

ing and stalking. To describe horizontal violence in abusive lesbian relationships as "mutual abuse" is to ignore the power imbalances and dominance patterns which abusers seek to impose. Since the justice system does not deal well with instances of horizontal (particularly lesbian) abuse, it is left to the community to find difficult solutions to the problems.

Some of the solutions Card reviews (though she would not necessarily define them as "solutions") include responses to homophobia, resistance to "passing" (as heterosexual), and consensual sadomasochism. Homophobia is, she reminds us, by definition an irrational fear. Yet the homophobia we experience is hostility, not fear, and "internalized homophobia" is not a pathology but often an appropriate response to, or real fear of, hostility. The politics of "outing," or bringing others out of the closet, while based on the belief that there is strength in numbers in resisting oppression and hostility, presents ethical problems for women who do not want to serve other women up to the patriarchy for further hostilities: "It is probably no accident that outing seems to be a game played mostly by privileged white men."

With respect to the assertion that, in addition to being a playful exchange of power in an erotic context, consensual sadomasochism plays a cathartic role as a "safety valve" in redirecting anger resulting from a previous history of abuse, Card fears that in fact s/m may sublimate desire for real political power (as Hoagland also suggests) and undermine resistance to oppressive models of domination and subordination: "What is required to make sadomasochistic contracts unattractive to lesbians and unprofitable to oppressors may be nothing less than a restructuring of society, or the creation of a new one."

Lesbian Choices is a closely argued book that looks at the realities and contradictions of lesbian lives, and tackles with aplomb the difficult issues we face in the context of a misogynist, homophobic world.

PLURAL DESIRES: WRITING BISEXUAL WOMEN'S REALITIES

The Bisexual Anthology Collective (Leela Acharya, Nancy Chater, Dionne Falconer, Sharon Lewish, Leanna McLennan and Susan Nosov). Toronto: Sister Vision Press, 1995.

by Karyn Sandlos

What about those, for example,
with hyphenated identities and
hybrid realities?

(Minh-ha 1990, 374)

Four years ago The Bisexual Anthology Collective gathered for the first time to discuss the realities of their lived experience as bisexual women. The six members of the Collective came together with a shared interest in exploring the personal and political significance of bisexual identity in the lives of women in a way that honours difference as a source of strength. Emerging from this collaboration is *Plural Desires: Writing Bisexual Women's Realities*, a polyvocal anthology which is powerfully significant for all of us concerned with questions of identity, coalition building, and sexual freedom, both as individuals and members of larger collective struggles.

In keeping with the (wo)mandate of Sister Vision Press, women of colour represent half of the contributors to the anthology as well as half of the editorial collective. In addition to the inclusion of the voices of a diverse group of women, the contributions themselves are as rich in creativity and content as they are varied in form. Through this collection bisexual women write/speak powerfully of their unique struggles both personally and within relationships with friends, loved ones, and political allies. Poetry, prose, photography, paintings, cartoons, interviews, and experimental fiction become the medium through which we are invited to engage critically and creatively with these lives lived at the place where

identities intersect. The editors and contributors to *Plural Desires* succeed in "...recognizing (sic) the necessity of speaking from a hybrid place, hence of saying at least two, three things at a time" (Minh-ha 1992, 140).

Plural Desires also finds historical significance as the first written work on bisexuality to be published in Canada, preceded by the 1991 U.S. publication of *Bi Any Other Name: Bisexual People Speak Out*, and *Closer to Home: Bisexuality and Feminism*, in 1992. The importance of this publication cannot be understated, occurring as it does at a time when a Canadian bisexual politics is in the early stages of its definition. The publication of *Plural Desires* represents an insurgent moment in the ongoing struggle to carve out a political space which would "...integrate a politicized interpretation of bisexuality with other empowerment struggles." For as the members of the Bisexual Anthology Collective attest, it is not enough to add the word "bisexual" in the naming of political movements in their critique of institutionalized heterosexism and other forms of oppression. What is called for is a reconfiguration of sexual politics toward a reimagining of the identity categories which simultaneously serve to define and to socially constrain.

