

## Lesbian and Bisexual Identity: Discourse of Difference

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### ABSTRACT

How does a lesbian or bisexual woman construct her identity? We examine this question through a discourse analysis of 20 interviews with lesbian and bisexual women. We theorize about the discursive production of identities using three broad classifications of discourse: "Labelling," "Coming Out," and "Building and Sustaining Identity."

### RÉSUMÉ

Comment une femme lesbienne ou bisexuelle crée-t-elle son identité? Nous étudions cette question par une analyse de discours de 20 entrevues avec des lesbiennes et des femmes bisexuelles. Nous théorisons la production discursive des identités en nous servant des trois grandes classifications du discours: "étiqueter," "coming out" ou "avouer son orientation sexuelle" et "créer et maintenir son identité."

Lesbian identity has typically been viewed from an essentialist standpoint, a view that has rendered bisexuality invisible. Essentialist models equate identity with essence or biology (Fuss 1989; Kinsman 1987). In this regard, identity has been conceptualized as being static, preordained at early stages of development, and the property of an individual in isolation from his/her daily socio-political context (Bohan 1993; Blumstein & Schwartz 1977; Firestein 1996; Fox 1996; Kitzinger & Wilkinson 1995; Paul 1985). Such scientific models, as well as popular beliefs about sexual identity, occur in the context of monosexism; that is, that an individual can only be attracted to either a male or a female (Nagle 1995). The ubiquity of such beliefs contributes to the invisibility of other sexualities.

Individuals who are openly claiming a bisexual identity confront a long held assumption that sexual attractions are binary (Hutchins 1996). The prevalence of bisexual behaviour as it now appears in many studies and the emergence of a bisexual community both provide a significant challenge to the monosexist thinking that currently dominates the models used to theorize about sexual identity (Firestein 1996; Hutchins 1996; Rust

1993). The source of information necessary to generate inclusive theories about sexual identities may be found in the bisexual narrative.

Articulating the bisexual experience serves a significant function. In addition to integrating personal experiences, the production of accounts provides a component essential to the creation of communities based on identity. The gay and lesbian liberation movement is a notable example of how constructing a lesbian identity in a positive light contributed to the emergence of the lesbian community. There is a dynamic and dialectical relationship, then, between an individual and the stories she constructs from the available discourse and from her location in a community in which her stories can be heard. Community, in turn, operates as a resource from which individuals may construct their identity.

The process of changing our theories and beliefs about sexuality is facilitated by the variety of accounts that are available. In this paper, the "discursive production" of lesbian and bisexual identities (Kitzinger & Wilkinson 1995) is the window for our theorizing. Our interview material with 20 women who identify as lesbian or bisexual provides us with accounts - a storied framework -

that are a collection of instances of what happens as a result of claiming a lesbian or bisexual identity, and the subsequent meaning ascribed to such events. This does not mean that these women are speaking with one unified voice. Rather, their individualized accounts form the basis for an inheritance that women may choose to access to a greater or lesser degree.

However, bisexual women have a story that contains a different stock of experiences than the lesbian one. The space for this story to be heard and recognized as such has been created by the increasing publicity and general awareness of lesbianism. To borrow from Plummer's idea (1995), we believe that the bisexual story is one "whose time has come." This is not only because it contains elements of the gendered and the relational, like the lesbian story; the bisexual story also contains a subversive potential that is both personal and political. The bisexual narrative reflects a usage of the lesbian lexicon in fashioning an identity that implicitly challenges the genderist ideology that sustains patriarchy. As bisexual women continue to generate their discourse, they provide us with an ongoing narrative of how bisexual identity is constructed and politicized in a monosexist society.

### THE PRESENT STUDY

Our interview material comes from a health care study in which 98 self-identified lesbian/bisexual women in Nova Scotia were interviewed in a semi-structured, face-to-face format. All participants were recruited through word-of-mouth technique. The interviews were audio-taped and transcribed into conversational text. The interview questions and procedures are described in detail elsewhere (Mathieson 1998). In general, women were asked to elaborate on their range of experiences while seeking health care.

