept temp worker with a history of brief relationships with men develops a mad crush on her new boss, a female gallery curator who is currently seeing a man but previously had a long-term relationship with a woman. Rozema's best film to date also features bisexuality. *When Night Is Falling* (1995) is the story of Camille, who teaches at a Protestant college and is engaged to be married to Martin when she falls in love with Petra, a free spirit who performs with a traveling circus.

Atom Egoyan is another Canadian director with multiple films with bi characters to his credit. Often, as with *Exotica* (1994), the bi character is played by his bisexual wife, Arsinée Khanjian. However, in *The Adjuster* (1991) Egoyan's plot centers on an insurance adjuster named Noah (Elias Koteas) whose passion for his job extends to sexually comforting both female and male clients.

Several other interesting, and sometimes frightening, films featuring bisexual characters have come from Canada in recent years. One of the biggest hits of the independent circuit in 1999 was Anne Wheeler's *Better Than Chocolate*, in which Carla, a worker at a women's bookstore whom everyone thinks is a lesbian, begins dating the lead character's brother. Music by Ani DiFranco and Ferron adds to the enjoyment of the film.

David Cronenberg's *Crash* (1997) has bisexual characters throughout. The story line concerns a group of people who derive sexual pleasure from viewing or participating in car crashes. Like some S/M communities, the sex of the particular partner in these acts is less important than the acts themselves. This, by the way, is not a film for the faint of heart.

Widely available on video, *Highway 61* (1992) is a little-known, but quite entertaining road movie about a young barber who accidentally gets caught up in a scheme to smuggle cocaine from his small Canadian town to New Orleans on Route 61. Along the way they encounter several outrageous characters, including a wealthy, over-the-top bisexual man in Memphis. Be forewarned-any attempt to consume liquids during the scene where Satan meets the little girl who wants to be a star could end in said liquids being expelled rather violently.

Bisexuality figures significantly in the plots of *Paris France* and *Love and Human Remains*, both released in 1993. The former is set in Toronto and

involves an odd triangle that eventually evolves toward bisexuality. The latter is based in Montreal and is director Denys Arcand's first English language film. The story concerns a group of young city dwellers attempting to come to grips with their place in the world, their sexuality, and a serial killer, who may be one of them.

For those who enjoy short films, *Breakfast with Gus* is highly recommended. Filmed from the viewpoint of Gus the cat, this particular morning sees his owner and her girlfriend preparing for work, and a gorgeous man emerging from the bedroom of her ostensibly straight brother.

Anyone wondering where the fault lies for some of the most interesting bisexual characters in recent films need only recall the theme song from *The South Park Movie*: "Blame Canada." Co-written by director Trey Parker (who played a bisexual character in the movie *Baseketball*), the song is a fitting tribute to the bi-positive cinema being produced north of the border.

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Bí Books

What
a Difference
a Decade
Makes

Heather Macmillan

Jan Clausen. *Apples & Oranges*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1999, 224 pages.

I used to hate Jan Clausen. Ten years ago, when I was a 19-year-old Women's Studies major just starting to accept my own attraction to women, I vividly remember reading Clausen's "My Interesting Condition." Trapped in a modernist mode of thinking, I was not ready to admit that homosexuality might not be a unified identity, consistent through time and space. Unfortunately, at the time I could only express my resistance in the predictable form of a late teenager: "She sucks, what a traitor!" This initial experience of Clausen's work caused me to roll my eyes when asked to review her new book. Secretly I feared I would have a similar reaction. I am extremely pleased to say my response was anything but that.

Ten years of schooling concentrated on ideas of subject formation and community politics obviously helped prepare me for my reintroduction to Clausen's work. I would like to think that some growth and maturity on my part has also helped. Of course, my change of heart is due not only to my own progress. Under the influence of bisexual and transgender politics, our awareness of the limitations of a binary sexual system has advanced a great deal culturally. Clausen illustrates how our narratives of identity form and limit what we can understand. Her very personal and highly analytic work shows beautifully how sexual identity changes over time. She illustrates wonderfully how one subject can move and shift through complexities of emotions, desire, and political affiliations while living in the liminal spaces between heterosexuality and homosexuality, between the heterosocial and the homosocial worlds.

Although Clausen's autobiography can be taken in many ways, *Apples & Oranges* must first be described as a history of one individual's coming of age. But unlike other coming-of-age stories, Clausen does not stop with the simple idea of coming out. Hers is a narrative about the very implications and problems of bisexual narrative. This is clear from the first sentence:

When I officially declared myself a lesbian at the age of twenty-four, I did not exactly forget about my history of vigorous if problematic involvement with men. Rather, after the fashion of all sorts of people who, in various circumstances, religious and secular, claim a symbolic rebirth, I bracketed that old life. (p. 1)

By focusing on the narrative elements of her sexual history, Clausen allows herself to think about what it means to tell the story of our lives. Why, for

political and personal reasons, do we selectively represent ourselves to each other, and what are the implications of these choices?

Although beginning from the position of a more normalized heterosexual identity, Clausen extends her narrative beyond sexual initiation-her learning she could “do men.” She thinks about the implications of what she does and the forces that form her, examining closely her family’s prohibitions about sex and her adolescent heterosexual experiments. As Clausen notes during the early part of her book, this narrative begins in a pre-AIDS context. Because of this context, the opening chapters focus on morality and a carefully situated middle-class whiteness.

