

Gendering (Bi)Sexuality

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In the United States we often associate the decade of the 1960's with "free love" and radically liberated notions of gender and sexuality. Yet fascinating discussions around gender and sexuality were also happening in the early- and mid-1970's, ones that illuminate not only the evolution of movements and ideas during these decades, but also our own historical moment. This paper, which relies on primary sources, situates questions of sexual object choice, gender non-conformity, racialization, and "bisexuality" in the historical moment(s) of the 1970's. These histories also have important connections to the contemporary moment of LGBT identities. I argue that today both bisexuality and transgender, while certainly acknowledged as labels that fit with lesbian and gay in a certain sense, are treated discursively and materially differently than the latter two, so often violently. For this reason, the last section of my paper draws connections between the 1970's and the present.

The decade of the 1970's provides important perspectives for understanding how the currents of this earlier decade have contributed to the present situation of the LGBT movement. The women's movement, lesbian cultural feminism, gay liberation, and the Sexual Freedom League (SFL) are important here because of their respective ideas about sexual object choice and bisexuality, as well as accompanying assumptions about race and gender. I would like to tell a story about the SFL using a genealogical approach to history; this will reveal interesting conceptions of gender, race, and sexuality in order to identify one point in a web of historical ideas, people, communities, and movements that inform our current moment today. In this vein, my analysis suggests that these ideas constitute one piece of a historical puzzle that have brought us contemporary LGBT issues and ideas, but are not necessarily causally related. In addition, more than to elucidate truths about people in the archive, I use their voices to explore what structural forces are at play during this time period.

The research for this project involves a series of primary sources from the Sexual Freedom League's file at Indiana University's Kinsey Institute. The materials in the SFL box span the time period of 1971-1977, with the majority coming from the early part of the decade. They can roughly be generalized as 1) internal notes, memos, letters, and flyers that pertain to the work and perspectives of the organization itself, and 2) newspaper clippings, articles, pamphlets, brochures, and

publications collected from other external resources that are associated with a much broader range of issues related to gender and sexuality. Consequently, throughout my essay these sources are used to achieve three main goals: to contextualize the League in the broader context of the 1970's; to describe the nature and mission of the SFL itself; and to provide insights into the diversity of ideas surrounding gender and sexuality in general, and bisexuality specifically.

I open with a memo from the archive entitled “Comments by Women in the League,” which is a document produced by the organization itself; the voices in this memo begin articulating a perspective on gender within the SFL and thus contextualize the SFL in the larger political and social moment of the 1970's. Feminism, named the “women's movement” by some, raises questions during this decade about a woman's right to be an independent being beyond certain constraints of patriarchy. These ideas are prevalent in nearly all the materials I found in the archive:

As a married woman, the League has treated me more as an individual than so-and-so's wife.¹

This comment shows us the influence of the feminist movement on the members of the SFL. Critiques of patriarchy and emphasis on the individuality of women were particularly meaningful for middle-class white women who were in monogamous, patriarchal marriages that prescribed restrictive gender roles on women. This woman can now better imagine herself with her own personhood, rather than an identity defined—and literally named—by her husband. The importance of individualism likewise speaks to white middle-class values; despite a break from patriarchal norms, this speaker nevertheless resists oppression by claiming her own independent identity, which is tied to a fundamental conception of the individual as central to liberal politics. This quote provides a first clue about the location of the SFL in the political and social context of the 1970's, namely one at least somewhat connected to white middle-class circles of straight married couples.

In the same vein, another woman commented in the same memo that:

¹ “Comments by Women in the League,” Box 1, Series 1, Folder 4 (1974), Sexual Freedom League Collection, Kinsey Institute, Indiana University.

SFL was a way to participate in sex with others and not put my home-life in jeopardy.²

This speaker's home-life is clearly significant, and points to a similar social context as that of the woman quoted above. Her home life was most likely shaped by the domesticity and gender roles of a white middle-class marriage. Indeed, economic choice to have wives stay at home while husbands worked was generally associated with the white middle-class. She seems unconcerned with a fundamental change in that part of her life, but rather, again, speaks of the possibility of more sexual freedom that certain aspects of the feminist movement offered her at the time. She resists patriarchy by accessing relatively private spaces in which a wider array of non-monogamous and not just heterosexual relationships were possible, but not a complete challenge to marriage itself or public expressions of new ideas about women's sexuality or gender. Sexual object choice, in other words, is the primary possibility for freedom from certain constraints. Sexual object choice is about who one is attracted to sexually or romantically and who one chooses to have sexual encounters with. This woman challenges patriarchal norms of gender and sexuality by choosing her own, different sexual object(s) in private spaces, and not allowing these activities to interrupt her other public or private lives.