The interviews contained elaborate talk about identity, even though we asked only one specific question about sexual orientation: *We don't have much research telling us about the health care needs of lesbian and bisexual women. It would be helpful for us to know if you feel comfortable with considering yourself lesbian or bisexual (gay, queer, two-spirited...).* After analyzing the

discourse about health, we realized that we needed to take a closer look at how the women talked about who they are. Health care issues receded into the background as we recognized that the health care encounter is one of many venues in which a woman may reveal her sexual identity. We then posed two organizing questions for the study we present in this paper: Does our interview material inform us as to how lesbian and bisexual women construct their identity? and Is there a difference between the discourse of lesbian and bisexual women?

Twenty interviews were then intentionally sampled (Lincoln & Guba 1985). We included all ten interviews with women who identified as bisexual, and then roughly age-matched these with ten interviews from lesbian women. The sample was heterogeneous. The ages of the women ranged from 26 to 48 years of age. Included in our sample were two native women, and one black woman; the remaining seventeen were white. One woman was physically challenged. Five women lived in rural areas while the rest lived in urban areas. Three women were single. Eight of the women had children of whom some were young and some adult. Participants reported a variety of occupations. Six women were students. Five women had completed high school while the remainder held university degrees. Three women had been incarcerated at some time in their lives. The interviews used in this sample, then, capture a wide range of socio-cultural experiences that would lend a certain texture to each woman's narrative.

Below we discuss the results of a discourse analytic procedure. We first utilized a coding process to locate general patterns in the discourse (see Miles and Huberman 1994). We began by noting on the transcripts all instances of talk about identity - even if remotely related - and then we started to classify these into themes. To conceptually develop the themes, they were discussed and the transcripts were reviewed until saturation was reached; that is, no new information was added by further review. Quote files were kept for each theme. We reconceptualized our themes according to three broad headings: "Labelling," "Coming Out," and "Building and Sustaining Identity." Such connotation is not intended to place *a priori* boundaries around interpretation of the

discourse. Rather, we use the headings to examine the interview material in depth. The headings serve to organize and accentuate what we believe to be critical points of comparison and contrast between lesbian and bisexual talk. This in turn allows us to theorize about the discursive production of such identities.

"Labelling" examines how women label and/or describe themselves and what this process means. In "Coming Out," we look at the ongoing, interactive process of articulating, and coming to terms with, a sexual identity that differs from that of a heterosexual (Rust 1993). In "Building and Sustaining Identity," we consider the accounts addressing the resources that a woman may draw upon in the process of constructing her identity.

### LABELLING

Women used the labels "lesbian," "dyke," "political lesbian," "gay," "bisexual" and "fly girl" to refer to their sexual orientation. Some women commented that they felt limited by these labels, or resented having to adopt them in order to gain "some recognition" and would therefore prefer not to use any label. Others preferred to use them strategically, identifying themselves as lesbian in certain circumstances to challenge the assumption that all women are heterosexual.

In addition, women also identified themselves according to other labels not related to sexuality: "disabled," "Native," or "Black." These other identities co-occurred with the discourse about sexuality. The experience of being lesbian or bisexual was compounded by the multiple discrimination women incurred as a result of these other identities based on their visible minority status. For example, one woman spoke of her experiences of prejudice when she said "... Sometimes I can't distinguish whether...it's because I am uh, gay, or because I am black."

Though both lesbian and bisexual women adopted the labels about sexuality as part of their discourse, their talk was different. The lesbian participants often spoke about a political stance and a dress code or particular appearance as indicative of what it means to be a lesbian. In contrast, the bisexual women provided definitions and

explanations for their bisexuality. In the bisexual interviews, there was an absence of conversation about appearances and politics. This absence does not mean that bisexual women do not make their sexuality political. Rather, we interpret this to mean that bisexual women are in the process of choosing a particular stance: that of being absorbed by neither the lesbian nor heterosexual communities. In a sense, the historical basis for their politic is now developing. In larger American centres, there are women articulating a politic of bisexuality, a process that includes claiming the bisexual label and generating meanings for it, and challenging the dualistic thinking typical of popular discourse regarding sexuality (Udis-Kessler 1995; Highleyman 1995). While the bisexual discourse here perhaps does not reflect a self-conscious politic, the bisexual women *are* choosing and articulating definitions and explanations of their bisexuality.

