SPECULATIVE FICTIONS, BISEXUAL LIVES:

CHANGING FRAMEWORKS OF SEXUAL DESIRE

by

JENÉE WILDE

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Department of English
and the Graduate School of the University of Oregon
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

June 2015

DISSERTATION APPROVAL PAGE

Student: Jenée Wilde

Title: Speculative Fictions, Bisexual Lives: Changing Frameworks of Sexual Desire

This dissertation has been accepted and approved in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in the Department of English by:

Michael Hames-García	Chairperson
Lisa Gilman	Core Member
Mary E. Wood	Core Member
Carol Stabile	Institutional Representative

and

Scott L. Pratt	Dean of the Graduate School

Original approval signatures are on file with the University of Oregon Graduate School.

Degree awarded June 2015

DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

Jenée Wilde

Doctor of Philosophy

Department of English

June 2015

Title: Speculative Fictions, Bisexual Lives: Changing Frameworks of Sexual Desire

        While studies of lesbian, gay, and transgender communities and cultural

production have dramatically increased, research on bisexuality remains highly

undervalued in humanities and social science disciplines. To challenge this lack of

scholarship, this doctoral dissertation applies both textual and ethnographic methods to

examine bisexual representation in non-realistic or "speculative" narratives and to

explore the insider perspectives of bisexual people who are also science fiction fans.

        The overall trajectory of chapters follows a progression from grounded research

and analysis to theory and application. First, I explore bisexual worldviews through

ethnographic research in overlapping sexual and fan communities and through textual

analysis of a 1980s bisexual fanzine. Next, I establish theoretical and methodological

foundations for a new sexual paradigm, called *dimensional sexuality,* and work to

intervene in interpretive methods that may restrict readings of sexuality in cinematic

narratives. And finally, I test dimensional sexuality as an interpretive mode by offering

dimensional readings of science fiction television and novels.

        From one direction, the project seeks to understand bisexuality as a position from

which to theorize sexual knowledge. A major claim is that bisexual epistemology offers

an alternative to dominant monosexual frameworks. Specifically, the multivalent logic of

bisexuality refutes the "either-or" structure of heterosexuality and homosexuality. By embracing the logic of "both-and," bisexuality as a category of knowledge enables the reorganization of sexuality within a non-binary, non-gender based multidimensional framework.

From another direction, the project demonstrates the productive textual and social spaces offered by speculative narratives for questioning what we "know" about gender, sex, sexuality, and other intersections of social identities. Science fiction bears a deep structural affinity with the dialectical thinking found in critical theory. By asking "what if" questions that challenge our assumptions about "what is," non-realistic narratives estrange us from the "known" world, interrogate our assumptions about the world, and make visible ideas and experiences outside of the norms we use to interpret what is "real" in a particular social and historical moment. As such, speculative narratives enable us to imagine sexual and gender possibilities beyond the episteme of the moment.

CURRICULUM VITAE

NAME OF AUTHOR: Jenée Wilde

GRADUATE AND UNDERGRADUATE SCHOOLS ATTENDED:

  University of Oregon, Eugene
  Goddard College, Plainfield, VT
  Boise State University, Boise, ID

DEGREES AWARDED:

  Doctor of Philosophy, English, 2015, University of Oregon
  Graduate Certificate, Women's & Gender Studies, 2015, University of Oregon
  Master of Fine Arts, Creative Nonfiction Writing, 2003, Goddard College
  Bachelor of Arts, English & Journalism, 1994, Boise State University

AREAS OF SPECIAL INTEREST:

  Queer & Bisexuality Studies
  Folklore Studies
  Popular Culture Studies
  20th Century Literature
  Speculative Fiction

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

  Development GTF, Center for the Study of Women in Society, 2012-2014

  Graduate Teaching Fellow, University of Oregon, 2008-2012

  Instructor, Gainesville State College, 2006-2008

  Adjunct Instructor, North Georgia Technical College, 2005

  Adjunct Instructor, Piedmont College, 2004-2005

  Adjunct Instructor, Brenau University, 2004-2005

  Reporter, *The Northeast Georgian*, 2000-2006

GRANTS, AWARDS, AND HONORS:

Jane C. Grant Dissertation Fellowship (accepted), Center for the Study of Women in Society, University of Oregon, 2014-15

Dissertation Fellowship (declined), Oregon Humanities Center, University of Oregon, 2014-15

Sherwood Graduate Research Award, Department of English, University of Oregon, 2014

John R. Moore Scholarship, LGBT Education & Support Services, University of Oregon, 2013

Miller Family Scholarship, Women's & Gender Studies, University of Oregon, 2013

Future of Minority Studies Research Award, Center for Race, Ethnicity, & Sexuality Studies, University of Oregon, 2013

Norman Brown Graduate Fellowship, College of Arts & Sciences, University of Oregon, 2012

Summer Research Award, Folklore Program, University of Oregon, 2012

Bruce M. Abrams LGBT Essay Award, Women's & Gender Studies, University of Oregon, 2010

PUBLICATIONS:

Wilde, Jenée. "Gay, Queer or Dimensional? Modes of Reading Bisexuality on *Torchwood*." *Journal of Bisexuality* special issue (forthcoming).

Wilde, Jenée. "Dimensional Sexuality: Exploring New Frameworks for Bisexual Desires." *Sexual and Relationship Therapy* 29.3 (August 2014): 320-38.

Wilde, Jenée. "Queer Matters in *The Dark Night Returns*, Or Why We Insist on a Sexual Identity for Batman." *Riddle Me This Batman! Essays from the Universe of the Dark Knight.* Ed. Kevin K. Durand and Mary K. Leigh. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2011. 104-123.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

For my sister, Pam.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

After bisexuality first appeared in late nineteenth century medical and sexological debates, the term accumulated a cargo hold of pathological baggage that was later retooled with Stonewall and gay liberation, rejected by lesbian separatists, demonized during the AIDS crisis, and ignored in the remaking of gay marriage as the poster child of homonormativity. Reverberations of these discourses have passed through cultural representations of bisexuality as an evolutionary or developmental phase, a utopian ideal, a lavender menace, a typhoid Mary, a ratings booster, and as a letter in an acronym that stays stubbornly invisible. As an epistemology and lived identity and experience, bisexuality remains outside the dominant framework used to organize sexual knowledge in the United States—binary heterosexuality and homosexuality.[1]

So if the category of bisexuality is so problematic, why not take up a doctoral research project on queer identity, representation, and knowledge instead? After all, the term *queer* meets cultural and analytical needs for sexual ambiguity and resistance—or does it?

Influenced by the radical queer politics of ACTUP and Queer Nation, queer analysis has been widely influential in academic theory as a kind of "final solution" to

---

[1] For genealogies of the concept of bisexuality and bisexual history, see Angelides and Storr; for a bisexual critique of same-sex marriage rights, see Wilde 321; for changing representations of bisexuality on scripted television in the 1980s-1990s, see Capsuto 224, 246, 302-304, 410; for bisexual invisibility, see Yoshino and *Bisexual Invisibility*; for bisexual epistemology and experience, see Hemmings and Storr.

heterosexism, heteronormativity, and more recently homonormativity. As a so-called empty signifier, anyone can identify with queer positions that resist normative structures of sexuality that pigeonhole, pin down, and oppress. As a post-structuralist, deconstructive critical position, it works to break down categorical boundaries that enforce marginalized positions.[2]

No doubt—*queer* offers some powerful tool of critical analysis. However, this project originates in part from frustrations I have felt with the lack of serious treatment given to bisexuality as a position from which to theorize sexual knowledge within queer theory. As an English and Folklore graduate student eager to embrace queer theorizing and reading practices, I kept bumping into a noticeable absence of bisexuality and bisexuals in queer research. Whereas queer readings of "straight" texts seemed to open up spaces for ambiguity in sexual desire—a natural location for bisexuality—some queer theoretical positions and research practices I encountered seemed to reify binary categories and elide the presence of bisexual identity and experience. In my queer theory coursework and reading groups, I was both excited by queer perspectives and perplexed by their failures to address my own experiences as a bisexual woman. At one point during a classroom discussion of an article on "straight" women in gay and lesbian spaces, where it appeared researchers had not bothered to ask the interloping women about their sexual desires, I blurted out, "Where are all the fucking bisexuals?"

---

[2] For more on queer theory and queer politics, see for example Ahmed, Doty, Warner, and Wilchins.

As the ethnographic research in this project helps to establish, dualistic sexual and gender frameworks affect how bisexuality is represented and interpreted in U.S. culture.[3] Oppositional heterosexuality and homosexuality form a monosexual knowledge framework through which a person's sexuality is read as oriented to only one gender.[4] In its very structure, monosexuality fails to adequately recognize and interpret the multiple gender attractions of non-monosexualities. People who identify as bisexual, pansexual, fluid, or otherwise non-monosexual in some form often struggle with U.S. culture's default to heterosexuality and homosexuality as the dominant knowledge framework for the interpretation of sexual orientation and identity—a default which underlies the gender and sexual stereotyping of bisexuals and their persistent misreading by others as "really" straight or gay.[5]

---

[3] When I say "culture," I am referring in general to the dominant forms of symbolic communication that influence social relations of power and ways of life in the English-speaking United States.

[4] According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, common meanings of sexuality include "sexual nature, instinct or feelings; or the possession or expression of these" (def. 2); one's sexual identity in relation to the gender to which one is "typically attracted" (def. 5); and one's sexual orientation, i.e. "fact of being heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual" (also def. 5). In this dissertation, I specify which definition(s) of sexuality are in use through specific qualifiers. When I speak of *sexual desire*, I am referring to the possession or expression of sexual feelings in definition 2 above. I use *sexual identity* to refer to the first part of definition 5 above, and *sexual orientation* to refer to the second part of definition 5. When I use the term *sexuality* on its own, I mean that domain of Western knowledge—socially constructed and discursively produced since the mid-nineteenth century—and its related social and cultural phenomena which attempt to make sense of how gender may or may not relate to the possession and expression of certain sexual desires, orientations, and identities. Plural forms of sexuality (e.g. sexualities, multisexualities, sexual multiplicities, etc.) intend to reflect the plurality and diversity sexual desires, orientations, and identities that actually exist and come into view through more expansive sexual knowledge frameworks, such as queer and dimensional sexuality. See Chapter V for a complete discussion of sexuality as a category of knowledge. See also n. 5 for *bisexuality*.

[5] In this dissertation, my uses of the terms *bisexuality* and *bisexual desire* are derived in general from uses of the term *sexuality* described in n. 4, although with *gender* defined in non-binary terms. Simply speaking, when I speak of *bisexual desire*, I am referring to the possession or expression of sexual feelings for more than one gender. When I say *bisexuals*, I mean those who possess bisexual desire. As with all categories of sexuality, people may or may not identify in alignment with their sexual desires. As such, I specify bi-identified people as those who claim bisexuality as an identity. When I use the term *bisexuality* on its own, I am referring to the category of knowledge about non-binary sexuality. The complicated social and

Moreover, social uses of the term *queer* may have unforeseen consequences for bisexually identified people. In Chapters II and III, for example, I show how in many lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) contexts this deliberately "empty" signifier often gets used as shorthand for gay and lesbian, contributing to bisexual and transgender erasure in those communities. Also, as many bisexuality theorists have shown, queer theory's continued reliance upon a queer-straight dichotomy reinforces a framework of knowledge that adheres to an "either-or" logical organization even as it claims to break down binaries.[6] In Chapter VI, for example, I illustrate how in some critical readings of sexuality, queer's insistence on ambiguity may mean that the value of "both-and" perspectives and specificity of bisexual representation may be misunderstood or ignored.

Please do not misunderstand my position: queer theorizing has advanced our knowledge about the multiple oppressive effects of heteronormativity, while queer interpretive processes have illuminated the non-straight erotics at the center of U.S. cultural production and reception. Indeed, queer resistance is politically crucial in minority social justice activism—I do not object to these points.[7] However, as I argue in Chapters V and VI, queer resistance alone cannot achieve escape velocity from binary systems of thought. Resistance works from within the structure of dominance, not outside of it. Queer positions itself against normativity, and thus remains caught within the

---

historical contexts of bisexual definition and who may be included as bisexuals are discussed in more depth in Chapter II, along with identity terms such as pansexual, fluid, and queer.

[6] See for example Erickson-Schroth and Mitchell; Hemmings; and Yoshino.

[7] See for example Doty; Eng, Halberstam, and Muñoz; Hames-Garcia; and Warner. Chapter VI discusses the influence of queer theory in intersectional studies and ethnic and indigenous studies.

gravitational pull of norm/resistance to norm. If queer is not ultimately a final solution to binary systems of thought, my question as a queer cultural theorist becomes: where do we go from here?

New directions sometimes require new paradigms. As such, the methodological directions of this project may help—in the spirit of science fiction—to launch us from a binary system into multidimensional possibilities. Indeed, speculative narratives excel at positing such paradigmatic shifts, as with concepts of "simplex," "complex," and "multiplex" thinking described in Samuel R. Delany's novel *Empire Star* (discussed in Chapter VII). In this project, the paradigm shift I propose is dimensional sexuality; the epistemological category that supports this shift is bisexuality.

Using interdisciplinary research methods and theoretical frameworks, my project investigates bisexuality on three intertwining cultural levels—identity, representation, and knowledge. On the level of group identity, I am not so much interested in understanding how bisexuality is defined by individuals but rather why some people choose to self-identify as bisexual rather than (or in addition to) queer, pansexual, fluid, genderqueer, or other terms that resist binary categorization or refuse them outright. I am interested in how this self-definition helps some people to understand their social and cultural experiences and to find communities. Moreover, I am interested in how non-realistic or "speculative" fiction genres may have contributed to some bisexual people's experiences of group identity and community.[8]

---

[8] As discussed in Chapter III, I use *speculative fiction* as a collective term for popular literature about worlds that are unlike the author's "real" world (mundane reality) in significant ways. Following this popular understanding, I use the term to refer to fictional narratives that exhibit generic tendencies of science fiction, fantasy, horror, and related non-mimetic or non-naturalistic commercial genres.

The connection to speculative fiction brings me to the second cultural level—bisexual representation. Here the issue I am interested in is how we "read" and interpret images of non-binary sexual desire in cultural production. In other words, what does bisexuality look like? The question is not as straightforward as it may seem since U.S. cultural codes for "knowing" the sexual orientation of another are directly linked to binary gender categories. If a person's sexual identity is undeclared, we presume straight, gay, and lesbian sexual orientations by the gender of one's partner in relationship. Bisexuality does not line up neatly with this coding for how to identify a person's "real" sexual orientation, which may lead to cultural invisibility and erasure for bisexual people.[9] So again, speculative fiction plays a role by representing in literary and visual media that which "does not exist" within a particular historical moment.[10] Through imaginative worlds, speculative narratives can show us what non-binary sexualities and relationships might look like—a critically important function for self-identified bisexuals seeking validation and community.

I have already touched on the third level because it is impossible to extricate from the other two—bisexuality as a category of knowledge in U.S. culture. This epistemic level governs what can or cannot be "known" about bisexuality and is utterly conflicted over what bisexuality is, what it looks like, who counts as bisexual or not, or whether it is even real. Once again, because speculative narratives imagine the "unknown" and envision alternatives to "normal" human life, science fiction literature, media, and fan

---

[9] For discussions of bisexual erasure and invisibility, see Yoshino and *Bisexual Invisibility*.

[10] See Butler for frames of recognition. In Chapter V, I discuss in great detail frames of recognition that affect who and what may be socially recognizable as "existing" within a particular historical moment.

communities are productive sites for exploring marginalized sexual representation and identity.

My ethnographic research in the first three chapters of this project shows how bisexuality is frequently erased in spaces that are intended to be inclusive of a spectrum of gender and sexual identities and expressions. Indeed, such an observation led Yale Law School professor Kenji Yoshino to ask, why is bisexuality so invisible? The resulting *Stanford Law Review* article, "The Epistemic Contract of Bisexual Erasure," has been instrumental in grounding contemporary bisexual research and activism. However, as a folklore and literature scholar, what I find compelling is the narrative *behind* the writing of his article.

While teaching a class on Sexual Orientation and the Law during the late 1990s, Yoshino faced an "old inconsistency" that became impossible for him to ignore. In the process of introducing students to the question of why contemporary American society organizes people according to sexualities, he proposed that sexual orientation classifications that use only the two monosexual terms of *heterosexual* and *homosexual* are "unstable and naïve." Taking up the more popular view of a sexual spectrum in modern American culture in class, he notes how this view "encouraged us to think of the straight/gay binary as defining the ends of a continuum that could be stretched, accordion-like, to accommodate ever finer gradations of cross-sex and same-sex desire." As such, a group called *bisexuals* can be recognized on the intermediate stretch of the continuum as well as a group left off the continuum, sometimes called *asexuals* (1). However, as soon as the introductory unit on sexual orientation was over, Yoshino noticed a glaring inconsistency in the discourse of the class as a whole:

I found myself and the class falling back into the very "unstable" usages I had worked hard to retire—specifically the usages of the words "heterosexual" and "homosexual" as mutually exclusive, cumulatively exhaustive terms. While we sometimes rallied by using the word "queer" instead of "gay," or by adding the rider "or bisexual" to "gay," these efforts were token and fitful. In the face of legal discussions and academic commentary that were relentless in reifying the straight/gay binary, it was difficult to hold the bisexual steadily visible, even as a spectral possibility. (1)

Yoshino's anecdote is an all-too common experience not only in academic discussions but also in everyday discourses. Those who acknowledge the existence of bisexuality "can nonetheless revert to the straight/gay dichotomy when the topic shifts," Yoshino said. "I myself can speak at length about bisexuals at one moment and then, in the next, field a question such as 'Is X straight or gay?' without instinctively feeling as if an important possibility—the bisexual possibility—has been elided" (1). For people who identify as bisexual, such erasures are a common experience, as discussed in Chapter II.

This situation illustrates a major concern of bisexual theorists: as categories of knowledge, heterosexuality and homosexuality continue to exert coercive influences on discourses of sexuality, gender, and race in the U.S. For example, by defining "mature" sexual orientation as a stable, gendered object choice, scientific discourses have historically treated bisexuality as immature, transitional, or otherwise inauthentic, while contemporary cultural production frequently stereotypes bisexuals as hypersexual, confused, or morally bankrupt for defying "either-or" choices. Moreover, racialized sexism in some health research conflates "down low" behaviors with bisexuality and disease transmission, thus reinforcing regimes of normative heterosexuality *and* homosexuality. As a consequence of such biphobic treatment and erasure across social identity boundaries, people with a bisexual orientation experience greater health disparities than the broader population, are far more likely to feel suicidal than people

8

with other orientations, and must struggle for legitimacy in straight, gay, and other social communities.[11]

In his article, Yoshino argues convincingly that such everyday examples of bisexual erasure continue because of the overlapping political interests of monosexuals who self-identify as straight, gay, and lesbian to deny the validity or even existence of bisexuality. He calls this set of closely overlapping interests a "contract" rather than a norm because norms "appear to arise from society as a whole, while 'social contracts' seem to arise out of the constituencies into which society is fractured." Moreover, he defines this contract as an "epistemic" one since it relates directly to the nature of knowledge in a society. An epistemic contract, he says, "is a social arrangement about what can be acknowledged or known." Rather than a conscious arrangement, however, such unconscious social arrangements arise "between groups that have distinct but overlapping interest in the promulgation or repression of certain kinds of knowledge." In the case of bisexuality, the epistemic contract relates to what *cannot* be known because it threatens the social and political interests of both dominant *and* subordinate monosexual groups (18).

Yoshino proposes that our fundamental structures of knowledge—of what can and cannot be known—support binary heterosexuality and homosexuality and erases bisexuality from view. Stephen Angelides backs up this insight through a historical analysis of the intertwined relationships among these three epistemological categories. In

---

[11] For the coercive influence of binary sexuality and gender, see Sedgwick, Angelides, and Storr, with further discussion in Chapter II and Chapter VI; for bisexual stereotypes in cultural production, see Capsuto and further discussion in Chapter VI; for racialized sexism in research on "down low" behaviors, see Decena; for bisexual health disparities, see *Bisexual Invisibility,* Barker et al., and Friedman et al., with further discussion in Chapter II.

A History of Bisexuality, Angelides suggests that the methodological foundations of both queer theory and gay and lesbian history must be reconceived to include bisexuality as a necessary third term in the logical structure of modern sexual definition. His discursive genealogy of bisexuality historicizes how the modern production of dualistic sexuality and sexual identities in scientific, sexological, psychological, gay liberation, and queer discourses have been "made possible through an incessant repudiation of the Other, of nonidentity, of bisexuality" (15). As such, he says, dyadic heterosexuality and homosexuality should not be employed as an axiomatic departure point for queer theory and gay and lesbian history. Instead, he argues that theories of sexuality must recognize how the concepts of heterosexuality, homosexuality, and bisexuality all function logically to evoke each other:

> [W]ithin Western discourses of sexuality, defined as they have been by classical logic, bisexuality as an epistemological category is part of the *logical or axiomatic structure* of the hetero/homosexual dualism—even if only as this structure's internally repudiated other. . . . Being *either* heterosexual *or* homosexual implies the conceptual possibility of being *both* heterosexual *and* homosexual. (15)

In this passage, Angelides refers to traditional "laws" of a two-valued or bivalent logical system (i.e. when propositions are either true or false), in which the laws of identity, non-contradiction, and the excluded middle axiomatically structure ontological propositions.[12] The scientific invention of homosexuality and heterosexuality logically

---

[12] Philosopher Bertrand Russell expressed the law of identity as "whatever is, is" (e.g. every proposition implies itself), the law of non-contradiction as "nothing can both be and not be" (e.g., no proposition is both true and false), and the law of the excluded middle as "everything must either be or not be" (e.g. every proposition is either true or false) ("Law of Thought"). While bivalent logic systems are useful in philosophical logic to address the question of what statements have a well-defined truth value, statements that are about the future or that are open to interpretation defy the principle of bivalence and suggest many-valued logics in which there are more than two truth values ("Many-valued Logic").

structures these terms as bivalent "either-or" categories under the first two laws. However, the law of the excluded middle evokes a third category—namely, "the notion of a dual sexuality, let us call it bisexuality . . . [as] a logical or axiomatic component of such a dualistic structure." As such, logically one can ether be homosexual or be heterosexual but cannot be both. Dualism prevails only by excluding the possibility of middle ground, Angelides says:

> [S]uch an act of repudiation can take place only by acknowledging in the first instance the conceptual existence of that which is being repudiated. This suggests to me that the concept of bisexuality as dual sexuality (both/and instead of either/or), as the conjunction of hetero- and homosexuality, or as the epistemological threshold between the two, must emerge as a logical and conceptual possibility *at precisely the same moment* at which hetero- and homosexuality emerged as dualized identities. (15)

In other words, the conceptual possibilities of all three modes exist concurrently as part of sexuality's logical structure. As such, within our modern epistemology of sexuality, "any figuration of homo- or heterosexuality *necessarily* entails—wittingly or unwittingly . . . a figuration of bisexuality." Because each term in this triune's axiomatic structure requires the other two for its self-definition, Angelides says, "shifts in any one of the terms . . . require and engender shifts in the others" (15-16).

This triune relationship poses problems for definitions of sexuality and gender as oppositional and mutually exclusive. In order to shore up dualistic constructions of sexuality and to avoid a collapse of sexual and gender boundaries, discourses since the second half of the nineteenth century have constructed what Angelides calls "*the economy of (hetero)sexuality*" (17). In this framework, binary heterosexuality and homosexuality have been (re)produced by "a particular *relationship* between the multiple

definitions of bisexuality and the notion of sexual identity itself" (194). This relationships
is structured, he argues,

> by a curious *dis/avowal* of bisexuality, where only some if its possible meanings
> have been authorized. A particular temporal framing of sexuality has thus cast
> bisexuality in the past or future, but never in the *present tense.* In other words,
> bisexuality has been identified only as a prehistoric, precultural, infantile, or
> utopian state, and not as a distinct identity. This means that it is *not* bisexuality
> *per se* that reinforces our binary categories of sexuality. Rather, it is the temporal
> framing of bisexuality—the persistent epistemological refusal to recognize
> bisexuality in the present tense—that has functioned to reinforce the
> hetero/homosexual binarism. (194)

For example, queer theory repudiates bisexuality as encoding binarism and as enforcing
rather than disrupting sexual categories; therefore, the discipline claims that *queer* and
not bisexuality holds the key to challenging our prevailing structure of sexuality.[13]
However, Angelides' genealogy demonstrates that such claims are based on an
inadequate understanding of bisexuality's place in the history of sexuality. He rightly
admonishes queer theory and gay and lesbian history for dis/avowing the category of
bisexuality even as disciplinary methods operate within the logical framework of binary
heterosexuality and homosexuality.

My theoretical and ethnographic work supports Angelides' crucial recognition
that the relationships among sexual categories are indeed *temporal* and that dis/avowing
this temporality has been a key discursive strategy for maintaining binary heterosexuality
and homosexuality, "wittingly or unwittingly." Without temporal grounding, such

---

[13] For example, Donald Hall says that bisexuality "inescapably encodes binarism" while Lee Edelman says
that the hetero/homo binarism is "more effectively reinforced that disrupted by the 'third term' of
bisexuality. Moreover, Eve Sedgwick consigns any political utility of bisexuality to a distant future, saying
that "in a discursive context that *wasn't* so radically structured already around gender-of-object-choice, the
concept of bisexuality could work very differently: instead of seeming to add the finishing touch to a
totalizing vision of human sexuality/gender, it could function as one sexually dissident self-description
among many others" (qtd. in Angelides 194).

monosexual concepts function similarly to Plato's ideal Forms, elevating abstraction over experience within our mutable, temporal world. However, I disagree with Angelides conclusion that bisexuality is only "an epistemological part of this framework, *unthinkable outside of binary logic*" and that any concept of bisexuality "can only ever be one of the binary logic's *effects*" (176). Mapping a history of discourses on bisexuality, Angelides is unable to see the trees for the forest. That is, his genealogy is situated within broad social and historical discourses *about* bisexuality under the old binary sexual paradigm and epistemic contract of erasure. As such, it fails to address sexuality from the non-binary temporal worldview of bisexuals.

While a dismantling of the heter-homo-bi triune may seem logically inevitable to Angelides, the deconstructive turn in queer theorizing is symptomatic of broader epistemic erasure of bisexuality as a position from which to theorize sexual knowledge. In a binary sexual system, questions of methods of study are paramount: how can bisexuality even be something to "know," and who is placed in the position of knower and known? As Yoshino points out, bisexual erasure is an unconscious *social* arrangement among monosexual groups about what can and cannot be acknowledged or known about sexuality. Likewise, research methods implicitly "discipline" sexual knowledge through an assumption of binary sexual and gender frameworks. However, bisexuality *itself* suggests an alternative to our framework of sexual knowledge. Using the "both-and" logic of bisexuality, my project demonstrates how binary logic can be reconfigured in a non-binary dimensional framework so that bisexuality becomes visible and our concept of sexuality as a whole better reflects the lived world.

Questions of "knowing" sexuality bring me back to representation and interpretation of non-binary sexualities in popular media. As I discuss in Chapter VI, viewers of mass media rely on signifiers that construct meanings through frameworks of shared knowledge—such as gender and sexual coding for same-sex attraction as gay and opposite sex-attraction as straight. Binary norms try to determine readings of sexuality for us, so bisexuality remains culturally illegible. Queer resists these norms through a positioning that refuses heteronormative assumptions. In the words of David Halperin, queer "acquires its meaning from its oppositional relation to the norm. Queer is by definition *whatever* is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. *There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers.* It is an identity without an essence. 'Queer', then, demarcates not a positivity but a positionality vis-à-vis the normative" (qtd. in Chambers 79). In theory, queer makes room for bisexual identity, representation, and knowledge; but in social practice, queer's negative positioning "vis-à-vis the normative" tends to result in the dismissal bisexual identity as illegible, the appropriation of bisexual representation as gay, and the erasure of bisexual worldviews altogether.[14] For bisexual visibility in popular media and culture, the matter of sexual frameworks—or how we "know" the sexuality of another—becomes a crucial one.

As much as queer theory frustrates me at times, it also has produced exciting insights into the operations of heteronormativity in popular media. For example, in *The Queer Politics of Television*, Samuel A. Chambers says there are three primary ways viewers can "know" the sexuality of characters: through presumption, identity, or

---

[14] See Chapters II and IV for discussion of queer's dismissal of bisexual identity, Chapter VI for its affects on bisexual representation and interpretation, and Chapter V for its erasure of bisexual knowledge.

interpretation. Chambers asks, how do we know someone is straight? Heterosexuality is normative, so there is usually no need to ask; all characters are initially presumed to be straight. Conversely, how do we know someone is gay? Usually, a character "comes out" and makes their homosexuality explicit, thereby drawing attention to heteronormative assumptions (67-68). Presumption and identification both provide viewers with a certain epistemological privilege since the question of sexuality seems decided. But when a character's sexual identity is unclear and normative presumptions are somehow questioned, viewers must fall back on interpretation. This reframes the epistemological question of how we "know" to one of how we "read" sexuality (69).[15]

For example, on the series *Six Feet Under,* the character Russell Corwin, the one-time boyfriend of main character Claire Fisher, has an affair with their art teacher Oliver. Russell never claims to be gay or straight, and Claire never achieves certainty about his sexuality. Therefore viewers must read their own meanings in his desire for women and men and his refusal of gay identity. "Russell's sexuality is *never* fixed because it is never clearly *legible*," Chambers says. "[He] throws into disarray both epistemological and hermeneutic practices in regard to sexuality; that is, he makes it impossible to *know* sexuality, and he makes it terribly difficult to *interpret* sexuality" (66).

Chambers deftly exposes the extent to which "we read our own sexualities *through* the very modern categories of homosexual and heterosexual identity" and how those readings reconsolidate those categories. If we read Russell's sexuality through heteronormativity, he says, then he is either gay or straight—or the "third modern

---

[15] See Chapter V for a discussion of how knowledge is affected by interpretive frames.

category: 'confused.'" If we try to read Russell "against the grain of heteronormativity," Chambers concludes, then we "*cannot read [his] sexuality.*" Not only is his sexuality "illegible" through the framework of modern categories, but he also resists claiming any static identity definitions. As such, Chambers says, Russell's positioning is "queer" in "his rejection of his only heteronormative options" (78-79).

Chambers' insightful reading of *Six Feet* Under exemplifies both the excitement and frustrations I feel toward much queer theorizing. On the one hand, he recognizes the normative power of binary sexuality and the need for alternative hermeneutic strategies that can make more sense out of "other" sexual positions. On the other hand, he brushes aside the "third modern category" as "confused" and so obscures bisexuality as a framework from which to theorize sexuality and to help make sense of Russell's sexual positioning as multidimensional.

While queer works from *within* the binary framework to denaturalize how we "know" sexuality, my intervention uses the multivalent logics of bisexuality to suggest our next step—a *new* hermeneutic paradigm. In the first half of this project, my ethnographic research establishes how the perspectives and experiences of bisexual people differ substantially from heterosexual and homosexual people. Bisexuality *can* exist as a mode of sexuality outside of an oppositional framework—no surprise to bisexuals—but to do so, the organization sexuality *itself* must change from "either-or" dualism to "both-and" multiplicity. In the second half of this project, I demonstrate how bisexual epistemology helps to *reframe* the organization of sexuality away from a static, bivalent logical system toward a temporal, multivalent one. As explained in Chapter V, this is possible because temporality implicates a *dimensional* shift in the logical

relationship among sexual categories. By accepting, rather than repudiating, bisexuality's *temporal* existence, dimensional sexuality expands the framing of sexuality from a single "either-or" axis to multiple axes where "both-and" functions among multiple logical possibilities.

The concerns I have outlined lead me back to the interdisciplinary approaches of this project. As a scholar working with both ethnographic and textual methodologies, at issue for me has been how sexuality studies might bridge methodological gaps among discursive/interpretive approaches to texts and those grounded in social science research among cultural groups.[16] Given this, "Speculative Fictions, Bisexual Lives: Changing Frameworks of Sexual Desire" has been shaped by three central humanistic concerns: How do the gender-linked categories of heterosexuality and homosexuality influence cultural representations of the non-binary desires generally categorized as bisexuality? How do some bisexuals use non-realistic or "speculative" fiction to help negotiate oppressive cultural norms and assumptions about their identities? And how might a diverse array of sexualities in U.S. culture and society be reconceptualized beyond binary categories of sexual knowledge? Broadly speaking, my intention with this inquiry is to intervene in humanistic interpretive practices and theoretical assumptions that may reconsolidate binary gender and sexual norms. Addressing the methodological gaps in sexuality studies more directly, my project suggests that the many-valued logics of

---

[16] Methodological divisions among the sciences and the humanities have been a central part of the academy's "two cultures" debate since the late nineteenth century. In 1959, C.P. Snow gave an influential lecture at Cambridge that proposed that the intellectual life of the whole of Western society was split between two titular cultures—the sciences and the humanities.

bisexuality's "both-and" epistemology may point toward a non-binary framework of sexuality for use in social science research and humanities scholarship.

As the title "Speculative Fictions, Bisexual Lives" suggests, my project works to address the theoretical and methodological problems I have outlined through both ethnographic and textual approaches to bisexual identity, representation, and knowledge. Taken together, I have dubbed these research directions "The BiSciFi Project."

From one direction, as already discussed, my research and theorizing in this project seeks to understand what bisexuality has to offer as a category of knowledge in U.S. culture—in spite of the social and political interests of monosexual groups to erase it from view, and the deconstructive thrust of queer theory to abolish sexual categories altogether. In terms of "where do we go from here," my claim is that the framework of bisexuality offers a non-binary, multidimensional alternative to dominant binary knowledge structures—whether viewed as heterosexual/homosexual or normal/queer. In other words, the multivalence of bisexuality refutes the logic of "ether-or" that structures such dualisms and embraces the logic of "both-and." As such, we can shift how we "know" the sexuality of another in a non-binary dimensional framework—a theoretical move that queer positioning suggests but has yet to fully imagine.

From another direction, my research demonstrates the productive textual and social spaces offered by speculative narratives for questioning what we "know" about gender, sex, sexuality, race, and other intersections of social identities. Carl Freedman argues that science fiction bears a deep structural affinity with the dialectical thinking (à la Kant) found in critical theory. While an empiricist mode sees the world as knowable through extractive processes of cognition, a critical mode understands knowing as an

active *interpretation* of unknowable phenomena. As such, critique must interrogate its own role in the construction of objects of knowledge and make visible "the absolute presuppositions of any knowledge" (2-3).

Linking critical theory to genre theory, Freedman modifies Darko Suvin's influential definition of the science fiction genre as "determined by the dialectic between estrangement and cognition" (16). According to Suvin, the creation of an alternative world that refuses to take the mundane world for granted "performs an estranging critical interrogation of the latter." Thus for Suvin, "cognitive estrangement" defines the science fiction genre, while cognition without estrangement produces "realistic" fiction and estrangement without cognition produces "irrationalist fantasy" (Freedman 17). Freedman suggests, however, that cognition *itself* is not defining of form but rather a "*cognition effect*" where generic discrimination occurs on "*the attitude of the text itself* to the kind of estrangements being performed," rather than on external generic classifications of rationality or irrationality (18). Freedman shifts the notion of genre away from static classification and dialectically conceptualizes it as "an element or tendency that . . . is active to greater or lesser degrees within a literary text . . . understood as a complexly structured totality" (20). Texts often display numerous "generic tendencies," so while estranging tendencies supply some of the power of realist fiction, Freedman says the term "science fiction" should be reserved for texts in which the cognition effect of estrangement is dominant (21-22).

As noted earlier, my use of the term "speculative" in this project acknowledges a broader scope of popular literature and media that display estranging tendencies from the mundane world (though these estrangements need not involve technology or the future).

From a folklore perspective, distinctions between "literary" and "popular" reinforce notions of popular culture as escapist fantasy and fail to capture the critical perspectives of science fiction and fantasy readers, viewers, and fan communities, discussed in Chapters III and IV. My use of the broader term "speculative" acknowledges the generic tendencies of non-realistic fictional narratives that estrange us from the "known" world, interrogate our assumptions about the world, and make visible ideas and experiences outside of the norms we use to interpret what is "real" in a particular social and historical moment. As such, speculative narratives may enable us to imagine sexual and gender possibilities beyond the episteme of the moment.

As a popular genre, science fiction has a history of pushing social boundaries around human sexuality, as Rob Latham outlines in his history of "sextrapolition" in science fiction (52). While editorial policies and self-censorship restricted explicit sexual content in the pre-1960s publishing market, a handful of pioneering writers managed to publish stories that tested taboos on subjects such as reproduction and sexual desire. For example, themes that conflicted with heterosexual norms by portraying "sex with aliens" or "alien sexualities" included Fritz Leiber's "The Ship Sails at Midnight" (1950), Philip Jose Famer's "The Lovers" (1952), and Theodor Sturgeon's "The Sex Opposite" (1952) and "The World Well Lost" (1953)—all appearing in publications struggling to survive the 1950s collapse of the pulp magazine market (55-56). While there was some conservative pushback, most readers responded positively in letters of comment that praised the skill and intellectual boldness with which these authors handled difficult themes. For example, one reader praised editors "for advocating more mature stories in which sex is allowed to appear in its true light: as an important and essential part of life

on this or any other planet" (qtd. in Latham 58). Some writers and editors also wrote

letters challenging the industry's censorship of sexual themes, especially if the genre was

to survive as more than space adventure. For example, in 1952 *Startling Stories* editor

Samuel Mines stated that science fiction should be "about people first and gadgets

second" (qtd. in Latham 58). In 1953, Sturgeon wrote in the letters column of *Thrilling*

Wonder Stories that if "science fiction is to remain the viable genre it is, it must be

capable of exploration in other frameworks—objectively, and all the way" (qtd. in

Latham 57).

In the 1960s, a growing market for novels enabled writers to avoid the editorial

censorship of magazines and to explore more explicit sexual content and adult themes

(Latham 60). For example, in 1960 Sturgeon published the novel *Venus Plus X*, which

explores a civilization that has eliminated gender difference and the human preoccupation

with sex. Also, in 1961 Robert A. Heinlein published *Stranger in a Strange Land*, a

widely influential novel that openly explores sexual liberation and free love.[17] In 1964,

New Worlds magazine became the flagship for innovative "New Wave" U.S. and British

science fiction that experimented with literary form and style and focused on "soft"

sciences and adult themes, including sexuality. Also, in the late 1960s, editors started

---

[17] Heinlein had a broad and seminal influence on writers and fans alike as a pioneer of adult social science fiction themes such as individual liberty and sexual freedom. Heinlein along with Isaac Asimov and Arthur C. Clark are widely recognized as the three masters of Golden-age science fiction, associated with editor John W. Campbell and the popular magazine *Astounding Science-Fiction*. Following the "pulp" era of the 1920s and 1930s, many "classic" science fiction stories were written, and the genre gained wide public attention. Golden-age stories often valorize heroes who solve problems or counter threats, linear narratives, and the technological idiom of space opera and "hard" science fiction. After the end of the Second World War, pulp markets began to collapse with increasing censorship and introduction of the 1954 Comics Code. New genres of science fiction emerged during the 1960s as technological advances during the Cold War space race challenged writers to consider the social consequences of scientific advancements ("Golden Age").

printing anthologies of innovative original stories as alternatives to the more conservative

magazine markets. In 1967, for example, the controversial anthology *Dangerous

Visions*—edited by Harlan Ellison with contributions by many award-winning authors—

won three Hugo awards from fans but provoked outrage among conservatives in the field

(Latham 60-61).

Since the 1960s, works of social, feminist, and/or experimental science fiction

have pushed conservative boundaries by extrapolating that in the future humans will have

regular contact—including sex—with many life forms and multiple human genders. This

"consenting aliens" motif has allowed science fiction writers to explore human sexuality

and relationships outside of the mimetic demands of "realistic" fiction and contemporary

gay and lesbian identities. After all, imagining the "what if" of social possibilities are

what speculative narratives *do*—what if women were the leaders of a society? What if

there was a world with no men? What if there were more than two human sexes? What if

family units of three or more people were a social standard? What if the gender and

race—both human and non-human—of one's sexual partner(s) were irrelevant in sexual

and family relationships?[18] Moreover, fan communities often critically engage with

issues of minority representation and social equality through processes of culture

building. By the 1970s and 1980s, the creation of inclusive science fiction clubs and

---

[18] See for example stories by feminist science fiction authors who have won James Tiptree Jr. Awards, an annual literary prize for science fiction or fantasy that expands or explores our understanding of gender. The award is named for Alice B. Sheldon, who wrote science fiction in the 1960s and 1970s under the pseudonym James Tiptree, Jr. By choosing a masculine pen name that concealed her gender, Sheldon helped to undermine perceived differences between "women's writing" and "men's writing" (*James Tiptree*).

convention spaces, as well as Internet sites in the 1990s, provide resources for some non-monosexual science fiction readers and media fans to find community and support.

The overall trajectory of chapters follows a progression from grounded research to theory and application. First, I explore bisexual worldviews through ethnographic research in overlapping bisexual and fan communities, supported by research studies in the social sciences and by scholarship on science fiction literature and fandom. Next, I establish theoretical and methodological foundations for a paradigmatic shift to dimensional sexuality and work to intervene in critical methods that may restrict a non-binary interpretation of gender and sexual signifiers in cinematic narratives. And finally, I test dimensional sexuality as a non-binary mode of analysis by offering dimensional readings of the science fiction television series *Torchwood* and of science fiction novels by Samuel R. Delany and Ursula K. Le Guin.

Chapter II, "Positioning Bisexual Lives," introduces my research participants and fieldwork locations for the ethnographic portions of this project.[19] In the first three chapters, the discipline of folklore informs my research methods, meaning that my analysis of fieldwork in subcultural communities is grounded in participant stories and collective themes. By exploring the emic worldviews of bisexually identified people, the chapter illustrates—from the inside out—how bisexual stereotypes and cultural attitudes affect bisexual people and what strategies participants use to negotiate these attitudes. As the interviews and dialogues demonstrate, the "both-and" logic of bisexuality helps participants to make sense of desires and experiences that cannot be accounted for by

---

[19] The human subjects portion of my project has received University of Oregon IRB exempt status (protocol #09182012.009), effective October 8, 2012.

other culturally available knowledge frameworks. Their stories contribute to a larger argument of this project: that bisexuality as a knowledge framework not only empowers identity and community formation but also may enable a dimensional paradigm shift that expands the recognition and interpretation of *both* monosexual *and* non-monosexual lives in culture at large.

Chapter III, "Speculative Narratives as Cultural Resources," introduces the popular genre of speculative fiction and illustrates why—in spite of hegemonic constructions of race, gender, and sexuality—speculative narratives have been valued as resources for imagination, validation, and community. The chapter brings together literary theories of estrangement and the novum, subjunctivity and intertextual mega-texts, along with the social processes of textual poaching and collective intelligence. These textual tendencies and social processes mark speculative narratives as spaces for exploring epistemological and ontological possibilities beyond the domain of accepted reality and social norms. Broadly speaking, this involves the non-"realistic" representation of worlds that challenge the status quo of the social here-and-now and that enable readers to build folk communities through shared knowledge. The chapter then explores how fans theorize their own social locations and identities by analyzing dialogue from a roundtable discussion and oral histories of four project participants. By connecting participant storytelling with the framework established earlier in the chapter, I illustrate how speculative fiction, identities, and social locations are interconnected for project participants. The themes that emerge help to illustrate the value of speculative narratives for participants in relation to bisexuality and other social locations including gender, race, class, geographic location, and religion.

Chapter IV combines ethnographic and textual analysis by exploring how *Politically Incorrect*, a fanzine produced in the late 1980s by two of my project participants, frames a particular narrative of what it means to be positioned as bisexual and as fannish. "'The Zine That Your Lover Warned You About!': Positioning, Narratives, and Bisexual Science Fiction Fans" draws from concepts in linguistic anthropology, social psychology, and narratology to explore how cultural narratives may be used to position bisexuals and bisexuality in certain ways, and how some participants have drawn upon the resources of fan culture to self-position bisexual identity and to foster community in the Minneapolis area. Through positioning theory (i.e. the "position/act-action/storyline" model of how personhood is mutually constituted through social discourses), the chapter analyzes at how bisexual, lesbian, and gay contributors to the fanzine position themselves in relationship to certain discourses on political correctness in fan communities and in gay and lesbian communities. Through the zine's framing as intended "for people like us," *Politically Incorrect* attempts to intervene in normative assumptions of *both* fan *and* gay and lesbian communities during the period.

Chapter V is a version of an article published August 2014 in *Sexual and Relationship Therapy*, an international peer-reviewed journal in the interdisciplinary field of clinical sexuality and sexual medicine. "Dimensional Sexuality: Exploring New Frameworks for Bisexual Desires" argues that the "both-and" of bisexuality *itself* shows a way out of the "either-or" binary that dominates current cultural and theoretical knowledge of sexuality. Building upon Judith Butler and post-structuralist theories of how knowledge frameworks make possible the recognition of another, the chapter discusses how the framework of heterosexuality and homosexuality erases bisexuality

25

from view. I argue that binary frameworks may be reconfigured in order to expand the domains of the knowable and to make sexual multiplicity more recognizable in Western knowledge production. However, a more complex recognition and understanding of multisexual lives necessitates a corresponding epistemic shift from sexual "knowing" that is singular, oppositional, exclusive, and static to that which is multiple, indeterminate, relational, and temporal. Dimensional sexuality changes how humanistic inquiry frames sexuality by fundamentally changing the logic we use to organize dominant categories of sexual knowledge. The chapter presents the principles that underlie dimensional sexuality and demonstrates how triangulation renders sexual multiplicity visible along several dimensional axes, such as object choice (fixed-fluid), number (one-many), and temporality (past-present-future). It also discusses how the dimensional model may provide new tools of interpretive analysis for humanities scholarship as well as a flexible analytical model for social science research.

Chapter VI is a version of another article forthcoming in a special issue of *The Journal of Bisexuality*, an interdisciplinary peer-reviewed journal produced by the American Institute of Bisexuality. "Gay, Queer, or Dimensional? Modes of Reading Bisexuality on *Torchwood*" critiques how binary homosexual and queer frameworks of analysis may restrict readings of same-and-not-same-sex desire in film and television. The chapter also discusses how binary sexual and gender codes and bisexual stereotypes in cinematic media work against critics who struggle to articulate on-screen bisexuality as both present and meaningful. Using the BBC series *Torchwood* as a case study, I demonstrate how dimensional sexuality may radically shift the interpretation of same-and-not-same sex desires in popular culture representations. Not only does triangulation

of multiple axes make bisexual other desires more visible, but the dimensional model also allows for a greater understanding of how different sexual standpoints are negotiated within unconventional relationships and commitments. Beyond *Torchwood*, I propose that the dimensional model's "open-ended" categories may enable popular culture scholars to analyze complex expressions of desire that are obscured within dualistic frameworks of visual analysis.

Chapter VII, "Reading Dimensional Universes: Samuel R. Delany and Ursula K. Le Guin," investigates how a dimensional framework may be used to interpret non-binary perspectives in literary narratives. As a hermeneutic lens, a dimensional mode of analysis may be thought of as a way of thinking or perceiving that allows for creative connections outside of "either-or" patterns of thought. In literary works, for example, bisexuality may be approached not only as literal representation but also as metaphor for "both-and" epistemic structures—what I call a dimensional way of looking at the world. Through close readings of three science fiction novels, I demonstrate how the authors make use of such dimensional thinking to influence both narrative and readerly dynamics in their novels. Delany's *Babel 17* and *Empire Star* and in Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* present protagonists who bridge different social worlds through their abilities to think—linguistically, mathematically, and/or temporally—beyond the dualistic conceptual restrictions of those worlds. As masters of the science fiction genre, Delany and Le Guin use temporality, bisexuality, polyphilic desire, and other dimensional metaphors to rupture dualistic frameworks of thought. The close readings illustrate how a dimensional lens may help to articulate the kinds of non-binary thinking performed within science

fiction as an affirming alternative to the negations of "either-or" epistemological frameworks.

A final note about the structure of this dissertation: As the chapter overview suggests, "Speculative Fictions, Bisexual Lives" combines multiple theoretical perspectives with several interdisciplinary methodologies. My project draws from the disciplines of bisexuality studies, queer theory, feminist theory, literary studies, film/television studies, cultural studies, folklore, narratology, sociology, and social psychology. As such, reviews of pertinent research literature and explanations of the materials and methods used to address problems have been included within relevant chapters. Also, I have made minor adjustments to MLA formatting for quotations from participant interviews and roundtables in order to avoid awkwardly breaking the flow of paragraphs. While MLA is the citation style of most chapters, Chapters V and VI were originally written as journal articles and are formatted in APA style. As such, the References Cited list at the end of the dissertation is subdivided by chapter and citation style.

CHAPTER II

POSITIONING BISEXUAL LIVES

A great number of conflicting cultural notions exist over what bisexuality is, who counts as bisexual, and where bisexual people may be found.[20] Common discourses describe bisexuality as an orientation to both men and women; however, this framing oversimplifies the varieties of potential bisexual desires. Researcher J.R. Little, for example, has identified no less than *thirteen* types of bisexual desires and experiences (Labriola).[21] Moreover, cultural notions regarding the "what" of bisexuality often fail to capture the "who" since many people who may behave bisexually do not call themselves bisexual. Plus notions of bisexuality as only oriented to two (cis)genders ignores the broader spectrum of trans* and genderqueer desires and identities of many bisexually

---

[20] Burleson provides a useful overview of such conflicting cultural notions from the perspective of self-identified bisexuals within bisexual communities. See also *Bisexual Invisibility*, Barker et al., and Miller, André, Ebin, and Bessonova.

[21] According to Little, *alternating bisexuals* may switch from one gender to another in successive relationships. *Circumstantial bisexuality* refers to heterosexuals who may choose same sex partners in situations where they do not have access to other-sex partners. *Concurrent relationship* bisexuals have primary relationships with one gender only but may have other casual or secondary relationships with people of another gender at the same time. *Conditional bisexuality* refers to straight or gay/lesbian people who may switch to a relationship with another gender for financial or career gain or for a specific purpose. *Emotional bisexuals* have intimate emotional relationships with both men and women, but only have sexual relationships with one gender. *Integrated bisexuals* have more than one primary relationship at the same time with people of different genders. *Exploratory bisexuality* refers to straight or gay/lesbian people who may have sex with another gender just to satisfy curiosity. *Hedonistic bisexuals* are primarily straight or gay/lesbian but may have sex with another gender primarily for fun or purely sexual satisfaction. *Recreational bisexuality* refers to heterosexuals who engage in sex with another gender only when under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol. *Isolated bisexuality* refers to people who are 100% straight or gay/lesbian now but have had one or more sexual experience with another gender in the past. *Latent bisexuals* are completely straight or gay/lesbian in behavior but have strong desire for sex with another gender that they have not acted on. *Motivational bisexuality* refers to straight women who have sex with other women only because a male partner insists on it to titillate him. *Transitional bisexuals* temporarily identify as bisexual while in the process of moving from being straight to being gay/lesbian or vice versa (Labriola).

identified people.[22] These complications make the "where" of bisexual communities difficult to identify and address.

To conceptualize the what, who, and where of bisexuality, imagine three concentric circles, one inside the other. The largest circle encompasses what might be called bisexual behaviors, such as those described by Little's typology or in more recent health studies such as *The Bisexuality Report* (Barker et al.). Well-known bisexual activist Robyn Ochs offers a carefully qualified definition that may be useful to describe bisexuality in this largest behavioral circle: "the potential to be attracted—romantically and/or sexually—to people of more than one sex and/or gender, not necessarily at the same time, not necessarily in the same way, and not necessarily to the same degree." In his groundbreaking sex study, Alfred Kinsey reported in 1948 that 37% of men had had a sexual experience with another man at least once in their lives (Burleson 48-49). However, more contemporary studies disagree as to how common bisexual behaviors are in humans—frequently because such studies have not differentiated between homosexual and bisexual behavior, among other methodological issues.

The second circle, much smaller than the first, encompasses what might be called bisexual identity—simply put, those people inside the first circle who say, "I'm bisexual." While increasing numbers of population surveys in the U.S. and across the world include questions about sexual orientation and gender identity, differences in survey methods and a lack of consistent questions over time have made it difficult to gather accurate estimates of LGBT populations. Moreover, bisexual and transgender

---

[22] The term *trans** is commonly used as an inclusive signifier of transgender identities.

people often are lumped together with lesbians and gay men in large surveys, making it difficult to understand the size and social demographics of minority sexualities. In 2011, the Williams Institute reviewed findings from eleven recent U.S. and international surveys that help to clarify the "who" of bisexual identity. According to the report, an estimated 3.5% of adults in the U.S. identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual and an estimated 0.3% as transgender. Of the LGB group, bisexuals comprise a slight majority at 1.8%, compared to the 1.7% who identify as lesbian or gay. Within the bisexual group, women are substantially more likely than men to identify as bisexual. Altogether, these statistics imply that there are about 9 million LGBT Americans—a figure "roughly equivalent to the population of New Jersey" (Gates 1-2).

The third circle, the smallest of all, inscribes what might be called bisexual community. In a very general sense, community may be thought of as a functional group of people brought together by commonalities (e.g. geographic location, identity, interests) who share a culture of some kind (e.g. activism, fandom) and to some degree (e.g. online groups, conferences). Given that bisexual behavior and identity cut across every social group and reflect many different cultures and beliefs, many bisexuals have nothing in common—not even agreement on what the word *bisexual* means. Moreover, barriers such as religion, geography, and stigma may inhibit bisexuals from looking for community. The reality is that few bisexuals are part of a bisexual community (Burleson 60, 63). As such, the small bisexual communities that have developed (both face-to-face and online) are important sites of cultural knowledge, offering a rare view into how bi people in the innermost circle see the world and expresses their relation to it.

From a folklore perspective, a community may be recognized through the people who feel a part of it, participate in it, and help define its culture. Finding them often begins with identifying the institutions that provide the primary outward manifestation of a community (Burleson 63). Institutions focused primarily on bisexuality are rare in the U.S., but they do exist. Examples include the Bisexual Resource Center, founded in 1993 in Boston; the BECAUSE Conference, founded in 1992 in Minneapolis; research organizations such as the American Institute of Bisexuality, founded by Dr. Fritz Klein in 1998; and educational organizations such as the Bisexual Organizing Project (BOP), founded in 1994 in Minneapolis. Also, since the late 1990s, the Internet has offered many vital resources for bisexuals seeking to find or create virtual and face-to-face communities. A quick Google search demonstrates that numerous blogs, websites, forums, chat rooms, and information resources exist online for people located within all three circles of bisexuality.

Recent health studies have provided a better sense of external challenges faced by bisexuals and the loosely interconnected bisexual community,[23] but what does the world look like from inside those tiny communities? When folklorists conduct ethnographic research in communities, a primary concern is the people's cultural "worldview," or "the manner in which a culture sees and expresses its relation to the world around it" (Toelken 263). Anthropology research has shown that "members of any given culture perceive reality in terms of culturally provided sets of ideas and premises, and that the world of reality is processed differently from culture to culture. Not only are the incoming data

---

[23] See for example *Bisexual Invisibility*, Barker et al., and Miller, André, Ebin, and Bessonova.

32

interpreted according to the pattern of a particular culture, but expressions and communications with others are based on those same perceptions and premises" (Toelken 266).

Given the large diversity of bisexual behavior and the lack of coherent or visible identity for bisexually identified people, almost no research—ethnographic or otherwise—has been conducted *within* bisexual communities. However, the little that has been done indicates important differences in bisexual worldviews from the cultures of gay men and lesbians and from straight cultures.[24] As *The Bisexual Needs Assessment* states, bisexual communities regularly face being "erased" from history by being mislabeled as some other orientation, having their contributions ignored by gay and lesbian activists, and often being ignored or even excluded from theoretically LGBT organizations (Bisexual Organizing Project 12). The loosely linked physical and virtual institutions that form what I am calling "the bisexual community" not only challenge such negations but also, I argue, support a worldview unlike those of straight or gay cultures. While bisexual behaviors range widely and bisexual identity remains largely invisible, this bisexual community forms a kernel of a sexual culture with its own "sets of ideas and premises" that allow for a distinct way of interpreting the world and negotiating conflicting cultural dynamics.[25]

---

[24] For example, in 2000 The Bi History Project began documenting bisexual history and the stories of its people in the Minneapolis area (Burleson 2-3). In 2005, BOP co-founder William E. Burleson published *Bi America: Myths, Truths, and Struggles of an Invisible Community*, which draws from The Bi History Project, surveys, and online support group discussions to tell the stories of bisexual people. In 2012, BOP produced *The Bisexual Needs Assessment* from focus groups, interviews, and surveys conducted within the bisexual community and seven LGBT organizations in the Minneapolis region.

[25] I do not intend to suggest here that "the bisexual community" is in any way singular or unified, any more than there is a singular or unified queer community or gay and lesbian community. It might be more accurate to think of "the bisexual community" as a series of loosely interwoven local, regional, national,

My ethnographic research—under the umbrella of The BiSciFi Project—seeks to understand how a bisexual worldview enables some bi-identified people to understand better their social locations and cultural experiences. In this chapter, I explore how bisexual identity helps some project participants to make sense of their lives, to negotiate cultural attitudes, and to find communities. Identification and community, not behavior, were key factors in locating project participants. A second key factor, discussed at length in Chapters III and IV, was discovering how some BiSciFi Project participants overlapped with science fiction fandom and inquiring how they made use of resources offered by speculative narratives and fan communities. Nearly all of the contributors to The BiSciFi Project were found through communities recognizable through their institutional manifestations, such as bisexuality and polyamory conferences, publications, and Internet sites.

The chapter begins with a discussion of the project's ethnographic approaches and fieldwork sites, followed by a summary of participants and questions addressed in individual and group interviews. The bulk of the chapter focuses on exemplars and analysis of several key themes from interviews that emerged through a process of open coding and grounded theory. Finally, I conclude with some implications of a bisexual worldview for rethinking sexual categories.

---

and international social networks and institutional loci that bisexually identified individuals feel a part of and contribute to in varying degrees. While individuals may differ from each other within any given community, ethnography offers a means of identifying commonalities of worldview that help a community name itself and cohere through institutional manifestations.

The BiSciFi Project: Methods and Participants

In the context of cultural anthropology, ethnography is a holistic approach to the study of cultural systems that draws upon both emic and etic perspectives in research. According to anthropologist Tony L. Whitehead, humans "construct *multiple realities* that are complex, multifaceted, differently expressed in specific situations (context) and continually undergoing change (process)" (6). As such, the immersive methods of fieldwork are essential to study how the socio-cultural contexts, process, and meanings within a cultural system help to make sense of our multiple realities. Through fieldwork as an open-ended learning process, researchers learn as much as possible about those realities and the connections between them. Ethnography promises to achieve "*emic validity*," or an understanding of the host community from their own system of meanings—i.e. their worldview (3-5). Moreover, analysis of available secondary data allows a researcher to identify gaps in what is known, to explore assumptions in research, and to generate questions for further investigation. This etic or outsider knowledge "helps in understanding what is truly emic, or 'true' in the study of a cultural system" (7).

My research on bisexual lives draws upon classic ethnographic methods such as secondary data analysis, fieldwork, participant observation, informal and semi-structured interviewing, grounded theory, and self-reflexivity to study the worldviews of bisexually identified people in certain communities.[26] Participant observation and interviewing

---

[26] According to Dewalt and Dewalt, participant observers take part "in the daily activities, rituals, interactions, and events of the people being studied as one of the means of learning the explicit and tacit aspects of their culture." Active participation in community events and detailed field notes, including personal responses to observations, enable the development of tacit understandings that prove valuable in the subsequent interpretation of collected materials (260). Also, Whitehead points out how informal conversations encourage participants and general informants to open up and share their perspectives at their own pace. Because ethnographers have some idea of what they want to learn in a setting, such

methods have allowed me to gather numerous stories about the multiple and conflicting realities that bisexually identified participants contend with in their daily worlds. An open process of coding interview transcripts enabled me to identify several prominent themes regarding bisexual lives. In this chapter, I analyze exemplars from individual and group interviews to explore the significance of these themes within an emic bisexual worldview. This grounded theory, in conjunction with critical analysis of etic assumptions about bisexuality, provides a real world basis for my reconsideration of how we conceptualize categories of sexuality in later chapters. Chapters III and IV follow a similar process to ground theory as to the resources that speculative narratives and fan communities may offer to bisexually identified fans.

As I said in Chapter I, my motivation for this project results in part from recognizing how bisexuality has been largely ignored as a position from which to theorize sexual knowledge. Moreover, my reviews of academic literature have shown that, outside of health and psychology, research on bisexuality has lagged substantially behind gay, lesbian, transgender, and queer studies. What research has been done on bisexuality frequently presumes a framework of binary heterosexuality and homosexuality, reinforces bisexual invisibility, and perpetuates biphobic popular

---

conversations may provide openings to explore research questions (16). H. Russell Bernard describes the semi-structured interview as having "much of the freewheeling quality of unstructured interviewing, but is based on the use of an interview guide . . . a written list of questions and topics that need to be covered in a particular order" (qtd. in Whitehead 17). The open-ended questions allow participants to respond fully from their perspectives so the ethnographer may attempt to gain "greater understanding of the context and meaning of those responses" (Whitehead 17.) According to Bernard and Ryan, grounded theory is a process of interpretation of texts that: "(1) brings the researcher close to informants' experiences; (2) provides a rigorous and detailed method for identifying categories and concepts that emerge from text; and (3) helps the researcher link the concepts into substantive and formal theories" (607-608).

attitudes.[27] However, my motivations for this project involve more than a desire to contribute to much-need academic research across the "two cultures" divide. As a bi-identified woman with an insider's (emic) perspective of bisexuality from within non-traditional relationship communities, I value the folk wisdom of these communities and believe academic scholarship can benefit from the worldview found within that third circle.

To be reflexive about my research focus, I must say that bisexuality and alternative sexuality communities have been a central part of my personal development. Since the mid-1990s, my friendship and social communities in the Pacific Northwest have provided me with enculturation related to "open" relationship lifestyles and "safe" touch (emerging from HIV prevention practices at the time). While heterosexual relations tend to be a norm in these communities, tacit acceptance of bisexual behavior and identity are also deeply engrained in the culture. After I came to University of Oregon in 2008, my academic study in queer theory, gender studies, folklore, and cultural studies

---

[27] Paula C. Rodrígues Rust offers a comprehensive review of social scientific and psychological research, theory, and clinical literature on human bisexuality in *Bisexuality in the United States* (2000) and its update, "Bisexuality: The State of the Union" (2002). These literature reviews show that the dominance of the homosexual/heterosexual paradigm led to a lack or research on bisexuality through the 1970s, while cultural attitudes and fears regarding the spread of HIV guided scientific research on bisexuality through the 1980s and 1990s. By the early 2000s, research on bisexuality still lagged far behind that of homosexuality, though some work was being done on the prevalence of bisexuality, cultural attitudes toward bisexuals, patterns of bisexual behavior, and the meaning of bisexual self-identity ("Bisexuality" 180-181). In 2000, the *Journal of Bisexuality* began publishing a wide range of peer-reviewed social science research studies and humanities scholarship, filling a need in both etic and emic perspectives in research on bisexuality. Interdisciplinary topics have included, among many others: bisexual issues in therapy; differences from the straight, lesbian and gay communities; growth of the bisexual movement; bisexuality and the media; bisexual history; and different bisexual lifestyles. In 2007, *Bisexual Health* showed that methodologies in social science research frequently lump bisexual data into either "lesbian" or "gay male" categories, making it difficult to research bisexual health concerns and develop adequate HIV/STI prevention efforts (Miller, André, Ebin, and Bessonova 4). In 2012, *The Bisexuality Report* argued that bisexual people face distinct issues (e.g. biphobia, double discrimination from heterosexuals and homosexuals, multiple marginalizations due to trans* and other intersecting identities) that should be addressed separately from lesbian and gay issues in social science research and health care.

gave me several useful theoretical frameworks through which to position my research and secure an outsider's (etic) critical distance in my study of bisexuality communities. Thus as simultaneously an insider/outsider, I am positioned to grasp the worldviews of people who participate in bisexual communities and to analyze the limits of current theories and cultural representations of bisexuality.

My positioning vis-à-vis fandom is less central. While I have long enjoyed science fiction and fantasy literature, film, and television and can "geek out" with other fans of the genre, I have never actively participated in fan cultures. As such, my research has relied more heavily on ethnographic and secondary sources for an emic understanding of science fiction fan culture and history.

Locating Participants

Participants for The BiSciFi Project were located primarily through their participation in national bisexuality and polyamory conferences and through the friendship networks of my participants and myself. Primary fieldwork was conducted in Philadelphia and Minneapolis, with secondary fieldwork in Madison, Wisconsin, and in Eugene, Oregon. Through semi-structured interviews, group roundtable discussions, informal conversations, and participant observation at events, I explored three primary issues: how the bisexual identities of participants intersect in significant ways with their social identities and locations, including status as fans/consumers of speculative fiction; how they respond to cultural attitudes about bisexuality from these social locations; and how they make use of speculative fiction as bi-identified producers and consumers.

Defining the number of people who contributed to my fieldwork is complicated by overlaps among formal and informal discussions in both individual and group settings. People I refer to as "project participants" include those individuals who consented to formal recorded individual and/or group interviews. Of these, several were interviewed on more than one occasion in both individual and group settings, while others were interviewed only as individuals or only in groups. With these distinctions in mind, I have conducted formal interviews with 11 individuals and with four different groups. Three of these groups were public roundtables, while the fourth was a private roundtable among women science fiction authors. Participants in the group settings totaled 37 people (five of whom also gave individual interviews). Collectively, these 43 people are my project participants.

Overall, participants are from the Midwest (45%), Northeast (48%), and Northwest regions of the U.S. Of the total participants, about two-thirds (66%) are female-bodied and one-third (34%) are male bodied. However, one participant actively identifies as transgender and about a half-dozen others consider their genders to be fluid regardless of their biological sex. In addition, three-quarters (75%) are over 40 years of age, and nearly 60% self-identify as "polyamorous," or practicing ethical non-monogamy. In addition, 16% are of non-white racial/ethnic heritage (Native American, African American, and Asian American). All individual participants self-identify as non-monosexuals; however, about 15% of group participants identify as straight. Finally, more than half of the participants consider themselves to be fans/consumers of speculative fiction genres.

While it is evident that BiSciFi Project participants may not be representative of bisexually identified people as a whole, the exemplars and analysis I present in the first half of this dissertation develop an important ethnographic understanding of the worldview of those who participate in bisexual communities and support the need for further ethnographic and sociological research in bisexual communities.

Fieldwork

Given that relatively few bisexuals are actively involved in face-to-face bisexual communities in the U.S., I began my ethnographic research focused on bisexually identified people in polyamory (or "poly") communities and their interactions with cultural expectations and media representations. From my own background, I knew that bisexual behavior and identity often overlap with non-monogamous relationship choices and that polyamory communities are welcoming of bisexuals. Public conferences for poly communities provided a means for me to locate self-identified bisexual women and men who have a shared sense of identity and community outside of queer spaces and the politics of LGBT activism.[28] I then extended my research to the bisexual community in the Minneapolis-St. Paul region where there is a long history of bisexual activism and science fiction fandom. Conducting ethnographic research in these overlapping communities allowed me to explore research on speculative fictions and bisexual lives in greater depth.

---

[28] While queer communities include polyamory, the poly movement may more accurately be described as alternative sexuality because heterosexual relationships figure prominently.

My first major fieldwork sites were the 2011 and 2012 Poly Living Conference in Philadelphia. According to conference materials, polyamory is "romantic love with more than one person, honestly, ethically, and with the full knowledge and consent of all concerned." The purpose of the conference is to offer education and a supportive environment for building community. Since 2005, the conference has been held annually by Loving More, a non-profit organization founded in 1985. The organization publishes *Loving More Magazine*, which since 1991 is the only magazine dedicated exclusively to topics involving polyamory and multi-partner relating. Held at the Embassy Suites Hotel, three-day conference attracted about 175-200 people when I attended and included public workshops and keynote speakers as well as public and private social events. While I observed some diversity in ethnicity, transgender identity, and physical ability in conference attendees, including a special dinner for Jewish guests, workshops were primarily aimed at sexuality and relationships and not at gender, race, and other intersecting diversity issues.

Fieldwork for both years included participant observation, discussions about my research, and networking with attendees, as well as six informal interviews the first year and two semi-structured interviews the second year. I also organized open group discussions on bisexuality that provided information on self-identified bisexuals and their experiences in the poly community. Eleven participants attended the 2011 Bisexuality Roundtable (held February 6), while eight participants attended the 2012 Bisexuality Roundtable (held February 12). While my questions in these roundtables sought the same information as individual interviews, group interests guided the direction of the discussions. This fieldwork was at the beginning of my research on bisexual lives, so

41

interviews and roundtables were exploratory in nature, aimed at understanding what participants perceived regarding cultural attitudes toward bisexuality, how others respond to their bisexual identities both inside and outside of poly or queer communities, and how they negotiate those attitudes and experiences in the context of their life experiences. At the 2012 conference, I also led a workshop on bisexual representation in the media with about 30 people in attendance.

