Borders of Belonging:
Situating Bisexual Communities in Toronto's Queer History, 1980s-2000s

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A Thesis
in the
Department of History

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Master of Arts (History) at
Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

July 2023

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CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY
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Abstract

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Scholarship on queer activism and communities has tended to focus mainly on gay and lesbian politics and organizations that began establishing themselves in the mid-twentieth century. As a result of the pervasiveness of the hetero/homosexual binary that insists upon a distinct separation between the gay and straight worlds, bisexual people and their historical contributions to the queer community have remained understudied, especially in a Canadian context. This thesis seeks to illuminate histories of bisexual activism and community organizing in Toronto from the 1980s to the 2000s, in the midst of and following the peak years of Canadian gay liberation. It demonstrates how widespread exclusion of bisexual people from the gay rights movement motivated activists to establish support, discussion and advocacy groups that sought to combat bisexual erasure within queer spaces and foster attitudes of pride within the city's queer community. Through oral history interviews with bisexual activists and other primary source records, it will become evident that bisexual community organizers in Toronto were concerned with creating safe, affirming spaces for bisexual people where their particular issues and experiences could be discussed, while also publicly engaging in educational advocacy that would enhance their visibility. This thesis directly addresses the lack of bisexual presence within the Canadian queer historical record, inviting historians to challenge still-pervasive binary notions of sexuality and expand ideas of who "belongs" and who might be excluded from dominant historical narratives.

Acknowledgments

I owe a massive thank you to Dr. Rachel Berger, who has been the most wonderful supervisor and mentor to me throughout my entire MA degree. She took on this project with such enthusiasm from day one and helped me shape it in ways that I am proud of, letting me tell the stories I wanted to tell while providing valuable feedback and suggestions along the way. Rachel, I cannot wait to keep working with you in the coming years. To Dr. Barbara Lorenzkowsi for readily agreeing to sit on my thesis defense committee and providing me with thoughtful feedback on my work. To Dr. Sarah Ghabrial, Dr. Max Bergholz and Dr. V.K. Preston, whose MA seminars pushed me to think and write about history in ways I never had before. I am truly grateful for the academic foundations you all helped me build throughout this degree. Thank you for inspiring me in various ways.

To Simone and Victor at the Archives gaies du Quebec for being impeccable guides through the intense and beautiful world of queer archives. To Daniel at The ArQuives in Toronto for always coming through with various scans of archival records when I needed them most.

To Sabrina for consistently checking in on me and always providing me with the motivation to keep going. To Liana for always getting excited about my thesis updates and cheering me on.

To my graduate school cohort who have been incredible pillars of support and friendship throughout this experience: Mark, Mustafa, Ellie, Devyn, Grace, Gab, Nia, Liam and Amanda. You are all truly wonderful and some of the most intelligent and interesting people I've ever met. I'm going to miss all of our chats in the grad lounge and McKibbin's. To Sarah for giving me the opportunity to attend my first bi brunch. I am so excited to see what you do next!

To my mom, Sabrina, dad, Gaby, and brothers, Justin and Gianluca. I feel your lifelong support in every single thing I do and wouldn't be here without you. To my mother-in-law Mindy for being my academic idol and making me feel like I can do anything I set my mind to.

To Aaron, the best life partner I could ever ask for. You gave me the courage to pursue this project from the outset when I was doubting taking a new research path. Your ever-enduring support and excitement about my work carried me through the process of researching and writing this thesis. Thank you for always seeing in me what I sometimes struggle to see in myself, and constantly making me cups of tea for long nights of writing at my desk. I love you tremendously.

Finally, to Dana, Margaret, Stephen, Jennifer, Krista, Leela, Lyn, K and Cheryl: this work would not have been even remotely possible without your enthusiasm and eagerness to share your stories with me. I hope I've done them the justice they deserve. I am humbled, inspired and grateful to have had the chance to speak to all of you, hear about your activism experiences and see them come together in this project. Thank you for the contributions you have all put into the development of bisexual community building in Toronto and across Ontario, and fostering much needed visibility and pride that can still be seen and felt today. I dedicate this work, above all, to every single one of you.

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Introduction: Where Are All the Bisexuals?

In November 2021, Google partnered with the visual content creation platform Polygraph to release a glossary of LGBTQIA2S+ terms compiled by queer researchers. The glossary was meant to be a resource for journalists that would encourage the use of inclusive language when writing about queer issues.[1] It included well-known terms such as "gay", "lesbian", "transgender" and "non-binary", as well as more niche ones such as "allosexual", "club kid" and "queerbaiting" amongst a multitude of others.[2] A term it did not include upon its initial release, however, was the term "bisexual." As a response to this omission, members of the bisexual community took to social media in the following days, keen to "point out that among the 100 words deemed worthy of defining, a certain key letter of the LGBTQIA2S+ acronym was glaringly missing."[3] Despite missing the mark on including the B in their extensive glossary, it would take days for Google to rectify this error and finally add the word "bisexual" to it.

While many advances have been made in recognizing the rights of gays and lesbians in recent decades, bisexuality is still often elided or ignored when discussing queer community issues collectively. Three years prior to the release of the aforementioned LGBTQIA2S+ glossary, Kirsten McLean would point out, as many other scholars of bisexuality have, that "[d]espite enormous gains in the recognition and acceptance of gay men and lesbian women, and to some extent, trans people, bisexual people have yet to achieve the same level of recognition and validation."[4] The historical record, as exemplified by Polygraph and Google's glossary, has

[1] "LGBTQIA+ Glossary," Polygraph, accessed May 14, 2023, https://lgbtq-language-project.uc.r.appspot.com/.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Mel Woods, "Bisexuals call out new Google LGBTQIA+ glossary for literally erasing them," *Xtra Magazine*, November 24, 2021, https://xtramagazine.com/power/identity/bisexual-erasure-google-213111.
[4] Kirsten McLean, "Bisexuality in Society," in *Bisexuality: theories, research, and recommendations for the invisible sexuality*, eds. D. Joye Swan and Shani Habibi (Cham: Springer, 2018), 77.

also often left the B out of queer scholarly consideration. Indeed, Steven Angelides, an affiliate of the Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society who has written extensively on the subject of bisexuality, has observed that histories of "homosexuality, and increasingly heterosexuality, abound. Yet bisexuality scarcely figures within the historiography of sexuality in general," though he acknowledges ongoing work on the study of topics such as bisexual theory and politics.[5] Despite the validity of Angelides' statement and the importance of his work in the field of bisexual history, he and many other researchers of bisexuality often focus on it as an epistemological category within sexuality studies.[6] These epistemological approaches tend to theorize the potential of bisexuality as a disruptive or destabilizing category of gendered and sexual experience that calls their heavily binarized structures into question. While this is an important and necessary research approach in sexuality scholarship, the study of bisexuality as a social driving force and lived experience throughout key moments of LGBTQ+ history, namely the gay rights movement in North America, has been left largely under-researched. What's more, analyses of the experiences of bisexual people within the pivotal decades of gay liberation activism in Canada from the 1970s to the early 2000s has not been undertaken at all.

To begin filling these research gaps, this thesis seeks to illuminate histories of bisexual-specific activism and community organizing in Toronto during this era. It will demonstrate how invisibility and exclusion from the gay liberation movement motivated bisexual people to establish support and advocacy groups that sought to combat erasure within queer spaces and foster attitudes of bisexual pride within the city's queer community. Underscoring this research are the following questions: What were the objectives of bisexual support and advocacy groups

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[5] Steven Angelides, "Historicizing (Bi)Sexuality: A Rejoinder for Gay/Lesbian Studies, Feminism, and Queer Theory," *Journal of Homosexuality* 52, no. 1-2 (2006): 127, https://doi.org/10.1300/J082v52n01_06.
[6] Ibid.

that were established in Toronto in the late twentieth century? How were these objectives, mainly geared towards increasing bisexual visibility and combatting exclusionary attitudes within the gay and lesbian community, accomplished? Finally, how did bisexual people in these groups situate themselves and build a unique community in the city's queer landscape? Through the use of archival records and oral history interviews with activists that formed the foundations of this research, it will become evident that bisexual community organizers in Toronto were concerned with creating safe, affirming spaces for bisexual people where their particular issues and experiences could be discussed, while also publicly engaging in educational advocacy that would highlight their visibility within gay and lesbian communities. For the purposes of this thesis, I will be analyzing bisexual erasure particularly within the context of the aforementioned gay and lesbian population, as bisexual people were mainly concerned with staking their place in the queer world rather than the heterosexual one. Indeed, while the idea that bisexual people retain some proximity to heterosexual privilege is pervasive, the activists interviewed for this thesis asserted that their lived experiences were unabashedly queer, publicly aligning themselves with causes for LGBTQ+ rights, liberation and community building rather than comfortably retreating into straight society. In this vein, my research will be prioritizing this positionality and framework of analysis.

The historical circumstances of bisexual exclusion from queer community affairs point primarily to negative views surrounding bisexuality that pervaded gay and lesbian spaces. In their article examining attitudes towards bisexual men and women, Tania Israel and Jonathan Mohr argued that these are "related to questioning the authenticity or existence of bisexual women and men […] based on the belief that bisexual individuals are really lesbian or gay

individuals who are in transition or in denial about their true sexual orientation."[7] Indeed, conducting a historical examination of the formation of organizations geared towards bisexual people reveals tensions within queer identity politics, inviting historians of LGBTQ+ life and activism to re-consider the "criteria" for membership within the larger queer community that has been heavily skewed towards gay and lesbian existence. As evidenced by the emergence of bisexual support and advocacy groups, queer experiences vary significantly, and further research on sexual diversity aids us in avoiding treating members of the LGBTQ+ community as a monolith. Moreover, the historical examination of bisexual-specific experiences in queer spaces reveals how marginalized people might encounter barriers to care, support and validation that access to community can provide, as well as how queer spaces often privilege certain experiences over others.

Finally, this research seeks not to define what bisexuality *is* beyond multigender sexual and romantic attraction that does not fit neatly into either homosexual or heterosexual experiences. Any attempt to pin down one or even a few concrete definitions will prove futile, as the vast amount of works on bisexual theory and scholarship have shown. How bisexuality differs from both homosexuality and heterosexuality is only important to keep in mind insofar as it is useful to understand why bisexual people, as belonging strictly to neither side of the hetero/homosexual divide, felt the need to form organizations focused on their issues that gay and lesbian ones did not address. To summarize, this thesis is an attempt to demonstrate how a shared axis of sexuality, despite one's individual experiences with it, has the power to bring people together and forge communities based on mutual care and support.

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[7] Tania Israel and Jonathan J. Mohr, "Attitudes Toward Bisexual Women and Men: Current Research, Future Directions," *Journal of Bisexuality* 4, no. 1-2 (2004): 121, https://doi.org/10.1300/J159v04n01_09.

Gay Liberation in Canada and Early Bisexual Organizing in the United States

Toronto has been selected for the geographic scope of this study due to the city's centrality within the Canadian gay liberation movement. Indeed, scholar Catherine Jean Nash has observed in her work on queer geographies and the rise of the gay liberation movement in Canada that, by the late 1960s, "the mainstream media in Toronto reported […] that certain residential and commercial spaces in the downtown core had such a significant gay presence that Toronto could be considered Canada's 'homosexual capital.'"[8] In order to fully contextualize the emergence of bisexual organizations in Toronto, it is necessary to highlight the political work of gay and lesbian activists who mobilized for liberation and human rights following an amendment made to the Canadian Criminal Code in August of 1969, which legalized "private sexual acts between two consenting adults (over the age of twenty-one)."[9] In an article on gay and lesbian political organizing, Canadian anthropologist Evelyn Kallen stated that, although the amendment did not mention homosexual acts specifically, "it clearly opened the door out of the closet for Canada's same-sex oriented persons. After this change in the Criminal Code, gay and lesbian organizations sprang up across Canada and their membership grew rapidly."[10] The first gay and lesbian group in Toronto, the University of Toronto Homophile Association (UTHA), was thus formed in 1969, following the amendment.[11] The student-led university group "began holding meetings, discussions, and set up information tables on campus. Growing out of these

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[8] Catherine Jean Nash, "Contesting Identity: Politics of gays and lesbians in Toronto in the 1970s," *Gender, Place & Culture* 12, no. 1 (2005): 116, https://doi.org/10.1080/09663690500083115.

[9] Evelyn Kallen, "Gay and Lesbian Rights Issues: A Comparative Analysis of Sydney, Australia and Toronto, Canada," *Human Rights Quarterly* 18, no. 1 (1996): 210, http://www.jstor.org/stable/762642.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Tom Warner, *Never Going Back: A History of Queer Activism in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 59.

developments was the Community Homophile Association of Toronto (CHAT), which focused on providing services for the growing gay and lesbian community beyond the university campus."[12] These included social assistance programs, as well as working to educate medical and legal professionals regarding the needs of the increasingly visible gay and lesbian population.[13] However, as the decade progressed into the 1970s, the era of the localized homophile association quickly evolved into a more radical national movement for gay liberation in Canada. In essence, the movement sought to ensure that gays and lesbians across the country would be legally protected against homophobic discrimination and harassment. Kallen stated that throughout the 1970s, there was the "development of an increasing number of political action groups that made extensive lobbying efforts to have 'sexual orientation' listed among the prohibited grounds for discrimination enumerated in human rights legislation throughout the country."[14] Canadian gay activist and author Tom Warner expands upon the aims of the gay rights movement by explaining that between 1970-1974:

> the new [movement's] ideology blossomed on several fronts: breaking through isolation and loneliness; rejecting the notions of sin, sickness, and criminality that previously defined homosexuality; fighting against oppression, discrimination, and harassment; asserting pride in same-sex sexuality as good and natural; engaging in aggressive public advocacy for social and legislative reform; and building both a community and culture based on commonly shared sexuality. Visibility and organizing became the objectives through which liberation would be attained.[15]

Elise Chenier also notes that in 1971, members of the group Toronto Gay Action (TGA) petitioned the Canadian federal government with a brief titled "We Demand" which called to end

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[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid., 59-60.
[14] Kallen, "Gay and Lesbian Rights," 210.
[15] Warner, *Never Going Back*, 61.

the forms of discrimination noted above by both Warner and Kallen, as well as demanding that "legal rights enjoyed by heterosexuals, such as economic benefits gained through marriage and adoption rights, be extended to homosexuals."[16] Thus, gays and lesbians were actively and visibly engaged in political activism on various fronts to ensure their rights to live freely from bigotry and harm imposed by conservative societal values that rejected homosexuality.

Gay and lesbian rights organizing was occurring simultaneously in the United States at this time following the famous Stonewall Riots in New York City in June of 1969, where police raided the Stonewall Inn, a gay bar in Greenwich Village. The night of the riots, patrons of the bar fought back against this targeted police harassment, igniting "a series of violent protests and street demonstrations […] These riots are widely credited with being the motivating force in the transformation of the gay political movement [in the United States]."[17] As a pivotal time in United States LGBTQ+ history, extensive scholarship has been published on the aftermath of the Stonewall Riots and the movement for gay and lesbian rights that spawned from them.

