



Beth A. Firestein
Editor

BISEXUALITY

The
Psychology
and
Politics
of an
Invisible
Minority



Beth A. Firestein

Editor

BISEXUALITY

The
Psychology
and
Politics
of an
Invisible
Minority



SAGE Publications

International Educational and Professional Publisher

Thousand Oaks London New Delhi

Copyright © 1996 by Sage Publications, Inc.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or utilized in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

For information address:



SAGE Publications, Inc.
2455 Teller Road
Thousand Oaks, California 91320
E-mail: order@sagepub.com

SAGE Publications Ltd.
6 Bonhill Street
London EC2A 4PU
United Kingdom

SAGE Publications India Pvt. Ltd.
M-32 Market
Greater Kailash I
New Delhi 110 048 India

Printed in the United States of America

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Main entry under title:

Bisexuality: the psychology and politics of an invisible minority /
editor, Beth A. Firestein.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-8039-7273-3 (alk. paper).—ISBN 0-8039-7274-1 (pbk.:
alk. paper)

1. Bisexuality—United States. 2. Bisexuals—United States—
Psychology. 3. Bisexuals—Counseling of—United States.
4. Bisexuals—United States—Political activity. I. Firestein,
Beth A.

HQ74.2.U5B57 1996
306.76'5—dc20

96-9987

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

97 98 99 00 01 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2

Sage Production Editor: Vicki Baker
Sage Typesetter: Andrea D. Swanson
Sage Cover Designer: Candice Harman

BISEXUALITY

Dedicated to bisexual people everywhere—
Come out, come out, wherever you are,
It is our time to dance!

Foreword

In 1969, at age 39, I came out as bisexual to colleagues at the Center for Special Problems in San Francisco. Their reactions vacillated from confusion to disbelief. It was scary, yet it was an important step in my own growth. I had not read Kinsey until then, and very little else was available. Some time after I came out, bisexual clients were finally included at the Center for Special Problems, alongside the gay, lesbian, transgender, and heterosexual clients already being served. In 1971, I became involved in the National Sex Forum in San Francisco, running sex education workshops for health professionals and, soon after, for the general adult public.

In 1972, Toni Ayres, Carolyn Smith, and I started San Francisco Sex Information (SFSI), a community sex education switchboard with a 50-hour training process for volunteers that gave accurate, nonjudgmental information to callers on a variety of sexual topics. The SFSI switchboard is still in existence today. SFSI became a haven for many bisexuals who found this community to be sex positive, accepting, and supportive of who they were. We included bisexual information and speakers at both SFSI and the National Sex Forum.

Out of SFSI came a core group who wanted a Bi Center and were willing to gather the energy to make it happen. Finally in 1976, several of us met and, with the generous support of Dr. Harriet Leve, pooled our money and our energy to start the Bisexual (Bi) Center in San Francisco. The Bi Center offered a base of support and a sense of community for people who were already defining themselves as bisexual or who were exploring bisexuality as a possible social and sexual option. The mission statement of the Bi Center stated, in part:

The Bisexual Center is united in struggling for the rights of all women and men to develop as whole, androgynous beings. We support relationships between persons of the same as well as the other sex. These relationships may include relating spiritually, socially, emotionally, sensually, sexually, and intellectually. We also support the choice of a celibate lifestyle. (Rubenstein & Leve, 1976)

The Bi Center offered multidisciplinary services, including counseling, discussion groups, social programs, a newsletter, a speaker's bureau, and a research program. The Bi Center finally closed its doors in 1984, but the work of making bisexuality visible continued in other organizations and in other places.

Organizing around the issue of bisexuality was controversial, but once we began to put forth information on bisexuality, people began to understand, at first hesitantly, then later with more acceptance. Since 1972, I have been working as a therapist and sexologist, teaching and educating audiences, students, and clients about the whole range of human sexuality, including bisexuality. This has been my life's work.