My second major fieldwork site was the bisexual community in Minneapolis, starting with the April 2012 BECAUSE (Bisexual Empowerment Conference: A Uniting, Supportive Experience). Established in 1994 by a group of bisexual activists, BECAUSE provides information and community for people who identify as bisexual. The conference is sponsored by the Bisexual Organizing Project (BOP), an umbrella organization established soon after the first BECAUSE. According to the conference program, the mission of BOP is to "advocate for equal acknowledgement and recognition of bisexual identities and communities" and to "create a safe community for bisexuals and our allies within and outside of GLBTA spaces, allowing each individual to fully be who they are."

Held at Metropolitan State University in St. Paul, about 200 people attended the two-days of events, which included workshops and panels, national speakers, and a cabaret show. The conference supports access and diversity with workshops and safe space discussions for transgender people and people of color, gender-neutral bathrooms, and support through accessibility (child care, low cost, accommodations for physical abilities). Fieldwork at the conference included presenting a workshop on bisexual (in)visibility in media images with about 20 people in attendance, participant observation, informal discussions about my research, and networking with conference attendees.

Informal discussions at BECAUSE revealed a rich history of overlapping activist and science fiction fan communities in the region. As a result, I returned to Minneapolis in August 2012 for additional field research involving five semi-structured interviews, a public roundtable discussion on bisexual science fiction with 13 participants, and a private roundtable discussion with five women science fiction authors. While in Minneapolis, I also researched the privately held archives of *Politically Incorrect*, a bisexual science fiction fanzine produced in the mid-1980s by two participants in my research. To follow up, I conducted additional semi-structured interviews and informal discussions with project participants at BECAUSE 2013, held in June that year at Augsburg College in Minneapolis.

I also conducted some fieldwork at WisCon37, held in May 2013 in Madison, Wisconsin. Founded in 1977, WisCon is considered the world's leading feminist science fiction convention with over a thousand attendees each year. According to the website, WisCon organizers strive to put feminist principles into action by encouraging "discussion, debate and extrapolation of ideas relating to feminism, gender, race and class" ("What is WisCon?"). Many of my participants from Minneapolis have been organizers of regional science fiction conventions, including WisCon. Fieldwork at WisCon37 included participant observation, informal discussions about my research, and two semi-structured interviews.

Finally, I made use of my local networks in Eugene, Oregon, to find additional participants for my project. This process included informal discussions about my research with friends and colleagues and three semi-structured interviews.

To respect the individual privacy of participants as much as possible, I have chosen to refer to first names only throughout the project, even though I received consent to use the full names of most participants. In the few instances where anonymity was requested, pseudonyms are used. To ensure equity, I do not distinguish between actual names and pseudonyms as I write. In the next section, I introduce core interview participants and a sample of questions they were asked.

Meet the Core Participants

Many of the stories shared in the pages that follow are from my interviews with eleven individual participants. These semi-structured interviews ranged in length from one to two hours for a single session, to as long as eight hours over multiple sessions. While these core participants are not equally represented in examples and excerpts, all of them contributed substantially to the development of this project. I shall briefly introduce these core participants to provide some context for their stories in relationship to the overall participant demographics above. All information presented about participants was given at the time of their interviews. I begin with the three from my own region, the Pacific Northwest.

Prajna, age 27, is a white genderqueer bisexual woman who lives in Eugene, Oregon. In an interview on January 29, 2011, Prajna shares what it has been like to identify as transgender for many years, including living her first year of high school as a boy. She offers insights into social pressures to conform to certain gender and relationships expectations, which has left her feeling at times like she is "not bisexual enough" by perceived cultural standards.

Greg, age 23, also lives in Eugene and describes himself as a white male-bodied genderqueer pansexual. As an activist in the University of Oregon queer community, he is concerned about the exclusions of certain identity terms and gender roles and expectations. Greg has spoken publically to many youth audiences about his coming out processes and ongoing questioning of his gender and sexual identity. The interview took place on August 15, 2012.

Originally from the eastern Great Lakes region, Grey, age 42, is a science fiction writer in Eugene who describes himself as a white male-bodied bisexual with fluid gender. As a queer activist ally in the 1990s, Grey talkes about the difficulties he faced coming out as bisexual, rather than gay, in the Chicago LGBT community. As a writer, Grey also has thought a great deal about gender and sexual representations in speculative fiction and offers his insights into attitudes of the "old guard" fan community compared to younger generations. The interview took place on August 6, 2012.

The next three participants live in the Northeastern region of the U.S. I spoke with the first two about their experiences as bisexuals in the poly community at the 2012 Poly Living Conference.

Alan, age 50, is a white bisexual man who lives in the Philadelphia area. Alan and his wife are activists in the local poly community as speakers and organizers of support groups. In an interview on February 11, 2012, Alan describes himself and his wife as the "go-to couple" for younger generations for questions about polyamory, bisexuality, and relationships. Alan offers insights into various adult sex-positive communities and how acculturation in straight society makes bisexual identity for men more difficult than for women.

Ann, age 56, is a white bisexual woman who lives in Maryland. Although partnered with a man in the poly community, Ann does not consider herself to be poly. In an interview on February 12, 2012, she shares what it was like to discover her same-sex desire later in her life, at the end of a previous marriage, and to have passed through straight, lesbian, and bisexual identities. She also describes the challenges of feeling like an outsider in both queer and poly communities and of being in partnership with a non-monogamous man.

Mark, age 49, lives in Syracuse, New York, though he still considers himself to be a Midwesterner. In an interview on May 26, 2013, Mark describes himself as a white bisexual queer person in a male body. He shares what it was like to "drop out" of normalizing social structures to be a Marxist Wobbly musician on the festival circuit. He feels that if he had remained in "straight" culture, he likely would have been trained to recognize himself in exclusively gay and homonormative terms.

The last five of my core participants live primarily in the upper Midwestern region of the U.S. While I met most of them at BECAUSE 2012 in St. Paul, all interviews took place during later trips to the Twin Cities.

Elise, age 52, lives in Minneapolis and describes herself as a disabled white "gender weird" poly bisexual woman, bi activist, and upper Midwesterner. Raised in a fundamentalist Lutheran church, Elise's sensibilities have been shaped by embracing outsiderness in multiple aspects of her life, whether as a science fiction fan, a bisexual activist in lesbian spaces, or in her spiritual journey from fundamentalism to paganism to Catholicism. Community building has been a central part of her experiences as a festival musician and artist, an activist, a science fiction convention organizer, and a fanzine

producer. Elise is a co-founder of BECAUSE and a co-editor of the fanzine *Politically Incorrect* (discussed in Chapter IV). As such, I researched her personal archives and conducted multiple interviews with her (Aug 18-21, 2012; June 10, 2013).

Victor, age 49, is a two-spirited mixed Native American/Scottish poly bisexual man living in Madison, Wisconsin. Raised in the Twin Cities area, Victor describes how a biracial identity has many parallels to a bisexual identity, and why claiming bisexual as an identity term is both personally and politically important. Because Victor is a co-editor of *Politically Incorrect* and a co-founder of BECAUSE, I researched his personal archives and conducted multiple interviews with him (Aug 19-20, 2012; May 24, 2013). Victor and Elise both provided a wealth of information on the overlaps among bisexual activism and science fiction fandom communities in their region.

Also a co-founder of BECAUSE, Lou, age 54, is a white butch poly bisexual woman, activist, and science fiction fan living in Minneapolis. In an interview on August 20, 2012, Lou describes how reading science fiction helped her to negotiate gender and sexual identities during her rural upbringing. She also shares about her non-traditional family structure and the importance of supportive and inclusive communities, particularly for working class parents.

Catherine, age 49, is a science fiction writer in Minneapolis who describes herself as a white lesbian-identified femme bisexual woman and queer activist. In an interview on August 21, 2012, Catherine shares her ongoing battle to maintain her bisexual identity in lesbian communities, especially since she has been married to a woman for nearly two decades. As a writer of lesbian science fiction and fantasy, she provides insight into the

difficulties faced by women writers of genre fiction outside of romance and erotica markets.

Lauren, age 28, is a queer bisexual woman of Native American decent also living in Minneapolis. A leader involved with university, regional, and state queer activist organizations, Lauren talks about of her struggles for acceptance within gay and lesbian organizations, even in leadership roles, and how she found "home" at BECAUSE. As a scientist, Lauren appreciates how science fiction employs creative problem solving and redefines future worlds in ways that bisexual and transgender people can fit into. The interview took place August 20, 2012.

Although the life experiences of participants determined the direction of questions and depth of each individual interview, the interviews and roundtables were guided by a core set of questions that address my ethnographic inquiry into bisexual lives and speculative fictions. The following sample questions were used for portions of interviews and roundtables focused on bisexual lives:

- What do you think about using the term "bisexuality," as opposed to "queer," "fluid," "pansexual," or some other non-binary identity term?

- Tell me about how you came to the sexual/gender identity you have today. What models did you have?

- In general, what have you observed about cultural attitudes toward bisexuality and images of bisexuality? How do you respond to those attitudes and images?

- How have you experienced/handled discrepancies between your self-identity and those cultural attitudes toward bisexuality?

- How have you experienced/handled expectations of normative heterosexuality and gender in your life?

- What do you wish people in general could know or understand about bisexuality?

In addition, the following sample questions were used for portions of interviews and roundtables focused on the role of speculative fiction in the lives of participants:

- What attracts you to science fiction and fantasy books/television/movies? Why are these genres important?

- What science fiction and fantasy texts/shows have been particularly important for you, especially in terms of their depictions of sexuality and gender?

- What texts/shows have you found particularly disturbing or frustrating in these terms?

- What fan cultures do you participate in? How do these cultures support or conflict with your gendered and sexual identity?

In the remainder of this chapter, I discuss the first set of questions on bisexual identity in the lives of participants in order to explore how the category of bisexuality helps participants to negotiate cultural narratives about bisexuality and to create a coherent sexual worldview. In Chapter III, I address the second set of questions focused on speculative fiction in order to explore how textual and cultural process operate in bisexual lives. Chapter IV brings together the ethnographic concerns of both speculative fictions and bisexual lives as I analyze the workings of narrative and social positioning in a bisexual science fiction fanzine.

What's in a Name?

While etymologically the prefix "*bi-*" means two, what two physical,

psychological, or sexual characteristics bisexuality consists of—or even if it consists of

only two things—has been invoked in different ways and at different times by different

researchers and social groups. In nineteenth and early twentieth century medical and

sexological debates, the term referred to the presence of both male and female physical or

anatomical characteristics. In the early twentieth century, medical and psychological

research shifted meanings of the term toward a combination of masculine and feminine

psychological characteristics, pathologizing any degree of same-sex desire as

inappropriately gendered. In the 1960s and 1970s, gay liberation movements challenged

the strict correlation of gender and sexual object choice, and bisexuality became linked to

heterosexuality and homosexuality (Storr 3-4). As identity politics developed in the

1970s and the AIDS crisis devastated gay communities in the 1980s, bisexual behavior

and self-identification troubled gay and lesbian sexual definitions and created conflicts

for bisexuals in gay and lesbian communities. In the 1990s, queer activism and theorizing

conceived of bisexuality as the constitutive boundary between heterosexuality and

homosexuality and challenged the viability of sexual categories altogether.

Since the turn of the twenty-first century, inclusionary models such as

GLBTQQIA or QUILTBAG express a recognition and proliferation of sexual and gender

identities along a continuum.[29] Meanwhile, what bisexuality means remains contested

---

[29] The acronyms stand for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning, Intersex, and Asexual (or Allied) and for Queer, Undecided, Intersex, Lesbian, Transgender, Bisexual, Asexual (or Allied), and Gay.

both inside and outside the category. For instance, *The Bisexuality Report* recently

offered a comprehensive description of how the term is used by insiders, stating that

bisexuals

> may include the following groups and more: people who see themselves as
> attracted to "both men and women"; people who are mostly attracted to one
> gender but recognize that this is not exclusive; people who experience their sexual
> identities as fluid and changeable over time; people who see their attraction as
> "regardless of gender" (other aspects of people are more important in determining
> who they are attracted to); people who dispute the idea that there are only two
> genders and that people are attracted to one, the other, or both. (Barker et al. 11)

Key in this list is the disagreement among non-monosexual people as to the degree of

gender's relevance in one's attractions. *Emic* or insider perceptions of gender's

relationship to bisexuality run the spectrum from dualistic (attracted to men and women)

to multiple (attracted to more than two genders) to irrelevant (aspects other than gender

are more important in attraction). This multivalency also affects *etic* or outsider

interpretations of bisexuality by those outside of the identity.

To understand how bisexuals are positioned in cultural narratives, in the next

section I take a closer look at etic interpretations of the term *bisexual*. These frequently

include layers of gendered attitudes, stereotypes, and myths perpetuated in cultural

discourses—all of which may impact bisexually identified people in a variety of social

locations. I also examine emic perspectives on labels for non-binary sexual and why

some participants prefer certain terms to others. Through their perspectives, what

becomes clear throughout the rest of this chapter is that—whatever words are used—

bisexuality as a "both-and" epistemological category helps participants to understand and

articulate desires and experiences that cannot be accounted for by other culturally

available knowledge frameworks.

What Culture Says: Etic Views of Bisexuality

In our contemporary sexual and gendered imagination, says cultural theorist Clare Hemmings, "bisexuality is the middle ground between sexes, genders and sexualities, rather than being a sexuality, or indeed a gender or sex, in itself" (2). In general, bisexuality scholars point to two conceptions operating in popular discourses that construct bisexuality as the inauthentic "middle ground" between heterosexual and homosexual orientations. First, a bisexual orientation is constructed as transitional phase or a precursor to recognizing one's "true" sexual identity as gay, lesbian, or straight; in other words, bisexuals are *really* just closeted or repressed homosexuals on the one hand, or curious or confused heterosexuals on the other. Thus conventional wisdom says *bisexuality is just a phase—eventually you'll settle down.* Second, a bisexual orientation is constructed as oscillation between heterosexuality and homosexuality due to a lack of ability to maintain a consistent object choice; in other words, bisexuals are "fence sitters" who are promiscuous, untrustworthy, indecisive, or otherwise incapable of monogamous commitment to one gender. Thus conventional wisdom says *a bisexual will always leave you—it's just a question of when.* [30] In addition, as Angelides points out, bisexuality often is constructed outside of the present moment as a utopian ideal. This framing can be seen in popular discourses that say, on the one hand, that *everybody is a little bit bisexual* and, on the other hand, that *true bisexuals don't really exist.* In all of these popular conceptions about bisexuality—as transition, as oscillation, or as utopian—the sexual

[30] For more on how bisexuality is understood in culture as "middle ground," see Hemmings, Hall and Pramaggiore, and Moorman.

knowledge framework being applied is the same: binary heterosexuality and homosexuality, known as *monosexuality,* is the cultural norm by which bisexual lives are interpreted and ultimately discounted.

These etic perceptions of bisexuality are perpetuated in both academic and popular culture discourses, as demonstrated by a study now infamous in the bisexuality community and bisexuality research circles. In 2005, psychologists from Northwestern University measured the genital arousal patterns of 101 men—30 heterosexual, 33 bisexual, and 38 homosexual, as self-reported identities. According to research findings, "bisexual men did not have strong genital arousal to both male and female sexual stimuli. Rather, most bisexual men appeared homosexual with respect to genital arousal, although some appeared heterosexual." As such, the report said, male bisexuality "appears primarily to represent a style of interpreting or reporting sexual arousal rather than a distinct pattern of genital sexual arousal" (Rieger, Chivers, and Bailey 579).

Shortly after the 2005 study was released, *The New York Times* headlined the story "Straight, Gay or Lying? Bisexuality Revisited" with this lead:

> Some people are attracted to women; some are attracted to men. And some, if . . . *millions of self-described bisexuals are to be believed*, are drawn to both sexes.
> But a new study *casts doubt on whether true bisexuality exists*, at least in men.
> The study . . . lends support to those who have *long been skeptical* that bisexuality is a *distinct and stable sexual orientation*.
> People who claim bisexuality, according to these critics, are *usually homosexual*, but are ambivalent about their homosexuality or simply closeted. "You're either gay, straight or lying," as some *gay men* have put it. (Carey, emphasis added)

While some balancing viewpoints are provided deep within the article, the headline and slanted language of the lead relies upon, and reconfirms, etic perceptions that that true

bisexuals do not exist and suggests that the millions of bisexuals who say otherwise are liars.

The 2005 study—and many popular press articles that followed—released a firestorm of criticism from the bisexual community, prompting a closer look at the study's research methodologies. This second look revealed that, if the goal was to study bisexual men, the study's research methodologies were flawed. Men for the study were recruited through advertisements in gay-oriented and alternative publications and were identified as heterosexual, bisexual, or homosexual based on responses to a standard questionnaire. Also, during testing the men were shown male and female same-sex porn videos but not bisexual pornography (Tuller). "They used videos where the women looked cracked out, had long press-on nails and seemed miserable," said Ian Lawrence, an American Institute of Bisexuality (AIB) board member. "The idea that you could accurately judge someone's bisexuality by showing them that kind of porn was really astonishing to me. If you do love and respect women, that kind of porn *should* repel you" (Denizet-Lewis).

The situation prompted AIB to promote and fund new research studies with better research models. As a result, in 2011 researchers at Northwestern published a follow-up study that reversed its earlier findings, suggesting that at least some men who self-identify as bisexual are, in fact, sexually aroused by both women and men (Rosenthal, Sylva, Saffron, and Bailey). The *Times* headline that followed read, "No Surprise for Bisexual Men: Report Indicates They Exist" (Tuller). In 2014, the *Times* published a more in-depth, day-in-the-life feature about AIB board members and their efforts to fund research, titled "The Scientific Quest to Prove Bisexuality Exists" (Denizet-Lewis).

Despite the latter article's more ethnographic look into the lives of bisexuals and the issues they face, some bisexual bloggers were still disappointed with *Times* coverage, and for good reason: both of the follow-up articles sacrifice accuracy for cleaver headlines that turn on the myth that bisexuality does not exist. As bisexuality researcher Amy André wrote in an online column for *The Huffington Post*, "Show me the quest for scientific proof that heterosexuality exists. It begins and ends with even just one person saying, 'I'm straight.'" Not so for bisexuality, she says, continuing: "Sexual orientation— that great proclivity of ours to love, whether or not that love takes place within gendered parameters—is not something that can be measured, confirmed, or ascertained on a penis machine." André's rebuttal is titled, "The Scientific Quest to Prove That *The New York Times* Exists."

What Bi People Say: Emic Views of Bisexuality

Bi-identified people develop various strategies to undermine the stereotypes and stigma perpetuated by cultural myths on bisexuality.[31] In BiSciFi Project interviews and roundtable dialogues, three themes emerge as primary strategies participants may use to negotiate bisexual stereotypes and cultural invisibility: a rejection of labels, a multiplicity of labels, and political activism. Moreover, as participant comments show, these strategies are not mutually exclusive but may be engaged at different times depending upon social circumstances.

---

[31] For more emic perspectives in bisexuality research, see Atkins, Beemyn and Steinman, and Burleson.

The first strategy involves rejecting sexual identity labels altogether as not able to contain their experience and knowledge, particularly when participants' identities included multiple intersecting social locations such as race/ethnicity and religion. At the BiSciFi Roundtable, for example, Lisa introduced herself as "coming out geek," employing the narrative of "coming out" not in terms of her sexual identity, but rather for her interest speculative fiction. While she views sexuality as fluid and has been learning to embrace that in her life, in the world she does not like the term *bisexual* because she sees it as "another box" to be put into. "I love who I love," Lisa said. "When somebody pushes me on it, I say that I'm fluid, but what does that mean?" Later, when discussion turned toward cultural attitudes about being sexually fluid in some way, she said, "I just think that the whole concept of sex, like sexuality, is not comfortable. . . . I'm nervous about speaking for the whole black community, but I can definitely say from my community . . . we don't talk comfortably about sex." Both race and religion play roles in her resistance to sexual identity labels: "It's not something that, you know—and I think part is I grew up Catholic . . . so I [grew up with] a lot of nuns and priests, and even for me . . . to come out in any kind of fashion—like if people ask me, well, how are you able to have sex with a woman? I'm like, same way I'm able to have sex with a man. I have to really pray through it because it's not really comfortable for me, in a natural sense, when I talk about morality and what's right and wrong."

Lisa's comments point to the intersections of gender, race, and religious beliefs with non-monosexual identities. By reframing her presence at the BiSciFi Roundtable as "coming out geek," she resists the traditional narrative of coming out in terms of sexual identity, saying that in the word bisexuality represents "another box." As a Catholic

56

African-American woman, Lisa's resistance is understandable given her religion's moral restrictions around sexuality and also given how frequently women of color are hypersexualized in U.S. culture and media. To "come out" as bisexual would endanger her moral standing and respectability within her community. Lisa recognizes the importance of community respect, as indicated by another comment: "I think that bisexuality is really a threat for individuals identifying as being gay or lesbian because for them it's not a choice. There is no fluidity. So when you have a group of people who say, hey, there's this range, you know—we're kind of destroying their whole argument to be respected. So I do want to put that out on the table, the fact that it comes across as a threat."[32]

A second strategy participants used to negotiate cultural definitions of bisexuality is to claim multiple sexual identity labels in order to better articulate and define their self-identity and experiences. For example, some participants use the term *pansexual* along with or instead of bisexual. Pansexual indicates that one is attracted to multiple genders or that one's attraction to others is not gender based. "Pansexuality often explicitly places people who are trans or gender nonconforming into the equation," said Greg. "I identify as genderqueer and so not necessarily feeling like I am traditionally or stereotypically a man or traditionally or stereotypically a woman. So I guess it [pansexual] makes me feel maybe a little bit more included."

---

[32] Moreover, the loss of "respect" can also mean the potential loss of essential social and economic support networks for ethnic and racial minorities who "come out" to their families and communities. See Decena's "Tacit Subjects."

Other participants use the term *queer* to indicate an identity that lies outside of normative heterosexuality but one that is not necessarily gay or lesbian. For example, Catherine described queer as a "catch-all" that carries with it the connotation that "you do in fact have a sexual or romantic or at least desire for somebody who is other than your birth gender and sexuality, and to me from a political standpoint, that's an important part of being out." Catherine said she describes herself as bisexual or queer, depending on what environment she is in, but she does not feel comfortable calling herself a lesbian. "Most people I know are not really going to get polymorphously perverse," she said.[33] "Looking for a way to conceptualize this in a way that encompasses a lot of things at once, [queer] is the term that I tend to prefer to use."

Given historical discourses around bisexuality, it is not surprising that queer is perceived by some as more progressive and inclusive than bisexual identity. However, the cultural shift to "inclusive" terms points to an implicit assumption that, because the root prefix *bi-* means "two," bisexuality is restricted to two-gendered attraction. For example, some queer and trans* activists strongly object to the term *bisexual* on the assumption that it only refers to cisgender and therefore excludes people who identify as a gender other than that which they were assigned at birth. However, as Victor observed, this argument is "based on imposing an outside definition of what bisexuality is supposed to be, which is in its own way . . . is just as wrong as somebody saying, 'Oh, it's only fifty-fifty.'" Two-gender attraction is just one of several meanings that bisexual people—

---

[33] Polymorphous perversity is a term from Freudian psychology that describes the ability to derive sexual gratification from multiple sources and parts of the body outside of socially normative sexual behaviors. Freud believed it to be an early phase of sexual development that children progress out of as they learn to constrain sexual drives to socially acceptable norms, culminating in heterosexuality ("Polymorphous Perversity").

including trans* bisexuals—use in practice (Barker, et al.). To impose a single meaning

onto the term misrecognizes the complex uses of *bisexual* for bi-identified people and

may, in turn, reinforce biphobia in lesbian, gay, and transgender communities and in

society at large.[34]

Moreover, some participants recognize the possibility that alternative terms like

queer may result in, as Victor said, "another wonderful opportunity to get erased." While

queer is a deliberately ambiguous term that ideally includes all non-heteronormative

sexual orientations and gender identities, in practice it is frequently understood as

shorthand for gay and lesbian. "The cultural understanding of queer is, for good or ill,

'Oh, you must be gay,'" Victor said. "And so to ask me to identify as queer instead of

bisexual is to say, 'Well, can't you just call yourself gay for a little while?'" Similarly,

Elise notes that "the word queer can get deployed in place of GLBT and then redefined to

be gay and lesbian, and that's just . . . not okay. I like the word queer. I use it a lot, but I

don't use it that way, and if somebody else uses it that way I'll usually call 'em on it."

---

[34] Many bisexual bloggers have weighed in on how etic definitions of bisexuality are destructive to bi visibility and community development. For example, in a blog posting on an Oct. 16, 2012, bi activist Patrick RichardsFink offered the following explanation: "People who do not identify as bi are redefining the word, saying it means something it doesn't mean—people are patiently explaining to me, someone who was bisexual before it started acquiring different meanings willy-nilly, how these meanings are more valid than the one that has been in use for decades. Saying that the word bisexual is oppressive to the non-cisgendered. . . . People who I debate in various corners of the internet, who identify as Anything But Bisexual, and then wonder why I ask them, if they are not identifying as bi, what gives them the right to redefine the term simply so they can reject it? (The common answer is, 'I'm not redefining the word, you are! Bi means two, therefore. . . . ') Look, it's not important because it annoys me. It's not even important because it's a fallacious reconstruction. **It's important because it disrupts visibility and bisexual community building**. It's important because people who are coming out as bi are going to have to struggle for years against people (straight and gay) who tell them they are just confused . . . [and who] are facing erasure and disdain and mythical definitions from other non-monosexuals. . . . The more people within the non-monosexual (there's that word again. Wish there was a better one without a hyphen that reflects who we *are* rather than who we *aren't*. Something like, I don't know, maybe ***BISEXUAL***?) who eschew the label—or labels altogether—out of the false idea that Bi Is Bad, the smaller our community appears to be" (RichardsFink, "Mincing").

Biphobic attitudes and erasures motivate some participants to claim bisexual as a political identity, the third major theme in response to etic perceptions. For example, Catherine, came out as bisexual in the mid-1980s and has been married to a woman for many years but still describes herself as bisexual because of the term's specific political connotations. "Back when . . . it was pretty much gay and lesbian," she said, "if you didn't fit into that, there was one other bucket to put yourself in." As such, bisexuality remains a recognized and viable term for political activism. Similarly, Victor says that claiming bisexual as a political identity recognizes that some people in straight and queer communities are prejudiced against bisexuality. "They do not understand, they are afraid of it, and they unfairly discriminate against people having multiple gender attraction," he said. "And as long as that's going on, I'm happy to wear that label." Victor is also irritated by people who impose their definition of what bisexuality is onto him and then claim that he either is, or is not, "really" bisexual, or that it is not legitimate for him to use the label for any number of reasons. "As long as that irritation is validated by the experiences that I have," he said, "yeah, I'm going to continue calling myself bi, and I make absolutely no apology for it."

Negotiating Terms

These strategies for negotiating identity labels were illustrated in the opening conversation of the BiSciFi Roundtable, a group interview on bisexuality and speculative fiction, held at the Open Book Arts Center in Minneapolis on August 19, 2012. When I asked the thirteen participants about using the term *bisexual* as opposed to queer, pansexual, fluid, or no labels, participants showed mixed feelings toward identity labels

in general. As the examples above and the conversation below illustrate, participants

differ in their interpretations of bisexuality and their negotiation of the identity label.

Some describe themselves as bisexual only within certain social contexts because they

feel it is better understood, while others prefer to use alternative terms such as queer or

pansexual because they perceive these labels to include more possibilities for identity and

desire on the sexual and gender spectrums. In addition, some participants describe

themselves as bisexual because of the term's historical and political significance as part

of LGBT political activism, while others resist or refuse the term because of perceived

limitations in how it is culturally defined.

In this following excerpt from the BiSciFi Roundtable, nine participants share

their thoughts on identity terms. The excerpt begins with Magenta's interpretation of

bisexuality as an identity category and continues with Elise, Catherine, and Lou

commenting on the term. All four speakers are white women over the age of 45:

> MAGENTA: I'm finding that bisexuality is too narrow, that fluid or queer is
> much more useful. Bisexuality kind of puts me in another box. A long time ago a
> friend said love is about what's in your head and your heart and not what's
> between your legs. . . . Another problem is this culture has very few boxes for
> relationships. . . . I have friends who I'm very close to, whether or not I'm
> genitally sexual with them, and that's what's important.
> ELISE: I came to the word bisexual partly because it pissed off all the right
> people. I liked that. On the other hand . . . if bisexuals are people who are open to
> being sexually involved with both genders, then I am not a bisexual because I
> don't believe in two genders. I still use the word. It still pisses off most of the
> right people. On the other hand, it is limited and some of those limits are ones I
> bump up against really hard.
> CATHERINE: I've always thought of myself as polymorphously perverse. That's
> usually how I describe myself.
> LOU: I started using the word bisexual when fluid and pan and omni were not
> really on the table, and I've never looked at it as I'm sexually attracted to two
> genders. I look at more like hetero is differently gendered, homo is same
> gendered, and bi is both differently gendered and same gendered, which I think
> covers a lot of ground. So I don't feel a lot of pressure to re-label myself, but

61

under today's standards, if I was coming out today, I would probably come out as pan or queer.

In a snap-shot, this opening sequence illustrates how bisexual participants negotiate categorical limits and erasures in complex ways by rejecting categories as not able to contain their experience and knowledge, by applying multiple sexual identity labels to better articulate and define their self-identity and experience, or by claiming bisexual as a deliberate political identity and activist stance—sometimes responding two or three ways simultaneously.

Both directly and indirectly, the generation of these four speakers, who are all over the age of 45, may be seen as framing their responses to the term *bisexual*. As noted earlier, during the 1970s and 1980s, bisexuality was the only "bucket" available for people with non-monosexual desires. With today's proliferation of sexuality and gender identities, some older participants see bisexual as carrying too much baggage for those with non-binary identity and desire. For example Magenta, who identifies as poly, finds today that narrow cultural perceptions of bisexuality put her in "another box" while fluid or queer are "more useful" to describe her relationships, which similarly have "few boxes" in culture. Elise, who is poly and genderqueer, in the past embraced the political implications of bisexual as "piss[ing] off" the right people in 1980s feminist and lesbian political organizing (discussed later in this chapter) while today she rejects any implication of only two-gender attraction in the term. Likewise, Catherine prefers terms that encompass many forms of desire at once, such as Freud's conception of polymorphous perversity. While these objections arise mostly from cultural notions of bisexuality as binary, Lou describes how she has negotiated a non-binary understanding of bisexual as attraction to both same and different—not opposing—genders, which

removes a subcultural "pressure to re-label" herself using terms now available to younger generations.

Next, speakers Jenna and Dawn, both of whom are female-bodied participants under age 30, take up Lou's mention of "coming out today" as pan or queer:

> JENNA: I guess I view bisexuality as . . . the all-encompassing term even though the *bi-* . . . denotes a two-genderedness. Me being genderqueer, I feel like I use bisexuality politically because it's the most well recognized. Even among the LGBT community I don't feel that bisexuality is . . . that prominent either. So I guess I get lazy and I don't want to explain myself too much. . . . I walk in a lot of heterosexual spaces, a lot of white spaces where there's a lot of privilege where I'm like, I don't want to have to explain to you that I'm transgender . . . and I'm pansexual, so I'm gonna use . . . words where [they] have an inkling of what that means, so it's a matter of convenience.
> DAWN: I've always felt like I could love anybody, it didn't really matter what was between their legs, so . . . I went looking for literature to read about what are other people are calling this. I have a really difficult time with the idea of duality in general and labels . . . the idea that it's this or this, I don't feel that in myself at all. So I came across a book that talked about sexual fluidity and that really made sense to me . . . I feel that pretty much everything is on a continuum. The culture in my family, the culture I grew up in being Native American, I grew up thinking circularly . . . it's all connected.

For Jenna, a pansexual genderqueer Asian-American, the complexities of multiple intersecting identities makes bisexual a useful descriptive term because of its history and recognition as a political identity. Like Lou, Jenna interprets bisexual as "all-encompassing," despite its etymology and lack of popularity in queer communities; it is a "convenient" choice for self-description in normative social environments. While Jenna calls the word choice "lazy" to this group of insiders, at the same time, not having to "explain to you that I'm transgender" seems to offer Jenna a measure of self-protection as a racial/ethnic, gender, and sexual outsider moving in normative spaces of white

heterosexual privilege.[35] While Jenna and Lou find their own means of negotiating bisexuality as a term, Dawn resists binary sexual labels and Western dualism altogether. Instead, she understands sexuality within an entirely different epistemological framework—that of Native American culture. Because she "grew up thinking circularly" and sees all things as "connected," she has difficulty with dominant binary conceptions of gender and sexuality as "either-or." Supported by her Native cultural worldview, she perceives sexuality in non-dualistic terms and embraces the idea of a continuum of fluid desires.

Next, Victor picks up Dawn's theme of cultural worldviews to describe his perspective on bisexuality:

> VICTOR: Nice to know there's another Native American person here. . . . I always found myself growing up of always having feet in two worlds . . . because of my racial and ethnic background. So when I realized . . . I was bisexual in my teens, I was . . . I have a model for this, really . . . not an either-or, not half-and-half, but a both-and way of looking at things. And along with that, if you'd asked me what I thought of my sexuality when I was a teenager, I would have said, I'm attracted to both genders. But over time as I've met other bisexual people, I find myself noticing that trying to pin down one definition of bisexuality is really hard. I've heard bisexuals describe themselves as attracted to both genders, attracted to more than one gender, attracted to all genders. And the definition which I tend to now use for myself . . . is being attracted to people but gender isn't a determining factor in my attractions. . . . It's about the electricity, not the plumbing.

Like Dawn, Victor's biracial identity provides him with a model of looking at bisexuality outside of binary cultural perceptions of "either-or" or "half-and-half." Instead, he embraces a non-binary "both-and" epistemological viewpoint that allows him to see the

---

[35] While not a focus of this project, several of my participants and informants identified as transgender, genderqueer, or gender fluid to some degree. What I learned from conversations is that a trans* identity tended to erase from view the fact that they also have sexual identities (e.g. lesbian, gay, bisexual, straight). In other words, gender identity trumped sexual orientation as a marker of who they "really" are. As a bisexual transman once said to me, "Trans people have sexualities!"

value of bisexuality as a way of looking at the world. Rather than "trying to pin down one definition," Victor sees bisexuality as multiple forms of gender attraction and more, which changes "over time" for himself and others. He recognizes the validity of multiple definitions and understands that temporality is a key part of reframing sexuality through a "both-and" worldview. In addition, by describing bisexual desire as "about the electricity, not the plumbing," he reframes the basic organization of sexuality using a metaphor for two systems that function along entirely different principles. From a bisexual perspective, biological sex (i.e. the plumbing) is not a determinate factor for sexual desire (i.e. the electricity).

So far, speakers in this roundtable excerpt have all recognized certain limitations of a bisexual identity, culturally conceived of as in-between heterosexuality and homosexuality. Although they contest binary sexuality, they nevertheless embrace a multisexual perspective gained through bisexuality as an epistemological category or worldview. Their standpoints thus beg a larger question in this project: what if the dominant framework of sexuality *itself* may be shifted from an "either-or" structure that sidelines and erases non-binary sexuality to a "both-and" structure that embraces sexual multiplicity?[36] The roundtable excerpt concludes with a discussion of such "what if" possibilities:

> MARIAH: I think that bisexual and other terms like that . . . they're really tools for political labels . . . to be visible, to make people realize that not everybody is heterosexual and you have all these other . . . options and identities. So eventually that might become so accepted that we don't really label ourselves as much . . .

---

[36] My proposed answer to this question is dimensional sexuality, discussed in Chapters V-VII of this project.

ELISE: Somebody once said, someday it's not going to matter, but until then it matters.
MARTIN: If it ever gets to the point where we're not teenily labeling ourselves on that particular front, we'll be labeling ourselves on other fronts. It seems to be human nature to split into various subgroups for various reasons and to self-identify in ways that feel important, even though any label, any word really, is just a working approximation. . . . No word is completely true.
ELISE: It would be nice if we could get to the point where bisexual is the beginning of the conversation rather than the end of it and go, oh cool! Which flavor?

As the speakers suggest, bisexual and other identity labels are "working approximation[s]" for the "flavor" of one's desires and that no word is "completely true." Yet political stakes remain high for achieving social recognition and justice for people in sexual and other marginalized social locations. Mariah, Elise, Martin, and other speakers understand that, one day in the future, all humans may be free to express multidimensional desire without needing labels or fearing consequences—like omnisexual Jack Harkness in the science fiction series *Torchwood*. However, until that day the words we use "matter."

Not Gay, Not Straight: Bisexual Experience and Identity Politics

So why do some participants choose to call themselves bisexual? In my research interviews, several themes were repeated as primary reasons for claiming a bisexual identity. In a nutshell, the category of bisexuality, broadly conceived, allowed many participants to find and maintain personal connections to identity, community, and politics.

Despite conflicting cultural views of bisexuality, many participants felt the word *bisexual* connected in important ways with their identities as having attraction to more than one gender or feeling that gender is not the most important factor in their attraction

66

to others. "The reason why I use bisexual as a term to describe myself is because that's who I am," said Victor, age 49. "To call oneself bisexual means to me that you recognize the possibility of multiple gender attraction, that one can be attracted to one's own gender as well as others." Similarly, Ann, age 56, feels that bisexual fits both her androgynous gender and her sexual desire. Near the end of a long-term marriage to a man, Ann fell in love with a dyke, came out as lesbian, and left her family. Three-years later, when she became partnered with a man again, she felt she had to reassess her identity and came out again as bisexual. "I'm a mixture of things, which when I think about as being bisexual . . . that fits," she said. "I got the boy and I got the girl."

Another reason bisexual was an important identifier for many participants, particularly those from the Twin Cities area and in poly communities, was that it allowed them to locate and participate in communities where they feel accepted for who they are. "I found my community through that word," said Lauren, age 28. "That word feels like home to me, and it makes me happy when I think of it because, I think, that's how I met my people." As an undergraduate, Lauren did not feel "queer enough" in student LGBT groups and only found full acceptance of her bisexuality when she attended BECAUSE: "To me no other term is going to have that same connection in my life." Indeed, Elise, age 52, noted that often times bisexual communities get built when people recognize a need for bi-specific support and resources and cannot find them: "There's a kind of joke in the sex information and activism community [that] the people who do a lot of that never get laid because they're too busy doing this, that, or the other. And there's a great deal of good-natured commiseration at conferences, but it's true that way for building bi-resources sometimes—you know, you build the thing you needed, but you don't have the

time to get the support from it, which is why you went looking for it. But it's there, and it's better that it's there."

These stories illustrate how identity and community are frequently intertwined with the third reason many participants call themselves bisexual—for them, political activism is important for ensuring that sexual minorities gain social equality and access to resources that address their specific needs. From the very first Pride March in 1970, out bisexuals have been lead organizers and active participants in gay rights activism. Yet bisexual people often face discrimination, prejudice, and erasure from within lesbian and gay communities, both historically and today.[37]

Several project participants involved in LGBT activism have experienced difficulties negotiating bisexual identities as members of gay and lesbian organizations. For example, Grey, age 42, began working as a straight ally in the Chicago gay rights movement during the 1990s. Prior to falling in love with a man at age 24, he had never considered his sexual identity to be anything other than straight. After he came out as bisexual, Grey faced negative treatment in gay and lesbian organizations, which underscores the challenges that bisexually identified people may face in gay political activism: "It was one thing to be a straight man in the gay rights movement. In general, people thought that was really cool, and some people assumed I was gay and some people were disappointed I wasn't gay. . . . But the second that I came out as bi, I feel like my treatment became much, much worse. In the early '90s, people in the gay rights movement thought bi people were muddying the issue and pretending. . . . I think just us

---

[37] For more on biphobia within gay and lesbian communities, see Barker et al., Bisexual Organizing Project, and *Bisexual Invisibility: Impacts and Recommendations*.

existing was disturbing and challenging to people's worldviews, and generally I had the impression they wanted us to shut up."

Even after the term *queer* gained more widespread use, younger bisexuals have continued to face biphobia in spaces designated as queer and inclusive. For example, Lauren said in the mid-2000s queer groups at Michigan State University rejected her bisexual identity because she dated men, even after she became a political organizer and leader: "I went to the dorm queer group, and they told me there was not such a thing as bisexuality. I couldn't call myself bi because I dated too many men, and they don't know anyone who calls themselves that, and I'm not a real queer anyway, and what am I doing here if I have a boyfriend." Though she went on to occupy leadership roles in the group, they never accepted her as a "full queer," she said. "They just erased literally the whole concept of [queer as an] identity." Lauren also joined and became president of the university's GLBTQA political advocacy group, where she still met with frequent rejection of her bisexual identity. "I was told I couldn't bring my boyfriend to events that we were hosting because I didn't look like I represented the community." Lauren did not know any other out bi people, although some people came out to her as bisexual in confidence, fearing similar rejection. "I was coming out of this very biphobic atmosphere without really even realizing it," she said. "I didn't know. I didn't have any other experiences of being accepted in a bisexual identity."

Lauren's story illustrates a dichotomy that bisexually identified activists can experience in queer political organizing—namely, as she said, working as an LGBT advocate "in the presence of this immense rejection of my own personal identity as a bisexual person." Like Grey's experience as an activist, Lauren often felt that she should

69

just "shut up" and go along with the gay and lesbian political agenda: "There's this concept of 'there aren't any bi issues, and if we attain this equality, you'll just be carried along on the coat tails and you'll get access to these things too when you need them.' But that's not actually everything that bi people need, or non-monosexual people need."

Though outsider perspectives and gay agendas tend to lump together LGBT social concerns, bisexuals experience a distinctly different set of social inequalities and oppressions from gay men and lesbians. According to *The Bisexuality Report*, there are "strong grounds for singling out bisexual people as a specific group in policy and practice." Reasons include the following:

- Bisexual people's experiences differ in important ways from those of heterosexual people and those of lesbian and gay people.
- Bi phobia is distinct from homophobia.
- Bisexual people often face discrimination and prejudice from within heterosexual, and lesbian and gay, communities. This can be obscured by LGBT amalgamation.
- Bisexual populations have significantly higher levels of distress and mental health difficulties than equivalent heterosexual or lesbian/gay populations. (Barker et al. 3)

Research has shown that bisexuals are at higher risk than other sexual identity groups for depression, anxiety, and suicide, physical and sexual abuse, and workplace discrimination stemming from biphobia and microaggressions.[38] "We need to feel a sense of belonging and community and not have constant rejection of that part of ourselves and our identity," Lauren said. "That is its own issue that deserves to be pursued because we know isolation really correlates highly with things like health disparities."

---

[38] See Barker et al., Bisexual Organizing Project, and *Bisexual Invisibility: Impacts and Recommendations.*

In 2008, during her first year of graduate school at the University of Minnesota, Lauren finally understood what full acceptance of her identity was like when she attended the BECAUSE Conference: "When I went to BECAUSE, it was the first time I viscerally felt that acceptance. I felt it in my whole being, and I knew what it felt like then to not have to be pushing back all the time around that specific part of myself. And I was elated and angry—incredibly elated and incredibly angry at the same time because I realized that I'd been for five years at Michigan State working really hard as a student organizer there . . . and I'd done absolutely nothing to address my own people. I'd done nothing where I'd ever felt accepted in this part of myself, even though I'd been working on queer organizing issues."

Identity, community, and political alliances are complexly interwoven in Catherine's bisexual identity. As discussed later in Chapter III, Catherine, age 49, sees herself as a "lesbian-identified bisexual" with many personal and political allegiances across lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender communities in the Twin Cities. She has been active in the bisexual community, feminist and queer science fiction organizations, and in many lesbian women's collectives and feminist organizations. She also has been married to a woman for nineteen years. Catherine says she has spent "years and years and years fighting the battle" to maintain her bisexual identity and feminine presentation in women's and lesbian communities: "Even when I'm invited to events that are mostly lesbian . . . where I'm included because we just sort of pretend [that she is lesbian] . . . I'm always the femmiest person in the room unless there's a trans woman there." She notes that other femme-presenting bi women in their mid-40s usually associate in different circles than hers because of pressures to conform to a normative lesbian identity.

71

Nevertheless, she feels the lesbian community has a lot to offer her. "There's a lot of really cool things that they're engaged with and that I want to be part of. It's a question of negotiating how that participation occurs."

Between Worlds: The Insider/Outsider Conundrum

While identity, community, and politics motivated some participants to claim space for bisexuals in LGBT communities, others found that socialization created barriers for accessing those communities. In other words, some participants felt too "straight" or "not bi enough" for queer culture. In some cases, bisexual participants found acceptance through spaces for "alternative lifestyle" communities, such as polyamory. At the Poly Living Conference, for example, ethical non-monogamy and non-traditional relationships provide the focus for educational workshops and community building that is welcoming to bisexual behavior and identity.

In an interview during Poly Living, Alan spoke about his experiences as a bisexual man in various "adult" communities. When Alan married his wife at age 33, he still identified as straight. With her support, however, he began to explore his bisexual attraction to men through their open relationship. He said that dating a gay man and entering into gay spaces and community made him realize why gay men and bi men do not typically date: "There's a huge cultural divide there. Most of the culturally bi men I know are sociologically pretty straight. They resonate much more with mainstream straight world than they do with a relatively closed gay community with it's own norms and mores and taboos and ways of doing things." As a man socialized in straight male cultural norms, Alan felt like an "oddity" to the gay men he met, "something, you know,

72

that was kind of cheap and trite and that they kind of laughed at—but there was never really full acceptance of me for who and what I was." In addition, Alan's experience in "the gay world" was of spaces where sex was detached from personal relationships and anonymous encounters were the norm. "I wouldn't do that with a woman, why would I do that with a guy?" he said. What Alan came to realize about himself was since he is "sociologically straight," he tends to be more attracted to other sociologically straight men. "I'm not sociologically gay," he said. "That world is as alien to me as it is to a straight guy."[39]

Alan said negotiating male-male desire and still living in straight culture's heteronormative frameworks is challenging for bisexual men, especially when faced with homophobic reactions to same-sex sexual attractions. As a result, bisexual men often will not be "out" about their bisexuality or only in limited ways. "The swinger world's not a safe place for a bi man," Alan said. "In the swinger world there's very little acceptance of male bisexuality. They love female bisexuals, but male bisexuals—either straight men are afraid they are going to try to have sex with them, or they make the presumption that if you're bisexual you're an increased risk of bringing STDs or STIs into their life."[40]

Homophobia can also mean that bisexual men fear exploring bisexuality openly while remaining in heteronormative social structures. During the 2012 Bisexual Roundtable at Poly Living, Dave said that as a young man he had no conception of how his desires for both women and men could work within the straight social world he knew,

---

[39] Ethnographic research in gay male cultures has shown that acculturation processes are important for acceptance and group identity. See for example Goodwin and also Weems.

[40] Swinger refers to the practice of a couple (primarily heterosexual) consenting to exchange sex partners with another couple or individual.

and that it was risky to express more than social affection for other men. "In my high school years . . . through Unitarian church groups or just other, more accepting ways of socializing, I became very affectionate with men while never identifying as bi," he said. "But men showing affection to each other in public was always a lot riskier than women showing affection to each other in public, especially for a [teenager]." Because he had girlfriends, Dave felt that his affection and sexual attraction for male friends was just a "normal" part of close friendships: "I think what kept me from reaching out was just this expectation that—like I do remember asking close . . . male friends, can we have sex, can we try this, and being rebuffed on a couple of occasions. But it never occurred to me at that age to put the two together and actually ask a guy out on a date." Dave remained monogamous in his fourteen-year marriage, though his same-sex desires were still present. "I remember thinking that I really regret that I never slept with a guy," he said. It was only after his divorce that Dave began to explore his bisexuality and polyamory by dating men and women.

As a man who enjoys affectionate friendships with both men and women, Dave discovered another barrier to bisexual relationships with men: "I tend to have quasi-romantic friendships, but I seem to be able to bridge fluidly that gap between all those things with women, and with men I'm either really touchy-feely-lovey-huggy but we're not having sex, or we're having sex but we're not touchy-feely-huggy." In the following excerpt, participants respond to Dave's dilemma and touch on some of the gendered implications of this situation:

> DAVE: I do a lot of dating online and writing and getting to know people by writing. . . . I would really just love it if a guy wrote me back with something other than 'you want to have sex?' . . .
> FEMALE: You want to be loved for more than your body.

DAVE: Right, I want to be loved for both by men . . . and I find it so easy with women. I find it so easy that she writes back . . . and now we're writing, and then we're going to meet, and pow, the fireworks are going to go off, but it never seems to happen that we write, write, write back and forth with men.

PAUL: . . . Here's what hit me when you said that. Maybe for the other guy it's safer for him to go right to the sex, once the initial connection's been made, then to explore the other side. Maybe . . . because he's leading with it, it doesn't mean it's not there.

DAVE: I think that's true, and I do go that way too, and hope to make that connection afterwards sometimes, and it's still . . . the same thing. I think those things tend to be, or I find them to be, more separated than I would like them to be.

The dialogue suggests how for Dave, as well as for Alan and other straight-socialized bisexual men, binary cultural perceptions of heterosexual-masculine and homosexual-feminine may come into direct conflict with their desire for both emotional and sexual intimacy with men. As Paul points out, going directly to sex may be "safer" for men living in straight culture and dating other men online for multiple reasons, such as maintaining norms of straight masculinity. For example, while sociologically straight men may express homosocial affection for each other or may be sexual under certain exceptional circumstances, to want both love and sex with men violates straight masculine norms and thus may be perceived homophobically as "gay." Recently, popularized terms like "bromance" and "man crush" provide a means of acknowledging and diffusing love and desire between men without relinquishing a straight identity or culture. Nevertheless, binary heterosexuality and homosexuality cannot adequately account for the "both-and" of bisexual male emotional and physical desire and so erases the actual presence of bisexual men in straight culture.

For gay-identified men, queer community may be necessary for social and personal connection and survival. However, bisexual men can more easily co-exist or "pass" in straight cultural spaces, so they may feel a less immediate need for queer

communities. Indeed, like other male participants who came to bisexuality as adults, both Alan and Dave have no wish to transition into queer or LGBT communities. "When you're gay, it's a burnt ship," Alan said. "The thing with being bi that's so difficult is, you can skate. You have a wife—you have a beard, you know? People perceive you as straight, you're sociologically straight, you're married—why would they think anything else? So it's actually, I think, in some ways a lot harder for a [bi] man to come out and be authentic because he doesn't have to be. You're gay, so you find the gay community and they welcome you with open arms. . . . But if you're bi, you know, you're living between two worlds." Moreover, biphobia may discourage bisexual men from being open while living within straight culture, especially if they have families. For example, Dave feared that if his ex-wife discovered that he dated men, she might leverage his bisexuality against him in a custody battle for their children.

Straight socialization and cultural expectations posed challenges for female bisexual participants, as well. Having spent most of her adult life identified as straight, Ann found adjusting to queer social spaces difficult because she did not know the right social cues for dating women—a situation that left her feeling like an outsider. "I feel that's the bisexual dilemma," she said. "If I clearly defined as lesbian, then I would know, here's how I act with all women, and if I clearly defined as heterosexual, here's how I act toward men or both, but when you're bisexual, oh no, what's safe? What do I do in that setting?" For example, during a trip to London with a LGBT choir, Ann went to a crowded gay and lesbian bar to dance and to meet women. "I was totally learning the language that I didn't know or understand, and blundering," she said. "I smiled at the women the way that my patterns had taught me to smile, which was . . . oh you're a

woman, you don't have to worry about me, I'm not a sexual conquest, you're not after me." Ann recalled that she did not consciously think about the social cues she was using at the time, but the effects were apparent. Approaching a man and a woman who were dancing together, she attempted to dance with them as she would have done in a straight bar when she wanted to dance: "I reverted to my patterns of 'heterosexual couple,' so you don't look eye to eye with the man and it's safe to do so with the woman . . . not thinking I'm a predator at all, but just wanting to dance, and they kind of frowned and got off the dance floor." Only afterward did she realize that the woman thought she was hitting on her. "So I recognized, oh my god, I'm a clod, I don't even know what to do in these settings. And so as a bisexual, I still to this day, what do I do in that setting?"

Moreover, gender presentation presented challenges for some participants who do not identify or present in gender normative ways. For example, Prajna, age 27, said her gender identity has been a strong influence in her sexual identity and relationship choices. For many years she identified as transgender, even cross-dressing as a boy through most of her first year in high school until her first heterosexual relationship around age 16. She still identifies as genderqueer and feels that loving someone has nothing to do with birth sex. But because her primary relationships, both monogamous and poly, have been with men, she feels inadequate to pursue the femme women she is attracted to. "When it comes to sexuality, I do feel all this tremendous pressure to either be presenting myself as gay and therefore attracting women, or presenting myself as female and therefore attracting men," she said. "There's some degree to which I'm like, I can't really pursue women because I don't know how, because I'm inept, because . . . I didn't get on that boat quick enough in life." Because of such polarizations, Prajna said that she does not

feel "bi enough" by cultural standards, even though she has always been attracted to women and has fallen in love with a woman: "Within the LGBTQAAI-whatever-the-fuck community, there's this elitism . . . that, 'all those women who are experimenting by making out with other women for the sake of performing for men—they're the fakes . . . but we are the real whatever.' That division leaves me in the space of . . . since I've only made out with women, and it's generally been in front of men . . . and because I didn't have sex with [girlfriend], even though we slept in the same bed all the damn time . . . there's this 'I'm not quite bi enough' [feeling] because I haven't buried my face in some gal's lap."

Also, Greg, age 23, said his genderqueer identity and presentation have led some of his female friends to assume that he is gay and therefore a "safe" male friend—a situation he finds frustrating. "It's confusing because they thought they could read me," he said. "I try to be very up front about the fact that I am queer in the genderqueer sense and also in the pansexual [sense]. . . . I'm attracted to people of all genders, that's the easiest way to describe [it], and I don't want to feel like . . . a wolf in sheep's clothing." In spite of his explicit identity, common gay stereotypes and media representations often lead people to assume they know his sexuality, which aggravates him: "I've been invited to so many girls nights as a gay man, which just makes me want to pull my hair out. If you want to invite me as whatever I'm identifying as that day, that's awesome. Maybe that day I am a gay man, but there is still all sorts of complications with that." The experiences of Prajna and Greg demonstrate some of the complex relationships among participants' gender identity, gender and sexual attraction, and sexual identity. The next

section examines more closely how participant respond to gendered stereotypes of

bisexual women and men.

Gender Stereotyping and Bisexual Experience

Similar to in the etic views of bisexuality outlined at the beginning of this chapter,

project participants identified three common themes in bisexual stereotyping—

bisexuality is just a phase, bisexuals are interested in sex all the time, and bisexuals

cannot be loyal. While these stereotypes are attributed to bisexuals in general, gender

plays a significant role in media representations of bisexuality (see Chapter VI). And as

already suggested, gender stereotyping in turn influences how bisexually identified

people of different genders respond to and negotiate their own gender and sexual

identities.

For example, when participants in the BiSciFi Roundtable were asked what

negative bisexual representations they saw in culture—not as an insider looking out, from

the outside looking in—here is an excerpt of how several women in the group responded:

> ELISE: I've got a pet peeve. All bisexuals are sexually interested all the time, and
> all you have to do is ask. My answer to that . . . is, hello, I am not a public utility.
> You cannot put a quarter in me and get, you know. . . . The same thing goes for
> poly. I have a button that says, "I'm poly, but I'm picky."
> MAGENTA: I'm really tired of the image that it's a stage I'm going through. You
> know, that once I grow up I'll decide or something. I've been going through this
> stage for a very long time and show no signs of deciding. . . .
> CATHERINE: Oh, just pick a lane and get in one.
> FEMALE: Sssssst . . .
> FEMALE: Pick a side.
> CATHERINE: Pick a side, pick a lane, pick a team. . . .
> MARIAH: We're not loyal.
> FEMALE: Make up your mind.
> ELISE: Pledge allegiance, one direction or another.
> FEMALE: Pledge allegiance, right.
> FEMALE: Sssssst . . .

This brief dialogue illustrates some of the reactions that female participants have with common bisexual stereotypes that equate bisexuality with psychological immaturity and ethical unreliability or that reduce their desires to "a public utility"—a metaphor that negatively associates female bisexuality with prostitution and public toilets or with voyeuristic male fantasy in pornography. Starting with Catherine, the women vocalize anger and frustration with these stereotypes by changing speech registers—from insider observations to the accusatory and blaming words of outsiders. Verbalizing these outside voices allows them, in turn, to mock and ridicule such words through exaggerated tones and hissing.

In the next sections, I take a closer look at two common examples of how female and male genders are associated with bisexuality and how some participants respond to and are affected by those associations.

Mythical Beasts

As already suggested, a common bisexual gender stereotype in U.S. culture is the sexually available bi woman.[41] So pervasive is the stereotype, Alan said, that in poly and "MW4W" (Men and Women for Women) online dating circles, the figure of the "hot bi babe" has become a sort of in-joke: "You'll see the profiles, a guy and a woman, married

---

[41] The trope of the "hot bi babe" in media images can be traced to changes in LGBT representation on television in the 1990s. According to Steven Capsuto's history of LGBT images on television, representations of lesbian and bisexual women and female same-sex kissing increased on television during the mid-1990s due to media activism by the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) and industry recognition of LGBT audiences as a market (256-260). Moreover, catering to straight male fantasies of sexy lesbians (an influence from the porn industry) also helped to increase representations of female same-sex kissing on television—so much so that the trope of men turned on by lesbians became a running joke in 1990s sitcoms like *Roseanne* (332). Since the 2000s, same-sex kissing between female "hot bi babes" has dramatically increased as ratings boosters aimed at queer and straight male audiences. However, representations of male same-sex kissing remain far less common.

couple, looking for only women that are a bisexual unicorn. It's so friggen cliché it's pathetic." A bisexual unicorn, he explained, is "an elusive animal that doesn't exist. There's no such thing as a unicorn, and single hot bi babes that want to date you as a couple are about as common as unicorns. That's the joke."

Roundtable participants also referred to the figure of the "hot bi babe." At the 2011 Bisexual Roundtable, for example, participants located this stereotype in college girls who experiment or who get drunk in bars and make out with each other for male attention. Likewise, participants in the BiSciFi Roundtable pointed to such drunk college girls and other young, sexually available bi women as the popular representation of bisexual culture—one that does not include men:

> SHELLEY: Aren't all bisexuals women? Hot models. No men.
> FEMALE: Um hm.
> FEMALE: Yeah.
> MAGENTA: Who will sleep with anyone.
> SHELLEY: Who will sleep with anyone, absolutely, and, you know, they're all in the videos. So that's the culture that has been touted as the bisexual culture, but no one has ever really put a face or a real, you know, frame around it.
> VICTOR: The hot bi babe.
> FEMALE: Um hm.
> SHELLEY: Yeah, exactly.

Again, in this excerpt female participants express frustrations by voicing outsider attitudes and point to "the videos" (e.g. YouTube, music videos, films) as projecting (male) fantasy images of (female) bisexual culture. However, while participants generally scorned such media representations as reinforcing the stereotype of bi women as sexually available to men, not all "hot bi babe" images were discounted as wholly negative. For example, during both the 2011 Bisexual Roundtable and the BiSciFi Roundtable, the character 13 on *House* was brought up as a "hot bi babe" who was less stereotypical because of her strong personality:

81

ELISE: There's some good things I like about her because she will take no shit, and she will take no prisoners.
MARIAH: Well she's not the hot bi bimbo that will . . . take any offer for a hot . . . threesome kind of thing, you know. That's kind of the stereotype.
LOU: She was first introduced to the show and to *House* as a lesbian, and then she got involved with one of the other doctors who was male. There wasn't any talk of, oh now you're heterosexual. (BiSciFi)

Participants at both roundtables also referenced just one bisexual male character—

Captain Jack Harkness from the science fiction series *Torchwood*—as the only exception

to the gendered image of the "hot bi babe" as female:

MAGENTA: I'm thinking of one that is not the hot bi babe, and that is Jack in *Torchwood*.
FEMALE: Jack isn't a hot bi babe?
ELISE: He is totally a hot bi babe! [agreement, laughing]
MAGENTA: Okay. Not male, female. . . .
MARTIN: Okay, for what the term referenced, that was not true. It was a very gendered term. (BiSciFi)

While participants recognize that the "very gendered" use of the term "hot bi babe" refers

almost exclusively to women, they also turn the popularized image of female sexual

fluidity on its head by including Jack, a swashbuckling hero figure and favorite character

for many science fiction media fans. Jack and 13 are examples of how participants push

against the empty signifier of the "hot bi babe" and fill the figure with personalities of

substance and depth. Through identifying "positive" representations of bisexual women

(and men) in charge of their own sexualities, participants give their own "face and . . .

frame" to bisexual culture.

One of the repercussions of the stereotype of bisexual women as sexually

available may be increased risk of sexual harassment and violence.[42] Catherine, who

---

[42] In 2010, the first nationwide U.S. study of domestic violence rates broken down by sexual orientation showed that 61.1% of bisexual women had experienced rape, physical violence, or stalking by a partner at some point in their lives, while 43.8% of lesbians and 35% of straight women had experienced at least one

works in Information Technology environments, says that since the age of Google she does not have control over how she is perceived at work. "I can tell you, you're coming from a different school of harassment if you're out at work as bisexual than you are as just completely unattainable for whatever reason," Catherine said during her interview. "Neither one is particularly good, but there's a difference in how you're perceived. I know a lot of straight men who are going to be a lot more comfortable hitting on you if you're out as bi at work." Those same men would not act the same way toward a woman who is out as a lesbian. In that case, she said, "You're . . . ether their buddy or their enemy. You're in a strict box, and for whatever reason you're off limits." While she acknowledges that there are always exceptions, in her experience in a male-dominated environment, "I'll be hit on more as a bi woman. And that's also about femme presentation of self too. If I presented more androgynously or somewhat more butchly, I'd probably have a different set of issues."

Double Standards

Another effect of bisexual gender stereotyping involves differing levels of cultural acceptance for bi women and bi men. While girl-on-girl kissing and female sexual fluidity has become more visible and acceptable in mainstream culture, bisexual male

---

of the three. Bisexual women were also the most likely to have been raped by anyone, partner or not—46.1% of bi women had experienced rape at some point, compared with 13.1% of lesbian women and 14.7% of straight women. And bi women were more likely to report that domestic violence had negatively impacted their lives—57.4% of bisexual women who had experienced violence said they also suffered aftereffects like missing work or having symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. Only 33.5% of lesbian women and 28.2% of straight women said the same. The survey also showed that 89.9% of the perpetrators of domestic violence against bisexual women were male. The Centers for Disease Control interviewed a total of 9,709 women for the survey—96.5% of them identified as straight, 2.2% as bisexual, and 1.3% as lesbian (North). For additional information, see *The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey* (Walters, Chen, and Breiding).

intimacy remains stigmatized in many contexts. For example, Alan said his experience of male bisexuality has been "a double standard for men and women." He remembers a cultural shift for female bisexuality in the mid-1990s with Madonna's collection of sexual portraits in *Sex* and the coming out of some high profile women as bisexual: "And now you can't swing a dead cat without hitting a bisexual woman—certainly not in anything that's alternative, whether it be the Burner community, the swinger community, the poly community, or the BDSM community."[43] However, male bisexuality has not received the same kind of acceptance in many of those communities and certainly not in mainstream culture: "Most of the men who I've run across who identify as bi are on the down low. . . . A large percentage of them are cheating on their partners because their partners wouldn't understand. There's a real double standard, and a real difference in behavior and acceptability."

Alan's personal observations are supported by research on cultural attitudes toward bisexuality. In 1997, for example, Mickey Eliason conducted a study of 229 self-identified heterosexual students at a large Midwestern university. The survey consisted of a set of 23 statements describing common stereotypes about bisexuality using the Beliefs about Sexual Minorities Scale, i.e. six statements depicting a range of attitudes (celebration, acceptance, tolerance, disapproval, disgust, hatred). Different versions of the survey collected information about beliefs towards lesbians, gay men, bisexual women, and bisexual men. Eliason found bisexual men were rated as "very unacceptable" by 26%

---

[43] "Burner" refers to Burning Man, which are large annual gatherings that promote radical self-reliance, radical self-expression, and cooperation; "swinger" refers to the practice of a couple (primarily heterosexual) consenting to exchange sex partners with another couple; "BDSM" refers to a wide variety of non-normative erotic or "kinky" practices such as bondage, dominance and submission, and role playing where participants consent to take on complementary but unequal power positions in the erotic practice.

of students. Conversely, more students rated lesbians and gay men as "very acceptable"

(22% for both groups) than bisexual women (14%) or bisexual men (12%).

"Disapproval" on the basis of moral or religious grounds was greatest for bisexual men at

21% (144-145). When responses were grouped by gender (170 female, 59 male), the

heterosexual men showed a greater tendency to believe in several stereotypes about

bisexuality: that bisexuals have more sexual partners, are more likely to have more than

one sexual partner at a time, are really gays or lesbians who are afraid to admit it, spread

AIDS to lesbians and heterosexuals, and are more accepted in society than gays/lesbians

(148).

Recent research seems to indicate that the cultural climate for bisexual men may

be in the process of shifting. For example, the keynote address for the 2010 Bisexual

Research Convention in London presented preliminary results of ethnographic studies

conducted by five researchers in the U.S. and U.K.:

> In our research on six soccer teams, a rugby team, and on street-corner conversations with bisexual men aged 18 to 42 in London, New York and Los Angeles, we are finding that, collectively, there is an overt acceptance of homosexuality and bisexuality among heterosexual male youth, and that bisexual men are mostly thriving in their communities. In fact, 48 of 60 university soccer players (ostensibly heterosexual) in the United States recognized a level of bisexuality within themselves. (Ripley et al. 203)

Despite these indications of change happening in some sports and youth cultures in large

metropolitan areas, in general the cultural climate remains more challenging for bisexual

men and women than for lesbians and gay men. For example, a recent U.S. survey of

1,500 adults showed that respondents were generally negative in terms of their attitudes

toward bisexual men and women. Sponsored by the University of Pittsburgh and the

Indiana University-Bloomington, results of the study were presented at the 2013

85

American Public Health Association's annual meeting in Boston. To test gaps in bisexuality research on "double discrimination" from straight and gay/lesbian communities and to control for other demographic variables such as age, race/ethnicity, and income, the researchers developed a new scale—Bisexualities: Indiana Attitudes Scale (BIAS)—to assess attitudes toward bisexual men and bisexual women (Friedman et al.). According to researchers, almost 15% of the sample disagreed that bisexuality is a legitimate sexual orientation. Indeed, men who identify themselves as heterosexual were three times more likely to categorize bisexuality as illegitimate. Researchers also noted that male bisexuals likely suffer more stigma than female bisexuals, and "respondents who identified as gay or lesbian responded significantly less positively toward bisexuality than those identifying as bisexual, indicating that even within the sexual minority community, bisexuals face profound stigma." As a result, researchers said that bisexual men and women experience unique and significant psychosocial stressors in comparison to exclusively heterosexual and homosexual counterparts ("Considerable").

Though many have recognized how media exposure and access to the Internet have contributed to shifting attitudes toward gay men and lesbians, continued stereotyping and double standards may still negatively affect bisexual people in different social locations.[44] For example, male participants in the poly community noticed a distinct double standard in online dating sites and in swinger communities where the cultural stereotypes of male bisexuals as a threat to straight masculinity or to public health (i.e. bisexual men as HIV carriers) may contribute to biphobia. As a result, Alan,

---

[44] See for example Atkins; Beemyn and Steinman; Capsuto; Hall and Pramaggiore; and Moorman.

Dave, and several other male participants said they were cautious about when and to whom they came out to as bisexual.

Some of the effects of this gender double standard were illustrated during a dialogue between bisexual men and women at the 2011 Bisexuality Roundtable. In the excerpt below, discussion came around to how perception of identity may change attitudes toward bisexual men:

> JOHN: I had a profile for years on . . . a swinger profile on a large-scale site—and I have met a lot of people. And I was swinging as a single, so there's a little acceptance that, you know, you're joining a couple. I had been together with other men . . . not solely as male to male, it was always part of a threesome, so I decided to change my description from male to bisexual male, and I got feedback from about half of the people I'd been with. "You never told me that!" . . . "How, how dare you! You were trying to make moves on my husband!" And, so I changed it back. . . .
> SUE: Wow.
> BETH: He just wanted to see what would happen, yes.
> MIKE: So they retroactively changed what happened in their own minds. That's—
> BETH: Very negative toward the bi male.

Here, John describes how some married couples swinging with a single man may maintain their normative heterosexuality by refusing male bisexual identity. In this circumstance, the assumption of heterosexuality and the presence of a woman may license male bisexual behavior without threat to presumed heterosexual identity or to the men's masculinity. However, John's change of description to male bisexual on his profile may have caused some couples to reinterpret past experiences with him as threatening to heterosexual identity and so provoked homo/biphobic reactions. Sue and Beth both show sympathy for John's experience, recognizing a cultural double standard exists for bisexual women and men.