A comparison between the two quotes raises more generally the question of public and private spheres in relation to the feminist movement of the time. Being treated as more than "so-and-so's" wife in the SFL points to a mostly private space—namely the social circles of the organization, rather than just the intimacy of the home—but does not speak of the wider public sphere within U.S. society. A greater emphasis on privacy rather than public access likewise speaks to particular white, middle-class values of individual freedoms. Important, though, is that the SFL offered the safety of spaces away from the broad public in which women could challenge patriarchy, but remain visible as the properly gendered feminine and sexually normative women they were imagined to be in the white, middle-class, monogamous circles of America. In this sense, the SFL served as a kind of in-between space, certainly not public (as in displaying new found sexual freedoms to anyone and everyone), but also not just private (as in restricted to the intimate domesticity of the home). This analysis shows us that public and private, while

² Ibid.

analytically useful categories, in fact exist on a spectrum, and that members of the SFL developed a space in a middle ground between the extremes.

A last quote from this memo most explicitly raises the specific norms of sexuality and gender within which white, middle-class women were living at this time.

I have learned to face and try to conquer puritan hand-ups that have been drilled into my head since birth.³

“Puritan hand-ups” speak to the patriarchal ideas about female sexuality and gendered expectations emphasized in many white, middle-class (Christian) spaces. Women were supposed to save sex for marriage and often came with negative connotations of shame and suppression. Sexual pleasure may or may not have had a place in marriage relationships after the priority of reproduction, and in any case, centered men’s sexual satisfaction and desire. Gender roles relegated women, who were imagined to be inherently nurturing, maternal, and soft, to the space of the home. Monogamy was the unquestioned framework within which all this operated. The SFL offered opportunities to unlearn some of these values, for women to prioritize their sexual desires, to move beyond the default expectations of their husbands, and to potentially experience sexuality without this patriarchal masculine presence (sex with women). Within the SFL, these women could own their personhood and their sexuality more than they could previously.

Significantly, these particular ideas of womanhood—demure, submissive, and uninterested in sexual experimentation or their own sexual desires—are particularly tied to whiteness. Constructions of race in the U.S. relied on (and continue to rely on) this image of white women to oppose conceptions of racialized people, and especially racialized women, as generally hypersexualized, promiscuous, even perverse, and not adequately contained by such patriarchal norms.⁴ The priorities demonstrated in these quotes by women in the SFL point to particularly white concerns regarding gender, sexuality, and patriarchy; even as the SFL allows women

³ Ibid.

⁴ Briggs, Laura, *Reproducing Empire: Sex, Science and U.S. Imperialism in Puerto Rico*. (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2003), 177, 181-182.

Somerville, Siobhan, *Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture*. (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2000), 15-38.

to branch out in terms of sexual object choice, gender normativity remains largely in tact, demonstrating a strong connection between whiteness and gender conformity. The (white) suburban housewife, which many of the above named women were in a variety of forms, is in many ways the quintessential embodiment of gender normativity, in addition to traditional sexual object choice: she performs strictly gendered roles within the domestic sphere which are taken for granted – or at least not recognized as labor – in the patriarchal framework, subordinates her sexual desires and experiences to those of her husband and to the privacy of the home, and aesthetically and behaviorally performs her gender as diffidently and properly feminine. She can still do all this while choosing new and multiple sexual partners in the SFL. Not only does this formation stand particularly in contrast to the image of racialized people who are not imagined to be heteronormatively gender conforming, but is also distinguished from urban and rural sexual dissidents who are more likely to be imagined as gender non-conforming in certain settings.⁵ In this sense, the SFL represents the possibility for resistance to certain heterosexist ways of living that nevertheless largely leave the gender normative values of whiteness in tact.