Those of us who were early organizers within the bi movement knew that education, research, therapy, politics, and sociosexual studies were flawed because of their omission of documentation of the bisexual experience. The struggle for recognition was a difficult path in the 1970s, much more so than now. Even now, as we speak out about all bisexual realities nationally and internationally, there is still resistance from those who tend to dichotomize sexuality, although in major cities and on campuses there is now much more inclusion of bisexuals.

For years, as a member of the Gay Pride Parade Committee in San Francisco, I and others fought for the name of the parade to be inclusive of bisexuals. In 1992, I was selected as co-Grand Marshall of the San Francisco Lesbian/Gay Freedom Day Parade, and in 1994, bi activist Lani Ka'ahumanu became co-Grand Marshall of that year's parade. Bisexual activists, transgender activists, and our supporters on the parade committee finally won support for making the name of the parade more inclusive. The 1995 celebration was the first parade to be known as the "San Francisco Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender Pride Parade."

As each decade passes, new bisexual and bi supportive people are emerging, speaking out in print and in films. New books on bisexuality are emerging at an unprecedented rate. I am honored to introduce to you this book, *Bisexuality: The Psychology and Politics of an Invisible Minority*.

It is important to bring bisexuality into focus within psychology, the other social sciences, and the helping professions. All professionals

and students within the “people-oriented” disciplines need both theoretical and practical information about bisexuality. Whether conducting research on sexual orientation or working with bisexual clients and bisexual issues in other ways, having accurate information about bisexuality is of vital importance to the success of this enterprise. This book accomplishes that goal by bringing together a thorough and diverse collection of important and significant writings on bisexuality.

This book is *very* well done. It covers so many important bisexual issues. Each author, personally and professionally, has brought out vital and enlightening information. I commend Dr. Firestein, as editor and author, and all of the authors who participated in the creation of this book, for their clarity and thoroughness. The material presented in this book is both new and, in some instances, dramatic. This book contributes to bisexual visibility and furthers our understanding of bisexuals and bisexuality by providing historical and contemporary perspectives on bisexuality in a way that reaches out to all readers, whether for personal or professional knowledge. Furthermore, the writings in this book provide clinicians with numerous guidelines and specific suggestions for conducting effective and ethical counseling with bisexual clients or clients dealing with bisexual issues.

What makes this book both unique and outstanding is the way that Dr. Firestein has tied all the writings in the book together within a highly readable and excellently presented format. *Bisexuality: The Psychology and Politics of an Invisible Minority* is a credit to her extensive work and the work of all the authors involved in this project. This book will be of interest to the professional and lay reader alike and is a “must read” for anyone interested in acquiring knowledge about bisexuality, particularly bisexual diversity. In a word, it succeeds.

In the 1990s, bisexual people and the bisexual movement have matured and are strong and vital. We are everywhere, telling the truth that was for so very long denied. We still have much more work to do, day by day, person by person, group by group. I am 65 years old now: happy, joyful, bisexual, androgynous, and proud—and very excited at how far our movement has come. We must remember and value our history, work hard in the present, and strive for even greater achievements in the future. As pioneers for bisexual rights, we have laid the foundation from which the bisexual community has grown. Together, with continuing work, we can eradicate bisexual invisibility and promote a more holistic vision of sexual orientation within the social sciences and helping professions, and in society at large.

MAGGI RUBENSTEIN

*Dean of Students at the Institute for the
Advanced Study of Human Sexuality, San Francisco*

Reference

- Rubenstein, M., & Leve, H. (1976). Mission statement. *The Bi-Monthly*, 1(1), 3. (San Francisco: The Bisexual Center)

Acknowledgments

There are so many people whose generous support is required to make a project like this possible. Although I cannot acknowledge every one of them here, I would like to give a special thanks to the people and institutions that were most integral to making this project happen.

First, I wish to extend my heartfelt gratitude to Southern Illinois University at Carbondale: to the Division of Student Affairs, Student Health Programs, and most particularly the Counseling Center and my director, Janet Coffman, whose support of my professional development leave request made the creation of this book possible. I also wish to thank the staff members of the Office of Women's Services for surviving and thriving for a year without me—and for accepting me back—and a special thanks to Laura Lyn for filling the coordinator role during the year that I was on leave.