What is interesting about the United States, and what I am attempting to undertake with this work in a Canadian context, is that some study of bisexual organizations that formed following the Stonewall Riots has been attempted, mainly by the bisexual activists who were involved in them. Indeed, the documentation of what has been typically dubbed the "bisexual movement" has taken place entirely within a U.S. framework of analysis. The "U.S. bisexual movement's grassroots rose from the pioneering efforts of bisexual activists within the civil rights, the gay, women's and sexual liberation movements of the 60s/70s+. In the 70s/80s, feminist women and men forged bisexual political groups, organizations and a movement that

[16] Elise Chenier, "Liberating Marriage: Gay Liberation and Same-Sex Marriage in Early 1970s Canada," in *We Still Demand!: Redefining Resistance in Sex and Gender Struggles*, eds. Patrizia Gentile, Gary Kinsman and L. Pauline Rankin (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2017), 33.
[17] David Carter, *Stonewall: The Riots That Sparked the Gay Revolution* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2004), 1.

emerged nationally during the mid-late 1980s and early 1990s."[18] The first bisexual organization to be established in the U.S., the Bisexual Center, was founded in San Francisco in 1976 by a number of activists, and was "at the centre of the scene" in the Bay Area.[19] The Bisexual Center preceded bisexual organizations that were later set up in New York, Boston, Seattle and other major U.S. cities. Maggi Rubenstein, one of the founders of the Bisexual Center, stated in a panel discussion about bisexual histories in San Franciso: "Everywhere bi people went we got trashed. Rap groups, counselors, gay and lesbian groups didn't want us, straight groups didn't want us, there was no place for us to go. So that was what the Bisexual Center was about: social programs, great parties, great drag, lots of disco, but we also had rap groups, social programs, counselors, speakers' bureau, newsletter, just a wonderful organization."[20]

Scholars of sexuality have thoroughly emphasized the importance of support groups and organizations in LGBTQ+ activism history, as evidenced by Warner's work which outlined goals for community care that gay and lesbian groups had propelled forward from the 1970s onward. Indeed, social support organizations for queer people provide resources for community building and enable access to such community. For bisexual people, however, the entry path to queer community was often met with obstacles and rejection from gays and lesbians. In *A History of Bisexuality*, Steven Angelides observes that in the U.S.:

> The issue of 'nonhomosexuals' in the [gay liberation] movement came to a head over the purpose and dynamics of consciousness-raising groups. Designed to enable homosexual men and women to develop an awareness of the patterns of gay oppression, consciousness-raising groups

[18] Lani Ka'ahumanu and Loraine Hutchins, *Bi Any Other Name: Bisexual People Speak Out*, eds. Lani Ka'ahumanu and Loraine Hutchins (New York: Riverdale Avenue Books, 2015), 4.
[19] Andrea Sharon Dworkin, "Bisexual Histories in San Francisco in the 1970s and Early 1980s," *Journal of Bisexuality* 1, no. 1 (2001): 90, https://doi-org.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/10.1300/J159v01n01_07.
[20] Ibid., 95.

sought to foster this through the sharing of the common experiences of its members. Those without such personal experiences were seen to have nothing to offer the groups.[21]

Angelides goes on to quote a man named Steve Gavin who wrote a piece in New York's leading gay liberation magazine *Come Out* in 1971, wherein he stated that "straights and 'bisexuals' should never be admitted into a gay consciousness-raising group; otherwise, the whole procedure is a sham."[22] These prevalent attitudes would ultimately result, as evidenced by Rubenstein's narrative above, in a recalibration that encouraged bisexual people to come together in their own organizations. As it will be shown, the process was very similar for bisexual activists in Canada.

While lobbying and political organizing for gay rights would progress throughout the 1970s into the 1980s, shifts would occur across various fronts that would expose fractures within gay and lesbian communities, providing opportunities for bisexual people to begin establishing their own organizations. In Canada, the work of gay activist and sociologist Gary Kinsman confirms that a shift was indeed occurring in gay and lesbian politics from that of radical liberation to assimilation within heterosexual society throughout these decades. Writing on the subject of the emergence of the "neoliberal queer," Kinsman observes that while many gays and lesbians had previously built connections with other heavily policed populations, such as people living in poverty and sex workers in the 1970s, the 1980s saw an era where these solidarities would be abandoned "in pursuit of a politics of respectability."[23] The focus on respectability politics was therefore likely to be undermined by the increasingly visible bisexual population in gay and lesbian communities, as "bisexuals are viewed as intrinsically promiscuous […]

[21] Steven Angelides, *A History of Bisexuality* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), 125.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Gary Kinsman, "Queer Resistance and Regulation in the 1970s: From Liberation to Rights," in *We Still Demand!: Redefining Resistance in Sex and Gender Struggles*, eds. Patrizia Gentile, Gary Kinsman and L. Pauline Rankin (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2017), 149.

assimilationist gays will be loath to recognize them as political allies," rendering bisexuality antithetical to these ideals.[24]

Bisexuality as a sexual identity category was also problematic for securing gay and lesbian rights based on ideas of sexuality's biological essentialism. In her study on lesbian and bisexual politics, feminist sociologist Paula C. Rust observed that much of lesbian (and gay) rights organizing was based on an ethnic model provided by the civil rights movements in the United States. Using this model, lesbian activists "had to construct lesbianism as an essential characteristic that is unambiguous, immutable and voluntary."[25] Bisexuality would then prove to be problematic for essentialist ideas that had clearly demarcated the lines between homosexuality and heterosexuality, which were deemed "innate" by various sexologists. Indeed, as noted by Laura Erickson-Schroth and Jennifer Mitchell, "the figure of the bisexual is a threat to the existing infrastructure of sexuality that bases itself entirely upon a dominant heterosexual population and an oppositional homosexual one."[26]

Dismissing or ignoring bisexual possibilities within gay and lesbian activist circles, then, has been viewed by many scholars as an attempt to firmly uphold the hetero/homosexual binary as lines in the sand between the oppressed and their oppressors can be more easily drawn in this way; bisexuality renders these lines blurry. Indeed, in his poignant essay, "Denying Complexity: The Dismissal and Appropriation of Bisexuality in Queer, Lesbian, and Gay Theory," Christopher James attributes the erasure of bisexuality within queer communities to "what bisexual activists often refer to as monosexism or compulsory monosexuality […] the instrument

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[24] Kenji Yoshino, "The Epistemic Contract of Bisexual Erasure," *Stanford Law Review* 52, no. 2 (2000): 427, https://www.jstor.org/stable/1229482.
[25] Paula C. Rust, *Bisexuality and the Challenge to Lesbian Politics: Sex, Loyalty, and Revolution* (New York: New York University Press, 1995), 176.
[26] Laura Erickson-Schroth and Jennifer Mitchell, "Queering Queer Theory, or Why Bisexuality Matters," *Journal of Bisexuality* 9, no. 3-4 (2009): 302, https://doi.org/10.1080/15299710903316596.

by which the false, but nonetheless pervasive, dichotomy of homo/heterosexual definition is enforced."[27]

To be fair, silences surrounding bisexual presence in Canadian queer historiography can be attributed to other factors, such as the widespread assumption that bisexual experiences automatically equate to those of gays and lesbians. An examination of Warner's extensive study on the history of queer activism in Canda shows that he frequently references the larger queer community as lesbians, gays, *and* bisexuals; yet, he only explicitly documents the activities of gay and lesbian organizations. Indeed, in studies on queer history such as Warner's, "bisexuality is subsumed within lesbian and gay identities."[28] Thus, considering the formation of Toronto's bisexual organizations in their own right will allow queer Canadian historians to expand the historical record on activism, which has tended to ignore or flatten the complexities of the bisexual experience and the issues associated with it.

Theoretical Considerations and Methodological Approaches

Theoretical writings about bisexuality have often fallen under the umbrellas of poststructural, feminist, postmodern and queer modes of scholarly inquiry. Indeed, as feminist theorist Clare Hemmings has argued in her work *Bisexual Spaces: A Geography of Sexuality and Gender*, "without feminist poststructuralist perspectives, it is not possible to make sense of the peculiarities of bisexual social and political existence, since there are no finite sexual or social

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[27] Christopher James, "Denying Complexity: The Dismissal and Appropriation of Bisexuality in Queer, Lesbian, and Gay Theory," in *Queer Studies: A Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Anthology,* eds. Brett Beemyn and Mickey Eliason (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 220.
[28] Surya Monro, Sally Hines and Antony Osborne, "Is bisexuality invisible? A review of sexualities scholarship 1970-2015," *The Sociological Review* 65, no. 4 (2017): 668, https://doi.org/10.1177/0038026117695488.

practices that adhere to or inhere in a bisexual identity."[29] Bisexual scholars' relationship with queer theory in particular, however, has sometimes been fraught. On the one hand, "queer" as both an identifier and academic field of study has allowed for the conceptualization of non-heteronormative sexual and gendered expressions beyond "gay and lesbian," as well as addressing and challenging the limits of identity politics by "exceed[ing] any unifying definition."[30] Queer can, in a sense, be seen as a non-identity with endless possibilities that could constitute an existence or praxis that challenges the neat categorization of gender and sexuality into either/or.

On the other hand, some researchers of bisexuality have pointed out that despite its unsettling and destabilizing potential, the term "queer" is often used interchangeably with gay and/or lesbian, precluding serious considerations of other non-heterosexual experiences in both theory and practice.[31] Erickson-Schroth and Mitchell have rightly observed that the academic movement surrounding queer theory "has come to theorize only homosexual identity, mainly at the expense of other sexual possibilities. By focusing on the relationship between homosexuality and heterosexuality, queer theory has stopped short of addressing the structures of power that underlie our organization of sexuality – something bisexuality speaks to on a daily basis."[32] Indeed, a significant number of bisexual anthologies critiquing such omissions in queer theory were published throughout the 1990s, demonstrating that academics and activists studying bisexuality were working against the glaring B-shaped gap within it.

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[29] Clare Hemmings, *Bisexual Spaces: A Geography of Sexuality and Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 38.
[30] Angelides, *History of Bisexuality*, 164.
[31] Stacey Young, "Dichotomies and Displacement: Bisexuality in Queer Theory and Politics," in *Playing with Fire: Queer Politics, Queer Theories*, ed. Shane Phelan (New York: Routledge, 1997), 51.
[32] Erickson-Schroth and Jennifer Mitchell, "Queering Queer Theory," 312-313.

I would also argue that bisexual activism history is strongly configured within an intersecting framework of cultural and social history; it requires analyses of ideas and politics generated by bisexual people based on lived experience within both gay/lesbian communities and hegemonic heterosexual society. To gain a stronger understanding of these ideas and politics, I employ cultural memory through oral history data as a crucial component of this research. Indeed, "cultural memory is most forcefully transmitted through the individual voice and body – through the testimony of a witness […] [and] can best be understood at the juncture where the individual and the social come together."[33] As will be observed in the oral history interviews conducted for this project, bisexual activists were able to recall both their *individual* experiences in coming to terms with their sexuality and how they articulated those experiences *collectively* in a supportive group setting.

Moreover, these interviews will allow us to examine how bisexual people negotiated their identities in a queer landscape that they both participated and were also often denied a role in. As pointed out by Lynn Abrams, "facilitating a memory narrative is a way of accessing how that person constructs the self and how she or he places himself or herself within the social world."[34] The queer community was, and continues to be, a contested space for bisexual people. It will be shown that they often navigated queer social spaces in a myriad of ways amongst gays, lesbians and transgender people.

Throughout both writing and reading this work, then, it is imperative to keep the concept of agency at the forefront. By publicly choosing to name themselves "bisexual" and organizing communities in Toronto around that identity, activists delineated their experiences as something

[33] Marianne Hirsch and Valerie Smith, "Feminism and Cultural Memory: An Introduction," *Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 28, no. 1 (2002): 7, https://doi.org/10.1086/340890.
[34] Lynn Abrams, "Memory as both source and subject of study: The transformations of oral history," in *Writing the History of Memory*, eds. Stefan Berger and Bill Niven (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 90.

different than that of being gay, lesbian or even queer. Different, however, does not mean unrelated. In fact, it will become evident that bisexual people did not adhere to separatist ideologies, nor did they disavow being a part of the larger queer community. Nevertheless, activists' choice to openly adopt a bisexual label in an environment that was often hostile to such a term connoted the importance of its role in building social communities with a shared culture that they wished to have not only for others, but for themselves.

As oral history interviews with bisexual activists constitute a significant source base for this thesis, it must be emphasized that LGBTQ+ researchers have long used this method of data collection to document queer community histories. Indeed, historians of queer life often face obstacles in locating subjects in official historical records, as these tend to contain "silences and sometimes particular agendas in describing queer people as sinful, sick or criminal."[35] Collecting oral testimonies as evidence is also a queer method in and of itself that requires situating researchers alongside their subject participants, blurring lines of authority and placing agential subjects in collaborative conversation to shape the historical record.[36]

Importantly, Nan Alamilla Boyd has also pointed out that queer historians who have "found themselves lacking print sources […] turned to live historical actors for information about the recent past."[37] No secondary source accounts of bisexual activism history in Toronto exist yet, and printed archival resources are not always easy to access. Thus, centering activists' oral accounts remains critical in documenting this community's histories. A reference note included in the introduction to the anthology *Bodies of Evidence: The Practice of Queer Oral*

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[35] David A. Reichard, "Animating Ephemera through Oral History: Interpreting Visual Traces of California Gay College Student Organizing from the 1970s," *The Oral History Review* 39, no. 1 (2012): 38, https://www.jstor.org/stable/41440957.
[36] Colin Whitworth, "Bodies in dialogue: offering a model for queer oral history," *Text and Performance Quarterly* 41, no. 3-4 (2021): 224, https://doi.org/10.1080/10462937.2022.2038795.
[37] Nan Alamilla Boyd, "Who Is the Subject? Queer Theory Meets Oral History," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 17, no. 2 (2008): 177, http://www.jstor.org/stable/30114216.

History co-edited by Boyd and Horacio N. Roque Ramirez evidently sums up the gap in historical bisexual scholarship: "We also note a serious limitation in this anthology – and more generally – that the B in the acronym LGBT is left unexplored, not because we do not believe in bisexual practices and identities but because few narrators or researchers take up an exploration of bisexual practices or politics in this work."[38] Oral histories, however, need to also be contextualized alongside other primary source records in historical research. Indeed, "narrators' voices must […] be read as texts, open to interpretation, and their disclosures should be understood as part of a larger process of iteration" as an interviewee's retelling of their experiences "is always constructed around historically specific norms and meanings."[39]

Undertaking the practice of oral history also necessitates considering the role of memory and the body in historical research. Indeed, the process of remembering is an embodied experience facilitated by interactions between both the narrator and the researcher. In analyzing the overlaps between queer performance studies and oral history, Colin Whitworth writes: "Given a methodological predisposition of re-telling and re-performing, oral history – even in its precedent forms – has always held some investment in the body."[40] He further observes that oral history "acknowledges and encourages […] sometimes-undervalued expressions of epistemology – specifically the procurement of knowledge from embodied and lived experiences."[41] As interviews for this thesis were conducted over Zoom due to the distances between myself and the bisexual activists who participated, this created a different set of circumstances than those typically expected in the oral history interview process. Nevertheless, being able to speak in the

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[38] Nan Alamilla Boyd and Horacio N. Roque Ramirez, *Bodies of Evidence: The Practice of Queer Oral History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 18. See footnote 2.
[39] Boyd, "Who Is the Subject?", 179-180.
[40] Whitworth, "Bodies in dialogue," 222.
[41] Ibid., 223.

comfort of one's home or office fostered a level of intimacy and physical comfort that allowed narrators to open up and interact with their memories in different ways. In some cases, narrators would go off camera to see if they still had ephemera or materials related to the stories they were recalling, such as conference documents, publications or event advertisements. Being able to hold and look at such items during the interview added another layer of embodied remembering and nostalgia, especially if they had previously forgotten that they had them.

Finally, I must also reflect on how my role as the interviewer contributed to the subjectivity of the practice of oral history and inevitably influenced the process of gaining historical perspectives on bisexual activism and community histories in Toronto. I asked pre-selected questions going into the interviews and I recognize that having asked a different set of questions, or following up on different statements from my narrators may have yielded different stories that would shape this thesis. In addition to my own questions, I ensured that the narrators were given the opportunity to tell me about things that they personally felt were important to their activism. Aside from providing an open-ended final question in which I asked them to share any additional thoughts, I encouraged all of them at the beginning of each interview to comment on anything that came to mind throughout, even if it was not in direct response to my guiding questions.[42] In doing so, I hoped to gain insight into what they remembered as being important, how they related certain events to each other, and what parts of their activism remained in their memory decades later, beyond what I felt was important for my own research. This approach to my interviews reflects Alessandro Portelli's statement that the "historian's agenda must meet the agenda of the narrator; what the historian wishes to know may not necessarily coincide with

[42] See appendix for the guiding questions used in the oral history interviews with bisexual activists.

what the narrator wishes to tell."[43] In reflecting on this process in this way, I hoped to create an environment that encouraged collaboration and openness with the activists interviewed, respecting which stories they wanted to share.