These articulations of what it means to be bisexual are in opposition to popular and scientific notions of bisexuality. The discourse reflects a dynamic and bi-directional relationship between widely available ways of speaking about sexuality and the simultaneous use of old ways of speaking, to create new ways of articulating sexual/relational experiences (Kitzinger 1987; Plummer 1995). The bisexual women rejected the dominant discourse that slots bisexuality into abnormality or promiscuity. It is in the bisexual discourse that the impact of living in a monosexist culture can be discerned. The awkwardness of existing in such a culture is sustained by the dualistic thinking that pervades general discourse about sexuality:

And it's weird too, because I often feel I can hide in the lesbian community if I want to and just not mention that I love men...and then of course I have my heterosexual privilege too. I can hide in that. I'm totally *aware* of all of that. But at the same time it's a *massive* contradiction to deal with.

Definitions of bisexuality implicitly challenge the construction of sexuality along gender lines. This challenge is more explicitly

articulated by bisexual activists who argue that our definitions of sexual identities are rooted in genderism. Though the women here did not indicate an awareness of the radical potential of a bisexual politic, their oppositional definitions of bisexuality encourage new ways of thinking and being in the world as well as new ways of ordering our world. This emergent discourse contains the possibility of inaugurating systemic changes in a potentially non-gendered world:

Because suddenly we realized bisexuality isn't just defining yourself as someone who sleeps with both sexes or genders, it's someone who defines themselves as being openly sexual...Regardless of sex or gender.

In general, we can make two observations regarding "Labelling." First, lesbian women have an inheritance that is relatively easy to access and is rich in resources. They have inherited a label that has recently been articulated in a positive light, in a variety of ways to speak about their sexuality, in a political stance that they may choose to adopt, and in a dress code to facilitate identifying and being identified by other lesbians. The lesbian women in our study considered these characteristics helpful in ameliorating any sense of isolation they experience as a result of their marginal identity status. In addition to being able to access this information, they are also contributing to the availability of this inheritance by talking about themselves as lesbians. In other words, the discourse draws on this inheritance and further facilitates its accessibility.

Second, bisexual women seem to be in the act of creating an identity. While they have a label, it is still fraught with the negative meanings ascribed to it by the mainstream, monosexist culture. On the other hand, their stories do not necessarily have the baggage of the lesbian history. Our participants did not seem to be aware of the emergent bisexual community in large urban areas, and as such may not be able to draw on those resources. In terms of creating new ways of thinking about identity, their discourse reflects their attempts to define for themselves what the label means. This labelling discourse positions them in a

unique space, offering all of us the possibility of imagining ourselves differently. By the very articulation of their experiences, the bisexual participants are creating a political discourse about bisexual identity.

## COMING OUT

The act of coming out may be conceptualized as consisting of two interrelated processes: disclosing one's identity and the process of story building. Coming out stories incorporate the events around specific disclosures; the events of one's past life are reinterpreted, given currently available discourses (Plummer 1995; Rust 1993). In this study, the focus of the interviews was health care, and therefore the discourse contained a high proportion of talk about coming out in health care situations. Coming out stories not related to health care were not directly solicited, yet the elements of such stories were prominent in the discourse. While there was a substantial amount of common discourse about disclosing to friends and family, the differences between the bisexual and lesbian accounts focus on two themes: when/where to disclose and reactions to disclosure.

Both bisexual and lesbian women reported being aware of a "constant questioning and deciding" about when and where to disclose. They were concerned with telling friends, family, and health care professionals. In addition to the act of telling, lesbians also referred to being affectionate with their partner in public, adopting a lesbian look, and living with a woman as indirect ways of communicating their identity. The bisexual discourse reflected different issues regarding disclosure, such as telling a partner and revealing a bisexual identity in the lesbian community. Disclosing to a partner, particularly when married to a man, proved to be problematic, as this woman stated:

But I identify more with that side of my personality than I do anything and I think that's why my husband has such a problem with it... he's totally heterosexual... to try and explain to him a bisexual feeling...he just doesn't comprehend the feeling so he

tends to want to compete with that.

For some of the bisexual women, disclosing to lesbian friends or to anyone else in the lesbian community was an issue. This concern has been identified by other researchers and has been articulated as a necessary consequence of the exclusion intrinsic to an identity-based politics and community (Rust 1992; Udis-Kessler 1995). Here one woman speaks about the experience of exclusion:

...I was identified as a lesbian for a long time...coming out as a lesbian to my family and friends wasn't difficult at all. The hardest part was when I started seeing a man and had to come out as bisexual to the lesbian community and I continue to find that a *very, very* major concern of mine...[The lesbian community is]... *extremely* unwelcoming...when I first came out as a bisexual...I was *extremely* back-stabbed, I mean I had a *lot* of, well, face-to-face comments like, "Oh, my god, we've lost a sister, can you really call yourself a feminist? How *dare* you, isn't that awful, so you're not fair game any more..."