Later in the 2011 Bisexuality Roundtable, discussion came back to why some

people who behave bisexually, particularly men, may choose to identify as bisexual while

others do not:

> KATE: I guess another question on some level is, you know, does it serve you to
> say that you're bisexual. I mean, what do we get out of that?
> BILL: A lot of people don't like labels at all. . . . I know there's this famous thing
> where they went to the nude beach . . . and they asked people, "are you a nudist?"
> And like, 70% said no. But there they are naked on the beach. So, sometimes
> people say, okay, I do this but it's not who I am. . . .
> KATE: Right. It's the identity. Do you identify, or do you just behave?
> MIKE: I remember hearing that in . . . urban centers . . . in the inner cities there
> are . . . men that we would imagine as being bisexual generally, and they would
> describe themselves as being on the down-low. They're not gay . . .
> SUE: Yeah. Most of them are bi.
> MIKE: . . . They just like having sex with other men occasionally.

Kate's question about how it "serve[s] you to say you're bisexual" gets to what is at stake

in bisexual behavior and identity. Since bisexuality is positioned in culture as the

inauthentic middle ground between heterosexuality and homosexuality, people who

behave bisexually but refuse minority identity labels can align with heterosexual identity,

so long as behaviors are not perceived as threatening norms. As Bill and Mike's

comments show, maintaining heterosexual alignment may be a strategy some bisexual

men use to avoid cultural double standards.

Beth and several other women in the group at first appear to understand the

"down-low" behavior of some men who do not describe themselves as gay. As noted

earlier, bisexual men socialized as straight may encounter barriers to gay community or

may have social investments in maintaining normative heterosexuality and masculinity.

As the roundtable dialogue continues, however, a division emerges between some female

and male participants over the issue of public health:

SUE: And they don't tell their partners about it, is part of the problem, which is why HIV is so rampant.

BETH: I've had one fellow that I've known all my life, and the more I got to know him as we're both adults, he seems much more bi to me, and he says 'I can only get emotionally involved with women, I can only fall in love with women,' but boy he sure loves sex with men. But, when it comes to the Red Cross and donating blood, you have to put that you're bisexual for that, and I said, "You have to accept it on some level because, my God, are you tainting the blood supply?" And it was a big issue. . . . But the fact that he wouldn't accept the label as—like at some level you have to because, you know, on the forms, yeah, I can check Hispanic, not just white. . . .

ANN: So that's what you ask people, "What do you check on the blood forms now?"

BETH: . . . because you have to check something to be honest.

SUE: It's usually, do you sleep with, have you slept with, someone of the same sex . . .

BILL: . . . and people lie on the blood forms. It's such a ridiculous thing.

SUE: . . . and the Red Cross doesn't even test all the blood.

BETH: It's not safe.

BILL: Well, hold on, hold on, hold on. We're getting into politics here, but one could make an argument that the Red Cross rule of not allowing blood from people who are gay or bi is ridiculous and that it's an act of . . .

MIKE: . . . built out of '80s paranoia.

BILL: . . . yeah, that it's an act of resistance to give the right answers, so you can give blood so you can save people's lives.

For the sake of social responsibility, Sue and Beth argue that bisexual men have to "be honest" on some level and suggest that bisexual men who do not accept the identity may endanger blood supplies and the health of their female partners. These concerns align with the social stereotype that male bisexuality—rather than unsafe sex practices—contributes to the spread of HIV. Beth's story also touches on the stereotype of non-white bisexual men as a "high risk" group. Bill challenges the direction of the discussion, pointing out that "politics" are involved in public health issues and the "ridiculous[ness]" of forcing identity declarations on blood donor forms since bisexuals may choose to be socially responsible by "giving the right answers" so their blood can save lives.

This roundtable dialogue illustrates how gendered double standards contribute to a double bind for bisexual men—to avoid stigma by maintaining alignment with heterosexual identity or to act as responsible citizens by "coming out" as bisexual. As Mike suggests, the linkage between declaring minority identities and a "safe" blood supply has been a common biphobic response to male bisexuality since the 1980s AIDS crisis—one still perpetuated in health services in spite of recent research that challenges this correlation.[45] Bill concludes that bisexual men may perform acts of "resistance" to resolve such double binds and maintain a viable social positioning and identity.

As I have shown, a cultural perception that female bisexuality is more acceptable than male bisexuality contributes to gendered stereotypes of the "hot bi babe" and bisexual male threat. Such cultural double standards may lead to social double binds, which may in turn lead to double lives for some bisexual men. As I have suggested, poly communities may offer a viable lifestyle for some bisexuals by supporting ethical non-monogamy, by accepting bisexual behavior and identity, and by offering a variety of open relationship and alternative family structures. Joining poly communities helped some participants to mitigate issues such as negative gender stereotyping and differences in straight/queer socialization. However, open relationships are not necessarily appropriate or desirable for all bisexuals, especially for those who prefer monogamous commitments. In the next section, I look at some of the complex relationships among bisexuality, monogamy, and non-monogamy.

---

[45] For more on AIDS research and policies that stigmatize men who have sex with men, see Decena's "Profiles," and Miller, André, Ebin, and Bessonova.

Bisexuality and (Non)Monogamy

Since part of my fieldwork was conducted at Poly Living conferences, it is not surprising that some participants see bisexuality and non-monogamy as intimately connected; in fact, nearly 60% of my participants identified as polyamorous. However, the relationship between bisexuality and (non)monogamy is complex and often controversial for bisexually identified people. For example, a cultural myth that bisexuality requires non-monogamy contributes to stereotypes of bisexuals as promiscuous, cheating, or otherwise incapable of monogamous commitments. Bisexually identified people respond in multiple, conflicting ways to this myth and the stereotypes it engenders. A case in point: At the 2012 BECAUSE Conference, a keynote speaker called for bisexuals to build stronger communities through "genital networking." While some may see this as a sex-positive response to identity and community, in defiance of cultural stereotypes, an audience member challenged the speaker for making assumptions about bisexual identity and for an apparent disregard for monogamous bisexuals in the community and audience.

Cinematic conventions that represent bisexuality as threesomes or as dual-gender love triangles (discussed in Chapter VI) may help to reinforce the cultural myth that to be bisexual one must be actively sexual with more than one gender. A recent media example may help to illustrate how this myth works: *True Blood* star Anna Paquin came out as bisexual in 2010, the same year she married co-star Stephen Moyer. In July 2014, she talked openly on *Larry King Now* about her bisexual identity in light of her marriage to Moyer and the birth of their twins. In a much-quoted excerpt, Paquin explained to King

that her bisexual self-identity and monogamous, opposite-sex marriage are not mutually

exclusive:

> KING: Are you a non-practicing bisexual?
> PAQUIN: Well, I am married to my husband and we are happily monogamously married.
> KING: But you were bisexual?
> PAQUIN: Well, I don't think it's a past-tense thing.
> KING: No?
> PAQUIN: No. Are you still straight if you are with somebody—if you were to break up with them or if they were to die, it doesn't prevent your sexuality from existing. It doesn't really work like that. (Nichols)

By asking Paquin if she is a "non-practicing bisexual," King equates bisexuality with

temporary behavior rather than with a distinct identity or sexual orientation—an

assumption she pointedly defies. As discussed in Chapter I, assumptions like King's draw

upon binary frameworks of sexual knowledge that interpret the sexuality of another based

on the gender of one's sexual partner(s). If a person is monogamously married, then the

etic presumption is that any previous bisexual "behavior" was only a temporary "phase"

and that one's "real" sexuality is evident in opposite- or same-sex gender within a

coupled relationship—assumptions that contribute to bisexual invisibility and erasure in

culture.

Like Paquin, some participants disagreed about the relationship between

bisexuality and (non)monogamy, as illustrated in this excerpt from the 2011 Bisexuality

Roundtable:

> MIKE: I think part of the problem with being bisexual, and being accepted as being bisexual, is if you're actively bisexual, that means that there's a polyamorous context. . . .
> BETH: Poly works for bi's.
> MIKE: . . . there's so many bi people out there, if you're actively being bisexual, you have to be in a couple of different relationships at some level. . . .

92

ANN: Wait, I don't agree with that. Why can't you be bisexual and you have a man one year and . . . a woman the next year. I mean, actively [means] when you're being with a man and woman at the same time, yes, poly, but . . .
SUE: Yes, I have my good friend whose bi, he's like that. He's monogamous and bi.
ANN: . . . I define myself as bisexual and I'm monogamous. I'm with a man, and three years ago I was with a woman. So, no, it does not define us all.

Here, Mike understands that the "problem with being bisexual" is it violates cultural norms for both monogamy and monosexuality. His perception aligns with cultural coding that represents bisexuals as participating in more than one relationship with people of more than one gender at any given time. Given how bisexuality is culturally represented, monogamous marriage seems to foreclose bisexual possibility, as King assumes. Mike and Beth suggest that polyamory "works for bi's" because it provides an ethical means for some bisexuals in committed relationships to engage in non-monogamous multigender relationships within a supportive community. However, just as Paquin disrupts King's assumption that bisexuality and monogamy are mutually exclusive, Ann's interjection contests the idea that bisexuality requires non-monogamy. Ann, Paquin, and the vocal audience member all illustrate that "it does not define us all."

Myths that assume that bisexuals are incapable of monogamy are why some bisexuals make a point of labeling themselves as monogamous bisexuals. In a recent online post, for example, blogger Patrick RichardsFink says that, in spite of his gender transgressions like fingernail polish and long dangly earrings, through a monosexual worldview he "looks straight" when he is with his wife. "So this is why I make a point of labeling myself as a monogamous bisexual," he says. "By being visible as such, I break down the metamyth, which also breaks down the idea that I will leave my wife someday

93

for a man, that I am a greedy cheater on the make, and the myth that I'm just a gay man with a beard (willing or otherwise)" (RichardsFink, "The Monogamous Bisexual").

Revisiting Categories of Sexuality

As participant comments make clear, etic perceptions of bisexuality are too narrowly conceived. As a result, people involved in bisexual communities often repeat the same messages to outsiders as to what bisexuality is *not*—e.g. bisexuality is not part heterosexual and part homosexual, and it does not reinforce binary gender and sexuality.[46] However, as I have shown, ethnography conducted within bisexual communities may help to clarify emic views of what bisexuality *is*. As noted earlier, loosely linked online and face-to-face social networks and institutions form a bisexual community with its own "sets of ideas and premises" that allow for a distinct way of interpreting the world and negotiating cultural dynamics. Based on my research in The BiSciFi Project, the following statements summarize some of the ideas and premises that help to organize a bisexual worldview:

- Bisexuality describes (the potential for) a range of non-binary emotional and/or sexual desires and expressions over time;

- Bisexuality embraces the ability to move fluidly along a continuum of multiple genders over time;

---

[46] For example, the annual BECAUSE Conference in Minneapolis offers "Bisexuality 101" workshops to educate newcomers and allies of all sexual orientations about bisexuality. Online, educational organizations such as the Bisexuality Resource Center in Boston offer articles that explain why the "binary" argument against bisexuality is fallacious and why one does not have "a right to define the label 'bisexuality' for others regardless of your vast knowledge of Latin prefixes" ("Way Beyond"). Also, bisexual bloggers such as Patrick RichardsFink often write about etic myths and misunderstandings in order to articulate an emic bisexual worldview.

- Bisexuality may involve non-gender based aspects of desire over time;

- Bisexuality and (non)monogamy are compatible over time.

Bisexuality as a category of sexual knowledge enables participants to negotiate cultural narratives about their desires and to create a coherent sexual worldview. From this worldview, sexual categorization *itself* is not the problem, as some queer theory suggests. Rather, a bisexual worldview reveals how the dominant epistemological categories of heterosexuality and homosexuality alone are inadequate to capture non-binary desires and experiences.

Worldviews emerge from systems of meanings that structure the self-understanding of a culture or community. As discussed in Chapter I, binary heterosexuality and homosexuality are the dominant meaning systems that structure sexuality, monogamy, relationships, family, and much more in Western culture. These binary categories are logically conceived of as mutually exclusive "either-or" options—*either* this *or* that, but *not* both—a worldview that is intolerant of desire and identities that color outside of black and white lines. Alternatively, a bisexual worldview is non-binary. The logical construction of bisexuality allows for holding simultaneously two options as possible—*both* this *and* that, and perhaps *more*. As participant stories illustrate, a bisexual worldview enables one to conceptualize a colorful continuum of sexual multiplicity.

Bisexuality is already a necessary and integral part of the epistemological domain of sexuality, as suggested by Angelides' triune model of sexuality (see Chapter I). However, in order to adequately account for a bisexual worldview, I propose that Western categories of sexuality may be reorganized in non-binary terms. As I discuss in

95

Chapter V, this means redefining the relationship of gender to sexuality and expanding

the frame so that fluidity, (non)monogamy, and other aspects of sexual desire and

relationships may be accounted for over time—in short, sexuality needs to be reorganized

in multiple dimensions.

In addition to clarifying an emic understanding of bisexuality, my ethnographic

research also indicates that a bisexual worldview works to negotiate etic perceptions that

tend to dismiss or erase bisexuality in cultural discourses. Although bi people engage

multiple strategies to resist such erasures, the following statements summarize some emic

premises that enable bisexuals to negotiate their positioning:

- Bisexuals exist;

- Bisexual and queer may overlap but are not synonymous;

- Bisexual experience differs from gay and lesbian experience;

- The complexities of bisexual experience are compounded by other
  intersecting social locations;

- Biphobia is real.

These statements suggest that it is important for more ethnographic research to be

conducted from within bisexual communities—both online and face-to-face—to better

understand how biphobia, erasure, and social locations impact bisexuals. While some

health-related studies are beginning to uncover the profound affects of these issues for

bisexuals, assumptions about sexuality in terms of binary categories still persist in health

and social science research models and methodologies.[47] Ethnographic research into

---

[47] See Atkins; Barker et al.; Beemyn and Steinman; *Bisexual Invisibility*; Bisexual Organizing Project; Friedman et al.; Miller, André, Ebin, and Bessonova; North; Rust; and Walters, Chen, and Breiding.

bisexual worldviews may provide a better means of understanding non-binary sexuality

and developing new methods for approaching sexuality in social science research.

CHAPTER III

SPECULATIVE NARRATIVES AS CULTURAL RESOURCES

In Chapter II, I examined how bisexuality as an identity helped participants in this project to make sense of their lives, to negotiate cultural attitudes, and to find communities. Chapter III extends this ethnographic inquiry by asking how bisexually identified project participants use non-"realistic" or "speculative" fiction to help negotiate oppressive cultural norms and assumptions in the lived world. To do this, I first discuss some of the textual aspects of speculative fiction and the social processes it inspires. I then demonstrate some of these elements at play in a conversation from the BiSciFi Roundtable. Finally, I take a closer look at the life stories of four participants to examine how these elements may offer certain resources to bisexually positioned readers.

Because this chapter extends the ethnographic methods and research began in Chapter II, my intention is not to present detailed arguments regarding the formal or generic boundaries of speculative narratives. Rather, my concern is to contextualize and explicate how speculative fictions connect to bisexual lives.

Generic Tendencies and Social Processes

As a "paraliturature" or popular literature read by more people than canonized literature, *speculative fiction* may be used as a collective term for fictional narratives about worlds that are unlike the "real" world (our consensual reality) in significant ways (Lilly). Following this popular understanding, I use the term to refer to contemporary stories that borrow from the "generic tendencies" of science fiction, fantasy, horror, and

other related commercial genres of non-mimetic or non-naturalistic fiction (Freedman 20-21). Beyond generic tendencies, speculative fiction also may be understood as a specialized mode of writing and reading—with its own codes for its construction and reception, and with its own "folk canon" (Broderick xiii). These two senses of the term—as generic tendencies and as creative and interpretive processes—are important for understanding the fannish dynamics of reading speculative fiction. By using speculative fiction as a collective term, rather than a more specific generic category like science fiction, my intention in this chapter is (1) to acknowledge the permeability of generic boundaries, and (2) to represent the broader domain of imaginative popular literature, the "folk canon," that is important to my research participants.

What resources do speculative fiction narratives offer bisexual readers for imagining alternatives to binary sexual and gender norms? To explore this question, in this section I outline some key textual tendencies and social processes that mark speculative narratives as spaces for exploring epistemological and ontological possibilities beyond the domain of accepted reality and social norms. Broadly speaking, this involves *the non-"realistic" representation of worlds that challenge the status quo of the author's empirical reality and that enable readers to build communities through shared knowledge.* These characteristics may help us to understand why—in spite of hegemonic constructions of gender and sexuality that pervade a great deal of mainstream

popular literature—speculative narratives have been valued as resources for queerly positioned writers and readers.[48]

Representing the "Unreal"

Rather than seeing genre as a static classification system, Carl Freedman dialectically conceptualizes genre as "an element or tendency that . . . is active to greater or lesser degrees within a literary text . . . understood as a complexly structured totality" (20). Since texts often display the activity of numerous different generic elements, a text's genre may be determined by the dominant generic tendency within the text as a whole (20-21). As such, I propose that the generic tendency in speculative fiction as a collective category of popular fiction is to defamiliarize readers from the empirical reality of the author's world. In other words, speculative fiction represents that which is "unreal" according to our consensual reality—aliens, time travel, magical powers, vampires; from alternate histories and parallel worlds to utopian societies and apocalyptic scenarios, speculative narratives create a sense of estrangement from the familiar and the known.

Darko Suvin's well-know taxonomy of fiction is a useful starting place for understanding speculative narratives as "estranged" from "naturalistic" or "realistic" literature. He divides fiction into categories according to the manner in which a narrative illuminates the relationships of humans to others and to their surroundings. As such, Suvin defines "naturalistic" fiction as "endeavoring faithfully to reproduce empirical

---

[48] In addition to gender and sexuality, speculative narratives—especially feminist science fiction—offers spaces in which to address race and ethnicity, disability, class, and other social intersections and identities, though these issues are beyond the scope of this project.

textures and surfaces vouched for by human senses and common sense" (18). By

contrast, fiction is "estranged" when it illuminates such relations by creating a radically

or significantly different space/time location or central figures for the narrative that are

"unverifiable by common sense" (18). Estranged genres include non-cognitive

metaphysical narratives (myth, folk tale, fairy tale, fantasy) and cognitive science fiction

(20).[49]

In terms of textual strategies, naturalistic fiction holds a mirror up to the empirical

world, metonymically showing us what we perceive to exist in our consensual reality.

Speculative narratives, however, use allegory to represent what we cannot see or what

cannot be known in the empirical world—whether a distant future, an alternate past, or

the dark shadow of the present moment. By showing us what does not "exist" in the

"real" world on its surface level, the estranged speculative narrative indirectly models the

author's world on deeper, metaphorical levels.

By dealing in allegory and metaphor rather than metonymy, speculative narratives

open a space for the possibility of representing subjective realities that deviate from the

author's "normal" world. In her essay in *Queer Universes: Sexualities in Science Fiction*,

Wendy Gay Pearson states that the risk in "realistic" narratives is that the subject may be

incorporated back into a naturalized and faithful reproduction of those so-called

"empirical surfaces and textures vouched for by human senses and common sense"

---

[49] Suvin describes "cognition" as perceiving a narrative as "not impossible" within the norms (both cosmological and anthropological) of the author's lived world (viii). Cognition differentiates the genre of science fiction from myth, folk tale, fairy tale, and fantasy, just as estrangement distinguishes science fiction from the "realistic" literary mainstream from the eighteenth century forward. Thus Suvin defines science fiction as *"a literary genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment"* (7-8, author's italics).

including naturalized constructions of gender, sexuality, and race (18). However, the very popularity of science fiction and "its resistance to interpellation within the 'mundane' field of literature," Pearson says, "provides tools for the author who wishes to avoid the dangers of mimesis that have typically hampered gay and lesbian writing in the naturalist mode" (18). For example, the non-Cartesian representations of subjects (as not male, white, middle class, and/or heterosexual) in the narratives of Samuel R. Delany and other speculative fiction authors may offer a resource for developing alternative notions of subjectivity. Later in this chapter, a dialogue at the BiSciFi Roundtable helps to illustrate what such alternative subjectivities might mean for queerly positioned readers.

Interrogating "What is" by Asking "What if?"

How speculative fiction goes about representing the "unreal" involves asking the question, "What if?" This element has been linked more specifically to Ernest Bloch's notion of a "novum" (innovation, novelty) that asserts a hegemonic dominance on the narrative world as deviating from the author's norm of reality (Suvin 64). The novum creates an "*alternate reality*" Suven says, "one that possesses a *different historical time* corresponding to different human relationships and sociocultural norms actualized by the narration" (71). This alternate reality tacitly presupposes the author's empirical reality and, as such, has an estranging effect on the reader by forcing an oscillation of perspective between world views, allowing the reader to see empirical reality from the new perspective gained (71). Suvin stresses that a science fictional novum produces a "cognitive" estrangement—i.e., an estrangement that is "perceived as *not impossible* within the cognitive (cosmological and anthropological) norms of the author's epoch"

(Suvin viii)—while the estrangements of metaphysical narratives do not. Nevertheless, the estranging tendency of speculative fiction as a whole often results from the "what if" scenario generated by a novum.

Moreover, Freedman claims that science fiction bears a deep structural affinity with the dialectical thinking found in critical theory. Of all the genres, he says, science fiction worlds are concretized within a cognitive continuum with the actual (á la Suvin). As such, science fiction is "the one most devoted to the historical concreteness and rigorous self-reflexiveness of critical theory" (xvi).

For queerly positioned writers and readers of speculative fiction, the estranging novum and critical reflexiveness of the genre may provide opportunities to imagine alternate realities with radically different (or the potential for different) social norms and structures in regard to gender and sexuality. Estranging novums have been generated from questions such as: What if there was a world without men (e.g. Joanna Russ, *The Female Man*) or without women (e.g. Lois McMaster Bujold, *Ethan of Athos*); what if a world had no gender (e.g. Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Left Hand of Darkness*) or had a multiplicity of genders and sexual orientations (e.g. Melissa Scott, *Shadow Man*); or what if a world's sexual and family relationships were not based on gender at all (e.g. Diane Duane, *Door into Fire*; Le Guin, "Mountain Ways")?

Even in a vast narrative universe like the *Star Trek* franchise, where alternatives to contemporary gender and sexual norms have been slow to emerge, fans have assessed the potentials and shortfalls of Gene Roddenberry's creation, actively campaigned for more inclusive representations, and satisfied their own needs by writing enormous amounts of fan fiction that (among many other fannish storylines) develop the queer

103

potentials of *Star Trek* characters, such as a deeply loving and potentially sexual bond between Kirk and Spock.[50]

Through the estranging effects of a novum, the "what if" of speculative fiction may offer possibilities for representing non-binary sexuality and gender that may be restricted or erased from view in naturalistic narratives. Such representations not only have the positive effect of enabling bisexual readers to see themselves represented in the alternate world, but also may have the critical effect of questioning normative ideas of gender and sexuality in the "real" world.

For example, in *Feminism and Science Fiction*, Sarah Lefanu describes what science fiction narratives *allow* in terms of gender representation.[51] When the rational discourse of science is combined with the pre-rational language of the unconscious encountered in fantasy, horror, mythology, and fairy tales, Lefanu says, science fiction makes possible "the inscription of women as subjects free from the constraints of mundane fiction" and offers "the possibility of interrogating that very inscription, questioning the basis of gendered subjectivity" (9). Not only do science fictional narratives defamiliarize social hierarchies through "what if" estrangements, they also make alternatives to the "real" world more familiar through the release from realism in the process of storytelling (21). In this tension between the possible and the impossible

---

[50] For more on histories of fan fiction, see Verba and also Jamison, especially pages 84-99 for fan recollections on the development of *Star Trek* fan fiction and K/S "slash" fiction. For more on campaigns for inclusion of queer representations on *The Next Generation*, see Jenkins, "Out of the Closet and Into the Universe: Queers and *Star Trek*."

[51] While Lefanu does not specifically use the term *speculative fiction*, I see her framing of the domain of science fiction as compatible with my own use of speculative fiction as a collective term for non-"realistic" popular genres (science fiction, fantasy, horror) that defamiliarize the author's world through an estranging novum.

(or the not yet possible), Lefanu says, science fiction tends toward open-endedness and the dissolution of structures and thereby interrogates and subverts unitary ways of seeing (22). Moreover, by breaking down Cartesian certainties and de-centering a coherent self, science fiction offers the means to construct subjectivities that replace absence/otherness with presence in a preponderantly (white, heterosexual) male discourse (23).

Similarly, Pearson examines some of the possibilities for queer representation in science fiction narratives, pointing out that the genre has a long history of questioning systems of thought, particularly the metanarratives of science and history. According to Pearson, queer operates as a radical and subversive challenge to heteronormativity's ideological teleology "to reveal the deeply un-natural and constructed nature of our understandings of biological sex, the performative nature of gender roles, and the sociocultural institutions founded on this ideology" (16-17). Queer, then, operates on some of the same levels as science fiction, with its "denaturalization of metanarratives and its movement towards subcultural and subaltern understandings of texts." Moreover, the insistence in science fiction narratives that the subject is the *effect* of the system lines up with alternative narrative strategies of dissident subjectivities that refuse the Cartesian subject. Thus science fiction's infidelity to the "real" world gives the fictive world the status of a critical model (18).

Reading Intertextually

While Suvin's model is useful for distinguishing literary genres for aesthetic purposes, his taxonomy is less helpful when considering the intertextual nature of speculative narratives and the reading practices in and around the "folk canon" of

speculative fiction. In *Reading By Starlight: Postmodern Science Fiction*, Damien

Broderick recalibrates Suvin's binary model of naturalistic fiction/science fiction to mesh

with a spectrum of representational and interpretive possibilities. Following Gregory

Renault's critique of Suvin, Broderick points out a misleading designation of naturalistic

fiction as portraying the author's empirical environment as the "Same" and estranged

fiction as portraying the "Same by the Other" (Renault qtd. in Broderick 51). Rather,

fictional narratives, whether naturalistic or estranged, always interpret the empirical

world through the selection of specific signifiers, so that any representation is necessarily

a mediated reconstruction. Naturalistic fiction chooses signifiers for their metonymic

links to the social and linguistic life-world of the author. Speculative narratives, on the

other hand, transgress the "real" by dislodging familiar signifiers from their supposed

direct reference to the author's and readers' life-world and allowing those estranged

signifiers to shape a radical otherness (57). In other words, Broderick says, science fiction

is written as "the narrative of the *same, as* other," which means that its "special

character" must be "in part to extend the range of potential signifiers" of the "real" (51).

Samuel R. Delany's theoretical work offers a useful model of science fiction's

signification strategies. He describes the textuality of science fiction as being grounded in

a distinctive *subjunctivity*, a grammatical term relating to a mood of verbs expressing

what is imagined, wished, or possible. According to Delany, " [a] distinct level of

subjunctivity informs all the words in an s-f story at a level that is different from that

which informs naturalistic fiction, fantasy, or reportage" (qtd. in Broderick 57). For

example, Robert Heinlein's phrase "the door dilated" is meaningless as naturalistic

fiction, but as science fiction, Broderick explains, "it confirms, while enacting, the text's

106

radical 'futurity' or 'otherness.' In this special kind of text, metonymy passes first through cascades of suspended lexical paradigms, words regarded as metaphorically equivalent, which are then detached and sent aloft, freed from any last vestige of a supposed everyday *direct* reference to reality" (57).

Over decades, says Broderick, science fiction's "potential signifiers" have built up an extensive generic "mega-text" of "mutually imbricated" texts. Using a strategy of "*semiological compensation*, or redundancy and overcoding," the science fiction mega-text works "by embedding each new work, seen by Delany as a self-structuring web of non-mundane signifiers and syntagms, in an even vaster web of interpenetrating semantic and tropic givens or vectors," thus creating a familiar generic iconography (59). While iconic images such as the spaceship and the robot do not have a single univocal meaning, Broderick says, their variants "tend to cohere about a limited number of narrative vectors" that promote reader familiarity and alert them to the narrative's reception codes and strategies. At the same time, science fiction icons retain at their heart "a *de-familiarising* impulse absolutely pivotal to the form's specificity" (60).

When considering the collective paraliterature of speculative fiction, generic encoding strategies and intertextuality have produced iconic figures and mega-texts in fantasy and horror as well as in science fiction. Dedicated readers of these popular genres know that magic has rules and that certain monsters have predictable characteristics—e.g. that alchemical transformation differ from sympathetic magic, or that vampires suck blood while zombies eat brains. Indeed, the mega-texts of popular fantasy and horror ensure that *deliberate* deviations from such tropes signal these anomalies as significant narrative elements. In Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight* series, for example, vampires avoid

107

direct sunlight not because it kills them, but because it would reveal their difference, and revealing their difference to humans is punishable by death according to their laws.

Because subjunctivity and the intertextuality of mega-texts pose interpretive challenges to uninitiated readers of speculative narratives, Delany proposed that a theoretical analysis of science fiction reception requires a specialized model of writing and reading. As Broderick explains, "[c]ertain codons manifested in the text," such as spaceships and other iconic images, "alert the reader to *a special way of actualizing the words. The text is then received in such a manner that the information density and texture of its discourse is appropriately decoded*" (66, author's italics). For readers who have developed the specialized skills for interpreting science fiction's subjunctivity, Heinlein's "the door dilated" may be swiftly decoded as an everyday occurrence in a futuristic world.

By extending the range of signifiers and encoding otherness as everyday, speculative narratives have the ability to denaturalize heteronormativity in potentially subversive ways. For example, the presence of a non-straight and/or gender-nonconforming character may not in itself be intended by an author (or producers, in the case of film and television media) as a subversive strategy in a narrative, yet it may signal to readers a radically different future or alternate world in which (gender) queerness is neither hidden nor revealed *as difference* but is simply there. The queerness of such characters—even in a world where heteronormative values are continuously reinscribed—may provide queer visibility and reader identification while simultaneously serving as a radically estranging novum.

An example may help to illustrate the subversive potential of encoding otherness as everyday in speculative narratives. Throughout the *Star Trek* television franchise, producers assumed a heteronormative future and argued that the inclusion of bisexual, transgender, lesbian, or gay characters would undermine the show's social inclusivity. Pearson says the circular reasoning against visibility of non-straight characters ran thus: "homophobia, they say, does not exist in the future as it is shown on *Star Trek*; gay characters therefore cannot be shown, since to introduce the issue of homosexuality is to turn it back into a problem; in order for *Star Trek* to depict a non-homophobic view of the future, it must depict a universe with no homosexuals in it" (15). Still, on *Star Trek: The Next Generation,* the "problem" of non-normative gender and sexuality gets played out in the episode "The Host." Here, "otherness" is encoded in an alien race that bonds with various host bodies, allowing the Trill "symbiont" to live multiple lifetimes. In this episode, the male host of Trill ambassador Odan is killed, forcing Odan to temporarily transfer to Lieutenant Commander William Riker to survive. The problem is that Dr. Crusher has fallen in love with Odan and is suddenly faced with the implications of a change in her lover's body. After much angst and self-questioning, Dr. Crusher seems to embrace transcendent love for Odan until the Trill's permanent host body arrives—a woman. Odan's subsequent gender change and the prospect of engaging in a same-sex relationship proves too much for Dr. Crusher. "Perhaps it is a human failing," she says, "but we are not accustomed to these kinds of changes" (Rodriguez).

By blaming "humanity" for her personal inability to see beyond the gender binary, the show works to reinscribe heterosexist norms by erasing transgender, bisexual, and lesbian possibilities. Nevertheless, the queerness of the Trill remains in the fact that

they can, and do, change genders with host bodies, allowing them to accumulate a wealth of experiences that are not bound by "human" failings, nor by the gender and sexual norms of the show's historical moment of production. For queerly positioned *Star Trek* fans, the encoding of Trill otherness may allow them to engage in what Henry Jenkins refers to as "textual poaching"—the appropriation and rereading (or in the case of fan fiction, rewriting) the text in a fashion that serves their own interests ("Television" 508). This leads me to the last aspect of speculative narratives that mark them as spaces for exploring alternative epistemological and ontological possibilities—readers and media fans.

Readers and Culture Building

So far in this section, I have concentrated on the first part of my opening claim— that speculative narratives allow the imagination of alternatives to binary sexual and gender norms through non-naturalistic representation of worlds that challenge the status quo of the author's empirical reality. Drawing upon literary theories of science fiction, I have examined how speculative narratives extend possibilities for queer representation and resignification. While these theories of science fiction may include (queer) readers as a theoretical subject position, the discussion would not be complete without addressing speculative fiction's actual readers and the long history of shared knowledge and community building in science fiction fandoms.

As shown in Chapter II, lesbian and gay communities shaped around identity politics may not be welcoming to bisexuals and other non-monosexual people. Moreover, as a haven for "nerdy white guys," women, queers, and people of color have frequently

110

encountered sexist, racist, and homo/biphobic responses in the physical and virtual spaces of science fiction fandoms. Indeed, the fracturing of fan conventions along the lines "serious" readers (gendered as male) and "media fans" (gendered as female), as well as notorious Internet "flame wars" when interpretive and evaluative norms have collided, may have resulted in part due to entrenched and unexamined sexism and racism in "old school" fandoms.[52] Nevertheless, the history of science fiction fandoms as participatory culture and the emergence of inclusive spaces illustrates that marginalized fans can and do find each other and build safe communities, whether through conventions (e.g. WisCon, the world's leading feminist science fiction convention, founded in 1976), fanzines (e.g. Elise and Victor's bisexual science fiction fanzine *Politically Incorrect— The Zine Your Lover Warned You About!*, published 1986-1989), or through organizations and online networks (e.g. The Gaylactic Network, founded in 1987 and organizers of Gaylaxicon and the Gaylactic Spectrum Awards).[53]

In his studies of fandom, Jenkins offers two concepts that are helpful for understanding the participatory and community building functions of science fiction fan culture: *textual poaching* and *collective intelligence*. Drawing from the popular culture theories of Michel de Certeau, Jenkins sees fans as "construct[ing] their cultural and social identity through borrowing and inflecting mass culture images, articulating concerns which often go unvoiced within the dominant media" ("Television" 508). As "textual poachers," fans wander nomadically among genres, taking pleasure in making

---

[52] For fan histories of gender and racial conflicts in fandom, see Jamison; Verba; and "RaceFail '09."

[53] See Chapter IV for a brief history of fandom. For more on the history of fandoms in relation to gender and other intersectional identities, see Jamison; Merrick; and Jenkins, "Interactive Audiences? The 'Collective Intelligence' of Media Fans."

intertextual connections across a broad range of media texts ("Television" 514).

Moreover, Jenkins sees fan reading as a social process where the interpretation and

repurposing of texts are shaped through an ongoing dialogue with other fans. These

"poached" meanings provide a foundation for future encounters with fiction, shaping not

only how it will be perceived but also how it will be used beyond its initial consumption

("Television" 519).

Moreover, the social dimensions of fan communities produce a kind of "collective

intelligence," a concept Jenkins adapts from Pierre Levy ("Interactive" 134). Because no

single fan can know everything necessary to fully appreciate a series, Jenkins says, fan

communities pool their knowledge to free individuals from the limits of memory, to

expand their productive capacity, and to enable the group to act upon a broader range of

expertise ("Interactive" 139). As self-organized groups, these new knowledge

communities are "voluntary, temporary, and tactical affiliations, defined through

common intellectual enterprises and emotional investments. Members may shift from one

community to another as their interests and needs change, and they may belong to more

than one community at the same time. Yet, they are held together through the mutual

production and reciprocal exchange of knowledge" ("Interactive" 137).

By bringing together theories of estrangement and the novum, subjunctivity and

intertextual mega-texts, along with the social processes of textual poaching and collective

intelligence, a framework begins to emerge that is supported by ethnographic evidence

regarding what resources speculative narratives have to offer bisexually identified

readers. The coding of speculative texts relies on specialized reading skills, a shared

knowledge of mega-texts, and certain enculturation processes that together allow readers

to recognize a "folk canon" of significant texts, build self-organized communities around shared interests, and develop collective intelligence not only to share information but also to work out conflicting interpretive strategies and subcultural dynamics. In other words, the theoretical framework I have described of textual tendencies within and social processes around speculative fiction helps to explain, from the outside, the collective knowledge my bisexually identified research participants possess through experiences as readers and as members of overlapping bisexual and fan communities. In the next section, participants describe for themselves how speculative narratives, bisexuality, and community are connected in their lived worlds.

Speculative Fictions and Bisexual Lives

Through storytelling and analysis related to the theoretical framework established earlier in this chapter, the following sections illustrate how speculative fiction, identities, and social locations are interconnected for project participants. From the inside out, what connections do participants make among bisexuality, identity, representation, and speculative narratives? And regarding the broader goals of this project, how might their lived experiences shed light on interpretive frameworks and inform new methods of interpretation and social analysis?

The BiSciFi Roundtable

As part of my fieldwork in Minneapolis, I organized the BiSciFi Roundtable—a public two-hour discussion on bisexuality and science fiction, advertised on Facebook and Meet-Up pages and through social networks in the Twin Cities area. The meeting

was held on August 19, 2012, at Open Book, an arts center located near downtown. The group included thirteen participants with the following identity characteristics (as apparent or volunteered information)—two men and eleven women (at least two self-identified as genderqueer); two Native Americans, two African Americans, one Asian American, eight Caucasians; three under the age of 30; one straight ally, one "queer-het", and all others bisexual or refusing labels.

Four of my core project participants—Lou, Catherine, Victor, and Elise—took part in the BiSciFi Roundtable, as well as several other "veteran" and "newbie" people within bisexual and/or fan communities in the Twin Cities area. Experienced participants displayed the collective intelligence of several decades of working within bisexual activism and fan organization by giving a great deal of support and encouragement to others in the group—especially those who were just venturing into the community. These group dynamics helped everyone feel welcomed and comfortable sharing their points of view, and all participants were engaged in open discussion. Aside from explaining my project and moderating questions and time, my contributions were minimal.

As discussed in Chapter II, the roundtable began with a conversation about identity terms and continued with responses to cultural stereotyping and popular culture representations of bisexuality. Shifting to speculative fiction, participants shared what portrayals in science fiction and fantasy have been particularly memorable for their depictions of fluid gender and sexuality. As the free-flowing conversation turned "geeky," participant dialogue illustrated not only several major themes regarding the importance of science fiction and fantasy to participants, which I discuss later in the

114

chapter, but also demonstrated how such emic themes are supported by certain textual

tendencies within and social processes around speculative fiction.

At one point, for example, the group discussed the female bisexual character Inara

Serra from the science fiction television series *Firefly*, a space western set in the 26th

century (Whedon).[54] As a semi-permanent passenger on the spaceship *Serenity*, Inara

rents one of the ship's shuttles as both transpiration and boudoir for her profession as a

high-class escort. As a "licensed Companion," Inara confers a degree of legitimacy and

social acceptance to *Serenity*'s crew that they would not have without her on board.

While Inara rendezvous with wealthy male and female clientele on the planets visited by

Serenity, Captain Malcolm "Mal" Reynolds leverages her presence to buy and sell cargo

in order for the ragtag crew to survive at the fringes of civilized solar systems. Romantic

tension complicates the relationship between them—Mal is in love but denies it, and

Inara refuses to give up her independence and freedom for anyone.

In the following excerpt, roundtable participants discuss Inara's bisexuality and

social status in relation to how sex work is coded in the science fiction series and in

contemporary culture, as well as her relationships with Mal and others on the show:

> DAWN: What about Inara from *Firefly*? . . . I almost feel like I get scared about
> saying Inara because she's a prostitute in a way, but I love her. I love her
> character. I think she's strong and beautiful and feminine . . .
> VICTOR: But wait a second, she is—what is it? A licensed . . .
> DAWN: . . . She's a Companion . . .
> VICTOR: . . . A licensed Companion, and what's interesting about that is . . . the
> way her character's portrayed. Do you remember "The Train Job"? Okay so . . .
> Zoe [second-in-command onboard *Serenity*] and Mal have been taken into

---

[54] *Firefly* takes its name from the "firefly-class" spaceship *Serenity* in the storyworld. The series was created and directed by Joss Whedon, known for other cult television favorites such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Dollhouse*. While *Firefly* was cancelled after only one season, its popularity led to expansion of the franchise in comic books and games, as well as the film *Serenity*.

custody by the Sheriff. Right? And so Inara has to go and rescue them. So she walks in and there's clearly a sense . . . she's not from there, she's very much respected, and as the Sheriff puts it, "Sorry for people staring, not many of them have seen a licensed Companion before." So there's this interesting thing that Joss [Whedon] did there with the scripting and direction to suggest, wait a second, maybe in the future people aren't as hung up about these things?

ELISE: She's high status.

VICTOR: She's high status, absolutely.

DAWN: That's what I really like about the portrayal . . .

LOU: . . . I think there's been some hints that she and Kaylee [ship's mechanic] have gotten together . . . if you see some of the interactions between her and Kaylee. . . . You have to spend a lot of time out in space getting from one place to another, so . . .

ELISE: Another thing is looking at the interesting and complicated navigation that a sex worker does to keep their own sexual autonomy, and to keep who she is, and what her work is, and how that intersects, and how that works. . . . In a sense, I think that a lot of us in the culture have pressures on us to be certain ways sexually, and we face some of the same kinds of questions—well, what *is* my sexuality, as opposed to what everything's pushing on me for my sexuality to be?

LOU: And one example of that is Inara's insistence that she has control over who enters the pod.

ELISE: Right.

LOU: You know, it's her pod, that's what she's leasing, so it's her territory.

CATHERINE: Except that Mal never treats her with any respect and completely disregards all of that, and goes into the pod, and ignores all the boundaries that she sets, and he's the point of view character. So I like her as a character, [but] I don't really like how they handle that. . . .

At the opening of this excerpt, Dawn is "scared" to bring up Inara as a positive media representation of bisexuality because "she's a prostitute in a way." Her reticence signals awareness not only of bisexual promiscuity as a cultural stereotype, discussed earlier in the roundtable, but also of negative cultural attitudes towards sex work (e.g. as victimization or as immoral). Although linking bisexuality with sex work may jeopardize Inara's positive image, Dawn immediately reframes the character against such negative perceptions by calling her "strong and beautiful and feminine." Dawn also understands that Inara is "in a way" like a prostitute but also is not, suggesting an alternate reality.

116

Next, Victor gives evidence from the science fictional storyworld that Inara is indeed a positive representation, supporting Dawn's assertion of "love" for the character. As a "licensed Companion," Inara has a respectability and social status that allows her to simply walk into a frontier settlement and retrieve her shipmates from legal custody. Having no here-and-now equivalent, such Companions are an estranging novum of the storyworld and an example of science fiction's subjunctivity through semantic encoding that signals profound social differences from the audience's life-world. Inara resists interpellation into the "real," and as such, her presence may also serve as a critique of the "real."

As the conversation continues, Victor and others demonstrate competencies both as fans sharing collective intelligence and as cultural critics of popular media and its production. Victor points out that producers of the series may intend to undermine contemporary sexual stereotypes through the scripting and direction of Inara. Moreover, Victor shows how the generic tendencies in science fiction may be used to interrogate "what is" by asking "what if." In the case of Inara, the question might be stated this way: what if humans had a positive relationship to sexual desire and expression? The presence and status of Companions in the storyworld suggests, Victor says, that "maybe in the future people aren't as hung up about these things." Elise agrees that Inara has "high status," which reassures Dawn and helps to express what she likes about the character's portrayal.

As further evidence of positive representations of bisexuality on *Firefly*, Lou observes that Inara and Kaylee, a fellow *Serenity* crewmember, may have "gotten together" based on their interactions together on the show. Kaylee is portrayed as

117

wholesome and sweet with a forthright innocence about her sexual needs. She has a crush on the ship's doctor, Simon Tam, but he bumbles at starting a romantic relationship with her. Lou's suggestion of bisexual exchange between Inara and Kaylee seems reasonable, given that Mal and Simon fail at romance with the two women and the ship "spend[s] a lot of time out in space getting from one place to another." The possibility offers a positive and pleasurable representation of fluid desire for bisexual spectators.

Linking bisexuality back to sex work, Elise next brings up the "interesting and complicated navigation" that Inara does "to keep [her] own sexual autonomy." Elise considers the intersections of who Inara is with what she does from a cultural perspective, suggesting that in the contemporary world social norms put pressures on people "to be certain ways sexually," which prompts some to ask, "what *is* my sexuality?" Elise's observation demonstrates that, through the "what if" of a sexual novum—i.e. Companions—the science fictional series defamiliarizes audiences from "reality" and helps them to interrogate the sexual norms of our lived social worlds.

Lou supports Elise's observation about Inara's sexual autonomy with the example of controlling her private space on the ship. By "insisting on control" over who enters her shuttle, Lou says, Inara is empowered to assert her authority and personhood. But as Catherine points out, though most of Inara's shipmates respect the pod as "her territory," Mal ignores all the boundaries she sets. Catherine clarifies that her dissatisfaction is aimed at how the series handles Mal's patriarchal assumptions as captain, not at Lou's or the group's comments about Inara. "I like her as a character," Catherine says.

This dialogue from the BiSciFi Roundtable demonstrates in practice how the representation of non-"realistic" worlds may challenge aspects of the contemporary

sexual status quo and enable audiences to build supportive environments through shared knowledge. The conversation also demonstrates how speculative fiction offers important resources for imagining alternative social worlds, seeing one's self in those worlds, and finding community—emic themes that figured prominently for bisexual science fiction fans interviewed in this project. Fan activities such as science fictions cons (e.g. WisCon, Gaylaxicon), clubs and organizations, online discussion boards, amateur press associations, and fan fiction all provide face-to-face and online resources for queerly positioned writers and readers to meet, communicate with each other, and form communities. In fact, as regular panel participants at cons, several roundtable participants were quite comfortable with the roundtable approach to discussing themes in speculative fiction.

In the remainder of the chapter, I present oral histories for Lou, Catherine, Victor, and Elise—all friends who have known each other for many years through bisexual activism and science fiction fandom in the Twin Cities area. The themes that emerge in their stories help to illustrate the value of speculative narratives for participants in relation to bisexuality and other social locations including gender, race, class, occupation, geographic location, and religion.

Lou's Story: "In Space, Everybody Needs to Have a Space Suit"

Born in 1958 and raised in rural Wisconsin, Lou was first introduced to science fiction when her Catholic nun teacher read most of C.S. Lewis's classic fantasy *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* (1950) to her first grade class. Lou felt affinity with the character of Lucy, called "Lu" by her brothers, who discovers a secret passageway to a

magical world in the back of a coat wardrobe. But the nun did not finish the book, which was not in the tiny library of her rural elementary school. Two years later, she signed up for a mail-order library program that gave her access to the full Chronicles of Narnia series and introduced her to other books in the category of young adult fantasy, which in turn led her to adult fantasy and science fiction. "I swear it was my salvation," Lou said of the mail-order catalog. "Basically, I started ordering every single one, which is why I hit Asimov really fast."

One of the most common themes arising from interviews with participants was conflict around social expectations of gender attraction and embodiment. Because gender (or more precisely, one's physical sex at birth) is so tightly linked to definitions of sexual orientation as "either-or," questions of non-conforming gender identity, embodiment, and attraction are deeply connected to bisexual identity and experience. Lou, for example, questioned her gender identity at an early age. As a "tomboy," she enjoyed the outdoor chores of a dairy farm and resisted feminine duties like washing dishes. "There was a point there when I thought to myself, am I really a girl if I enjoy doing all these things . . . that are more male-oriented?" But reading science fiction stories helped her to reconcile her "butch" personality with being a girl. "In space, everybody needs to have a space suit and know how to handle zero gee and stuff like that," she said. "When I put that together, that you could be interested in things that are identified as being masculine . . . but you could still be a woman, that solved a lot of fuzziness in my mind for me." For Lou and other participants, the "what if" of speculative fiction opened up imaginative spaces where gender divisions no longer mattered.

During her middle school years, Lou also began to process attractions for more than one gender: "I was interested in boys, but I also knew I was also interested in girls, as well, and I was very aware that that was not cool, so I never told that side to anybody." Like other participants, reading science fiction—particularly Robert Heinlein, author of *Stranger in a Strange Land* (1961)—gave Lou gender and sexual models that were not present elsewhere in her life: "Heinlein was a big protagonist for writing bisexual characters, and he didn't always get it right . . . but he had characters who weren't straight white males, which was an astonishing thing back in the 1960s and '70s." When rumors of David Bowie's bisexuality made news in the 1970s, Lou finally discovered the name for her sexual orientation and felt a sense of peace: "When I heard that, I knew there had to be other people who were bisexual because they wouldn't have made up a word for just me and David Bowie."

Participants frequently said that imagining different worlds and the lives within those worlds are important elements of what makes science fiction and fantasy attractive to them. "Things there are different and it's a challenge," said Lou. "I don't like things to be boring and the same. I like things that have variety." Characters in science fiction can have sex and relationships with a variety of non-humans, which Lou said appeals directly to her bisexual identity: "So if you're talking about having sex with aliens . . . how big of a jump is it to think about having sex with a same-gendered person or a differently-gendered person?" She gave the example of Ursula K. Le Guin's *Left Hand of Darkness* (1969), which to her speaks eloquently to the idea of developing relationships with others regardless of one's gender or racial identity. The novel's human male protagonist makes first contact on a world where humans have evolved without biological sex or social

gender: "The human develops a relationship, not a sexual relationship but a very deep and significant relationship, with somebody who is asexual most of the time." Lou said the book, which is still among her top five favorite novels, has meant a lot to the bisexual and transgender communities.

Like other participants discussed in Chapter II, Lou had difficulty negotiating her sexual identity among her social peers in college. As a student at Cornel University in the late 1970s and early 1980s, she felt uncomfortable coming out because of negative attitudes toward bisexuality, so she dated men and had relationships with women secretly. "The straight people, had they known that I was bi, would have lumped me in with the gays and lesbians," she said. "But as the same time, I was hanging out with enough gays and lesbians and heard enough biphobic remarks, 'she's only gay until graduation' or 'she's only gay when she's drunk,' . . . so even [them] I did not feel comfortable coming out bisexual to." After graduating, Lou moved to Minneapolis and met her husband, whom she credits with coming out both as bisexual and as polyamorous: "When I got involved with [him], we both assumed that it was going to be your basic heterosexual monogamous relationship." But Lou's desire to have an open relationship with a female friend two years into their marriage brought both of them out to each other: "I shy away from something as sappy as saying 'soul mate,' but you know, it's been thirty years now, and every time we've had a major direction change in our lives, we've been on course."

Lou's first connection to bisexual community came in 1985, when the couple began looking for groups in Minneapolis and found Bi Connection: "We came back out after the first meeting and looked at each other and just grinned because there [were] twelve other people in the room who were also bisexual—oh my god!" Bi Connection

122

introduced Lou to bisexual activism, including a five-year campaign in the early 1990s to include bisexuals and transgendered people in gay and lesbian organizations. While the campaign was a success, bi activists' ongoing frustrations with biphobia in gay and lesbian groups led, as she said, "a bunch of goddamed independents"—including Lou, Victor, Elise, and others—to start the BECAUSE Conference on bisexuality in 1992. In 1995, they also helped to found the Bisexual Organizing Project (BOP), a non-profit organization that organizes the annual BECAUSE conference and promotes bisexual education and activism in the Twin Cities region.

Lou continued to be an avid science fiction reader in adulthood and became involved in fan activities in 1990, when Victor urged her to attend Minicon in Minniapolis. Lou enjoyed the family-friendly event, but as working-class parents with young children, traveling to other regional cons proved impractical. In 1996, Victor told her that Le Guin would be a guest of honor that year at WisCon, a leading feminist science fiction conference held in Madison, Wisconsin. WisCon is well known for its equal-access feminist practices, so costs are kept low by strong volunteer support, donations, work exchanges, free childcare, and even free food. Lou could not miss seeing her favorite writer, she said: "We went to WisCon 20 and we've been to every single WisCon since then."

Like other participants in this project, Lou discovered many organic, overlapping connections among bisexual and science fiction fan communities in her region—from BOP and BECAUSE to MiniCon and WisCon. "There's a lot of bisexuals there," Lou said of WisCon. "Truly, nobody really cares what sexuality, what your orientation is." What this translates to for her is a feeling of acceptance and belonging—where diversity

123

is the expectation, not the exception. Giving an example, Lou said that she and Victor both served as co-chairs for the planning and organization of WisCon 36: "If you're at any organization, including a GLBT organization that isn't specifically bisexual, [and] two of the three chairs for that year are bisexual, it would be commented on. If somebody pointed that out as exceptional at WisCon, people would go, 'Yeah? So?' It's really wonderful."

For Lou and for other participants interviewed in my project, three major themes emerged regarding the importance of speculative narratives in their lives: envisioning worlds that are different from our own, seeing room for one's self in those worlds, and finding likeminded others. When asked why science fiction matters to them, participants consistently talked about imagination, validation, and community as important connections. Summed up, these three themes might be interpreted as a kind of romantic narrative arc, a "coming out" story if you will, of the nerdy queer fan who sees his/her own desires and discovers like-minded others through the love of a genre. To a certain extent this idealized narrative is present in many of the stories told by my participants, including Lou, but in other ways the narrative oversimplifies the complexities of different intersecting social identities and begs the chicken-or-egg question of which came first— the bisexual or the fan. The reality for participants appears to be more appropriately non-binary—both and neither.

Catherine's Story: Lesbian-identified Bisexuality

While Lou's story may be viewed romantically as finding herself through imagination, validation, and community, Catherine describes her own experiences as the

opposite: "I'm afraid I'm the anti-romantic figure, it's very sad," she said. "I did not leap into reading and go, 'Oh! This is it!' I leapt and went, 'hmm, we're going to have to process this tomorrow.'"

Unlike Lou, Catherine did not recognize imaginative possibilities for herself in speculative fiction until much later in life. Born in 1963 and raised in New York and Georgia, Catherine's parents were fans of classic science fiction and fantasy, so she grew up in an environment where authors like Olaf Stapleton, Robert Howard, August Derleth, and H.P. Lovecraft were familiar to her. However, she had no exposure to women science fiction authors or to emerging feminist science fiction: "I was a pre-teenager and teenager in the '70s, and a lot of the books that we talk about cheerfully now as having been around and about were not around and about where I was." Instead, she read Isaac Asimov, Arthur C. Clarke, Ray Bradbury, Harlan Ellison, and most of what is now considered the canon of science fiction.

Catherine first discovered feminist and queer speculative fiction in the early 1980s with the fantasy novels of Le Guin, saying it was "a happy day" when she found *A Wizard of Earthsea* (1968). She also enjoyed novels by Andrea Norton and Marion Zimmer Bradley, but it took time for her to connect more personally to their fluid sexual representations. "It was also a matter of me getting to a place where I identified myself as not being straight," she said. "I read some things before then, but it was, 'oh that's interesting' [mimes tossing book away], but it didn't really click." Only later after recognizing her own desires in college did the imaginative possibilities in science fiction help to validate her attractions to more than one gender. "Probably the big quasi-coming out novel for me would have been *The Shattered Chain* [1976], which was one of

125

[Bradley's] Free Amazons of Darkover stories." The novel explores the lives of the Renunciates—women who despite living on a deeply patriarchal and feudal world have renounced both the protection and control of men to live by their own social rules.

Catherine identified as straight until she attended Washington University in St. Louis, where she became involved with women's organizations run by lesbians. Like several other participants, discussed in Chapter II, Catherine felt "a fair amount of pressure . . . to choose sides" from her social peers in college: "I ended up having a very brief affair with a . . . female friend of mine that caused me to rethink where I was at [sexually]. . . . Because I still dated men and was in . . . an open relationship with a man, I did not feel that either politically or personally I should refer to myself as a lesbian, so I do not." Catherine came out as bisexual at age 23, and as a long-time bi activist she maintains the political identity in spite of continued erasure within queer communities. Married to a woman for nineteen years, she has taken a "fair amount of grief" in women's collectives and in the feminist movement for not coming out as a lesbian: "I can actually have conversations with lesbians where I can start out by saying I'm bisexual, I'm identified as bisexual, and within five minutes they refer to me as a lesbian. . . . I spent years and years and years fighting that battle."

The process of negotiating her sexual identity as an adult brought greater meaning to the speculative narratives she discovered that portrayed fluid desires. While working at a women's collective bookstore in St. Louis, Catherine gained access to Dianna Rivers, Sally Miller Gearhart, and other authors of lesbian separatist utopian fiction, but the writing "never spoke to me," she said. However, she did notice when some sword and sorcery novels began to feature bisexual characters, such as J.F. Rivkin's

126

Silverglass (1986) in which the two female protagonists, a mercenary and a mage, sometimes sleep together and have other subplot relationships with men. "Not that it's the most brilliant book ever," she said, "but at the time, for a lot of us, it was the first time we'd seen that." By the time she was in graduate school at University of Iowa and afterward, as a bookstore owner in Iowa City, Catherine had at last discovered the works of queer science fiction authors such as Samuel R. Delany and Joanna Russ: "The magical day when I found Joanna Russ was just like, 'Where have you been!'" After closing her bookstore in the mid-1990s, Catherine briefly attended law school until she wrote and sold her first science fiction short story. She quit law and has been working as a professional writer ever since.

For Catherine, lesbian communities continue to be where she finds connection with others, despite insider/outsider positioning, as discussed in Chapter II. "I would describe myself as a lesbian-identified bisexual," she said, "but I haven't let go of the possibility of other forms of desire being something that is a direction that my life moves in once again." For Catherine and many other participants who identify as bisexual, time itself—the whole of one's lifetime of experiences—is often key to their identity choices. From this perspective, as I discuss later in Chapter V, one's sexuality does not necessarily depend on the gender of one's desired object in the past, present, or future. "All of my close personal friends get the distinction of why I call myself bi, regardless of where they come from," Catherine said, "and that's why they're my close personal friends." Those who do not understand her identity choices, "I tend to keep at arm's distance because if they don't get something that fundamental, they're not somebody that I'm going to feel totally comfortable with."

While her sexual identity proved challenging in lesbian communities, writing lesbian science fiction and fantasy gave her access to social networks of science fiction writers and fans. Even in these communities, however, Catherine has had to carve out her identity as a writer of lesbian fantasy and science fiction—not romance or erotica, which dominate the LGBT publishing market today. In the 1980s and early 1990s, she said, "it was a lot more common for there to be magical realism with lesbian and bi characters," as with stories by Jewell Gomez, Ellen Galford, Nicola Griffith, Melissa Scott, and other authors who were not considered genre romance writers. When the publishing industry shifted toward eBooks in the mid-1990s, many feminist presses failed and feminist bookstores went out of business: "As it got into more online, [publishing] shifted pretty drastically into romance and the stuff that came out of the fanfic." As a result, writers of mystery, fantasy, and science fiction who used to focus on lesbian characters now have difficulty finding a market for their work: "There's a group of us who are . . . trying to revive that tradition so that it's not so limiting—the tradition of lesbian fiction that isn't necessarily entirely a romance [and] that goes outside [of those] tropes." Today she continues to write and sell queer speculative narratives, participates professionally in science fiction and fantasy fandom, and stays active in queer political organizing.

Although Catherine's story may follow an "anti-romantic" trajectory, nevertheless it reinforces important participant themes regarding the difficulties of negotiating non-monosexuality in their lives and the value of speculative narratives as resources for imagination, identity, and community. While her love for science fiction developed independently of her social identity, the two eventually wove together in her professional career. "Science fiction and fantasy is the literature of possibility," she said. "It's

128

envisioning a different interpretation, a different perspective on how you may be viewing the world." As a writer who knows that a lack of positive media portrayals may contribute to high suicide rates among queer teens and other social consequences, she recognizes the urgency of bisexual and queer representations in speculative fiction: "Visions of the future, visions of the past, reinterpretations of new worlds—all of those things are areas in which visibility is so very important."

Victor's Story: Bi-racial Bisexuality

Although Victor recognized from a young age his sexual attraction to more than one gender, his awareness of difference first began through another intersecting social location. "The place where I noticed that I was different from all the other kids wasn't being bisexual," he said, "it was being biracial." Victor is Native American, a member of the Rosebud Sioux tribe, and also is of English and Scottish heritage. Born in Pittsburg in 1963, he spent his early childhood in Ohio before his family moved to Minneapolis in 1968 because his father, a professor of anthropology and sociology, was hired to establish the Department of American Indian Studies at the University of Minnesota.

While Victor grew up in an Indian-identified household, he was not aware of his biracial differences until he entered kindergarten. For show-and-tell one day, he was told to bring something from his family to share in class. "My father had taught me a song that was in Lakota," he said. "I remember singing it for the other students and realizing, wow, I really am not like the other kids." As part Native American, "Even playing cowboys and Indians takes on a whole new dimension."

For participants, the complexities of negotiating a biracial identity may have contributed positively to understanding non-binary sexuality. Dawn said (in Chapter II) that her Native American identity helped her to view gender and sexuality on a continuum. Similarly, Victor said that his biracial identity provided a model that helped him to negotiate his sexual attractions. From a very young age, his "much more identifiably Native American" father told him not to feel pressured to present himself as something he was not, and that he did not have to fit somebody else's notion of what he should be like: "Just be yourself, okay? You're Indian. That's perfectly fine."

By the age of 10, Victor recognized he had attractions for both girls and boys, but he also understood that in his peer group, "It was okay to talk about being attracted to girls, but it was not okay to be attracted to boys." As a teenager without anyone to talk to, he swiped pornography from his father to learn more about sex, but it did not give him the information he needed: "I was a smart enough kid that . . . it was also important to go and research this stuff properly." He began to read books in the human sexuality section of the local library "hoping desperately nobody [would] notice." At age 17, Victor decided to tell his parents he was bisexual, even though his reading had led him to expect that coming out as anything other than heterosexual would result in rejection. But just as they taught him to be "perfectly fine" with his biracial identity, they accepted his sexual identity: "I didn't have a traumatic experience with my family at all."

As with Lou and other participants, reading science fiction and fantasy played an important role in Victor's developing sexual identity as a teenager. In imagined worlds, he found hints about non-binary sexualities and possibilities for multigender attractions and relationships, though they usually involved female characters. A pivotal story for him

was Diane Duane's *The Door Into Fire* (1979), a sword and sorcery fantasy where multisexuality and open social relationships are modeled on the cosmology of a triple-goddess and her/their love for twin brothers who also love each other. For the first time, Victor saw representations of sympathetic bisexual male characters in non-monogamous relationships where what counts are the quality of the connections, not their configurations. "It was like getting an electric shock for me," he said. "Here's a society . . . that sexuality and relationships are interrelated in a completely different way, that same-sex relationships and relationships across lines of gender are perfectly normal, that social responsibility is not wrapped up with judgment about sexuality. . . . I read this book and I said, 'Here—she's talking about me!'"

Similar to other participants discussed in Chapter II, Victor found it difficult to find acceptance for his bisexuality in gay and lesbian communities. At Macalister College, a small liberal arts school located in St. Paul, he joined the campus lesbian and gay group where he was the only out bisexual man in "a very gender-segregated community." Similar to the experiences of bisexual female participants in this project, Victor felt "a tremendous amount of pressure to conform" to a gay identity. After struggling to assert his bisexual identity, he finally gave in and called himself gay—for two weeks. "It just so didn't fit, it so didn't work," he said. "To identify in a way that I validated one and denied the other would have felt sort of like, well, which hand am I gonna cut off?" After college in the 1980s, Victor continued with social activism work in gay and lesbian groups, where he noticed early on that it was easier for him get along with lesbians and bisexual women: "I think partly because I was cheerfully resistant to acting stereotypically [gay] that they were like, 'You know, we can keep him around.'"

At the same time, he felt the misogynistic judgments of gay men who seemed to have "a real visceral difficulty with the idea, the notion of being a bisexual man." Their attitude toward him and to women did not make sense to Victor since "it was pretty clear that what we were about was trying to create a world where—and this is where science fiction comes back into play—where people can be anything and that's okay."

Outside of gay and lesbian communities, Victor's love for speculative fiction helped him to find like-minded others in several overlapping local networks related to science fiction subcultures in the Twin Cities region: "One of the only places where I found that I could talk about this stuff and have people . . . just respond to it and talk about it and not challenge it—or challenge it less, I should say—was within science fiction fandom. I mean, science fiction fans already think of themselves as being different and weird, particularly at that time. And so to say that you're different and weird in a particular way was, for the most part, 'Oh, okay . . . so you're like that. Oh, okay, fine. Well, I'm like this.'"

Starting in the early 1980s, Victor became involved in science fiction fan societies and conventions, Dungeons and Dragons gaming, fantasy roleplaying, and professional performance at Renaissance Festivals: "There were a number of subcultural scenes where there were enough people crossing over from one to another that they all knew each other." These friendship and shared interest networks also provided opportunities for people with similar sexualities to find each other—like Victor and Elise, as I discuss later in this chapter and in Chapter IV.

Speculative fiction enabled Victor to imagine what is possible in the human experience, to validate his own desires, and to find supportive communities of like-

minded others. Because where our society is today informs where we might want to be in our future, he believes speculative narratives are important for helping us to consider how we want the world to be different, especially for minority groups: "The power, in particular, for groups that are in subordinate positions in society is that speculative literature allows us to imagine what the future might be like if that were not true." Even though the world is flooded with cultural objects that support dominant patriarchal, racist, and heterosexist notions, Victor said, the literature of speculative fiction allows us to challenge ideas about what the world is, what it means, and where it is going: "To that extent, the publication of speculative fiction and media that challenges this stuff is important for almost the same exact political reasons as it's important to say that I'm bisexual. It's all of a piece . . . it's just which particular corner of the fight do you want to be in and get involved in." As such, he said, "the parallels in many ways between my . . . biracial identity and my bisexual identity just go on and on and on."

Elise's Story: "Joyful Outsiderness"

While racial and sexual identities intersect in important ways for some participants, the intersections of gender and sexuality with religion were primary factors for Elise. Born in 1960 and raised in a fundamentalist Lutheran church in rural Wisconsin, her first exposure to imaginative fiction at age seven left her not enamored but bewildered when she started reading a book from Andrea Norton's Witch World series. Without appropriate reading competencies to understand fictional world building, "The story didn't make sense," she said. "I was mostly raised on 'here is the Bible and everything in it is true,' so I figured everything in books was probably true." It was not

133

until the mid-1970s that Elise first "really read and understood" science fiction as social critique through analogy. Reading Damon Knight's *Analogue Men* (1962) felt "totally subversive" at the time, she said: "It was something that was directly pertinent to the church when I read it because it was about people who were conditioned . . . in their loyalty to corporate sponsors." The parallels with her religious upbringing in a splinter Lutheran sect were striking to her: "I read it and went, 'I shall hide this book from my parents.'"

A common theme among Elise's experiences in religious, fan, and queer communities was how being an outsider draws people together: "I grew up in a place with people that made a fetish of outsiderness, and that was proof of goodness, really." As a religious outsider, she remembers the sense of recognition she felt when reading about outsiders in science fiction, such as Zenna Henderson's stories about refugees from an alien race with special abilities hiding among the larger human population: "The sense of being the remnant or a member of a small population that was kind of amidst a larger one, that really resonated for me."

Being a science fiction fan also marked her as an outsider. "You got your life made miserable and you got teased for being a fan," Elise said. "I mean it was in a lot of ways analogous to the milder forms of hassle to the moderate forms of hassle that kids get for being gay. It's not the same thing . . . but I've known people who got beat up real bad for being a fan and, in fact, the slurs were often the same. You know, 'oh, you nerd, you faggot, bang-bang-bang.'" Such social stereotyping and rejection helped to develop in her a kind of "militant" love for science fiction that she recognized in other fans: "Liking the genre provided a model for joyful outsiderness, and I use that really

134

specifically because there was a phrase that used to be quite current, and the phrase was, 'It's a proud and lonely thing to be a Fan.'" Though fans were stereotyped as geeks with comic books and nerds with thick glasses that nobody would date, she said, the bits that were true in the stereotypes also made it possible for fans to find each other and create communities: "We learned that if you love something and other people make fun of you for it, you still love that thing, and maybe you love it even a little harder, because they're not right . . . about what turns you on. And that generalizes to the other thing."

The "other thing" for Elise was her bisexuality. In high school, a fellow student's class report on the Kinsey scale gave her the name for her sexual orientation, while reading Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land* (1961) exposed her to the idea of being committed to more than one person and gender in a loving group relationship. The book affirmed the intimate bonds she felt with her close male and female friends: "It wasn't so much a model of something I could do, as a model of something that was already happening." Calling themselves "The Group," her seven friends would go to parties in different configurations "just to weird people out," she said. "I remember going to the movies and holding hands with the people on either side of me, and that's how that was."

In 1978, Elise attended the University of Minnesota "because it was frickin' huge . . . and I figured I could do whatever the hell I wanted and change my mind ten times." But like other participants, as she struggled to create a life for herself, she failed to find support for her bisexual identity: "I talked to a couple of my college friends about it, but I had the impression that there were no bisexuals in the world, and that there had been some once, but they all lived in France and they were dead now." Shortly after leaving college, Elise married an entertainer because it seemed like what was expected of her,

135

though her relationship didn't last more than a year: "I figured that there wasn't anything like me . . . and that anything I wanted pretty much wasn't there, so I might as well try to do things they said I should do."

Looking for a supportive place for herself as a bisexual woman, in 1981 Elise began to get involved in the Minneapolis women's community: "At the time, the definition of women's community was 'lesbian-and-you-can-be-bisexual-if-you-don't-talk-about-it' community." Her experience of overt, casual biphobia in lesbian communities led her to look for groups specifically for bisexual women, but all she found was a "coming out" support group. "I was like, 'It's the mid-eighties, I've been out for ten years. Let's talk about why there's no group for ongoing, hello-I'm-not-thinking-of-changing-my-orientation, bisexual women!'" Others agreed, and the group became radicalized and formed Bi-women Welcome: "We were so sick of the 'no bisexuals' in all the ads, and we wanted to have a name that said 'yes bisexuals!'" Meanwhile, as a result of her marriage, Elise discovered other joyful outsiders at science fiction conventions and area Renaissance Festivals, where she performed music: "I remember somebody telling me once about the lesbian community and how it was different and closer than any other community because you could decide you were going to a conference out of town and you could arrange to stay in the house of people you've never even met. I just looked at the person telling me that and went, 'Yeah, like going to science fiction conventions and staying with people you've never met.' . . . There was a tremendous connection and trust, and I think a lot of that grew out of the days when it was a proud and lonely thing to be a Fan."