Affective Activism

The previous section outlined the importance of oral history for this project, and how it places narrators' lived experiences front and center in research. With a focus on the body "as a site of knowing in the data collection process," I argue that the field of affect studies is also applicable in conceptualizing the driving forces of queer, and in this case bisexual, activism and community building.[44] Cultural theorists Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth wrote in their introduction to *The Affect Theory Reader*: "Affect marks a body's *belonging* to a world of encounters or; a world's belonging to a body of encounters but also, in *non-belonging*."[45] They also write about the bodily potentials of affect and ask: "How does a body, marked in its duration by these various encounters with mixed forces, come to shift its affections (its being affected) into action (capacity to affect)?"[46]

So, what *can* bisexual bodies do when various social forces are enacted upon them? Queer feminist philosopher Sara Ahmed's work on queer phenomenology, space and the concept of "orientation" is particularly relevant when considering this question. Ahmed suggests that "phenomenology reminds us that spaces are not exterior to bodies; instead, spaces are like a

[43] Alessandro Portelli, "A Dialogical Relationship. An Approach to Oral History," Conference paper (1985): 1, link to article.
[44] Whitworth, "Bodies in dialogue," 223.
[45] Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg, "An Inventory of Shimmers," in *The Affect Theory Reader* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 2.
[46] Ibid.

second skin that unfolds in the folds of the body."[47] Thus, I would like to examine how bisexual people inhabited and were oriented within queer spaces in this thesis. It is important to note that these ways of inhabitation vary for those who experience social marginalization compounded by race, class or gender, in addition to being bisexual. It will be shown that transgender and racialized women in particular navigated bisexual activist spaces in ways that were different from male, white and non-transgender bodies. Still, as perpetual outsiders in gay, lesbian and heterosexual spaces, bisexual bodies often experience disorientation, of "encountering the world differently."[48] Subsequently, they often have to reorient themselves – either in the above-mentioned spaces or towards new ones, towards each other. Indeed, as put aptly by Ahmed, "orientations towards sexual objects affect other things that we do, such that different orientations, different ways of directing one's desire, means inhabiting different worlds."[49]

Orientation and affect, then, are useful concepts for understanding how bisexual people have historically situated themselves, moving into spaces and towards objects that affected them in positive ways. For Ahmed, these objects can be "anything that we imagine might lead us to happiness, including objects in the sense of values, practices, and styles, as well as aspirations."[50] Support and advocacy groups built around shared experiences can then be construed as objects towards which bisexual people affected by feelings of alienation or exclusion from gay, lesbian or heterosexual life might orient themselves towards. As Jessa Lingel states in her analysis of bisexual passing and its effects on identity, when lacking a "coherent space from which to manifest a bisexual community, acts of professing to be attracted to men and women can be

[47] Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 9.
[48] Ibid., 68.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Sara Ahmed, "Happy Objects," in *The Affect Theory Reader* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 41.

emotionally fraught ones. Feelings of alienation can be profound, an assault of emotional homelessness waged on multiple fronts."[51]

A distinct sense of being recognized and affirmed as bisexual would then be a positive affect generated by being part of such communities. Indeed, this type of affect can be defined as "the corporeal instantiation of recognition, the sensations one may feel in being recognized, which accumulate over time, fostering a sense of self-worth. Moments of recognition, therefore, function as affective force…"[52] In this case, I suggest that the affective experience of exclusion and invalidation within queer spaces were motivating factors for bisexual activists to collectivize and form support groups in Toronto; thus, they translated into social action. "Space," writes Ahmed, "acquires direction through how bodies inhabit it, just as bodies acquire direction in this inhabitance."[53] In these spaces, bisexual bodies were affected and directed towards consciousness-raising that would promote visibility and, subsequently, validation of their experiences.

As this project entails the creation of an oral history archive imbued with various affects, we must also consider Ann Cvetkovich's concept of the archive of feelings. In her seminal work, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*, Cvetkovich delves into the subject of queer affect and feelings within a framework of lesbian activism and public cultures related to trauma. Using documentary sources and first-hand accounts from lesbians regarding their public and private lives, Cvetkovich ties connections between traumatic experiences and how the affects associated with them permeate facets of lesbian existence in a

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[51] Jessa Lingel, "Adjusting the Borders: Bisexual Passing and Queer Theory," *Journal of Bisexuality* 9, no. 3-4 (2009): 386.
[52] Megan Watkins, "Desiring Recognition, Accumulating Affect," in *The Affect Theory Reader* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 273.
[53] Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 12.

variety of ways. This makes up the aforementioned archive of feelings, "the many forms of love, rage, intimacy, grief, shame, and more that are part of the vibrancy of queer cultures."[54] To separate affect and feelings from queer life, and activism in particular, would then be disregarding a major driving component of its existence and how activists relate to one another in these charged environments.

It is also important to emphasize that affect and feelings are not only a major factor in histories of queer organizing and social movements, but also in the collection of historical data. To briefly return to oral history, conducting interviews with bisexual activists proved to be an inherently affective mode of research in addition to expanding the queer historical archive. Indeed, the process of memory sharing remains charged with emotion as the "turn to memory is also a turn to the affective or felt experience of history as central to the construction of public cultures, to give a range of people the authority to represent historical experience…"[55]

Oral histories in particular, according to Cvetkovich, highlight "feelings of belonging and vulnerability that are fundamental to political organizing."[56] Indeed, affect needs to be considered within every aspect of these oral testimonies as "without attention to affect […] it's a real struggle to articulate and explain the way that oppression registers at small scales – in everyday interactions, in gesture, tone of voice, etc."[57] In giving due attention to the dynamics of affect and feelings in bisexual activist histories, we can glean a more complete picture of the role that they play in the construction of a bisexual culture through support groups and activities in

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[54] Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 7.
[55] Ibid., 37.
[56] Ibid., 203.
[57] Sarah E. Chinn, "Queer Feelings/Feeling Queer: A Conversation with Heather Love about Politics, Teaching, and the 'Dark, Tender Thrills' of Affect," *Transformations* 22, no. 2 (Winter 2012): 126, https://hcommons.org/deposits/item/hc:17379/.

Toronto such as Pride celebrations, educational activities, and events focused on bringing members of the community together.

This thesis will be divided into two chapters. The first chapter examines bisexual activism in Toronto in the 1980s, with the establishment of the first bisexual women's group in all of Canada, and followed thereafter by a mixed gender bisexual group at the end of the decade. These early organizations undertook various educational endeavours highlighting the existence and experiences of bisexual people within the gay and lesbian community. It will be shown that, in addition to providing access to safe spaces, bisexual activists in these early groups prioritized promoting visibility at collective queer community events and within public spaces in Toronto. The second chapter focuses on bisexual activism from the 1990s to the early 2000s and engages with bisexual feminist scholarship to highlight the gendered aspect of bisexual experience. The 1990s saw the formation of another bisexual women's group and prompts us to consider how bisexual women negotiated their identities in both queer women's and mixed gender bisexual spaces. Moreover, the chapter provides insight into continued activist work promoting visibility and inclusivity for the bisexual population in Toronto which built on efforts from the previous decade.

Chapter 1: A Growing Bisexual Movement in Toronto: Bykes and the Ontario Bisexual Network, 1980s-1990s

"[…] in some of the early years, say at something like Pride, there would be people that would come by and either question our right to be there or do something like thumbing their noses or making faces or giving middle fingers from a distance."

-Stephen Harvey, Ontario/Toronto Bisexual Network

In a 1972 issue of *The Body Politic*, Canada's leading Toronto-based magazine for gay liberation news, Hugh Brewster published an article titled "The Myth of the New Homosexual." Brewster's work responded to another article written by a Tom Burke in *Esquire* which argued that "just when Middle America finally discovered the homosexual he died", implying that the gay man was evolving into something new and unrecognizable to his community.[58] Brewster responded to Burke by debunking this perceived myth, as well as many others that he saw as being tied to the "new homosexual." One of these "myths" was that homosexuality was being undermined by an increase of bisexual behaviour within the gay community. Under a subheading in his article titled "Bi's Are Groovier" – the myth to be tackled – Brewster wrote:

> the new homosexual does not hate women, he may *even* be bisexual […] Yet too often the word 'bisexual' is employed as a great euphemism for 'homosexual' by those whose relationships with the opposite sex have extended no further than high-school necking parties or other brief unhappy encounters. Under this fashionable liberal label, they can avoid the stigma of 'gayness' and put off the often-agonizing reappraisal of fully coming out. If we wish to create a sense of gay community, we must rid ourselves of these euphemisms.[59]

[58] Hugh Brewster, "The Myth of the New Homosexual," *The Body Politic*, May/June 1972, 3.
[59] Ibid.

Sentiments about bisexuality being a cover for "true" homosexuality or somehow tainting the possibilities for fostering strong ties between the gay community were maintained by a significant number of gay men and lesbians during this time. It seems that where bisexuality's validity was not entirely derided or dismissed in the gay community, as per Brewster's article, it was largely ignored. By the time *The Body Politic* entered its last era of publication in the late 1980s, bisexuality and bisexual issues were hardly ever given due attention in the magazine, aside from bisexuals' own self-identifications within the classified ads. In those ads, some would write to find roommates, friends and sexual or romantic partners. The term "bisexual" would also be used as an add-on to the gay male community within news article reporting on the severity of the HIV/AIDS crisis that began in the early 1980s. However, it is obvious that the targeted imagined community for the magazine was primarily gays and lesbians until its final issue was released in 1987, only a few years after bisexual groups began organizing more concretely across Canada.[60]

The proliferation of the concept of "bisexual chic," the implications of which could be seen in Brewster's article above, was complex. Indeed, when considering its relationality to both gay liberation and lesbian feminism, we can observe that within the "post-1960s lens of the gay/lesbian and women's liberation movements […] bi was problematically portrayed as the idealistic 'best of both worlds,' as well as threateningly 'faithful to neither world' [of homo/heterosexuality]."[61] Despite its absence within gay media, bisexuality was nevertheless afforded some attention in mainstream newspapers as the century began to draw to a close, signifying its ambiguous place within the homo/heterosexual binary. Toronto-based publications,

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[60] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso Books, 2016), 35-36.

[61] Linda D. Wayne, "Bisexuality and Agency," *Transformations: The Journal of Inclusive Scholarship and Pedagogy* 13, no. 2 (2002): 110, http://www.jstor.org/stable/43505829.

such as *The Globe and Mail*, *Toronto Star*, and other newspapers across Ontario, provided some opportunities to discuss bisexuality more openly within the mainstream press that imbued it with a certain level of acceptability. However, bisexuality's supposed trendiness effectively depoliticized it during a time when gay liberationists were engaged in activism surrounding the decriminalization of homosexual behaviours and fighting for their rights in Canada. That bisexuality was regarded as a phase for curious heterosexual people to dabble in without necessarily committing to the cause of gay liberation within the mainstream media was, in my view, a driving factor as to why bisexuals were made to feel unwelcome within the movement.

These ideas, unfortunate as they were, were not necessarily unfounded. In her extensive study on the social pervasiveness of bisexuality *Vice Versa: Bisexuality and the Eroticism of Everyday Life*, Marjorie Garber observes that within the counterculture movements of the 1970s "the ostensible objects were pleasure, freedom, and the breaking down of boundaries. Bisexuality and the drug culture promised the experiences of the borderline, the edge […] Bisexuality, and its uneasy sometime-synonym, androgyny, were signs of the times."[62] Steven Angelides notes the same, that for a "short period in the early 1970s bisexuality was seen to enjoy the status of radical chic among the cultural avant garde […] it was intimately bound up with the countercultural loosening of sexual mores and a blurring of gender distinctions in dress and behavior."[63] Given its popularity as a countercultural lifestyle that seemed detached from gay liberation's poignancy and urgency, it is no wonder that gays and lesbians were often distrustful of bisexual-identified people who began loudly and proudly proclaiming themselves within their activist communities. Jennifer Chambers, a feminist bisexual activist who founded Toronto's first bisexual women's group that will be discussed below, aptly stated that "the

[62] Marjorie Garber, *Vice Versa: Bisexuality and the Eroticism of Everyday Life* (New York: Touchstone, 1995), 20.
[63] Angelides, *History of Bisexuality*, 119.

reason the lesbian and gay community has such a strong sense of ingroup is because the outgroup is very scary and threatening to lesbians and gays. People have literally lost their lives so when bisexuals seem to them to be unclear which side we're on, then they're leery."[64]

The Canadian mainstream media's sporadic reporting on the "bisexual lifestyle" did not cease as the twentieth century came to its end. In 1995, *The Ottawa Citizen* released a news article on the subject titled "Gen X members embrace new era of bisexual chic." According to its author, Trip Gabriel, one the main factors for the re-ascendance of bisexuality in the mid-1990s was a growing acceptance of it as a valid sexual orientation by the younger generation; yet, its supposed validity was overshadowed by Gabriel's questionable use of the term "chic." This use of language classified bisexuality as something fashionable rather than a legitimate sexual orientation that had, by this time, established its own radical queer politics. "In cities such as Boston and San Francisco," Gabriel wrote, "young people are creating the first open bisexual communities, modelled on the culture of urban gay men and lesbians. Bisexuals have attracted a surge of scholarly interest and, after grudging resistance, a place at the table of the gay rights movement."[65]

At the time of this article's publication, however, these bisexual groups in the United States had already been well-established, with San Franciso's Bisexual Centre having been founded in 1976 and the Boston Bisexual Women's Network in 1983, one which remains a prominent feminist bisexual organization even today.[66] It is unclear if Gabriel was merely misinformed about the timeline of the earlier United States bisexual groups or unaware of their

[64] Jennifer Chambers, in interview with the author, May 6, 2022.
[65] Trip Gabriel, "Gen X members embrace new era of bisexual chic," *The Ottawa Citizen*, June 18, 1995, link to article.
[66] "San Francisco's Bisexual Center and the Emergence of a Bisexual Movement," Bay Area Bi+ and Pan Network, accessed March 15, 2023, https://www.babpn.org/sfbc.html.

existence prior to the 1990s. Nevertheless, this reporting certainly demonstrates the lack of nuanced discussion and acknowledgement of bisexual activism both by the gay press, which was more insular, and the national media.

The news coverage of "bisexual chic" and the supposed novelty of bisexual presence within the gay liberation movement was prominent toward the end of the twentieth century. When one looks closely, it seems that what Gabriel had dubbed bisexual chic was actually bisexuality garnering more visibility and general acceptability through organizing efforts by bisexual activists. Further, the poignancy of the HIV/AIDS crisis necessitated increased visibility and recognition of bisexuality as it "[had] been blamed for a number of social ills ranging [such as] the spread of the AIDS virus in the 1980s-90s."[67] Gabriel observed in his article that in the 1980s, "the term 'bisexual' came into much broader use because of concerns bisexuals would be a conduit for the spread of AIDS to heterosexuals. Some bisexuals who felt they were being made scapegoats turned to political organizing."[68] He is not the only reporter to have related the growth of bisexual visibility back to the HIV/AIDS crisis. Salem Alaton wrote, in a 1993 issue of *The Globe and Mail*, that bisexuals "started forming groups in the last five years in part because of the accusations concerning AIDS; their standard response is that the issue isn't orientation but the practice of safe sex."[69]

Unfortunately, neither Gabriel nor Alaton covered bisexual support groups and advocacy efforts within Canada specifically in their articles. Nonetheless, underscoring public media discourses around bisexuality and its association with HIV/AIDS is pertinent for understanding some of the main foundations of bisexual activism related to sexual health education. Indeed,

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[67] Wayne, "Bisexuality," 110.
[68] Gabriel, "Bisexual chic."
[69] Salem Alaton, "BISEX What some view as panoramic promiscuity and others call polymorphous perversity seeks its rightful place on the sexual spectrum," *The Globe and Mail*, June 26, 1993, link to article.

writing about the development of the U.S. bisexual movement in the 1980s and 1990s, Paula C. Rust has observed that "heterosexuals and epidemiologists began to fear that bisexuals would be the gateway through which AIDS would spread from the gay population to the heterosexual population. Ironically, the ensuing condemnation of bisexuality helped created bisexuality as a recognizable form of sexuality and is in large part responsible for the rapid growth of the bisexual movement in the late 1980s."[70] Rust then goes on to state that, in the midst of the mainstream and gay media coverage on bisexuality and AIDS, "most bisexuals [were] practicing safer sex and, along with gays and lesbians, [were] taking the lead in educating others about AIDS."[71] Thus, highlighting the motivations for bisexual activism in the context of HIV/AIDS requires prioritizing the educational and community care aspects of the epidemic, aligning bisexuals' experiences with those of gays and lesbians who were also embroiled in the fight against it.