These constructions of gender, race and sexuality point to the wider context of the social movements in the U.S., which demonstrated and perpetuated many of the same ideas. By the 1970's, identity-based movements, including feminism and gay liberation, faced increasing conservative radicalism that narrowed possibilities for activism and resistance, and forced reactionary changes in priorities. Letters from executive members of the SFL provide hints about how the social movements in particular situated themselves in relation to these shifts. For example, Anita Bryant was a popular right-wing persona who argued vigorously against “homosexual” rights. Dan Brown, a coordinating officer within the SFL, wrote a letter to the Florida Citrus Commission stating that

Due to the recent political activities of your spokesperson, Anita Bryant, our members do not plan to buy Florida orange juice. She has set herself up as a moralist and religious crusader. She has demonstrated a basic intolerance for human rights and civil liberties...The SFL is a non-profit organization designed (1) to

⁵ Ferguson, Roderick, “Sissies at the Picnic” in Hokulani Aiku, Karla Erickson, Jennifer Pierce, eds., *Feminist Waves, Feminist Generations: Life Stories from the Academy*. (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 188-196.

Butler, Pamela. “Sex and the Cities” in *Queer Twin Cities: GLBT Oral History Project*. (Durham and London, University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 203-233.

promote sexual equality, (2) to increase sexual awareness in society, and (3) to end social and legal restrictions on sex between consenting persons. We are in favor of equal protection of the law for all citizens. We firmly believe in the doctrine of the separation of church and state...⁶

As Bryant attempted to convince the American public that “homosexuals” were a threat to children and society at large, progressive movements were in some ways forced to make their politics more palatable. SFL’s rhetoric of basic sexual freedom within its own private sphere could certainly stand up against Bryant’s assertions that same-sex activity would ruin America’s youth. In the case of the women’s movement, dominant strands of feminism consciously chose to focus on women’s health and privacy rather than women’s sexual freedom, which likewise allowed for more realistic and pragmatic goals and victories in the political climate of the time.⁷ The SFL indeed provided space for increased sexual freedom, in a certain sense, and aligned with those women’s voices that reflected concerns about the equally more palatable values of liberal individuality, the private sphere, and white female sexuality in relation to sexual object choice (i.e. liberation simply by choosing one or more partners of one or more genders within the relatively private space of the SFL). Focus on these matters sharpened the elitist tendencies already present in the movement, since, as discussed earlier, these were particularly racialized and class-based issues.⁸

As I have begun to demonstrate, the values and ideas found in these primary sources, as well as the political time period they represent, speak to a break between sexual object choice and gender non-conformity. Gender non-conformity is any embodiment of non-typical gender expectations; this can involve behavior, roles in relationship to other people, clothing and physical presentation, mannerisms, identification, etc. Today we often name complete gender non-conformity *trans*. Similarly, none of the 1970’s voices or spaces described so far place sexual object choice and gender non-conformity in the same arena, but rather, work hard to

⁶ Letter, Dan Brown to Florida Citrus Commission, April 29 1977, Box 1, Series 1, Folder 8, Sexual Freedom League Collection, Kinsey Institute, Indiana University.

⁷ Valentine, David, *Imagining Transgender: An Ethnography of a Category* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 56.

⁸ *Ibid.*

separate them. By this decade, spaces for and emphasis on gender non-conformity had shifted towards space for and emphasis on sexual object choice. That is, especially in the 1950's and 60's, but even before that, resistance to hegemonic and oppressive social institutions regarding gender and sexuality in fact did emphasize and make space for gender non-conformity as a marker of dissent. In other words, there was a close link – expressed in a multiplicity of ways – between gender non-conformity and subversion of normative experiences and identities of gender, race, and sexuality. This multiplicity of ways included personal gender expression and identification, as well as gender roles and stereotypes within relationships and social spaces. I will delve into these histories a little more in a moment. By the 1970's though, especially through specific social movements of the 1960's, this link was disintegrating, and sexual object choice became the dominant marker of dissent from some patriarchal social norms that still inscribed white gender normativity. This explains why we see the above comments by women who more concerned with their access to new and different sexual practices without particularly challenging gender roles or domestic patriarchal and white expectations of women. Although we may not often imagine that the SFL shared this fundamental assumption with (lesbian) cultural feminism, gay liberation, and the women's movement, I use each of these moments to highlight the emphasis on sexual object choice that was becoming dominant by the 1970's.