Festivals attracted several overlapping communities including folk and filk music lovers, fantasy and science fiction enthusiasts, and a variety of sexuality and lifestyle seekers. "Renaissance Festival for a newly divorced person was definitely a candy store," Elise said. "And then a year or two later at the Renaissance Festival, Victor comes up, says 'So I hear you're bisexual. I am too. We should talk.'" Elise and Victor became close friends and began working together on bisexual activism in their communities. By 1986, frustrated at having to repeat their messages over and over, they borrowed a page from fandom and started a bisexual science fiction fanzine called *Politically Incorrect: "The Zine That Your Lover Warned You About!"* As Chapter IV discusses in depth, Elise and Victor's zine explores the social positioning of bisexual, lesbian, and gay people in the science fiction fan community, the positioning of bisexuals in the gay and lesbian community, and the value of speculative narratives in the working out of these subcultural dynamics.

BECAUSE We Can

As the stories of Lou, Catherine, Victor, and Elise illustrate, speculative fiction offers resources for imagination, validation, and community to bisexual fans. The framework of textual tendencies within and social processes around speculative fiction described in the first half of this chapter helps us to understand the value of the collective knowledge that participants possess through experiences as readers and as members of overlapping bisexual and fan communities.

One of the long-lasting results of the collective knowledge produced by the intersection of bisexual and fan communities in the Twin Cities area is the BECAUSE

Conference. Established in 1992, the BECAUSE Conference is the longest running conference on bisexuality in the United States. Its success can be traced to the involvement of bisexual fan organizers experienced in putting on regional science fiction conventions such as MiniCon and WisCon. In an interview together, Victor and Elise spoke about the founding of BECAUSE, which grew out of a desire to find other bisexuals and to create a space similar to science fiction conventions. "We wouldn't have been able to do it if we hadn't had the experience working on cons," Victor said.

One incident in particular catalyzed bi activists to organize a conference on bisexuality. In 1991, as part of a five-year campaign to include bisexuals and transgendered people in gay and lesbian organizations, bi activists held an in-service panel discussion on bisexuality for members of the Gay and Lesbian Community Action Council (now known as OutFront Minnesota). While the GLCAC had "bisexual" in their mission statement, the group did not include bisexual people in their practices. "So we called them on that," Victor said. Lou, Victor, Elise, and other area bisexual activists participated on the panel.

Elise said that the bi panelists encouraged audience members to ask them questions that they might otherwise be embarrassed to ask. "And by god they did," she said, "and that was good." Victor said one audience member in particular, a well-known and respected gay professional, took the lead in asking many difficult questions but "was not sure he was okay with what he was hearing." The response was familiar to the panelists, who felt frustrated by repeated encounters with the same misinformation and mistrust about bisexuality. Elise said, "At the intermission, all of us on the panel went out in the hall for a minute and went, 'AHH! I'm glad we're doing this, but AHH! We need

138

to have something that's just us instead of constantly having to do this. Let's have a farking conference or something!'"

    That moment planted the seed for the first bisexuality conference. Soon afterward, meetings were held to begin organizing a conference modeled on science fiction cons. Victor recalls how organizers coined the name BECAUSE: "Everyone kept using the term—because we need to do this, because we need to do that, and then I said, 'Well, I guess it's an acronym,' and then [Elise] started working it up." And so was born the Bisexual Empowerment Conference: A Uniting and Supportive Experience. Over time organizers have worked to make BECAUSE as inclusive as possible. For example, a Tweeted picture of a welcome sign from BECAUSE 2015 announced that the conference is "by, for, and about the bisexual, pansexual, fluid, queer, unlabeled (bi+) community and allies."

CHAPTER IV

"THE ZINE THAT YOUR LOVER WARNED YOU ABOUT!":

POSITIONING, NARRATIVES, AND BISEXUAL SCIENCE FICTION FANS

Chapter III brought together literary theories of estrangement and the novum, subjunctivity and intertextual mega-texts, along with the social processes of textual poaching and collective intelligence, in order to develop a framework for understanding what resources speculative narratives have to offer bisexually identified readers. As participant stories demonstrated, specialized reading skills, a shared knowledge of mega-texts, and certain enculturation processes allow readers to recognize a "folk canon" of significant texts, build self-organized communities around shared interests, and develop collective intelligence not only to share information but also, as this chapter illustrates, to work out interpretive strategies and subcultural dynamics.

To further explore how speculative fiction serves as a resource to bisexual fans, in this chapter I use concepts from linguistic anthropology, social psychology, and narratology to structurally analyze some the textual and social processes made possible through speculative fiction. The theoretical perspective I develop draws from Erving Goffman's work on frames and footing along with positioning theory from social psychology and concepts in narrative theory. Through combined ethnographic and textual analysis, I will explore how cultural narratives may be used to position bisexuals and bisexuality in certain ways, and how bisexuals have developed communities in the Twin Cities area by drawing upon the resources of fan culture.

First I contextualize my analysis with a brief overview of the development of science fiction fan culture and fanzines in the U.S. Then I discuss positioning theory and the "position/act-action/storyline" model of analysis as a means of understanding how personhood is mutually constituted through social discourses. With these tools, I then closely examine how *Politically Incorrect*, a fanzine produced in the late 1980s by two of my project participants, frames a particular narrative of what it means to be bisexual and fannish. I also look at how specific contributors to the fanzine position themselves in relationship to the zine's framing and in relationship to certain discourses on political correctness in fan communities and in gay and lesbian communities during the period. Through the narratives of these writers, *Politically Incorrect* attempts to make specific interventions in the normative assumptions of *both* fan and gay and lesbian communities by reflecting how non-monosexual science fiction fans understand, and are affected by, these norms.

Building Culture: Fans, Cons, and Zines

Fan histories generally point to the letters column of *Amazing Stories* as the beginning of science fiction fandom. Founded in April 1926, *Amazing Stories* was the first magazine dedicated to publishing stories that were part science and part fiction. Though such stories had appeared regularly in pulp magazines prior to *Amazing*, publisher Hugo Gernsback helped define a new pulp genre through the term *science fiction* (though he preferred *scientifiction*). He also encouraged fan communication by printing the addresses of people who wrote letters to the magazine. Thus the letters column of *Amazing* and other prozines (professional magazines that published science

141

fiction, weird fiction, and fantasy) became a primary resource for fans to communicate with each other, to produce their own fanzines (amateur publications written and published by fans without expectation of profit), to establish special interest clubs, and by the late 1930s, to organize the first cons (science fiction conventions and conferences).[55]

The model of fandom was not new, however. According to fan historian Harry Warner, Jr., early prototypes of fandom were already established by late nineteenth and early twentieth century amateur press associations (or apas), American pulp magazine and dime novel collectors, and hobby clubs. Warner says the most telling piece of evidence for the early existence of fandom was a comment by Gernsback in the June 1926 issue of *Amazing*: "From the suggestions for reprints that are coming in, these 'fans' seem to have a hobby all their own of hunting up scientifiction stories" (qtd. in Warner 49). This passage also marks the first public use of the term *fan* as, Warner says, "the name for the person who likes science fiction too much to be content with merely reading it occasionally" (49).

Through the 1930s and 1940s, science fiction fandom acquired traits of a subculture all its own with fan-produced zines, art, music (known by the 1950s as filk), and other specialized ways of sharing culture and group membership, including the development of slang terms and expressions. As Warner notes, words in fanspeak (the meanings of which are not obvious to mundanes, or non-fannish people) are unlike other interest group slang or jargon in that "they are neither exact synonyms for an existing, suitable word . . . nor terms created to describe an object or process peculiar to the field. . .

---

[55] For more on early fan history see Warner, Verba, and the website fanlore.org.

. . Instead they are words devised by fans to cope with situations that are not unique to fandom but have failed to produce a really adequate word in mundania" (69-70).

For example, during the Second World War the term *gafia* (formed from the initials of "getting away from it all") originally denoted doing fannish things "to forget or avoid the unpleasant things in the warring world around him," but later came to mean the opposite: the dropping of fannish obligations and activities (or fanac) (Warner 70). Other examples of early fanspeak include faan or Trufan (an individual who is more interested in fandom than in professional science fiction), fakefan (someone who likes the company of fans but has no real interest in fandom), bem (giant bug-eyed monster aliens, usually found on the covers of pulp magazines, though they need not have bug-type eyes to qualify as bem), and fen as the plural of fan (Warner 69-74). The lexicon of fandom has since expanded enormously, as shown by a quick perusal of the 1,152 glossary entries at fanlore.org.

In addition to letters columns in prozines, science fiction fanzines became a primary resource for fan culture to develop during the 1930s and 1940s. *The Comet* is credited as the first science fiction fan publication, produced in 1930 by the Science Correspondence Club in Chicago. Though the term *fanzine* has been dated to 1940, fan publications at the time were also known as fanmags or letterzines, consisting primarily of non-fiction about fandom and letters of comment (LoCs) about the publication to the editor. Some fan publications consisted almost exclusively of letter columns, where

debates among fans were conducted in much the same way as Internet newsgroups, discussion forums, or email lists are today.[56]

The pulp magazine industry declined in the 1950s as a result of a growing paperback book market and a U.S. Congressional inquiry into the effects of comic book violence on children,[57] but science fiction fandom continued to develop through cons, clubs, fanzines, collecting, and a new market for science fiction novels and short fiction anthologies in the 1960s (see Chapter I). Then in 1966, Gene Roddenberry screened the pilot to his new television series at the Cleveland World Science Fiction Convention just before the show premiered on NBC, and a new media fandom was born (Verba 1).

The television series was, of course, *Star Trek*.

While media fandoms had formed around earlier television series such as *The Man From U.N.C.L.E* (1964-68), *Star Trek* fandom heralded the first significant fan fiction (or fanfic) about the world and characters of a television series. The earliest known *Star Trek* fanzine was *Spockanalia*, first published in September 1967 as the second season began airing. It consisted of articles and one non-relationship-oriented "general interest" (or gen) fan story (Verba 1). In April 1969, *Spokanalia 4* published

---

[56] As amateur publications, print fanzines were produced through the reproduction technologies available to zine editors at a given time (e.g. typewriters, mimeographs, and copy machines) and distributed at club meetings and cons, or by subscription (usually for the cost of production and postage). Also, fanzine editors often announced other zines of interest to their readers so that fans could network and communicate with each other through multiple amateur publications in addition to meeting at regional and national cons. In the digital age, Internet wikis have become the new knowledge repository for fan history and culture. Wikipedia.org and Fanlore.org are two popular sites for information about fandoms, fanzines, and fan culture and history.

[57] In 1954, American psychiatrist Fredric Wertham published *Seduction of the Innocent*, which warned that comic books were a serious cause of juvenile delinquency. Wertham's book galvanized parents to campaign for censorship, and the U.S. Congress launched an inquiry into the industry. As a result, publishers voluntarily established the Comics Code Authority to self-censor their titles ("Seduction").

"Time Enough," by Lelamarie S. Kreidler, a mildly suggestive "girl-meets-Spock, girl-beds-Spock" story that may have been the first fanwork featuring the trope later called het (heterosexual relationship story) (Verba 3).

Though the show was cancelled in 1969, Trekker fandom was only beginning. By 1970, the first *Star Trek*-related fan clubs were established, while the first *Star Trek* conventions were organized a few years later. Also, the fanzine *T-Negative* began printing letters of comment from readers. As with the early pulp science fiction magazines, letter columns became increasingly important to Trekker fan communication, so much so that entire fanzines were devoted to LoCs. Also, fan publications began advertising fellow Trekker fanzines and printing the first collected listings of available fanzines with contact information (Verba 4).

As *Star Trek* media fandom grew, it also became clear that there were often significant differences between science fiction literature fans and media fans. As fan historian Joan Marie Verba points out, an ever-increasing number of *Star Trek* fans in the late 1960s and early 1970s had no experience, or interest, in science fiction. Many of these mostly female fans viewed the series as a "buddy" show or a Homeric/romantic drama. When these fans wrote stories, they featured the relationship between Captain Kirk and his First Officer Spock as the most important element, often through "hurt/comfort" scenarios in which one character is hurt physically or psychologically and the other character rescues and comforts the suffering one (23). In 1974, the fanzine *Grup* published "A Fragment Out of Time," by Diane Marchant, which may have been the first homosexual Kirk/Spock or K/S story. In her history of Trekker fanzines, Verba describes the piece: "[Marchant's] story in *Grup* was two pages long, and described two people,

one of them male, neither of them identified by name, making love. The details were so vague in the essentials that a reader might assume that it was a man and woman making love, but from Diane's essay in the next issue of *Grup*, as well as her subsequent writing, it is now clear that this was a story of Kirk and Spock making love" (19). More direct K/S followed in both underground and "above ground" fanzines, accompanied by a great quantity of fan discussion about male love and its expression in the Kirk and Spock relationship. In 1975, the publication of *Start Trek Lives!*—the first fan-produced popular book on *Star Trek* fandom—brought a huge influx of new fans into the world of *Star Trek* fanzines, gen fanfic, K&S (romantic) fanfic, and K/S (sexual) fanfic (20). Over time, the convention of linking two same-sex characters together with the virgule, or "/" mark, came to designate the homoerotic fanfic genre known as slash.

In the context of 1970s science fiction fandom, discourse about sex, sexuality, gender, and their expressions were already well underway. American counter-culture and free love movements, gay liberation, and second wave feminism had opened new ground for social science fiction writing. Meanwhile the continuing popularity of the *Star Trek* franchise in the television series re-runs, original novels, and films gave fans opportunities to explore multiple possibilities of same-sex relationships and desire in slash fanfic.

People who participate in fan cultures are accustomed to working out their issues through discussion and debate in fanzines and at cons. When a community disagrees too greatly on an issue, splinter groups may develop new zines and cons as they split away to pursue their own values and ideas. For example, after the 34th World Science Fiction Convention in Kansas City, a group of social science fiction fans were inspired to

146

organize a convention like WorldCon but with feminism as the dominant theme. This led to the first WisCon, held in 1977 in Madison, Wisconsin. WisCon continues today as the world's leading convention for feminist science fiction and fantasy, offering the James Tiptree Jr. Award for the best portrayals of gender and the Carl Brandon Award for the best portrayals of race in speculative fiction. WisCon stands as a model of feminist praxis by offering programming on diversity, gender-inclusive facilities, and accommodations for people with low-incomes and disabilities.

Some Tools for Fanzine Analysis

Before the Internet, fanzines and prozines were primary resources for ongoing discussions and community building in fan cultures. Fanzine articles would prompt letters of comment, follow-up articles, and inspire discussion panels at cons, which would in turn prompt more articles and letters in fanzines. These threads of discussion and debate give some fanzine texts the conversational qualities of talk. As such, some of the tools used in analyzing conversational interactions may be useful for understanding how fanzines contribute to the social and cultural work of building and sustaining fandom.

When it comes to methods for analyzing social interactions, sociologist Erving Goffman has been one of the most influential American scholars of the twentieth century. During the 1960s and 1970s, he made substantial advances to the study of face-to-face interaction and developed numerous concepts that have had tremendous influences on the study of everyday life, social interaction, the social construction of self, and the social organization of experience. His work popularized the study and importance of individual interactions, social constructionism, symbolic interaction, conversation analysis, and

147

ethnographic studies, and had long-lasting impacts on multiple disciplines including sociology, anthropology, linguistics, communication, and narratology ("Erving Goffman").

In *Frame Analysis*, Goffman theorized that we organize our experiences through "frames," or sets of concepts and theoretical perspectives, that guide the actions of individuals, groups, and societies. A frame provides the structure that holds the content of experiences together in meaningful ways, like a frame around a photograph. While frames provide a means of interpreting talk and aligning speakers and hearers, in *Forms of Talk*, Goffman analyzed how the frame for events may be affected by changes in "footing," or "significant shifts in alignment of speakers to hearers" (127). When footing shifts in natural talk, a participant's "alignment, or set, or stance, or posture, or projected self is somehow at issue" (128). An example is when talk shifts from the world that is spoken about (narrative level) to the world in which the speaking occurs (discourse level). Shifts in embedded speech or narrative levels are also common. Such changes in footing are a persistent feature of natural talk and happen constantly as a speaker works to manage the production and reception of an utterance. For example, a speaker may change footing to embed a different kind of talk, like narrative or reported speech, in order to establish a stance within a particular social identity or role in a given conversation (145-147).

Goffman's analysis of fames and the structure of talk provide a foundation for the development of positioning theory in social psychology. Positioning refers to the process of telling stories and situating our points of view in order to achieve personhood in our own and others' eyes. Social psychologists Luk van Langenhove and Rom Harré define

positioning as "the discursive construction of personal stories that make a person's actions intelligible and relatively determinate as social acts and within which the members of the conversation have specific locations" (16). Who we present ourselves to be, our persona, in any given social situation depends on the interaction of all participants. As Harré and van Langenhove state, "It is in the constant interplay of mutual recognition of one's own and the other's position that the particular version of a public self appropriate to the occasion is constructed" (9). Because selfhood is publically constructed, a lack of social recognition for a given persona can have profound consequences on how a person is viewed and treated by others: "If what one says or does cannot be fitted coherently into a locally acceptable cluster of the types of behavior that define a persona, that person is bound to be treated with reserve or even suspicion" (8).

Bisexuality provides a prime example of these processes, as illustrated in Chapter II. Bisexuals position themselves and are positioned by others in dynamic and ongoing discursive acts that produce multiple and conflicting meanings of bisexuality on individual, social, and institutional levels. Etic and emic viewpoints on bisexuality, political alliances, gender differences, social locations, (non)monogamy, and terminology all contribute to the framing of bisexuality and discursive acts that—depending on bisexuality's intelligibility in a given conversation—may result in an affirmation of personhood or in social erasure and invisibility for bisexually identified people.

According to van Langenhove and Harré, the structure of conversations is tri-polar, consisting of positions, storylines, and relatively determinate speech-acts, all of which are mutually determining (18). As talk unfolds, a position metaphorically links a person to certain moral and personal attributes (e.g. trustworthy, duplicitous, confused)

149

and affects how a speaker's contributions to the conversation are hearable. Positioned as powerful, for example, one speaker may be listened to whereas another speaker's voice may not be heard if positioned as powerless. Positions are also linked to storylines, so that living out a particular storyline (e.g. a career in education) in speech-act and action involves adopting a particular position (e.g. teacher) with its attendant moral rights and obligations (e.g. authorization to instruct and grade students) that make one's speech acts relatively determinate (e.g. student mentoring). Since certain rights and obligations accompany any given position, a shift in positioning will also shift the storyline and the social force of the speech-act (e.g. a student guides her teacher through using an app on a smart phone, thus taking up the position of mentor in that social interaction) (17).

The framework of position/act-action/storyline provides a methodological tool for the analysis of conversation and other intentional, normatively constrained patterns of interaction. Among other uses, it allows researchers to analyze how psychological phenomena such as personal identity (a continuous sense of self, or "I") and public personas (the discontinuous personal diversity, or "me's," displayed across social contexts) are produced through discourse, or the symbolically mediated interactions between people. The social world is created through the discursive processes of positioning and narrative storytelling that help to make people, institutions, and social events intelligible (van Langenhove and Harré 15).

Because positioning is always relational and can happen on individual, institutional, and social levels, the concept provides important insights into how domains of human knowledge are structured (or framed, à la Goffman) and maintained discursively. "To know anything is to know in terms of one or more discourses," say

social psychologists Davies and Harré (35). In other words, what we can experience and understand of our social identity, social world, and our places within it are always discursively produced through dynamic, ongoing interactional processes: talk with others and self-talk, social and institutional interactions, engagement with cultural productions, and so on. From a post-structuralist perspective, people's experiences of certain aspects of their personal-social identity "can only be expressed and understood through the categories available to them in discourse." These categories, or frameworks of knowledge (e.g. culturally and historically situated concepts of gender, race and ethnicity, sexuality, class, age, religion, family, work, leisure, health, friendship, and so on), allow them to take up certain subject positions and personas that incorporate "both a conceptual repertoire and a location for persons within the structure of rights and duties for those who use that repertoire" (Davies and Harré 35). It also means that the frameworks of knowledge available to us can limit our understanding of others and ourselves.

For instance, in the category of family, the positions grandparent/parent/child provide normative resources for discursively producing a particular social self in appropriate situations, such as when a father asks his son when he is going to marry a nice girl and start a family so he can be a grandparent. In this speech-act, the father positions himself and his son as characters within a traditional heteronormative storyline of family. In response, the son negotiates a new position in the contemporary storyline of gay marriage by responding that he has been thinking of getting married to a nice boy he is in love with. The father may then be faced with a conflict; if he has no framework for understanding this new aspect of the son's personhood and his self-positioning within a non-heteronormative family storyline, they may have difficulty negotiating their

conflicting discourses to achieve a determinate storyline. If the father's storyline of family cannot incorporate the possibility of his grandchild having two fathers, then his son may no longer appear intelligible to him in important ways.

As this example shows, the multiplicity of discourses in our social world can create distinct versions of reality that may compete or be incompatible with each other. By taking up a certain subject position, "a person inevitably sees the world through the vantage point of that position in terms of the particular images, metaphors, storylines and concepts which are made relevant within the particular discursive practice in which they are positioned" (Davies and Harré 35). Who we are as individuals, then, is not a fixed product but a shifting answer through the multitude of positions available and the stories through which we make sense of our lives.

While positioning theory offers a structure for the analysis of conversational elements in fanzines, other concepts from folklore and narrative theory provide the basic vocabulary I use in my analysis of how narratives work to position speakers in fanzine discussions. Some helpful terms include myth, narrative address, direct address, reported speech, embedded narrative, alignment, footing, framing, audience, and actual and implied readers.[58]

Politically Incorrect: **'The Zine That Your Lover Warned You About!'**

The tripolar model of position/act-action/storyline offers a useful framework for understanding how the fanzine *Politically Incorrect* addresses multiple positionings and

---

[58] For more on the core concepts and terms of narrative theory, see Herman et al.

152

storylines within overlapping fan and queer communities. As shown later, writers in the zine narrate their self- and social positionings in order to negotiate alternatives to dominant storylines and to affirm individual personhoods as well as group memberships.

Politically Incorrect was produced in the Twin Cities area during the mid-1980s by two of my project participants, Elise and Victor, who in a shared interview recalled meeting at the 1984 Minnesota Renaissance Festival, or RenFest. Victor was busking as a bagpipe performer while Elise was singing in a duo. Both were out as bisexuals, which they agreed was unusual at the time.

"The RenFest was of course a hotbed of sexuality," Elise said, "but not necessarily of people coming out about their preference." "Oh God, no," Victor replied. "But the level of innuendo was Empire State Building tall." "We were probably the only two out bi people at the festival at that point," she said. While other behaviorally bisexual people were around, Elise said they did not want to "deal with the hassle they'd get" by being open. However, she "didn't give a crap" about what other people thought of her bisexuality: "If you grow up in a fundy church and get away from it, any hassle you get from anyone is going to be small after that and actually kind of amusing. There was a fair amount of, 'You can't abuse me like that, I've been abused by experts!'"

Individually, the two friends were from very different backgrounds—Elise from a rural fundamentalist Lutheran family, and Victor from an urban social justice activist Native American family. However, they soon discovered that they shared many overlapping social circles, such as the Society for Creative Anachronism, pagan and polyamory groups, and the folk and filk music scenes; active involvement in science

fiction fandom including societies, cons, apas, and zines; and activism in lesbian and gay organizations, among other communities.

"This was something of a small town if you were not straight and you had an interest in any of this," Victor said. "So chances were good if you got involved in any one of these things and you were not straight, you were likely to run into other people who were interested in the same things and who were also not straight."

Victor and Elise agreed that learning to busk successfully at festivals—i.e. talking to groups of people and getting them to pay attention and money—was part of what shaped how they did activism. Victor said, "If you were entertaining, you could get away with almost anything, and that provided us with . . . a hell of a lot of practice."

"[Performing] also bent us toward the use of humor in what we do," Elise said, "which turned out to be a useful thing, because if you can get people laughing, they will examine things in a different way than if they think they're *supposed* to be examining something."

While there was a small bisexual community in the Twin Cities during the mid-1980s, neither Elise nor Victor knew anyone involved with it. Instead, each was active in lesbian and gay organizations, usually as the only out bisexuals in their groups. As such, they encountered both pushbacks from groups over their bisexual identities (Elise, particularly, in the Minneapolis women's community) and secret admissions of bisexuality from individual gay men and lesbians. "That sort of thing happened a lot," Victor said. "People who just say, 'Well, I'm actually bisexual.' . . . Part of what got us cranky is we kept running into organizations that were gay and lesbian oriented, where there were all these bi people, yet their policies were biphobic."

154

Both Elise and Victor found that their different backgrounds, as well as their shared identities in overlapping social circles, gave them multiple perspectives from which to challenge fixed perceptions on issues in both fannish and gay and lesbian communities. Elise said, "We at least had glimpses of what each other's personal and . . . other [social] communities *outside* our [shared] community's political struggles were, and we could make jokes about them that tied them together and compared the pieces."

"People literally couldn't get fixed on something that they wanted to pick at," Victor said. "What would end up happening is Elise would say something and then I would follow up with some other context, and people would say, 'OK, I guess I really have to think about this.'"

"We tag-teamed a lot," she said.

Politically Incorrect emerged partly because they wanted "something real," Victor said, and partly because "we were frustrated that we had been talking about it and people did not seem to remember that they had been listening, that we had said anything. . . . On some level we wanted to be able to say, 'Here, go read this.'"

"Things in print were real, were documented, could be looked at, could be shared, and had a certain legitimacy," Elise said. "In fandom at the time, questions were generally not seen as serious and weighty until they were being argued about in fanzines, and arguing about stuff in fanzines was part of how you worked out your group culture. It was culture building." Both had contributed to other fanzines and apas, so "it was natural to do a fanzine," she said.

Prior to the wide use of Usenet groups and Internet forums, zines were the discussion forums of the day, Victor said. As such, *Politically Incorrect* came out as part

155

of the "last flourish" of zine fandom: "We were able to say something and get noticed in a way that wouldn't have been the same even ten years later." The first four-page issue of the zine was distributed at the 1986 Minicon, a regional science fiction convention produced by the Minnesota Science Fiction Society. During the con, Elise and Victor gained subscribers and traded their zine with other editors to build their mailing list for future issues.

The zine's title was meant to "poke" at cultural discourses around so-called political correctness, a concept that was beginning to enter mainstream circles at the time. Victor knew the term from leftist politics, while Elise had encountered it in a women's coffeehouse and in the lesbian community.

Two tag lines were associated with the zine's title. The first one, which appeared on the masthead, declared the publication to be *The Zine That Your Lover Warned You About!* (see Fig. 1). Like the title, this subtitle satirized Elise and Victor's experiences as out bisexuals in gay male and lesbian communities. "People were talking about what was politically correct and not," Elise said, "and doing anything that gave women's energy to men was seen as politically incorrect. So being bisexual was by nature politically incorrect, especially if you had anything to do with the lesbian community because we were syphoning the female energy from the poor defenseless lesbians who were building a culture and sneaking it out under cover of whatever and giving it to men."

Fig. 1: Masthead for *Politically Incorrect.*

The second tagline read, "Politically Incorrect is a zine for bisexuals and their friends (and if you can't find yourself in either catagory [sic], that's just too bad!)." While this line appeared only in Issue 3.5 and Issue 3.8, it may have helped to clarify the zine's address to "people like us" (see Fig. 2) since the publication by that time was being circulated in broader fandom and zine communities.

In general, the address of *Politically Incorrect* works on multiple levels. First, the positioning and storylines offered by article contributors draw in "people like us" from overlapping queer and fan communities and invite them to participate in a shared conversation. Second, the editors use self-reflexive humor and exaggeration—in both written and visual forms—to simultaneously confront and diffuse possible moral and aesthetic objections from more normative readers in science fiction and zine communities. And third, the zine's editors and readers negotiate their positions in relationship to the zine and to one another through the storylines of letters of comment.[59]

Between 1986 and 1989, Elise and Victor produced six issues of *Politically Incorrect* (or *PI*):

- Issue 0, "Special Minicon XXI Issue" (4 pages, March 1986)

- Issue 1, "The Coming Out Issue" (24 pages, cir. November 1986-January 1987)

- Issue 2, "To Boldly Go…" (46 pages, cir. April-May 1987)

---

[59] Letters of comment offer a particularly productive space for examining how Politically Incorrect readers position their own and others' sexuality through narrative, particularly through an in-group meme: "That's nice, dear, pass the potato chips." While I do not have space here to analyze the LoCs, as a future project I plan to develop a new section titled "That's Nice, Dear, Pass the Potato Chips": Positioning Selves and Others in P.I. Letters of Comment.

- Issue 3, "Religions, Spirituality and Other Unnatural Vices" (41 pages, February 1988)

- Issue 3.5, untitled (4 pages, January 1989)

- Issue 3.8, untitled (8 pages, April 1989)

In the analysis that follows, I reference multiple pages from Issues 0, 1, and 3. While I have included portions of these pages as figures in this chapter, scans of all referenced *PI* pages can be found in the Appendixes at the end of this project.

"There Was a Clear and Distinct Reason": Positioning the Zine

In "An Editorial" on the back page of Issue 0 (see Appendix A), Elise wrote a description of why producing *PI* felt important to both her and Victor at the time. The editorial is exemplary of the acts of positioning and narrative framing at work to negotiate group social identities—a project that the zine, as a whole, was also engaged in (see Fig. 2).

With the opening words, "In the beginning . . . ," the editorial evokes the narrative frame of a mythic creation story that explains how something came into being. In such stories, form is given to absence, and voice is given to silence. In the creation of *PI*, the zine's form and voice help to make legible a position and storyline—that of bisexuality— that are present in culture but socially unrecognizable. "There was a clear and distinct reason that this 'zine was necessary," Elise continues, though at first she is unable to "articulate" what that reason is since sharing knowledge of a particular viewpoint depends upon mutual reference points that signify meaningfully to others. Without a

158

shared knowledge framework to articulate her position directly, Elise must instead

"<u>demonstrate</u>" the experience of it through storytelling.

An Editorial~

In the beginning...

There was a clear and distinct reason that this 'zine was necessary...the only problem was that I couldn't seem to articulate it. However, I can <u>demonstrate</u> it in an anecdote:

The other day, I told a gay male friend of mine that I was helping with a 'zine called Politically Incorrect. He blinked and said, "I thought we were Politically Correct." As a joke, I replied, "You forget -- I'm a militant bisexual"* He looked at me quite seriously and said, "Maybe you'll grow out of it."

Hmm....My being what I am struck him as unacceptable and limited our interaction: something about this Politically Correct stuff reminds me of the virulent brand of Christian fundamentalism I fled as an adolescent. In-Groups and Out-Groups are dangerous things. To my mind, the cirtue inherent in being Politically Incorrect lies in the fact that P.I. people dislike dogma. Dogma is rigid. Life is flexible -- people change and shift (in multiple dimensions, I might add -- remember that no personal choices are two-option only, "either you're for us or against us" choices) and the wheel turns. SF people (most of 'em) value the ability to put on and appreciate other world-views and other realities. That's vhy there aren't too many "control junkies" among them -- we tend to be a pretty flexible bunch. There's nothing a control freak fears more than people who can appreciate alternate viewpoints -- in short, people who don't make a fetish of being Politically Correct. That's why I'm P.I....it seems the only gentle, strong and whole way for me to approach the multiplicity of people I meet and love. And at the risk of sounding maudlin, if you are reading and enjoying this, you're likely to be or soon become one of those people. So...let me know what you think of the 'zine and what you'd like. And remember -- this is truly 'a zine for people like us.' - Elise

(I can only agree with my whole heart - Victor)

* or a lesbian who makes exceptions -- the definitions changes week to week.

Fig. 2: Editorial from *Politically Incorrect* Issue 0, page 4.

In the embedded narrative that follows, Elise attempts to make coherent an

experience of self that appears illegible to some social positions: "The other day, I told a

gay male friend of mine that I was helping with a 'zine called Politically Incorrect. He

blinked and said, 'I thought we were Politically Correct.' As a joke, I replied, 'You

forget—I'm a militant bisexual'* [sic] He looked at me quite seriously and said, 'Maybe

you'll grow out of it.'"

The speech-acts in this brief narrative position the actors in conflicting storylines as the two negotiate the determinate meaning of the topic—political correctness—and their relative positions to it. In the anecdote, Elise opens an exchange with a friend by telling him about the zine, embedding the friend's position as a "gay male" to indicate its relevance to the story's outcome. Her friend, however, does not follow her anticipated social script by showing interest in the zine. Rather, he "blinks," indicating a lack of comprehension at the title "Politically Incorrect"; in the mid-1980s, insiders used the phrase *politically correct* to refer to the progressive politics of gay men and lesbians. The friend then shifts footing, replying, "I thought we were Politically Correct," the capital letters here indicating a proper name and group personhood. Perhaps his response was meant to be clever, but the pronoun "we" repositions them both as "Politically Correct" (PC) group members while his comment also censures her zine's title as an apparent violation of her group membership.

Elise resists his positioning of her as PC by shifting footing again, making a political inside joke by calling herself a "militant bisexual." By alluding to the "militant" exclusion of men and bisexual women by some radical lesbians, she derives humor from upturning the meaning of *militant* to describe herself radically *inclusive* of gender. Her joke dually resists the friend's positioning of her as PC and includes them both within another group, as fellow outsiders to radical lesbian feminism. However, he refuses the implication of a shared outsider group membership. Instead of accepting the common ground of this experience, he positions her as outsider to his own PC insider group of gay and lesbian politics. His final response, "Maybe you'll grow out of it," carries the force of a stereotyped cultural narrative of bisexuals as confused and immature. For Elise (and

160

Victor), the social force of this storyline and how it positions bisexual people in political and social situations warrant *PI* as "necessary."

"Hmm. . . . ," the editorial continues, again giving voice to something unformed and pausing to find a means to articulate the knowledge. "My being what I am" (the definition of which "changes week to week," she says in a footnote) "struck him as unacceptable and limited our interaction." Once more, Elise embeds a brief example, using Christian fundamentalism as a metaphor to explain how PC "dogma" creates "In-Groups and Out-Groups," which are "dangerous things." The virtue in being politically *in*correct (PI), she says, "lies in the fact that P.I. people dislike dogma." Elise draws a clear distinction between the rigidness of either-or binaries and multidimensional worldviews, recognizing that "life is flexible—people change and shift . . . in multiple dimensions," and that "no personal choices are two-option only."

Elise then introduces another group position—science fiction people. "SF people (most of 'em) value the ability to put on and appreciate other world-views and other realities," she says. They are people "who don't make a fetish of being Politically Correct," implying that more "control junkies" may be found among PC gays and lesbians than among PI science fiction people. "We tend to be a pretty flexible bunch," indicating with the pronoun "we" her clear membership in the science fiction community: "That's why I'm P.I. . . . it seems the only gentle, strong and whole way for me to approach the multiplicity of people I meet and love."

Elise's positioning in the editorial evokes not a queer perspective but a dimensional one. At the moment of *PI*'s creation, Elise's experience of her self draws complex intersections among overlapping social groups. To be "gentle, strong and

161

whole" within these groups requires the ability to see others and her self in flexible and non-dogmatic ways—a position framed in the zine through the metaphor of political incorrectness. The metaphor captures a narrative and positioning that is difficult to articulate—a dimensional way of thinking that embraces a multiplicity of viewpoints and brings wholeness. In her conclusion, Elise invites the reader into this framework through an emotionally vulnerable direct address: "And at the risk of sounding maudlin, if you are reading and enjoying this, you're likely to be or soon become one of those people." A final pronoun shift from "you" to "us" includes herself and the reader within this newly drawn group. "And remember," she concludes, "this is truly 'a zine for people like us.'"

"I can only agree with my whole heart," Victor adds at the end.

Elise's editorial illustrates through narrative that in certain social minority group contexts gays and lesbians share a privileged PC in-group status that positions bisexuals as politically incorrect and bisexuality as an invalid social position. On the other hand, bisexuals and some science fiction people share a politically incorrect out-group status because they resist dogmatic points of view. Moreover, she suggests that some bisexuals and science fiction people share a dimensional way of looking at the world that embraces more than binary "either-or" choices. While she warns that in/out group divisions are dangerous, Elise knowingly draws a circle around "people like us" to demonstrate why the zine is necessary—to concretize and validate the "Politically Incorrect" worldviews of bisexual science fiction people and their friends.

While the editorial frames a reason for the zine's existence as a whole, two articles in Issue 0 signal the zine as continuing ongoing conversations among some fans who are interested in non-normative sexuality in speculative fiction. The first article,

162

"Whatever Happened to Consenting Aliens??" on the front page (see Appendix A),

locates the zine as the continuation of dialogues that began in the mid-1980s at Minicon,

a regional science fiction convention held in Minneapolis. "You may recall the discussion

. . . on lesbian and gay characters in SF, known as the 'Consenting Aliens' panel," says

the author (likely Elise), who states that several people had organized discussions of this

type in the past. Since the usual organizers were

> over-committed (or is that over-committeed??) for Minicon XXI, they deemed it
> best to step to one side and let someone else have a go at it. Unfortunately,
> 'someone else' with the time and inclination has not come out of the . . .
> woodwork (or anywhere else), yet, ergo, no discussion. But lest you think that this
> con will escape totally unscathed, be aware that the editors of PI (dat's dis rag
> what you've got in yer mitts right now) and some of their friends are threatening
> to throw a Coming-Out Party for the 'zine.

> Right away this front cover article situates *PI* as part of an ongoing conversation

among fans interested in "consenting aliens," a metaphor that plays upon a science fiction

trope of the alien "other" as a figure of homosexual threat, while also conveying

acceptance of any sexual expression among agreeable beings. However, the author also

recognizes that not all who pick up the zine may be "friends" to "consenting aliens," or

may be unable to participate in such discussions, by playing on the metaphor of the closet

and coming out—both in the mild rebuke that no one "has come out of the . . .

woodwork" to organize a panel discussion that year, and in the dual celebration-threat of

a "Coming-Out Party" for the new zine. By light-heartedly warning that the con will not

"escape totally unscathed" from "threatening" "aliens," the piece works to undermine

homophobic discourses and the social force of the closet at the regional fandom level of Minion.[60]

An article by Victor likewise situates the zine as part of an ongoing conversation. In "Why *Door into Fire* and *Door Into Shadow* Aren't Gay Fantasy—and Shouldn't Be" (see Appendix A), Victor offers further reflections on an argument with his friend David at a previous Minicon over whether or not the Dianne Duane novels were really "gay" fantasy literature. As with the editorial, positioning and storylines provide resources for Victor (and David in the next issue) to understand the source of their interpretive disagreement and to negotiate their responses.

Victor explains that Duane's *Door into Fire* features two male protagonists who are in love—a fact that "didn't shock anyone in their society." In the novel's world, custom demanded that each person must have a child to be considered a mature adult. After that, "it didn't matter with whom you fell in love." The interpretive dispute with David hinged "on the business of having to have children," Victor wrote. "David felt that this custom clearly made it impossible for the characters to be really 'gay.' I felt that it was a different approach to a common social situation, and did not invalidate their 'gayness.'"

In this reported summary of the dispute, Victor and David each argue from different interpretive frameworks that hinge on the storylines and positioning of each actor in relation to what it means to be gay in their particular historical moment. Victor

---

[60] In terms of aesthetics, the article's self-conscious use of illiterate or "countrified" diction in reference to itself—i.e. "dat's dis rag what you've got in yer mitts right now"—engages with an anticipated critique of the zine as having a poor production quality. Hand-written page numbers, editorial comments, headers, typeface, and spacing all purposefully engage the aesthetics of DIY zine production during the period, a point I plan to develop further in future work.

realizes that their differing sexual identities affect their interpretive stances in relationship to sexuality in the Duane novels—specifically, Victor identifies as bisexual while David identifies gay. (Their sexual identities are explicitly stated later in the "Coming Out" Issue of *PI*, published in late 1986.) By placing quote marks around "gay" and "gayness," Victor marks these terms as situating their points of view in relationship to a specific social identity category. He positions David's objection as resting on "what seemed to be a very 'politically correct' interpretation of what gayness is all about. Simply put, a 'real' gay role model was not to be shackled by the customs of a straight society," such as obligatory procreation. Victor goes on to agree that the novel "is not, strictly speaking, gay fantasy literature." By momentarily aligning himself with David's viewpoint, he is able then to draw an important distinction between two genres: on the one hand, "gay fantasy literature" as aligned with gay and lesbian identity and politics, and on the other hand, science fiction and fantasy as "the literature of the possible."

Victor's alignment as an ally to the gay community is critical to the move he makes next. He explains that "the entire business of what gayness is all about is a direct result of the Stonewall riots of 1969—the liberation of gays, and the breaking of old stereotypes and myths about gays and lesbians. It was a direct consequence of a specific set of social conditions, and was a catalyst for change." Victor demonstrates that he grasps David's position as a politically progressive gay man by showing his own moral understanding. However, similar to Elise's editorial, Victor maintains that David's principled objection—one framed through a gay liberation narrative—is a PC interpretation that may not be appropriate in this case. He then *reframes* David's objection by asking the kind of open-ended "what if" questions that are characteristic of

speculative fiction as a popular genre: "What if those cultural and religious conditions did not exist? Had *never* existed?"

Victor's questions signal a shift in footing that alters the framework for interpreting the novels. As Goffman pointed out, changes in footing imply "a change in alignment we take up to ourselves and the others present as expressed in the way we manage the production and reception of an utterance" (*Forms of Talk* 128). An alignment with gay liberation politics provided the frame for David's interpretation of Duane's novels as *not* gay fantasy literature. When Victor shifts footing, he takes up an interpretive framework with a different storyline and alignment in relation to the novels. In Victor's case, the new framework becomes "the tradition of science fiction and fantasy." He points out that, in *Door Into Fire*, "the Judeo-Christian objections to homosexuality never existed, and the entire society developed along very different lines." Victor shifts the lens from what is politically correct today to what might be possible in imagined worlds. "The characters of the story shouldn't be expected to fit into what we think of as being 'gay'," he says, "simply because they have never lived in this world."[61]

Victor then embeds a hypothetical objection into his argument, anticipating further PC claims: "One might charge that the author has lived in this world, and therefore has a responsibility to break with traditional role patterns." He replies that this

---

[61] When shifts in footing happen in talk, other participants can then take up the change in footing or negotiate other shifts, depending upon the social force of the speech acts involved. In textual discourse, the process is slower but he same dynamics of position / speech-act / storyline still can be seen at work. In Issue 1, for example, David responds to Victor's *Door Into Fire* article in Issue 0 by shifting footing again—away from Victor's genre argument and toward an analysis of his own negative response to Duane's novels. In short, David says he feels jealous of the main character's freedom to have a family (see Appendix B, "A Thoughtful Reconsideration of Door Into Fire, or What are We going to do with all these rotting Albatrosses?)."

is "tantamount to telling the author how to write, which is not in the tradition of science fiction and fantasy—the literature of the possible, right?" Gayness is one pattern of homosexual interaction, "yet it is not the only pattern," Victor says. The construction of "believable, internally consistent" worlds is a "vital part of science fiction and fantasy." As such, he concludes that it may be inappropriate to use "gayness as a standard to judge depictions of alternate affectional preferences in science fiction and fantasy."

Like the strategy of address used in the "consenting aliens" article, Victor invites further dialogue in his conclusion by asking the reader to "make up your own mind" while diffusing his PI stance with humor: "As for myself, though, I'll just continue to worry about when G.R.I.M. (Gays for Righteous Image Management) will come knocking on my door. . . . "

"Bisexuality: Threat or Menace?": Positioning Bisexuals in Lesbian and Gay Spaces

While Victor's reference to "G.R.I.M." was meant to be humorous, the reality of biphobia in lesbian and gay spaces at the time gives his joke a satirical edge. In fact, a year and a half after publishing Issue 0, the editors ran headlong into a "G.R.I.M." situation as volunteers for a student conference at the University of Minnesota. In Issue 3 of *PI*, they described their experiences in a seven-page "con report" of the Midwest Lesbian Gay Student Conference, held October 23-25, 1987 (see Appendix C). Using DIY zine techniques such as appropriation of printed materials, cut-and-paste collage, and hand-written editorial commentary, the report graphically demonstrates some of the conflicting ways in which bisexuals were positioned within gay and lesbian spaces at the time and how Victor and Elise negotiated this positioning.

167

The seven-page section can be read generally as a chronological narrative progression, with the first two pages as pre-conference organizing, the next four pages as Friday and Saturday's conference events, and the final page as an afterward reflecting on the experience. However, the collaged pages and layered narratives resist an easy linear reading.

As Fig. 3 illustrates, many of the appropriated materials from the event are cut into triangles, trapezoids, parallelograms, and other geometric shapes. In fact, very little of the text is set squarely to the reader's point of view, forcing one to physically tilt one's head or the page itself to read a piece of printed text. Only a few elements such as the Friday and Saturday schedule for the conference are squarely framed in reference to the reader. Even so, the program has been reduced to half the size of a normal sheet and heavily annotated by editorial comments. And since many of these materials have been cut through or layered over other materials, only fragments of the printed content are available to readers.

Layered on top of this base level are comments by the editors—hand-written at various angles—that respond both to the collaged fragments and to one another's comments. By collaging pieces of printed planning, promotional, and conference materials together with layers of narrative commentary, the editors produce a visual mosaic that must be read as a whole assemblage. Like the multiple *visual* angles, the collaged materials and the hand-written comments add multiple *narrative* angles to the story of the event. This visual and narrative framing is deliberately dis-orienting to the actual reader and opens a new narrative space for Elise and Victor to negotiate their

positions, both in relation to lesbian and gay spaces and to the implied readers of the zine—i.e. "people like us" situated by the zine's editorial in Issue 0.
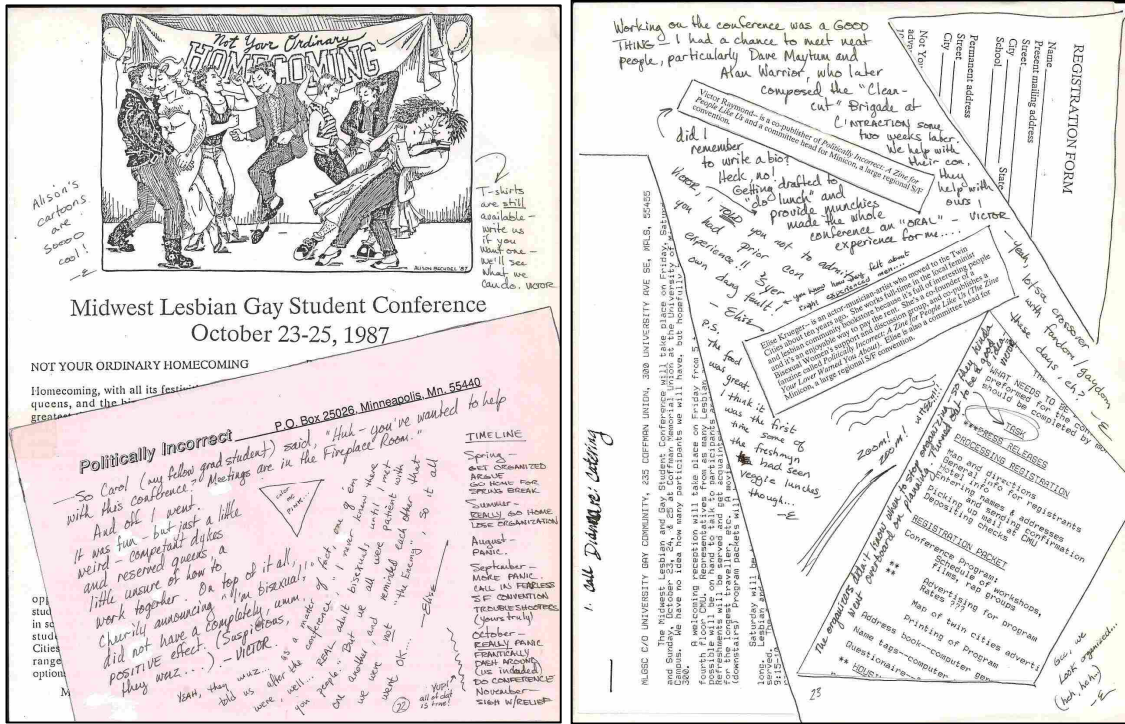
Fig. 3: Con report from *Politically Incorrect* Issue 3, pages 22-23.

Several elements position Victor and Elise as sharing fandom and fanac as frames of reference with the zine's readers. Initially, "Midwest Lesbian Gay Student Conference" is listed under the heading of "Trip/Con Reports" in the issue's table of contents. A con report typically refers to science fiction conventions or conferences, so the report itself is situated within the knowledge framework of fandom even though the event was not a "con" *per se*. The circumstances of Elise and Victor's involvement also position them as having experience as con organizers. According to his "timeline" in the right margin of page 22 (see Fig. 3), the student volunteers "get organized" and "argue"

in the spring, go home for summer and "lose organization," and begin to "panic" by August. In September they "call in fearless SF convention troubleshooters (yours truly)" to help with struggling organizational efforts. Moreover, on page 23, Elise and Victor's bios from the event program list each as "a committee head for Minicon, a large regional S/F convention." These and other items position them both as having knowledge and expertise that the lesbian and gay student organizers lacked. Elise writes on page 23, "Victor, I TOLD you not to admit you had prior con experience!! 'Syer own dang fault!"

Additional elements indicate that, much like the zine itself, Elise and Victor welcomed the opportunity to help bring together two communities they both participated in. On page 23 Victor writes that "Working on the conference was a GOOD THING—I had a chance to meet neat people," some of whom helped at another con two weeks later. "We help with their con, they help with ours," he says. Elise responds, "Yeah, lotsa crossover with fandom/gaydom these days, eh?" Also on page 24, Victor comments that he had "an opportunity to dash through the equivalent of the Huxter's Room (the Organization Fair)," while he mentions on page 25 that, "After having volunteered to do parties for two other cons, LUNCH for this turned out to be a breeze." They also participated on a panel called "Lesbians and Gays in Science Fiction Literature," which Elise writes on page 24 was "sort of yer generic 'Consenting Aliens' Panel, for those of you who have been to Minicon." By referencing multiple similarities and crossovers between fandom and the lesbian and gay community, the editors bring themselves and readers into a shared space for "people like us."

While Elise and Victor experienced continuity with their identities as fans and some positive crossovers between fanac and the student conference, other elements of the

report indicate that their bisexual identities were disturbing to the "Politically Correct" lesbian and gay community. In his initial comments on page 22, Victor tells a short anecdote to illustrate this: "So Carol (my fellow grad student) said, 'Huh—you've wanted to help with this conference? Meetings are in the Fireplace Room.' And off I went." Right away, the terseness in Carol's brief reported speech implies a frustration with the conference organization process and a measure of disbelief ("Huh") that Victor would want to "help," signaling a problem in the ranks of the student committee. Likewise, his initial enthusiasm is dampened by the situation he encounters: "It was fun—but just a little weird—competent dykes and reserved queens, a little unsure of how to work together." As the "fearless SF convention troubleshooters," Victor and Elise bridge this gap and provide assistance that the "dykes" and "queens" needed to work together, but their positioning as experts is undermined by their politically incorrect sexuality. Victor continues, "On top of it all, cheerily announcing 'I'm bisexual!' did not have a completely, umm, POSITIVE effect. (Suspicious, they wuz . . .)."

In her responding comment, Elise confirms this negative positioning by the student committee: "Yeah, they wuz . . . as a matter of fact, one of 'em told us after the conference, 'I never knew there were, well . . . REAL adult bisexuals until I met you people." While Elise also says "we all were patient with one another, and reminded each other that we were not 'the Enemy,'" several other elements of the con report indicate their ongoing attempts to negotiate the social positioning of bisexuals as outsiders who threaten the lesbian and gay community.

For example, on page 25, Elise comments on a workshop titled "'Fitting in' the Lesbian Community" that the point was "nobody fits in all the time." "I enjoyed it," she

171

writes, "but as a new and different experience I <u>didn't</u> come out as bi there. Was I

chicken? Or was I just having a mellow episode? (probably chicken.)" Victor responds,

"Yup. <u>I</u> understand—not easy to be honest—all the time." Also, commenting on the

"Bisexuality" workshop they led together, Elise writes on page 26, "Yup. We had a

workshop. Well, I mean, it wasn't hands on, or anything, but it was ok." The "hands on"

comment attempts to lighten her unenthusiastic report, but it falls somewhat flat—and

perhaps deliberately so, given negative cultural stereotypes of bisexuals as too "hands

on." Victor is more direct with his feelings about their workshop: "Hmm—how do you

deal with an oppression that gets expressed as 'I snuck in—I didn't want to be thought of

as bisexual.'? Well?" As the reported speech demonstrates, even in an "insiders"

workshop, bisexuals were positioned as "outsiders" to the gay and lesbian community. As

such, Victor's rhetorical demand for a way to respond to such oppression remains

unanswered.

On page 27, a block of time at the end of Saturday's printed schedule announces

separate "Lesbian only" and "Gay male only" meetings—descriptions that specifically

exclude from attendance women and men who identify as bisexual. The editors circled

the text and exchanged the following comments in the margin:

> **Victor**: So where did we go? Out to dinner!
> **Elise**: Was that a 'bisexuals only' meeting?
> **Victor**: Just what <u>is</u> a BISEXUAL SEPARATIST, anyway? And how do we TELL?
> **Elise**: Am I a Bisexual Separatist yet?? Well, no chance, really. . . . (But I <u>was</u> pretty grouchy when we were left out.)

Their comments echo the editorial in Issue 0, where Elise's gay male friend fails to get

the joke about her being a "militant bisexual." The ridiculousness of bisexuality as a

"separatist" gender-inclusive sexual orientation satires the gender-exclusive practices

motivated by political correctness in the lesbian and gay community at the time.

The background layer of page 28, the final page of the report, features a workshop

proposal form that the editors have filled in with mock statements. In addition to

requesting a "lavender" T-shirt (only turquoise, white, and pink are offered) and claiming

in their illiterate bio spoof that "they wuz overworkd at too meny conz, so they died,"

Elise and Victor list as their workshop title, "BISEXUALITY: THREAT OR

MENACE?" By using the satirical phrase "threat or menace," which plays upon 1950s

McCarthy-era discourses of homosexuals as "menace" to society as well as 1970s

liberation-era discourses of the "lavender menace" in second-wave feminism, the editors

effectively sum up their positioning by others as both "threat" to lesbian and gay

identities and "menace" to the community's politically correct ideals.[62]

In the margins of page 28, Elise and Victor offer their final words on how their

self-positioning as insiders, in tension with others' positioning as "the Enemy" within,

was negotiated by each of them—at least in part. On the workshop proposal form's

---

[62] The phrase "threat or menace" has commonly has been used to satirize an unfair prejudice. While the origins of the phrase are unknown, it may have been borrowed from the legal phrase "without threat or menace." Some accounts say that the phrase first appeared non-satirically in a pre-1960s anti-drug educational film, "Marijuana: Threat or Menace?", although the film's authenticity has been questioned. Early known satirical uses of the phrase include *The Harvard Lampoon*'s 1968 parody of *Life Magazine*, which included a story titled "Flying Saucers: Threat or Menace." In July 1971 the *National Lampoon*'s cover story declared "Pornography: Threat or Menace?" The phrase has also been linked numerous times to the Marvel Comics universe, where publisher J. Jonah Jameson frequently denounces Spider-Man in his newspaper the *Daily Bugle*. In *The Amazing Spider-Man Annual #15*, published in 1981, the *Bugle* carries the headline "Spider-Man: Threat or Menace?" ("Threat or Menace?"). Examples of discourses framing homosexuals as "menace" include a 1957 book by Dr. Arthur Guy Mathews, *Is Homosexuality a Menace? A Revealing Examination of Sex Deviation by a Physician and Criminologist,* which argues that homosexuality results from conditioned moral degeneration ("Is Homosexuality A Menace?"). Also, Betty Friedan, president of National Organization for Women (NOW), used the phrase "Lavender Menace" in 1969 to describe the threat that she believed lesbianism posed to NOW and the emerging women's movement. In 1970, radical lesbian feminists reclaimed the phrase "Lavender Menace" to protest homophobia in the women's movement ("Lavender Menace").

173

address header, which reads "Midwest Lesbian-Gay-Bisexual Student Conference," the word "Bisexual" has been circled. Next to it, Elise writes:

> This title was a move toward validation after the "B-word" was left off of the publicity . . . and the T shirt . . . and the banner . . . I spoke my mind on the subject, and this form and others were corrected. It was particularly angering to be deleted when I and at least one other bisexual had been at the very first organizing meeting, and had done quantities of work. I remember making a comment to the effect of, "I don't think it would have gone to the printer without the word Lesbian, huh?" I'm glad the response was toward inclusion.

Victor also comments that, after the conference, "I was surprised to to [sic] hear that the main woman in charge was thankful to me for the work that I did—not that I did such a great job, but that a bisexual had done it—a bi-man, at that—which just highlighted the tension between the wimmin's and men's groups—too bad."

"Coming Out, But Where?": Positioning Gay, Lesbian, and Bi Science Fiction Fans

       Between November 1986 and January 1987, the first full issue of *PI* "came out" in both literal and metaphorical senses. Below the masthead, "THE COMING OUT ISSUE" is splashed over the drawing of a gender-ambiguous space warrior (i.e. male bulge with female breasts) who looks out challengingly at the reader (see Fig. 4). This science fiction drawing juxtaposed with the rhetoric of coming out signal the major theme of Issue 1—how bisexual, lesbian, and gay science fiction fans have negotiated their overlapping identities within different communities. In the four articles that discuss being "out," the writers narrate stories that illustrate their various self-positionings as gay, lesbian, or bisexual fans, how they are positioned by other fans or sexual minorities, and how they respond to these positionings (see Appendix B).

Fig. 4: Front and back cover art for *Politically Incorrect* Issue 1.

The first article, "Being Out in Fandom," was written by David, an official

"noodge" who contributed to the content and production of three issues of *PI*. David

begins his article with a short fictional account of a young man coming out to his parents:

> Johnny Thranxbottom stood nervously in the well-appointed living room of his parent's home. His mother, clearing her throat, settled into a favorite well worn leather chair. Johnny's father soon tottered in from the kitchen, wiping his hands dry, having finished the supper dishes.
> "Well, son, you said you wanted to talk to us." Pipe smoke wreathed his Mother's face.
> Johnny coughed, "Mon [sic], Dad, I just wanted you to know that I'm a . . . a <u>fan.</u>"
> "Oh NO! I **knew** we never should have gotten you that subscription to <u>OMNI!</u>" His father cried, "I thought you were just <u>technical</u>!!"
> "GET OUT OF THIS HOUSE!" His mother roared, "No son of mine's gonna be a **Trekkie**!"

In this opening story, David tells a familiar tale of coming out and rejection. However, he signals a shift in the usual tale type by flipping the stereotypical gender roles of the parents (e.g. mother smokes pipe and father washes dishes). Also, by replacing the anticipated words "gay," "sensitive," and "sissy" with the words "fan," "technical," and "Trekkie" (considered derogatory by fans), David transposes the gay coming out narrative into the context of being a fan. Moreover, the story substitutes a science magazine subscription for the more clichéd doll or other feminized object that some heteronormative storylines of gender and sexual development blame for homosexual and other "un-masculine" behaviors (e.g. dressing up in "Trekkie" costumes). The frame story thus provides a touchstone for the (straight) fan to understand a little of what being out as gay is like for David. The narrative transposition to fandom works because being a science fiction fan did not yet have the cultural capital that it has gained today. Like gays who came out in the 1970s, many fans who "came out" with the rise of *Star Trek* fandom in the 1970s also experienced social harassment, bullying, or rejection because of their unconventional social identities.

After the opening frame story, David's article shifts into a more serious tone to discuss his own experiences being out as gay in fan communities. "I have found acceptance in Fandom," he says, "but also ignorance and narrow thinking." David's positioning by some straight fans as a gay outsider undermines fandom's narrative of inclusivity and reveals a dissonance with fan storylines that espouse a "brotherhood of fankind." Debunking this attitude, he points out that fandom contains "countless people with entire universes of opinions and beliefs," as he illustrates with an anecdote of kissing his lover at a New Year's Eve party for fans. When he approached another male

176

friend to give him a hug, "a woman standing nearby turns toward us and shrieks, 'Oh God! Don't **kiss** him!'"

But homophobia in fandom is only part of his struggle. David's self-positioning and storyline in the article reveals an ongoing struggle with gay shame in spite of his efforts to embrace a positive "gay is good" storyline. He says, "there are times when I 'conveniently' forget that I'm gay and looking at my homosexuality can feel like a punch to the stomach." While he has argued with other fans and taken public stands on gay issues in "an attempt to get others to accept homosexuality for me," he has learned that "IT DOESN'T WORK." For example, in *Minneapa* (publication of the Minneapolis Amateur Press Association), he once "wrote something to the effect that it was completely impossible for straight people to understand what gay people went through (I do things like that whenever I get jealous of heterosexuals . . .)."

After illustrating his experiences with both accepting and intolerant fans, David says, "I've spent much of my time thinking about what I can do to make local fandom more accepting of gay issues." He outlines three possibilities: first, to confront "people's fears and misunderstandings about gay people," starting with "my own homophobia"; second, to acknowledge the support he has received from friends for being gay and "for working to accept and love myself for being gay"; and third, to "use my experiences being gay" to find common ground with straight people in order to "bridge over differences." Johnny Thranxbottom's story functions as this sort of narrative bridge by positioning straight fans with gay fans in a shared experience—coming out to mundanes.

In an effort to resolve conflicting storylines and positionings he has encountered in fandom, David's article suggests that fans should use "the things we ha[ve] in common

177

as keys to understanding our differences." He gives the example of a local fan and lawyer who worked with the Minneapolis Civil Liberties Union to get the local city council to approve a block party for Gay Pride. The lawyer also gave a speech at a rally about the importance of defending gay rights, and his wife later wrote in *Minneapa* about how similar the rally felt to a science fiction convention. David concludes, "Maybe together we can make fandom a little more **open**. . . ."

Tess, another *PI* "noodge," writes the issue's second article on the theme of coming out, titled "Oh Lord, I'm Backsliding Into Booze, Gambling and Wild Women Again, or A Lesbian Comes Out In Fandom (periodically)." In the opening paragraph, Tess positions herself in relation to David's article by saying "I often wish I'd had the presence of mind" to make "the grand gesture of 'coming out' to fandom" by writing and article and handing it out to people: "Aside from a lover attached at the waist, it seemed like the most secure way to establish one's identity in fandom." Instead, her experience in fandom has been, on the one hand, a persistent assumption of "heterosexual-couple status" when participating in fanac with a good friend who is male, such as editing a zine with him. On the other hand, when she has "come out" to correct heterosexual assumptions, fen responses have included subtle to outright homophobic or misogynistic remarks within her hearing, being "specifically not invited to bring a companion" to fannish events, and no longer receiving invitations "when people realize I am 'serious about this nonsense.'" Worst of all, she says, are longtime fan friends who "when they can no longer avoid putting two and two together, politely avoid the subject and the sight and the reality of me with another woman."

Gender, fan, and sexual minority identities all play significant roles in the positionings of David and Tess. David's article shows an *inward* struggle centered on his self-positioning as being out as a gay man, expressing both defensiveness of gay identity and issues as well as jealousy of those positioned as straight. However, while the acceptance of his gay identity may be at issue with some in fandom, his positioning as a (male) fan is not. Not once does he question if he belongs in the fabled "*brotherhood* of fankind" (italics mine), nor does he indicate in his discussion of "gay people," "gay issues," and "gay rights" that lesbian women or bisexuals are included in those numbers. The only time gender seems to be at issue in his account is in the satirical frame narrative when David links the words fan/gay, technical/sensitive, and Trekkie/sissy through the cultural narrative of homosexuals as effeminate and when he reverses the gender roles of the parents.

Tess's article, on the other hand, shows an *outward* struggle with positioning by others that negates part of her self-positioning as a lesbian woman and as a fan—two aspects of her identity that are important to her storyline of selfhood. Her gender is specifically at issue in this struggle, from getting "hit on by male fans who are sure they 'have the answer' to my 'problems'" to receiving "disapproving looks" for bringing a female lover to fan events. Moreover, Tess recognizes how her self-positioning as a lesbian fan in dual social worlds has been "complicated by a peculiar dichotomy: lesbians who were willing to be out as lesbians were rarely active as fans, and lesbians who were active as fans were rarely out to fandom as lesbians." As a result of this split in her social worlds, "I have for years drawn strange looks from the lesbian community for my fannish communities, and in fandom I have achieved a status bordering on invisibility."

For Tess, negotiating a satisfactory positioning and storyline with others in this "peculiar dichotomy" remains problematic. Looking for responses that may affirm her selfhood to others, she reports a short anecdote told by a female friend from a working class background who recently "married into money." At a party, acquaintances of her husband were "making disparaging remarks about their domestic help and 'the Mexicans' taking over all the jobs." Her friend "suddenly felt as if she were hearing these people for the first time." After asking repeatedly for them to stop and being ignored or laughed at, she asked her husband to leave with her, explaining to the people first *why* she was leaving. Although her friend does not receive as many party invitations, she "had begun to wonder if perhaps she didn't already have too many 'friends.'" Tess says in response to this narrative, "I have often had that reaction to fandom." However, when she thinks of giving up fandom, "I face the idea of giving up what has been a central part of my social life since I was 12." Given her struggles with fannish friends "who have betrayed or ignored or only half-acknowledged my values for years," Tess wonders, "isn't that marvelous spark I first saw in them worth the drawbacks?"

While "less certain of the answers" for herself, she broadens her question to include gay fans in general. Shifting to the third person plural "they," she outlines several possible responses of "gay people" to their marginalization in the science fiction community: some gays will drop out of fandom, some will assimilate into monogamous relationships and avoid being "too gay," some will exaggerate their own gayness to elicit laughter in order to gain acceptance, and some will tolerate the situation and try "to reason or persuade the community into civil behavior."

Aligning herself with a storyline of "out and proud" as a response to erasure and homophobia in fandom, Tess concludes with a last possibility, "one for which the SF fan community doesn't seem too well prepared." Shifting to the inclusive plural "we," she fully aligns herself with the gay community as she lists scenarios that may invoke—or provoke—the final response:

> It could happen the next time we introduce our lover to the hostess and she introduces us to the rest of the party as roommates (whether or not we live together). It could happen the next time we correct someone's assumption that we are straight and they say something along the lines of "That's nice, dear. Pass the potato chips." It could happen the next time we volunteer in childcare at a convention, and the coordinator makes sure there is another adult on the shift with us. It could happen any time over any little thing: you never know. Some of us might just come right out and get blatant.

To "get blatant" signals a refusal of fan positionings that revise ("roommates"), avoid ("That's nice, dear"), or morally judge her gay identity. Despite her alignment with the gay community, however, Tess does not say she is leaving fandom. Neither is she going to joke about nor tolerate homophobia and misogyny to blend in at fan events. Instead, the conclusion warns the science fiction community that if they do not behave better she will, like her friend in the anecdote, leave the party—but not before explaining *why*.

While Tess ultimately aligns herself with the gay community in response to the storylines and positionings of fans, Elise aligns herself with the science fiction community in response to the positioning of her bisexual fan identity by lesbians in the women's community. In the article "Coming Out, But Where?" Elise reflects on the issue's theme of coming out in fandom (see Appendix B). In her opening remarks, however, she realizes that coming out in fandom is not the main problem. When she has come out as bisexual (or "a lesbian who makes exceptions") to fenfolk, the response has usually been supportive: "The worst I usually have to deal with is a small flock of

nebbishly straight men following me around with hungry expressions on their faces."
Elise brushes off this stereotypical positioning of bisexual women as sexually desirable
and available to men, positioning them in turn as a nuisance: "('Will you please buzz off?
I'm trying to talk to this woman . . .') I've found that swatting them away with a rolled up
'zine usually works."

After reading David's article, Elise says, "Suddenly I realized where I had trouble
coming out. Not with fandom . . . but with the women's (read 'lesbian') community."
Coming out as a science fiction fan to lesbians was more challenging for her, especially
given "the additional problems of coming out as a bisexual in the lesbian community."
Unlike the articles by David and Tess, Elise does not pursue the question of being out as
a *bisexual*, other than to note that for lesbians the topic of science fiction was "only
slightly more socially acceptable than, say, bisexuality, or cannibalism." Rather, her
focus is on the "anti-SF feeling that surfaces occasionally in the lesbian community" and
how that storyline affects her self-positioning as a *fan*. All three writers deal with
particular cultural narratives that suborns one group's values as, as Elise says, "against
The Natural Order of Things."