In sum, national news coverage of "bisexual chic" in both gay and mainstream media lent credence to viewing bisexuality as a "transitional phenomena some individuals experience as they proceed toward permanent monosexual lesbian and gay [or heterosexual] identities."[72] Meanwhile, drawing connections between bisexuality and the spread of HIV/AIDS served to promote a much more sinister narrative that bisexuals would bring the disease into the heterosexual world; and the gay press, particularly *The Body Politic*, would only tack on the word "bisexual" to headlines which discussed the status of the epidemic without noting any other stories related to bisexual people and their issues. All of these narratives served to create a public discourse about bisexuality towards the end of the twentieth century that bisexual people

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[70] Rust, *Bisexuality and the Challenge to Lesbian Politics*, 243.
[71] Ibid., 244.
[72] Ronald C. Fox, "Bisexual Identities," in *Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Identities over the Lifespan: Psychological Perspectives*, eds. Anthony R. D'Augelli and Charlotte Patterson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 52.

themselves effectively lacked input in. Thus, bisexual activists in many cities, and in our case Toronto, would engage in various types of advocacy and outreach that would attempt to debunk these ideas while also building a community in which they could connect with each other.

With such discourses surrounding bisexuality and its place in the queer movement as of the 1970s, bisexual activists sought to publicly combat negative stigmas and provide spaces for themselves and others to gather free of judgement. The tenets of bisexual activism in Toronto thus stemmed from three main branches: one, to provide a supportive space for anyone who was questioning their sexuality or identified as bisexual and felt isolated within the gay community; two, to continue working with gay and lesbian activists on issues of shared oppression on the basis of heterosexism, such as the illegality of homosexual activity, bans on same-sex marriage and government inaction regarding the destructive spread of HIV/AIDS; and finally, engaging in education and advocacy that encouraged thinking beyond the homo/heterosexual binary to account for bisexual-specific experiences and concerns.

This activism formally began in 1983 when Bykes, the first bisexual support and discussion group in Toronto and all of Canada, was founded by Jennifer Chambers.[73] Prior to starting the group, Jennifer had actually been actively involved in a lesbian discussion group based at the University of Toronto, where she was one of the only openly bisexual members. She was also involved with the university's sexual education centre and personally "went to all sorts of lesbian events and lesbian bars and lesbian dances and coming out groups" where she encountered many closeted bisexual women, alerting her to the anxieties and fears many women were experiencing surrounding coming out as bisexual.[74] Jennifer recalled that, on many

[73] Another bisexual activist stated that Bykes was started in 1984 while Jennifer stated that it was "*around* '83." Bykes might have therefore been formed either in 1983 or 1984.
[74] Chambers, interview.

occasions, when she would say she was bisexual in these lesbian-centered settings, “there’d almost inevitably be at least one person” who would approach her afterwards and say that they were bisexual too but to not tell anyone else.[75] “There were a lot of people who were scared,” Jennifer recalled, presumably of being excluded or judged within these spaces.[76] She eventually took over running the U of T lesbian discussion group, which had been renamed to include the word “bisexual,” but stepped away when she began her graduate studies at York University. Nonetheless, the idea of starting a bisexual women’s group had remained in the back of her mind due to her many encounters with closeted bisexual women.[77]

Hosting a meeting at a sexuality conference about bisexuality turned out to be a pivotal point that finally led to the materialization of this group that she had been thinking about for some time. In our interview, she recalled that at a women’s sexuality conference around 1983:

> I had the group ‘Being Bisexual’ […] But there was one woman who came, was lesbian, she just came […] going like ‘why are you here, you’re traitors to lesbians, you don’t really love women’ and all this sort of thing […] this kind of went on for a while and finally, somebody else said ‘why are we putting up with this?’ […] So [the heckler] left and then we got into a great discussion and the strongest thing that came out of it was people wanted to keep talking but people had come from all over. So there was a few of us in Toronto so I said that I would start a bi group in Toronto.[78]

Although she had been open about her bisexuality in the lesbian circles she was heavily involved in prior to founding Bykes, Jennifer’s impetus to start the group was the experience of being taunted and shamed for her sexuality in that conference space. Sharing in that uncomfortable and alienating experience with a room full of other bisexual women was a profoundly negative

[75] Ibid.
[76] Ibid.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Ibid.

affective experience that moved them to continue seeking out support, validation and discussion amongst each other.

While the core aim of Bykes' existence was to allow bisexual women to get together and talk about their issues such as "[c]oming out in the straight or queer community and also socializing," discussing their lived experiences as bisexual women were most pertinent. Indeed, while straightforward in nature, these spaces to discuss bisexual experiences in an era where bisexuality was consistently elided within gay and lesbian circles were not to be taken for granted. Research has shown that bisexual support and advocacy groups are a crucial avenue for building strong communities and confidence of identity. In their article discussing the effects of discrimination on physical and mental health within a sample of 442 bisexual people, Doan Van et al. observed that "participants […] mentioned the need to find support through other individuals who had similar experiences, such as social support from LGBTQ and bisexual individuals or communities."[79] Accurately observed by the late Karol Steinhouse, a Toronto-based bisexual activist and health researcher: "Bisexual community building and political organizing have a profound impact on both individual and social well being. Moving out from the margins or total invisibility to the center brings potential for healing and empowerment."[80] Such support groups were – and still are – a valuable and necessary resource for bisexual people to be able to access for their well-being, as well as community development.

However, even with the help that she received from other women who were interested in having Bykes as a safe space for bisexual women in the city of Toronto, there were many

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[79] Emilie E. Doan Van et al., "Perceived Discrimination, Coping Mechanisms, and Effects on Health in Bisexual and Other Non-Monosexual Adults," *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 48, no. 1 (2019): 166, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-018-1254-z.
[80] Karol Steinhouse, "Bisexual Women: Considerations of Race, Social Justice and Community Building," *Journal of Progressive Human Services* 12, no. 2 (2001): 17, https://doi.org/10.1300/J059v12n02_02.

challenges that Jennifer faced in establishing the group. One of those challenges was finding an actual physical space that would be secure to attend meetings in. Bykes members had originally set up the discussion space in some of their homes but, after receiving "all sorts of hate calls […] from religious people" who had seen an ad for the group in Toronto's NOW Magazine, decided that they "needed a public space both for people to come to more easily and also so [they] didn't expose [themselves] to risk."[81] The 519 Church Street Community Centre located in Toronto's Gay Village was the obvious choice, as it was the primary space where gay and lesbian groups met and held events. Bykes group members, however, had to "do some advocating, for the fact that it was a lesbian and gay oriented centre and [they] were bi."[82] Jennifer made the case that it was intended to be a safe space for *all* people attracted to members of the same sex, even if not exclusively gay or lesbian, and the women were eventually granted a slot to hold their meetings at the 519.[83]

The precarity of this often contested bisexual presence within collective queer community spaces has long been a subject of keen interest and discussion amongst scholars and activists. In *Bisexual Spaces*, Clare Hemmings argued that "bisexual subjectivity is historically and culturally formed almost exclusively in lesbian, gay, or straight spaces. The minimal bisexual spaces that do exist – such as bisexual conference spaces and support groups – are recent, often temporary, and do not always feed into a larger bisexual community."[84] As seen with Jennifer's experiences advocating for space for Bykes at the 519, this bisexual meeting space was indeed temporary, nestled within a physical area that was specifically targeted towards the gay and lesbian community; once the bisexual women of Bykes left the community centre, it

[81] Chambers, interview.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Hemmings, *Bisexual Spaces*, 42.

was once again returned to its original form as a solely gay and lesbian institution. Allowing for bisexual possibility in communal gay and lesbian spaces, in addition to creating bisexual-specific ones, was therefore a sticking point for activists during this time.

In the same vein, increasing bisexual visibility in Toronto's annual Pride parade was also at the top of Bykes' advocacy agenda. Jennifer remembered that one of the group's members had been involved in volunteering with the Toronto Pride parade committee around 1983-1984. This had actually resulted in more visibility for bisexual women at the event, as prior to this unknown person's contribution to Pride celebrations in the city, Jennifer recalls asking "if bis could march [in the parade] and they said no, for gays and lesbians only."[85] However, with a bisexual woman contributing as a committee volunteer that year, members of Bykes were allowed both to march in the parade and have a table for people to walk up to, which would potentially garner more interest for the group. Still, bisexual presence at Pride was treated with disdain that first year. Jennifer recalled that people would be walking down Church Street "then they'd do a big semi-circle around the [Bykes] table like [they] had a contagious disease."[86] Indeed, the concept of "pride" was not extended to the bisexual population as it had been to the gays and lesbians present at the event, except amongst each other.

With negative attitudes that still permeated much of the queer public opinion towards bisexual people, activists strove towards educational endeavours centred on bisexual experiences and issues. Jennifer herself took on many opportunities to publicly inform people about bisexuality at queer events. As "one of the only visible openly bi people around," she was often invited to speak on panels at sexuality conferences.[87] Prior to establishing Bykes and while

[85] Chambers, interview.
[86] Ibid.
[87] Ibid.

involved with the sexual education centre at the University of Toronto, Jennifer was a speaker on a panel for the university's Gay Awareness Week alongside a lesbian and gay man, each there to share their experiences and enlighten attendees on matters of their sexualities.[88] Some time after Bykes was founded, Jennifer was once again a speaker, this time on a bisexuality-specific panel, at a later edition of Gay Awareness Week. "[S]o many people wanted to attend," she recounted. "At first, they had to move to a larger room and then the room was packed, and people were standing out in the hall [...] So many people wanted to attend that panel. That was very cool."[89] In her view, the massive interest that the panel had garnered was a positive sign that bisexuality was perhaps becoming a more accepted orientation within the larger queer community in the mid to late 1980s.[90]

What we can observe within these first few years of bisexual activism is the establishment of what I would like to refer to as a "bisexual ethos" within the city of Toronto that was made manifest by Bykes. Although Bykes itself was a contained entity, in the sense that it was a bisexual women's-only space, it embodied an ethos similar to that of gay and lesbian activists who had been organizing politically and developing communities in the prior decade. In an essay titled "An Ethos of Gay and Lesbian Existence," political scientist Mark Blasius argues that "lesbian and gay existence should be conceived of as an ethos rather than as a sexual preference or orientation, as a lifestyle, or *primarily* in collectivist terms, as a subculture, or even as a community."[91] The main component of the ethos which Blasius observes as being at the heart of lesbian and gay existence is that of *coming out*. Essentially, it is "in the relationship that the individual creates with her- or himself and with others in this practice of the self that is called

[88] Ibid.
[89] Ibid.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Mark Blasius, *Sexual Identities, Queer Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 143.

coming out that an ethos emerges."[92] For Blasius, there is no gay or lesbian ethos without coming out as such; and coming out is both an internal and external process of self-realization and making one's identity known to others who share similar experiences, thus "breaking through the cold walls of isolation that separate us from one another."[93]

An ethos defined by coming out is a lens through which we can also examine bisexual community formation in Toronto. Indeed, coming out as bisexual is a complex dual experience wherein one has the capacity to stake a claim in both the heterosexual and gay/lesbian worlds, or neither. Therefore, those making their identity publicly known under a bisexual label put themselves "in a position where the different social settings of gay and straight worlds must be negotiated regularly."[94] We can expand Blasius' concept of a lesbian and gay ethos by extending it to bisexual people, where a *bisexual ethos* emerges, one which is highly influenced by these negotiations. In coming out, bisexual people can construct communities tied together by "a shared way of life through which [they] invent themselves, recognize each other, and establish a relationship to the culture in which they live."[95] Coming out also goes hand-in-hand with augmenting a community's public visibility, which then becomes part of the ethos. As we can see with the work that Jennifer did both individually and through her work with Bykes, bisexual visibility as part of the community's ethos is two-fold: becoming visible both in hegemonic heterosexual society, as well as within gay and lesbian communities.

Hemmings' work touches on the importance of visibility in a similar way to Blasius in her examination of controversies surrounding bisexual inclusion in Massachusetts' infamous

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[92] Ibid.

[93] Naomi Tucker, "What's in a Name?", in *Bi Any Other Name: Bisexual People Speak Out*, eds. Lani Ka'ahumanu and Loraine Hutchins (New York: Riverdale Avenue Books, 2015), 285.

[94] Amanda Udis-Kessler, "Challenging the Stereotypes," in *Bisexual Horizons: Politics, Histories, Lives*, eds. Sharon Rose, Cris Stevens et al. (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1996), 50.

[95] Blasius, *Sexual Identities*, 147.

Northampton Pride March of 1991. In Northampton, Massachusetts, there had been heated public debates in the queer community about whether or not to explicitly include bisexuals in what was then the annual Gay and Lesbian Pride March as of 1989. These debates had been stoked in large part due to Northampton's status as a lesbian haven in the state.[96] Hemmings acutely points out that the primary contention surrounding the name change to include bisexuals specifically "was that it reflected a move away from lesbian visibility and politics."[97] In other words, bisexual inclusion meant taking away from the centrality of lesbians in this community. Revisiting the controversy, Jessica Nathanson also noted that "Northampton illustrates two classic tensions of social movements: the struggle over the meaning of an identity/community that is both personal and political, and the consequent struggle over its ownership," especially at a time when bisexual visibility was becoming more prominent.[98] In this case, "ownership" of a community is crucial for maintaining visibility. Northampton lesbians' concerns about relinquishing their "territory", for lack of a better term, would then mean a loss of their community, pushing them to the margins and rendering them unseen.

We can then observe the stakes involved in cementing one's place in the queer community and what it means for visibility. Returning to the stakes for bisexual presence and inclusion in Northampton's Pride march, Hemmings commented further: "Visibility functions as a way both of creating and maintaining self and of obtaining external political validation. Community reflects the individual, and the individual can see herself reflected in both community and other similarly formed selves."[99] Visibility then, is also key to recognizing

[96] Hemmings, *Bisexual Spaces*, 53-54.
[97] Ibid., 67.
[98] Jessica Nathanson, "Pride and Politics: Revisiting the Northampton Pride March, 1989-1993," in *Bisexual Women in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Dawn Atkins (New York: Harrington Park Press, 2002), 156.
[99] Hemmings, *Bisexual Spaces,* 84.

differences between communities and their respective processes of forming and becoming themselves. Thus, the ethos of augmenting visibility through coming out would constitute the building of a more vast and concrete bisexual community which hinged on the *naming* of bisexuality in the face of erasure and claiming it as a unique community with its own boundaries and spaces.