The feminist movement, in addition to concerning itself with more mainstream issues like those described above, also developed communities and ideas around the category lesbian. By the 1970's, radical cultural feminism had taken up lesbian as a dominantly political category meant to resist patriarchy more than to denote erotic desire. As such, choosing women instead of men as sexual objects became, in these circles, an (or the) act of resistance to patriarchal oppression.⁹ The political underpinnings of the category lesbian indeed perpetuated, by this decade, the dominance of white, middle-class, and gender normative demographics. However, this was not because a diversity of groups and subcultures did not exist; they very much did. Rather, many of these subcultures strongly embraced various kinds of gender non-conformity, like butch/femme dynamics that were more prevalent in working class and communities of color. These differences perpetuated and sharpened the racial and class-based divides within lesbian and lesbian-feminist

⁹ Valentine, *Imagining Transgender*, 46.

groups.¹⁰ Lesbians rejected non-gender normativity for explicitly white feminist reasons, doing so in a way that contributed to the mainstreaming of sexual object choice as the potential for subverting hegemonic heterosexism. This is one of many developments in the 1970's that allowed non gender-normativity and non-homonormative sexual deviance to become continually closely associated with racialized, lower class bodies more than with white, middle or upper-class bodies.

Gay liberation likewise emerged in the 1960's and into the 1970's as a movement to challenge the marginalization of homosexuality. By the 1970's, gay men dominated the movement and had established a strong culture around cruising, partying, and pleasure.¹¹ Access to these spaces often required a degree of economic choice generally only associated with the urban middle-class, and gay male subculture was soon indeed shaped by the fun and exotic activities and aesthetics of the city.¹² In addition to the more directly class-based essentials of this culture, the exoticization of non-white bodies informed much of the desire and sexuality associated with gay men. This furthered the increasingly exclusive racial make-up of gay liberation and gay male subculture during this time period.¹³ All this of course also revolved around the sexual object choice of other men, and in combination with the class and race markers of these communities, moved away from gender non-conformity; this was even the case as these circles were in many ways breaking from the heterosexual and monogamous aspects of white middle-class culture. This is again not to say that other communities and groups did not exist, though. Gay liberation stemmed from a history in which "self-named fairies, queens, fems, homosexuals, transvestites, and latterly, transsexuals" existed often together within implicitly and explicitly subversive spaces and used this language to describe themselves.¹⁴ Indeed, sexuality and gender non-conformity had existed at least side-by-side, if not in overlapping and inseparable ways. This is the case even, or perhaps especially, for identities that we might now understand as *trans*. The point is that a particular set of developments in the 1970's produced a movement and set of

¹⁰ Ibid.

Enke, Anne. *Finding the Movement: Sexuality, Contested Space, and Feminist Activism*. (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007.)

¹¹ Silverstein, Charles and Felice Picano, *The Joy of Gay Sex* (New York: William Morrow, 1977).

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Valentine, *Imagining Transgender*, 42.

communities that foregrounded sexual object choice and marginalized, or did not even register, gender non-conformity.

The important take-away from each of these strands of social and political developments in the 1970's is that, increasingly, they served to introduce and deepen the split between gender conformity and sexuality. The latter was almost solely about object(s) of desire, and thus perpetuated pre-existing conceptions of whiteness and racialization in the U.S. In the case of the women's movement, radical cultural feminism, and gay liberation, issues of sexuality were treated and lived as distinct from those of gender. Specifically, resistance to particular hegemonic ideas about sexuality had little connection to dissent from oppressive conceptions of the gender. The Sexual Freedom League arose out this context.

Indeed, the SFL was also dominantly concerned with sexual object choice because a space had now been opened for less fundamentally radical or racially aware—but still somewhat subversive—challenges to patriarchal and heteronormative structures. In other words, the SFL could situate itself within white middle-class circles and propagate liberation via (only) different sexual object choice. As such, the organization developed an interesting conception of “bisexuality” (read: sexual object choice) as that which, as written in a letter from the founder of the SFL, would “liberate the suppressed majority.”¹⁵ A newspaper article about the SFL further describes “swinging” as one of its main activities, which was the “practice of having intimate relations with a variety of partners other than one's spouse...in a short span of time.”¹⁶ The organization is labeled in the same article as a “secret middle-class organization.”¹⁷ These descriptions fall in line with those made by the women discussed earlier, as well as my analysis of the race and class-based circles the SFL's membership occupied. Swinging parties attracted heterosexual married couples and single people who were interested in expanding their sexual experiences beyond the monogamous, heterosexual bedroom.¹⁸ This seems to be the “suppressed majority,” which makes sense particularly in the context of certain patriarchal sexual expectations that women members sought to undo and the more liberatory experiences they desired.