I also wish to thank Colorado State University, Scott Hamilton, chair, and the staff of the Department of Psychology at CSU for supporting this project by allowing me to affiliate with the Department as a Visiting Scholar during the summer and fall of 1994. The months that I spent in Fort Collins were pure joy for me, and a great amount of the work for this project occurred during that time. A special thanks goes to Pour la France and Starry Night Coffee Company for letting me sit around for hours on end with my Powerbook and my decaf, for providing me with nourishment while I worked on the project, and for never kicking me out, no matter how long I stayed.

I would like to thank Charles (Terry) Hendrix, senior editor at Sage Publications, for giving this first-time book editor a contract and, therefore, the peace of mind necessary to really begin this project, and

Dale Mary Grenfell, also of Sage, for her timely responses to my queries and for helping me to keep track of the passing seasons without ever pressuring me about deadlines.

Loraine Hutchins lent me books about publishing and gave me copious amounts of free publishing advice. Lani Ka'ahumanu provided me with positive strokes and consistent encouragement, reminding me that the project was growing ever nearer to completion. I thank both women for their pioneering efforts in putting together their 1991 anthology of bisexual voices, a project that gave me my first opportunity to publish on the topic of bisexuality. Now, 5 years later, they have contributed to this book.

A number of friends and colleagues offered feedback on various pieces of this manuscript at different stages, particularly on the material that I wrote. I wish to thank Jeff Harris for his feedback on my book proposal and subsequent writings and Kathy Taylor, Dallas Denny, Lisa Hollabaugh, Loraine Hutchins, Jan Lund, Dave Matteson, Irene Stein, Leslie Strategier, and Amy Willis for their comments on various drafts of my chapters. I particularly wish to thank Paula Rust and Ron Fox for their thorough critique of my work; and my father, Rabbi Louis Firestein, for his supportive feedback on the draft of my "Paradigms" chapter. Robyn Ochs assisted tremendously with the Resource Appendix and returned my queries practically before they could even leave my e-mail box—she gets the "Speedy Author" award for this volume. I wish to express my sincerest gratitude to Ron Fox, who nurtured my vision of this volume from the beginning, constantly pushed me to make this a better book, and whose detailed advice invariably improved the final manuscript.

I wish to thank Evan Young and Leslie Strategier for their superior assistance in technical editing and index preparation. I also wish to thank Maggi Rubenstein, Michael W. Ross, and Sari H. Dworkin for their helpful feedback on the entire manuscript, with a special thanks to Sari for her detailed and thoughtful suggestions for each chapter of the book. And I wish to thank each of the contributors to this volume for their fine work on the chapters and their patience with the seemingly endless number of drafts and revisions, frantic queries, and ever-pressing deadlines associated with their work on this book.

Finally, I wish to thank those in my intimate circle, whose support, love, patience, and encouragement saw me through this project—from a dream that woke me at four in the morning to the book that you now hold in your hands. Scott Shaw has been a loving companion and friend, whose belief in my ability to complete this project never wavered, whose patience wavered only occasionally, and who provided me with generous doses of silliness and affection throughout the

process. Jan Lund brought love, a keen intelligence, and valuable perspective to our long conversations about this book. She was my constant companion from a distance and a powerful link to my dreams and to my love for women. The meals she wanted to cook for me and the errands she wished she could run for me were much appreciated. Kathy Taylor provided warmth, encouragement, and a ready ear at every stage of the project. Each of you made personal sacrifices to support me in completing this book, often by putting your own needs on the back burner and letting the book come first in my life. I also want to thank my cat, Beau, just for being my cat and for being probably the only one in my life (including me) who *never* complained about my working on this book. Last, but not least, I wish to thank my parents, Louis and Margaret Firestein; my sisters, Karen Runyon and Julie Andress; and my brother, David Firestein, for their love and encouragement as I worked on this project. To all of you, I offer my love and my gratitude.