Regarding community boundaries, the work of social anthropologist Anthony P. Cohen is particularly useful, especially in his study on the symbolic construction of communities and their boundary markers. Cohen argues that "the boundary encapsulates the identity of the community and, like the identity of an individual, is called into being by the exigencies of social interaction. Boundaries are marked because communities interact in some way or another with entities from which they are, or wish to be, distinguished."[100] He further states that "community is more than oratorial abstraction: it hinges crucially on consciousness. This consciousness of community is, then, encapsulated in perception of its boundaries, boundaries which are themselves largely constituted by people in interaction."[101] Interactions amongst bisexuals, gays and lesbians illuminate community boundaries that are drawn based on what are perceived to be significant differences in social experiences of homosexuality and bisexuality in a world dominated by heterosexuality. This points to the idea that these different experiences manifest different needs and, thus, require distinction. The boundaries of sexual minority communities were often muddied, however; bisexuals problematized the concept of the community boundary by retaining solidarity with gays and lesbians as fellow *queer* people oppressed by heteronormative ideals. Nevertheless, as gay and lesbian communities often remained reluctant to welcome bisexual people into their folds, bisexual activists would construct communities as a means through which

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[100] Anthony P. Cohen, *The Symbolic Construction of Community* (London: Routledge, 2001), 12.
[101] Ibid., 13.

others who felt excluded or isolated within a tightly bound landscape of gay, lesbian and straight spaces could orient themselves towards. Thus, amongst gay and lesbian liberation activists, bisexual activists would create an additional community boundary that was defined by bisexual-specific experiences.

The bisexual ethos of increasing visibility was carried into and further developed towards the end of the 1980s as another major bisexual support group would be founded, this time targeted at bisexual women and men alike. A few years after Bykes, the Ontario Bisexual Network (OBN) was created in 1988. Interestingly, the founding of this group was again spearheaded by Jennifer Chambers herself, as well as a male friend of hers.[102] Jennifer stated that, in addition to wanting to open up the community conversation to bisexual men's experiences, she had been in touch with a number of bisexual groups in Canada and North America and was interested in forming networks between them.[103] In the case of the OBN, the network would "enable contacts among bisexual people in Ontario" to spread news about "support group meetings at the 519 Community Centre in Toronto, social events, political action, production of educational material, […] a Newsletter, a mailing list, and sharing safer sexuality information."[104] Stephen Harvey, who was an active member of the group and remains involved even after its name change to the Toronto Bisexual Network (TBN), confirms that at its inception, the primary aim of the OBN was "growing to try to be two things. One, to be a provincial voice for bisexual issues and second to be a place for networking in a number of

[102] Chambers, interview.
[103] Ibid.
[104] Ontario Bisexual Network, "Application to the Lesbian and Gay Community Appeal for Funds to Expand the Ontario Bisexual Network Newsletter," November 18, 1994, The ArQuives online database.

cities."[105] These aims signify that the bisexual community across Ontario was growing in its membership towards the end of the 1980s.

While Toronto was a central hub for bisexual activism in the province, cities such as Kitchener-Waterloo, London, Hamilton and Peterborough were among those who were within the Ontario Bisexual Network's sphere.[106] Here, I would like to briefly highlight the bisexual support group in Kitchener-Waterloo founded by the first person I interviewed, Lyn McGinnis. This group, which changed names from the Southwestern Ontario Bisexual Network to Cambridge-Kitchener-Waterloo Bisexual Liberation (CKWBL) in the mid-1990s, maintained ties with the Ontario Bisexual Network and attended Pride events in Toronto on various occasions throughout its run. McGinnis' vision for the group aligned with those of Toronto activists, which was "to give people [...] a feeling of place and a sense of belonging and to develop friendships and relationships in an affirming setting."[107]

Although it was only active for a short period of time from 1993 to 1997, CKWBL provided access to a bisexual support system in a suburban area, fostering a sense of community for a "group of people who were queer as hell and knew it and yet they didn't feel they had a home."[108] As part of the Ontario Bisexual Network, Lyn recalls that the Kitchener-Waterloo group would often go to Toronto for Pride events and to attend meetings at the 519. Ultimately though, the presence of bisexual support and advocacy groups in smaller cities demonstrated a need for local support that was more easily accessible, while the OBN marked another need to have these organizations in contact with each other to build a stronger coalition for visibility and community across the province.

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[105] Stephen Harvey, in interview with the author, March 24, 2022.
[106] Ibid.
[107] Lyn McGinnis, in interview with the author, March 10, 2022.
[108] Ibid.

In addition to being a local support setting, Toronto's OBN group was an important stopping point for bisexual people who lived in smaller cities and rural areas that did not have access to such community organizations. Regardless of whether attendees were local or from out of town, going to one's first OBN meeting would prove to affect people in various ways. Of his own experiences attending meetings in Toronto in the early 1990s, Stephen recalled:

> […] there would be some people who would come to the [OBN] meeting, be coming from about an hour outside of Toronto and where they were living, it was a very conservative area […] And for some people, it would feel as easy as breathing to come to their first meeting. For some other people, it would be a monumental task to work through significant issues, personal issues, to get to the point of feeling comfortable […] And there would be people who would be so emotional, that it was so profound to be in a space with others who see them as they are, that there would be tears.[109]

OBN organizers recognized the dual significance of their work both at the provincial level for larger discussions about bisexual people's needs and experiences, as well as their duty to offer a local safe haven for those coming to terms with their identity in a collective space. Indeed, community "gives a shared sense of pride and acceptance of the whole. It breaks down the isolation and fear, giving strength to those who come out. As people identify with each other, a sense of caring and sharing emerges."[110] These emotionally charged support group meetings thus functioned as spaces that heeded individual bisexuals' experiences and applied them to the collective community's well-being.

An article from the *Kitchener-Waterloo Record* also covered news about the OBN some time after its official formation. Although the group had been in existence for a few years by the

[109] Harvey, interview.
[110] Betsy Rose, "Room for you," in *Bi Any Other Name: Bisexual People Speak Out*, eds. Lani Ka'ahumanu and Loraine Hutchins (New York: Riverdale Avenue Books, 2015), 167.

time of the article's publication, it reported that bisexuals "from four cities gathered in Waterloo on Saturday to form a network and stake out an identity of their own apart from the gay or straight communities."[111] This attempt to advocate for and highlight a unique bisexual identity can be viewed as an example of what José Esteban Muñoz has coined "disidentification" with binary notions of sexuality that permeated the queer activist scene at that time. In Muñoz's work, he argues that the process of identifying with "an object, person, lifestyle, history, political ideology, religious orientation, and so on, means also simultaneously and partially counteridentifying, as well as only partially identifying with different aspects of the social and psychic world."[112] Oppositional either/or views of sexuality engendered by the dominance of the homo/heterosexual binary made this disidentification necessary for bisexual people.

Indeed, considerations of the "'incredible variety' of possibilities among bisexuals, from openly polygamous pairings to a series of monogamous relationships with male and female partners" may certainly have been precluded in groups that prioritized the gay and lesbian homosexual experience.[113] For bisexual activists and support group members, disidentification was enacted not only through the claiming of new space through these organizations but also through language; indeed, language allowed bisexual people the agency to engage in discourses of sexual possibilities that influenced the spaces they occupied with others. Self-identification through language was just as important as (bi)sexual activity, as argued by activist researcher Emiel Maliepaard.[114] "Language *does*," claims Malipaard. "Viewing language as daily practices,

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[111] "Bisexuals Will Seek Grant for Education," *Kitchener-Waterloo Record*, August 16, 1993, link to article.
[112] José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Colour and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 8.
[113] Miles Socha, "Bisexuals are outsiders in both worlds: Local support group would let people 'feel OK' about dual nature," *Kitchener-Waterloo Record*, January 25, 1993, link to article.
[114] Emiel Maliepaard, "Bisexual Spaces: Exploring Geographies of Bisexualities," *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies* 14, no. 1 (2015): 225, https://acme-journal.org/index.php/acme/article/view/1148.

it is obvious that language also enables or restrains the practicing of sexual identities and therefore affects the coding of sexualised space."[115]

The strictly homosexual coding of gay and lesbian spaces, then, omitted full consideration of bisexual experiences within them; disidentifying opened up the possibility to construct spaces where dialogues around supposed contradictory forms of sexuality could be acknowledged, affirmed and made visible. Aptly stated by Muñoz, "disidentification is a remaking and rewriting of a dominant script" – in this case, the dominant script of homosexual versus heterosexual lived experiences that leaves little room for others.[116] While many bisexual people still identified to some extent with gays and lesbians on the basis of shared same-sex attraction, experiencing multigender attraction placed them somewhere different, allowing for this process of *disidentification through self-identification (as bisexual)* to occur.

Still, bisexual activists recognized their shared struggles with gays and lesbians as queer people suppressed by hegemonic heterosexual society and sought to maintain their alliances with them on that basis. For members of the OBN, their advocacy efforts were aimed at validating the bisexual experience through bringing awareness to the queer population, and demonstrating *both* its convergence and the "point where [they] diverge" with gays and lesbians.[117] Indeed, the OBN stressed, in their bid to increase funds to circulate their newsletter more widely in 1994, that they "would like to build better connections with the lesbian, gay and transgender communities in Ontario."[118] Even prior to this explicit expression of alliance, Stephen noted that one of the things he remembers most fondly in his diligent work with the OBN was their participation in

[115] Ibid., 226.
[116] Muñoz, *Disidentifications*, 23.
[117] "'Double closet' big step for bisexuals: support groups come to aid of sexual outsiders," *Toronto Star*, February 27, 1993, access provided by The ArQuives online database.
[118] Ontario Bisexual Network, "Application."

political action with gays and lesbians: "[…] we wanted to be involved with the larger community in some of the political activism that was happening in Toronto. The die-ins of the early and mid-90s, the fight for same-sex marriage."[119] Jennifer had also conducted activism with her long-time partner, who was a lesbian. Together, they "did a lot of work on getting sexual orientation protected under the Human Rights Code in Ontario" by cold-calling political officials and asking if they would add their names to a telegram that they planned to send to the premier of the province on the matter.[120]

The emphasis on bisexual activists' work with the gay and lesbian community also appeared in a brochure compiled by BiCEP (the Bisexual Committee Engaging in Politics) which was circulated by the OBN as a local contact. The brochure was informational in nature, including blurbs that highlighted some of the most common inquiries about bisexuality, such as: "What is Bisexuality?", "The Bisexual Identity," "How Common is Bisexuality?", "Bisexual Relationships," and "Bisexuals and AIDS."[121] In the last section titled "Bisexuality and Politics," BiCEP wrote: "Bisexuals are an increasingly visible presence within a variety of political movements. Bisexuals are working with gays and lesbians on common issues such as foster care and AIDS, as well as fighting discrimination against bisexuals within the homosexual community."[122] Indeed, bisexual activists would publicly emphasize that social discrimination and bigoted government policies which hurt gays and lesbians were hurting them as well.

There was also some recognition on the part of gay and lesbian community members that bisexuals were within their political ranks fighting for queer human rights. In *Rites*, a now-

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[119] Harvey, interview.
[120] Chambers, interview.
[121] Bisexual Committee Engaging in Politics, "Bisexuality Brochure," ca. 1990s, access provided by The ArQuives online database.
[122] Ibid.

defunct gay and lesbian magazine based in Toronto, Gary Kinsman published an article titled "Bi's must fight heterosexism" as a response to one previously written in the same magazine by Melinda Wittstock on the subject of bisexual exclusion in the gay and lesbian community. Kinsman directly responded to Wittstock's assertion that "the political and cultural necessity of exclusive homosexual identification […] has polarized human sexuality. Bisexuality has been precluded, but not because it doesn't exist."[123] While Kinsman conceded that "it is very important that the lesbian and gay media begin a discussion on bisexuality and on lesbians and gay men who also sometimes engage in heterosexual sex," he also seemed reticent to acknowledge Wittstock's comments about the major exclusionary attitudes towards bisexual people from a large number of gays and lesbians.[124] His insistence that "institutionalized heterosexuality […] organizes the oppression of both bisexuals and lesbians and gay men" is accurate, demonstrating why bisexual activists attempted to ally themselves with the gay community on the basis of this shared oppression.[125]

However, the examined timeline of bisexual activism has clearly shown that gay and lesbian institutions all too often "*disavowed* bisexuals from gay liberation practice."[126] Bisexual activists operated in this space fraught with conflicting attitudes, where some gay and lesbian activists were both hesitant to ally themselves with bisexuals while also recognizing how heterosexism affected all of them as a queer population. This tension was a key area where bisexual activism developed in conjunction with and discretely from gays and lesbians. Indeed, reconciling both sameness and difference between themselves and other queer people was a

[123] Melinda Wittstock, "The Best of Both and Still Nothing: Bisexuals Come out to Talk," *Rites for Lesbian & Gay Liberation*, May 1987, link to article.
[124] Gary Kinsman, "Bi's must fight heterosexism," *Rites for Lesbian & Gay Liberation*, June 1987, link to article.
[125] Ibid.
[126] Angelides, *History of Bisexuality*, 131.

point of tension in building the movement generally, which would also be seen in the following decade.

While the OBN would advertise that, overall, its "only mandate [was] to bring people together," there were specific goals that the organization targeted for the advancement of the bisexual community in Toronto and across Ontario.[127] In addition to strengthening their coalition with the gay and lesbian community and networking with other bisexual groups across the province, education about bisexuality, and the prejudices associated with it, was also vital to the OBN's activism. These educational endeavours were not new, as Jennifer had been involved in educating the non-bisexual public about her experiences for years before at various sexuality conferences and panels. As bisexual people were still not sufficiently considered within gay and lesbian public discourses by the time the OBN was formed, education and advocacy needed to continue.

In their grant application to expand the OBN newsletter, members of the group outlined that "people expressed a desire to expand the OBN focus to emphasize advocacy, education and political action. They wish[ed] to make bisexual people more visible through speaking engagements, educational seminars and the production of material outlining bi concerns and issues."[128] One of the main issues referred to here was the rampant biphobia that existed within the medical community at this time.[129] An OBN newsletter published in winter/spring 1994 included a section addressing mental health concerns for the bisexual community. In this section, they highlighted the efforts of two OBN activists who had begun putting together a document to

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[127] Ontario Bisexual Network, "Ontario Bisexual Network News," Winter/Spring 1994, access provided by The ArQuives online database.
[128] Ibid.
[129] Here I use the term "biphobia" to connote negative attitudes, stereotypes and prejudices aimed at bisexual people based on their multigender attraction/behaviours. In the case of medical practitioners, this often results in bisexual peoples' classification as hypersexual, promiscuous and confused about their "actual" sexual orientation.

send to mental health professionals, as well as inviting them to a workshop on the topic of bisexual mental health. The OBN wrote in this newsletter that some therapists may have "preconceptions about bisexuality that lead them to negate their patients' bisexual identity. It is hoped that this document, and the workshop, will help mental health professionals overcome their biphobia so that they can effectively counsel their patients."[130]

Another piece of material distributed by the OBN regarding bisexual mental health was a brochure titled "Bisexual Issues in Community and Mental Health Services." OBN activists would emphasize the following in this brochure:

> […] working with bisexuals in a therapeutic setting is a process of working with someone for whom the usual societal boundaries of what is acceptable, normal and predictable do not apply […] A therapist or counsellor who is contemplating working with a bisexual client would be well served to carefully examine his/her prejudices and pre-conceptions and ask him/herself if s/he is able to deal with the contradictions and paradoxes which are often part of the bisexual experience.[131]

This portion of the brochure strongly suggested that non-bisexual mental health professionals had proven to be ill-equipped to properly treat their bisexual clients. Indeed, the document highlights that a number of OBN members had "been told that they must choose between either a homosexual or a heterosexual orientation or lifestyle; they [were] told that they [were] confused, misinformed, or sexually addicted" when disclosing their bisexual identity to a counselor.[132] Advocacy efforts taken on by the OBN with particular regard to the mental health sector would then serve to enhance community wellness amongst bisexual people; especially, as it has been

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[130] Ontario Bisexual Network, "Ontario Bisexual Network News."
[131] Ontario Bisexual Network, "Bisexual Issues in Community and Mental Health Services," ca. 1990s, access provided by The ArQuives online database.
[132] Ibid.

demonstrated through various studies, stigmas associated with bisexuality "may cause bisexual-specific minority stress culminating in adverse health outcomes."[133]

Though these OBN documents were circulated in 1994, Jennifer had also encountered concerning views around bisexuality in the medical field around the time that she had first founded Bykes. While training as a counselor in a master's program at York University, she applied to work in a counseling centre aimed at gays and lesbians. After disclosing that she was bisexual to the interviewing counselor, she was met with silence before ultimately being told that they "[didn't] know how people [felt] about there being a bisexual counselor," despite confirming that the centre did in fact accept bisexual patients.[134] After referring the issue to the centre's board of directors, it was decided that the issue was too controversial to discuss, and it was ultimately never resolved. Recounting this experience of stigma as an undiscussable member of the community and therapeutic profession, Jennifer understandably lamented: "[T]his made me concerned about what kind of counseling bisexuals were getting at that centre."[135] For the OBN, then, there existed an urgent need to "[alert] isolated bisexual people to the services available to them" which largely included support groups and associated health services.[136]

Education about bisexual experiences thus served as a critical component of the group's activism efforts and, subsequently, its spirit of community care. Here, Michel Foucault's influence with his work on the ethics of the care of the self is evident when framing bisexual activism. For Foucault, "the interplay of the care of the self and the help of others blends into preexisting relations, giving them a new coloration and a greater warmth. The care of the self – or the attention one devotes to the care that others should take of themselves – appears then as an

[133] Doan Van et al., "Perceived Discrimination," 160.
[134] Chambers, interview.
[135] Ibid.
[136] Ontario Bisexual Network, "Application."

intensification of social relations."[137] Bisexual support and advocacy groups were subsequently strengthened by devoting efforts to care across various channels related to health and community.