¹⁵ Letter, Jefferson Clitlick to Paul Eberlie, Box 1, Series 1, Folder 3 (1971-1973), Sexual Freedom League Collection, Kinsey Institute, Indiana University.

¹⁶ *The Reader* (San Diego), August 1, 1997, Box 1, Series 1, Folder 8, Sexual Freedom League Collection, Kinsey Institute, Indiana University.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

Another SFL Newsletter contains statistics about how many people are bisexual and asks about interest in bisexuality and planning a bisexuality activity.¹⁹ It seems that, within the SFL, bisexuality became both a focus and potentially a means to an end, namely loosening the grasp of heteronormativity and restrictions on sexual object choice. Indeed, in this context bisexuality seemingly had nothing to do with gender non-conformity or even gender in a broader sense (gender roles, stereotypes, etc.). Rather, this category opened the door for freer sexual object choice. According to the SFL, this was the key to moving beyond the suppression experienced by what is dominantly imagined as the average American during this period—white, monogamous, gender normative middle-class and certainly not radicalized, as we might be more likely to associate with lesbian communities, cultural feminism, and gay liberation. Through this lens, bisexuality is a relatively simple (though not insignificant) question of sexual object choice that does little to raise more fundamental critiques about the structures of gender, race, and sexuality in which the target audience of the SFL, as well as so many others, were living.

Bisexuality in the context of the 1970's and the SFL is not uncomplicated, however. Primary sources also portray much more nuanced conceptions of gender, sexuality, and the relationship between the two. I have made an argument about gender non-conformity versus sexual object choice until now for two reasons: 1) the dominance of this shift in multiple social movements and contexts during or by the 1970's and thus 2) the seeming prevalence of similar thinking in some members and leaders of the SFL. Other people (their membership unknown) thought about and experienced bisexuality differently, however. The following quotations appear in few issues of the *Bi-Monthly Newsletter*, which was found in the SFL archive but is a publication seemingly external to the organization itself:

Although my point of view has expanded somewhat, the essence of what the article says is still intact. I would add to it now the importance of androgyny (i.e. being tender and touch, sensitive and successful, nurturing and strong) as qualities to support in both women and men, as sex positive and life affirming, whatever one's sexual self-definition. I present it here, 2 years later...²⁰

¹⁹ Newsletter, July 6, 1973, Box 1, Series 1, Folder 3, Sexual Freedom League Collection, Kinsey Institute, Indiana University.

²⁰ *The Bi Monthly Newsletter* (The Bisexual Center), March/April 1977, Box 3, Series 3, Folder 19, Sexual Freedom League Collection, Kinsey Institute, Indiana University.

Another side benefit of bisexuality is that it promotes androgyny. Sex roles will be more easily eliminated when women and men feel free to develop their own feminine and masculine sides mentally, emotionally, and physically.²¹

Bisexuality for these individuals connects fundamentally to androgyny, which itself upends the supposed division between gender and sexuality. Here, sexual object choice in fact has very much to do with gender (non-)conformity. Sex and relationships with both men and women results in new ideas, roles, and even identities regarding gender. To state the implications of these comments more sharply: sexuality and gender are not distinct categories or experiences but rather depend on and inform one another, as mental, emotional, and physical relationships and beings develop and change.

These ideas indeed have particular meanings for both men and women. A headline in a newspaper entitled “Bisexuals” explains that,

‘For John Platania bisexuality is more important as a sign of emotional and spiritual growth than as a physical ability.’ ... Women’s liberation has made it easier for Platania to relate to women....

Three young women who consider bisexuality and the women’s movement closely linked got together recently to talk about their experiences... ‘Among some radical feminists it’s embarrassing to admit that you’re bisexual rather than Lesbian.’²²

Sexuality in Platania’s experience marks and allows meaningful changes and understandings in his holistic being, although not in the sense that bisexuality is imbued with some sort of inherent essence. Rather, sexual experiences with two genders opens the door for personal growth, especially in terms of gender (as he now

²¹ *The Bi Monthly Newsletter* (The Bisexual Center), Jan/Feb 1977, Box 3, Series 3, Folder 19, Sexual Freedom League Collection, Kinsey Institute, Indiana University.