First, Elise differentiates between a lack of interest in and an outright dislike of
science fiction in women's and lesbian communities. The "blank stare[s]" of people in
the first group do not bother her so much as the "sneer[s]" or "dead silence followed by a
change of subject" of those in the second group because, she says, active dislike probably
indicates exposure "to at least one sample of bad SF." Elise acknowledges that there are
many examples of "truly atrocious writing around" and that the lesbian community "has
on average less patience with sexism, heterosexism, and just plain insensitivity than many

182

straight readers. (If you deal with something every day you tend to recognize it easily.)" Likewise, she recognizes her own intolerance for "culture-bound SF" that "present strange new worlds full of amazing alien life forms—who all pair off boy-girl, boy-girl just like those dance classes in junior high." Thus she finds valid the criticism that "SF, as a genre, could refrain from grafting on unwieldy (and inaccurate!) twentieth century social myths onto the explorations of the future."

However, Elise disagrees with a second argument for dismissing science fiction, one "which seems to flourish in the lesbian, ecology, and disarmament milieus." The argument, she says, stems from the "Neo-Luddite" idea that "**Technology is Evil**," the feminist version of which claims that "**of course** it's **man's evil**." The premise of this line of thought is that "technology **In And Of Itself** is somehow dehumanisizing [sic] and against **The Natural Order of Things**." In a parenthetical asides, Elise points out that the anti-gay argument of being *against the natural order of things* found in homophobic social discourses ("Hmm . . . why do those last words sound so familiar?") is based on the same logic as the anti-technology argument found in utopian feminist science fiction (i.e. "the marshmallow 'wimmun's utopias' I have read all too much of lately"). While Elise admits to a simplistic framing of the "evils of technology" viewpoint, she does so "[r]eductio ad absurdum" to make a point:

> Technology is amoral.
> It is classless, nationless, genderless, and utterly innocent of volition, let alone malicious intent.
> Humans are not.
> Science and technology are tools, and abuses of tools are the responsibility of the particular primate wielding the tool. In other words, technology isn't ugly and mean—people are ugly and mean.
> They are also noble, truthful and kind.
> The trick is to encourage the latter type of behavior. As SF is supposed to be the literature of the possible, let's dream some possible futures where this is so.

As she continues, Elise admits, "I guess I have a little anger about a few things" but also that "[t]here's no neat solution to this bundle of hope and misgivings. I suppose that I'll just keep wearing the appropriate teeshirts to the appropriate functions: you know, the 'Come out, come out, wherever you are' to MNstf meetings and the Minicon teeshirt to Sappho's Lounge."[63] She hopes that the "growing interest in SXf within the women's community will bring out a few new fen for me to talk with" since she has "reached saturation point as far as talking about cats, co-dependency, and the Michigan Music Festival whenever I go to the coffeehouse. It's time for some new areas of conversation. To seek out brave new writers . . . To boldly go where no dyke has gone before . . ."[64]

Whereas David and Tess both struggle primarily with their alignments to fandom as out homosexual fans, Elise struggles primarily with her alignment to the lesbian community as an out bisexual fan. All three position themselves as members of both fan and sexual minority communities—even though these groups offer only partial recognition of their overlapping memberships. As groups (not necessarily as individuals), these communities draw from homo/biphobic, technophobic, and/or radical feminist discourses that position parts of their social identities as unethical or otherwise deviating from group norms. So long as David, Tess, and Elise display acceptable in-group characteristics, they can "pass" as members of a given community. However, violations of the storylines of what it means to be a politically correct "fan" or a "lesbian" results in sanctions from that group. As Victor says in the final article on the theme of "Coming

---

[63] "MNstf" or "Minn-StF" are abbreviations for the Minnesota Science Fiction Society.

[64] "SXf" is likely a fanspeak word at the time for women's or feminist science fiction, with the "X" referring to the XX chromosome in women. Also, the Michigan Music Festival is an all-women event.

Out" in Issue 1, "they'd better not get uppity." Despite these positionings by in-groups, however, all of the "coming out" articles in Issue 1 refuse a partial recognition of selfhood in relationship to fan and sexual minority communities and continue to negotiate their storyline as full members of those communities.

Victor's article, "A Bittersweet Reflection on Joanna Russ, SF Conventions, and a 'Peculiar Dichotomy'" (see Appendix B), provides a sociological viewpoint on the topic of coming out in fandom. He begins by challenging the assumption among science fiction fans that "the fannish community is the most open-minded group that they will ever belong to." While that may be true in some cases, he says, "as far as alternative sexual preferences are concerned, fans seem a little closed minded." The assumption of "heterosexual until proven otherwise" in fandom is so prevalent that "it seems to be difficult for somebody who is homosexual or bisexual to get that firmly established in fannish minds, much less accepted."

But "it isn't just the fans" who behave this way, Victor writes: "The mainstream American society would rather not know that there are **avowed** homosexuals in its midst, and this attitude carries over into fandom." Moreover, fans already perceive themselves as a social out-group with a reputation "of reading 'that sci-fi stuff'. Who knows what it might lead to? Maybe (gasp!), **dancing**." [65] However, because fans have been assimilating into mainstream society for a long time and other subcultures are more readily identifiable as deviant and socially polarizing, "fans in general are probably quite happy with whatever acceptance from the rest of society that they seem to receive."

---

[65] The phrase "it might lead to dancing" is a particularly Midwestern joke that satirizes a conservative and often religious-based suspicion of anything that encourages a corruption of moral values.

Victor's observation about fannish concerns for reputation lines up with social theory regarding the effects of "cultural capital," or assets such as education, intellect, or appearance that provide social mobility beyond economic means.[66] The cultural capital of the science fiction fans was on the rise during the 1980s, thanks to the blockbuster success of films such as Lucas' *Star Wars* trilogy and Spielberg's *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* and *E.T.* However, by-and-large fandom was still regarded as a fringe subculture by mainstream society, and fans were sensitive to this status. As Victor says, "any sub-grouping within fandom that is less socially acceptable is probably going to be considered damaging, especially to whatever group reputation fandom has achieved in the mainstream society. It's **bad**, it's **unnecessary**, and further, it probably leads to **dancing**." Thus, the social positioning of fans *in general* as lacking cultural capital may have further oppressive affects on fans with minority social statuses, such as lesbians, gays, and bisexuals.

The question then is how do non-minority fans negotiate the unequal and potentially uncomfortable positionings of social minorities within fandom? Victor observes that "fandom seems to accord them the status of being invisible, and probably that status is considered quite generous, given all the bad press gays, et. al. [sic], have received." The problem is that this "invisible" status effectively positions fans with minority social statuses as "second-class citizens of the galaxy: fans <u>tolerate</u> gays, lesbians, and bisexuals, but they'd better not get uppity. That would be entirely unacceptable." With the reference to getting "uppity," Victor's satirical comment is

---

[66] For more on Pierre Bourdieu's theories of social and cultural capital, see Fowler.

meant to remind readers of oppressive discourses that subjugated African Americans as second-class citizens for decades under Jim Crow laws and the rhetoric of "separate but equal." While he acknowledges that his comments refer to group behavior, not individuals, it is still "unfortunately true that the fannish tradition of being accepting of a person's idiosyncracies [sic] is observed more in the breach as far as the gays and lesbians are concerned."

While David and Tess align themselves with a storyline of coming out as gay in fandom and Elise aligns herself with the storyline of coming out as a fan (and bisexual) in the lesbian community, Victor's positioning attempts to balance his allegiances with both groups—a strategy aligned with his negotiation of biracial identity (see Chapter III). Rather than coming out as a particular social identity, Victor says he tends "to move in a lot of social circles, many of them wildly different from all the rest." While fandom is an important part of those circles, "there are times when I feel out of place as someone who isn't straight within the fannish community." Also, while he mentions a "significant other," only those who know Victor personally would know his partner's gender, leaving open the question of his sexual orientation (at least in the article). Without a more explicit "coming out" narrative, Victor's positioning is more ambiguous—a deliberate strategy which allows him to suggest an alternative storyline to an outsider-within coming out narrative.

The alternative storyline is not about declaring difference, but about acknowledging similarity. Victor says, "[M]aybe I can say something to both gays and fans: you'd be surprised at how much alike fans and gays really are, and perhaps more so at how many people are a part of both." Echoing a phrase used by Tess, Victor says it is

"a 'peculiar dichotomy' that gays and fans often think little of each other's interests, primarily because of a lack of real knowledge of each other." Shifting into a register more recognizable as "gay" in address, he says, "You wouldn't **believe** it, Mary, if I told you the amount of just plain **trouble** it has caused me, trying to be a part of both groups."

Victor sets up this alternative storyline near the opening of the article when he talks about the process of coming out, but not from a personal viewpoint. Instead, he uses a sociological framing to show that "coming out as a <u>fan</u> is in some ways rather similar to coming out as somebody <u>gay</u>." While David uses the Johnny Thranxbottom story to illustrate this idea, Victor outlines how

> fans seems to go through all of the same stages as gays do when coming out: they realize that they are different from a (perceived) majority of the population; they might very well go through a stage of self-condemnation or at least low self-image (internalizing what they assume other people think fans are); then, discovery of others "just like them"; and then immersion in the sub-culture as a means of bolstering self-image.

Victor supports this storyline of similarity by his "vigilance" about calling people on their stereotyped attitudes and not letting "little slights" go past unnoticed in any of his communities. "[D]on't think it only happens with fans," he says. "I go to the same lengths to defend science fiction amongst all of my gay friends, who think that 'sci-fi' is for the birds (or at least straights)." Pointing out Joanna Russ's "sensible attitude" of making "no bones about being a lesbian and a science fiction writer," he reiterates the similarities of both communities over their perceived differences. In his conclusion, Victor shifts from a sociological to a personal address, alluding to Tess's challenge and using an inclusive plural pronoun to clearly mark his membership across group boundaries: "If you think that such 'blatant' statements are unnecessary, remember that

you almost certainly know someone who is gay or a fan, **or both**, and don't know it yet. **We** are everywhere."

As an "afterward" to Issue 1, two items on the final pages help to frame again the "clear and distinct reason" that Elise and Victor produced *Politically Incorrect*. On the back interior page (see Appendix B), a "Homophobia Alert" by Elise offers a short narrative about promoting *PI*'s "Coming-Out Party" at Minicon, where they debuted the zine. Elise had taped up posters inviting "Lesbian and Gay Fans and their Friends" to stop by the party for a copy of Issue 0. As she climbed a stairwell to the party, she saw that a poster "had accidentally fallen off and (also accidentally, I presume) managed to rip itself into shreds. Hmmm . . ." After being told that several other posters also had "self-destruct[ed]," she facetiously suggests that "the Moral Majority has been conspiring to plant 'pro-family' printing stock in the local copy shops again" because "surely, no <u>FAN</u> would trash such a cheerful, upbeat poster . . ."

As with David's article, Elise demonstrates that while "[f]andom may be one big happy family," just like families of origin, members of science fiction fan communities may show homophobic responses toward other members who come out. "There are some people out there to whom our very existence is an offense," she says, and given that "some of those people are fans . . . we will eventually run into them." Elise closes with a condolence offered by a co-worker: "'But you know, it's better that they were put up and torn down than never put up at all.' I guess, given the alternative, I'll just keep putting 'em up. Hopefully someday they'll stay there."

The issue closes with a counterpoint to the experience of homophobia in fandom—biphobia in gay and lesbian spaces. On the back cover, a cartoon depicting

"Editorial Comments" on the eve of production (see Fig. 4) provides some humorous glimpses into drawing, writing, and typesetting the zine ("Pizza. With apostrophes . . . er, anchovies."). However, the final dialogue exchange offers a sobering reminder of the positioning of bisexuals as outsiders: "Let's print this turkey and make tracks to the bar!" "Okay, but I don't think any of 'our kind' of places will let us in . . . together." "Damn. I keep forgetting . . ."

Politically (In)Correct Moments: Then and Now

Politically Incorrect worked to subvert expectations of the "right" way to do fandom, fanzines, and social identity in the late 1980s. Unconventional zine formatting and content deliberately crossed science fiction fandom with gay community boundaries to bring current sexual politics into the science fiction community and science fiction into lesbian, gay, and bisexual communities. In interviews for this project, Elise and Victor spoke about the zine as a vehicle not just for talking about sexuality, but also for talking about what impacted the daily lives of people in their overlapping communities. "To us," Victor said, "the moment of the dialogue and the scope of who was involved—that was what made it worthwhile."

By addressing issues and audiences across the boundaries of zine culture, fandom, and sexual minority communities, the editors could narrate social positionings that may have been illegible within a single community alone. In an interview, Victor described the stakes of *Politically Incorrect*'s bisexual-science-fiction-zine crossovers:

> They didn't recognize what it [the zine] represented to us—this moment of, 'Here are these issues that we're dealing with that are real and true and affect us in our daily lives and are fundamental to who we are as people,' and, 'It's about what we like to read and what we think is interesting and what we like to imagine.' Right?

190

And so for fanzine fans, it was like, 'You're really worked up about something.' [Victor nods,] 'Uh huh.' And for science fiction readers, it's kind of like, 'you're bringing in all this current day stuff.' [Victor nods,] 'Uh huh.' And for the current-day LGBT and straight larger-world context folks, 'Boy, you're bringing in all this science fiction.' [Victor nods,] 'Uh huh.'

As Victor's comment demonstrates, the "both-and" logic that underlies a bisexual worldview may have a generative capacity. By refusing "either-or" positionings, possibilities for both selfhood and community may be expanded by asking "what if?" from multiple and intersecting social locations, such as that of a bisexual fan. As friends who shared this narrative positioning, Victor and Elise hoped that *PI* would build connections across their communities to create a safe space for other "people like us." As Victor said, "One of the reasons why we did [the zine] is that we wanted people to wake up at two in the morning going, 'What did they mean by that?' We wanted people to get something out of it where they were like, 'I never thought about it that way before. Huh. Maybe I wanna think about this differently.' And if we got people to do that, I think that was a healthy chunk of what we considered to be a success."

However, opening *PI*'s discussion to broader issues within their overlapping communities also got them "in over [their] heads," Victor said. Because in Issues 0-2 they were having fun "tweaking the nose of social convention," *PI* increasingly became a focal point for some fanzine fans with a "soapbox." The situation reached a critical point with their call for submissions to Issue 3, "Religions, Spirituality and Other Unnatural Vices." The editors felt conflicted over validating in print such polarized opinions as "with me or against me" views on homophobia in fandom and heteropatriarchal views of gender and sexuality in paganism. They struggled with being true to the principle of voicing "politically incorrect" points of view versus maintaining control over the zine's

191

editorial scope. "That sort of editorial control was something I don't think we ever fully resolved," Victor said. "The fact of the matter is that science fiction fandom, to this day in many places, still reflects some pretty masculine, heteronormative ideas about how society ought to work." Without a clear pathway through such editorial dilemmas, Victor produced an "interim" issue of four-pages (Issue 3.5) and Elise one of eight-page (Issue 3.8) before they both moved on to other social and political interests and commitments.

Records of the fanzine show that, in addition to the title *Politically Incorrect*, Elise and Victor had brainstormed several other possible names for the zine, including *Your Name Here*, *Through the Looking Glass*, *The Other Closet*, *One of Those 'Zines*, and *The 'Zine Your [~~Mother~~] Lover Always Warned You About* (a version of which made it into the publication's subtitle). In an interview, Elise said that their final title choice worked at the time as an "affectionate joke" for politically progressive insiders who were caught up in the rhetoric of so-called political correctness. "What we were writing was not meant to be a last word or a slap," she said of the zine. "It was meant to say, 'Hey, there's something left out. There's something that's not being talked about yet.'" In the context of the 1980s women's movement, women-only spaces, and sexual minority politics, Elise said, the missing piece was the inclusion of bisexuality:

> There was starting to be a gay and lesbian establishment—a small, fragile, under-attack gay and lesbian establishment, but something. And as that establishment was working to define itself, we [bisexuals] were getting asked to leave a support group that [we] were one of the founding members of. . . . "Oh, my gosh, but this is a lesbian thing." No, you've retro-defined it as a lesbian thing. It was a womyn-loving womyn thing. Now you are moving the lines here because of the assumptions of what that means.

However, Elise also recognized that what she and Victor meant by "politically incorrect" then is the opposite of how the phrase gets used today. "I feel like a tool we had has been

192

run off with by vandals," she said, describing how people in the mainstream now preface a racist, sexist, or other prejudicial remark by saying, *I know it's politically incorrect but—,* when what they mean is, *Hi, I'm about to be an asshole.* "If I had a time machine," Elise said, "I would say, 'Do not use that phrase. No. Bad title.' I don't know what we'd use instead, and it was of its time, but it sure didn't mean the same thing."[67]

When asked if a bisexual science fiction fanzine would work in today's social milieu, Victor said that some of what spurred the production of *Politically Incorrect* in the context of science fiction in the late 1980s is not as pressing today. "Science fiction by itself no longer defines difference," he said. "When you have all these different forms of media between superheroes and fantasy and science fiction, the sorts of things that used to mark someone as being really different thirty or forty years ago are the things that tie everyone together today." At the same time, he still feels that there is a need for projects that subvert the dominant paradigm in both mainstream and LGBT communities:

> I think there continues to be a tremendous amount of bisexual erasure and
> biphobia that takes place. . . . My sense is that to subvert the dominant paradigm

---

[67] One version of the phrase's origins says that political correctness began in the 1970s as an in-joke on the left. Stuart Hall, for example, relates a story of "radical students on American campuses acting out an ironic replay of the Bad Old Days BS (Before the Sixties) when every revolutionary groupuscule had a party line about everything. They would address some glaring examples of sexist or racist behaviour by their fellow students in imitation of the tone of voice of the Red Guards or Cultural Revolution Commissar: 'Not very "politically correct", *Comrade*!'" Hall goes on to warn, however, that such jokes "almost certainly turn around an bite you" (164-165). What began in the 1970s as an ironic self-satire by the New Left to guard against its own liberal orthodoxy became repurposed in the 1980s as a phrase encapsulating conservative concerns about the left, particularly around multiculturalism and Affirmative Action in academia ("Political Correctness"). Hall first encountered such conservative concerns about political correctness when he was giving a talk at an American university in the mid-1980s. Conference organizers warned him to be careful of what he said because "in the new climate of the times following the Reagan election, the right had established campus committees to monitor speakers and take notes on everything said in lectures which could be interpreted as undermining the American Constitution or sapping the moral fiber of the nation's brightest and best. Here, PC was clearly part and parcel of the 1980s backlash against the 1960s" (165). By the early 1990s, right-wing politicians and pundits had adopted political correctness as a pejorative descriptor of any speech, policy, or behavior that the speaker or writer regarded as the imposition of a liberal orthodoxy ("Political Correctness").

involves having to recognize to what extent you're already complicit in that going on, and I see [in] the LGBT communities, there's a way in which, particularly in this same-sex marriage debate, . . . what's going on is that the drive for conformity is stronger now than in the past. . . . That kind of conformity to classic American values is, in a sense, truncating and potentially erasing of a lot of history about, and a lot of identity about, approaching all of this differently.

In response to the same question, Elise said a zine like *Politically Incorrect* might work again in today's world but not with the political and social terms used in the 1980s. While discourses at that time were centered on sexuality, sexual orientation, or "affectional preference," today there is more understanding in queer communities that notions of sexuality are built on certain frameworks of gender:

I'm pretty sure that if it were happening now . . . we would be publishing discussions of transpeople's critiques of whether the word *bisexual* was enforcing gender duality or not, we'd be publishing responses from people who thought it did, people who thought it didn't . . . and then twelve more iterations of examining it from every side and figure out, well, what the hell does this mean, or do, or what's the function of it, how do I fit, am I something other than I thought, are you something other than what I'm calling you, what do you wanna be called anyway? . . . You can't say, 'same-sex marriage' without going, okay, what do I mean by that? Is there same sex marriage if you have more definitions than 'M' and 'F'? Would a same-sex marriage be if I were marrying another comfortable with the appellation 'bisexual,' 'genderqueer,' what I call 'amiable weirdo,' like me? Or is anything else an other-gendered, other-sex marriage? I don't know. Good question.

In her comments, Elise demonstrates another kind of generative capacity that underlies the "both-and" logic of a bisexual worldview—that of inclusion and multiplicity. By refusing "either-or" positionings for *both* sexuality and gender, possibilities may be expanded in directions that have yet to be explored only in speculative narratives.

Though Elise said that she would change social and political terminology in an updated zine, she feels the focus on science fiction would still be relevant because the "what if" of speculative narratives wrestle with important social questions of what it means to live in a society and to be human with all of the "horrible and good things" that

those encompass. "All of those skills in science fiction," she said, "skills of extrapolation and imagination, and projecting oneself into a different situation, or trying to fit someone else's reality into your head, are exactly the skills that social justice work wants. So I see 'em as inextricable, which is why there's been a social justice thread running through science fiction from the very beginning."

Inclusivity and affirmation of multiple standpoints prove key to the dimensional framework opened up through bisexuality as a worldview. "I think that if I were doing [a zine] now," Elise said, "I wouldn't call it *Politically Incorrect*, but I would be tempted to call it *Yes/And* because that gets close to what it is, where it's positioned, where we were standing to look from."

From Ethnography to Theory and Interpretation

To this point, my ethnographic research has helped to shed light on several questions at issue in this project, such as how the gender-linked categories of heterosexuality and homosexuality influence etic notions of bisexuality, and how some bisexuals use resources offered by the textual and social processes of speculative fiction to help negotiate such outsider perspectives. While I have established the importance of ethnographic approaches to bisexuality studies, my intention with this inquiry is also to intervene more broadly in theoretical assumptions and interpretive practices that may reconsolidate frameworks of binary gender and sexuality across humanistic and social science disciplines. The multivalent logic of a bisexual worldview offers clues for such an intervention by illuminating how sexuality may be re-conceptualized as multidimensional.

The remainder of this project discusses the theory and application of dimensional sexuality—my solution to a non-binary framework of sexual knowledge that works to expand the recognition and interpretation of sexual lives. Chapter V establishes the theoretical foundations of dimensional sexuality and the organizing principles that enable the shift from an "either-or" to a "both-and" logical structure; Chapter VI offers critical comparisons of homosexual, queer, and dimensional interpretive readings of the BBC science fiction television series *Torchwood*; and Chapter VII provides a dimensional reading of science fiction novels by Samuel R. Delany and Ursula K. Le Guin.[68]

Recognizing that sexuality itself is a socially constructed and historically contingent category of Western knowledge, I offer in what follows new methodological models for how to re-think the organization of sexuality at its most fundamental levels. It is my contention that the critical deconstruction of sexual norms will only take us so far; to truly undo sexuality's binary framework requires a re-visioning of sexuality altogether. In other words, in order to get to where we want to be, we need somewhere in particular to go. That somewhere is dimensional sexuality.

---

[68] Chapter V is a version of an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Routledge/Taylor & Francis in *Sexual and Relationship Therapy* in August 2014, available online at: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14681994.2014.919377. Also, Chapter VI is a version of an Accepted Manuscript of an article to be published by Taylor & Francis in the *Journal of Bisexuality* in a forthcoming special issue. Both chapters use APA journal documentation styles rather than the MLA style of other chapters.

CHAPTER V

DIMENSIONAL SEXUALITY:

EXPLORING NEW FRAMEWORKS FOR BISEXUAL DESIRES

The Territory: Sexuality

Knowledge frameworks are powerful things. What we think we "know" about something shapes our perspective, allows us to see some things and not to see others. Consider maps as a metaphor for how knowledge frameworks shape our views of the world. Maps help us orient ourselves in a particular terrain. The complexity and diversity of the actual territory means that 1:1 map is impossible, but a good guide map can help us understand the landscape and recognize important sites. With an inaccurate or outdated map, however, we risk misrecognizing the very ground we walk upon. Likewise, knowledge frameworks help us orient to the world by giving us a particular perspective on and a sense of familiarity with vast and complex social processes by assuring us of what we "know" is important about them. Flexible knowledge frameworks may help improve our understanding of the world, while rigid or outdated ones may limit our ability to understand others and ourselves. Moreover, all maps *frame* our knowledge about a territory in highly specific ways—topography, tourist destinations, real estate valuations, transportation routes, and so on. Thus the particular map, or epistemological framework, we consult to orient ourselves in a domain of knowledge will shape our perceptions of the territory in different ways, for better or worse.[69]

---

[69] For a complete discussion of knowledge frameworks and their effects, see Butler (2009).

Now consider that sexuality is the territory.[70] Within the knowledge framework that U.S. culture most commonly uses to recognize and understand the sexuality of another,[71] the territory is framed by the specific, visible gender of one's desired object—who we have sex with, or want to have sex with, determines our sexual orientation. Given the power of dimorphic sex and gender in historical, social, scientific, and political discourse, culture tends to see sexuality in terms of the easy binary categories of same-sex and opposite-sex attractions.[72] Heterosexuality and homosexuality dominate how we interpret the sexuality of another—our most popular guide map for sexuality, if you will. Desires for both, neither, and other genders breech the categorical clarity of this simple one-dimensional framework and, as a result, are more difficult to recognize and understand as legitimate in U.S. cultural knowledge production. In essence, they fall off the map.

Look at a recent U.S. media example. On March 28, 2013, an article in *Time* magazine traced the social and political history of "How Gay Marriage Won" (Von Drehle, 2013). In it, the phrase "same-sex couples" is used frequently and interchangeably in reference to "lesbian and gay" people and couples, but not once does the word "bisexual" appear in the article's discussion of marriage rights, nor does the article acknowledge that not everyone in same-sex pairings self-identifies as lesbian or

---

[70] Meanings of sexuality can be slippery in use. See n. 4 for an explanation of how terms for sexuality are used in this chapter.

[71] When I refer to the "sexuality of another," I mean a process by which we make sense of another's sexual desires, orientation, and/or identity. Such a process requires the use of an interpretive framework through which we not only apprehend something about another's sexual desire but also can recognize and understand it as a particular sexual orientation and/or identity.

[72] When I say "culture," I am referring to the dominant forms of symbolic communication that influence social relations of power and ways of life in the English-speaking United States.

gay. As a result, the article neatly frames bisexuality and self-identified bisexual people out of the social and political landscape, despite the fact that major sexuality studies have shown that the incidence of bisexuality is greater than or at least comparable to that of homosexuality (Yoshino, 2000; Gates, 2011) and that bisexual people and organizations have been fighting for civil rights alongside lesbians and gay men since the 1970s (Angelides, 2001; Hemmings, 2002). While much critical and theoretical work has been done to explain the persistent erasure of bisexuality as an epistemic category of cultural discourse,[73] my purpose here is to help social science research and humanistic scholarship redress such erasures by introducing a theoretical and methodological tool that allows us to look at the sexual landscape from a fresh angle: dimensional sexuality.

What would it mean to map sexuality in such a way so that the gendered markers of same-sex and opposite-sex desire are no longer necessarily defining characteristics for interpreting the sexuality of another? This may seem hard to imagine, given our reliance on these markers and their policing through heteronormative and homo/biphobic political and social institutions and mores.

To be successful, a new framework—the interpretive lens or schema or map through which we perceive and understand the world—would need to be able to bring within the domains of cultural knowledge the lives of self-identified bisexual, pansexual, fluid, multisexual, queer, and non-labeling people of multiple genders in a variety of relationship configurations. Under such a framework, for example, debates over extending civil union benefits could widen from a focus on monogamous lesbian and gay

---

[73] See Yoshino (2000), Angelides (2001), Hemmings (2002), and Erickson-Schroth and Mitchell (2009).

couples with families to what these rights might mean more broadly for self-identified bisexual, transgender, polyamorous, and other non-(hetero/homo)normative people in a variety of domestic and family arrangements.

It is well worth remembering that knowledge frameworks may not be free of moral and cultural bias. Historically, certain so-called Western knowledge frameworks have imposed oppressions over who and what counts as a livable human life—consider nineteenth-century evolutionary biology and the colonial/modern gender system as a richly elaborated case in point (Lugones, 2007). However, since the oppressive natures of binary race, sexuality, gender and other patriarchal knowledge frameworks have been well surveyed by women of color and indigenous feminisms, ethnic and indigenous studies, and other intersectional scholarship, my intention is not to retrace those paths here.[74] Rather, my intention is to look more closely at how *frames of recognition* shape how we interpret, and thereby "know," the sexuality of another and to offer dimensional sexuality as a more expansive framework for the recognition of bisexual and other non-normative sexual lives. My aim here is to take a positive step toward replacing our culture's outdated one-dimensional map of binary sexuality with a multidimensional framework that enlarges the human domain and breaks the epistemic contract of bisexual erasure once and for all.

To lay the groundwork for this, I draw upon post-structuralist theories of how knowledge frameworks make possible the recognition of another. I then demonstrate how

---

[74] For further discussion of oppressions resulting from binary gender, sexuality, and race, see for example Sedgewick (1990), Butler (1990/2006, 1993, 2004b), Rich (1993), Angelides (2001), Johnson and Henderson (2005), and Lugones (2007). For more on intersectional queer studies and queer ethnic and indigenous studies, see Gopinath (2005), McRuer (2006), Hames-García and Martínez (2011), Driskill, Finley, Gilley, and Morgensen (2011), and Chávez (2013).

the framework of binary heterosexuality and homosexuality affects recognition of bisexuality, and show how it may be possible to shift the principles upon which a framework is based in order to expand the domains of the knowable. To accomplish this, I present the concepts of triangulation and family resemblance as processes that allow the framework of dimensional sexuality to render sexual multiplicity visible along several axes. In the process, I argue that a more complex recognition and understanding of multisexual lives necessitates a corresponding epistemic shift from sexual "knowing" that is singular, oppositional, exclusive, and static to that which is multiple, indeterminate, relational, and temporal. Finally, I consider how using the dimensional sexuality framework as a theoretical and methodological tool might aid social science research and humanities scholarship.

The Map Is Not the Territory: Frames of Recognition

Framing as a social science concept can be traced to a 1955 essay by sociologist Gregory Bateson, who argued that statements do not have intrinsic meanings, but only acquire meaning in a frame that is constituted by context and style. In 1974, sociologist Erving Goffman influentially expanded this premise, arguing that meanings only arise in processes of interaction, interpretation, and contextualization. What emerges from those processes are "social frameworks" that "provide meaning, determine what is relevant and irrelevant when considering certain actors, issues or events, and suggest appropriate behavior." Goffman also pointed out that at any one moment of activity, an individual is likely to apply several frameworks (as cited in Vliegenthart and van Zoonen, 2011, p. 103).

The work of post-structuralist philosopher Judith Butler deconstructs frameworks on an epistemological level by critically examining how they guide the interpretation of a social scene through norms. Butler (2009) states that recognition of another is made possible through normative frameworks of intelligibility established within domains of the knowable. These normative frameworks must be present for bodies to be recognizable as male or female, as heterosexual or homosexual, or for one to be recognized as human at all. To understand how this works, Butler draws upon the frame of *recognition*, understood in Hegelian terms as a reciprocal action undertaken by at least two subjects in a scene of address. This frame of recognition—i.e. the hailing of another as a particular subject, and the acknowledgement of the other *as* that subject—is necessary in order to comprehend *recognizability,* or the general conditions that shape a living being into a recognizable subject.[75]

Beginning with *Gender Trouble* (1990/2006) and extending through several other works on politics and ethics, Butler's theories demonstrate how such normative frameworks must be present for one to be recognizable within the epistemological domain of "human." For instance, the schema of "female" implicitly guides the interpretation of a person's gender based on cultural norms of physical appearance, gait, gestures, tone of voice, and so forth, for it is only *through* such frameworks that we know what is and is not "female." In other words, one must conform to the delimited boundaries of "female"—i.e. its *frame*—in order to be recognizable as such.

---

[75] For a more detailed discussion of frameworks of recognition, see Butler (2009) p. 4-9.

By delimiting the domain of the knowable, such interpretive schemas establish themselves as epistemological frameworks through which we perceive and understand the world and ourselves. In other words, like a specialized map, these frameworks help us to recognize and know the territory of gender. However, if a person's gender expression exceeds the frame of "female" by violating these norms—e.g. a masculine physique combined with feminine dress and hairstyle—then that person is no longer recognizable within the larger epistemological domain of the human, since "human" is defined in part by dimorphic gender. The territory does not fit our map, and we can no longer be certain of how to interpret that which we apprehend.

According to Butler (2009), such schemas of intelligibility—or *frameworks*— allow us to recognize and know what we apprehend by preparing the way for recognition and producing norms of recognizability. But while such norms help us navigate the world, they also limit what is recognizable within a frame. Butler consistently interrogates how norms operate "to produce certain subjects as 'recognizable' persons and to make others decidedly more difficult to recognize." What is at stake here, she says, is "not merely how to include more people within existing norms, but to consider how existing norms allocate recognition differently" (p. 6).

My concern is with a knowledge framework whose set of normative conditions also differentially allocates recognition in contemporary U.S. culture: oppositional heterosexuality and homosexuality. This framework organizes the domain of sexuality around dimorphic sex: heterosexuality is attraction between two people of the opposite biological sex and homosexuality is attraction between two people of the same biological sex. While this interpretive frame places homosexuality as the abject outside of

203

normative heterosexuality, Butler and other queer theorists have established that heterosexuality is in fact *constituted* by this abject outside, thus both categories are interdependent—one cannot exist without the other or the interpretive frame breaks down. For this reason, while homosexuality may violate the cultural norm established by compulsory heterosexuality, homosexuality is still in some sense knowable within the established epistemology of "the closet"; moreover, as the *Time* article showed, gay and lesbian identities are rapidly becoming normalized through assimilationist gay marriage discourses, queer consumerism, and media mainstreaming.[76]

However, what this binary hetero/homo framework actually excludes as "knowable" are sexualities that do *not* rely on the specific gender of one's sexual object choice as their organizing principle—such as bisexuality, a category of sexuality defined broadly as a having attraction to more than one gender.[77] Within the hetero/homo framework, bisexuality is decidedly more difficult to recognize, so bisexual lives often appear illegible *as lives* to culture. "In the current sexual and gendered imagination," says Hemmings (2002), "bisexuality is the middle ground between sexes, genders and sexualities, rather than being a sexuality, or indeed a gender or sex, in itself" (p. 2). As a

---

[76] For more on compulsory heterosexuality, see Rich (1993); for more on homosexuality as knowable, see Foucault (1976/1978), Sedgwick (1990), and Butler (1990/2006, 1993). For more on homonormative politics and queer liberalism, see Warner (1999) and Eng, Halberstam, and Muñoz (2005).

[77] *The Bisexuality Report* states that bisexuality as a category "may include the following groups and more: people who see themselves at attracted to 'both men and women'; people who are mostly attracted to one gender but recognize that this is not exclusive; people who experience their sexual identities as fluid and changeable over time; people who see their attraction as 'regardless of gender' (other aspects of people are more important in determining who they are attracted to); people who dispute the idea that there are only two genders and that people are attracted to one, the other, or both" (Barker, Richards, Jones, Bowes-Catton, Plowman, Yockney, & Morgan, 2012, p. 11)

result, bisexual representations in U.S. culture are frequently stereotyped as confused, and bisexual identities are likewise dismissed as "inauthentic."

Viewed through the hetero/homo framework, bisexual identity and experiences are interpreted as "inauthentic" by framing them as a transitional phase or a precursor to recognizing one's "true" sexual identity as lesbian, gay, or straight. From this perspective, bisexuals are thought to be either closeted or repressed homosexuals, or curious or confused heterosexuals; thus the so-called cultural wisdom is that *bisexuality is just a phase—eventually you'll settle down.* Bisexuality is also perceived as oscillating between heterosexuality and homosexuality and therefore unable to maintain a consistent object choice. From this perspective, bisexuals are "fence sitters" who are promiscuous, untrustworthy, indecisive, or otherwise incapable of monogamous commitment; thus the so-called cultural wisdom is that *a bisexual will always leave you—it's just a question of when.*[78] Locked within the logic of mutual exclusions, of "this *or* that," bisexuality's relational logic of "this *and* that" remains unrecognizable in the hetero/homo framework that dominates U.S. culture.

Butler (2009) rightly recognizes that the problem with norms is how they allocate recognition differently, and that expanding existing norms to include more people, as in the case of homonormativity, does not resolve the fundamental issue of the undemocratic allocation of recognition. As Butler deconstructs the normative frameworks that make some lives unrecognizable as lives, she asks, "What new norms are possible, and how are

---

[78] For more on cultural conceptions of bisexuality, see Pramaggiore (1996), Hemmings (2002), Israel and Mohr (2004), Diamond (2008), Moorman (2008), and Erickson-Schroth and Mitchell (2009).

they wrought? . . . What might be done, in other words, to shift the very terms of recognizability in order to produce more radically democratic results?" (p. 6).

For some time I have been considering similar questions in relation to sexual norms and the epistemic contract of bisexual erasure, as explained in detail by Yoshido (2000) and Angelides (2001). The questions I have been asking are: How might we produce better conditions for the recognition of bisexuality in the domains of the knowable? More specifically, how might the very terms of recognizability—terms now dictated by the hetero/homo framework—be radically shifted toward a more democratic recognition of the varieties of bisexual lives?

These are not easy questions since the term *bisexual* encompasses a broad range of incommensurable desires, experiences, and identifications that are irreducible to the mutually exclusive, gendered terms of the hetero/homo framework. One may be able to apprehend the existence of these non-normative desires, but such apprehension cannot be extended to recognition and legitimation within the framework that currently governs sexual norms. A different framework is needed for bisexual lives not only to be visible, but also to be recognizable within the domain of the human *as lives*.

Butler (2009) also states that for frames of recognition to gain power as *knowledge* frameworks, they must establish themselves in other contexts beyond their original domains. The schema for masculinity and femininity, for example, has extended well beyond the human domain into language markers for inanimate objects (e.g. ships are gendered feminine). This is possible because interpretive frames, which in effect "decide which lives will be recognizable as lives and which will not," are also unstable and must "break from themselves in order to install themselves" hegemonically in other

206

contexts (p. 12). In other words, for the hetero/homo framework to coercively delimit recognizable sexuality, it must break from the domain of sexuality and circulate in other contexts, for it "depends upon the conditions of reproducibility in order to succeed" (p. 10).

Indeed, Sedgwick's (1990) study of the epistemology of the closet illustrates the astounding success of the hetero/homo framework and its entanglement in what now registers for us as knowledge. Sedgwick argues that the division imposed between heterosexuality and homosexuality is central to our conceptual universe, acting as a kind of master framework (though a highly unstable one) in Western culture's domains of knowing. To establish its hegemony, the hetero/homo binary breaks from the context of sexuality to mark such epistemic divisions as same/different, inside/outside, public/private, secrecy/disclosure, health/illness, life/death, and more.[79] Joyrich (2001) aptly summarizes the impact of this sexual framework:

> Given this defining relation to founding conceptions of truth, identity, and knowledge, the hetero/homo division is then not just relevant to a select few (those identified under its regime as homosexual) but to everyone because we are all catalogued according to these contested axes. In fact, it is precisely because these categories *are* contested that such enormous (though often contradictory) efforts are made to police their borders. (p. 441)

Yet the reproducibility of frames, their constant breaking from contexts to gain power in others, can result in unforeseen consequences, Butler (2009) says. When a frame breaks with itself, "a taken-for-granted reality is called into question, exposing the orchestrating designs of the authority who sought to control the frame." In these circumstances, when

---

[79] See Sedgewick (1990, esp. p. 2-3, 10-11, 33-34, 44, and 71-73.

"those frames that govern the relative and differential recognizability of lives come apart," Butler says,

> it becomes possible to apprehend something about what or who is living but has not been generally "recognized" as a life. What is this specter that gnaws at the norms of recognition, an intensified figure vacillating as its inside and its outside? As inside, it must be expelled to purify the norm; as outside, it threatens to undo the boundaries that limn the self. In either case, it figures the collapsibility of the norm; in other words, it is a sign that the norm functions precisely by way of managing the prospect of its undoing, an undoing that inheres in its doings. (p. 12)

Given that frames by their nature never quite contain the scenes they are meant to delineate, my contention is that *the hetero/homo frame cannot maintain hegemony over bisexuality and other sexualities not organized by the same principles.* Through the hetero/homo frame, bisexuality is interpreted as a passing phase on the way to realizing one's "true" heterosexual or homosexual identity, so bisexual persons are seen as "fence sitters," promiscuous and untrustworthy. Yet the specter of bisexuality's "this *and* that," though expelled from the hetero/homo framework, still gnaws at its taken-for-grantedness from the outside, exposing the structural limits of "this *or* that" and making it possible to apprehend something about bisexual lives that *cannot* be recognized or contained within the hetero/homo frame and thus constantly threatens to undo its boundaries.

My reading of the "breaking out" or "breaking from" inherent in frames (Butler, 2009, p. 10-12) is that it is possible to deliberately reconfigure these structures in order to better recognize and interpret what is apprehended; in other words, a sexual framework may be shifted from "this *or* that" to "this *and* that" so that the variety of bisexual lives become legible in culture. However, because frameworks delimit the domains of the knowable, such a move would necessitate a corresponding epistemic shift away from binary sexuality to *multisexuality*; in other words, the undoing that inheres in the doing of

the hetero/homo binary must be the rupture of duality *itself,* which would then allow the borders of the knowable to be expanded. Indeed, Butler (2004b) calls for such a paradigm shift in her own critical epistemological project to loosen gender from the norms of masculine/feminine. "It seems to me that the future symbolic will be one in which femininity has multiple possibilities," she states, "where it is . . . released from the demand to be one thing, or to comply with a singular norm, the norm devised for it by phallogocentric means. But must the framework for thinking about sexual difference be binary for this feminine multiplicity to emerge? Why can't the framework for sexual difference itself move beyond binarity into multiplicity?" (p. 196-197).

I believe frameworks *can* be moved, but that getting there also requires a paradigmatic shift in how we "know" sexuality.[80] If the metaphor of the closet has functioned as a controlling paradigm for the hetero/homo binary, then a new paradigm is needed to support an epistemological framework of sexual multiplicity. In the following section, I propose the concept of triangulation as a key organizing principle and method for shifting our sexual framework from duality to dimensionality.

The Key: Shifting Principles of Organization

Before I discovered how well Butler's deconstruction of frameworks fit my own theoretical quest to shift our dominant sexual paradigm, I found a method for actually

---

[80] Foucault (1976/1978) and Halperin (2002) demonstrate how epistemological frameworks for sexual norms have shifted over time in various cultures. However, given how sexual discourses are tied to functions of power, I am not suggesting that shifting sexual frameworks would be a simple project—only that history already demonstrates that such epistemological shifts can and do happen. I do believe, however, that new structures for thinking about sexuality in scientific and humanistic fields are needed in order to foster more democratic conditions for such a cultural shift. My hope is that theorizing sexual multiplicity in a dimensional framework may contribute to such conditions.

doing it. A few years back, I was reading a summary of research methods in feminist media studies when I came across the idea of improving interpretive data collection and analysis through *triangulation*, defined as "the act of bringing more than one source of data to bear on a single point" (van Zoonen, 1994, p. 139).

Thanks to high school math, I was already familiar with the idea of using three reference points to determine a location in space. In geometry and trigonometry, triangulation allows one to determine distances using the angles of triangles. In surveying, large triangulation networks are used to determine unknown locations from within three known points; in fact, the same method is used by emergency and law enforcement services to locate the origin of a cell phone call using telecommunication towers.

But triangulation is not only useful for spatial location, I learned. As a research method in the social sciences, the concept of triangulation can be used to validate data through cross-verification from at least three research sources. Given that a single research source can be inaccurate or biased and that two research sources may clash, triangulating research using multiple sources of data "will modify the weaknesses of each individual method and thus greatly enhance the quality and value of interpretive research projects" (van Zoonen, 1994, p. 139).

I began thinking about how I might apply the concept of triangulation to sexuality as a possible solution to my ongoing frustrations with some of the theoretical uses of *queer*. As a bisexual theorist, I have been perplexed that the foundational body of work in queer theory has little to say about bisexuality as a potential resource for undoing the "either-or" logic of binaries. In the 1990s, queer critical attention focused on the

210

processes of normalization and how, through hegemonic social structures, certain subjects are rendered "normal" through the production of "perverse" others. As such, queer epistemology has been traditionally oriented toward a "subjectless" critique that forestalls a fixed political referent and works to dismantle the "strategic essentialism" (Gayatri Spivak's famous term) at the heart of identity politics. However, a strong social turn toward queer normalization in the 2000s produced a new "queer liberalism" in politics that encouraged queer discourses focused primarily on lesbians and gay men. Between queer as a subjectless critique and queer liberalism, bisexuality as subject position, identity, and site of knowledge has dropped from view.[81]

Please do not misunderstand me; queer has been incredibly valuable as a theoretical position that challenges the normalizing mechanism of state power and as an interpretive practice that opens a door to understanding fluid desire as central to sexuality. It seems to me, however, that rather than reconfiguring the binary principles that underlie sexual categories in Western knowledge production, queer's deconstruction of heteronormativity (and the new homonormativity) has fostered an impulse to resist *all* sexual categorization.

A key promise of queer theory has been that queerness remains open to critiques of its exclusionary operations.[82] "As expansive as the term 'queer' is meant to be," Butler

---

[81] For discussions of queer theorizing of heteronormativity, see Sedgewick (1990), Butler (1990/2006, 1993, 2004a, 2004b), Rich (1993), Warner (1999), Johnson and Henderson (2005), Lugones (2007), and Hames-Garcia (2011); for discussions of the role of queer theory and politics in bisexual erasure, see Yoshino (2000), Angelides (2001), Hemmings (2002), Moorman (2008), and Erickson-Schroth and Mitchell (2009).

[82] Recently, this promise has been fulfilled as interdisciplinary queer scholars have shifted queer critical attention toward examining both normalization and intersectionality at once. These scholars have mobilized queer studies to engage in broad, interdisciplinary social critiques of race and ethnicity, gender, age, class,

(1993) says, "it is used in ways that enforce a set of overlapping divisions." Anticipating

the need for queer to remain contingent, Butler says that in order for the term "queer" to

act as a site of "collective contestation," it will have to remain "never fully owned, but

always and only redeployed, twisted, queered from a prior usage and in the direction of

urgent and expanding political purposes. This also means that it will doubtless have to be

yielded in favor of terms that do that political work more effectively." In other words,

though queer's "subjectless" critique might be tempted to reject identity categories as

insufficient because "every subject position is the site of converging relations of power

that are not univocal," Butler says that such a rejection "underestimates the radical

challenge to the subject that such converging relations imply." In this sense, Butler says,

"it remains politically necessary to lay claim to 'women,' 'queer,' 'gay,' and 'lesbian,'

precisely because of the ways these terms . . . lay their claim on us prior to our full

knowing." Reclaiming these and other identity categories remains necessary in order to

refute their deployments in sexist and homophobic discourses (p. 228-229).

Queer, then, was never meant to replace social categories but to allow for the

critique of processes of normalization. The value of social categories—particularly

queerly positioned ones such as bisexual, pansexual, polyamorous, dominance and

submission, kink, and so on—remains in their specific and intersectional framing of non-

---

socioeconomic status, nationality, disability, and religion as well as sexuality. In addition, interdisciplinary queer scholars have insisted that global issues of empire, race, migration, geography, subaltern communities, activism, class and labor, as well as national issues of neoliberalism, cultural politics, subjectivity, identity, family, and kinship, are all central to the continuing critique of queerness, sexuality, sexual subcultures, desire, and recognition (Eng, Halberstam, & Muñoz, 2005). These shifts in the field of queer studies can be seen today in queer ethnic and indigenous studies scholarship that explores non-Western epistemological frameworks for sexual knowledge and experience. See also Driskill et al. (2011) and Hames-García (2013).

normative social worlds. However, as the *Time* article illustrates, bisexuality continues to be deployed by social discourses in ways that marginalize non-monosexual queers and erase bisexual identity and experience as a legitimate position from which to theorize sexual knowledge. When sexual categories themselves are deemed the problem and anti-identitarianism is offered as a primary—or only—solution, such queer theoretical work inadvertently contributes to the normative, regulatory power of the hetero/homo binary by supporting the erasure of bisexuality from our epistemological frameworks as a legitimate resource for sexual knowledge and experience.

Triangulation as a methodological process may offer a concrete step beyond the seeming trap of dualism. Considering how the use of three or more data sources might be applied to reconfiguring sexual categories, I asked: What if bisexuality, with its non-exclusionary logic, was included as a reference point to triangulate sexual categories? What other frameworks of sexual knowledge might become visible? I realized, as well, that simply adding bisexuality to heterosexuality and homosexuality was not sufficient; I did not want another additive typology, but rather a new method of understanding the varieties of bisexual lives in the world—like complex three-dimensional mapping techniques that allow us to model the earth in new ways.

This thought was in my mind when conversing with a friend who, like myself, uses *bisexual* to describe his attractions to others. As we talked, it occurred to me that, in addition to bisexuality, other aspects of attraction and relationships were equally as important in shaping the subjective sense of what it means to be bisexual for each of us. We both were attracted to multiple genders, but my friend embraced an open relationship model of polyamory, or consensual non-monogamy, while I preferred monogamous

commitments. We also experienced our own genders with varying degrees of fluidity, which also affected our attractions. I realized that we were alike and not alike, and the commonalities and differences in our standpoints were clearly important in shaping the meaning of bisexuality for both of us. Meanwhile, common cultural attitudes would erroneously stereotype him as one of those "greedy bisexuals" while they would fail to recognize me as bisexual at all. So I asked myself: How would our cultural perceptions of bisexuality have to change in order to recognize and accept *both* of our attractions and relationships as legitimate? The solution, I realized, would require complex thinking—a *visualizable* model that shifted from the one-dimensional norm of gender-linked sexual orientation to a multidimensional frame that can account for (non)monogamy, multiple genders, and other salient aspects of sexuality: dimensional sexuality.

I propose that we can radically alter our sexual map by reconfiguring the basic principles upon which we organize sexuality: away from the singular, oppositional, exclusive, and static and toward the multiple, indeterminate, relational, and temporal. Under this new paradigm, detailed in the next section, the concept of triangulation is applied within a dimensional framework to make recognizable multisexualities that heretofore have been illegible within the hetero/homo frame. In dimensional sexuality, multiple aspects of sexuality are triangulated using at least three axes. In addition, the dimensional model acknowledges the ambiguity inherent within sexuality and supports the permeability of categorical boundaries as integral to its framework. By shifting our sexual framework from a single to multiple dimensions and applying the concept of triangulation, we can expand the domains of the knowable, thus bringing more bisexual and other non-normative sexual lives into culture's field of intelligibility.

In the next section, I will demonstrate how a structure of multiple axes comprised of *relational terms* can emphasize not how sexualities are mutually exclusive but rather what they have *in common*. As I will demonstrate, the sexual categories that result from the triangulation of these axes illustrate not rigid boundaries but rather the looser associations of *family resemblances*. As a result, the dimensional framework more accurately reflects the realities of sexual multiplicity.

The New Map: Dimensional Sexuality

Dimensional sexuality draws from the general principle of triangulation as *orientation through multiple reference points*. To illustrate how this works, let me begin with a model of the heterosexual/homosexual framework (see Figure 5). Here, with the specific gender of one's sexual object as the *only* organizing principle, the terms of opposite- and same-sex object choice are situated at opposing poles of a single axis. Because there are no other dimensions included in the frame, its categories of sexual knowledge are static and fixed. Presented with only two choices, someone situated at the fulcrum of this axis has no choice but to monosexually orient as either heterosexual or homosexual; oscillation between the poles is not permitted in the framework. And once oriented as "this *or* that," the frame presumes that the person has always been that way despite subjectivity, identity, and/or desire that may bridge both ends of the axis over time: "this *and* that" is not an option here.

Heterosexual | Homosexual

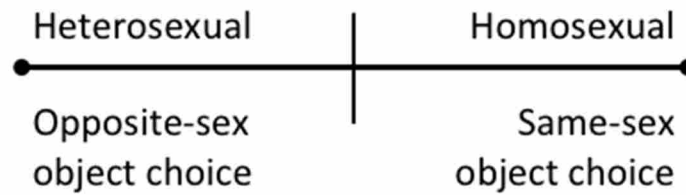Opposite-sex object choice | Same-sex object choice

Fig. 5: The heterosexual/homosexual framework.

Remember, however, according to the principle of triangulation, a methodology that uses only two reference points may result in inaccurate or biased information. So even though bisexuality is the unrepresented, inauthentic "middle ground" between "real" sexual identities in the hetero/homo framework, non-monosexual desires and identities nevertheless remain present in their troubling of this binary model. By acknowledging bisexuality as one of several significant reference points, and by situating these reference points on three or more axes, we should be able to triangulate sexual desires and subjectivities with more accurate results—i.e. the recognition of sexual lives that are not legible within the hetero/homo framework.

In the dimensional framework, axes may be organized around a number of significant dimensions of sexual desire; for the purposes of framing bisexual lives, I will be using axes organized by *object choice, number of sexual partners desired,* and *temporality*.[83] After describing all three of these axes and how they form a dimensional

---

[83] I understand that any given framework is actively "jettisoning and presenting" at once without "visible sign of its operation" (Butler, 2009, p. 73); as such, even frames of sexual multiplicity necessarily delimit what is inside and outside. My purpose here, however, is not to critique dimensional sexuality for what it may exclude. Rather, my purpose is to explore the inclusive possibilities of dimensional sexuality and to offer it not as a rigid, fixed schema but as a flexible, adaptable structure that can accommodate other axes and relational terms in addition to those suggested here.

framework, I will explain the process of triangulating these dimensions and the categories of sexual knowledge that result.

As previously stated, the hetero/homo frame is based on the premise that gender is the defining characteristic of one's sexual orientation. Through this frame, sexual maturity is presumed to be a stable same- or opposite-gender object choice, which leaves bisexuality as the immature and unstable middle ground. But what if the gender axis was altered to reflect the reality of bisexual experience? What if we accepted that people also can experience multiple gender attractions over the course of their lives, or that gender may not always be a significant factor in sexual attraction?

If we accept the premise that attraction to one gender and multiple genders *both* are significant reference points of sexual desire, then the axis of object choice begins to look quite different. Because multiple gender attraction is included in the dimensional framework, sexual desire for *which* or *any* gender in particular is no longer relevant on the object choice axis. All that matters is whether or not that desire stays consistent, more or less.

This change is possible because organizing principles have shifted: from static, oppositional terms in binary sexuality to temporal, relational terms in dimensional sexuality. As Figure 6 shows, the object choice axis now includes the relational terms of *fixed* and *fluid*. A fixed object choice means that, relative to one's own gender, a person's desire in regards to gender remains more or less consistent over time; thus in this framework, both heterosexual and homosexual desires are considered fixed. A fluid object choice means that a person's desire over time is non-exclusive to a particular gender, so various forms of bisexual desire are considered fluid. For the dimensional

framework, the category *monosexual* includes fixed sexual desires, regardless of same- or

different-gender object choice, while the category *bisexual* includes all forms of fluid

desire. As such, individuals with primarily fixed desires in relation to their own gender

are referred to as *monosexuals*, and individuals with primarily fluid desires are referred to
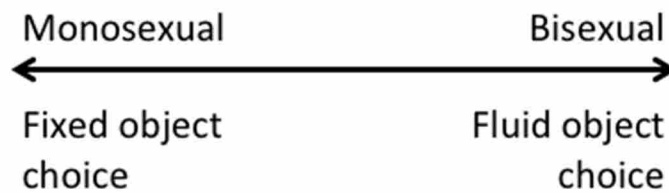
as *bisexuals*.[84]

Fig. 6: Object choice dimension.

As I said, the process of triangulation requires at least three axes. Since my

purpose here is to develop a dimensional framework to aid in the recognition of bisexual

lives, another significant reference point is the *number* of people one desires. As the

earlier story about my conversation with my friend illustrated, bisexuals can be

monogamous and not monogamous—each may be present for different people and at

different points in one's life. However, one of the cultural assumptions about bisexuality

is that someone can only be bisexual if that person is sleeping with men and women

concurrently, if not in the same sexual act. Bisexuality framed in this way *requires* non-

[84] All terms used in the dimensional framework are in reference to reframed categories of sexual knowledge; none of the terms are used as labels of individual or social identity, nor are they meant to impose such identities. As I developed the framework, I was faced with many choices as to what terminology to use. While I found some neologisms such as *monophilic* and *polyphilic* were necessary due to a lack of established categories for these concepts, I decided that reframing the more familiar terms *monosexual* and *bisexual* was the best choice due to their cultural recognition, currency in social science research, and historical and political significance as knowledge categories.

monogamy and gives rise to the stereotype that bisexuals are cheaters who lack the ability to commit to monogamous relationships. Despite this, bisexual experience frequently includes devotion to only one person in committed relationships. Moreover, a desire for multiple sex partners is not exclusive to bisexuals but is also a part of monosexual experience, as in the case of some heterosexual and homosexual people involved in poly and swinger communities. Thus the number dimension is needed to more accurately triangulate this aspect of sexual desire for monosexual and bisexual people alike.

Paired on the number axis in Figure 7 are the relational terms of *one* and *many*. For the dimensional framework, the category *monophilic* (loving one) includes desire involving only one person at a time such as monogamy and serial monogamy, while the category *polyphilic* (loving many) includes desires involving more than one person at a time such as non-monogamy, polyamory, and swinging. Thus an individual who desires and/or is devoted to one person is termed a *monophil*, and a person who desires and/or is devoted to more than one person is termed a *polyphil*.[85]
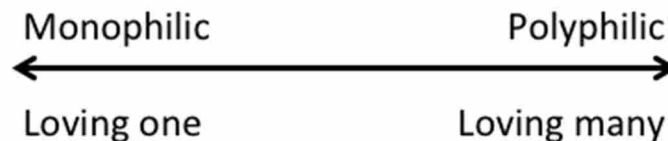
Monophilic   Polyphilic

Loving one   Loving many

Fig. 7: Number dimension.

---

[85] Note that *polyphilic* as a descriptor does not necessarily mean desiring more than one person in the *same* sexual experience; while the term is inclusive of this, it more broadly refers to the desire to have multiple sexual and/or romantic partners.

While the axes of object choice and number provide two of the dimensions needed for the process of triangulation, both already point to a necessary third dimension—temporality. Time is inextricably woven into the dimensional framework. It is the means of recognizing both the fluid dynamics of bisexual and polyphilic desires and the measured consistency of monosexual and monophilic desires. The relational terms of *past* and *present* (as well as *future potential*) open the dimensional framework to be read *not as a static state but as a dynamic process that changes with an individual subjectivity over time*. This temporal dimension is particularly crucial for bisexual and polyphilic desires, which cannot be adequately described by a fixed point in time and space.

With the axes of object choice, number, and temporality, we are ready to see what happens when we apply the process of triangulation to the framework as a whole. As Figures 8 and 9 show, by crisscrossing sets of relational terms—fixed and fluid on the object choice axis, and one and many on the number axis—the triangulated result is four *temporal* categories of sexual knowledge: (1) *monophilic monosexuals,* whose desires are oriented more or less toward one person of specific gender*;* (2) *monophilic bisexuals,* who are oriented more or less toward one person of non-specific gender; (3) *polyphilic monosexuals,* who are oriented more or less toward more than one person of specific gender; (4) and *polyphilic bisexuals,* who are oriented more or less toward more than one person of non-specific gender.
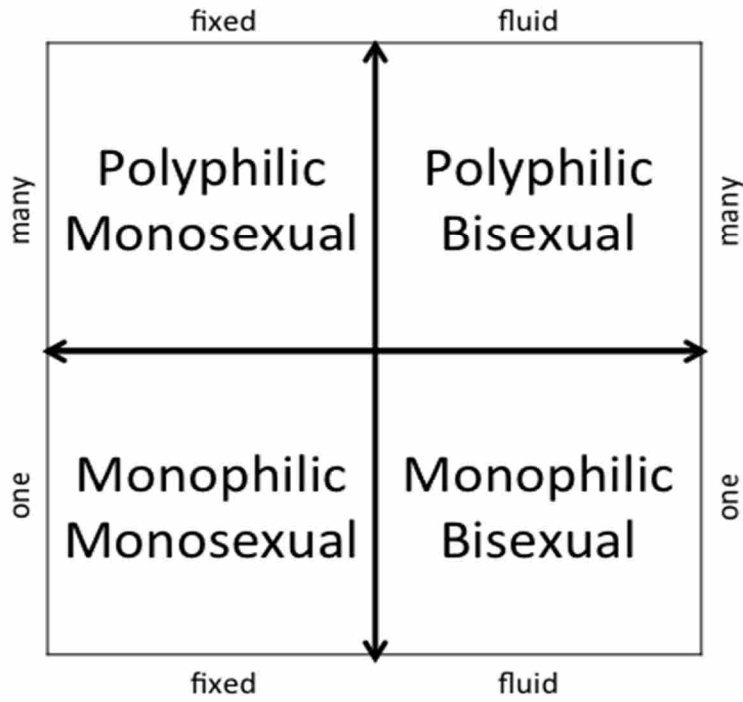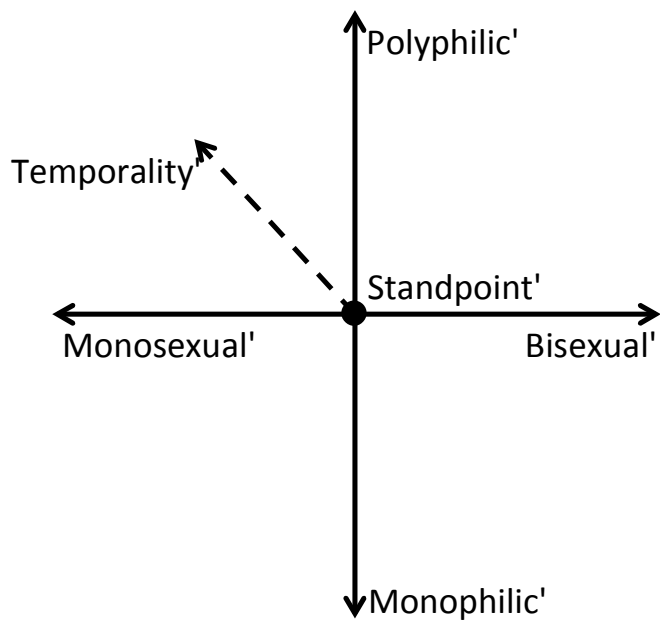
Fig. 8: Four triangulated categories of sexuality.

Fig. 9: Dimensional sexuality framework.

With Figures 8 and 9, we can see how these triangulated categories of sexual

knowledge are not mutually exclusive but rather share an intrinsic relationality through

family resemblance, a concept proposed by early twentieth-century German philosopher

Ludwig Wittgenstein and developed further by Michael Hames-García (2011). According

to Hames-García, Wittgenstein attempted to come up with a definition for what makes

something a *game* and encountered a version of the challenge posed by multiplicity:

> Some games have one player (solitaire), others many (football); some have clear rules (chess), some do not (ring around the rosies). Yet, Wittgenstein notes, these many disparate things that hold 'no one thing in common' do collectively entail enough sufficiently similar qualities that one can call them all games. He calls this phenomenon a family resemblance: 'a complicated network of similarities overlapping and crisscrossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail.'"(p. 21)

Similar to this concept, Hames-García suggests that "social group identities are also made

up of relationships among people who, instead of sharing one thing in common, share

various different kinds of commonalities and resemblances" (p. 21).

Because sexual identities "share various different kinds of commonalities and

resemblances," the concept of family resemblance illustrates how a multiplicity of sexual

identities and locations can be framed within dimensional knowledge categories. For

example, gay-, lesbian-, and straight-identified couples in polyamorous, swinger, and

other forms of open relationships all share the crisscrossing dynamics of polyphilic

monosexuals; thus dimensional sexuality makes possible the recognition of what these

different sexual identities have in common. In addition, triangulation reveals categories

for which we have no adequate social identity labels, such as monophilic bisexuals who

experience fluid sexual desires and are coupled in committed lesbian, gay, and straight-

appearing relationships; thus dimensional sexuality makes possible the expanded recognition of real sexual lives.

Moreover, family resemblance reminds us that sometimes the properties of categories overlap so boundaries can never be certain. In the case of a biological species, Hames-García says, "the Darwinian theory of the evolution and differentiation of species tells us that one *cannot determine* strict, invariable requirements for delineating the qualities that make up a given species." Yet this indeterminacy does not prevent scientists from classifying species according to family resemblances; rather it means that species definitions remain flexible and that attempts to impose overly exact boundaries distort the reality of biological variation (p. 21). Likewise, crisscrossing the axes of object choice, number, and temporality (see Figures 8 and 9) reveals the overlapping properties of triangulated sexual categories. Returning to the story about my friend and myself, triangulation clearly shows how we share the fluid gender attraction of bisexuality while remaining distinct as to our monophilic and polyphilic desires. By using a dimensional sexuality framework, we both become more visible and recognizable in the domain of the knowable. Ironically, by being *less determinate* than oppositional sexuality, relational terms and their triangulated categories allow dimensional sexuality to be *more realistic*.

This brings me to another important feature of the framework. For the sets of terms on each axis to be relational and not oppositional, they must account for a *range* of desires that can be grouped together based on family resemblances. For example, the object choice axis encompasses a spectrum of possible gender attractions, such as we are familiar with from the Kinsey scale, and groups them into two families: those which are more or less fixed toward a particular gender, and those which are not fixed. As such, the

223

monosexual family group would roughly compare to the 0-1 and 5-6 ranges on the Kinsey scale, while the bisexual family group would roughly compare to the 2-4 ranges. However, the Kinsey scale does not account for non-binary gender and so inadvertently reproduces dualistic gender and sexual orientation. On the other hand, because the object choice axis is *not* tied to specific gender, the dimensional framework denaturalizes the relationship between gender and sexuality and allows for a greater range of expression in both.

Rethinking the place of gender in sexuality is particularly important in a dimensional framework, for its relational terms also allow for the recognition of a range of gender identities and expressions. Unlike the hetero/homo frame, which ignores transgender identities and forces all bodies into biological sex categories, dimensional sexuality does not require a fixed sex or gender expression to triangulate its sexual categories. On the object choice axis, specific gender locations are irrelevant because one's fixed or fluid object choice is determined *only in relation to the gender of an individual subject.* Since the categories on the object choice axis (monosexual and bisexual) do not depend upon specific gender locations for subject or object, the sexualities of transgender and genderqueer people may also be triangulated. Take the case of a biological male who only has sexual relationships with cis-bodied men and who later identifies as a transwoman. By categorizing this person as homosexual, the hetero/homo framework would be unable to recognize her *straight* sexual identity without also suppressing aspects of her gender identity (transwoman) and sexual identity history (gay to straight). But since triangulation occurs in space *and* time, the object choice axis allows us to recognize her as consistently monosexual before and after

transitioning her gender. Moreover, it is possible that the dimensional methodology may be used to frame non-binary gender in more productive ways. By extending the basic principles discussed here (e.g. multiplicity, relationality, temporality, indeterminacy), a new framework for *dimensional gender* may be organized—one that breaks the frame of dimorphic gender and supports the non-binary logic of "this *and* that."

As I have shown, triangulating sexual desire by crisscrossing dimensions can help to organize a multiplicity of identities, attractions, and desires we call sexuality. However, when triangulating sexual dimensions, we must also take care to remember that all social identities are all inextricably intertwined in the formation of the individual subject. As Foucault (1976/1978) and Butler (1990/2006) point out, our identities never quite belong to us in any strict sense because identity is not *inherent* in a person but rather is constituted by regulatory practices of gender, race, and sexuality. Because triangulated sexual categories are always relational, and who we are as sexual, gendered, and raced beings is in a very real sense determined by multiple, mutually constitutive social locations, the final step in the triangulation process is to read the sexual dimensions *through* standpoint (see Figure 9).

I use the term *standpoint* to emphasize that we are all situated *within* multiple, overlapping social groups that affect how our sexualities are experienced. I borrow the term from feminist standpoint theory, which values how one's perspective is shaped by one's experience in multiple social locations such as race, gender, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, nationality, ability, sexuality, and so on.[86] As Harding (2004) explains, the

[86] For additional information on standpoint theory, see Wylie (2003) and Harding (2004).

"folk philosophies" found within feminist standpoint theory give voice to those who are marginally situated and work "to explain kinds of accounts of nature and social relations not otherwise accessible" by mainstream Western philosophy and science (p. 3). Thus considering standpoint in relation to triangulated sexual categories may help to expose how *different material positions are differently empowered and disempowered in culture.* For example, two lesbian Latina women may share a sexual, gender, and ethnic identity, but if their socioeconomic status differs, their standpoints are not exactly the same, which has implications for their social and political investments. With standpoint at the center of the framework, we are reminded to engage not only with the epistemic and ontological dimensions of sexuality, but also its critical and political stakes in the broader context of social identities and structures of power.

Moreover, standpoint reflects our social multiplicity, defined by Hames-García (2011) as "the mutual constitution and overlapping of simultaneously experienced and politically significant categories" (p. 13). Even as the dimensional framework seeks to expand our understanding *within* the domain of sexuality by acknowledging the mutual constitution of triangulated sexual categories, standpoint reminds us that, in the territory of our lives, sexual multiplicity is mutually constituted with social multiplicity. Thus reading triangulated sexual categories through various standpoints may help us go further in mapping or describing additional important aspects of the "actual territory."