Bisexual activists from the OBN would also focus their efforts on visibility and inclusion specifically in Pride celebrations in Toronto. Even from the early days of Bykes, it was crucial for bisexual people to be present in that collective queer space regardless of the Pride committee's initial refusal to fully acknowledge their participation. It was not until the later 1990s, through increased organizing efforts, that some attempts were made for Pride to be more bi-inclusive. Despite the OBN having a table at Pride since at least 1990, the word "bisexual" was not included in what was then known as Lesbian and Gay Pride in Toronto. Stephen recalled: "it was 'lesbian and gay, lesbian and gay' [Pride]. Constantly […] And so we did advocating, we did activism. It got us nowhere."[138] That bisexuals were obviously present in the festivities and conducting outreach through tabling at Pride but remained unacknowledged in its official title demonstrates that "bisexual identity is never predominant in either set of [gay, lesbian or straight] spaces, and although the presence of bisexuality may be acknowledged, it is seldom fully included."[139] Interestingly, such debates about inclusion in collective queer spaces often lacked bisexuals' input. Stephen recounted: "[In 1996] Pride became bi inclusive on their own. We didn't even know it […] we did not know until it was coming up, that bisexual pride was part of the name."[140] Although members within the OBN who had lobbied strongly for these titular changes years prior were not notified of it, we can deduce that the decision on Pride

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[137] Michel Foucault, *The Care of the Self* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 53.
[138] Harvey, interview.
[139] Gavin Brown, Kath Browne and Jason Lim, "Introduction or Why Have a Book on Geographies of Sexualities?" in *Geographies of Sexualities: Theory, Practices and Politics*, eds. Kath Browne, Jason Lim and Gavin Brown (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2007), 9.
[140] Harvey, interview.

Toronto's part to officially include bisexuals in their name was owed to a recognition of increasing bisexual identification within the city's queer community.

We can draw an interesting parallel between what happened with Lesbian and Gay Pride in Toronto in 1996 and what had occurred with the aforementioned Northampton Pride March, where disputes surrounding the naming of bisexuals in Pride celebrations had already occurred in 1991. As Clare Hemmings wrote, it appears that "debates about the inclusion of the term *Bisexual* in the Northampton Pride March and Committee emerged as a result of conflict within the lesbian and gay community, not outside it."[141] Based on Stephen's account that bisexual activists were not notified of the name change for Toronto's Pride festivities, it can be assumed that the lesbian and gay community had reached the decision to include bisexuals amongst themselves, once again problematizing the precarity of bisexual presence in queer spaces. Still, the ethos of coming out and visibility that bisexual activists were embodying had presumably made it difficult to ignore their presence in the larger queer community and, subsequently, at Pride.

Pride was also a viable opportunity for conducting queer community outreach and education. For Pride Week's 1993 edition, the OBN advertised an event titled "Bisexuality 101 for Pride Week" in their newsletter. It announced: "If you are curious about bisexuality and have questions about the bisexual community, this evening of frank discussion is for you! Join female and male members of the Ontario Bisexual Network for a two-hour celebration of the bisexual experience, lifestyle choices and dynamics within the Bisexual/Lesbian/Gay Communities."[142] The use of the phrase "lifestyle choices" as written in this advertisement suggests a queering of

[141] Hemmings, *Bisexual Spaces*, 71.
[142] Ontario Bisexual Network, "Bisexuality 101 Offered for Pride Week," 1993, access provided by The ArQuives online database.

sexuality that was at odds with the prevalent essentialist notions of sexuality that had long been touted by gays and lesbians in rights-based activism. As this Bisexuality 101 event was held in the early 1990s when queer theory was emerging in the midst of "an intellectual movement that oppose[d] the use of binary labels to describe sex, gender, and desire," we can observe efforts by bisexual activists to take advantage of a sexual landscape that was becoming less defined by strict boundaries and rigidity, ultimately opening up to new expressions of sexuality and community that people could align themselves with.[143]

Within this chapter, we have observed how members of the nascent bisexual community in Toronto found themselves within a bourgeoning territory that was beginning to allow for recognition of sexual identities outside of the homo/heterosexual binary beginning in the 1980s. These developments can be traced through a chronology, beginning with the proliferation of wariness surrounding "bisexual chic" within gay and lesbian communities, as well as the mainstream media's fascination with the trendiness of bisexuality from the early 1970s to the 1990s. In the midst of this, bisexual people in Toronto began to combat these negative stereotypes and form organizations for mutual support, discussion and advocacy.

Effectively, the beginnings of bisexual activism in Toronto were an act of agency in claiming a bisexual identity within the larger gay and lesbian community. The process of combatting negative stereotypes and increasing bisexual visibility started slowly with the establishment of Bykes for bisexual women and cemented itself more sturdily with the Ontario Bisexual Network, which brought bisexual men's experiences into the conversation. In founding these groups, bisexual people began to connect and discuss their experiences in order to mitigate feelings of isolation due to exclusion amongst gays and lesbians, as well as promoting visibility,

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[143] Alison L. Bain and Catherine J. Nash, "The Toronto Women's Bathhouse Raid: Querying Queer Identities in the Courtroom," *Antipode* 39, no. 1 (2007): 22, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8330.2007.00504.x.

education and community care. Despite the differences drawn between gays, lesbians and bisexuals, these communities' boundaries were still very much permeable; and while bisexual activists prioritized their safe spaces amongst each other within their support groups, they remained committed to maintaining solidarity with fellow gay and lesbian activists with regard to heterosexist oppression. The implications for the permeability of community boundaries, with particular attention paid to the dynamics amongst lesbians and bisexual women, will be explored further in the following chapter.

Chapter 2: Bisexual Women of Toronto, Toronto Bisexual Network and the Gendered Edge of Activism, 1990s-2000s

"[…] I finally felt like I got understanding and that I was in a room full of people who understood my experience, or at least had some connection with it."

-Dana Shaw, Bisexual Women of Toronto

Bisexual activism in Toronto heralded by the OBN was reaching a peak point at the beginning of the 1990s. The 1990 edition of Pride Day saw the OBN having their own information table for the first time, allowing people to interact with them and learn about the organization. Meanwhile, Bykes disbanded a year later in 1991, making the OBN the only active bisexual support and advocacy organization in the city by that time.[144] In the middle of the decade, however, changes occurring within Toronto's bisexual activist landscape led to gender politics occupying a more prominent place within the movement, particularly within the realm of feminist activism.

A long-standing history of women's liberation and radical feminist ideologies that had informed much of lesbian activism in decades prior had often placed lesbians and bisexual women at odds in both the United States and Canada. As the gay liberation movement began to gain a foothold in social politics in the late 1960s, lesbians were often faced with the reality that many of their fellow gay male activists were in denial of the fact that "lesbians faced problems unique to them and due to their status as women."[145] With this realization, many lesbians began to seek refuge in the women's rights and feminist communities. However, they often found

[144] Bisexual Women of Toronto, "Who We Are," 2002, access provided by The ArQuives online database.
[145] Shane Phelan, *Identity Politics: Lesbian Feminism and the Limits of Community* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), 37.

themselves disappointed yet again as heterosexual feminist activists "highlighted issues that seemed to focus on relations between men and women as sexual and life partners, which led lesbians to wonder where their problems fit with those of other women."[146] Acting upon their acknowledgement that their status as both women *and* lesbians placed them in a different, more isolated social category altogether, lesbian feminists formed their own activist circles predicated upon their unique experiences as homosexual women; something neither the male-dominated gay liberation nor heterosexual-majority feminist movements could adequately address. These lesbian activist groups retained a radical positioning that rested upon the notion that "men as constituted by heterosexist society were, indeed, the enemy […] The man of contemporary society and historical account is not simply the 'other half' of women, but is in a dominant position over them."[147] Thus, men and women who accepted relationships with men in their personal lives were considered not allies, but hindrances, to the woman-identified lesbian feminist movement that had gained steam from the 1970s onward.

As we have observed from historical accounts of activists, bisexual people had been part of gay and lesbian liberation efforts prior to the burgeoning of the bisexual movement in the later twentieth century; lesbian feminist communities were no exception, and as bisexual women became more vocal and visible beginning mainly in the 1980s, so too would their assertions that they had long been within their ranks. Nevertheless, those who would choose to identify as bisexual later were often ostracized; indeed, many lesbian feminists disqualified bisexual women "from political alliance or comradeship with lesbians" due to their personal associations with men, even if some would choose to abstain from relationships with men altogether in the interest

[146] Ibid., 38.
[147] Ibid., 44.

of feminist politics.[148] From a Toronto-specific vantage point, the late Sharon Dale Stone provided her point of view as someone involved with the city's radical lesbian feminist community, mainly the Lesbian Organization of Toronto (LOOT). Writing about bisexual women in lesbian spaces, she recalled that in the 1970s, "many lesbians created spaces that were meant to not only celebrate lesbian existence but also serve as havens purified of male influence."[149] The creation of lesbian-specific spaces was not only the result of radical feminist ideologies but it was also spatially necessary. Catherine Nash and Andrew Gorman-Murray have also observed that, in Toronto, gay business owners "often instituted policies designed to deliberately exclude certain women […] [There is a] long history of lesbian exclusion from [gay male] spaces" throughout and beyond the 1970s.[150] As a counteraction to this exclusion, LOOT actually established what is considered the first lesbian centre in Canada, which included a gathering space, lesbian feminist newspaper and coffeehouse.[151]

Interestingly, Stone's article was an attempt to rectify the lesbian feminist mindset that "bisexual women dilute the movement."[152] She shed light on the reality that they "have been in the lesbian feminist movement all along," much like earlier bisexual activists had argued about their long-standing presence in gay and lesbian communities, even if not in name.[153] Not only this, but the bisexual women activists interviewed for this thesis, and many others, had all been involved in some capacity with projects and organizations geared towards women's health and queer youth support in Toronto prior to becoming involved in bisexual-specific activism,

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[148] Rust, *Bisexuality and the Challenge to Lesbian Politics*, 61.
[149] Sharon Dale Stone, "Bisexual Women and the 'Threat' to Lesbian Space: Or, What If All the Lesbians Leave?", *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 16, no. 1 (1996): 103, https://doi.org/10.2307/3346927.
[150] Catherine Nash and Andrew Gorman-Murray, "Lesbians in the City: Mobilities and Relational Geographies," *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 19, no. 2 (2015): 181, https://doi.org/10.1080/10894160.2015.969594.
[151] Becki Ross, "The House That Jill Built: Lesbian Feminist Organizing in Toronto, 1976-1980," *Feminist Review* no. 35 (1990): 76, https://doi.org/10.2307/1395402.
[152] Stone, "Bisexual Women," 113.
[153] Ibid.

demonstrating their commitment to strengthening both the women's and queer communities. Still, claiming a bisexual identity within lesbian feminist communities was rarely looked upon with favour at the height of the movement. We can once again observe here Cohen's work on constructing community boundaries and deduce that many lesbians' exclusionary attituded towards bisexual women was a result of "the prospect of change being regarded ominously, as if change inevitably means loss [of lesbian community]."[154]

Departing from the lesbian feminist standpoint that lesbians are "the ones who are truly demonstrating a commitment to feminism, while heterosexual or bisexual women are less feminist" that characterized queer women's politics throughout the 1970s and 1980s, bisexual women were faced with the choice to either conceal their attractions to men and potentially be accepted in the lesbian community, or attempt to find and form communities with each other.[155] Consequently, language would be a key factor in furthering the process of community building. As many bisexual women were coming out of lesbian feminist circles and a heavily binarized sexual landscape that stressed hard boundaries between gay and straight, using the word "bisexual" was pertinent to finding others who resonated with the same language and were possibly emerging from similar contexts. As Kristyn Gorton has noted in her engagements with affect and feminist scholarship, "most authors [of feminist works] are interested in the performativity of language and its ability to move people into action […] language affects our sense of self and place in the world."[156] Language can also be utilized to ally oneself with a community as a means of forging political and social alliances. In her study on women's choice to either embrace or reject a bisexual label, longtime bisexual activist Robyn Ochs has said:

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[154] Cohen, *Symbolic Construction*, 109.
[155] Phelan, *Identity Politics*, 45.
[156] Kristyn Gorton, "Theorizing emotion and affect: Feminist engagements," *Feminist Theory* 8, no. 3 (2007): 339, https://doi.org/10.1177/1464700107082369.

> […] my bisexual identity was a route to community. By responding in September 1982 to an announcement in the paper about a discussion about bisexuality, I found my way into a room of women who also identified as bisexual, who understood my experience. This led to membership in a support group, to friendships, and subsequently to advocacy and activism, all of which have greatly enhanced my life.[157]

While the earliest iteration of an activist bisexual women's community could be found in the establishment of Bykes, the group's dissolution in 1991 left behind a vacuum of organizations that catered specifically to the needs of bisexual women. Thus, Bisexual Women of Toronto (BIWOT) was founded some years later in 1994, by the late Karol Steinhouse and another woman, offering a new bisexual women's space. The majority of people interviewed for this thesis' purposes were prominent and visible members of this group.