²² “Bisexuals,” Box 2, Series 3, Folder 1, Sexual Freedom League Collection, Kinsey Institute, Indiana University.

relates to women differently). Again, sexuality is associated with the emotional and spiritual aspects of this individual's being as well as his relationships. The women mentioned here, alternatively, speak specifically to the exclusionary nature of some radical feminists, whom I discussed earlier. Although they experience their (bi)sexuality as closely related to the women's movement, and thus implicitly connected to issues of gender, that particular feminism holds little space for them. They hint at a more nuanced experience of the relationship between gender and sexuality, although we do not know which particular aspects of the women's movement in particular they felt connected to.²³ Nevertheless, both these comments point to more complex experiences of the relationship between gender and sexuality.

Finally, an article, also external to the organization, about Kate Millet features a quote about her own relationship to bisexuality:

Millet said she has felt criticism from both straight and gay women, because bisexuality is thought of as being a 'cop-out.' 'I've had intimate and lasting relationship with a man for years, that I'm not going to just forget about because I also have wonderful, full relationships with women,' she said. She hates the whole 'nonsense' of categorizing...²⁴

This is particularly interesting given Millet's immensely influential role in the emergence of 1970's feminist critiques of patriarchy, which were radical and fundamental.²⁵ She, too, seems to experience gender more fluidly than, at the very least, the hardline lesbian feminists who rejected men or relationships with men

²³ This is noteworthy given my earlier discussion of the women's movement, whose priorities evolved over time. Some aspects and moments were more and others less concerned with gender (non)conformity, gender roles, privacy, domesticity, etc., as I described. It could be, in other words, that these women's connections to the women's movement were more exclusively concerned with sexual object choice, like women's freedom to have many partners without the double standard of slut-shaming, while it could also be that issues like reproductive rights, gender roles in the home, and access to the public sphere were of consequence to them. The degree to which their mention of the women's movement reveals a concern with gender non-conformity, broadly understood, is unclear.

²⁴ "West's Decadence Outranks East's for Kate Millet," *The Daily Californian*, (University of California: Berkley), March 16, 1973.

²⁵ Kate Millet wrote *Sexual Politics*, a seminal text in the feminist movement of this period that articulated patriarchy as a systemic mode of oppression that affects nearly every level and realm of society, and whose roots are both political and cultural. Millet was widely influential and in many ways seen as a symbol of feminism in the 60's and 70's.

because of their automatic and nonnegotiable connection to the violence of patriarchy. Millet, however, seems to occupy both spaces: she undoubtedly shares these harsh critiques of patriarchy, yet also feels strongly that drawing rigid boundaries along lines of gender and sexuality is, at best, not right for her and, at worst, unproductive and detrimental to the project of undoing heterosexist white supremacist patriarchy. This dual positionality comes with tension in the context of the 1970's, in which various political movements and social communities, as I have outlined, increasingly insist on the mutual exclusivity of subversion in terms of sexual object choice and resistance to white gender conformity.

The tensions of the 1970's resolved themselves to some degree by the following decade—and onward—as the split between sexual object choice and gender non-conformity, and its implications for conceptions of race, was solidified further. (For example, this allowed, among many other factors of course, transgender to emerge as a fixed identity category and object of study in the 1990's.) Nevertheless, in the mid-1970's a multiplicity of ideas about sexual object choice versus gender non-conformity seem not to have yet completely dismissed the possibilities of their entanglement. On the one hand, cultural feminism and gay liberation of the 1970's both had histories which very much lived in the interwoven connections between sexual object choice and gender non-conformity, and centered also around multi-racial and non-white communities. Ideas about bisexuality as we saw in some of primary sources about the 1970's relied on similarly more interconnected ways of thinking and being. On the other hand, dominant cultural feminism, gay liberation, the bisexuality of the SFL, and certain aspects of the women's movement seemed increasingly to think about gender non-conformity and sexual object choice as distinct, indeed, and gender and sexuality as entirely separable.