New Territory

As I have shown, dimensional sexuality is a flexible epistemological framework that allows for greater recognition of a variety of sexual lives through the triangulation of

relational terms situated on crisscrossing axes. For humanities scholars, dimensional sexuality offers a rich and complex tool for the analysis and interpretation of a variety of sexual representations in texts. For example, in my own analysis of non-normative sexual representations in literature and media, dimensional sexuality allows me to call attention to elements of bisexual and polyphilic desire and relationships that may be subsumed under literary analysis that tends to read texts through more dualistic frameworks (see Chapters VI and VII). In addition, while queer reading methods help to keep the ambiguity of sexuality in our sights, dimensional sexuality as a hermeneutic framework makes possible a nuanced reading of bisexuality in particular and varieties of sexual multiplicity in general. By using dimensional sexuality in complementary ways with queer interpretive practices, scholars can draw upon the strengths of each method to reveal sexual meaning.

For researchers in the social sciences, the reconfigured principles that underlie the framework of dimensional sexuality may offer new methodologies for the development of sexual research models, while the dimensional framework itself may offer an enhanced tool for data collection and analysis or for the development of therapies aligned with a multidimensional model of gender and sexuality. Moreover, the flexibility of dimensional sexuality means that the model is not limited to the axes of object choice, number, and temporality, which I have focused on here. Sexual identities such as asexuality, autoeroticism, and varieties of kink are comprised of significant characteristics that also may be configured for dimensional triangulation. So long as the principles of dimensional sexuality are adhered to (e.g. the sets of terms used on each axis are relational and

temporal), such dimensions can be triangulated. The trick is to avoid the dualistic logic of "this *or* that" and adhere to the logic of indeterminacy in "this *and* that."

Consider another possible axis in a dimensional framework, one I shall refer to as *direction of sexual attention*. This axis would schematize how some people find their greatest pleasure in being exclusively on the giving *or* receiving end of sexual attention, while others find pleasure in giving *and* receiving sexual attention more or less equally. The former desires would be categorized as more or less *directed*, while the latter desires would be categorized as more or less *distributed*. Including this axis in a dimensional framework may help to make more recognizable directed sexual desires such as dominant, submissive, and stone butch identities. Triangulating direction along with object choice and temporality would provide the categories of attention-directed monosexuals and bisexuals and attention-distributed monosexuals and bisexuals— categories of analysis that may prove useful in the study of kink communities. In the end, what dimensions one chooses to triangulate depends on one's research needs and should be guided by best practices for quantitative and qualitative research. But be vigilant against easy dualisms; triangulation of multiple sexual dimensions only works as long as one maintains the principles that underlie the logic of "this *and* that."

As dimensional sexuality illustrates, a more complex recognition and understanding of multisexual lives requires a corresponding shift in sexual "knowing" from that which is singular, oppositional, exclusive, and static to that which is multiple, indeterminate, relational, and temporal. As such, dimensionality and multiplicity allow us to rethink sexual knowledge in productive ways. While oppositional heterosexuality and homosexuality must constantly police their borders, dimensional sexuality shows us how

228

boundaries are permeable, sexuality is relational, characteristics are shared, and the frame is both repeatable and open to permutation and expansion. This framework more clearly reflects the reality that our sexuality, as Butler (2004a) points out, always exceeds identity categories—indeed, always exceeds the knowable. "There are no direct expressive or causal lines between sex, gender, gender presentation, sexual practice, fantasy and sexuality," says Butler. "None of those terms captures or determines the rest. Part of what constitutes sexuality is precisely that which does not appear and what which, to some degree, can never appear" (p. 131). While I make no claim that dimensional sexuality can chart *all* the varieties and vagaries of human sexuality, its framework of multiplicity can and does, as Butler (2000) says, "insist upon the extension of . . . legitimacy to bodies that have been regarded as false, unreal, and unintelligible" (p. xxv).

CHAPTER VI

GAY, QUEER OR DIMENSIONAL?

MODES OF READING BISEXUALITY ON *TORCHWOOD*

Many popular culture scholars recognize the BBC science fiction series *Torchwood* (Davies, 2006) as a culturally significant site for viewers internationally to encounter portrayals of bisexual desire, defined broadly here as physical, romantic, and/or emotional attraction to more than one gender. Airing two regular seasons and two miniseries between 2006 and 2011, the series gained popular attention for what executive producer Russell T. Davis characterized as the show's "fluid sexuality" (Hills, 2010a, p. 279). In October 2006, Davies told the *Gay Times*, "Without making it political or dull, this is going to be a very bisexual programme. I want to knock down the barriers so we can't define which of the characters is gay" (Walker, 2007, p. 159). With 2.4 million viewers, the pilot episode alone was the most-watched non-sport digital program ever broadcast in the UK. Over time the number of viewers more than doubled as the series moved from niche to mainstream channels and international rebroadcasting.

Torchwood follows a secret British government team in charge of policing aliens and alien technology that slip through "The Rift," a time-space wormhole located in Cardiff, Wales. Team members include leader Captain Jack Harkness, medical officer Owen Harper, computer specialist Toshiko Sato, "office boy" Ianto Jones, and "new girl" Gwen Cooper. While each character is shown in sexually fluid situations during the first season, the most consistent portrayals of bisexual desire occur in relation to Captain Jack,

the character that inspired *Torchwood*. A rakish Time Agent from the fifty-first century, Jack first appeared in the 2005 revival of the long-running BBC science fiction series *Doctor Who* (Davies, 2005) and became immediately popular with fans. Jack has often been described as "omnisexual," or having a pansexual potential for aesthetic attraction, romantic love, or sexual desire towards anyone—including intelligent non-human species. As one *Torchwood* character observed, Jack will "shag anything so long as it's gorgeous enough" ("Day One," 1:02).

With a character like Jack, reading bisexual desire on screen may seem obvious, but as many bisexuality scholars have observed, "seeing" bisexuality in a cinematic medium is anything but straightforward in studies of popular culture. In this article, I use *Torchwood* as a case study of how homosexual and queer methodological frameworks affect readings of bisexual desire in a cinematic medium—specifically, how gay critical readings may appropriate same-sex desire as meaningful only in terms of homosexuality while dismissing not-same-sex desire as irrelevant, and also how queer critical readings may frame certain aspects of bisexual desire as queer resistance and other aspects as normative. Moreover, I illustrate how these frameworks constrain bi critics who struggle to articulate on-screen bisexuality as present and meaningful. Finally, I demonstrate how a dimensional framework of interpretation may enable more nuanced readings of sexual multiplicity on *Torchwood* and beyond.[87]

---

[87] To clarify, this article only addresses certain critical reading practices and their associated methods of interpretation. Practices of spectatorship by fans and differently positioned groups and individuals are beyond the scope of the article. However, it is worth noting that, while individual viewing practices may vary as a viewer's mood or interests change, some preferences, such as genre, may be relatively stable and contribute to the mainstreaming of "cult" science fiction television shows like *Torchwood*. For more on cult television, see Hills (2010a, 2010b).

Bisexual theorizing has made progress toward engaging bisexual epistemologies as resources for reshaping how we think about sexuality on screen and in life (see, e.g., Angelides, 2001; Bong, 2011; Elizabeth, 2013; Galupo, 2011; Hemmings, 1997, 2002; Pramaggiore 1996, 2011; Yoshino, 2000). But as film scholar Maria Pramaggiore (2011) has observed, to this day bisexual theorizing remains "unduly invested in queer theory's erasure of 'bisexual'" rather than "developing *a mode* of employing bisexual concepts and practices to productively engage with sociality" (p. 592, emphasis added). I believe dimensional sexuality to be such a mode—one that triangulates bisexuality as one of several significant axes within a multidimensional framework. Reading *Torchwood* through a dimensional lens can help scholars to reconfigure how they think about sexuality by allowing Captain Jack's "omnisexual" desire to shine.

Screening Bisexuality

Before turning to criticism of *Torchwood*, I would like to situate such discussions by reviewing some conventional limitations for representing bisexuality on screen and how bi-identified critics have approached these problems. As I have discussed elsewhere (Wilde, 2014), in Western culture our conceptual frameworks help us to interpret or "read" what we perceive about others as meaningful in specific ways, as with certain historically situated conventions and codes for gender and sexuality. When viewing a film, we depend upon such conventions, or *schemata*, to read narrative images

meaningfully.[88] According to film theorist David Bordwell (1985), how we understand a film depends in part upon schemata drawn from our historically and culturally situated interactions with the everyday world and from prior experience with other films and cultural products. While watching a film unfold, viewers use sets of schemata to make sense of the story—e.g. to make assumptions about characters based on incoming cues, to draw inferences about events as they happen, and to make hypotheses that help them to anticipate developments.

In Western cultures, the schemata we use to understand gender and sexuality have a restrictive effect on visual codes for representing bisexual desire on screen. Specifically, the "hegemony of the couple" (Pramaggiore, 2011, p. 587) schematizes sexual orientation so that a man and a woman shown together are conventionally coded as straight while two women together are coded as lesbian and two men are coded as gay. Since bi-identified people may participate in *all* of these coupled situations, only a few options remain for screening same-sex and not-same-sex desires that are not mutually exclusive. A character can explicitly identify as bisexual (or refuse identity labels) even after coupling, as does the character nicknamed 13 on the series *House* (Attanasio, 2004). Also, a character can be shown in non-monogamous situations such as a threesome or love triangle—or both in the case of Bo, a bisexual succubus on the series *Lost Girl* (Firestone, 2010). Finally, a character can be shown oscillating back and forth between women and men, as does the lead female character in the film *Chasing Amy* (Mosier &

---

[88] For a thorough discussion of Roland Barthes' conception of artistic codes and conventions and how they can be applied to film, see Lesage (1976-77). My sincere thanks to Julia Lesage for her comments on this chapter.

Smith, 1997).[89] Moreover, the convention of romantic coupling at the end of a narrative typically signifies an end to bisexual possibilities and reinforces norms of monogamy, marriage, gender, and sexual orientation. Such schemata may perpetuate cultural myths regarding bisexuality and biphobic social attitudes toward people who identify as bisexual.[90]

Given this limited representational range, bi-identified critics have paid close attention to thematic meanings associated with bisexuality in film and television, such as stereotypes that reinforce negative cultural attitudes and tropes that use bisexuality to signify other social discourses. However, B. C. Roberts (2011) suggests that these approaches may overlook how meanings are formally constructed through cinema's spatial and temporal characteristics, such as order and duration, which influence how viewers understand bisexual behavior. An analysis of cinematic narrative, says Roberts, may help bi critics to foreground "the problem of temporality and the role it plays in how we make sense of sexualities in a medium that privileges the visual" (p. 338). As I discuss later, dimensional sexuality provides a method of analysis that brings attention to the narrative storyworld and a character's expressions of desire over time.

While thematic concerns weigh heavily in some approaches to bisexuality on screen, other bi theorists have given critical attention to film scholarship that appropriates the representation of bisexuality in unacknowledged ways. In his analysis of bisexuality in queer, lesbian, and gay theory, Christopher James (1996) shows how "appropriation

---

[89] For further discussion of conventions of bisexual representation on screen, see Pramaggiore (1996, 2011), Moorman (2008), Roberts (2011), and Richter (2013).

[90] For more on biphobia, see *The Bisexuality Report* (Barker et al., 2012).

without representation" occurs when a theorist labels "behaviorally bisexual people or texts with bisexual characters as content, as 'queer,' 'gay,' or 'lesbian'" (p. 228). Building on this insight, Nicole Richter (2013) demonstrates how scholarship surrounding the "lesbian vampire" film subgenre uses bisexuality to structure a coherent lesbian identity, even though a bisexual perspective offers a broader understanding of the sexuality expressed. Richter says, "The theoretical perspective these critics embrace prevents them from seeing—literally seeing—bisexuality on screen. Miriam and Sarah [in *The Hunger*] do not suddenly become lesbian when they are intimate with one another—they are still bisexual, and this is what bisexual sex looks like" (p. 276). The problem with such critical frameworks, as these scholars show, is not an absence of bisexuality on screen but a refusal to see its presence.

The case of *Torchwood* demonstrates a need to place narrative temporality at the forefront of how we make sense of sexualities when visual codes are privileged. As Roberts (2011) said, "Notions of bisexuality, like narrative structure in the cinema, operate on a time/space continuum, whereby the factors of presence, duration and order determine how it is expressed and understood. Therefore, any theory of visibility should have to take into account how the spatial and temporal dimensions of bisexuality intersect with those of the cinema across a narrative" (p. 339). In the next section, I illustrate how homosexual and queer critical lenses tend to overlook temporality in cinematic narratives and see a character's sexual desire in binary "either-or" terms that obscure "both-and" possibilities from view.[91]

---

[91] Angelides (2001) has shown how binary knowledge frameworks deploy the logic of non-contradiction, where each term in the dialectical structure is *either* A *or* not-A. Terms that employ the logics of *both* A

Reading Bisexuality on *Torchwood:* Homosexual and Queer Modes

As I proceed, please understand that my intention here is not to discount or minimize the value of homosexual and queer analyses—of *Torchwood* in particular, or of popular culture in general. On the contrary, queer, lesbian, and gay perspectives remain crucial for the ongoing theoretical and political work of challenging heterosexist norms, inequalities, and oppressions. Rather, my intent is to intervene in methods that may restrict a bisexual interpretation of gender and sexual signifiers in cinematic narratives and, more broadly, to take a concrete step toward actualizing how bisexuality's "both-and" epistemology enables a broader recognition of sexual multiplicity.

Christopher Pullen (2010) argues that the narrative construction of *Torchwood* sensitizes mainstream audiences to gay and lesbian lives through the filter of bisexuality—a critical position that draws from notions of bisexual identity as inauthentic compared to gay and lesbian lives. Specifically, Pullen reads the representation of bisexuality on the series as both pleasurable and problematic. On the one hand, Pullen says, Captain Jack's sexual desire is largely directed toward potential male (rather than female) partners and thus is a pleasurable representation of male-to-male intimacy and same-sex desire. On the other hand, he frames the show's fluid sexuality as problematic since it employs "a preferred bisexual representation as a substitute for homosexual identity" (p. 136). Pullen claims that while the series presents Jack as "sexualized and bisexual," the "real substance" of the show lies in the "hidden story" of homosexual

---

and not-A (e.g. bisexuality) or *neither* A *nor* not-A (e.g. asexuality) are repudiated from the binary framework to maintain the integrity of "either-or."

identity in the relationship between Jack and his team member Ianto. He concludes that *Torchwood* "vivifies homosexual tension suggesting possibility, [while] at the same time it represses homosexual identity and is symptomatic of denial" (p. 136).

Pullen (2010) draws upon common stereotypes to dismiss bisexuality as the inauthentic middle ground between gay and straight sexual identities. As other bi critics have shown, this positioning strategy frequently can be found in gay and lesbian arguments that work to generate and reproduce certain cultural meanings of bisexuality—meanings that ensure gay theorists' own texts function in particular ways (see, e.g., Hemmings, 2002; Richter, 2013; Roberts, 2011; Yoshino, 2000). In this case, Captain Jack becomes the straw bi-man against which a covert and more "authentic" homosexual text is read. Rather than foregrounding ambiguity in Jack's story that may offer queer pleasures to a multiplicity of spectators, Pullen brackets out the "anomalous" bisexual narrative to reinforce a homosexual interpretation of the show. Moreover, through the character of Gwen Cooper, Pullen views *Torchwood* as foregrounding a "female-oriented" heterosexual world and explicitly frames the relationship between Jack and Gwen as an iconic representation of the "gay man and the 'fag hag'" (p. 136). By regarding same-sex desire as meaningful and disregarding not-same-sex desire entirely, the reading collapses fluid representation into a dualistic "either-or" framework that neatly erases bisexual meaning.

While some critics may read *Torchwood's* sexuality to suit a gay critical agenda, others who acknowledge the value of fluidity may still default to a binary lens to interpret same-sex representation in the series. For example, Lee Barron (2010) describes Jack as "an iconic figure who combats television heteronormativity as much as he combats

Weevils" (p. 217), but he also frames Jack's sexual encounters as "tend[ing] not towards the bisexual or the omnisexual . . . but the homosexual" (p. 216). Even as Barron acknowledges that "the idea of boundary slippage is central to the narrative, and is also mirrored in its representational strategy concerning sexuality" (p. 219), he still reads Jack as "homosexual" and the show as "littered with Jack's references to and reminiscences of past male lovers and potential sexual scenarios that involve men" (p. 224).

These analyses point at the limits of reading bisexuality through a dualistic interpretive mode. When Jack is shown kissing Ianto, conventional schemata mark such male-male eroticism as homosexual rather than bisexual, so a viewer may assume that Jack and Ianto are gay and attend more to evidence that supports a homosexual reading. But this overlooks, as noted earlier, that watching a cinematic narrative involves an active process of construction and interpretation. The dominance of "looking" in a visual medium means that more attention may be paid to "either-or" schemata for gender and sexuality than to complications of such schemata within the storyworld. From the "both-and" of bisexuality, "looking" regards *all* expressions of love and desire over time as relevant, not just same-sex erotic scenes. As such, elements of narrative carry significance equal to images of desire when it comes to interpreting Jack's sexual, romantic, and emotional desires for same-and-not-same-sex humans and non-humans across televisual spaces.

During appearances on *Doctor Who,* for example, Jack flirts outrageously with anyone he meets, including the Doctor, a male alien Time Lord; his human companions Rose Tyler and Martha Jones; two female androids; and an insectoid female named Chantho ("The Empty Child," 1:09; "Bad Wolf," 1:12; "Utopia," 3:11). Beyond

238

flirtations, several *Torchwood* episodes develop Jack's long-term female loves, both past and present. For example, "Small Worlds" (1:05) tells the story of Estelle, an elderly woman with whom Jack is especially close as the "son" of her first love—only Jack, who cannot die, actually *is* the man she fell in love with during the Second World War. Also, the end of "Something Borrowed" (2:09) reveals an old-fashioned picture of Jack with an unknown bride, while Jack's daughter Alice Carter and grandson Steven play key roles in the third season, *Torchwood: Children of the Earth* (Davies, 2009). Most significant of all, Jack maintains a series-long desire for and emotional bond with his team member Gwen, which I will discuss in more detail later. These narrative elements over time clearly problematize a homosexual reading of Jack's expressions of desire in the storyworld.

A queer critical mode may reinforce, albeit unintentionally, another dichotomy— i.e. norms and resistance to norms. As David L. Eng (with Halberstam & Muñoz, 2005) notes, around 1990 *queer* emerged as a term that "challenged the normalizing mechanisms of state power to name its sexual subjects: male or female, married or single, heterosexual or homosexual, natural or perverse" (p. 1). However, Eng's list itself is telling of queer's organizational lens. While essential to interrogating the social processes that produce, normalize, and sustain certain power relations, queer theory nevertheless enacts a dualistic mode by restricting critical readings of sexual desire to the axis of normal/queer. As Laura Erickson-Schroth and Jennifer Mitchell (2009) have noted, "[I]n an attempt to oppose heteronormativity in the age of identity politics, this academic movement has come to theorize only homosexual identity, mainly at the expense of other sexual possibilities" (p. 312). Despite the intentional ambiguity of *queer* as a term, queer

film and television criticism may focus selectively on some same-sex desire as representing queer resistance and most not-same-sex desire as normative—an "either-or" perspective which cannot adequately account for "both-and" desires.

For example, Frederik Dhaenens (2013) uses queer theory to ask if *Torchwood* explicitly marks certain characters and themes as gay and to what extent these representations "challenge heteronormativity and thereby articulate queer resistance" (p. 104). He explains that theories of the fantastic consider ambivalence to be an intrinsic characteristic, expressing through the monstrous "other" both a human desire for transgression and a need for stability and control. Non-realistic genres can accommodate more characters that express fluid sexual desires or who subvert or diverge from heteronormative subject positions, and as such are able to provide representational spaces and temporalities outside of the heteronormative order.

While popular culture scholars have recognized the queer potentials of fantasy genres (see, e.g., Pearson, 2008; Ireland, 2010), Dhaenens (2013) extends this point at the cost of collapsing all queer positionings into the monolithic category of gay. In a footnote, Dhaenens explains how he uses the concept of gay to name "those who are identified and/or self-identify as gay, lesbian, and bisexual in contemporary Western society" (p. 115, note 1). He extends the category of homosexuality "to refer to same-sex desire in general" so that all people who experience homosexual desires are "referred to as gay, even though these men and women may refer to themselves otherwise" (p. 115, note 1). Since all same-sex desires are marked as gay, any characters that exhibit same-sex desire are also marked as gay characters, whether or not they also exhibit not-same-

sex desires. Any opposite-sex (or other-sex) desires are relegated to normative heterosexuality and do not count as "queer."

Dhaenens (2013) rightly recognizes that queer resistance is articulated in the way *Torchwood* refuses to label the sexuality of characters. For example, scenes of same-sex desire and same-sex intimacy establish more complicated queer and bisexual positionings, as when Jack meets and kisses his namesake in the time-traveling episode "Captain Jack Harkness" (1:12). However, Dhaenens says, "By representing the main characters as *gay* without fixing their sexual identity, *Torchwood* represents *gay characters* whose sexuality is experienced from queer subject positions" (p. 107, emphasis added). Even though the footnote explains "gay" is meant to include bisexual identity and desires, bisexual scholarship has shown that gay and bisexual are not synonymous identities or cultural positionings (see, e.g., Angelides, 2001; Barker et al., 2012; Erickson-Schroth & Mitchell, 2009; Yoshino, 2000). The collapsing of bisexuality into a monosexual, same-sex framework means that Dhaenens dismisses Jack's not-same-sex relationships and desires as heteronormative rather than exploring them as meaningful parts of queer and bisexual desire, love, and relationships.

Without a theoretical framing that can adequately account for bisexuality's "both-and" logical structure, such queer critical modes restrict readings of characters to a dualistic normal/queer framework. As I demonstrate later, a dimensional mode of reading not only will allow scholars to recognize the ambiguity of queer positionings, it also will enable them to read bisexuality as central to the narrative representation of Jack and other characters on *Torchwood*.

Outside of the storyworld, a queer interpretive lens has been used to scrutinize the BBC's production of *Torchwood*. As noted earlier, rather than making sexual identities an "issue" on the show, producers made a continuum sexual desire integral to characters and incidental to plot—what Matt Hills (2010b) describes as the show's "non-agenda agenda" (p. 12). As such, says Dee Amy-Chinn (2012), what makes *Torchwood*'s success important is that viewers across broadcast media spaces "who would not watch a queer show through choice find themselves exposed to a different set of values, creating the potential to influence public understanding of, and tolerance for, minority behaviors and identities" (p. 64).

However, Amy-Chinn (2012) also argues that representations of bisexuality on *Torchwood* may not be as radical as accolades have suggested. While executive producers insisted after the first season that homosexual and heterosexual relationships should be depicted equally on screen, the show's framework of bisexual permissibility fundamentally changed when the show migrated over the course of three seasons from marginal to mainstream public broadcasting channels in the United Kingdom. Though not discussed by Amy-Chinn, BBC's co-production of the fourth season with U.S. cable network Starz all but eliminated on-screen representation of bisexuality and instead focused on Jack's attraction to men through explicit sexual encounters. These shifts in representation imply that bisexuality was able to exist temporarily in the series but was forced into a gay reading over time. As Steven Angelides (2001) and other bi theorists have discussed, bisexuality often is figured in gay and queer scholarship as an ideal of the future or as a relic of the past and thus cannot exist as a real possibility in the present moment. Similarly, Amy-Chinn concludes that while Jack's presence promoted queer

242

visibility on the BBC, his omnisexuality implied that "a fluid approach to sexual object choice may be a feature of the strange future, but not of the normal present" because the restriction of bisexual potential in the series "reinforced the sense that same-sex attraction is unusual and exceptional" (p. 76).

Using queer theory to illustrate how the BBC "gradually imposes a discourse of normativity onto *Torchwood*" (p. 73), Amy-Chinn (2012) makes a convincing case for how nationalized public broadcasting affects on-screen representations of sexual fluidity. In her analysis, queer theory provides a useful lens for examining how moving from a marginal postwatershed time slot to increasingly mainstream audiences impacted the sexual stories told on *Torchwood* from season to season. However, I am not as convinced of her conclusion that the series "compromises its radical credentials" (p. 64) for two reasons.

First, Amy-Chinn's (2012) criticism that "bisexuality is cast as 'alien'" (p. 64) fails to consider *Torchwood*'s generic form as science fiction. The purpose of the team in the storyworld is to protect Earth from aliens and alien technology, so "alien influence" is a defining feature of the show's generic structure. Moreover, the fifty-first century omnisexuality of Captain Jack falls well within the scope of science fiction literature, which began to push conservative boundaries during the 1960s by extrapolating that in the future humans will have sexual contact with many life forms. This "consenting aliens" motif has allowed science fiction writers and readers to explore human sexuality and relationships outside of the demands of "realistic" fiction and contemporary identity

politics.[92] As such, Amy-Chinn's expectation that the show should offer "a same-sex relationship of substance and depth free from alien influence" (p. 74) shows a lack of attention to its strategic use of generic form to imagine other sexual possibilities. Contradictorily, Amy-Chinn wants realism from a science fiction telefantasy—a perspective that overlooks generic qualities that give *Torchwood* flexibility to portray bisexual desires in the first place.

Amy-Chinn's somewhat puzzling dismissal of generic considerations makes more sense in light of her use of normal/queer as a theoretical framework—the second reason I am not entirely convinced of her conclusion. As discussed previously, while queer theory may be essential to critique normativity, it also imposes a mode of reading that may obscure bisexuality. Specifically, a queer mode tends to mark same-sex attraction on screen as significant (i.e. as signifying either radical or normative sexuality) while dismissing opposite-sex attraction as normative by definition. A critical reliance on this methodology makes problematic the task of reading same-and-not-same-sex aspects of bisexual desires over time as "radical" or even meaningful within a narrative whole.

As a result, Amy-Chinn's queer analysis of normalization in the show's production history overwrites a bisexual analysis of the storyworld's "radical credentials." In short, to support her claim of a "[restricted] scope for characters to explore their bi potential" (p. 63), she jumps interrogatory levels from the storyworld itself to the conditions of *Torchwood*'s production—a shift that favors reading Jack's sexuality as becoming more "gay" and therefore "normalized." As noted earlier, binary

---

[92] See Pearson (2008) for a discussion of science fiction's representation of postmodern, queer subjects. See Chapters III and IV for a discussion of bisexuality in science fiction and and its significance for bisexual science fiction fans.

modes of reading work against seeing bisexuality on screen by filtering images through schemata that privilege "either-or" visual codes. This is why narrative temporality must be considered along with representations of desire on screen—just as bisexual people do not "become" gay or straight when entering into a coupled relationship, Jack's radical omnisexuality remains an integral part of his character over time.

The critical views I have discussed show how modes of analysis organized on a heterosexual/homosexual or normal/queer axis make it difficult to visualize the crucial role of temporality in cinematic representations of bisexuality. Rather, these single-axis modes tend to isolate instances of same-sex desires from the full narrative and read them as evidence of homosexual desire or of queer resistance/acquiescence to norms. When this happens, the interpretive lens defaults to a static dualism as the only meaningful mode of analysis—and thus fails to account for same-and-not-same-sex desires over time. In other words, when only same-sex desire signifies as meaningful, not-same-sex desires may be written off as conforming to gendered social norms or may be bracketed out of readings entirely. In spite of a nominal inclusion of bisexuality, methods grounded in homosexual or queer theoretical assumptions neglect "the problem of temporality" and so may be unsuited to reading the full spectrum of sexuality in a cinematic medium.[93]

Scholars need methodological tools that are up to the task of theorizing sexual representations—and more broadly, social positionings and lived embodiments—that breech dualistic categorization. Within a dimensional framework of spatial and temporal axes, desire on screen may be understood as engaging in (committed) relationships over

---

[93] Nor are such readings able to give an adequate account of bisexual spectatorship practices or of a multiplicity of embodied sexual desires and identities in lived lives, though these issues are beyond the scope of this article.

time with one (or more) persons of one (or more) genders. As a methodological approach to complex cinematic representations, dimensional sexuality enables scholars to shift from a framework of duality to one of multiplicity. In the next section, I take a closer look at how a dimensional model may be used to interpret varieties of sexual desires and relationships in a cinematic narrative.

Reading Dimensionally: The Case of Captain Jack

In the absence of an explicit bisexual identity, conventions in sexual representation and interpretation tend to treat instances of fluid same-sex desire on *Torchwood* and elsewhere as homosexual. But what would happen if the gendered markers of same-sex and opposite-sex attraction no longer ruled how we read sexuality?

Such is the case with dimensional sexuality. A dimensional mode of analysis alters conventional schemata by triangulating multiple axes—each composed of non-binary, "relational" terms that reveal how temporality is inextricable to sexual meaning. This is possible because the dimensional framework organizes sexuality around the principles of relationality, indeterminacy, multiplicity, and temporality. Dimensional sexuality triangulates at least three spatial and temporal axes through a central standpoint, as shown in Figure 9 (see Chapter V). Standpoint recognizes that we are all situated *within* multiple, overlapping social groups that affect how our sexualities are experienced, such as race, gender, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, nationality, ability, age, and so on. As such, considering an individual's or group's standpoint in relation to triangulated sexual categories helps to engage not only with the epistemic and ontological

dimensions of sexuality, but also its critical and political stakes in the broader context of social identities and structures of power.

The horizontal axis represents *object choice* as a continuum from (more-or-less) fixed desire for one gender to (more-or-less) fluid desire for more than one gender.[94] As such, relatively consistent representations of homosexual or heterosexual desires over time are interpreted as *monosexual*, and relatively consistent representations of desires for more than one gender over time are interpreted as *bisexual*. In the storyworld of *Torchwood*, Gwen and Owen demonstrate primarily monosexual desire for the opposite gender while Toshiko, Ianto, and Jack demonstrate bisexual desire for more than one gender.[95] In a framework that takes both a flexible object choice and temporality as significant dimensions, bisexuality comes back into view as a meaningful source of cultural knowledge, social identity, and embodied desire.

Another dimension shown on the vertical axis of Figure 9 is the *number* of people desired, which is represented on a continuum from loving one person at a time (*monophilic*) to loving more than one person at a time (*polyphilic*). This axis is especially important for understanding bisexuality beyond cultural myths that bisexuals must be

---

[94] Aligned with dimensional sexuality, some social science researchers have theorized sexual orientation on a continuum from fixed to fluid desire as an alternative to binary heterosexuality and homosexuality. See for example Diamond (2008) and Ross, Daneback, & Mansson (2012).

[95] While Both Owen and Gwen have bisexual encounters, their desires remain largely directed to the opposite sex through the course of the narrative. Some might also interpret Toshiko's desire as heterosexual, given her long-standing crush on Owen. But while Tosh loves Owen, in the episode "Greeks Bearing Gifts" (1:07), Tosh has sex with Mary, an alien who takes the form of a woman. But Mary's manipulation does not negate Toshiko's pleasure in the affair, seen clearly when the two women kiss publically in a café. Also, Gwen tells Tosh that, during the affair, "you've had a look about you. Love suited you." Toshiko's affair with Mary does not foreclose her sexual object choice during the series, nor does her love for Owen preclude her desire for Mary. By not "settling" into a coupled relationship, Tosh confounds cultural notions of a happy heterosexual union as the ultimate resolution to desire. Viewed through a dimensional framework, Toshiko can be more accurately described as a monophilic bisexual, meaning her gender-fluid desire is directed primarily at one person at a time.

247

non-monogamous or that coupled relationships must be either straight or gay. Instead, the triangulation of fluid monophilic desire in Figure 8 (see Chapter V) enables scholars to read monogamous bisexuality as a meaningful standpoint, as with the character of Ianto.

Narrative development shows Ianto's monophilic love directed toward a woman in his backstory and toward Jack as the narrative progresses. Early in the first season of *Torchwood*, we learn that Lisa, Ianto's girlfriend, was partially converted in a Cyberman invasion of the Torchwood Institute and that Ianto has hidden her in the Hub in hopes of finding a way to make her human again. When Lisa escapes and attempts to "upgrade" the team, they are forced to kill her ("Cyberwoman," 1:04). In following episodes, Ianto's grief over Lisa's death is contrasted with his growing physical attraction to Jack, which evolves into a semi-secret sexual affair. However, both loves remain important to Ianto, as shown in episode "Adam" (2:05). After a memory-altering alien infiltrates the Hub, Jack restores their memoires by giving his team a memory drug and asking them to recall what defines who they are. Ianto remembers how he "never felt so alive" as when he met Lisa and fell in love, and "the way the world had ended" when she died. But he also remembers how joining the team—and Jack—gave meaning to his life again. Later in the series, Ianto acknowledges to his family that he is in a relationship with Jack, but he still refuses to have his sexuality labeled. "It's not men," Ianto says to his sister, "it's just him. It's only him" ("Day One," 3:01). This declaration, along with his love for Lisa, forestalls a monosexual reading of Ianto. Rather, like many people whose gender attraction over time can be described as more fluid than fixed, triangulation in a dimensional framework allows scholars to read Ianto as a monophilic bisexual whose desire at any given time is focused on a single person, not a single gender.

With Jack, triangulation enables him to be read not only as bisexual but also as polyphilic, or as desiring more than one person at a time. For example, in his debut appearance on *Doctor Who* ("The Empty Child," 1:09), Jack seems equally enamored with both the alien Time Lord and his human companion Rose. In both *Doctor Who* and *Torchwood*, Jack jokes about his exploits—from acrobatic twins to waking up in bed with both of his would-be executioners—leaving his multiple desires open for speculation. A conventional reading of Jack's equal-opportunity libido might see it as confirming myths and stereotypes about bisexual promiscuity. Remember, however, that binary frameworks by definition cannot include bisexuality as a legitimate standpoint. In contrast, triangulation challenges such readings by providing an apparatus for understanding Jack's polyphilic bisexual standpoint as serving dramatic developments through his commitment to the many.[96]

Jack's complex love and desire can be seen most clearly in his relationships with Ianto and Gwen. Jack flirts with Ianto during the first season but refrains from initiating a sexual relationship until Ianto coyly propositions him in episode eight ("They Keep Killing Suzie"). Their casual sexual involvement over time develops into romantic love, which I discuss later in more detail. Meanwhile, Jack and Gwen share a strong physical attraction, as shown by his hands-on approach to weapons training ("Ghost Machine,"

---

[96] To demonstrate a dimensional reading of Jack's bisexual and polyphilic commitments to his team members, examples in the article focus primarily on *Torchwood*'s first two seasons—before the deaths of Owen and Toshiko at the end of season two and of Ianto in season three. While there are fewer conventional representations of Jack's bisexual desire in the third season, *Torchwood: Children of the Earth*, a dimensional reading of the storyworld still accounts for the relationship between Jack and Ianto without restriction to a binary framework. Also, rather than viewing Jack's explicit male-male sex scenes as "gay" in the fourth season, *Torchwood: Miracle Day* (Davies, 2011), a dimensional frame reads his emotional devotion to Gwen and ultimate self-sacrifice to The Blessing as part of his ongoing bisexual polyphilic commitment to the many.

1:03). Their emotional bond grows through the first season until "End of Days" (1:13), when immortal Jack appears to die permanently. In the morgue Gwen kisses his cold lips as a final goodbye, but as she walks away he revives in a reverse *Sleeping Beauty* moment and whispers, "Thank you." Jack then has an emotional reunion with all team members, including a tender kiss with Ianto. Later, in the second season episode "Adam" (2:05), Gwen—like Ianto—must recall what defines her in order to restore her true memories. She tells Jack that her fiancé, Rhys, makes her laugh and she loves him, "but not in the way I love you."

The season-long narrative arc of television opens a space to question conventional representations of bisexuality and to subvert dominant readings of coupled relationships. While some critics may interpret the Ianto-Jack-Gwen triangle as evidence of Jack's "fence-sitting" or "true" homosexuality, dimensional sexuality allows scholars to see his polyphilic ability to love and commit to more than one person in different ways. As I will show, the relationships between Ianto and Jack and between Jack and Gwen help to illustrate the complexities of bisexual desire while resisting its most clichéd enactments.

Nowhere is the ongoing theme of Jack's polyphilic commitment to the many more evident than in the opening episode of season two, "Kiss Kiss, Bang Bang" (2:01). Here, the interlacing threads of his emotional, romantic, and sexual desire are brought together by two major dramatic developments: Jack's sudden return to the Hub after a long and unexplained absence, and the unexpected intrusion of a fellow Time Agent and former lover, Captain John Hart. Through the figure of Captain John, Jack's past provides a measure of how far Jack has come—from con man to Torchwood leader—and the commitments that brought him back to Earth.

Like Jack, Captain John has the omnisexual appetite of a man from the future. Unlike Jack, however, he has no loyalty to anyone but himself and has no qualms using seduction and murder to get what he wants. When the team goes to investigate Rift energy at a homicide scene, Jack receives a holographic message from John who apologizes for "the mess" and asks for a meeting with his old partner in crime.

In the scene that follows, Jack and John meet face-to-face in a high-tension moment balanced between fighting or falling into each others arms. They do both, kissing roughly, then punching and laughing in a crashing fight. Familiar icons from the Western genre—swinging doors, barroom brawling, vintage costuming, period side arms—elevate this performance of desire and hyperviolent masculinity to the level of camp. But just as Richter (2013) points out that female vampires in *The Hunger* and other films do not suddenly become lesbian when they are sexually intimate, neither do Jack and John suddenly become gay when they kiss and "bang" each other passionately. Abundant evidence in this episode shows that Jack and John are still bisexual and, to paraphrase Richter, same-sex eroticism is what bisexual sex looks like.

Critics who interpret such scenes as homosexual miss other important elements that support a dimensional reading not only of Jack's bisexual desire but also how his desire embraces a polyphilic commitment to the many. For instance, Pullen (2010) reads Jack's emotional intimacy with John, Gwen, and Ianto in "Kiss Kiss, Bang Bang" as pushing him to make an "either-or" object choice by "giv[ing] up his bisexual unknowable past, and mov[ing] towards an affirmation of *commitment to one suitor*" (p. 47, emphasis added). In this reading, a binary lens assumes that sexual, emotional, and romantic commitments may occur only with a single person. By foreclosing bisexual and

251

polyphilic possibilities, the reading denies the possibility of multiple commitments to more than one person of more than one gender. In contrast, a dimensional reading of Jack's return to Torchwood demonstrates his commitment not to a single "suitor" but to his entire team, individually and collectively.

This polyphilic commitment is first revealed when Jack reappears in Cardiff and returns to the Hub with the team. Watching as they smoothly work a new case without him, Jack says, "Got pretty organized without me." Gwen turns suddenly and throws him against a wall. "You left us, Jack!" she cries. "I know, I'm sorry," he says. "We knew nothing, Jack," she retorts, but he offers no more information. "Where were you?" Tosh asks. "I found my Doctor," he replies, smiling. "Did he fix you?" Owen asks, but Jack deflects by saying, "What's to fix? You don't mess with this level of perfection." Looking vulnerable, Ianto asks, "Are you going back to him?" Jack says to him, "I came back for you," then to Gwen and the whole team, "all of you."

By drawing upon multiple axes of analysis, a dimensional model enables a more nuanced interpretation of Jack's declaration of returning for "all of you" as it connects to the episode as a whole. As the plot unfolds and John's nefarious intentions are revealed, Jack passes tests of his commitment to Torchwood not only by refusing John's offer to leave Earth, but by asserting his emotional and romantic bonds with Gwen and Ianto. Two important scenes—one with Gwen in a underground corridor of the Hub, and one with Ianto in a high-rise office building—reveal Jack's new dedication and vulnerability as points on a timeline of his polyphilic bisexual desire.

In the first scene, Gwen and Jack walk down a corridor arguing about whether or not to trust the ex-Time Agent. She confronts Jack about abandoning the team and—by

implication—her. "Why did you desert us?" she asks. "Where did you go? Tell me. Talk to me." Although he almost never speaks of his immortality, Jack confides that dying and coming back to life so many times is "like being hauled over broken glass," but what motivates him to keep going is his commitment to Torchwood and all that implies. "I knew I belong here," Jack says. "What kept me fighting was the thought of coming home to you."

This is a pivotal moment in Jack's relationship with Gwen. Despite their mutual attraction, Jack has always wanted Gwen to have a "normal" life with Rhys, her boyfriend. Now, in a rare showing of emotional vulnerability, Jack confesses that he finally knows he belongs "here" (at this temporal point, with Gwen, in Torchwood, on Earth) with "you" (Gwen, the team, humankind). These multiple layers of meaning echo his earlier confession to the team that he has come back for "all of you."

As Jack takes her hand, however, he discovers something that clearly shakes him—an engagement ring. Jack has literally as well as emotionally reached out to Gwen and let her inside his emotional barriers only to find a new obstacle. "What's this?" he asks, pulling up her ringed hand. Gwen plucks her fingers from his, saying pointedly that she got engaged to Rhys because "no one else will have me." It takes over thirty seconds (and fifteen shots) for Jack to recover from her news—stepping back, folding his arms, and interrogating her closely as if he cannot wrap his head around the thought: "Gwen Cooper getting married. Huh!" Recovering his composure at last, he pulls her to him for a congratulatory kiss on the cheek. Although Gwen obviously feels moved by his touch and Jack seems reluctant to release her, they pull apart. Gwen is still bounded by her "normal" life with Rhys.

While Jack's desire for Gwen is restricted by circumstances, his desire for Ianto is not, as shown later in the same episode. When Jack and Ianto search the top floor of an office building, their first moment alone together since his return, Jack confesses that such places always get him "excited" because to him "they are exotic—office romances, photocopying your butt." Ianto interrupts this awkward attempt to renew intimacy by drawing attention back to their search and avoiding eye contact. As Ianto wanders further into the open office space, their physical gap emphasizes the emotional distance created by Jack's absence and heightened with the intrusion of an ex-lover. When Jack asks with concern, "How are you," Ianto replies with a falsely cheerful, "All the better for having you back, sir!"

But just as Jack earlier opens himself up emotionally with Gwen, he now opens himself up romantically with Ianto. Asking him to drop the "sir," Jack says haltingly, "While I was away, I was thinking, maybe we could, when this is all done, dinner? A movie?" Ianto finally pauses to look at Jack: "Are you asking me out on a date?" Jack replies, "Interested?" Ianto appears thrown off-balance by Jack's open acknowledgement of romantic interest—previously kept noncommittally in the realm of flirtation and casual sex. "Well, pft, as long as it's not in an office," he replies, looking around. All business again, Ianto says, "Some fetishes should be kept to yourself." The banter signals both a return to their flirtation and the progression of their romantic status—a change made especially clear when Ianto says, looking vulnerable for the first time, "Why are we helping him?" Jack assures Ianto that John is a reminder of his past that he wants gone—implying that the way will be clear for Ianto in the future.

As noted earlier, the "both-and" of bisexuality regards *all* expressions of love and desire over time as relevant, not just same-sex erotic scenes. As such, when it comes to interpreting Jack's sexual, emotional, and romantic desires on screen, elements of narrative carry significance equal to images of desire. In the *Torchwood* episode I've been discussing, Jack expresses physical desire for John, emotional desire for Gwen, and romantic desire for Ianto. Moreover, triangulating his expressions of devotion over time to Gwen, Ianto, and the whole team within the storyworld allows scholars to read his non-exclusive commitments as polyphilic—having loving bonds with more than one person that are expressed differently with each. The fact that in a single episode Jack can erotically fight John, emotionally reveal himself to Gwen, and romantically proposition Ianto all demonstrate how important it is to consider sexuality from a framework of multiplicity. Otherwise, we risk reducing to black and white the colorful continuum of Jack's polyphilic bisexuality.

Moving Forward

In their article on why bisexuality matters, Erickson-Schroth and Mitchell (2009) said that the "existence of bisexuality and bisexuals virtually demands a reconfiguration of the ways in which we define our desired-object-choice, diffusing outward from a monosexual paradigm to significantly more open-ended categories" (p. 313). As I have demonstrated with *Torchwood*, dimensional sexuality radically shifts how scholars interpret same-and-not-same sex desires in popular culture representations. Rather than conventionally reading Ianto and Jack as a homosexual couple, a dimensional reading shows both characters over time as similar in their object choice (bisexual) but differing

255

in their commitments to number. In other words, Ianto tends toward desire for one person at a time (monophilic) while Jack desires many and expresses that desire in different ways (polyphilic)—a difference that challenges both men at times. Triangulation of multiple axes not only returns their bisexuality to view in *Torchwood*, it also adds to an understanding of how different standpoints are negotiated within unconventional relationships and commitments.

Beyond *Torchwood*, the dimensional model's "open-ended" categories enable popular culture scholars to analyze complex expressions of desire that may be obscured within dualistic frameworks. On *The Good Wife* (Scott, 2009), for instance, a reading of Kalinda Sharma as a polyphilic bisexual may offer greater insight into her determination to remain an independent and free agent in the storyworld. Or on *Lost Girl*, a dimensional lens may help to reveal the relationship complexities that Bo negotiates as a polyphilic bisexual with her lovers Lauren and Dyson, both of whom are monophilic monosexuals.

Moreover, dimensional sexuality allows for the triangulation of axes of desire not discussed here—so long as the principles fundamental to a non-binary framework are sustained (see Chapter V). Another dimension, for example, might situate the giving and receiving of sexual attention along a continuum from that which is (more or less) directed at one person to that which is (more or less) distributed equally between people. Triangulating this axis with time and object choice enables an analysis of sadomasochistic and other attention-directed desires represented in films like *Secretary* (Fierberg & Shainberg, 2002) and *Fifty Shades of Grey* (De Luca, Brunetti, James, & Taylor-Johnson, 2015), as well as in television episodes such as "The Ecstasy of Agony" (1:08) on *Forever* (Miller, 2014).

Dimensional sexuality takes a concrete step toward actualizing a broader recognition of sexual multiplicity—a step made possible by theorizing grounded in bisexuality's "both-and" epistemology. For sexuality studies to grow, scholarship needs to place higher value on such non-binary frameworks of knowledge. Only then can we move past the endless questions of why bisexuality matters and instead devote needed attention to what bisexuality offers.

CHAPTER VII

READING DIMENSIONAL UNIVERSES:

SAMUEL R. DELANY AND URSULA K. LE GUIN

I began this project investigating how the dominant categories of heterosexuality and homosexuality affect project participants who self-identify as bisexual. What I discovered is that while the term *bisexual* has positive value for my participants, its rupture of binary sexual categories also poses multiple challenges for them, such as how to negotiate social invisibility and cultural myths and how to find communities. These issues are not resolved by the term *queer*, which fails to capture the social positioning of bi participants who face insider/outsider conundrums in gay, lesbian, and straight communities.

I also explored how speculative fiction, by imagining alternatives to binary sexual and gender norms, has contributed to group identity and community for some bi people. Analyzing personal stories and the pages of *Politically Incorrect*, I showed that textual tendencies within and social processes around speculative fiction allow bi-identified fans to envision alternative social worlds, see themselves in those worlds, and find likeminded others. Speculative fiction, in short, provides opportunities and means for some bisexual fans to share resources for navigating contemporary social worlds.

More broadly, the perspectives of my bi-identified participants illustrate a non-binary epistemological standpoint—one where the logic of "both-and" is valued over exclusionary logic of "either-or" sustained by binary categories of sexual difference. The lived experiences of bi participants demonstrate a need for non-binary theoretical tools

that can render sexual multiplicity visible, so I have drawn upon non-binary logic as a means of developing tools adequate to this task.

Dimensional sexuality shows how categories are relational, characteristics are shared, boundaries are permeable, and the frame is open to permutation and expansion. As illustrated with *Torchwood*, reading cinematic narratives in a dimensional mode allows scholars to call attention to elements of bisexual, polyphilic, and other desires and relationships that may be subsumed under more dualistic homosexual and queer methods of analysis. In this final chapter, I investigate how a dimensional framework may be used to access non-binary perspectives in literary narratives. What meanings might be uncovered by adding more dimensions of analysis and a "both-and" interpretive lens to close readings of fictional works?[97]

Reading Literature Dimensionally

While my primary intention with dimensional sexuality is to expand frames of recognition within the domain of sexuality, applying the principles of a dimensional framework in literary analysis may also contribute to shifting frames of perception in interpretive practices. As I argue in Chapter V, binary frameworks of knowledge may be reconfigured in order to expand the domains of the knowable. The principles that underlie a dimensional framework facilitate an epistemic shift from sexual "knowing" that is

---

[97] The readings of speculative narratives in this chapter do not examine literary representations of desire in terms of LGBT identity or politics—e.g. "good" or "bad" representations, their cultural visibility, or their historical contexts. Nor do they "queer" representations that appear heterosexual or normative, as this method retains a single "either-or" axis of analysis that may obscure temporal and relational aspects of desire. I do provide a few examples of how queer and dimensional readings may overlap in some respects and differ in others. However, an extensive comparison of both analytical frameworks is beyond the scope of the chapter.

singular, oppositional, exclusive, and static to that which is multiple, indeterminate, relational, and temporal. This shift occurs through triangulation, a process seeks at least three points of reference, so a dimensional analysis of desire in literary works may rupture static "either-or" binaries in part by incorporating a third axis, such as temporality.

As a conceptual framework, a dimensional mode also may be thought of as a way of thinking or perceiving—i.e., a worldview—that allows for creative connections outside of "either-or" patterns of thought. In literary works, for example, bisexuality may be approached not only as representation but also as a metaphor for "both-and" epistemic structures—a dimensional way of looking at the world. What strikes me in my readings of Samuel R. Delany and Ursula K. Le Guin is how they make use of such dimensional thinking to affect both narrative and readerly dynamics. The authors present protagonists who bridge different social worlds through their abilities to think—linguistically, mathematically, and/or temporally—beyond the dualistic conceptual restrictions of those worlds.

In the close readings that follow, I illustrate how a dimensional lens may help to articulate the kinds of non-binary epistemological work performed within selected science fiction novels, particularly in themes connecting temporality with language, thought, and desire. In Delany's *Babel*-17 and *Empire Star*, language and "multiplex" thinking provide frameworks for understanding sexual multiplicity and "triple" relationships within a space adventure setting. In Le Guin's *The Dispossessed*, the protagonist's General Temporal Theory provides the logic of "both-and" that supports an affirmative form of social freedom and sexual desire within a critical utopian setting.

Looking at these novels through a dimensional lens opens an interpretation of the narratives as demonstrating how bisexuality, polyphilic desire, and other dimensional metaphors may help to rupture dualistic frameworks of thought.

Dimensional Perspectives I: *Empire Star* and *Babel-17*

While the generic attributes of *Empire Star* and *Babel-17* may be space adventure, Delany uses science fictional tropes as vehicles for a deeper thematic exploration of how language structures shape our thinking and affect our social worlds. As such, his stories illustrate how changing language forms—forms that serve as our primary frameworks of knowledge and perception—may literally change how we think, adding dimensions we may not have recognized within previous frameworks. The narratives express dimensional thinking in part by introducing conceptual and relationship structures where a third element is key to understanding non-binary perspectives. In *Empire Star*, "multiplex" names a third form of non-linear multidimensional perception that goes beyond ordinary "simplex" and "complex" thought. In *Babel-17*, "triple" names and validates a form of bonded sexual relationship among three people that is distinct from paired coupling. By adding a third element, Delany illustrates the value of thinking in multiple dimensions to understand perspectives and experiences that may not be legible within dualistic frames of recognition.

Before turning to the novels, a brief review of some relevant events affecting Delany's early life may help to contextualize the dimensional perspectives illustrated in both books. In 1960 at age nineteen, Delany dropped out of college, married poet and editor Marilyn Hacker, and moved to the East Village in New York. He wrote several

261

novels over the next few years, supplementing his income as a folk musician in the bohemian culture of Greenwich Village. Delany's depictions of Transport subculture in *Babel-17* resonate in many ways with subcultural scenes in New York during this era.

Delany wrote *Babel-17* between December 1964 and September 1965 during a very transformative period in his life. In the later part of 1964, at age twenty-two, he was hospitalized at Mt. Sinai in New York City due to a "fixation with subways and suicide" (McEvoy 53). After three weeks, the hospital placed him in a program that sometimes allowed him to return home during the day. In February 1965, Delany met Bobby Folsom, a tool and die shop worker from Florida who was a year older than Delany. He invited Folsom home for dinner with Hacker in their Lower East Side apartment. Within days the young people were living together in a three-way relationship. By March, Delany was released from the hospital program (McEvoy 54). However, his personal life became complicated when Folsom's wife appeared and put strain on the "triple" relationship. In April, Delany and Folsom left New York and hitchhiked to Texas, where they worked on shrimp boats for about a month. When they returned north, the relationship between Delany, Hacker, and Folsom (and his wife) fell apart. With nothing compelling him to stay in Manhattan, Delany decided to go to Europe but needed money to do so. He finished *Babel-17* by September, and in two more weeks planned, wrote, and retyped *Empire Star*, selling both to Ace Books (McEvoy 62). *Babel-17* won the Nebula Award for best novel in 1967 and was nominated for a Hugo award.

While both novels are space adventures, undoubtedly events in Delany's personal life influenced the narratives he told. For example, the main character in *Babel-17* is Rydra Wong, a galaxy-famous poet who once had been in a "triple" with famous writer

"Muels Aranlyde," which is an anagram for Samuel R. Delany. In the storyworld, Muels authored the "Comet Jo" books, one of which was called *Empire Star*. Rydra and Muels were tripled with the interstellar transport captain "Fobo Lombs," which is an anagram for Bob Folsom. According to Rydra, Muels based his stories of Comet Jo on Fobo. In Delany's present, all of *Babel-17*'s epigraphs are excerpted from Hacker's poems, and some of Comet Jo's adventures in *Empire Star* are borrowed from Folsom's own (McEvoy 55).[98] Finally, *Babel-17*'s dedication reads, "this one, now, is for Bob Folsom, to explain just a little of the past year."

While life events may have shaped his storytelling, Delany's novels are not memoirs. Characters like Rydra Wong, Muels Aranlyde, and Comet Jo can only exist in the context of an imagined future. By writing them as science fiction, Delany was able to describe other ways that people might live and think in his social present, and fans responded positively. Biographer Seth McEvoy retells this story from Delany's first World Science Fiction Convention in 1966, when *Bable-17* had been out for a few months: "A young fan asked him, 'Do people *really* live like that?' Delany answered, 'Yes, people really *do* live like that.' The fan seemed relieved to find out that it was so" (55).

Empire Star and *Babel-17* both illustrate Suvin's cognitive estrangement as well as the radical subjunctivity of language that Delany theorized (as discussed in Chapter III). In Delany's narratives, words take on new meanings in the estranged world of the

---

[98] Hacker wrote about her relationship with Delany and Folsom in her long poem "The Navigators," which takes its title from the "triple" relationships described among spaceship navigators in *Babel-17*. Before its publication, the poem bore an epigraph from *Babel-17* that read, "You know, jobs for broken triples aren't that easy to come by" (McEvoy 55).

future. The stories teach readers how to read them and to understand an entirely different worldview, sometimes with the aid of a more familiar point of view character that is also learning for the first time. In fact, *Empire Star* is constructed around teaching the reader, along with Comet Jo, how to think and perceive in expanded dimensions that "complex" fails to adequately describe. Only by embracing non-linear temporality and "multiplex" thinking does the circular narrative become clear.

Simplex, Complex, Multiplex

The novella *Empire Star* is about Comet Jo, a farmer who finds a crashed ship carrying a message and who journeys to the center of power in the galaxy to deliver it. The story's narrator is Jewel, a Tritovian who crystalized itself when the ship crash-landed near Jo's home on the satellite Rhys. Jewel travels in Jo's pouch as a passive, omniscient point of view. In the opening passage, Jewel directly addresses the reader to explain its viewpoint: "I have a multiplex consciousness, which means I see things from different points of view" (4). Through Jewel, Delany is able to tell a "multiplex" story— one in which the whole is greater than the pieces because the mosaic it forms cannot be grasped in a straight-line plot (McEvoy 63).

Empire Star explores thought and perception on three levels, or "plexes," of consciousness—simplex, complex, and multiplex. Before Comet Jo leaves Rhys, he walks with Charona, gatekeeper for the Transport Area, under a structure called the Brooklyn Bridge. "To travel between worlds," Charona says, "one must deal with at least complex beings, and often multiplex" (13). To illustrate what this is like, she tells the simplex boy to stop and look above at the holes in the plating of the bridge floor. "They

264

look like random dots, do they not? . . . That's the simplex view." Next Charona says to look while walking forward, and Jo sees that some dots wink out while others appear and wink out again. "There's a superstructure of girders above the bridge that gets in the way of some of the holes and keeps thee from perceiving all at once," she says. "But thou art now receiving the complex view, for thou art aware that there is more than what is seen from any one spot." She then tells Jo to start running while looking, and he notices the holes make a pattern:

> It was only with the flickering coming so fast that the entire pattern could be perceived—
> He stumbled, and skidded onto his hands and knees.
> "Didst thou see the pattern?"
> "Eh . . . yeah." Jo shook his head. His palms stung through the gloves, and one knee was raw.
> "That was the multiplex view. [. . .] Thou has also encountered one of the major difficulties of the simplex mind attempting to encompass the multiplex view. Thou art very likely to fall flat on thy face" (16-17).

The bridge metaphor provides a beginning step for readers to understand how space and time are connected to "multiplexity" while warning that, if proper attention is not paid, they will also stumble in understanding that what is true of the bridge is also true of the story itself.

Delany's formulation of "multiplex" ruptures the dualism of "simple/complex" by adding non-linear temporality as a third dimension of perception—for characters and for readers. In the storyworld, Empire Star is where seven giant stars rotate around each other creating gravitational stresses that warp space and time. As one character explains, "The fibers of reality are parted there. The temporal present joins the spatial past there with the possible future, and they get totally mixed up. Only the most multiplex of minds can go there and find their way out again the same way they went in. One is always arriving on

Wednesday and coming out again on Thursday a hundred years ago and a thousand light years away" (83-84). On his journey to Empire Star, Comet Jo begins to grasp how a non-linear perception of time plays into multiplexity when he realizes that "this has all happened before" and he must "order [his] perceptions multiplexually" to understand his encounters with other characters (65-66).

Moreover, the novel's structure affects readerly dynamics by altering the reader's perception of how characters and events are connected. Clues signal how the narrative folds back onto itself in ways that may be described as "multiplex." For example, the circular narrative begins and ends with the same event: with Comet Jo on Rhys finding a dying survivor of a crashed starship who begs him take an urgent message to Empire Star, and with Norn crashing his spaceship on Rhys with an urgent message that he begs a local native to deliver. Comet Jo and Norn are the same character. Contacts with Empire Star change Jo's temporal present, perhaps several times, so at times in the story he crosses his own personal timeline.

Such temporal overlaps occur several times in the narrative. "The multiplex reader has by now discovered that the story is much longer than she thinks, cyclic and self-illuminating," Jewel says in the final chapter. "I must leave out a great deal; only order your perceptions multiplexually, and you will not miss the lacunae" (89). By adding a third temporal dimension to "complex" perception, readers grasp that characters in the narrative become each other, transformed by time travel and storytelling into archetypes that transcend a single identity: Comet Jo is the writer Muels Aranlyde, is an enslaved Lll, is a computer known as LUMP (a linguistic ubiquitous multiplex), and

others inside the storyworld.[99] The character's selves meet each other (again) at different temporal points in the cyclical narrative, though Delany leaves it for readers to fill in how their transformations occur. As Jewel says in the final passage, "It's a beginning. It's an end. I leave to you the problem of ordering your perceptions and making the journey from one to the other" (92).

With simplex, complex, and multiplex, readers have a framework for unraveling *Empire Star*'s non-linear temporal structure. A multiplex viewpoint perceives the world as a spatial and temporal whole—a perspective mirrored structurally in the cyclical, recursive pattern of the narrative. To understand Delany's story, readers themselves need to be able to shift from a simple (linear, chronological) viewpoint to think dimensionally—or "multiplexually"—about the story's (non)linear narrative progression and the (non)chronological timelines of characters, including the multifaceted narrative point of view of Jewel. "I hope you haven't forgotten about me," Jewel says to readers two-thirds of the way through, "because the rest of the story is going to be incomprehensible if you have" (66). Seeing the narrative through Jewel's "multicolored, multifaceted, multiplexed" (6) framework is essential for reader comprehension. The reader begins to understand these dimensions of "multiplex," the term "complex" seems overdetermined and inadequate to describe the story's plot progression, character development, and readerly dynamics.

---

[99] Adding to these narrative levels, in the novel *Babel-17*, Muels Aranlyde is named as the author of *Empire Star* and other Comet Jo stories, while the name "Muels Aranlyde" is an anagram for Samuel R. Delany—the real-world author of *both* novels. Delany makes extensive use of such nested, circular narrative dimensions in his masterpiece *Dhalgren,* published in 1975.

In *Empire Star*, Delany explores how the "right" word—i.e. one that captures other facets and other dimensions of experience—may help to shift perceptions so more of our social worlds become recognizable and meaningful. The term "multiplex" demonstrates a "lacuna" of consciousness that is not visible until a reader's perceptions shift away from a dualistic simple/complex framework of understanding. Delany demonstrates with science fiction a kind of perceptual shift that I theorize with the dimensional framework (see Chapter V). Similar to "multiplex," the term "dimensional" reveals conceptual gaps in binary "either-or" frameworks of knowledge, while the principles of dimensional sexuality provide a method for expanding forms of recognition.

Delany's speculative fiction consistently explores language and text, perhaps in part because of his struggles growing up as an unrecognized dyslexic. The idea of having the "right" word may take on new meanings when words themselves shift and transform on the page. In *Babel-17*, Delany explores how language itself, and the particular forms of words we have to express ideas, can shape and change how we think.

Language and Thought

With *Empire Star*, the generic possibilities of science fiction allow Delany to metaphorically illustrate the value of shifting frames of perception—specifically, that we may begin to recognize dimensions of experience (social, cultural, sexual, etc.) that were unknowable to us previously. *Babel-17* does this as well, primarily through its major theme of how language shapes our thinking processes and cultural understanding.

The novel tells the story of Rydra Wong, a famous poet, linguist, and code-breaker who can read body language in a manner bordering on telepathy. Rydra is asked

to use her unique linguistic talents to solve the puzzle of Babel-17, a code intercepted at Alliance military installations on several worlds just before acts of sabotage by the Invaders. She later reveals the code to be an incredibly efficient analytical language designed to subvert those who use it into acting for the Invaders.

Babel-17 investigates a theory of linguistic relativity, or how the structure of a language affects the ways in which its speakers can conceptualize their world. Using Babel-17 as a metaphor, the narrative speculates on "what if" a strong correlation exists between the form of a culture's native tongue and the worldview possible within it—a version of linguistic determinism popularly known as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis ("Linguistic Relativity").

Adept at multiple human and non-human languages, protagonist Rydra Wong understands that the form of a language directly impacts how one thinks within that language. "[M]ost textbooks say language is a mechanism for expressing thought," she says. "But language *is* thought. Thought is information given form. The form is language. The form of [Babel-17] is . . . amazing. [. . . W]hen you learn another tongue, you learn the way another people see the world, the universe. [. . .] And as I see into this language, I begin to see . . . too much" (23). As the narrative demonstrates, the hypothesis that "language *is* thought" has consequences for what we are able to think. If forms of language shape our perceptions, then those forms determine what we can think and know—so much so that contact between "nine species of galaxy-hopping life forms" is extremely rare, Rydra says later. She recalls treaty negotiations with a non-humanoid alien species with no word for "house," "home," or "dwelling." The sentence, "We must protect our families and our homes," took forty-five minutes to say in the alien language,

269

detailing boundaries of space and temperature that mean "home" to humans. "Their whole culture is based on heat and changes in temperature," she says. "We're just lucky that they do know what a 'family' is, because they're the only ones beside humans who have them" (152-53).

As Rydra begins to think in Babel-17, she discovers that it allows her to analyze and process information more quickly and precisely than any other language she knows: "Babel-17; she had felt it before with other languages, the opening, the widening, the mind forced to sudden growth. But this, this was like the sudden focusing of lens blurry for years" (113). For example, when her ship's navigation is sabotaged, Rydra solves the problem by using her growing understanding of Babel-17 to shift how she thinks of the conundrum. As she tells a crewmember, "We have to go to another language in order to think about the problem clearly without going through all sorts of roundabout paths for the proper aspects of what we want to deal with." Bable-17 works best because "most of its words carry more information about the things they refer to than any four or five languages I know put together—and in less space" (69).

Babel-17 is a metaphor for the limits of knowing within different language forms and how alternative language structures may open us to other dimensions of knowing. As Delany demonstrates, the structures of languages frame what we can "know" about the world in particular ways, and Babel-17 is no different. On the one hand, its processing speed is so fast that thinking in the language seems to slow the passage of time, stretching a moment into minutes that allow a person to analyze large amounts of information and to "know" quickly how to succeed in a crisis situation. On the other hand, the language has no words, no structural forms, for concepts like "I" and "you." Thus personal

270

pronouns in other languages—and the personhood they represent—are meaningless to the only native speaker of Babel-17 in the story: a psychopath known as "The Butcher." In his case, not having the "right" words means not having a basic foundation for morality—i.e. knowing that lives matter. "Butcher, there are certain ideas which have words for them," Rydra says. "If you don't know the words, you can't know the ideas" (150).

To illustrate how language gives form to ideas—including self-awareness—Delany uses the example of a person regaining consciousness. When her ship is sabotaged for a second time at the end of Part Two, Rydra is knocked out—a break in the character's awareness that is structurally mirrored in a sudden break in the chapter's last sentence. After the nearly empty pages marking the transition to Part Three, the first two pages of the next chapter describe someone slowly coming awake in an unfamiliar space:

> Abstract thoughts in a blue room . . .. Sixteen cases to the Finnish noun. Odd, some languages get by with only singular and plural. . . . The blue room was round and warm and smooth. No way to say *warm* in French. There was only *hot* and *tepid*. If there's no word for it, how do you think about it? And, if there isn't the proper form, you don't have the how even if you have the words. Imagine, in Spanish, having to assign a gender to every object: dog, table, tree, can opener. Imagine, in Hungarian, not being able to assign a gender to anything: *he, she, it* all the same word. (111)

Delany illustrates how certain concepts like gender and number may be overdetermined in some language structures and missing in others. Even having the words is not enough if the proper form of expression is not present in a language's structure, as he illustrates with "oriental languages" absurdly expressed in English: "you are my friend, *you* are my parent, and YOU are my priest, and *YOU* are my king, and **You** are my servant, and ***You*** are my servant whom I'm going to fire tomorrow if ***You*** don't watch it" (111). As Delany's examples suggest, morphological and taxonomic differences within languages

271

are not neutral; they have social implications in the relationship of self to others within a cultural worldview. Examples of this are given later in the same passage. As Rydra slowly awakens, her thoughts wander among words that mark categories of things and names that mark individuals:

> What's your name? she thought in a round warm blue room.
>   Thoughts without a name in a blue room. . . . Name. Names? What's in a name? What name am I in? In my father's father's land, his name would come first, Wong Rydra. In Mollya's home, I would not bear my father's name at all, but my mother's. . . . But were words names for things, or was that just a bit of semantic confusion? Words were symbols for *whole* categories of things, where a name was put to a single object. . . . "All right, *woman*, come here!" and she had whispered, with her hands achingly tight on the brass bar, "My *name* is *Rydra*!" An individual, a thing apart from its environment, and apart from all things in that environment; an individual was a type of thing for which symbols were inadequate, and so names were invented. I am invented. I am not a round warm blue room. I am someone in that room. I am— (111-112)

The passage illustrates how social recognition and individual existence is linked to words and naming. Rydra moves from "abstract thoughts" to awareness of herself as an individual—not a "round warm blue room" but "someone in that room." By understanding *how* forms of language structure (self)-perception—e.g. syntax, categories, names—we may begin to understand the boundaries of perception and self-awareness within cultural and linguistic worldviews.

Later in the novel, when Rydra teaches The Butcher the concepts of "I" and "you," the connection between words and existence becomes more explicit. He is called The Butcher because of his killing efficiency, but it is only a categorical description, not a name. "In the beginning was the word," Rydra tells him. "That's how somebody tried to explain it once. Until something is named, it doesn't exist" (151). Although he has learned to speak in another language, he still thinks in Babel-17, which does not contain "I" as a concept. For him, "the hand" moves and "the brain" thinks, but he has no

framework for how to name himself or others as individual subjects. Without a self-conception, other people do not "exist" for The Butcher except as categories of objects, which give him no moral sense that their ongoing existence has value.

In the long discussion between Rydra and The Butcher, Delany defamiliarizes "I" and "you" for readers, shifting our relationship to these concepts. Rydra says,

> "Look. A book *is*, a ship *is*, Tarik *is*, the universe *is*; but, as you must have noticed, I *am*."
> The Butcher nodded. "Yes. But I am what?" . . .
> "That's a question only you can answer." . . .
> "You and I," the Butcher said. He moved his face close to hers. "Nobody else is here. Just you and I. But which is which?" (154)

As The Butcher struggles with conceptual and morphological distinctions between "I" and "you," he mirrors Rydra's use of the words, saying "you" to mean "I" and "I" to mean "you." In the process, the reader's own conceptual distinctions between "I" and "you" become confused. As a result, his description of loneliness and isolation could be the reader's own: "No one really understood you when you spoke to them. You did not really understand them. Maybe because they said *I* and *you* so much, and you just now are beginning to learn how important you are and I am" (157). By rupturing distinctions between "you" and "I," Delany affects readerly dynamics so that not only do characters seem to be remembering experiences that are not their own, but readers feel as if they had the same experiences—a semantic confusion that metaphorically illustrates that "I" and "you" are the same. And as such, our existence matters.