Like the bisexual support groups that had been established in the previous decade, much of BIWOT's activism efforts were heavily informed by bisexual exclusion and derision, with particular regard to radical lesbian feminism. Indeed, Toronto's lesbian communities were still very much "deeply influenced by second wave feminism [and] lesbian separatism […] with a real strong focus on a real binary of […] you are lesbian or you're straight."[158] BIWOT was also formed within the context of increased bisexual visibility in the city's queer community that had been proliferating throughout the 1980s and early 1990s. Moreover, there was an acknowledgement that, although some bisexual women retained ties with lesbian groups, their needs and concerns related to sexuality were not being fully serviced within them. Indeed, women involved in BIWOT operated within a crucial tenet of feminism that emphasized "every

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[157] Robyn Ochs, "What's in a name? Why women embrace or resist bisexual identity," in *Becoming Visible: Counseling Bisexuals Across the Lifespan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 84.
[158] Krista Taves, in interview with the author, April 28, 2022.

woman's right to a self-defined sexuality" – in this case, having various relationships with both men and women.[159]

Informational brochures for BIWOT adopted a similar approach as the OBN, wherein the group was branded as a safe space to be with other bisexual women, discuss their issues, make friends and get involved in political action. These brochures contained a myriad of components that emphasized BIWOT's dedication to community building amongst bisexual women, as well as combatting negative stereotypes. Various elements such as the tagline "Support, Education, Social Action" written in bold letters, an overview of their mandate and, interestingly, a section titled "Bisexual Slogans: Snappy Comebacks for Daily Living" by Susan Kane were included in BIWOT brochures. Kane's work had been originally published in *Plural Desires: Writing Bisexual Women's Realities*, an anthology created by a racialized bisexual women's collective in Toronto which will be discussed further below. The slogans were bi-positive in nature while also attempting to deconstruct some of the most common myths and stereotypes associated with bisexuality. Some examples include: "Bisexual by luck, queer by choice", "Well, I don't think you exist either", We're not fence-sitters, we're bridge-builders," and "You may be confused, but I'm not."[160] We can observe that the inclusion of these slogans in a public document that was accessible to bisexual, queer or questioning women indicates "an awareness of negative stereotypes of bisexuals [which discourage] bi women from marking themselves as bisexual from 'fear of reprisal', loss of legitimacy or efficacy, and from feelings of shame in both lesbian

[159] Rust, *Bisexuality and the Challenge to Lesbian Politics*, 188.
[160] Bisexual Women of Toronto, untitled informational brochure, late 1990s, access provided by The ArQuives online database.

and 'straight' social spaces," and an attempt to rectify them for any bisexual women looking to discover an affirming community.[161]

In the mandate published in BIWOT brochures, the group described themselves as:

> a safe place for bisexual women, or women who are interested in bisexuality, to discuss and listen to various perspectives on current bisexual issues. We offer support, a social network, information and referral to other bisexual organizations and services. We also offer the opportunity to become politically involved in bisexual issues […] We are a diverse group of women who try to foster inclusivity by welcoming and encouraging women of diverse backgrounds and experiences […] We also welcome transsexual and transgendered women.[162]

Explicitly including trans women in BIWOT's mandate was a significant indicator of their gender politics, while revealing that exclusionary and bigoted attitudes towards transgender people was common at this time in other queer spaces. In their collection of essays on the convergences of bisexual and transgender experiences, Jonathan Alexander and Karen Yescavage highlight the idea that "the intersection between trans and bi lives, identities and communities is that both offer radical border crossings, question what is socially constructed as 'natural,' and offer alternatives for experiencing and expressing desire."[163] Alexander and Yescavage's work is one of many that has emphasized solidarities between bisexual and transgender people as outsiders to gay and lesbian communities. Especially in regard to radical lesbian feminist ideals, Kelly Phipps has pointed out that while bisexuality was "subjected to harsh criticism […] male-to-female transsexuals were [also] deemed undesirable invaders of lesbian culture" and were often prohibited from participating in it as bisexual women were from

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[161] Amber Ault, "Ambiguous Identity in an Unambiguous Sex/Gender Structure: The Case of Bisexual Women," *The Sociological Quarterly* 37, no. 3 (1996): 454, http://www.jstor.org/stable/4121293.
[162] Bisexual Women of Toronto, "Who We Are."
[163] Jonathan Alexander and Karen Yescavage, "Introductions," in *Bisexuality and Transgenderism: InterSEXions of the Others*, eds. Jonathan Alexander and Karen Yescavage (New York: Harrington Park Press, 2003), 7.

the 1970s onward.[164] This general observation can be contextualized more concretely in Toronto's queer scene. Indeed, according to an anonymous interviewee, to whom I will refer only as K, "for a time [in the 1990s] […] the trans women's community hooked up with the bisexual community […] So it was common for whenever bisexuals were having an event, that the trans women would come and hang with us."[165] The alliance and feelings of solidarity between both groups, then, is understandable.

It must be noted that, while BIWOT members were keen to be a space that was accepting of transgender women and ideas of gender fluidity, many of the people whom I interviewed were not transgender themselves. As such, they recognized that their positionality may have affected how welcoming their space actually was for trans women. During our oral history interview on April 28, 2022, Krista Taves, a member and facilitator of BIWOT from 1994 to 2001, recalled:

> BIWOT became a place […] where you could be accepted as a transgender woman because we were fluid in our sexuality. So it wasn't a really big step to like, have an appreciation of the fluidity of gender […] Not to say that we were perfect at it either! […] I think that there were definitely some missteps and definitely ways that we, you know, we assumed as shared experience when there were significant differences in experiences and perspectives. But we were, for some women, an important stopping off point in their journey and it really became […] a real opportunity for me to expand my understanding of womanhood.[166]

Regarding womanhood and BIWOT's gender politics, Dana Shaw, who had been in a leadership role within the group as a facilitator and event organizer by 1999, also clarified in our interview: "I suppose it bears mentioning that for BIWOT, we defined a woman as anyone who is now or

[164] Kelly Phipps, "'Look over here, look over there, lesbians are everywhere": Locating Activist Lesbians in Queer Liberation History" (PhD diss., Concordia University, 2020), 111, Concordia University Library Spectrum Research Repository.
[165] Anonymous, in interview with the author, April 11, 2022.
[166] Taves, interview.

ever has identified as a woman."[167] This stance on womanhood, as a potentially temporary or fluid process of identification rather than a fixed category, destabilized essentialist ideas of gender. It also further demonstrates the social aspect of both bisexual and transgender lived experiences within binary structures of gender and sexuality, forging a link between the communities that we can observe here with BIWOT. Michaela D.E. Meyer has thoughtfully noted that there is a complex interplay inherent in human experiences, that "identity is both social process and social product."[168] This complexity was embraced, at least at an institutional level, by BIWOT leadership. Viewing womanhood as a human potential rather than an essentialist fact thus opened up space for transgender women in the group, if they chose to occupy it.

Margaret Robinson, a bisexual activist who moved from Halifax to Toronto in 1997 and joined the BIWOT ranks around late 1998, also highlighted how trans women's presence in the group allowed her to deepen her understanding of gender diversity and different forms of womanhood. In 2002, she wrote an article on the subject in *Siren*, a Toronto-based lesbian magazine, reflecting on how the presence of trans women in bisexual groups and spaces expanded not only her perception of bisexual/trans intersections, but also their differences of experiences. Further, she emphasized how engaging with these differences offered chances to improve upon bisexuals' allyship with the trans community. "I started to notice that the kinds of oppression I experienced as a bisexual were strikingly similar to the things the transwomen I met

[167] Dana Shaw, in interview with the author, April 7, 2022.
[168] Michaela D.E. Meyer, "Looking Toward the InterSEXions: Examining Bisexual and Transgender Identity Formation from a Dialectical Theoretical Perspective," in *Bisexuality and Transgenderism: InterSEXions of the Others*, eds. Jonathan Alexander and Karen Yescavage (New York: Harrington Park Press, 2003), 166.

were reporting […],” Margaret wrote. “We are both frequently excluded from queer community as pretenders or outsiders.”[169]

Nevertheless, she was cognizant not to completely equate transgender experiences with bisexual ones, advising bisexual women activists to beware tokenization within the community and practice allyship with trans women that valued their contributions through power-sharing. Margaret emphasized that if bisexual activist organizations were “serious about transwomen participating as full members of the bi community (and not as tokens or symbols), then the concerns and interests of bisexual transwomen must shape the community as much as the interests of non-transwomen. Power sharing means recognizing that an issue which affects bisexual transwomen is a bisexual issue.”[170] In our interview that took place on April 14, 2022, Margaret recalled that many of the trans community groups that had begun to coalesce towards the end of the 1990s “were always very bi positive and [BIWOT] had been trans positive because [they] had trans members in the community and lots of people were dating trans folks or knew trans folks.”[171] Similarly to Krista however, she notes that BIWOT’s perception of its trans-positive mandate may not have been received in such a way by members of the trans community themselves. She stated: “I think we self-defined ourselves as trans positive, but you know, if we’re not trans ourselves we would never really know how accurate that was.”[172]

As with trans women’s distinct experiences and perspectives within the majority non-transgender BIWOT space, racialized women interviewed for this thesis expressed that the centrality of whiteness was also prominent within the bisexual movement more generally. For

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[169] Margaret Robinson, “Transwomen,” *Siren Magazine*, December/January 2002, GALE Archives of Sexuality and Gender, link to article.
[170] Ibid.
[171] Margaret Robinson, in interview with the author, April 14, 2022.
[172] Ibid.

many bisexual women of colour, political intersectionality was a concern that was not adequately addressed in bisexual support group settings. In her interview, K, a Black bisexual woman, stated outright: "You're gonna find that this history is gonna be very white."[173] Margaret, who is biracial, wrote in 2004 that "bisexual events remain largely white dominated spaces, and the vision of a multiracial and multicultural bisexual movement remains unfulfilled."[174] The realization that the bisexual movement, and BIWOT specifically, was a majority white space did not go unnoticed by leadership. One of BIWOT's co-founders, the late Karol Steinhouse, noted in an article on bisexual women's community and race that her experiences with BIWOT "made [her] conscious of how sexuality was in the foreground of the discussion, with race as a marginal or invisible component of members' identities."[175]

Some racialized bisexual women in Toronto chose to directly counter this invisibility through the aforementioned feminist anthology *Plural Desires: Writing Bisexual Women's Realities*. This effort was realized wholly independently of BIWOT; in fact, none of the contributors to the anthology were directly involved with the group and had instead planted their activist roots in anti-racist and feminist activist groups while retaining the importance of their bisexuality to their identities. Bisexual feminist and anti-racist activist Leela Acharya joined the anthology's collective in Toronto in the summer of 1991 "with the primary goal of finding other bisexual women to begin work on an anthology and the secondary goal of forging some bisexual feminist community in Toronto."[176] When asked if she was involved with BIWOT in any

[173] Anonymous, interview.
[174] Margaret Robinson, "Becoming Who We Are: Building Bisexual Women's Community in Toronto," (unpublished manuscript, 2004), 13, link to online publication.
[175] Steinhouse, "Bisexual Women," 10.
[176] Bisexual Anthology Collective, *Plural Desires: Writing Bisexual Women's Realities*, ed. Bisexual Anthology Collective (Toronto: Sister Vision Press, 1995), X.

capacity, Leela responded: "Not really. They seemed very white at the time, and I wasn't sure about their politics in terms of feminist and anti-racist [issues]."[177]

The women included in the anthology collective came from many different racialized backgrounds: some were Black, some South Asian, some Jewish; some had been involved in feminist organizing and working with those afflicted with HIV/AIDS; they also came from various class and educational backgrounds.[178] Nevertheless, the collective were, at their core, "committed to the voices of racialized bisexual women" and targeted their activism efforts towards that through their writing.[179] That this collective existed demonstrates that in the 1990s, bisexual women's activism had not fully achieved an environment that felt accepting of the experiences of racialized women, and other avenues needed to be explored to amplify their voices.

Still, for many, BIWOT acted as a political group which embodied a feminist praxis, aiming to strengthen relationships between bisexual and queer women through discussion and socialization. Dana described the group's main goals as being "a little broader than [the mixed gender group's] because it incorporated things having to do with women's rights and choice and things of that nature and incorporated some dyke politics."[180] Other topics of interest for the BIWOT women included their "collective experience with abuse and harassment […] And also the difficulties of flirting with other women versus flirting with men."[181]

Despite many seemingly clear goals for operation which included political action, support and community building, BIWOT retained its positionality as a grassroots organization that was

[177] Leela Acharya, in interview with the author, April 23, 2022.
[178] Bisexual Anthology Collective, *Plural Desires*, XI.
[179] Acharya, interview.
[180] Shaw, interview.
[181] Ibid.

attempting to situate itself within a shifting queer landscape and a still-developing bisexual community in Toronto. The needs of its members were varied and, therefore, sometimes misaligned with each other. Speaking about her experience at her first BIWOT meeting in 1994, Krista remembered that:

> there was a political brouhaha happening! […] there was a debate between women who were, like myself, largely coming from heterosexual experience and wanted to explore sexual relationships with women. And so, they were cruising. And then there were the women who wanted more of a support group setting but also more of a political focus on establishing a bisexual presence in the city of Toronto, in the queer community […][182]

While building political and social alliances with other bisexual people and the larger queer community were major priorities, BIWOT also sought to make their support group a safe space for the exploration of romantic and sexual desire with other women; especially for those, as noted above, who lacked experience in that area. This highlighted the enrichment of these relationships for bisexual women's personal and political lives. Dana herself even developed a BIWOT workshop "after a couple of years of people complaining that they didn't know how to do flirtation with other women," which had supposedly made a difference for those who chose to attend.[183] However, it was not only women who had "come from a heterosexual experience" that entered BIWOT's space.[184] Many women who previously identified as lesbians also sometimes found themselves at meetings, not only to explore their potential or confirmed bisexuality, but also because they had subsequently either lost or were afraid to lose the lesbian communities that they were part of in the process. Margaret recalled that women who came to BIWOT meetings

[182] Taves, interview.
[183] Shaw, interview.
[184] Taves, interview.

and had been out as lesbians for a long time "were now in a similar awkward place where none of the issues that they needed to discuss about their interest in other sex partners could be discussed in their queer community. You know, that's not a conversation their lesbian friends wanted to have with them."[185]

These various arenas for providing support for women in the group was not limited to BIWOT meetings. As with many queer support groups, members would often organize social activities at their homes such as "potlucks and socials and movie nights," or out in the city at various bars, clubs, movies or restaurants.[186] Krista remembered that she and other women in the group would sometimes go to a lesbian bar called The Rose, which was founded in Toronto in October of 1987, as well as the queer venue Buddies in Bad Times. She described the latter as a space where bisexual people felt very comfortable and able to be themselves, as it was not advertised as a solely gay/lesbian space.[187] In areas that were more heavily skewed towards the gay and lesbian, or even heterosexual, population, BIWOT members would frequently rely on each other as a social support system. The socialization aspect of the group, then, extended further out from its setting at the 519 Community Centre where discussion meetings happened. Indeed, what can be appreciated in terms of how the group operated within a sphere of feminist ideology is that feminism "opens the world to women, but perhaps even more radically, feminism gives women access to women: to themselves and to others."[188]

Access to women's community that recognized many forms of queer experiences beyond radical lesbian feminism and patriarchy is what truly allowed BIWOT's influence to spread to

[185] Robinson, interview.
[186] Shaw, interview.
[187] Taves, interview.
[188] Margaret Mihee Choe, "Our Selves, Growing Whole," in *Closer to Home: Bisexuality and Feminism*, ed. Elizabeth Reba Weise (Seattle: Seal Press, 1992), 18.

spaces where “women may experiment with being visible as bisexual in the queer women’s community.”[189] On attending queer women’s events, especially for those who were new to these spaces, Dana stated that BIWOT members would often arrive at them together but would then split off individually; however, meeting up beforehand was a way to assuage some people’s feelings of being out of place or misunderstood, and help them to take their first steps into being in spaces with other queer women outside of the community centre.[190]

Bisexual women’s presence in lesbian bars like The Rose also contributed to a queering of lesbian space by challenging the norms and assumptions of who would normally occupy such areas. This was also the case with Toronto’s Pussy Palace, a queer women’s bathhouse that attracted national attention in the early 2000s after a police raid occurred there due to concerns over their liquor license. Pussy Palace itself was not necessarily an activist space, although it had been “first organized in the fall of 1998 by a handful of self-identified queer women activists in Toronto.”[191] Catherine Nash, a scholar of queer geographies, explains that the Toronto Women’s Bathhouse Committee (TWBC), who were the organizers of Pussy Palace, encouraged “people to explore, experiment or play with gender and to challenge the rigidity of gender categories, stereotypes, norms, and expectations, particularly those the TWBC see as arising from the narrow and limiting tenets of lesbian feminism.”[192] If that sounds like something of a bisexual approach to exploring queer women’s sexuality, it is because there was a significant bisexual presence in the TWBC. Dana herself was a committee member in the mid-2000s and explained that “most of the people on that committee were bi. And it wasn’t known. [People] assumed they

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[189] Robinson, “Becoming Who We Are.”
[190] Shaw, interview.
[191] Bain and Nash, “Bathhouse Raid,” 17.
[192] Catherine Jean Nash and Alison L. Bain, “Pussies Declawed: Unpacking the Politics of a Queer Women’s Bathhouse Raid,” in *Geographies of Sexualities: Theory, Practices and Politics*, eds. Kath Browne, Jason Lim and Gavin Brown (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2007), 161.

were lesbians."[193] Indeed, Nash points out that "the gendered and sexualised identities of the participants and organisers of the Pussy Palace were flattened in the press to that of lesbian women. The words bisexual, transsexual and transgender were not used in the mainstream press coverage of the Pussy Palace raid […]"[194] For example, one article circulated by the *National Post* about the raid contained only the word "lesbian" in its headline, describing attendees and protesters of the raid as "panty-waving **lesbians**" and stating that "the **lesbian community** has raised at least $5,000 to help defend the women, who face fines if they are convicted."[195] We can see here Nash's assertion that many queer women's identities were flattened in the Pussy Palace raid's news coverage. This contributed to bisexual women's erasure, despite not only their presence within queer women's spaces, but their efforts in helping to shape it.