Historically, coming out has been considered exclusively in terms of *homosexual* identity formation, a process that was characterized as unidirectional, goal-oriented, and consisting of a series of stages that culminate in a homosexual identity (Coleman 1982; Cass 1979). According to this developmental trajectory, coming out is a process of discovery in which the individual sheds a false heterosexual identity and comes to correctly identify and label her own true homosexual essence (Rust 1993). Within this framework, a bisexual woman can only be perceived as either confused, deceitful, or a false lesbian (Whisman 1993). The limitations of this developmental paradigm, apparent in light of the transitory nature of sexual identity as articulated by the women quoted above, have also been found in other studies regarding sexual identity (Blumstein & Schwartz 1977; Rust 1993).

Despite these limitations, the bisexual women utilized this language in concepts such as "coming out." Their discourse, however, may also contained other ways of framing sexual identity:

It's not a stage, it's a *process*! It's a continuum. I mean, all of us change our sexualities as we find new partners.... So, it's not a question of, you know, jumping from one to the other. It's more of a question of growing and learning about one's own sexuality. It's not a stage...

Both lesbian and bisexual women reported experiencing a range of responses when disclosing, from positive experiences of support and acceptance, to tolerance, to more negative experiences like rejection and discrimination. Bisexual women also reported being ultimately rejected from the lesbian community. Given the more hostile responses, and the lack of a supportive community, claiming and maintaining a bisexual identity is difficult and sometimes, "It isn't worth it." At the very least, maintaining a bisexual identity is a struggle. The woman quoted below discussed her bisexuality with her therapist, a man she characterized as being open to talking about sexuality:

...I have the feeling that he's trying to influence me or convince me that I'm not bisexual...he's talking about...the genetic thing or something like the biological thing...I don't know whether he's aware of it but he seems to be indicating...it's like an either/or thing...maybe I'm not really bisexual. Although I had defined myself for a long time as bisexual...And I felt comfortable with that, then I said well maybe he's right, like maybe I'm not really bisexual, maybe that's like not who I am...

In another instance a woman told a gay male friend that she was bisexual after she identified as lesbian:

And... the first comment I got back when I decided to come out was, "Oh, well, you're not really bisexual, you'll decide

soon, you're really a lesbian and you know it and I know it, and one of these days you'll figure that out, you know." So, then I kinda went, yeah, I am, I really am. And then years later realized, well, no I'm not....

While the bisexual women did not have access to a community per se, some had a group of friends with whom they shared their experiences. The positive impact of this experience was articulated by this woman:

For a while I didn't want to label myself, because I had so much trouble with the coming out as a lesbian who loved men. So that was really difficult, you know, and I kind of...threw it all to the wind and said, "Well, sexuality is sexuality." But I now have female bisexual friends and we're empowered in our sexuality and it's a term that we use very openly and comfortably.

Claiming a bisexual identity can affect both a woman's thinking about herself and her social interactions. This is also true for women who claim a lesbian identity. However, the differences in consequences are indicative of the differences in the attitudes that exist in popular discourse about sexuality. The act of disclosing is different for a bisexual than for a lesbian woman in another sense. A bisexual woman could hide in either the heterosexual community or the lesbian community. The act of disclosure, then, represents a concerted effort on the part of bisexual women (Ochs 1996), as they must constantly answer explicit and implicit challenges from both the heterosexual and lesbian communities, and must weigh the consequences of rejecting the "either/or thing:"

...there...is an entrance into either one [lesbian or heterosexual worlds] in some way. You could go to a woman's dance or you can go to a couples dance or whatever but in another way you're totally excluded because you, you're not accepted, like, in either world.

Finally, we point out that there were many instances in the lesbian interviews of coming out stories that were relatively intact or whole. In these sections, various milestones, or turning points, of an individual's history tended to be emphasized and, in general, they were characteristic of the established phenomenon of the coming out story in gay/lesbian culture (Plummer 1995). In their coming out stories, bisexual women included some, but not all, of the components mentioned in the lesbian discourse. For example, some bisexual women mentioned thinking they were different in childhood, or they indicated that now that they were bisexual, they had finally achieved their true identity. On the whole, however, there was an absence of structure that lacked the rehearsed quality we heard in the lesbian discourse. We interpret this as being indicative of bisexual women utilizing the lesbian lexicon in fashioning a bisexual story.