Indeed, this is why dimensional frameworks are important. By triangulating a third element and naming the results, we can recognize social positionings that may be obscured within binary frameworks—e.g. the existence of multiple forms of bisexuality. Moreover, the principles of dimensionality are relational, making visible the shared

273

characteristics between seemly different categories. In other words, a dimensional perspective changes how we see others, showing how "I" and "you" are the same. The value of "you" and "I" is developed further in the novel's exploration of different social worlds and ways of perceiving through dimensional forms of thought.

Transgression

While space adventure drives the narrative of *Babel-17*, the novel engages in social commentary through the cultural lines drawn between "Customs" people who work planet-side and "Transport" people who work in space. Bridging both worlds, protagonist Rydra Wong helps readers understand subcultural perspectives, particularly around transgressive sexuality, that may not be legible within dominant ways of thinking. Learning the "language" of a subculture becomes a metaphor for perceiving the world differently.

Delany illustrates the cultural divide between Customs and Transport by shifting the point of view character early in the narrative. After Rydra translates enough of Babel-17 to learn that another attack on the Alliance is imminent, she hurries to gather a starship crew overnight in Transport Town. In order to leave Earth for an Alliance outpost by morning, she takes a Customs Officer with her to approve the "psyche indices" of crewmembers. For more than thirty pages, the narrative point of view shifts to the redheaded and bespectacled Officer Danil D. Appleby. His viewpoint gives readers an introduction to Transport culture through the conservative perspective associated with "the horde of pale, proper men and women who managed the intricate sprawl of customs operations" (3).

Reminiscent of Greenwich Village in the early 1960s, where Delany performed as a folk singer, Transport Town houses a culture apart from the "proper" world of Customs. Because interstellar travel is accomplished by interfacing human bodies and minds with technology, Transport has evolved surgical body modifications, intimate team relations, and life-after-death occupations into their own subcultural aesthetics and lifestyles. The Customs Officer knows, in theory, that the special requirements of interstellar travel mean that Transport workers can be corporate or discorporate, may form triple relationships, and often have "cosmetisurgery" to modify their bodies; however, he is unprepared to encounter these radical differences in culture and embodiment face to face. "They're all so weird," he tells Rydra after meeting an ebony-skinned male pilot transformed by cosmetisurgery into a bejeweled bat-like figure. "That's why decent people won't have anything to do with them" (30).

Here, the word "decent" signals that Customs and Transport are metaphors for the division of what is socially customary from what is socially transgressive. In general, social customs enforce standards that normalize behavior into recognizable, approved patterns, as represented by the Customs Officer whose job is to literally judge the behavior and compatibility of Transport crew. From the viewpoint of Customs, people are "decent" when they conform to standards of behavior and "weird" when they transgress customary boundaries.

As Rydra takes the Officer through Transport Town, he confronts many transgressions of customary boundaries of sexuality. For example, Rydra recruits two male starship navigators, Calli and Ron, whose polyphilic bisexual "triple" was broken when Invaders killed their female Navigator One. Rydra promises to find the two men a

275

replacement navigator whom they can love at the Morgue, a cryogenics facility for corporate and discorporate Transport workers (i.e., those who are not permanently dead). She also goes to the "discorporate sector" to recruit another triple team—ghosts who work as Eye, Ear, and Nose sensory scanners on the ship. Like "multiplex," the concept of a "triple" ruptures customary boundaries around sexual and social relations by opening a new dimension of perception. By naming triple relations, Delany shows that forms of polyphilic sexuality not only exist but also provide vital cultural resources.

To illustrate how "triple" relations challenge a "decent" worldview, Delany parallels the transgression of mortality with the transgression of sexual customs—both of which are positive and necessary functions in Transport culture. As Rydra's new crew passes through the "discorporate sector," a literal ghost town, the Customs Officer is confused that he cannot remember the faces of ghosts who pass them by. "You know I've been approving psyche-indices on Transport workers corporate and discorporate for ten years," he says. "And I've never been close enough to speak to a discorporate soul." Calli tells him that some jobs on transport ships cannot be given to living humans because a "live human scanning all that goes on in those hyperstasis frequencies would—well, die first and go crazy second." Defensive of his ignorance, the Officer says, "I do know the theory." Calli responds angrily, "You don't know anything, Customs. . . . Aw, you hide in your Customs cage, cage hid in the safe gravity of Earth, Earth held firm by the sun, sun fixed headlong toward Vega, all in the predicted tide of this spiral arm. . . . And you never break free!" Interrupting the Officer's angry retort, Rydra explains that Calli was part "of a triple, a close, precarious, emotional, and sexual relation with two other people. And one of them has just died." Though subdued by her words, a sliver of the Officer's

276

anger still escapes: "Perverts!" Feeling hurt, Ron echoes Calli's words by saying that some jobs on a transport ship "you just can't give to two people alone. The jobs are too complicated" (42-43).

In this passage, Transport culture represents a metaphorical freedom to move through other social worlds, to "break free" of the predictable in order to explore dimensions that transgress customary behavior. But breaking free of the known requires finding new ways to navigate the unknown. As ship navigators, Calli and Ron would need at least three reference points to triangulate a location in space. Similarly, the "close, precarious, emotional, and sexual" structure of a polyphilic triple provides triangulation reference points for navigating relationships. When those triple bonds are broken, the survivors find themselves lost and searching for direction. As Ron says earlier, "You know, jobs for broken triples aren't that easy to come by" (34).

While the Officer "knows" such differences exist in Transport, he has never been forced to confront them. Customary perspectives limit his understanding of human potentials for self-expression through control over one's body and relationships. Because he is unable to "break free" of his own cultural worldview, he sees the transformative possibilities of Transport culture only as perversion of what is "decent"—that is, until he experiences such transgression for himself.

After Calli confronts the Officer, the crew goes deeper into "illegal" sections of the discorporate sector while the Officer, disinclined to break the law, waits alone on the street. In the chapter that follows (comprising a single page), the officer encounters a discorporate female street hustler who seduces him without spoken words. Incomplete

277

sentences, indirect dialogue, and other syntactic interruptions leave gaps in meaning that

evoke emotion and desire:

> "You're so forward. I mean I'm not used to young women just coming up and . . . behaving like this."
>
> Her charming logic again explained it away, making him feel her near, nearer, nearing, and her banter made music, a phrase from.
>
> "Well, yes, you're discorporate, so it doesn't matter. But—"
>
> And her interruption was a word or a kiss or a frown or a smile, sending not humor through him now, but luminous amazement, fear, excitement; and the feel of her shape against his completely new. He fought to retain it, pattern of pressure and pressure, fading as the pressure itself faded. She was going away. She was laughing like, as though, as if. He stood, losing her laughter, replaced by whirled bewilderment in the tides of his consciousness fading— (44-45)

The ghost's emotive presence arouses intense feeling in the Officer—a memory of love,

unfinished, that he struggles to recall. When the crewmembers return, they laugh that a

"succubus" had hustled most of his money. For the Officer, however, "The emptiness of

his thefted recollections was real as any love loss. The rifled wallet seemed trivial" (46).

This encounter presents a turning point for the Officer. At the end of the novel, he

has become a frequent visitor in Transport Town and gets his first cosmetisurgery. He has

broken free of predictable customs, understanding difference now as expanded

dimensions for living: "I saw a bunch of the weirdest, oddest people I had ever met in my

life, who thought different, and acted different, and even made love different. And they

made me laugh, and get angry, and be happy, and be sad, and excited, and even fall in

love a little myself. . . . And they didn't seem so weird or strange anymore" (194).

Transgression has significance only within customary boundaries. When those

boundaries shift, what once seemed transgressive is revealed as something else—a

dimension that opens a new perspective, a new world, or a new way of being. As a

discorporate crewmember says at the end of the novel, "Sometimes worlds exist under

your eyes, and you never see them" (205). The novel works through Rydra and others to "cut through worlds, and [join] them—that's the important part—so that both [become] bigger" (205). Using science fiction metaphors as conceptual frameworks—e.g. by naming "triple" relations or "multiplex" thought—Delany demonstrates dimensional perspectives that may allow readers to see more clearly social worlds in the contemporary present that may exist under their own eyes.

Dimensional Perspectives II: *The Dispossessed*

Winner of the Nebula, Hugo, and Locus awards, Le Guin's 1974 science fiction novel has been called a "critical utopia," which is a subgenre of social science fiction literature born out of oppositional political movements of the 1960s (Hansen 246). While recent print editions drop the novel's original subtitle, "*An Ambiguous Utopia*," Le Guin's framing acknowledges both the utopian impulses from which the narrative springs and the inevitable conceptual problems faced by visions of "perfect" societies. In the case of *The Dispossessed*, an ambiguous narrative stance allows Le Guin to critique multiple social structures while exploring how a utopian social vision might work in practice.

Among its themes, the novel asks "what if" questions regarding forms of social and political power through the science fiction novum of twin planets: Urras and Anarres. Whether driven by capitalism or socialism, power on the rich Earth-like world of Urras resides in possession and ownership, both public and private. With economic, social, or intellectual power comes the freedom to make individual choices, while moral obligations, rigid social hierarchies, and laws replace an ethical responsibility to others. As a result, stark contrasts exist between the rich and poor in every society on Urras. In

279

contrast, on the resource-poor world of Anarres live the Odonians, an anarchistic society with no ownership and no hierarchical authority. Founded by revolutionaries who were exiled from Urras almost two hundred years earlier, the people of Anarres believe that freedom comes from social solidarity, an ethical responsibility to others, and that ownership and individualism are at the root of human suffering and evil. Odonians reject ownership of any kind—even the language, Pravic, lacks possessive pronouns and proprietary idioms for the sexual act. To Odonians, possessing is a kind of prison, while freedom comes from having nothing and sharing everything. This decentralized, cooperative, and organically modeled social system functions on mutual aid—a deeply ethical feeling of responsibility to each other that is made meaningful by individual choice.

The novel's protagonist is Shevek, an Anarresti physicist who is developing a unified theory of time that may revolutionize space travel. However, the Odonian people are not interested in his original theories or in leaving their planet, so Shevek exiles himself from his people and journeys to Urras to complete his theory among the hated "propertarians." As the narrative progresses, chapters alternate between the Shevek's present exile on Urras and his past life on Anarres leading up to the decision to leave. By oscillating the plot progression in both space and time, and between opposing cultures, Le Guin builds a framework that reveals a third way of knowing—one that breeches walls of "either-or" thinking.

As I discuss below, thematic connections between forms of sexual freedom and concepts of time are key to the narrative's "both-and" epistemological perspective and support a dimensional reading of sexuality within the narrative. Although these themes

are deeply intertwined in *The Dispossessed*, I disentangle some aspects of them below so I may offer an example of reading a literary work through the three axes of dimensional sexuality. First, I look at the significance of walls in the novel as symbols of "either-or" divisions and their inherent ambiguities. Next, I use the three axes of dimensional sexuality—number, object choice, and temporality—as a framework to explain the "both-and" perspectives represented in the sexual freedoms of Odonian society and the temporal unity sought by Shevek. By embracing "both-and" thinking, Shevek realizes that the answer to a unified General Temporal Theory lies not in resolving two conflicting views of time but in accepting that *both* are true, as he already has in his relationships.

Ambiguous Walls

Ambiguity in literature refers in part to the ways in which a piece of language may have multiple meanings or a detail may be effective in several ways simultaneously ("ambiguity"). Le Guin opens *The Dispossessed* with such a detail—a low wall surrounding the spaceport on Anarres. Without a gate and easily climbed, the wall represents "an idea of boundary" rather than a genuine barrier: "But the idea was real. It was important" (1).

The idea signified by the wall is freedom, but who is free or not changes based on perspective: "Like all walls it was ambiguous, two-faced. What was inside and what was outside it depended upon which side of it you were on" (1). From one perspective the wall quarantined the spaceships, their crews and worlds, "and the rest of the universe. It enclosed the universe, leaving Anarres outside, free." From another perspective the wall

"enclosed Anarres: the whole planet was inside it, a great prison camp, cut off from other worlds and other men, in quarantine" (2). The spaceport wall signifies freedom and restriction ambiguously through simultaneous, contradictory meanings linked to cultural points of view. Shevek's first act in the narrative is to breech this wall by walking into the spaceport through a hostile mob of his own people. Literally and metaphorically, Shevek crosses the boundaries that divide one world from another.

The metaphor of walls reoccurs many times in the novel as Shevek encounters intellectual and social barriers that restrict thinking in himself and on both worlds. But as the opening image of the spaceport wall demonstrates, how one interprets such boundaries, or even recognizes them as existing, depends upon the framework through which one understands the world. Similar to Delany's exploration of linguistic determinism, Le Guin investigates how language and culture shape forms of thinking on Urras and Anarres. As someone from a culture and language founded on permanent revolution, Shevek readily recognizes certain conceptual barriers in Urrasti thinking. For example, on the ship he converses with Dr. Kimoe, who tries to explain Urrasti cultural perspectives to the foreigner. Because each man takes for granted "certain relationships that the other could not even see," their conversations were "exhausting to the doctor and unsatisfying to Shevek, yet intensely interesting to both" (14-15). During their few days together, Shevek begins to understand the doctor's mind as "a jumble of intellectual artifacts" and ideas that "never seemed to be able to go in a straight line; they had to walk around this and avoid that, and then they ended up smack against a wall. There were walls around all his thoughts, and he seemed utterly unaware of them" (16). Similar to

Delany's demonstration of worlds that exist unseen under the eyes of Customs, Le Guin illustrates how walls may be invisible to those enclosed within them.

Just as the spaceport wall has two faces, Shevek's idealism limits his ability to recognize walls in his own culture. Steeped in the Odonian worldview, it is only after working on the far edges of mathematical theory that he begins to recognize how public opinion limits creativity on Anarres. "[S]ocial conscience completely dominates the individual conscience, instead of striking a balance with it," Shevek tells his partner, Takver. "We don't cooperate—we *obey*. We fear being outcast, being called lazy, dysfunctional, egoizing. . . . We've made laws, laws of conventional behavior, built walls all around ourselves, and we can't see them, because they're a part of our thinking" (330-331).

The image of walls is a metaphor for concepts that operate within dualistic "either-or" logical structures, drawing attention to fragile boundaries between opposing ideas and the perspectives upon which they depend. As Shevek learns on Urras, crossing such boundaries is not enough. To "unbuild walls" (75) and expand ways of knowing, he learns to embrace the "both-and" of ambiguity and the indeterminacy that accompanies it.

Themes of freedom and time provide important grounding for the exploration of sexuality and relationships in the novel's social world. As the narrative progresses, the reader begins to understand how freedom is shaped by indeterminacy and connections with others over time—a perspective that supports a way of looking at social and sexual freedom in dimensional terms as relational, temporal, indeterminate, and multiple. As I discuss below, the dimensional axes of number, object choice, and temporality all

contribute to an understanding of sexuality from the standpoints of Odonian sexual freedom and of Shevek's sexual development.

Sexual Freedom I: The Number Dimension

As discussed in Chapter V, the number axis provides a means of analyzing representations of monophilic desire for one person and of polyphilic desire for more than one person. Situated on a temporal continuum, the dimension of number helps to unmake walls of convention by revealing standpoints that may be stereotyped or invisible (e.g. polyamory, monogamous bisexuals) within a gender-based and hierarchical "either-or" sexual framework (e.g. heterosexuality and homosexuality). In *The Dispossessed*, number gives added dimension to representations of desire and paves the way for a dimensional "both-and" perspective of sexuality and relationships.

As followers of the anarchistic philosophy and social ethics of Odo, founder of the Odonian revolutionary movement, the Anarresti people have no laws or government of any kind, and total individual freedom is the social norm. However, this anarchistic freedom is not unconstrained or amoral, but rather is deeply rooted in the idea of the promise: "The validity of the promise, even promise of indefinite term, was deep in the grain of Odo's thinking; though it might seem that her insistence on freedom to change would invalidate the idea of promise or vow, in fact the freedom made the promise meaningful" (244). In other words, individual freedom is possible only through time-binding social relationships where making and keeping a promise goes hand-in-hand with the freedom to choose at any given moment.

These anarchistic social arrangements support sexual freedom for all Odonians with "complete fulfillment [as] the norm from puberty on" (245). No law, punishment, or disapproval applies to "any sexual practice of any kind," and as such a "whole type or section of humanity" in Odonian society—both women and men—views fidelity as "a refusal of real sexual freedom" (245). In a world where social revolution is ongoing in every act, polyphilic desire becomes a normal—perhaps even conventional—expression of sexual freedom.

Le Guin balances the view of Odonian sexual liberation as freedom from restrictions with a different perspective—the freedom to seek sexual fulfillment through commitment: "Odo came to see the promise, the pledge, the idea of fidelity, as essential in the complexity of freedom" (245). Without marriage or other social institutions to sanction or support committed relationships, Odonians who choose monophilic partnership undertake monogamy "just as [they] might undertake a joint enterprise in production." As such, sexual partnership "was a voluntarily constituted federation like any other. So long as it worked, it worked, and if it didn't work it stopped being" (244). The strength in such partnerships, "whether homosexual or heterosexual," resides in the promise as a "time-binding" choice—one that gives meaning to the past, present, and future as a whole (245). From a dimensional perspective, the structure of Odonian sexuality portrays a full continuum of monophilic and polyphilic desires that intimately link number to the axes of object choice and temporality, both of which I will discuss in more detail later.

In the narrative, the dimensional complexities of Odonian freedom influence Shevek's sexual development as well as his growing understanding of temporality. At

age fifteen, Shevek attends the Northsetting Regional Institute of the Noble and Material Sciences, where he becomes friends with three other boys his age—Tirin, Kvetur, and Bedap. The four boys have reached the age where they are acutely aware of girls: "Everywhere they looked, waking, or asleep, they saw girls. They had all tried copulating with girls; some of them in despair had also tried not copulating with girls. It made no difference. The girls were there" (41). In the context of Odonian sexual freedom, however, bisexual desire for other boys is presented as a common and unremarkable aspect of growing up: "Like all children of Anarres [Shevek] had had sexual experience freely with both boys and girls" (51). The four friends are free to share pleasure with each other, although only Bedap seems to prefer sexual relations with boys more than with girls.

At age eighteen, Shevek encounters different ways of looking at sexual freedom that are influential in his transition to adulthood and in his later development of temporal theory. Shevek is posted away from the Institute to a special work levy on a desert reforestation project. While he resents the interruption in his studies, "some of the workmates were really extraordinary people. Gimar, for instance. At first her muscular beauty had rather awed him, but now he was strong enough to desire her." Physical labor helps him to feel more self-confident, but Gimar declines his request to share sexually with him because she has a life partner:

> She looked so regretfully at him that he said, with . . . hope, "You don't think—"
> "No, You can't work a partnership that way, some bits for him and some bits for others."
> "Life partnership is really against the Odonian ethic, I think," Shevek said, harsh and pedantic.
> "Shit," said Gimar in her mild voice. "Having's wrong; sharing's right. What more can you share than your whole self, your whole life, all the nights and all the days?" (49-50)

286

For the first time, Shevek encounters monophilic desire—i.e. monogamous commitment to a life partner—as an expression of the Odonian ethic of sharing. Since monogamy has no social force through custom or law, time gives value to an individual's choice to share "all the nights and all the days" with one person. A short while later, Shevek has his first adult sexual relationship, which also is linked to the experience of time: "Beshun, expert in delight, took him into the heart of sexuality, where there is no rancor and no ineptitude, where the two bodies striving to join each other annihilate the moment in their striving, and transcend the self, and transcend time" (51). In these passages, the temporal nature of sexuality is shown as both extending through time and also as annihilating the moment and transcending time—states of becoming and being that express views of time that Shevek later unifies in his General Temporal Theory.

On his way to a different posting, Shevek encounters a contrasting view of sex and partnership from his traveling companion, Vokep:

> "Women think they own you. No women can really be an Odonian."
>   "Odo herself—?"
>   "Theory. And no sex life after Asieo was killed, right? Anyhow they're always exceptions. But most women, their only relationship to a man is having. Either owning or being owned."
>   "You think they're different from men there?"
>   "I know it. What a man wants is freedom. What a woman wants is property. She'll only let you go if she can trade you for something else. All women are propertarians." (52)

Vokep takes an essentialized view that equates "[h]aving babies" with ownership: "Touch and go, brother, that's the rule. Don't ever let yourself be owned." As Shevek thinks about his companion's polyphilic attitude, he remembers how Beshun had cried herself sick when he was reposted to the Regional Institute and had insisted she could not live without him. Both of them, in the rapture of sexual passion, had felt they had

287

possessed each other: "But they had both been wrong; and Beshun, despite her sentimentality, new it; she had kissed him goodbye at last smiling, and let him go." Shevek's own body had "possessed him" in sexual passion, but it was Beshun, "in her freedom, who had set him free." Responding to Vokep, he says, "I think men mostly have to learn to be anarchists. Women don't have to learn" (53-54).

Shevek achieves a more mature understanding of Odonian sexual freedom as not only a movement away from attachments and ownership, as Vokep claims, but also a movement toward fulfillment through choices, as Gimar and Beshun demonstrate. For the first time, he understands that freedom is not only a state of being but also a process of becoming through time. He also recognizes that expressing polyphilic and monophilic desires are both valid choices that have meaning for those who make them. What he does not yet know is, given such complete freedom to choose, what choices will be meaningful to him.

Sexual Freedom II: The Object Choice Dimension

As discussed in Chapter V, the object choice axis provides a means of analyzing representations of gender-fixed monosexual desires and gender-fluid bisexual desires. As I have already touched on in this chapter, the temporality of the object choice continuum helps to breech binary "either-or" sexual frameworks by revealing their structural limits. By undoing binary gender as the basis of sexual orientation, the dimension of object choice enables a "both-and" perspective of sexuality and relationships that help to provide greater visibility and meaning to multiple expressions of desire and gender identity.

As noted earlier, Le Guin describes bisexual behavior as a common part of sexual exploration for Odonian youth. While the narrative refers to adult partnerships as "heterosexual or homosexual" (245), Le Guin does not foreclose bisexuality as an adult possibility. In fact, bisexual expression plays an important role in the relationship between Shevek and his friend Bedap, who is described during their time at the Regional Institute as having "accepted the homage of a younger boy who had a homosexual-idealistic crush on him" (55). Later in the story, Shevek's sexual and emotional bonds with Bedap help the protagonist to break free of constraints affecting his creative thought.

At nineteen, Shevek goes to the port city of Abbenay to work on his theories of temporal physics at the Central Institute of the Sciences. After three years of hard work that goes largely unrecognized as having value, he feels angry, miserable, and alone: "Nothing he did was understood. To put it more honestly, nothing he did was meaningful." Feeling socially without purpose and intellectually burnt out, Shevek believes that he has "come up against the wall for good" (161).

However, the situation changes abruptly when Shevek runs into his old friend Bedap on the streets of Abbenay: "They hugged each other, kissed, broke apart, hugged again. Shevek was overwhelmed by love. Why? . . . Their friendship was a boyhood one, past. Yet love was there: flamed up as from shaken coal" (161-162). As they talk into the night, Bedap introduces Shevek to the notion that their society has become ruled by public opinion that ignores new ideas and stifles the creative mind. Shevek defends his idealism, and they argue at length. Though each feels hurt "as if they had fist-fought but not fought all their anger out," Shevek tells Bedap to spend the night rather than walking an hour back to his dormitory in cold weather. They share a bed, feeling the "warmth of

the other's body as very welcome." Moving closer together, Shevek falls asleep while

Bedap "struggled to hold on to consciousness, slipped into the warmth, deeper, into the

defenselessness, the trustfulness of sleep, and slept."

Despite bruised feelings, the two friends trust each other on an intimate level: "In

the night one of them cried out aloud, dreaming. The other one reached his arm out

sleepily, muttering reassurance, and the blind warm weight of his touch outweighed all

fear" (171-172). Knowing who cries out and who reassures is not important here; rather,

what is important is that both can fulfill these roles equally. As Shevek discovers during

his exile from Anarres, such intimacy between men is impossible on Urras, where rigid

hierarchies divide genders and masculinity forces men to reject all that may be seen as

feminine in their own behaviors.

After that night together, bisexual intimacy plays an important role in the renewal

of friendship and love between Shevek and Bedap:

> They met again the next evening and discussed whether or not they should pair
> for a while, as they had when they were adolescent. It had to be discussed,
> because Shevek was pretty definitely heterosexual and Bedap pretty definitely
> homosexual; the pleasure of it would be mostly for Bedap. Shevek was perfectly
> willing, however, to reconfirm the old friendship; and when he saw that the sexual
> element of it meant a great deal to Bedap, was, to him, a true consummation, then
> he took the lead, and with considerable tenderness and obstinacy made sure that
> Bedap spent the night with him again. They took a free single in a domicile
> downtown, and both lived there for about a decad; then they separated again,
> Bedap to his dormitory and Shevek to Room 46. There was no strong sexual
> desire on either side to make the connection last. They had simply reasserted trust.
> (172)

The description of sexual preferences in this passage as "pretty definitely" hedges an

adult sexual orientation as exclusively "either-or." From a dimensional perspective, this

opens the narrative to a reading of sexual desire on a continuum and sexual expression as

relational and temporal—i.e. as aligned with the person, situation, and moment rather

than with a particular gender. Sexual intimacy provides Shevek with a means to affirm his relational bonds with Bedap, past and present, even though by this point the protagonist feels blocked both in his creative work and in his sexual desire. Nevertheless, with "considerable tenderness and obstinacy," Shevek acts from a place of love for Bedap, who perceives the "sexual element" as "a true consummation" of a relationship, making it complete.

Shevek gives Bedap pleasure, and as their friendship evolves, what Bedap gives Shevek is "a freedom of mind that [he] craved" (173). Through long arguments and debate, Bedap shows Shevek the walls of public opinion that have halted his progress: "He had changed Shevek's life, and Shevek knew it, knew that he was going on at last, and that it was Bedap who had enabled him to go on" (173). Bedap helps Shevek to uncover the real wall—not in himself, but in the Odonian public conscience. Moreover, his renewed friendship with Bedap illustrates that bisexual expression does not have to be excusive from monosexuality. Rather, bisexual intimacy can be seen as part of a continuum of sexual experience that is not reduced in meaning even when a person is "pretty definitely" a monophilic monosexual, as we see with Shevek.

Several months later, Shevek goes on a hiking trip with Bedap's friends and meets Takver, a girl who had been at the Regional Institute though he had not noticed her. Alone together, Shevek and Takver talk about their dissatisfactions with sex. Shevek says it has been nearly a year since he has copulated "and that was just with Dap." Takver says she used to have a lot of fun copulating, but then "it got unsatisfying. I didn't want pleasure. Not just pleasure, I mean." Shevek says that about the time sex for him began to so sour "so did the work. Increasingly. Three years without getting anywhere. Sterility.

Sterility on all sides" (179). When he asks Takver what she needs, she replies that she needs "the bond. . . . The real one. Body and mind and all the years of life. Nothing else. Nothing less." At that moment, Shevek sees for the first time that this is also what he needs: "Joy was rising mysteriously in him. . . . He had a feeling of unlimitedness, of clarity, total clarity, as if he had been set free" (180). After the hiking trip, Shevek and Takver move into a double room to begin their lives together:

> It was now clear to Shevek, and he would have thought it folly to think otherwise, that his wretched years in this city had all been part of his present great happiness, because they had led up to it, prepared him for it. Everything that had happened to him was part of what was happening to him now. Takver saw no such obscure concatenations of effect/cause/effect, but then she was not a temporal physicist. She saw time naively as a road laid out. You walked ahead, and you got somewhere. If you were lucky, you got somewhere worth getting to.
>   But when Shevek took her metaphor and recast it in his terms, explaining that, unless the past and the future were made part of the present by memory and intention, there was, in human terms, no road, nowhere to go, she nodded before he was half done. "Exactly," she said. "That's what I was doing these last four years. It isn't *all* luck. Just partly." (183-184)

Through the complexities of anarchistic social freedom and multiple dimensions of sexuality, Le Guin portrays monophilic commitment to one partner as a time-binding choice that adds value and meaning to the present by linking past and future actions into a temporal whole. Without social institutions or laws, Odonians have absolute freedom to choose whom they are with and for how long. In their temporally dynamic sexual system, Shevek is free to *both* express bisexual fluidity *and* find fulfillment in monophilic monosexuality.

The novel's inclusion of multiple perspectives on sexual freedom provide the ambiguity marked in the novel's original subtitle and allow for a dimensional reading of sexual desire on a continuum within the storyworld. Sexual choice is framed not just as a movement away from restrictions but, more importantly, as a movement toward

fulfillment. The "both-and" way of thinking that results is utterly unlike binary frameworks—e.g. the hierarchical valuing of pair bonding over multiple relationships, masculinity over femininity, monosexual over bisexual desires, or heterosexuality over homosexuality. When triangulating sexual number with object choice in multiple temporal dimensions, such binary constraints are revealed as ambiguous walls—ideas of boundary that shift or even disappear according to one's standpoint.

Uniting It All: The Temporal Dimension

As I have already touched on, time is inextricably linked to number and object choice in a dimensional framework. In Chapter V, I discussed how time provides the means of recognizing both the fluid dynamics of bisexual and polyphilic desires and the measured consistency of monosexual and monophilic desires. Triangulation of these dimensions with past and present (and future potential) provides a method of interpreting an individual's changing standpoint over time as meaningful, rather than as ambiguous or anomalous. In short, time is what makes dimensional thinking possible.

As a temporal physicist, Shevek struggles with opposing linear and circular models of time that block his development of a General Temporal Theory: "There is the arrow, the running river, without which there is no change, no progress, or direction, or creation. And there is the circle or the cycle, without which there is chaos, meaningless succession of instants, a world without clocks or reasons or promises" (223). The pure mathematical proofs of physics attempt to describe how time works with certainty, but reality always involves ambiguity and indeterminacy. In life, he experiences time as both circular and linear, as both being and becoming. To complete his theory, Shevek comes

to recognize that opposing theories of time as either sequential or simultaneous misrecognize the true nature of temporality as both and more.

At age eight, Shevek imagines a logical conundrum involving time and space: If a rock thrown at a tree must cross a distance that can be split in half again and again, paradoxically the rock can never hit the tree. As Shevek matures in his work as a theoretical physicist, the problem (known as Zeno's paradoxes of motion) raises important questions about the nature of time as either linear or as circular. During his exile on Urras, Shevek once again returns to the image of throwing a rock at a tree to illustrate the dilemma to party-goers at a social event:

> "It's like this, to make a foolish little picture—you are throwing a rock at a tree, and if you are a Simultanist the rock has already hit the tree, and if you are a Sequentist it never can. So which do you choose? Maybe you prefer to throw rocks without thinking about it, no choice. I prefer to make things difficult, *and choose both*."
> "How—how do you reconcile them?" the shy man asked earnestly.
> Shevek nearly laughed in despair. "I don't know. I have been working a long time on it! After all, the rock does hit the tree. Neither pure sequency nor pure unity will explain it. We don't want purity, but *complexity*, the *relationship* of cause and effect, means and end. Our model of the cosmos must be as inexhaustible as the cosmos. A complexity that includes not only duration but creation, *not only being but becoming*, not only geometry but ethics. It is not the answer we are after, but only how to ask the question." (225-226, emphasis added)

Shevek's "foolish little picture" illustrates that mutually exclusive "either-or" explanations are insufficient to explain the temporal physics of being and becoming. His answer to this logical quandary comes by shifting from oppositional "either-or" thinking to dimensional "both-and" thinking: he comes to think of the rock as both always and never hitting the tree. By choosing *both* circular "being" *and* sequential "becoming," Shevek shifts logical grounding away from exclusionary opposites, which allows for greater complexity in his "model of the cosmos" and reveals dynamic relationships

294

among its elements, including their ethical implications in human relationships, as I discuss later. This dimensional perspective allows him to think within an entirely different logical structure that "violates" the known laws of physics.

In a moment of epiphany, Shevek understands what choosing complexity over simplicity actually means—acceptance of indeterminacy: "He had been groping and grabbing after certainty, as if it were something he could possess. He had been demanding a security, a guarantee, which is not granted, and which, if granted, would become a prison" (280). To realize a model of the cosmos "as inexhaustible as the cosmos" requires accepting past, present, and future as *both* simultaneously *and* sequentially real: "The wall was down. The vision was both clear and whole. What he saw was simple, simpler than anything else. It was simplicity: and contained in it all complexity, all promise" (280). By breaking free of constraining "either-or" patterns of thought and working from the assumption that both models of time are true, Shevek's perspective expands dimensionally—allowing him to complete his General Temporal Theory.

Shevek's temporal "both-and" way of knowing is contrasted with the multiple ways that "either-or" thinking underlies Urrasti relations of power, which are fixed in binary hierarchical categories. For example, on the ship to Urras, Shevek has his first encounter with patriarchy and sexism in a conversation with the ship's medical doctor, Kimoe. When the doctor asks if there is "really no distinction between men's work and women's work" on Anarres, Shevek explains that Odonians choose work "according to interest, talent, strength—what has the sex to do with that? . . . [T]he men maybe work faster—the big ones—but the women work longer. . . . Often I have wished I was as

295

tough as a woman" (17). Kimoe is "shocked" at the suggestion of women physically laboring alongside men: "But the loss of—of everything feminine—of delicacy—and the loss of masculine self-respect— You can't pretend, surely, in *your* work, that women are your *equals*? In physics, in mathematics, in the intellect? You can't pretend to lower yourself constantly to their level?" (17). Shevek begins to recognize many walls around ideas of "superiority and inferiority" in Urrasti thinking: "If to respect himself Kimoe had to consider half the human race as inferior to him, how then did women manage to respect themselves—did they consider men inferior? And how did all that affect their sex lives?" (18). Viewing Urrasti social customs as an outsider, he sees "walls all around" their thinking of which they were "utterly unaware" (16).

Shevek also confronts how those in positions of powerful on Urras use hierarchical class and racial heritage to rationalize dominant social positions. For example, Shevek wants to give his temporal theory to all of humankind because it will make possible instantaneous space travel between the known worlds. However, the Urrasti physicist Atro, an aristocrat who believes in Darwinian social elitism, tries to convince Shevek that he should keep his theory for the Cetians—the people of Anarres and Urras. With superior knowledge, Atro wants to prove the intellectual superiority of Cetians over non-Cetians, the "aliens" who made first contact with Urras during his boyhood:

> "Well, nowadays 'mankind' is a bit overinclusive. What defines brotherhood and nonbrotherhood? Definition by exclusion, my dear! You and I are kinsmen. . . . I don't want those damned aliens getting at you through your notions about brotherhood and mutualism and all that. . . . The law of existence is struggle—competition—elimination of the weak—a ruthless war for survival. And I want to see the best survive. The kind of humanity I know. The Cetians." (142-143)

Atro is willing to overlook that Shevek's ancestors were "probably herding goats" only a few centuries earlier because "we're members of the same family"—that is, from the same gene pool within the solar system (142).

The categorical purity of gender, class, and race espoused by Kimoe, Atro, and others on Urras is possible only through "definition by exclusion"—an atemporal separation of end from means that supports hierarchical power relations. In contrast, Shevek's unified temporal physics implies an ethics of responsibility to others *because* our sense of time "involves our ability to separate cause and effect, means and end" (225). Odonian freedom through social solidary lays groundwork for an ethical perspective in Shevek's temporal physics. At the party where he describes the rock and tree paradox, Shevek explains how temporality and social responsibility are linked: "The baby, again, the animal, they don't see the difference between what they do now and what will happen because of it. They can't make a pulley or a promise. We can. Seeing the difference between *now* and *not now*, we can make the connection. And there morality enters in. Responsibility" (225). Contrary to Atro's interpretation of human survival as competition for resources, Odonians understand human evolution as sharing resources. When only the strongest survive, Shevek says, "the strongest, in the existence of any social species, are those who are most social. In human terms, most ethical." On arid Anarres, he says, the only resource they can count on is one another: "There is no strength to be gained from hurting one another. Only weakness" (220). Shevek's temporal theory has ethical dimensions that subvert hierarchical assumptions of class and race in social organization. As such, the narrative illustrates how dimensional ways of

297

thinking may allow for a more equitable, and perhaps more ethical, consideration of human social relationships.

As I have shown, reading Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* through a dimensional framework allows for the triangulation of Shevek's monophilic desire, bisexual fluidity, and temporal experiences. Together, these dimensions open the reading to a "both-and" epistemological perspective that works to resolve seeming opposites. Outside of a binary "either-or" structure, sexual freedom can be viewed in different terms—not as a "freedom from" imposed restrictions, but rather as a "freedom to" seek fulfillment. By accepting time as both sequential and simultaneous, Shevek understands that a monogamous commitment to Takver does not negate his bisexual experiences with Bedap, but rather affirms that both are valid and meaningful choices. Seeing the ethical dimensions of temporality, Shevek understands his chosen bond with Takver as binding time in a way that gives duration meaning in his life beyond the sequence of cause and effect or the illusion of "either-or" choices. As a result, a third way of knowing opens up within the text—a dimensional mode of thinking that works with time as both being and becoming. As one character says, "It isn't changing around from place to place that keeps you lively. It's getting time on your side. Working with it, not against it" (311). Likewise by working with time and not against it, dimensional sexuality helps to give meaning to multiplicity.

Queer, Bisexual, Dimensional: Some Implications

My close readings of Delany and Le Guin in this chapter are experimental—a first sustained effort to interpret literary meanings through a dimensional framework. As such, I refrain from using the queer and feminist theories that I would employ under more usual

298

conditions of literary interpretation. While this process at times has felt artificial, the results have been positive and can be developed further in dialogue with other theoretical frameworks—e.g. how might dimensional sexuality support or be supported by other modes of gender and sexual analysis? How might it challenge or be challenged by them?

In the process of writing this project, some thoughts have become clear on the relationships among queer, bisexual, and dimensional. As I discuss in Chapters V and VI, the term *queer* overlaps with *bisexual* by marking desire that, as Alexander Doty says, is "non-, anti-, or contra-straight" and that anyone may experience, no matter one's social location. (3). Queer identities are deliberately ambiguous, blurring the categorical boundaries of heterosexuality and homosexuality, and queer reading practices interpret ambiguous desires where otherwise "straight" readings may be preferred. As such, there is affinity between queer and bisexual epistemological viewpoints; however, they are not identical nor are they mutually exchangeable, as Chapters II and VI demonstrate. Queer is still situated within an oppositional framework as a position that is not straight, not heterosexual. It opens up sexuality as a spectrum of desires and identifications but still functions critically under the rubric of definition by exclusion (normal/queer). By comparison, bisexuality is simultaneously (and paradoxically) heterosexual *and* homosexual—a breeching of the "either-or" logical structure and remaking of the relationships between categories. Bisexual epistemology is what makes dimensional sexuality possible.

As I have demonstrated in this chapter, reading texts through a dimensional framework is *not* about queering straight desire (queer already does that very well) and is not *only* about reading bisexual desire (although that can be one aspect). My dimensional

readings of Delany and Le Guin step past the "either-or" of categories defined by exclusion and instead takes up the "both-and" of relational categories to expand our understanding of the real and the possible. Far from utopian idealism, the reality and presence of bisexuality as a way of knowing affirms the possibility of theorizing human desire and relationships as multidimensional.

Consider, as I showed in the Le Guin reading, that a dimensional frame does more than look for representations of bisexual or polyphilic desires. While these certainly may signal an opening for a dimensional perspective, bisexuality *itself* as an epistemological framework speaks to a way of looking at the world that encompasses "both-and" possibilities—e.g. Shevek's monophilic monosexuality and bisexual experiences not as mutually exclusive but as open possibilities over time. From traditional modes of definition/categorization by exclusion, bisexuality embraces an apparently paradoxical viewpoint, simultaneously both heterosexual and homosexual and more, and without hierarchically marking one form of desire over another. Unlike queer, a bisexual epistemology accepts the full range of human desire, relationships, and embodiment over time and as such may offer an affirming alternative to the negations of "either-or" epistemological frameworks.

Moreover, a dimensional framework can be seen as queer in its most radical sense—i.e. the understanding that fluid desire may be experienced by *anyone,* at any point in life, no matter one's social positioning or sexual identity. This begs the question—why not stick with queer? As discussed in Chapter VI, queer critique is still positioned as opposed to heterosexual norms, and it still functions within a negating "either/or" epistemological framework. Queer does not adequately recognize opposite-

sex bisexual desires because it is framed as resistance to (perceived) binary exclusions instead of as recognition of multiple positivities. In contrast, bisexual epistemology enables us to step outside of categorization by exclusion to formulate multiple relational categories within a continuum of possibilities. As such, a dimensional framework allows us to shift modes of analysis by demonstrating the value of uncertainty, by providing a means of thinking relationally across boundaries, by recognizing temporality (becoming) as essential to being, and by understanding that the expression of complexity through multiplicity is necessary to wholeness (e.g. "multiplex," "triple"). A dimensional framework offers an *affirming* approach to sexuality that is compatible with intersectional modes of analysis (standpoints) and may help to broaden critical views through multiple ways of knowing.

Finally, returning to the ethnographic chapters of this project, the dimensional model also may prove valuable in future research among marginalized groups. Dimensional sexuality is affirming of the multiplicity and complexity of desire and how people actually live their lives. The triangulation of desires in a dimensional framework more closely resembles how participants in this project described themselves by showing what still remains invisible in dualistic and queer frameworks—e.g. bisexual, monophilic bisexual, and polyphilic desires, among other possibilities. A dimensional frame affirms the variables of human desire and may offer a means of stepping into "what if" in the here-and-now.

CHAPTER VIII

AFTERTHOUGHTS

When I began the final chapter of this project, I had no plan but to let a dimensional perspective guide my readings of Samuel R. Delany and Ursula K. Le Guin. As an experiment, I kept my analyses of passages deliberately "pure" of other interpretive methods and literary theory in order to see what possibilities might be offered by a dimensional framework and a "both-and" way of knowing. In short, I wanted to find out if the model was as useful for interpreting literature as it was for analyzing visual media in Chapter VI. Reading speculative narratives in this manner—without recourse to queer reading practices or the critical perspectives of queer and feminist theory—often felt like swinging from one slippery trapeze bar to the next without a net.

While at times frightening and lacking in grace, I feel that the conceptual risks I have taken throughout the project have been worthwhile. In these chapters, I have begun to articulate a dimensional perspective that, once grasped, seems almost obvious and only needed to be recognized and named. Or perhaps it felt this way because, as a bisexual woman whose social positioning fluctuates constantly, I find relief from multiple cultural and academic tensions within the standpoint of "both-and." Or perhaps it is because, as a science fiction fan, my reading competencies include—to borrow Delany's terms—a "mega-text" of ideas and concepts that encourage "multiplex" thinking.

Dimensional sexuality emerged from my recognition that substantive contributions to the study of bisexuality were long overdue in humanities research. Taking a critical position in relation to queer theory—one of the most influential

302

theoretical frameworks of the last twenty-five years—has been enormously challenging because I fully stand with queer's critical projects, numerous permutations, and interdisciplinary alliances. However, I have not always felt as though queer stands with me.

My study of speculative fiction and bisexual lives—The BiSciFi Project—crystalized when I realized that I am not alone in my perceptions. Like me, there are researchers who recognize that queer may not be the final solution to social identity and critique. Like me, there are people who view the world as "both-and" and who recognize speculative narratives as resources for imagination, validation, and community. This recognition of where I stand—not liminally as insider/outsider, but as a member of particular social and intellectual communities—inspired me to consider deeply the collective intelligence of bisexuals and science fiction fans.

I was once asked, in earnest goodwill, why bisexuality should matter to anyone outside of the specific identity category. What I understand now, to paraphrase Le Guin, is that it is not an answer I am after, but only how to ask the question. At the conclusion of this project, I recognize now that the question is not *why* bisexuality matters but rather *what bisexuality offers*.

And the possibilities are, indeed, dimensional.

APPENDIX A

POLITICALLY INCORRECT, ISSUE 0,

"SPECIAL MINICON XXI ISSUE," FRONT COVER AND PAGES 3-4

POLITICALLY INCORRECT

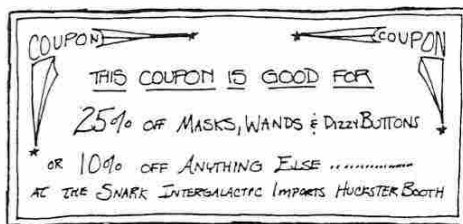## The Zine That Your Lover Warned You About!

Special Minicon XXI Issue
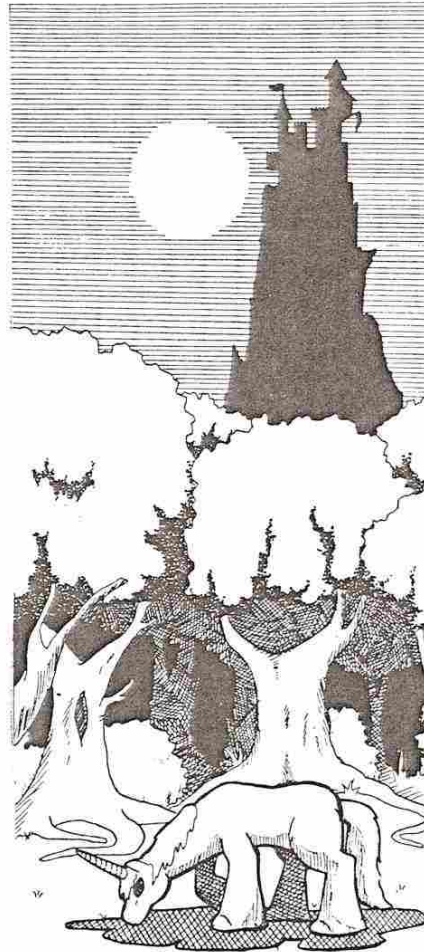
*** WHATEVER HAPPENED TO ***

*** CONSENTING ALIENS ?? ***

For those of you who attended Minicon in 1985, You may recall the discussion in Kruschenko's on lesbian and gay characters in SF, known as the "Consenting Aliens" panel.* In years past several people have organized discussions of this type: last year's effort was moderated by David Cummer and Elise Krueger. As they were both (as usual!) over-committed (or is that over-committeed??) for Minicon XXI, they deemed it best to step to one side and let someone else have a go at it. Unfortunately, "someone else" with the time and inclination has not come out of the... woodwork (or anywhere else), yet, ergo, no discussion. But lest you think that this con will escape totally unscathed, be aware that the editors of PI (dat's dis rag what you've got in yer mitts right now) and some of their friends are threatening to throw a Coming-Out Party for the 'zine. Check the posters and stop by to socialize, critique, or show us your favorite Johnny Weismuller impression. Hope to see you all there!

* didn't sound all that alien to me...Ed.

COUPON   COUPON

THIS COUPON IS GOOD FOR

25% OFF MASKS, WANDS & Dizzy BUTTONS

* OR 10% OFF ANYTHING ELSE ....
AT THE SNARK INTERGALACTIC IMPORTS HUCKSTER BOOTH

Come see our fine selection of feathered masks and unusual jewelry ...ask for Elise.

305

Why Door Into Fire and Door Into Shadow Aren't Gay Fantasy--And Shouldn't Be.

I think it all started at a Minicon a couple of years ago, when David Cummer and I had gotten into a heated discussion of the relative merits of Door Into Fire by Diane Duane. As I recall, David was vehement that it was NOT "gay" fantasy literature, as we understood it, because the main characters had to have children. To explain, the two protagonists, Herewiss and Freelorn, one a Prince of the Brightwood and the other the Crown Prince of Arlen, happened to be in love. This didn't shock anyone in their society, because in that world, you had to have children before you were considered a completely mature adult -- and after that, it didn't matter with whom you fell in love.

Back to my story. I had felt for some time that Herewiss and Freelorn offered some very positive role models for gays, and I just couldn't understand why David felt otherwise (or so it seemed). When we got down to brass tacks, it seemed to hinge on the business of having to have children. David felt that this custom clearly made it impossible for the characters to be really "gay." I felt that it was a different approach to a common social situation, and did not invalidate their "gayness." I must admit, neither David nor myself were expressing ourselves very clearly at the time (it being late at night or early in the morning, depending on how you viewed this sort of thing). Afterwards, however, I gave the whole business a great deal of thought.

Upon reflection, I soon realised that his entire objection was based on what seemed to be a very "politically correct" interpretation of what gayness is all about. Simply put, a "real" gay role model was not to be shackled by the customs of a straight society, such as necessary procreation, and to give in was to deny one's inner gay personality. In this world, though, gays and lesbians do have children, and many possess a fierce desire to raise children. I think what David was objecting to was the seeming necessity of having the little brats (I like children, really...).

Now, mind you, I haven't changed my mind; I still feel that Door Into Fire provides some excellent role models for gays. But I do agree that it is not, strictly speaking, gay fantasy literature. Let me explain: the entire business of what gayness is all about is a direct result of the Stonewall riots of 1969--the liberation of gays, and the breaking of old stereotypes and myths about gays and lesbians. It was a direct consequence of a specific set of social conditions, and was a catalyst for change. The society that we live in (even today) has a predominent cultural and religious bias against gays and what they stand for.

What if those cultural and religious conditions did not exist? Had never existed?

That is just the case in the world of Door Into Fire: the Judeo-Christian objections to homosexuality never existed, and the entire society developed along very different lines than the one we've had the "privilege" of growing up within. The characters of the story shouldn't be expected to fit into what we think of as being "gay", simply because they have never lived in this world. One might charge that the author has lived in this world, and therefore has a responsibility to break with traditional role patterns. Yet, this is tantamount to telling the author how to write, which is not in the tradition of science fiction and fantasy--the literature of the

3

possible, right? Further, anyone who has read either <u>Door Into Fire</u> or <u>Door Into Shadow</u> will realize just how different the customs in that society are from what we might consider traditional role patterns.

The point I am trying to make is that gayness is one pattern of homosexual interaction, one that has been made necessary by the society in which we all live, yet it is not the <u>only</u> pattern. A vital part of science fiction and fantasy is the construction of a believable, internally consistant secondary world; a world-setting different from the one we live in.

These secondary worlds may be very close to ours, or they may have no relationship whatsoever. In any case, using gayness as a standard to judge depictions of alternate affectional preferences in science fiction and fantasy may be inappropriate. I would go so far as to say that it would be presumptuous to do so, especially in the case of such books as <u>Door Into Fire</u> and <u>Door Into Shadow</u>.

So make up your own mind; if you feel it necessary to read political correctness into your SF, that's fine. As for myself, though, I'll just continue to worry about when G.R.I.M. (<u>G</u>ays for <u>R</u>ighteous <u>I</u>mage <u>M</u>anagement) will come knocking on my door....

An Editorial~

In the beginning...

There was a clear and distinct reason that this 'zine was necessary...the only problem was that I couldn't seem to articulate it. However, I can <u>demonstrate</u> it in an anecdote:

The other day, I told a gay male friend of mine that I was helping with a 'zine called Politically Incorrect. He blinked and said, "I thought we were Politically Correct." As a joke, I replied, "You forget -- I'm a militant bisexual"* He looked at me quite seriously and said, "Maybe you'll grow out of it."

Hmm....My being what I am struck him as unacceptable and limited our interaction: something about this Politically Correct stuff reminds me of the virulent brand of Christian fundamentalism I fled as an adolescent. In-Groups and Out-Groups are dangerous things. To my mind, the cirtue inherent in being Politically Incorrect lies in the fact that P.I. people dislike dogma. Dogma is rigid. Life is flexible -- people change and shift (in multiple dimensions, I might add -- remember that no personal choices are two-option only, "either you're for us or against us" choices) and the wheel turns. SF people (most of 'em) value the ability to put on and appreciate other world-views and other realities. That's vhy there aren't too many "control junkies" among them -- we tend to be a pretty flexible bunch. There's nothing a control freak fears more than people who can appreciate alternate viewpoints -- in short, people who don't make a fetish of being Politically Correct. That's why I'm P.I....it seems the only gentle, strong and whole way for me to approach the multiplicity of people I meet and love. And at the risk of sounding maudlin, if you are reading and enjoying this, you're likely to be or soon become one of those people. So...let me know what you think of the 'zine and what you'd like. And remember -- this is truly 'a zine for people like us.' - Elise

(I can only agree with my whole heart - Victor)

---

* or a lesbian who makes exceptions -- the definitions changes week to week.

4

APPENDIX B

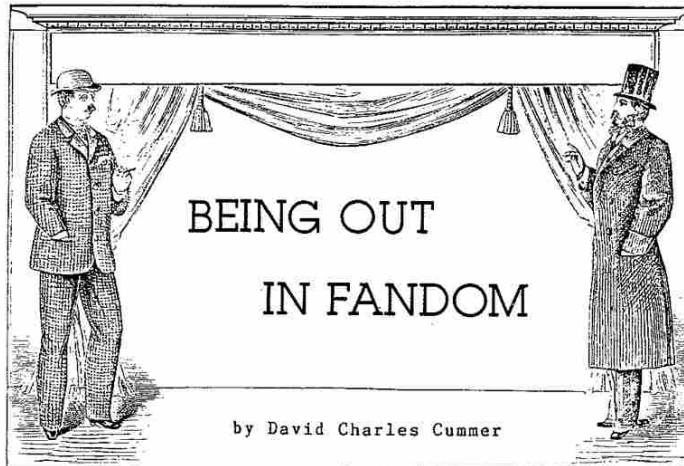## *POLITICALLY INCORRECT*, ISSUE 1, "THE COMING OUT ISSUE,"

FRONT AND BACK COVERS AND PAGES 5-8, 11-17

POLITICALLY INCORRECT

The Zine That Your Lover Warned You About!

THE COMING OUT ISSUE

BEING OUT

IN FANDOM

by David Charles Cummer

Johnny Thranxbottom stood nervously in the well-appointed living room of his parent's home. His mother, clearing her throat, settled into a favorite well worn leather chair. Johnny's father soon tottered in from the kitchen, wiping his hands dry, having finished the supper dishes.

"Well, son, you said you wanted to talk to us." Pipe smoke wreathed his Mother's face.

Johnny coughed, "Mon, Dad, I just wanted you to know that I'm a...a fan."

"Oh NO! I **knew** we never should have gotten you that subscription to OMNI!" His father cried, "I thouht you were just technical!!"

"GET OUT OF THIS HOUSE!" His mother roared, "No son of mine's gonna be a **Trekkie!**"

*   *   *

I have, as Paul my lover put it, let getting this article written "go to the wire". I guess writing about my experiences as a gay fan is frightening; one reason being that I have to confront my own homophobia to do so. there are times when I 'conveniently' forget that I'm gay and looking at my homosexuality can feel like a punch to the stomach. But anyway....

I have found acceptance in Fandom, but also ignorance and narrow thinking. The reason being is that fandom is not just one person with one way of thinking, but countless people with entire universes of opinions and beliefs. None of those people are all-accepting, th universal fan that warmly greets everyone they meet. Fans are human beings with complete sets of biases and intolerences. Let me show you what I mean.

Example # 1: Paul, my lover, and I are at a New Year's Eve party at the French House, a huge three story house owned by several Minneapolis fans. The clock has just struck midnight and the entire first floor is a churning mass of people passing hugs and kisses arouhd like bottles of champagne. After kissing, Paul and I separate and make our ways through the room to greet people. After a while I see a friend of mine, an out-of-towner, and start over toward him. As I am about to give him a hug a woman standing nearby turns toward us and shrieks, "Oh God! Don't **kiss** him!"

Example # 2: In 1981, the Minneapolis Gay PRide Committee applies for a permit to hold a block party on Hennepin Avenue. The local city council votes against this, and legal action is taken against them by the Minnesota Civil Liberties Union. Jonathan Adams, a local fan and lawyer works with the MCLU and they are successful in getting the city council to change their decision and the block party goes on. Carol Kennedy, Jonathan's wife later writes in Minneapa about attending a rally in Loring Park (in which she notices how similar it feels to a science fiction convention) where Jonathan makes a speech about the importance of defending gay rights. While wrestling with this article I've spent much of my time thinking about what I can do to make local fandom more accepting of gay issues.

First, I think I must start to confront other people's fears and misunderstandings about gay people. The only way to do this honestly is to confront my own homophobia. All too many

times I have taken public stands on gay issues with my motivation being an attempt to get others to accept homosexuality for me, to make it "okay" for me to be gay. I Have learned something about this technique that I'd like to share with you.

IT DOESN'T WORK.

Secondly I have acknowledge the support I've gotten from my friends for being gay and for working to accept and love myself for being gay. Doing this makes phrases like, "gay is good" live, and gives them a flesh and blood reality that I need.

Thirdly, I can use my experiences being gay to bridge over differences and bring about an understanding between myself and someone else. Something like this happened in Minneapa a few years ago. I got pissed off and defensive and wrote something to the effect that it was completely impossible for straight people to understand what gay people went through (I do things like that whenever I get jealous of heterosexuals...). I fought with the other members of the apa for the next couple of issues and in fighting we began to see similarities in some of our experiences. We then used the things we had in common as keys to understanding our differences.

I once met a man that talked about the "brotherhood of fankind," like a fabled time of old. That time never existed, but I do know that there are some people within Fandom that I can lean on for support. Maybe together we can make fandom a little more open....
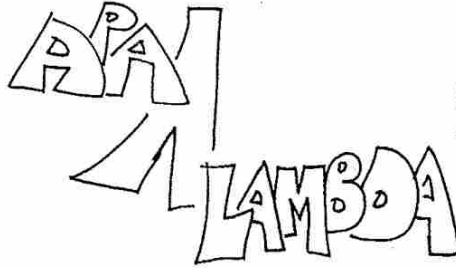
(reprint)

APA LAMBDA

What is an "APA"?

Amateur Press Association: Where individuals send copies of their writing to an "Organizing Editor" who collates all 'zines and sends a copy to each member.

What is a "Lambda"?

The eleventh letter of the Greek alphabet.

This APA's discussion "restrictions" are as follows:
a) Gay Themes & Ideas in Fantasy, SF, & associated literatures
b) Gay Fandom: Issues, problems, concerns
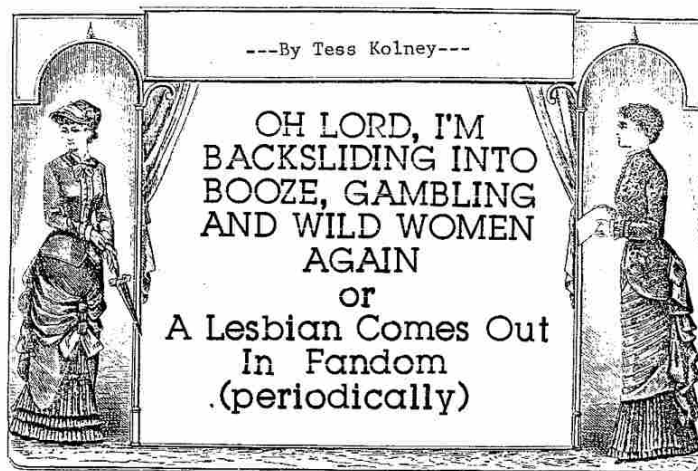c) Gay Issues In General -- which covers almost everything, of course.

Topics of arguments have ranged from whether or not Kirk/Spock stories are gay related fiction to whether the mating habits of swine are kosher, from S&M/B&D as political statement to good fun, from gun control to censorship.
Everything is an acceptable topic; and you don't have to use your real name when you publish if you would feel more secure that way.

Founded in 1981 as a special interest SF APA for both male & female fen, we are still going strong.

Sample copies of back issues are available for $2; a copy of just the Rules & Regulations is $0.30 (postage & handling).

Lambda Amateur Press Association
1847 North Second Street
Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53212-3706

311

---By Tess Kolney---

OH LORD, I'M BACKSLIDING INTO BOOZE, GAMBLING AND WILD WOMEN AGAIN

or

A Lesbian Comes Out In Fandom (periodically)

I often wish I'd had the presence of mind to do what David Cummer of Minneapolis did when he decided to come out in fandom: He wrote an article on it. He printed the article. He reprinted the article. He handed it out on street corners. (Well, okay, maybe he didn't go quite that far but...)

It made quite an impact on people. There it was in print, something solid, something they could hold in their hand and re-read and discuss and remember. Aside from a lover attached at the waist, it seemed like the most secure way to establish one's identity in fandom. Only wish I'd thought of it.

I never made the grand gesture of "coming out" to fandom that David did, and I've often wondered if I should have. When I became active in Minneapolis SF fandom, I had my friend and co-editor Charles as-good-as-attached-at-the-hip. After all, we edited a zine together, ran The Council of St. Valentine-of-the-Snows together, threw parties and appeared at events together, and -- most damningly of all -- both came here from Johns Hopkins University in the alien world of Baltimore. Clearly we had a match made in the stars, right? Wrong. Chas and I were good friends, were people who sparked the creative energies in each other. We still are, and still do (at least when we get the chance -- since he now lives in DC). Despite the fact that we said this repeatedly, fandom persisted in assigning us heterosexual-couple status.

Even when Chas left Minneapolis, the image plagued me. It was further complicated by a peculiar dichotomy: lesbians who were willing to be out as lesbians were rarely active as fans, and lesbians who were active as fans were rarely out to fandom as lesbians. I tended to find myself in bizarre situations like being involved for years with one fan who wanted me to know how I could "ruin her reputation in the community" by identifying her as a lesbian, or being involved with active lesbians who were also avid science fiction readers who wanted to know how I could spend so much time with "those people" (the mostly male SF community). As a result, I have for years drawn strange looks from the lesbian community for my fannish communities, and in fandom I have achieved a status bordering on invisibility.

When I first came into fandom, I had a perception of fandom as a body of people with "their heads in the future," a group of people interested in all of the possibilities of the human race. I still have that perception, though I have accepted the fact that certain individuals and even certain groups in fandom seem to be an exception to that definition. Nevertheless, I am often startled by the reaction of fandom to my lesbianism and/or my lovers. While no one has taken to burning condoms (or whatever the heterosexual equivalent of crosses might be) on my lawn, my presence has stopped no one from telling homophobic jokes or making misogynistic remarks. Nor has it encouraged or even enabled others to recognize the existance of gay or lesbian fans.

On a regular basis, I get hit on by male fans who are sure they "have the answer" to my "problem." Sometimes I dismiss this as ignorance or drunkenness, sometimes I repress a desire to knee them in the balls and invite them to "relate intimately." Very occasionally, I realize they are sincere in their

interest in me and we have a (basso profundo) **serious conversation**.

More often I find the responses from both men and women are more subtle. Sometimes they change the subject when I bring up my lover or my lifestyle. Sometimes they go on making vaguely homophobic or misogynistic remarks within my hearing. More often, it hits home more directly. I am often invited to gatherings to which I am specifically not invited to bring a companion, or one at which I draw disapproving looks when I do so without asking. Or I stop receiving invitations to certain places when people realize I am "serious about this nonsense." Perhaps worst of all are the friends I've known who, when they can no longer avoid putting two and two together, politely avoid the subject and the sight and the reality of me with another woman. Very rarely are most fans openly confrontational on the subject, but the degree to which they are evasive or ignorant is truly mind-boggling.

I had a talk with a friend recently which cast an interesting light on this subject: she is an actress from a working class background who "married into money" (at least, as she and I think of money). She relayed a tale of being at a party where the friends and business acquaintances of her husband were making disparaging remarks about their domestic help and "the Mexicans" taking over all the jobs and ruining their work environments and so. She said she suddenly felt as if she were hearing these people for the first time. She asked them to stop making these remarks. They ignored her and went on with it. She persisted, trying to explain how lacking in reason their arguments were and how much their time they seemed to devote toward creating a negative image of the rest of the human race. They continued their conversation, careful to exclude or laugh at her. She located her husband and enlisted his support in putting her point of view across. Still, no one listened to it. So she decided that they would leave the party – but she stopped to explain to the people **why** she was leaving. She told me she didn't receive nearly as many party invitations these days, but then she had begun to wonder if perhaps she didn't already have too many "friends.".

I have often had that reaction to fandom. Unfortunately, I am either more tolerant or more sentimental or less a woman of principle than she is, and I find myself struggling along with same friends who have betrayed or ignored or only half-acknowledged my values for years. I have constantly wondered: isn't that marvelous spark I first saw in them worth the drawbacks? As the years go by,

I am less certain of the answers. And sometimes I am less sure that the answer is yes.

I envy her her ability to say "Perhaps I have too many friends in life." When I think of giving up SF fandom, I face the idea of giving up what has been a central part of my social life since I was 12. And when I think of giving up specific friends here in Minneapolis, I admit the possibility of giving up my first social circle in the Twin Cities and a hell of a fine bunch of people, at least in other ways. The person who make unconscionable remarks toward me can also be some of the most intellectually stimulating and otherwise moral people I have encountered in this area of the country. Which view will win out?

I think ultimately a variety of things will happen. Some gay people, feeling ignored or "made invisible" by the community, will drop out of or avoid the science fiction community altogether. Some gays will become our "civil rights negroes," settling into monogamous couples and in every other way avoiding being "too gay" and probably gaining acceptance to some degree in the community (no, this is not meant to be a slam against monogamy). Others will probably go the way of the Jewish comics of the Berkshires circuit: these men were poor Jews who made their way into wealthier WASP circles by exaggerating their own Jewishness and inviting the goyim to laugh. It was okay to laugh at the jokes this time because, after all, wasn't it a Jew telling the jokes? There are also some gays who will probably just tolerate the situation, trying to reason or persuade the community into civil behavior.

Yet there exists another possibility, one for which the SF fan community doesn't seem too well prepared. It could happen the next time we introduce our lover to the hostess and she introduces us to the rest of the party as roommates (whether or not we live together). It could happen the next time we correct someone's assumption that we are straight and they say something along the lines of "That's nice, dear. Pass the potato chips." It could happen the next time we volunteer in childcare at a convention, and the coordinator makes sure there is another adult on the shift with us. It could happen any time over any little thing: you never know. Some of us might just come right out and get blatant.

When Victor and I decided to devote issue #1 to "Coming Out in Fandom", I thought, "Lovely! I can write some wry stories about well-meaning straight people ("That's all right...it's nobody's business but your own...") and make a few pointed asides on homophobia and basic human rights." Then I sat down and tried to write the darn article. Tried to list more than three bad experiences I had had in coming out to fenfolk.

Couldn't... find... 'em. The worst I usually have to deal with is a small flock of nebbishy straight men following me around with hungry expressions on their faces. This usually occurs when I am wearing my snake-print leotard, chainmail, and leather. They also will invariably show up just as I am about to get into an interesting conversation. ("Will you please buzz off? I'm trying to talk to this woman...") I've found that swatting them away with a rolled up 'zine usually works.

Anyhow, I was worried. Surely I must have something to say about coming out...after all, I've done it at least five times now.

Then I read David Cummer's article in this ish. Suddenly I realized where I had trouble coming out. Not with fandom---perhaps my experience has been more pleasant than most, but you folks have usually been supportive and all that---but with the women's (read "lesbian") community. Let me elaborate.

The real reason that the growing interest in SF among the women's community encourages me is that I'm hoping for a trend. It has long been a wry joke for me that it is easier to come out as a lesbian in fandom than to come out as a fan in the lesbian community. (Admittedly my perceptions are a bit tinted by the additional problems of coming out as a bisexual in the lesbian community, but I think there is a valid point in all this kvetching of mine. Please read on.)

I have a few theories on the anti-SF feeling that surfaces occasionally in the lesbian community. First, let me differentiate between a lack of interest in SF (which affects a lot of the populace beyond the lesbian community) and an outright dislike of SF.

The folks in the first group just give us fans a blank stare.

The folks in the second group have responded to my fannish coming out with reactions ranging from a sneered "You mean that ray-gun stuff?" to dead silence followed by a change of subject, as if the topic is only slightly more socially acceptable than, say, bisexuality, or cannibalism....

The lack of interest doesn't disturb me beyond the feeling that those

COMING OUT, BUT WHERE?

---By Elise Krueger---

314

disinterested probably don't know what they're missing. It's the active dislike that bothers me. An active dislike indicates that tha person has been exposed to at least one sample of bad SF.

Unfortunately for all of us, there are lots of such example of truly atrocious writing around, examples which would turn anyone off. The lesbian community, moreover, has on the average less patience with sexism, heterosexism, and just plain insensitivity than many straight readers. (If you deal with something every day you tend to recognize it easily.)

Isis knows, there are enough examples of culture-bound SF around to gag a maggot, as my old friend Beek used to say. My least favorites are the ones that present strange new worlds full of amazing alien life forms---who all pair off boy/girl, boy/girl just like those dance classes in junior high...

Obviously, being disgusted by this type of nonsense is reasonable.One would hope that SF, as a genre, could refrain from grafting on unwieldy (and inaccurate!) 20th century social myths onto the explorations of the future. I find this criticism valid. It is another viewpiont with which I wish to disagree.

There is a reason for dismissing SF which seems to flourish in the lesbian, ecology, and disarmament milieus. (Before you fire off a nasty letter accusing me of being a conservative, let me present the obligatory credentials: MPIRG employee in the good old days, Fellowship of Reconciliation member back in the round of anti-draft anti-registration action before the current one, and employment on the original community education and canvassing team for the Nuclear Freeze in Minnesota. I believe that I am somewhat familiar with the issues. More important, I'm familiar with the MYTHS.)

The particular myth I'm referring to is a sort of Neo-Luddite reaction. Stated in its most simple form, this premise is **Technology is Evil**. The feminist version of this is Technology is evil, and **of course** it's **man's evil**. (Bear with me - I know it's not that simplistic, but I'm trying to make a point. Reductio ad absurdum.)