To suggest, however, that the editors and contributors to *Plural Desires* find agreement on the issues arising in the struggle to define a "bisexual identity," would undermine what I believe is the political objective through which the collection came into being. As readers, we are invited to enter into a discussion which honours the immediacy of the questions it raises while refusing to reduce their inevitable complexity. An engagement with *Plural Desires* is unavoidably an engagement with a multiplicity of personal and political experiences and perspectives on bisexuality, many of which have previously been silenced within a sexist, racist, ableist, and homophobic society. Other "silences" have also been effected when sexual choices transgress the boundaries defined by and

through identity categories, which are often inadequate in their efforts to contain the realities and contradictions of our lived experiences as sexual beings. *Plural Desires* provides the forum in which these realities can be both shared and affirmed.

Trinh T. Minh-ha's notion of "leaky categories," one of the subtleties through which the collection is organized, poses the paradox which underlies the struggle to define a bisexual identity/politic, and which bears resemblance to the struggles faced by many other collective political movements. Naming ourselves "bisexual" can imply the attainment of shared agreement over the very definition of the term. But as the contributors to *Plural Desires* reveal, definitions of "bisexuality" are as diverse as the women who construct them. How then, to emerge collectively as agents into the political sphere, in ways that honour difference and diversity? What are the limits to our definitions of bisexuality, and what material impact might they bring to bear on our sexual freedom? These are questions for which there are no simple answers. Yet it is these very definitional terms and political implications that are continually problematized throughout the anthology. As Melina writes,

the essence of what I've learned from my sisters is that boxes cut you up into convenient cubes so you are managed and functioning within a grand hierarchy. And these boxes have nothing to do with that fluid beautiful energy that emanates from those who refuse the box and let us recognize each other.

Perhaps most tenuous, yet critical in the struggle to build coalition across difference, is the articulation of bisexual women's multiple responses to the often contested notion of a bisexual legitimacy by (some) lesbian women. Stories of rejection, accusations of "fence sitting," and personal and political struggles toward accountability through privilege, shared

both by lesbian and bisexual women, both unsettle and provide insight into the challenges at hand. As the members of the editorial collective write,

In terms of the les/bi divide, which can emerge when lesbians judge and dismiss bisexual women as traitors with divided loyalties and allegiances, it is the thorny question of bisexual women's relationships with men upon which the judgements pivot. What several contributors illuminate is that such judgements are oversimplifications of how bisexual feminists contribute to struggles against homophobia and heterosexism and how we can exercise agency in relation to the men in our lives.

The task of reordering a new sexual politic based upon expanded and more fluid notions of sexual identity is one which challenges bisexual women, lesbians, and all of us to remain open and committed to the complex, shifting, and relational nature of who we are in the world. In an interview with Zelig Pollon, June Jordan remarks, "I'm not sure that what I call an honest human body and an open heart can make an irrevocable commitment, to anybody—let alone a commitment along genetic lines. That's like going through the world with half of it shut down to you, isn't it?" The political imperative might then be realized if we imagine that "Identity" has now become more a point of departure than an end point in the struggle" (Minh-ha 1992, 140). In its courageous and eloquent expression of "identity" within the indeterminate space of its complexity, *Plural Desires* invites us to remember,

It is an unimagining world.
But we can imagine it differently.

Hutchins, Loraine and Lani Kaahumanu, eds. *Bi Any Other Name: Bisexual People Speak Out*. Boston: Alyson Publications, 1991. Minh-ha, Trinh T. "Not Like You/

Like You: Post-Colonial Women and the Interlocking Questions of Identity and Difference." *Making Face, Making Soul (Haciendo Caras): Creative and Critical Perspectives by Women of Colour*. Ed. Gloria Anzaldúa. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Foundation, 1990. Minh-ha, Trinh T. *Framer Framed*. New York: Routledge, 1992. Weise, Elizabeth R., ed. *Closer to Home: Bisexuality and Feminism*. Seattle: Seal Press, 1992.

Call for submissions

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Growth, experience, coming of age, wisdom, Alzheimers, tolerance, conservatism, outrageousness, change of decade, finances, health, parents, children, partners. What does aging mean for women? Deadline Oct. 31, 1996.

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Submit fiction, essays, or non-fiction to 3,000 words, 4 to 5 poems, or black-and-white artwork. Send SASE for complete guidelines. <http://www.swift.com/bcamp/directory/literature/roomhome.html>

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