B. A. F.

Prologue

That Naked Place

Lani Ka'ahumanu

For now I look you in the eye and say
I will not be the skeleton in our family closet
I will not be your homo or heterosexual assumption
I will not be your scapegoat
I will not be controlled
I will not be contained
I will not betray my truth

I am spontaneous combustion
I am fluid motion seeking her complement
I am language searching for new meaning
I am social construction looking to change

I am a sexual borderline bandit
a traitor to the cause

I am in-law and out-law
connected at your hip

I am your nitty gritty
raw naked to the bone
shameless fluid desire

come home
I am your primal cream
I am your forbidden dream

I am beyond binary

I am sexual
without category

I am sexual
without gendered reference points
riding the chemistry
as it unfolds

I am a free range chicken
don't fence me in
I can cockadoodle doo your do
and lay with the best of your hens

I am a criss-cross hop scotching
ready or not here I come
boat rocking radical
in a swiftly shifting paradigm
heading towards the next millennium

If I pass
for other than what I am
do you feel safer?

I ask
where do you draw your lines?
whose back do you watch?
who do you include?

Do you hear what I'm saying?

If I pass
for other than what I am
do you feel safer?

My light skin
My female lover
when I have one,

or for that matter,
My male lover
when I have one,
are tickets
to games
I don't want to play

I am the bone of your contention
I am the white noise whisper that will not cease
I am the muddy waters, the complication, the confusion of issues

I will not give up my freedom for safety

I will not be patronized
I will not be tokenized
I will not be tolerated, and
I will not be quiet

I am not satisfied
with the concessions bisexuals have been given
Just who is it
who thinks
they are giving what
to whom?

I have been here all along
I have as much to give,
as I am given

This is a two way street

I am a sexual politic
free to follow the geography of my desire

I am a human politic
carving out new language
in a time when there are no pat answers

I want us to go to that naked place
where terror
and the desire for justice
lives inside our souls

Search for the place

that remembers,
we are family,
we are a tribe, one among many
we are connected and dependent upon the earth,
the air we breathe,
the food we eat,
the water we drink,
and each other

We are the descendants and the ancestors

I want us to go to that naked place
where we remember the truth,
for the truth is all we have,
and, the truth is all we need

If we do this
we can influence the flow of evolution,
by risking being part of the change

Mahalo/thank you.

NOTE: This is an edited version of the poem that was delivered by Lani Ka'ahumanu as part of her keynote address for "In Queery, In Theory, In Deed: The 6th Annual North American Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Studies Conference" on November 19, 1994, in Iowa City, Iowa. Copyright © Lani Ka'ahumanu. Reprinted by permission of the author.

Introduction

Beth A. Firestein

We're here to talk today about everybodyexceptyou.
We're working for the rights of everybodyexceptyou.
The oppression of everybodyexceptyou has got to end.

Susan Carlton (1991)

Bisexuality is a concept with the potential to revolutionize Western culture's understandings of sex, gender, and sexual orientation. Accorded the recognition and validity it deserves, bisexuality has the explanatory power to illuminate many of those elements of sexual orientation and sexual identity that have remained heretofore most mysterious and unexplored. The differing and common roots of homosexual and heterosexual desire; the multidimensional, fluid, and evolving nature of sexuality and its expression over the life cycle; the role of gender in attraction and sexual desire—these are only a few of the elements of human sexual experience made visible through the lens of bisexual identity and expression.

Throughout this book, the terms *bisexuality*, *bisexual*, and *bisexual identity* are used, both in combination and independently, to convey particular meanings. Broadly conceived, bisexual means of or pertaining to one's experience of erotic, emotional, and sexual attraction to persons of more than one gender. Such individuals may identify as bisexual, homosexual, lesbian, gay, heterosexual, transgendered, or transsexual or may choose not to label at all. Within the sexual orientation literature, bisexual identity or bisexually identified generally refer