#### **BUILDING AND SUSTAINING IDENTITY**

"Building and Sustaining Identity" refers to the resources that a woman may draw upon in the process of constructing her identity. Community and relationships are two arenas in which she may do this. As indicated in the Coming Out section above, the combination of women's shared stories of oppression and liberation provided the content of the lesbian culture and the basis for the emergence of a lesbian community. The accounts of community and relationship reflected some fundamental differences in the social and political consequences between lesbian and bisexual identity.

Reflective of most of the lesbian women's views about community, one participant said the lesbian community is "very much like a small town in that it will come together when it needs to." Like a small town, it has its benefits and disadvantages. Of all the benefits that the community offers, however, perhaps the most important is that it provides the space to be lesbian:

Well, in terms of your emotional health, in terms of living who you are in a society that sort of doesn't legitimize who you are,

it can be difficult not to have some sense of community or some place where you can go and say I can relax, I can be me, I can be open about who I am.

The lesbian women in this study articulated a relatively monolithic picture of the lesbian community. For the most part they seemed to take for granted what it means to be a lesbian. It is in the bisexual discourse about community that the limitations imposed by the lesbian and heterosexual monoculture are exposed; it is here where the relationship between the emergence of community and an individual's identity is more clearly discerned. The portrayal of the lesbian community as a cohesive culture, where one's sexual identity is perceived as "normal" and taken for granted, is articulated by this bisexual woman:

I know a lot of lesbian women who fit in this category - who don't believe that their lesbianism is an issue of politics because they're within a strong lesbian community and don't feel oppressed in it. So that's fine, as far as I'm concerned, that's their lives. That's where they fit in.

That there are requirements for belonging in the lesbian community was indicated by this woman:

I have this perception about the [town name] gay community that it...is mainly dominated by stereotypical lesbians who I can't connect with...I think it's because I have a really strong objection to stereotypes of any kind, and when people try to live by a stereotype, or try to fit into a stereotype, I can't understand it. And sometimes I think that to fit in to the [town name] gay community you have to be, you have to try and fit the stereotype.

The implicit pressure to identify as lesbian as opposed to bisexual is quite strong given the support available from the community. The extra effort that is required to maintain a bisexual identity was articulated by this woman:

...if you all of a sudden felt...that it was just women that you were interested in there's a whole lesbian community that's very tight that...I think...you could come out and make a stand...But when...you have feelings in both directions it's as if there's nobody there...there is no visible community to access...it's very appealing to be a lesbian....To proclaim one way or the other is [easier] because you have a community.

That community is significant as a resource in building and sustaining a sexual identity is evident in the quotes above. It is also significant that the origin of a community based on sexual identity is generated by individuals producing their stories and putting them into the public domain (Plummer 1995). Currently there is an absence of a bisexual community and hence an absence of resources and role models for constructing one's bisexual identity. For the moment, bisexual women alternate between the lesbian and heterosexual worlds for their resources. The lesbian discourse may be a greater contribution, however, as its visibility in mainstream culture has contributed to an increased awareness of the experiences of those who do not fit the heterosexual norm. This has formed the space in which the bisexual discourse may be heard. As bisexual women speak about themselves and connect with each other, they also increase the listener's ability to recognize the story as such.

Relationships provide another, more intimate resource for building and sustaining a sexual identity. The rules and regulations regarding the meaning of the term lesbian also contribute to the definitions of what constitutes an appropriate lesbian relationship. The propensity of some lesbians to seek mainstream acceptance and legitimacy reflects the high value many lesbians place on constructing relationships that reflect the heterosexual ideal (Saalfeld 1993). This, of course, is not reflective of all lesbians; however, the discourse in this study is characterized by such mainstream notions of relationships. Lesbian women described their relationships in such terms as "long-term," "monogamous," and "like a

marriage."