Thinking forward to our own moment suddenly seems a little clearer. Indeed, it is only in this historical context that our contemporary mainstream category *LGBT* makes sense, as tensions within these histories of gender and sexuality remain underlying: lesbian, gay, and bisexual are indeed distinct from transgender because gender non-conformity is now understood as a different non-overlapping identity and experience from that of sexual object choice.²⁶ Here and now, then, when I say

²⁶ I would like to acknowledge that *LGBT* is not the only acronym used both within and external to communities of minority identities of sexuality, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, and romantic identity or orientation. I am choosing to focus my discussion on this particular formulation of an acronym because I believe it is most dominantly used and because this set of letters/categories in particular elucidate the histories I am exploring here.

gender, I mean: “what is your gender identity, i.e., how do you feel internally and express yourself externally?” which is the only way gender non-conformity can be dominantly understood contemporarily. When I say *sexuality* I mean: “what is your sexual orientation, read, sexual object choice?” which is the only way that sexuality can be read dominantly today. The assumed commonality between *L*, *G*, *B*, and *T* as they are conceptualized currently is that all represent an innate identity. In other words, desire for a particular gender (sexual object choice) and internal gender identity (gender non-conformity) are both inherent, although disconnected. Nevertheless, I would like to suggest that *L*, *G*, and *B* belong with *T* in the same acronym and perceived social community precisely because the historical connections between conceptions of gender and sexuality are so strong and so interwoven.

During the 1970’s a dichotomy emerged between sexual object choice and gender non-conformity, evidenced through the bisexuality of the SFL, lesbian cultural feminism, and gay liberation, as well as those focusing more on an amalgamation of the two. In particular, new ideas about gender and sexuality in the 1970’s departed from particular notions of bisexuality and earlier experiences of gender and sexuality. I suggest that there are two important understandings to take away from this history of the Sexual Freedom League. These archives show us that neither of these distinct ways of understanding bisexuality in the 1970’s are particularly intelligible today: although bisexuality is often associated with experimentation in a delegitimizing way in today’s dominant narratives, bisexuality is nevertheless not seen as a means to an end for straight (monogamous) people in the same way as it was in the 1970’s, nor is bisexuality seen as an experience of fluid and evolving ideas, experiences, and identities concerning gender. This insight elucidates a broader understanding about the category *LGBT*. This acronym and the identities and communities it represents are in fact *not* natural or given, but rather come out of specific historical, ideological, and social developments that construct gender, race, and sexuality in particular ways. In the 1970’s, an interesting moment appears in which sexual object choice and gender non-conformity are driven apart, and at the same time people are holding on to conceptions of bisexuality and gender and sexuality which imagine the whole lot as fundamentally indistinguishable. I want to emphasize that the latter materials which offer more nuanced perceptions of bisexuality provide no clues about the racial identifications or perspectives of the

This is certainly not to dismiss the existence of *Q* (queer or questioning), *I* (intersex), or *A* (asexual), among other letters that are sometimes added to the acronym, nor to ignore the history of and discussions around *queer*.

speakers; I thus cannot speak to whether these particular circles of bisexuals or people experiencing bisexuality were or were not more racially aware and inclusive than the other strands of gender and sexual minorities during this time period that I have mentioned.

I ask a series of questions about what these nuanced connections mean for our present moment, especially with regard to political organizing around LGBT issues, because LGBT politics today does not always address the particular marginalization and violence that *B* and *T* face. To be clear, my purpose here is not to delegitimize any of the categories available to us through *L*, *G*, *B*, and *T*. My own sense of security and stability in relation to my identity lies squarely within this acronym. At the same time, my interest in this project comes from my recognition that *L*, *G*, *B*, and *T* not only mean distinct things, but that they are treated wildly differently in our society. This is particularly and most obviously the case with *B* and *T*. I believe that history can provide us clearer understandings of why this is the case, and, hopefully, what to do about it. Indeed, this story about the SFL speaks both directly and indirectly to the history of bisexuality (now dominantly conceptualized through sexual object choice) and transgender (now dominantly understood as gender non-conformity).

Broadly speaking, then, what does this history that intertwines gender and sexuality so complexly mean for our identities and our acronym today? Specifically, how does this help us understand the ways in which bisexuality is often erased and maligned and the way that transgender is often marginalized and delegitimized? How does this relate to the exclusionary basis, especially in terms of race and class, of many LGBT spaces? Why has a movement and field of study emerged around transgender but not bisexual? How might we allow these insights to inform our political organizing around the struggles and violence that people experience through these identities? Given this, what new and different narratives would we like to imagine around gender and sexuality? Do we want to imagine a kind of liberation in conceptions and experiences of gender and sexuality that are not automatically separable but rather fundamentally intertwined?

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