The idea is that technology **In And Of Itself** is somehow dehumanizing and against **The Natural Order of Things**. (Hmm...why do those last words sound so familiar?) Technology is also somehow addicting: there's a slippery slope leading to perdition (shades of Reefer Madness!) and, of course, **Absolute Technology Corrupts Absolutely**. One wonders if we should check our female engineers, physicists and mathematicians to make sure they aren't sprouting horns and/or penises. (penii?) [and just what

should we check for on their male counterparts?!? - VR]

All right, all right, I'm being bitchy. But I have heard one too many "evils of technology" lectures over the strains of the latest politically correct women's folk music--played on a piece of state-of-the-art electronic equipment. (Lately I've been hearing these lectures with the aid of two nifty in-the-ears devices manufactured by Telex. Along with the above mentioned words, these pieces of technology are allowing me to hearing free of previous distortion--birdsongs, the dialogue of movies, the recordings of Stan Rogers, and, for the first time in our relationship, my lover's voice, thank you very much.) If you are tempted to dismiss technology out of hand, I urge you to go check your closets. I'll bet almost all of your favorite lavender teeshirts were dyed with synthetic dyes...And Cold Spring isn't bottled by fairies, you know. (Well, I'm not entirely sure of that, as I haven't met all of the employees, but whatever their affectional preference, they use electricity, not magic.) It's like the bumper sticker says: if you complain about farmers, don't talk with your mouth full. If you need any further perspective, go ask an insulin-dependant diabetic friend for their opinion.

All right, it's obvious (to me, at least) that all technology ain't evil. But I'm prepared to make a radical statement: Technology ain't **at all** evil.

Let me explain before you fling those big, heavy (but oh so natural!) rocks.

In the interest of brevity, I will only say this once.

Gently.

Technology is amoral.

It is classless, nationless, genderless and utterly innocent of volition, let alone malicious intent.

Humans are not.

Science and technology are tools, and abuses of tools are the responsibility of the particular primate wielding the tool. In other words, technology isn't ugly and mean---people are ugly and mean.

They are also noble, truthful and kind.

The trick is to encourage the latter type of behavior. As SF is supposed to be the literature of the possible, let's dream some possible futures where this is so. (BY the way, I am convinced that a future world a la Tiptree or Brunner is much more likely, not to mention more interesting, than the marshmallow "wimmun's utopias" I have read all too much of lately.)

Well, after reading this over, two things are obvious. First is that I guess I have a little anger about a few things. Weeelllllllll.... I do realize this.

I also think there is a nubbin of truth in here somewhere.

The second obvious thing is that it's time to wrap this and go do something constructive. There's no neat solution to this bundle of hope and misgivings. I suppose that I'll just keep wearing the appropriate teeshirts to the appropriate functions: you know, the "Come out, come out, wherever you are" to MNstf meetings and the Minicon teeshirt to Sappho's Lounge...

With luck, the growing interest in SXf within the women's community will bring out a few new fen* for me to talk with.

(Oh yes, I do have personal motives in all of this!) Besides, I'm afraid I've reached saturation point as far as talking about cats, co-dependancy, and the Michigan Music Festival whenever I go to the coffeehouse. It's time for some new areas of conversation. To seek out brave new writers... To boldly go where no dyke has gone before...

And another thing. I plan to wear my Spandex-and-chainmail Space Barbarian costume to next year's Women's Hallowe'en Dance. Anyone else feeling brave? Maybe we can all come out together.

----

*plural of fan

316

A Bittersweet Reflection on Joanna Russ, SF Conventions, and a "Peculiar Dichotomy"

By Victor Raymond

It is often assumed among SF fans that the fannish community is the most open-minded group that they will ever belong to. In some cases, that is probably true, but as far as alternative sexual preferences are concerned, fans seem a little closed minded. When editing Tess Kolney's and David Cummer's articles elsewhere in this issue, I noticed a common thread of "assumed to be heterosexual until proven otherwise." I mean, it seems to be difficult for somebody who is homosexual or bisexual to get that firmly established in fannish minds, much less accepted. It bothered me a great deal - why do fans behave this way?

Probably, it isn't just fans. The mainstream American society would rather not know that there are **avowed** homosexuals in its midst, and this attitude carries over into fandom. Further, fans already have a negative reputation (at least fans think so), of reading "that sci-fi stuff". Who knows what it might lead to? Maybe (gasp!), **dancing**.

Well, this led onward to other conclusions: coming out as a <u>fan</u> is in some ways rather similar to coming out as somebody <u>gay</u>. David Cummer and I playfully discussed this idea when he was writing his article. It seemed to my sociological mind that fans seem to go through all of the same stages as gays do when coming out: they realize that they are different from a (perceived) majority of the population; they might very well

go through a stage of self-condemnation or at least low self-image (internalizing what they assume other people think fans are); then, discovery of others "just like them"; and then immersion in the sub-culture as a means of bolstering self-image.

Now, it might be concluded therefore that fans are yet to have their Stonewall, but this conclusion doesn't necessarily follow. Fans, for example, are not as polarized in their relationship to mainstream society as gays are. Further, fans have been going through a period of assimilation into mainstream society for a long period of time. Finally, there are other sub-cultures that are more easily identified as being deviant than fandom. All of this indicates that fans in general are probably quite happy with whatever acceptance from the rest of society that they seem to receive. Thus, any sub-grouping within fandom that is less socially acceptable is probably going to be considered damaging, especially to whatever group reputation fandom has achieved in the mainstream society. It's **bad**, it's **unnecessary**, and further, it probably leads to **dancing**.

So where does this lead as far as gays, lesbians, and bisexuals are concerned? Well, fandom seems to accord them the status of being invisible, and probably that status is considered quite generous, given all the bad press gays, et. al., have received. Yet, such a status is effectively that of

317

second-class citizen of the galaxy: fans <u>tolerate</u> gays, lesbians, and bisexuals, but they'd better not get uppity. That would be entirely unacceptable. Insofar as Twin Cities fandom is concerned, this seems to be true, based on the impressions of two **known** homosexuals. It should also be remembered that I am not speaking of individuals, but of group behavior; I am quite aware that there are some fine, caring, and accepting people within this microcosm of fandom. But, it is unfortunately true that the fannish tradition of being accepting of a person's idiosyncracies is observed more in the breach as far as gays and lesbians are concerned. "That's okay, it's nobody's business but your own..."

Now, it might be contended that it is only the subjective perception of gays and lesbians that fandom is rife with homophobia, but that misses the point. Fans may have the best of intentions, and may think they are not being homophobic, but that, too, is just a subjective perception. Part of "coming out" is realizing that discrimination against anyone who isn't straight is drilled into everyone from childhood - and rejecting it.

To bring this back to a more personal level, I really enjoy fandom - my significant other and I thought about all the social circles we could be involved in, and we decided that fandom offered the highest probability of intelligent conversation and cameraderie that we could reasonably expect. This isn't to say I think the bar scene is dull, but it does get repetitive. I tend personally to move in a lot of social circles, many of them wildly different from all the rest, but fandom is an important part of most of them. But there are times when I feel out of place as someone who isn't straight within the fannish community. So it was at a convention recently, when I overheard a conversation between a pro and a fan, both of my acquaintance. The fan was commenting irritably that he could not understand why homosexuals had to use the word "gay" to describe themselves - "why couldn't they have chosen a **different** word?" Oh, Gods...

Such an attitude is often not representative in its insensitivity, but if you really begin to notice all of the little slights, they add up quite quickly. Probably, if you are straight and reading this, you are thinking that it couldn't be you that I am referring to. Maybe, maybe not. I **certainly** can't tell until I've met you - and judging the worth of a person solely on this basis is impolite, and unworthy of me. But I'm not about to let such "little slights" go past unnoticed. If you think such vigilance is unjustified, don't think it only happens with fans. I go to the same lengths to defend science fiction amongst all of my gay friends, who think that "sci-fi" is for the birds (or at least straights). It's a "peculiar dichotomy" that gays and fans often think little of each other's interests, primarily because of a lack of real knowledge of each other. You wouldn't **believe** it, Mary, if I told you the amount of just plain **trouble** it has caused me, trying to be a part of both groups.

So I suppose the real reason for writing this somewhat bitchy editorial is that maybe I can say something to both gays and fans: you'd be surprised at how much alike fans and gays really are, and perhaps more so at how many people are a part of both. It is a tribute to fandom that there exists a means to talk about all of this, but is also clear that fans have a long way to go. I've often felt that Joanna Russ has a sensible attitude in that she makes no bones about being a lesbian and a science fiction writer. If you think that such "blatant" statements are unnecessary, remember that you almost certainly know someone who is gay or a fan, **or both**, and don't know it yet. **We** are everywhere.

EDITORIAL COMMENTS
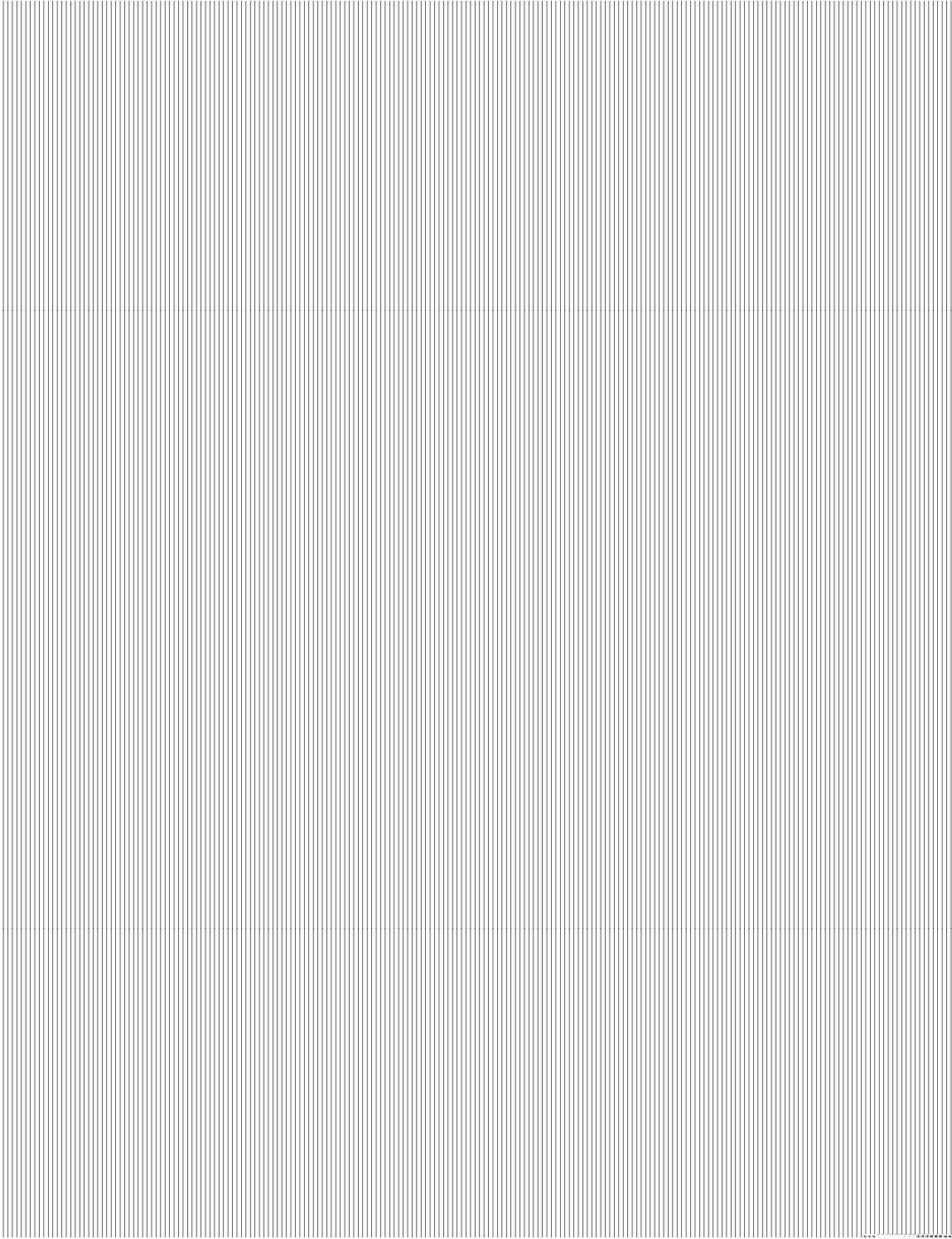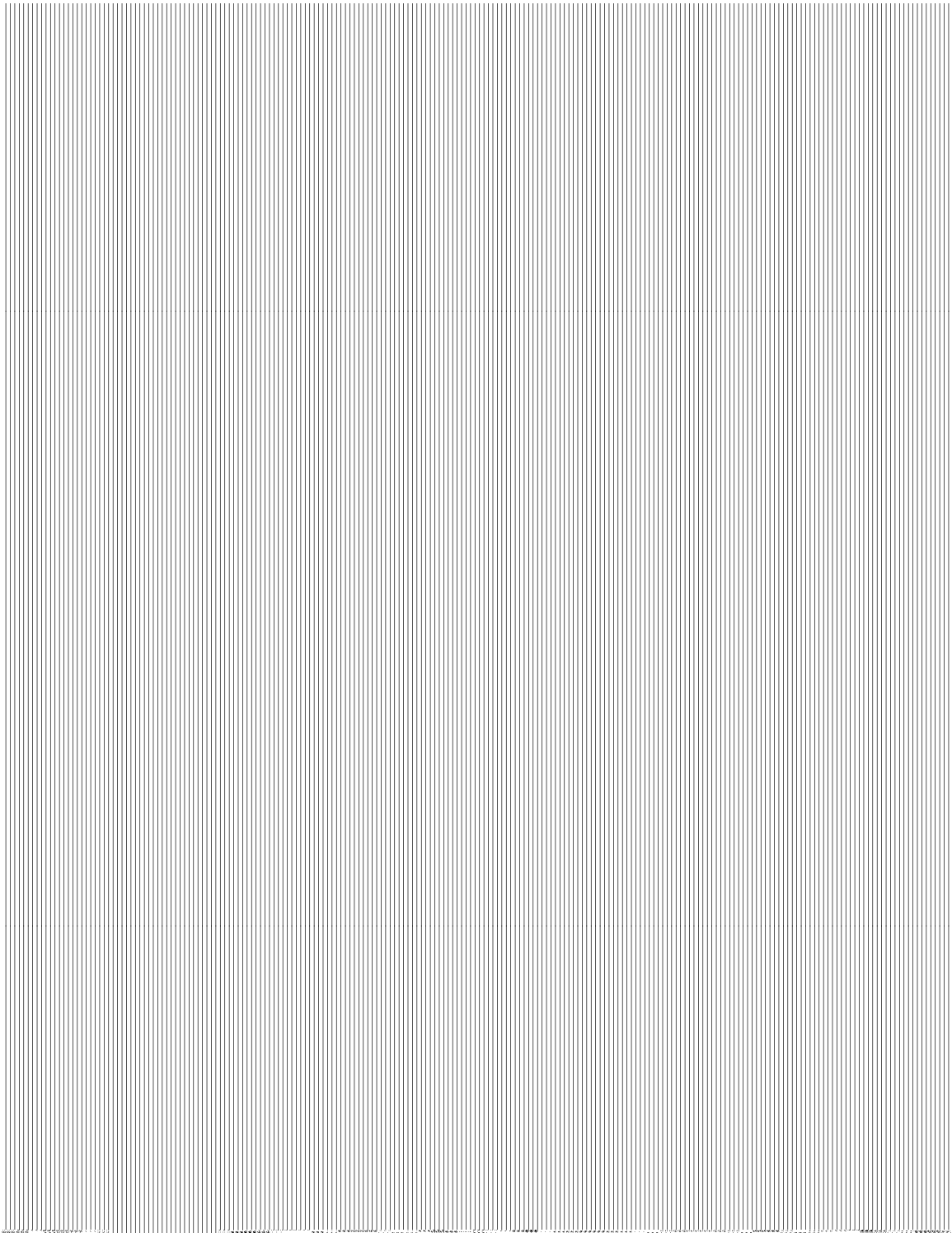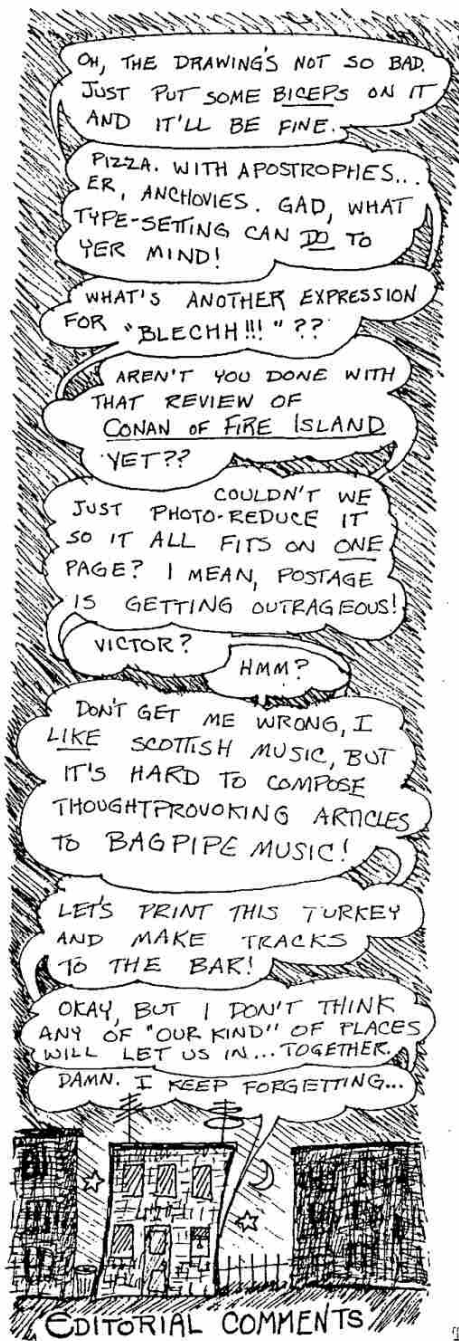
APPENDIX C

POLITICALLY INCORRECT, ISSUE 3, "RELIGIONS, SPIRITUALITY AND OTHER UNNATURAL VICES," FRONT COVER AND PAGES 22-28

POLITICALLY INCORRECT

The Zine That Your Lover Warned You About!

Religions, Spirituality and Other Unnatural Vices

Midwest Lesbian Gay Student Conference
October 23-25, 1987

NOT YOUR ORDINARY HOMECOMING

Homecoming, with all its festivi...
queens, and the b...
greatest...

Alison's cartoons are soooo cool! —E

T-shirts are still available - write us if you want one - we'll see what we can do. VICTOR

opp
stud
in so
stud
Cities
range
option

M

Politically Incorrect — P.O. Box 25026, Minneapolis, Mn. 55440

—So Carol (my fellow grad student) said, "Huh - you've wanted to help with this conference? Meetings are in the Fireplace Room."
And off I went.
It was fun - but just a little weird - competant dykes and reserved queens, a little unsure of how to work together. On top of it all, cheerily announcing "I'm bisexual!" did not have a completely, umm, POSITIVE effect. (Suspicious, they wuz...) —VICTOR.

YEAH, they wuz... told us after the conference. as a matter of fact, one g'em "I never knew there were bisexuals until I met you people." REAL adult But we all were patient with one another and reminded each other that we were not "the Enemy", so it all went OK.... —Elise

YUP! all of dat is true!

Color me PINK...

(22)

TIMELINE

Spring -
GET ORGANIZED
ARGUE
GO HOME FOR
SPRING BREAK

Summer -
REALLY GO HOME
LOSE ORGANIZATION

August -
PANIC.

September -
MORE PANIC.
CALL IN FEARLESS
SF CONVENTION
TROUBLESHOOTERS
(yours truly)

October -
REALLY PANIC
FRANTICALLY
DASH AROUND
(us included)
DO CONFERENCE

November -
SIGH W/RELIEF

Working on the conference was a GOOD THING — I had a chance to meet neat people, particularly Dave Maytum and Alan Warrior, who later composed the "Clean-cut" Brigade at L'INTRACTION some two weeks later. We help with their con, they help with ours!

Victor Raymond-- is a co-publisher of *Politically Incorrect: A Zine for People Like Us* and a committee head for Minicon, a large regional S/F convention.

did I remember to write a bio? Heck, no! Getting drafted to "do lunch" and provide munchies made the whole conference an "ORAL" — VICTOR experience for me....

VIGOR, I TOLD you not to admit it! you had prior con experience!! 3yer own dang fault! — Elise

← you know how they felt about eight experienced men....

P.S. The food was great. I think it was the first time some of the freshmyn had seen veggie lunches, though... —E

Elise Krueger-- is an actor-musician-artist who moved to the Twin Cities about ten years ago. She works full-time in the local feminist and lesbian community bookstore because it's full of interesting people and it's an enjoyable way to pay the rent. She's a co-founder of a Bisexual Women's support and discussion group, and co-publishes a fanzine called *Politically Incorrect: A Zine for People Like Us* (*The Zine Your Lover Warned You About*). Elise is also a committee head for Minicon, a large regional S/F convention.

—Yeah, lotsa crossover with fandom/gaydom these days, eh? —E

1. Call Diane re: catering

MLGSC C/O UNIVERSITY GAY COMMUNITY, 235 COFFMAN UNION, 300 UNIVERSITY AVE SE, MPLS, 55455

The Midwest Lesbian and Gay Student Conference will take place on Friday, Saturday and Sunday, October 23, 24, & 25 at Coffman Memorial Union at the University of M... Campus. We have no idea how many participants we will have, but hopefully...

A welcoming reception will take place on Friday from 5... fourth floor CMU. Representatives from as many Lesbian a... possible will be on hand to talk to participants an... Refreshments will be served and get acquaint... (downstairs) Program packets will... for the longest traveller, etc.. A movi...

Saturday will be... long. Lesbian an... served. The... 9:15-1...

23

ZOOM! ZOOM! WEEE!!!

The organizers didn't know when to stop organizing—so they kinda went overboard on planning. Turned out to be a good idea.

WHAT NEEDS TO BE preformed for the con should be completed by m...

TASK
***PRESS RELEASES
PROCESSING REGISTRATION
Map and directions
General info for registrants
Hotel info
Entering names & addresses
Picking up and sending confirmation
Depositing checks mail at CMU

REGISTRATION PACKET
Conference Program:
** Schedule of workshops,
Films, rap groups
Rates ???
Advertising for program
Map of twin cities adverti...
Printing of Program
** Address book--computer
Name tags--computer gen
** Questionaire--...
** HOUSI...

Gee, we look organized... (heh, heh...) —E

work, work, work — I had an opportunity to dash through the equivalent of the Huxters Room (the Organization Fair) and I grabbed lots o' stuff to read later, however, Grad school got in the way...
— VICTOR

It was nice to see all of us queers up and out in the hallowed halls of the Campus Club!
— E

FRIDAY NIGHT

5:00-9:00
Reception

7:30   Great Hall
Lecture: *Gay and Lesbian Liberation into the 90's* by Sue Hyde

9:00-10:30   Great Hall
Film: *Life and Times of Harvey Milk*

SATURDAY

9:15-10:15

Lesbians and Gays in Campaign '88
                        Ed Patuto   Room 3_
An Alternative View of the Scripture and Homosexuality
                        Mark Rohrbaugh   Room 307
Lesbian Literature: A Road to Power
                        Toni McNaron   Room 354
Lesbians and Gays in Science Fiction Literature
                        Tess Kolney, Elise Krueger,
                        Victor Raymond   Room 308
The Enemy Within: Internalized Homophobia
                        Craig L. Anderson   Room 353
Misogyny and Lesbian Sexuality
                        Nancy Barts   Room 3_

THIS WAS SORTOF YER GENERIC "Consenting Aliens" Panel, for those of you who have been to MINICON. (David Cummer thought up that one years ago — thanks, DAVID! ≥kiss, kiss≤)
— Elise

_G IN L COMM.
_G/L LEG.
STRATEGIES
4. ~~XXXX~~ ADOLESCENCE
5. ~~XXXX~~
6. TAROT
7. BIBLE & HOMOSEXUALITY

_:15-3:15
ORG. ON COLLEGE
SPIRITUALITY and L/G
BISEXUALITY
L HERSTORY
G HISTORY
~~XXXX~~
L HUMOR

The Quatrefoil Library

Midwest
Lesbian
Gay

University
of
Minnesota
Oct. 23-25, 1987

WE NEED YOU — WE_
VOLUNTEERS:
MONDAYS
FIREPLA_
HALL, _
KAREN - 822-78_
DAVE - 332-1_

YOU KNOW, WE MADE A FLYING TRIP TO THE STIPPLE-APA COLLATION TO DROP OFF ZINES IN THE MIDDLE OF THIS THING — WOTTA TRIP! (we came back with several orders for T shirts, too!)
— Elise

one, but couldn't.

I wanted to go to this one, but couldn't.
— E

10:30-11:30

"Fitting In" in the Lesbian Community
        Nancy Hammond   Room 353

Spirituality/Sexuality: Two Different Sides of the Same Coin
        M.D.B.   Room 355

Strategies in Passing Gay/Lesbian Legislation
        Leon Rouse   Room 354

Surviving Adolescence: Lesbian and Gay youth in a premier of a new video
        Gary Remafedi   Room 327

Portrayal of Lesbian Sexuality and Erotica in the movie Holding (movie will be shown during workshop)
        Judith Halberstam   Room 320

Family/Partner and Employment Legal Issues
        Susan Short   Room 307

the basic point of this was "Nobody fits in all the time." I enjoyed it, but as a new and different experience I didn't come out as bi there. Was I chicken? Or was I just having a mellow episode?
        — Elise

After having volunteered to do Parties for two others cons, doing LUNCH for this turned out to be a breeze... Interestingly enuf, all of the "politically correct" veggie food went practically untouched. Too bad – but us ORGANIZERS found the killer brownies that Zorka's provided. Mmmm –
        VICTOR

LUNCH BREAK

Lunch for pre-registrants and workshop leaders in Rm. 306.
Film: *Who Happen to Be Gay* will be shown in Rm. 320 at 11:40
Film: *Pink Trangles* will be shown in Rm. 320 at 12:15

(probably chicken.
— E)

YUP. I understand – not easy to be honest – all the time.

1:00-2:00

Lesbians Coming Out to Mothers; A Particularly Female Experience
        Gigi Carr,
        Lisa r Yates   Room 354 (women only)

Lesbians and Aids
        Ann Viitala   Room 352-351

How to Get What You Want From Men
        Don LeTourneau   Room 325-326 (men only)

Telling Our Tales: Gay/Lesbian Writing and Publishing in the '80's
        The Evergreen Chronicles
        Editors Lisa Albrecht
        and Douglas Federhart   Room 353

Coming Out in Rural Areas
        Nancy Barts   Room 355

PARENTS— UNDERSTANDING YOUR GAY SONS AND LESBIAN DAUGHTERS

INTRODUCTION
It is often a shock for parents that their child is homosexual, whether are a mother or a father, whether son or a daughter... [partially obscured]

← PFLAG flyer (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays)

WORKSHOP TIME SLOTS

MORNING 9:15-10:15
1. MAKE-UP FOR MEN
2. G/L ORG & ELECT. 88'
3. L/G PROFESSIONALS

... CREATIVE WRIT.
... FITTI...

3. LESBIAN LITERATURE
4. INTERNALIZED HOMOPHOB
5. L/G IN SF
6.
7.
AFTERNOO...
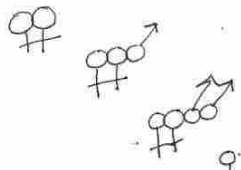
2:15-3:15
Organizing Lesbian and Gay Groups on College Campuses
Sue Hyde — Room 352-351
Lesbian Humor: Truth, Myth, or Merely a Contradiction in Terms
Alison Bechdel,
Becky Kent — Room 353
Bisexuality
Victor Raymond,
Elise Krueger — Room 354
"Real Girls" and Lesbian Resistance--Another Look at Butch/Fem Roles
Jacquelyn Zita — Room 355
Tarot from a Feminist Perspective
Nancy Garnier — Room 307
Gay History and Literature — Room 308

3:30-4:30
Gay and Lesbian Civil Rights/Gay Rights
Ann Viitala — Room 353
Speaking Out: How to Talk to (straight) College Classes
Diane Benjamin — Room 307
Witchcraft as Goddess Religion
Bob Swart — Room 355
Lesbian Battering
Mary Allen,
Paula Poorman — Room 308
Hot, Horny, Healthy (will run for approximately 2 1/2 hours)
Don LeTourneau — Room 325-326
Spinsters, Dykes, and the Lavender Menace: Changing Lesbian Images and Identities
Susan Cahn — Room 354

YUP. WE HAD A WORKSHOP. WELL, I MEAN, IT WASN'T HANDS ON, OR ANYTHING, BUT IT WAS OK.

Hmm — how do you —Elise deal with an oppression that gets expressed as "I snuck in—I didn't want to be thought of as bisexual."? Well? I wound up Good workshop. I'm glad I in it by accident, but I was there. —E

Wanted to see this, too. AARGH! -E

this was a great idea and the guys came and set up and were ALL ready, and.... Nobody showed, 'cept me and another fellow. STRANGE — you'd think that condoms were bad or something. — VICTOR

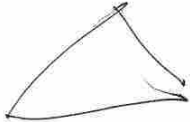THE EVERGREEN CHRONICLES

The Evergreen Chronicles is a quarterly literary journal dedicated to present visual artists. The artistry revealed is not limited to "gay" or lesbian ... tions. What is revealed are the unique perspectives and sensibilities of they ... lective artistic creations are the unique work ... tography. The artistic philosophy of The Evergreen Chronicle can perh ... Stonewall gay author who wrote in the preface to The Sleeping Tree ...

aw, c'mon, Victor — a lot of these folks were nervous someone would see 'em going into the room and think they were having SEX, or something — E (ever wonder why the literature panels were so well attended?)

so how am I supposed to reply to THIS, huh? — VICTOR

8.31.87
MSA grant?
Student Union co-sponsorship?
Speaker (seminar) on Friday (afternoon? evening?)
forum
CAFS? Hum?
staying w/friend (No housing assistance?
liaison?
Aquarium? Pam
- 720 Coffman 5-4455
- assistance

9.28.87
Carol — Dai
MTI

early fundraising efforts

(26)

328

4:45
Lesbian only meeting in room 311.
Gay male only meeting in room 309.

So where did we go? Out to dinner!
Was that a "bisexuals only" meeting? — E

Just what IS a BISEXUAL SEPARATIST, anyway? and how do we TELL?

FILMS
films will be shown in rooms 325-326.

4:45
Film: *Word is Out*

5:45
Film: *Silent Pioneers*

Watching ANOTHER COUNTRY with Carol was lots of fun — and so was seeing all the stuff about English prep schools later. Victor

Am I a Bisexual Separatist Yet??

(But when we left out.) *Well, no chance, really.... I was pretty grouchy — when we were — E*

VIDEOS
The following videos will be shown in room 327. Check door for times.

Therese and Isabelle
Another Country
Entre Nous
Lily Tomlin
Golden Girls (lesbian episode)
Fun with a Sausage
Leather Intellectual

This one we screened at Confidential I, silly, silly — but FUN! — Victor

Love those Left Handed Lithuanian Lesbians! — Elise

FOR MORE INFORMATION:
Minnesota AIDS Project
2025 Nicollet Ave. S., #200
Minneapolis, MN 55404
(612) 870-0700 (Info Hotline)
(612) 870-7773 (Office)
State Wide Toll Free Hotline
1-800-248-AIDS
Minneapolis He
(612) 348-2
He

NO. NO. MEAN IT. I MEAN THEM. CALL THEM. — Victor

9:00-12:30   Great Hall

NOT YOUR ORDINARY HOMECOMING DANCE

GREAT CARTOON (see first page of con report). IT WAS ON THE T-SHIRT. (The Dance title was my idea — egoboo, egoboo!! — Elise)

The dance was the first chance I had to relax the entire con, uh, CONFERENCE. Nice music, nice people (Karen was great in black leather pants, and all of my Mac MLGC friends stopped by — surprised to see me selling dance tickets). — VICTOR

1:00-2:00
1. L & AIDS
2. MALE INTIMACY
3.
4. ASTROLOGY
5. L & COMING OUT TO MOMS
6. RACISM
7. COMING OUT RURAL
3:30-4:30
1. HOT, HORNY, HEALTHY (MAP)
2. G/L CIV. RTS
GODDESS RELIGIONS
LESBIAN SEXUALITY
SPEAKING TO STR. GROUP
LEGAL ISSUES

DAMN, I missed the dance. Can't remember why, now... — Elise

(27)

329

— A SUPPORT GROUP WHERE YOU CAN TALK ABO[U]
WHAT IT IS LIKE TO BE YOU. A PLACE TO STOP BEING
ALONE. A SAFE PLACE.

— OPEN TO GAY AND LESBIAN YOUTH AGE 15-19

— SCHEDULED TO BEGIN SUNDAY OCTOBER 18, 3:00-4:30.

— IF YOU ARE INTERESTED OR WANT MORE INFORMATION
CALL BETH ZEMSKY OR DAN KEEFE AT 340-7444.

FAMILY AND CHILDREN'S SERVI[CE]
414 SOUTH 8TH STREET
MINNEAPOLIS, MIN[N]

This title was a move toward validation. After the "B-word" was left off of the publicity... and the banner... and the T-Shirt... I spoke my mind on the subject, and this form and others were corrected. It was particularly angering to be one at the very first deleted when I and at least other bisexual had been organizing meetings, and had done quantities of work. I remember making a comment to the effect of, "I don't think I would have gone to the printer without Lesbian, word huh?" I'm glad the response was toward inclusion. —V

Midwest Lesbian-Gay-Bisexual
Student Conference
% University Gay Community
235 Coffman Memorial Union
300 University Ave SE
Minneapolis, MN 55455

~~I~~ WE formally agree to lead a workshop on Saturday October 24
at the Midwest Lesbian-Gay-Bisexual Student Conference at a
time to be arranged on this topic: Bisexuality

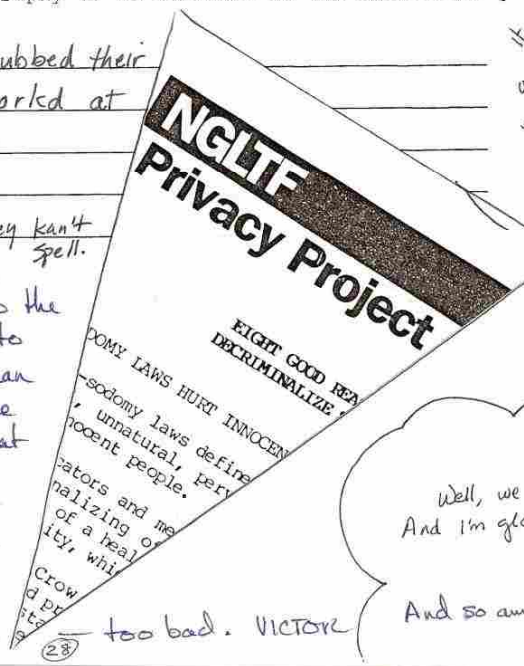Signature: *Victor J. Raymond   Elise Krueger*

Title for your workshop: BISEXUALITY: THREAT OR MENACE?
(we will assign a title if you don't want to ...)

The T-Shirts come in 100% cotton in turquoise and white, and
a 50/50 blend in pink. Please indicate your color choice and
size: lavender?

Please write a brief biography to be included in the conference
program:

They wuz born. They pubbed their ish. They wuz overworkd at too meny conz, so they died. Thee end. And they kan't spell.

*After the conference — which thankfully came in close to the black — I was surprised to to hear that the main woman in charge was thankful to me for the work I did — not that I did such a great job, but that a **bisexual** had done it — a bi-**man**, at that — which just highlighted the tension between the wimmin's and men's groups.*

NGLTF
Privacy Project

EIGHT GOOD RE[ASONS]
DECRIMINALIZE

[SO]DOMY LAWS HURT INNOCEN[T]
sodomy laws defin[e]
unnatural, per[v]
[inn]ocent people.
[cre]ators and me
[pen]alizing o
[ual]ity, of a heal
[ity], whi[ch]
Crow
a p[r]
[i]t[s]

(28) too bad. VICTOR

Well, we did it. And I'm glad.
≥whew≤
And so am I — ε ⇒
V.

330

REFERENCES CITED

Chapter I

Ahmed, Sarah. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. New York: Routledge, 2004. Print.

Angelides, Stephen. *A History of Bisexuality*. Chicago, IL: U of Chicago P, 2001. Print.

Barker, Meg, Christina Richards, Rebecca Jones, Helen Bowes-Catton, Tracey Plowman, Jen Yockney, and Marcus Morgan. *The Bisexuality Report: Bisexual Inclusion in LGBT Equality and Diversity.* Buckinghamshire: Open University, 2012. PDF.

Bisexual Invisibility: Impacts and Recommendations. San Francisco, CA: San Francisco Human Rights Commission LGBT Advisory Committee, 2011. PDF.

Butler, Judith. *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* New York: Verso, 2009. Print.

Capsuto, Steven. *Alternate Channels: The Uncensored Story of Gay and Lesbian Images on Radio and Television.* New York: Ballantine, 2000. Print.

Chambers, Samuel A. *The Queer Politics of Television.* London: Tauris, 2009. Print.

Decena, Carlos. "Profiles, Compulsory Disclosure and Ethical Sexual Citizenship in the Contemporary USA." *Sexualities* 11.4 (2008): 397-413. Print.

Delany, Samuel R. *Babel-17; Empire Star*. New York: Vintage, 2001. Print.

Doty, Alexander. *Making Things Perfectly Queer: Interpreting Mass Culture.* Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1993. Print.

Eng, David L., Judith Halberstam, and José Esteban Muñoz. "Introduction: What's Queer About Queer Studies Now?" *Social Text* 23.3-4 (2005): 1-17. Print.

Erickson-Schroth, Laura and Jennifer Mitchell. "Queering Queer Theory, Or Why Bisexuality Matters," *Journal of Bisexuality* 9 (2009): 297-315. Print.

Freedman, Carl H. *Critical Theory and Science Fiction*. Middletown: Wesleyan UP, 2000. Print.

Friedman, M. Reuel, Brian Dodge, Vanessa Schick, Debby Herbenick, Randolph D. Huback, Jessamyn Bowling, Gabriel Goncalves, Sarah Krier, and Michael Reece. "From Bias to Bisexual Health Disparities: Attitudes Toward Bisexual Men and Women in the United States" *LGBT Health* 2.0 (2014): 1-10. Print.

"Golden Age of Science Fiction." Wiki page. *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, 2 Feb. 2015. Web. 13 Mar. 2015.

Hames-García, Michael. "What's After Queer Theory? Queer Ethnic and Indigenous Studies." *Feminist Studies* 39.2 (2013): 384-404. Print.

Hemmings, Clare. *Bisexual Spaces: A Geography of Sexuality and Gender*. New York: Routledge, 2002. Print.

Latham, Rob. "Sextrapolation in New Wave Science Fiction." *Queer Universes: Sexualities in Science Fiction.* Ed. Wendy Gay Pearson, Veronica Hollinger, and Joan Gordon. Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 2008. 52-71. Print.

"Law of Thought." Wiki page. *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, 4 Dec. 2014. Web. 8 Mar. 2015.

James Tiptree, Jr. Literary Awards Council. Home page. *James Tiptree, Jr. Literary Awards Council.* N.p., n.d. Web. 1 May 2015.

"Many-valued Logic." Wiki page. *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, 26 Dec. 2014. Web. 8 Mar. 2015.

"sexuality, n." *OED Online*. Oxford UP, n.d. Web. 1 Mar. 2014.

Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Epistemology of the Closet*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1990. Print.

Snow, C.P. *The Two Cultures*. 1959/1964. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998. Print.

Storr, Merl, ed. *Bisexuality: A Critical Reader*. London: Routledge, 1999. Print.

Suvin, Darko. *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1979. Print.

Warner, Michael. *The Trouble With Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life.* Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1999. Print.

Wilchins, Riki A. *Queer Theory, Gender Theory: An Instant Primer*. Los Angeles: Alyson, 2004. Print.

Wilde, Jenée. "Dimensional Sexuality: Exploring New Frameworks for Bisexual Desires." *Sexual and Relationship Therapy* 29.3 (2014): 320-338. Print.

Yoshino, Kenji. "The Epistemic Contract of Bisexual Erasure." *Stanford Law Review* 52 (2000): 353-461. Print.

Chapter II

2011 Bisexuality Roundtable. Group interview (11 participants). 6 Feb. 2011.

2012 Bisexuality Roundtable. Group interview (8 participants). 12 Feb. 2012.

Alan. Personal interview. 11 Feb. 2012.

André, Amy. "The Scientific Quest to Prove that *The New York Times* Exists." *Huffpost Gay Voices.* Huffington Post, 26 Mar. 2014. Web. 15 Apr. 2015.

Angelides, Stephen. *A History of Bisexuality*. Chicago, IL: U of Chicago P, 2001. Print.

Ann. Personal interview. 12 Feb. 2012.

Atkins, Dawn, ed. *Bisexual Women in the Twenty-First Century*. New York: Haworth, 2002. Print.

Barker, Meg, Christina Richards, Rebecca Jones, Helen Bowes-Catton, Tracey Plowman, Jen Yockney and Marcus Morgan. *The Bisexuality Report: Bisexual Inclusion in LGBT Equality and Diversity.* Buckinghamshire: Open University, 2012. PDF.

Beemyn, Brett, and Erich Steinman, eds. *Bisexuality in the Lives of Men: Facts and Fictions.* Binghamton: Hawthorne, 2001. Print.

—. *Bisexual Men in Culture and Society*. Binghamton: Hawthorne, 2001. Print.

Bernard, H. Russell, and Gery W. Ryan. "Text Analysis: Qualitative and Quantitative Methods." *Handbook of Methods in Cultural Anthropology.* Ed. H. Russell Barnard. London: Sage-Altamira, 1998. 595-646. Print.

BiSciFi Roundtable. Group interview (13 participants). 19 Aug. 2012.

Bisexual Invisibility: Impacts and Recommendations. San Francisco: San Francisco Human Rights Commission LGBT Advisory Committee, 2011. PDF.

Bisexual Organizing Project. *The Bisexual Needs Assessment 2012*. Minneapolis: BOP, February 2012. PDF.

Burleson, William E. *Bi America: Myths, Truths, and Struggles of an Invisible Community*. New York: Harrington, 2005. Print.

Capsuto, Steven. *Alternate Channels: The Uncensored Story of Gay and Lesbian Images on Radio and Television.* New York: Ballantine, 2000. Print.

Catherine. Personal interview. 21 Aug. 2012.

Carey, Benedict. "Straight, Gay or Lying? Bisexuality Revisited." *The New York Times.* New York Times, 5 July 2005. Web. 21 Mar. 2013.

"Considerable Gender, Racial and Sexuality Differences Exist in Attitudes Toward Bisexuality." University of Pittsburg, Schools of the Health Sciences Media Relations, 5 Nov. 2013. Web. 9 Apr. 2015.

Decena, Carlos Ulises. "Profiles, Compulsory Disclosure and Ethical Sexual Citizenship in the Contemporary USA." *Sexualities* 11.4 (2008): 397-413. Print.

—. "Tacit Subjects." *GLQ* 14.2-3 (2008): 339-359. Print.

Denizet-Lewis, Benoit. "The Scientific Quest to Prove Bisexuality Exists. *The New York Times.* New York Times, 20 Mar. 2014. Web. 15 Apr. 2014.

Dewalt, Kathleen M., and Billie R. Dewalt, with Coral B. Wayland. "Participant Observation." *Handbook of Methods in Cultural Anthropology.* Ed. H. Russell Barnard. London: Sage-Altamira, 1998. 259-299. Print.

Eliason, Mickey. "Bi-Negativity: The Stigma Facing Bisexual Men." *Bisexuality in the Lives of Men.* Ed. Brett Beemyn and Erich Steinman. Binghamton: Hawthorne, 2001. 137-154. Print.

Elise. Personal interviews. 18-21 Aug. 2012; 10 June 2013.

Friedman, M. Reuel, Brian Dodge, Vanessa Schick, Debby Herbenick, Randolph D. Huback, Jessamyn Bowling, Gabriel Gonclaves, Sarah Krier, and Michael Reece. "From Bias to Bisexual Health Disparities: Attitudes Toward Bisexual Men and Women in the United States." *LGBT Health* 2.0 (2014): 1-10. Print.

Gates, Gary J. "How Many People are Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender?" The Williams Institute. Los Angeles: UCLA School of Law, April 2011. PDF.

Goodwin, Joseph. *More Man Than You'll Ever Be: Gay Folklore and Acculturation in Middle America.* Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1989. Print.

Greg. Personal interview. 15 Aug. 2012.

Grey. Personal interview. 6 Aug. 2012.

Hall, Donald E., and Maria Pramaggiore, eds. *RePresenting Bisexualities: Subjects and Cultures of Fluid Desire.* New York: New York UP, 1996. Print.

Hemmings, Clare. *Bisexual Spaces: A Geography of Sexuality and Gender*. New York: Routledge, 2002. Print.

Labriola, Kathy. "What is Bisexuality? Who is Bisexual?" Online posting. *Kathylabriola.* N.p., n.d. Web. 14 Mar. 2015.

Lauren. Personal interview. 20 Aug. 2012.

Lou. Personal interview. 20 Aug. 2012.

Mark. Personal interview. 26 May 2013.

Miller, Marshall, Amy André, Julie Ebin, and Leona Bessonova. *Bisexual Health: An Introduction and Model Practices for HIV/STI Prevention Programming.* New York: National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute, Fenway Institute at Fenway Community Health, and BiNet USA, 2007. PDF.

Moorman, Jennifer. "'Shades of Grey': Articulations of Bisexuality." *Televising Queer Women: A Reader*. Ed. Rebecca Beirne. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008. 163-178. Print.

Nichols, JamesMichael. "Anna Paquin Brilliantly Schools Larry King On Bisexuality." *Huffpost Gay Voices*. Huffington Post, 31 July 2014. Web. 9 Apr. 2015.

North, Anna. "Bisexual Women Almost Twice As Likely To Be Abused As Straight Women." *BuzzFeed*. N.p., 25 Jan. 2013. Web. 10 Apr. 2015.

Ochs, Robyn. "Bisexual." Online posting. *RobynOchs*. N.p., n.d. Web. 13 Mar. 2015.

Politically Incorrect. Fanzine. Ed. Elise Krueger and Victor Raymond. N.p, March 1986- April 1989 (6 issues). Print.

"Polymorphous Perversity." Wiki page. *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, 20 Mar. 2015. Web. 20 Apr. 2015.

Prajna. Personal interview. 29 Jan. 2011.

RichardsFink, Patrick. "Mincing Bisexual, or Waking Up on the Wrong Side of the Procrustean Bed." Online posting. *Eponymous Fliponymous*. N.p., 16 Oct. 2012. Web. 8 Apr. 2015.

—. "The Monogamous Bisexual." Online posting. *Eponymous Fliponymous*. N.p., 14 Sept. 2012. Web. 8 Apr. 2015.

Rieger, Gerulf, Meredith L. Chivers, and J. Michael Bailey. "Sexual Arousal Patterns of Bisexual Men." *Psychological Science* 16 (2005): 579-584. Print.

Ripley, Matthew, Eric Anderson, Mark McCormack, Adrian Adams, and Robin Pitts. "The Decreasing Significance of Sigma in the Lives of Bisexual Men: Keynote Address, Bisexual Research Convention, London." *Journal of Bisexuality* 11 (2011): 195-206. Print.

Rosenthal, A.M., D. Sylva, A. Safron, and J.M. Bailey. "Sexual Arousal Patterns of Bisexual Men Revisited." *Biological Psychology* 88 (2011): 112-115. Print.

335

Rust, Paula C. Rodríguez. *Bisexuality in the United States: A Social Science Reader*. New York: Columbia UP, 2000. Print.

—. "Bisexuality: The State of the Union." *Annual Review of Sex Research* 13 (2002): 180-240. Print.

Toelken, Barre. *The Dynamics of Folklore*. Rev. and Exp. Ed. Logan: Utah State UP, 1996. Print.

Tuller, David. "No Surprise for Bisexual Men: Report Indicates They Exist." *The New York Times*. New York Times, 22 Aug. 2011. Web. 21 Mar. 2013.

Victor. Personal interviews. 19-20 Aug. 2012; 24 May 2013.

Walters, M.L., J. Chen, and M.J. Breiding. *The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS): 2010 Findings on Victimization by Sexual Orientation*. Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2013. PDF.

"Way Beyond the Binary." Web page. *Bisexual Resource Center*. BRC, n.d. Web. 15 Apr. 2014.

Weems, Mickey. *The Fierce Tribe: Masculine Identity and Performance in the Circuit*. Salt Lake City: Utah State UP, 2008. Print.

"What is WisCon?" Web page. *WisCon: World's Leading Feminist Science Fiction Convention*. Society for the Furtherance and Study of Fantasy and Science Fiction, n.d. Web. 1 Apr. 2015.

Whitehead, Tony L. "Basic Classical Ethnographic Research Methods." EICCARS Working Paper Series. Cultural Ecology of Health and Change. College Park: University of Maryland, 2005. PDF.

Chapter III

BiSciFi Roundtable. Group interview (13 participants). 19 Aug. 2012.

Bradley, Marion Zimmer. *The Shattered Chain*. New York: DAW, 1976. Print.

Broderick, Damien. *Reading by Starlight: Postmodern Science Fiction*. London: Routledge, 1995. Print.

Bujold, Lois McMaster. *Ethan of Athos*. New York: Baen, 1986. Print.

Catherine. Personal interview. 21 Aug. 2012.

Duane, Diane. *Door into Fire.* New York: TOR, 1979. Print.

Elise. Personal interviews. 18-21 Aug. 2012; 10 June 2013.

Freedman, Carl H. *Critical Theory and Science Fiction*. Middletown: Wesleyan UP, 2000. Print.

Heinlein, Robert A. *Stranger in a Strange Land.* New York: Putnam, 1961. Print.

Jamison, Anne Elizabeth. *Fic: Why Fanfiction Is Taking over the World*. Dallas: Smart Pop-Ben Bella, 2013. Print.

Jenkins, Henry. "Interactive Audiences? The 'Collective Intelligence' of Media Fans." *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture*. New York: New York UP, 2006. Print.

—. "Television Fans, Poachers, Nomads." *The Subcultures Reader*. Ed. Ken Gelder and Sarah Thornton. New York: Routledge, 1997. 506-522. Print.

Knight, Damon. *Analogue Men*. Berkley: Berkley Medallion, 1962. Print.

Lefanu, Sarah. *Feminism and Science Fiction*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1988. Print.

Le Guin, Ursula K. *A Wizard of Earthsea.* New York: Parnassus, 1968. Print.

—. *Left Hand of Darkness.* New York: Ace, 1969. Print.

—. "Mountain Ways." *The Birthday of the World and Other Stories.* New York: Perennial, 2002. Print.

Lewis, C.S. *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe.* United Kingdom: Bles, 1950. Print.

Lilly, N.E. "What is Speculative Fiction?" Online posting. *GreenTentacles*. N.p., Mar. 2002. Web. 9 Apr. 2015.

Lou. Personal interview. 20 Aug. 2012.

Merrick, Helen. *The Secret Feminist Cabal: A Cultural History of Science Fiction Feminisms*. Seattle: Aqueduct, 2009. Print.

Meyer, Stephenie. *Twilight*. New York: Little, Brown, 2005. Print.

Pearson, Wendy Gay. "Alien Cryptographies: The View from Queer." *Queer Universes: Sexualities in Science Fiction.* Ed. Wendy Gay Pearson, Veronica Hollinger, and Joan Gordon. Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 2008. Print.

"RaceFale '09." Wiki page. *Fanlore*. Fanlore, 25 Mar. 2015. Web. 20 Apr. 2015.

Rivkin, J.F. *Silverglass*. New York: Ace Fantasy, 1986. Print.

Rodrigues, Amanda. "Trill Gender and Sexuality Metaphors in *Star Trek*." *BitchFlicks*.
    N.p., 6 Feb. 2013. Web. 9 Apr. 2015.

Russ, Joanna. *The Female Man*. New York: Bantam, 1975. Print.

Scott, Melissa. *Shadow Man*. New York: TOR, 1995. Print.

Suvin, Darko. *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a
    Literary Genre*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1979. Print.

Verba, Joan Marie. *Boldly Writing: A Trekker Fan and Zine History, 1967-1987*. 2nd ed.
    Minnetonka: FLT Publications, 2003. PDF.

Victor. Personal interviews. 19-20 Aug. 2012; 24 May 2013.

Chapter IV

Buffy the Vampire Slayer. Created by Joss Whedon. Prod. Mutant Enemy Productions,
    Sandollar Television, Kuzui Entertainment, and 20th Century Fox Television. 144
    episodes. The WB and UPN. 1997-2003. Television.

Close Encounters of the Third Kind. Dir. Steven Spielberg. Prod. EMI Films. Columbia
    Pictures. 1977. Film.

Davies, B. and R. Harré. "Positioning and Personhood." Harré and van Langenhove 32-
    52. Print.

Dollhouse. Created by Joss Whedon. Prod. Mutant Enemy Productions, Boston Diva
    Productions, and 20th Century Fox Television. 27 episodes. Fox. 2009-2010.
    Television.

Elise. Personal interviews. 18-21 Aug. 2012; 10 June 2013.

"Erving Goffman." Wiki page. *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. Wikipedia, The Free
    Encyclopedia, 28 Mar. 2015. Web. 1 Apr. 2015.

E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial. Dir. Steven Spielberg. Prod. Amblin Entertainment. Universal
    Pictures. 1982. Film.

Fanlore. Homepage. Fanlore, n.d. Web. 1 Apr. 2015.

Firefly. Created by Joss Whedon. Prod. Mutant Enemy Productions and 20th Century
    Fox Television. 14 episodes. Fox. 2002. Television.

Fowler, Bridget. *Pierre Bourdieu and Cultural Theory*: *Critical Investigations.* London: Sage, 1997. Print.

Goffman, Erving. *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*. New York: Harper and Row, 1974. Print.

—. *Forms of Talk.* Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1981. Print.

Hall, Stuart. "Some 'Politically Incorrect' Pathways Through PC." *The War of the Words: The Political Correctness Debate*. Ed. Sarah Dunant. London: Virago, 1994. 164-184. Print.

Harré, Rom, and Luk van Langenhove, ed. *Positioning Theory: Moral Contexts of Intentional Actions.* Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999. Print.

—. "The Dynamics of Social Episodes." Harré and van Langenhove 1-13. Print.

Herman, David, James Phelan, Peter J. Rabinowitz, Brian Richardson, and Robin Warhol. *Narrative Theory: Core Concepts and Critical Debates.* Columbus: The Ohio State UP, 2012. Print.

"Is Homosexuality a Menace?" Wiki page. *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia.* Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, 7 May. 2014. Web. 6 Apr. 2015.

Jenkins, Henry, with John Campbell. "'Out of the Closet and into the Universe': Queers and *Star Trek.*" *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture.* New York: New York UP, 2006. Print.

"Lavender Menace." Wiki page. *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, 27 Feb. 2015. Web. 6 Apr. 2015.

The Man From U.N.C.L.E. Created by Sam Rolfe and Norman Felton. Prod. Arena Productions and MGM Television. 105 episodes. NBC. 1964-1968. Television.

"Political Correctness." Wiki page. *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, 21 Apr. 2015. Web. 23 Apr. 2015.

Politically Incorrect. Fanzine. Ed. Elise Krueger and Victor Raymond. N.p, March 1986-April 1989 (6 issues). Print.

 "Seduction of the Innocent." Wiki page. *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, 2 Dec. 2014. Web. 9 Apr. 2015.

Serenity. Dir. Joss Whedon. Prod. Barry Mendel. Universal Pictures. 2005. Film.

Star Trek. Created by Gene Roddenberry. Prod. Desilu Productions and Paramount Television. 79 episodes. NBC. 1966-1969. Television.

Star Wars. Dir. George Lucas. Prod. Gary Kurtz and Lucasfilm. 20th Century Fox. 1977. Film.

"Threat or Menace." Wiki page. *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, 17 Nov. 2014. Web. 6 Apr. 2015.

van Lagenhove, L. and R. Harré. "Introducing Positioning Theory." Harré and van Langenhove 14-31. Print.

Verba, Joan Marie. *Boldly Writing: A Trekker Fan and Zine History, 1967-1987*. 2nd ed. Minnetonka: FLT Publications, 2003. PDF.

Victor. Personal interviews. 19-20 Aug. 2012; 24 May 2013.

Warner, Harry. *All Our Yesterdays: An Informal History of Science Fiction Fandom in the Forties*. Chicago: Advent, 1969. Print.

Chapter V

Angelides, S. (2001). *A history of bisexuality*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Barker, M., Richards, C., Jones, R., Bowes-Batton, H., Plowman, T., Yockney, J. , & Morgan, M. (2012). *The bisexuality report: Bisexual inclusion in LGBT equality and diversity*. Buckinghamshire: Centre for Citizenship, Identity and Governance, the Open University.

Butler, J. (1993). *Bodies that matter: On the discursive limits of "sex."* New York, NY: Routledge.

Butler, J. (2004a). Imitation and gender insubordination. In S. Salih (Ed.), *The Judith Butler Reader* (pp. 119-137). Oxford: Blackwell.

Butler, J. (2004b). *Undoing gender*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Butler, J. (2006). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York, NY: Routledge. (Originally published in 1990).

Butler, J. (2009). *Frames of war: When is life grievable?* New York, NY: Verso.

Chávez, K. (2013). *Queer migration politics: Activist rhetoric and coalitional possibilities*. Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press.

Diamond, L.M. (2008). *Sexual fluidity: Understanding women's love and desire*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Driskill, Q-L., Finley, C., Gilley, B.J., & Morgensen, S.L. (Eds.) (2011). *Queer indigenous studies: Critical interventions in theory, politics, and literature*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press.

Eng, D.L., Halberstam, J., & Muñoz, J.E. (2005). Introduction: What's queer about queer studies now? *Social Text, 23*(3-4)*,* 1-17.

Erickson-Schroth, L., & Mitchell, J. (2009). Queering queer theory, or why bisexuality matters. *Journal of Bisexuality, 9,* 297-315.

Foucault, M. (1978). *The history of sexuality: Volume I: An introduction.* (R. Hurley, Trans.) New York, NY: Vintage-Random House. (Originally published in 1976).

Gates, G.J. (2011). How many people are lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender? Los Angeles, CA: The Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law. Retreived from www.law.ucla.edu/williamsinstitute

Gopinath, G. (2005). *Impossible desires: Queer desire and South Asian public cultures*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Halperin, D.M. (2002). *How to do the history of homosexuality*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Hames-García, M. (2011). *Identity complex: Making the case for multiplicity*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Hames-García, M. (2013). What's after queer theory? Queer ethnic and indigenous studies. *Feminist Studies, 39*(2), 384-404.

Hames-García, M., & Martínez, E.J. (Eds.) (2011). *Gay latino studies: A critical reader*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Harding, S.G. (2004). *The feminist standpoint theory reader: Intellectual and political controversies.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Hemmings, C. (2002). *Bisexual spaces: A geography of sexuality and gender*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Israel, T., & Mohr, J. (2004). Attitudes toward bisexual women and men: Current research, future directions. *Journal of Bisexuality, 4*(1-2), 117-133.

Johnson, E.P., & Henderson, M.G. (Eds.) (2005). *Black queer studies: A critical anthology.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Joyrich, L. (2001). Epistemology of the console. *Critical Inquiry, 27,* 439-467.

Lugones, M. (2007). Heterosexualism and the colonial/modern gender system. *Hypatia, 22*(1), 186-209.

McRuer, R. (2006). *Crip theory: Cultural signs of queerness and disability*. New York: New York University Press.

Moorman, J. (2008). "Shades of grey": Articulations of bisexuality. In R. Beirne (Ed.), *Televising Queer Women: A Reader* (pp. 163-178). New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

Pramaggiore, M. (1996). Straddling the screen: Bisexual spectatiorship and contemporary narrative film. In D.E. Hall & M. Pramaggiore (Eds.), *RePresenting Bisexualities: Subjects and Cultures of Fluid Desire* (pp. 272-297). New York: New York University Press.

Rich, A. (1993). Compulsory heterosexuality and lesbian existence. In H. Abelove, M.A. Barale, & D. M. Halperin (Eds.), *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader* (pp. 227-253). New York, NY: Routledge.

Sedgwick, E.K. (1990). *Epistemology of the closet*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

"sexuality, n.". (2014, March). OED Online. Oxford University Press. Retrieved from http://www.oed.com.libproxy.uoregon.edu

van Zoonen, L. (1994). *Feminist media studies*. London: Sage.

Vliegenthart, R., & van Zoonen, L. (2011). Power to the frame: Bringing sociology back to frame analysis. *European Journal of Communication, 26*(2), 101-115.

Von Drehle, D. (2013, March 28). How gay marriage won. *Time*. Retrieved from http://swampland.time.com

Warner, M. (1999). *The trouble with normal: Sex, politics, and the ethics of queer life*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Wylie, A. (2003). Why standpoint matters. In R. Figueroa & S.G. Harding (Eds.), *Science and Other Cultures: Issues in Philosophies of Science and Technology* (pp. 26-48). New York, NY: Routledge.

Yoshino, K. (2000). The epistemic contract of bisexual erasure. *Stanford Law Review, 52,* 353-461.

Chapter VI

Amy-Chinn, D. (2012). GLAAD to be *Torchwood*? Bisexuality and the BBC. *Journal of Bisexuality, 12*, 63-79.

Angelides, S. (2001). *A history of bisexuality*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Attanasio, P. (Executive producer). (2004). *House* [Television series]. Los Angeles, CA: Heel and Toe Films, Shore Z Productions, & Bad Hat Harry Productions.

Barker, M., Richards, C., Jones, R., Bowes-Catton, H., Plowman, T., Yockney, J., & Morgan, M. (2012). *The bisexuality report: Bisexual inclusion in LGBT equality and diversity.* Buckinghamshire: Centre for Citizenship, Identity and Governance, The Open University.

Barron, L. (2010). Out in space: Masculinity, sexuality and the science fiction heroics of Captain Jack. In A. Ireland (Ed.), *Illuminating Torchwood: Essays on narrative, character and sexuality in the BBC series* (pp. 213-225). Jefferson, NC: McFarland.

Bong, S.A. (2011). Beyond queer: An epistemology of bi choice. *Journal of Bisexuality, 11,* 39-62.

Bordwell, D. (1985). *Narration in the fiction film*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

Davies, R. T. (Executive producer.) (2005). *Doctor Who* [Television series]. Wales, UK: BBC Wales.

Davies, R. T. (Executive producer). (2006). *Torchwood* [Television series]. Wales, UK: BBC Wales.

Davies, R. T. (Executive producer). (2009). *Torchwood: Children of the Earth* [Television series]. Wales, UK: BBC Wales.

Davies, R. T. (Executive producer). (2011). *Torchwood: Miracle Day* [Television series]. United Kingdom & United States: BBC Wales, BBC Worldwide, & Starz Entertainment.

De Luca, M., Brunetti, D., & James, E. L. (Producers), & Taylor-Johnson, S. (Director). (2015). *Fifty Shades of Grey* [Motion picture]. United Kingdom & United States: Focus Features, Michael De Luca Productions, & Trigger Street Productions.

Dhaenens, F. (2013). The fantastic queer: Reading gay representations in *Torchwood* and *True Blood* as articulations of queer resistance. *Critical Studies in Media Communication, 30*(2), 102-116.

Diamond, L.M. (2008). *Sexual fluidity: Understanding women's love and desire.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Elizabeth, A. (2013). Challenging the binary: Sexual identity that is not duality. *Journal of Bisexuality, 13*, 329-337.

Eng, D.L., with Halberstam, J., & Muñoz, J.E. (2005). Introduction: What's queer about queer studies now? *Social Text, 23*(3-4)*,* 1-17.

Erickson-Schroth, L., & Mitchell, J. (2009). Queering queer theory, or why bisexuality matters. *Journal of Bisexuality, 9*, 297-315.

Fierberg, A. (Producer), & Shainberg, S. (Director). (2002). *Secretary* [Motion picture]. United States: Twopoundbag Productions, Double A Films, & SloughPond Co.

Firestone, J. (Executive producer). (2010). *Lost Girl* [Television series]. Canada: Prodigy Pictures & Shaw Media.

Galupo, M. P. (2011). Bisexuality: Complicating and conceptualizing sexual identity. *Journal of Bisexuality, 11,* 545-549.

Hemmings, C. (1997). Bisexual theoretical perspectives: Emergent and contingent relationships. In Bi Academic Intervention (Eds.), *The bisexual imaginary: Representation, identity and desire* (pp. 14-37). London, UK: Cassell.

Hemmings, C. (2002). *Bisexual spaces: A geography of sexuality and gender*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Hills, M. (2010a). Torchwood. In D. Lavery (Ed.), *The Essential Cult TV Reader* (pp. 275-281). Lexington: University Press of Kentucky.

Hills, M. (2010b). *Triumph of a time lord: Regenerating Doctor Who in the twenty-first century*. London, UK: I. B. Tauris.

Ireland, A. (2010). Introduction: Reading the rift. In A. Ireland (Ed.), *Illuminating Torchwood: Essays on narrative, character and sexuality in the BBC series* (pp. 1-7). Jefferson, NC: McFarland.

James, C. (1996). Denying complexity: The dismissal and appropriation of bisexuality in queer, lesbian, and gay theory. In B. Beeman & M. Elianon (Eds.), *Queer studies: A lesbian, gay, bisexual & transgender anthology* (pp. 217-240). New York: New York University Press.

Lesage, J. (1976-77). *S/Z* and *Rules of the Game. Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media, 12-13*, 45-51.

Miller, M. (Executive Producer). (2014). *Forever* [Television series]. United States: Warner Bros. Television.

Moorman, J. (2008). "Shades of grey": Articulations of bisexuality. In R. Beirne (Ed.), *Televising queer women: A reader* (pp. 163-178). New York, NY: Palgrave-Macmillan.

Mosier, S. (Producer), & Smith, K. (Director). (1997). *Chasing Amy* [Motion picture]. United States: Mirimax Films.

Pearson, W.G. (2008). Alien cryptographies: The view from queer. In W. G. Pearson, V. Hollinger, & J. Gordon (Eds.), *Queer universes: Sexualities in science fiction* (pp. 14-38). Liverpool, UK: Liverpool University Press.

Pramaggiore, M. (1996). Straddling the screen: Bisexual spectatorship and contemporary narrative film. In D.E. Hall & M. Pramaggiore (Eds.), *RePresenting bisexualities: Subjects and cultures of fluid desire* (pp. 272-297). New York: New York University Press.

Pramaggiore, M. (2011). Kids, rock and couples: Screening the elusive/illusive bisexual. *Journal of Bisexuality, 11*, 587-593.

Pullen, C. (2010). "Love the coat": Bisexuality, the female gaze and the romance of sexual politics. In A. Ireland (Ed.), *Illuminating Torchwood: Essays on narrative, character and sexuality in the BBC series* (pp. 135-152). Jefferson, NC: McFarland.

Richter, N. (2013). Bisexual erasure in "lesbian vampire" film theory. *Journal of Bisexuality, 13*, 273-280.

Roberts, B.C. (2011). Muddy waters: Bisexuality in the cinema. *Journal of Bisexuality, 11*, 329-345.

Ross, M. W., Daneback, K., & Mansson, S.-A. (2012). Fluid versus fixed: A new perspective on bisexuality as a fluid sexual orientation beyond gender. *Journal of Bisexuality, 12*, 449-460.

Scott, R. (Executive producer). (2009). *The Good Wife* [Television series]. New York, NY: Scott Free Productions, King Size Productions, Small Wishes Productions, & CBS Productions.

Walker, S.J. (2007). *Inside the hub: The unofficial and unauthorized guide to Torchwood series one.* Surrey, UK: Telos.

Wilde, J. (2014). Dimensional sexuality: Exploring new frameworks for bisexual desires. *Sexual and Relationship Therapy, 29*(3), 320-338.

Yoshino, K. (2000). The epistemic contract of bisexual erasure. *Stanford Law Review, 52*, 353-461.

Chapter VII

"ambiguity." *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory.* 1976. Ed. J.A. Cuddon. London: Penguin, 1999. Print.

Delany, Samuel R. *Babel-17; Empire Star*. 1966. New York: Vintage, 2001. Print.

—. *Dhalgren*. 1974. New York: Vintage, 2001. Print.

Doty, Alexander. *Making Things Perfectly Queer: Interpreting Mass Culture.* Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1993. Print.

Hanson, Carter F. "Memory's Offspring and Utopian Ambiguity in Ursula K. Le Guin's 'The Day Before the Revolution' and *The Dispossessed*." *Science Fiction Studies* 40.2 (2013): 246-262. Print.

Le Guin, Ursula K. *The Dispossessed*. 1974. New York: HarperCollins-Perennial, 2003. Print.

"Linguistic Relativity." Wiki page. *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia.* Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, 30 Nov. 2014. Web. 16 Jan. 2015.

McEvoy, Seth. *Samuel R. Delany*. New York: Ungar, 1984. Print.