In contrast, the bisexual women defined the type of relationship they were in as "heterosexual," "lesbian," "gay," or as having multiple partners. There was an absence of talk about their partners except in terms of specific issues. One woman commented on her husband's difficulty in dealing with her bisexuality. Most, however, either did not mention their partners, or they separated their personal concerns about sexuality from the context of their relationship. In addition, the bisexual women experienced discrimination differently than lesbians. While their concerns were similar when they were in a relationship with a woman, they reported being aware of monosexist - versus exclusively heterosexist - assumptions. Indicative of this, one woman stated: "My difference is invisible because I'm in a relationship...with a man and so it's invisible, it's just presumed..." This woman also indicated that it would take a substantial effort on her part to make her difference known.

One general observation that we made regarding the discourse about relationships is that most of the women in this study reported sexual/relational experiences with both men and women at different points in their lives. What distinguished lesbian from bisexual discourse was how the women identified themselves. It was typical of those who labelled themselves lesbian to refer to past relationships with men. One atypical instance was also reported by one woman who identified as lesbian at the time of the interview and was still in a sexual relationship with her husband. In light of the earlier discussion concerning community, it is not surprising that lesbian women would not consider adopting a bisexual label. Such instances of transitions and incongruity between sexual/relational behaviour and sexual identity have been noted by other researchers (Blumstein and Schwartz 1977; Kitzinger & Wilkinson 1995; Rust 1992). Rust (1993) explains such transitions in sexual identity as reflective of changes in available language, concepts of sexuality, and political context.

A second general observation about relationships is that lesbian and bisexual women differed in the way that they considered themselves

in relation to their partnerships. Lesbian women spoke as if their relationships were part of their lesbian identity. In contrast, bisexual women made a distinction between who they were and their relationship:

I don't know if any of them other than my sister, and my mother, really fully understand that it's an internalized lifestyle thing. It's the rest of my life. And if I choose to be married and heterosexual for the rest of my life then I'm *still* bisexual....If I choose to *act* married and heterosexual in a relationship with a man, then I'm *still* bi-sexual.

The distinction made by the bisexual women between one's sexual identity and one's sexual behaviour/relationships is a significant departure from the lesbian discourse regarding relationship. In their speaking, the gender of a bisexual woman's partner was often ambiguous. We were impressed by this and realized that it actually provides a striking example of how pervasive genderism is in our own thinking. The bisexual discourse represents a challenge to this and to the currently popular essentialist views of sexual identity. It also reveals the subversive potential contained within the bisexual story.

## GENERAL DISCUSSION

By comparing and contrasting the accounts of lesbian and bisexual women, we discover that differences within the discourse are in fact a description about the different resources available for constructing identity. There is a difference between lesbian and bisexual women in how they claim their labels, construct their coming out stories, and build and sustain their identities. Through all of these important pieces of the story runs the theme that lesbian women already have an inheritance upon which to draw; bisexual women do not. Still, Gavey's (1989) point is well-placed here:

Individuals...are active and have a "choice" when positioning themselves in

relation to various discourses....women can identify with and conform to traditional discursive constructions...or they can resist, reject, and challenge them.  
(464)

Overall, important theoretical concepts that emerge from our analysis are that sexual identity is both mutable and stable and that it is reflective of and is reflected in available discourse.

In their talking and their being, women who identify as bisexual blur the distinctions between us/them, oppressor/oppressed, lesbian/straight (Highleyman 1993; Rust 1992). As a result, bisexual women are contributing to changing the language we use to describe ourselves, our thinking about sexuality, relationships, and ultimately the socio-political context in which we live. The potential and need for a systemic transformation is more clearly explicated in the emerging bisexual discourse than the lesbian one. It is in the bisexual community, such as it is, where a politic of bisexuality is now being articulated. This politic holds the promise of rejecting the dichotomies between sexualities and genders and of generating a community where identity-based actions are only one strategy among many used to

change society (Highleyman 1993). Individuals in the gay/lesbian liberation movement of the 1960s initially articulated a challenge to the socio-political and economic institutions of the time. The logical consequence of organizing around an identity, however, was an increased focus on civil rights and desire to participate in mainstream culture resulting in a lack of any fundamental, systemic change (Highleyman 1993). The radical potential of bisexuality ultimately relies on the relinquishing of a bisexual identity in favour of diverse conceptualizations of gender, sexuality, and the existence of a "multiply gendered society" (Nagle 1995). The discourse of difference constructed by bisexual women both creates and critiques our prevailing notion of sexual identity - not only as who we are now, but who we may become.

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