There was no sex in my childhood, which began in 1950 in Coos Bay, Oregon and wavered into consciousness in Eureka, California, a timber industry outpost where my father was employed in forest product research. No dirty jokes, no playing doctor or even spin the bottle, no MTV, no R-rated or X-rated movies. . . . No songs about sugar in bowls. . . . No “Yo bitch, suck my dick” rap pounding out of neighbor’s windows. (p. 17)

Within this sheltered environment, Clausen at first associates the sexual and the secret. This mixture of pleasure and discomfort associated with heterosexuality does not complete the story.

Unlike most LGBT narratives of sexual identity, Clausen’s account continues to explore her relationships with women and men after what is usually the climactic moment of coming out into the lesbian community-her finding she can also “do women.” Extending her narrative beyond this traditional ending of most lesbian autobiographies, Clausen meditates on the intricacies of this delicate thing we call “identity.” She highlights and explores the conflict of emotions involved in long-term sexual relationships (and I would argue all types of long-term relationships between people): passion/tedium, tenderness/indifference, and finally loving/leaving. In her chapter “Menage a N,” Clausen considers the contradictions inherent in her attraction to multiple people-men as well as women-during her post-college, art-commune days and her final decision that women might resolve this conflict. As she puts it, “It was the flip side of Kate Millett’s anguished disavowal of bisexuality, the idea of loving another woman was simply a better deal (why sleep with your oppressor?) and civic minded to boot.” Finding herself in New York as part of a poetry scene (more lesbian than not) and meeting her partner-to-be, Clausen reaches what might have been the typical end of a lesbian narrative. But, as she again realizes, this is not the whole story. Clausen continues her

narrative into the relationship, talking frankly about her dissatisfaction with settled life-the infamous problem of “lesbian bed-death.”

In exploring these issues both analytically and personally, Clausen examines the limits of the heterosexual “family” model-how even the most passionate and loving relationship can leave a lot to be desired. Finally, Clausen breaks from this model too and opts for a relationship with a man, as much determined by circumstances as by simple attraction and desire. It is not easy for her to be part of a heterosexual relationship while attempting to combat the heterosexist nature of society-and the disapproval of peers who cling emotionally to either/or models of identification.

One of the particularly remarkable aspects of the book deals with Clausen’s responses to and understanding of sexual violence. As someone deeply invested in analyzing the intricate details of her own sexual identity, I found it fascinating that in her narrative Clausen mentions two major incidents of sexual violence without dwelling on either. For second-wave feminism, the issue of sexual violence has always been at the forefront. Violence has also been a radicalizing factor for LGBT politics ever since the Stonewall Riots solidified the movement. For Clausen, however, violent incidents that once would have been seen as crucial are rather quickly set aside. Some might see her de-emphasizing violence as a form of denial. I do not. Clausen understands how these events inform her responses to people around her, as well as how they affect those close to her. At the same time, Clausen suspects that survivors of sexual assault too often fixate on their victimization. She considers how violent events limit her mobility and also how her partner’s response increased the difficulty of her response. But Clausen’s unwillingness to make more of these events subtly reworks traditional wisdom. She implicitly calls for a radical rethinking of how we look at ideas of victimhood/survival and of what sexual violence means personally as well as culturally.

In short, Clausen’s *Apples & Oranges: My Journey Through Sexual Identity* is interesting, charming, and emotionally challenging. For people concerned with issues of identity formation and sexual/gender politics, it is a wonderfully enjoyable yet intellectually stimulating book. But most simply, it is a pleasure to read, a powerful testament to Clausen’s strength as a thinker, a writer, and a person.

Brief Mention

David Van Leer

Petronius. *Satyricon*. Trans. R. Bracht Branham and Daniel Kinney. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997, 220 pages.

New translation of the classic Roman novel, probably the first literary treatment of bisexuality. Written in the first century A.D., the novel is best known from Fellini's 1970 film version. The skillful editorial materials make this classic text accessible to a general readership, and well worth the attention of everyone interested in early representations of bisexuality.

Martel, Frederic. *The Pink and the Black: Homosexuals in France Since 1968*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999. xx + 442 pages.

A magisterial, indispensable account of French homosexuality, both reviewing historical events and offering biographies of the key players. Although not focused on the differences among sexual identities, it attends fully to the role of such French bisexuals as Andre Gide, Simone de Beauvoir, Marguerite Yourcenar, and Christine Delphy in fostering the sexual revolution.

Parker, Richard, Regina Maria Barbosa, and Peter Aggleton, eds. *Framing the Sexual Subject: The Politics of Gender, Sexuality, and Power*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000. x + 271 pages.

Recognizing the differences in the international transmission of HIV, this anthology discusses global distinctions among sexual identities. Focusing on cross-national politics, the essays will particularly interest a bisexual readership in their consideration of identities that avoid homo/heterosexual dichotomies—like the Indonesian “Waria,” the Peruvian “entendido,” and similarly nontraditional identities throughout Argentina, Costa Rica, Brazil, the Philippines, and South Africa.

Seidman, Steven. *Difference Troubles: Queering Social Theory and Sexual Politics*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997. xiii + 307 pages.

A wide-ranging collection of essays on sexuality and politics from one of our most important contemporary sociologists. Seidman claims bisexuality challenges conventional “postmodern” models of sexuality that reinforce the hetero/homo dichotomy. Building on the work of Jan Clausen, Seidman argues that some bisexuals reject the use of gender preference to define what constitutes sexual identity.

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