It is necessary to highlight that, while BIWOT existed specifically to serve the needs of bisexual and questioning women, the group remained within the orbit of mixed gender and bisexual men's groups. However, through creating BIWOT, bisexual women signalled two significant things: one, to the lesbian community their need for support systems that would account for the fluidity of their sexualities and romantic relationships with various genders; two, to bisexual men in the mixed gender group that they would not tolerate the imposition of cishet gender norms in shared bisexual spaces.[196] These stances in regard to mixed gender spaces becomes clear when analyzing the participation of bisexual women in the Toronto Bisexual Network (TBN), which was formed from a change in format on the part of the Ontario Bisexual Network. In 1993, there had been some confusion regarding "perceptions of local and provincial

[193] Shaw, interview.
[194] Nash and Bain, "Pussies Declawed," 166.
[195] April Lindgren, "Lesbians to protest raid on Pussy Palace: They thought it was 'a safe place to be themselves'," *National Post*, October 27, 2000, link to article.
[196] The term "cishet" is an abbreviation for "cisgender-heterosexual" which describes people who are not queer in their sexuality nor their gender.

versions of OBN," as many local bisexual groups across Ontario had been loosely affiliated through the network.[197] Thus, the TBN was inaugurated in 1994, the same year as BIWOT.

The shift to cementing the TBN as a viable bisexual group in Toronto required an adjustment period. According to a BIWOT information package that briefly outlined the history of the bisexual community in Toronto, there were scarcely any attendees at TBN meetings all throughout 1995. In 1997, however, this issue was rectified and both the TBN and BIWOT saw an increase in member attendances at their support group meetings that year.[198] This could be attributed in part to the alliance that was formed between the two groups. Indeed, while BIWOT focused on ensuring that bisexual women retained a space away from male influence, many of the group's members were also heavily involved with TBN activities – to the point where BIWOT listed TBN as an affiliated group in many of their informational brochures. Dana herself had attended some TBN meetings after joining BIWOT and noticed that they needed help with facilitation; from there, she began to help organize their social events and remained a part of the group.[199]

Krista came to TBN due to her interest in understanding the lives of bisexual men, but reiterated that she enjoyed how woman-focused BIWOT was compared to the mixed gender group.[200] She also noted that some women in BIWOT had no interest whatsoever in being involved with TBN, which was due to the fact that bisexual women were still sometimes subject to performing "sexual labour reinforcing […] male privilege" in mixed gender bisexual spaces.[201] Dana recalled that TBN differed from BIWOT in the sense that "in TBN, there were

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[197] Bisexual Women of Toronto, "Who We Are."
[198] Ibid.
[199] Shaw, interview.
[200] Taves, interview.
[201] Robinson, "Becoming Who We Are."

often people who were mainly cis men who were there to see if they could find a hookup […] That didn't happen in BIWOT. I mean, it did, but not with the same sort of male privilege, you know."[202] Margaret confirms this in recalling that "women didn't often to go to the mixed group. Many women reported […] getting hit on by men. And so […] they would go to the mixed group and never go back again."[203] Clearly, then, there were gendered dynamics at play within TBN that made the existence of BIWOT all the more crucial as these dynamics infringed upon bisexual feminists' want "to be involved with men on equal terms."[204] Indeed, Steinhouse asserted that "bi men and women have distinct experiences of being queer because of power and gender dynamics that prevail in society."[205] Pointed out by Joan Wallach Scott as well, the operations of sex and gender in feminist historical study establish "not only the legitimacy of narratives about women but the general importance of gender difference in the conceptualization and organization of social life," allowing us to understand both the relationship and tensions between BIWOT and TBN members along gendered lines.[206]

Bisexual activist, researcher and zine creator Cheryl Dobinson is another one of the women who was also involved in both BIWOT and TBN. She personally felt as if the groups were quite connected but appreciated that the existence of both created "different ways for people to engage" in discussions that centered on sexuality for bisexual people in general and women's issues for BIWOT members specifically.[207] There was certainly value in having separate spaces for bisexual men and women, but also an empowerment in coming together as

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[202] Shaw, interview.
[203] Robinson, interview.
[204] Tamara Bower, "Bisexual Women, Feminist Politics," in *Bisexual Politics: Theories, Queries & Visions*, ed. Naomi Tucker (New York: Haworth Press, 1995), 102.
[205] Krista Taves, "Bi Lines - Remembering Karol," *Siren Magazine*, June/July 2000, GALE Archives of Sexuality and Gender, link to article.
[206] Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 20.
[207] Cheryl Dobinson, in interview with the author, August 30, 2022.

people who felt unwelcome in gay and lesbian spaces as a whole. Reflecting on her involvement in the bisexual activist community with both groups, Steinhouse wrote that “when some women from BIWOT wanted to be more active as facilitators for the TBN mixed gender group, their participation was welcomed […] we have benefitted from the joint organising efforts [of both groups]” and recognized that “the men in bi women’s lives may well be part of perpetuating patriarchy, but they also may be part of dismantling it.”[208] By committing to a continued alliance with TBN and simultaneously prioritizing the friendships and solidarity created within BIWOT, bisexual women demonstrated that it was possible to retain a feminist praxis that uplifted and supported queer women’s community while not denying the complexities of their sexuality which might preclude meaningful interactions or relationships with queer men.

Beyond organizing social gatherings and support group meetings, BIWOT and TBN sought to continue enhancing bisexual visibility in queer spaces, which mainly involved making their presence known at various sexuality workshops and events. K recalls that, on the TBN membership’s part: “we made it a point, we showed up…at every single [sexuality] workshop there was, there was a representative there to say ‘well, I’m bisexual, how do I fit in in all this?’”[209] Asserting their presence at such events and verifying that bisexual people were being included in larger conversations about queer community issues emphasized activists’ concerns with community care outside of their own spheres.

Toronto Pride continued to be a major avenue through which visibility was prioritized. Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, a heightened creative energy that had built off the momentum of the previous decade’s activism was utilized to combat bisexual erasure at Pride.

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[208] Karol Steinhouse, “Bi Lines - Girl toys, allies or enemies: The men in our bi lives,” *Siren Magazine*, October/November 1999, GALE Archives of Sexuality and Gender, link to article.
[209] Anonymous, interview.

For instance, Margaret recounted that in the early 2000s, TBN group members "made this big flag and then we all just grabbed a section of it and carried this big, gigantic bi flag down the street. So it didn't matter that there might have been only 12 of us marching in that contingent, our flag took up an enormous amount of space […]"[210] Anonymous interviewee K also stated that some members of BIWOT and TBN would attempt to come up with different themes for each annual iteration of Pride, although did not specify any examples.[211] Krista remembered that in the 1990s, the bisexual groups would march in the parade with banners that they had made themselves: "We created banners, like we didn't have any banners, so we thought okay, well, we gotta make banners! So we designed banners, and we got our community out to march and […] I think in the highest, when we were at our highest energy point, we had like 40 or 50 people marching between the banners."[212] Cheryl also noted that the bisexual activist contingent had what they referred to as a float that they would bring out for Pride festivities, "a truck that you could decorate and dance on the back of."[213] That support group members were eager to come together and made efforts to create prominent visual markers for themselves at Pride demonstrates the continued importance, as well as the necessity, of openly proclaiming a bisexual identity in collective queer spaces.

As the twentieth century neared its close, activists would continue to find many avenues through which to be visible, publicly affirm their identities and connect with other bisexual people. Indeed, this period saw the flourishing of projects and events brought on by shared engagement and collaboration between members of the bisexual community. In a way that continued to exemplify their creative spirit at the end of the twentieth and beginning of the

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[210] Robinson, interview.
[211] Anonymous, interview.
[212] Taves, interview.
[213] Dobinson, interview.

twenty-first century, cabaret events were organized by activists to provide space for embodied expressions of gender, sexuality and queerness. As a practice, cabaret events have often been a way for queer people to connect with themselves and others through performance. Through her work on queer cabaret as a form of radical resistance, Julie Gouweloos has pointed out that “the safety cultivated in queer cabaret contexts is a means of ensuring that narrative building projects create opportunities for voices that may not otherwise be included in the collective ‘we’.”[214] Bisexual activists took advantage of Celebrate Bisexuality Day annually, which falls on September 23rd, to host a cabaret event called the Bi Bash.[215] K would attend these cabarets from the mid-1990s on, where she would “sing or do storytelling.”[216] Cheryl recalled with fondness how it was “super well-attended and fun and [they] would have everything from […] live bands, spoken word […] singer-songwriter, burlesque […] any kind of performance that people could do, and it was a fundraiser for Toronto Bisexual Network.”[217] Unfortunately, due to lack of people power and time constraints, the Bi Bash had its final run in 2009.

For Cheryl, having the opportunity to be part of organizing creative events geared specifically towards the maintenance of the city’s bisexual groups and community celebration “just felt really important and unique.”[218] As queer space was still very politicized in terms of who “belonged” and who did not, bisexual activists purposefully fostered and cultivated bi-specific events meant to celebrate and uplift their community in Toronto. Indeed, the “growing bisexual culture and social structure […] created new social and political landmarks with which

[214] Julie Gouweloos, “Intersectional Prefigurative Politics: Queer Cabaret as Radical Resistance,” *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 26, no. 2 (2021): 247, https://doi.org/10.17813/1086-671X-26-2-239.
[215] Dobinson, interview.
[216] Anonymous, interview.
[217] Dobinson, interview.
[218] Ibid.

individuals anchor[ed] bisexual identities."[219] Thus, in addition to her work with BIWOT and TBN, Cheryl spearheaded her own project at the beginning of the 2000s: the publication of a bisexual women's zine titled *The Fence: A New Place of Power for Bisexual Women*. She described the zine as her "own little labour of love […] and wanted to make one that would be meaningful" to herself and her community of bisexual women.[220]

As noted in the previous chapter, bisexual presence in *The Body Politic* and other gay liberation print media was insufficient to account for bisexual people being part of the gay and lesbian imagined community. As a result, they would often take the route of fabricating and distributing their own publications meant to provide a forum for discussion and self-expression, in a similar way to anthologies. The first page of every volume of *The Fence* included Cheryl's biography, as well as a description of the zine that read:

> Calling bisexuals 'fencesitters' has been a way of marginalizing us, of placing us outside gay/lesbian and straight cultures by saying that we haven't made a decision about our sexuality. 'The Fence' is all about bisexual women reclaiming this position and speaking from our unique viewpoints that traverse straight and gay/lesbian cultures, but also allow us to have spaces of our own. 'The Fence' can be a positive and powerful place, and this zine is for the women who have decided to stay there![221]

While some bisexual women activists, including Margaret, Krista and Dana, would sometimes occupy a small space in Toronto's lesbian magazine *Siren* as contributors for the "Bi Lines" column, this was decidedly not a publication geared towards bisexual women. *The Fence*, then, provided an important forum for bisexual women's voices which were utilized in "short articles,

[219] Paula C. Rust, "Sexual Identity and Bisexual Identities: The Struggle for Self-Description in a Changing Sexual Landscape," in *Queer Studies: A Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Anthology,* eds. Brett Beemyn and Mickey Eliason (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 71.
[220] Dobinson, interview.
[221] Cheryl Dobinson, *The Fence: A New Place of Power for Bisexual Women*, volume 3, ca. 2003.

poems, rants, personal narratives, stories, fiction, quotes, reviews, comics, drawings, photos, collages and so on…" that served their community specifically.[222] Indeed, as Rob Cover has argued, through the act of consuming queer media, there occurs a shift "from a reader seeing herself as a member of an audience to a member of a community."[223] In his work, Cover also acknowledged the limitations of many gay and lesbian publications, specifically that "the very grounding of lesbian/gay print media in the hetero/homo binary, and their primacy as a 'resource' for non-heteronormative performative subjectivities, forecloses on the contestation of the binary and the proliferation of sexualities that is opened by queer theoretical discourses."[224] Thus, while bisexual groups conducted the important work of connecting local community members and providing an environment for discourse, education and support, a publication like *The Fence* allowed for an expansion of the bisexual women's imagined community on a national scale, something that magazines like *The Body Politic* and *Siren* did not sufficiently accomplish.[225] It is necessary to stress the role that access to community can have on inspiring grassroots projects such as *The Fence*. Indeed, in an advertisement and call for submissions for the zine in *Siren*, Cheryl shared: "I've become very empowered through being involved in the bi community in Toronto, [especially] the bi women's community. So I see this partially as a way of helping to build the community and connections that I'd like to see."[226]

The residual effects of lesbian feminist ideologies on the queer women's community combined with enhanced bisexual visibility throughout the 1980s to the early 2000s provided

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[222] Cheryl Dobinson, "'The Fence': A Bi Women's Zine is Born," *Siren Magazine*, 2003, access provided by The ArQuives online database.
[223] Rob Cover, "Re-Sourcing Queer Subjectivities: Sexual Identity and Lesbian/Gay Print Media," *Media International Australia* 103, no. 1 (2002): 119, https://doi.org/10.1177/1329878X0210300114.
[224] Ibid., 121.
[225] Dobinson, interview.
[226] Dobinson, "'The Fence'."

opportunities for bisexual women to coalesce and claim their own space in support and discussion groups. For some, this resulted in involvement with larger queer and feminist political organizing. However, similar experiences of sexuality were, for many bisexual women activists, as important to their politics as gender. In analyzing the activities undertaken by bisexual women from the 1990s onward, we can observe a reconfiguration of feminist woman- *and* bisexual-identified activism wherein bisexual women chose to direct their political and social energy towards each other, within Bisexual Women of Toronto, the Toronto Bisexual Network and beyond. This further demonstrates the politics of choice at play in the bi women's community, not only regarding romantic and sexual partners, but also friendships and alliances based on shared visions of fostering more inclusive attitudes within Toronto's queer community. Through their activism, bisexual women demonstrated their commitment to the women's community while also remaining cognizant of their differences amongst lesbians and shared axis of discrimination with bisexual men. Thus, they retained ties to both communities while also building their own.

In 2000, BIWOT co-founder Karol Steinhouse passed away unexpectedly in a car accident. Krista, who referred to Karol as a mentor[227], quoted her in a "Bi Lines" article dedicated to her memory which highlighted the political nature of BIWOT's existence:

> 'In my mind,' [Karol] wrote, 'there is no doubt that BIWOT is political […] I see the act of forming and attending the group as political acts. We've marched, been interviewed, designed radio shows with bi content, produced public forums, sponsored safer sex events, flyered, joined other queer activism efforts, and lobbied. Personal change, group support, and collective action often interlink and sometimes overlap.'

[227] Taves, interview.

BIWOT members interviewed for this project all addressed Karol's death in some way or another; she is, after all, an integral part of the cultural memory and ethos of BIWOT. Thus, her passing initiated a shift in action for many members of the group, as well as exposing the depth of the importance of BIWOT for the women involved.

Karol had been a very active facilitator and organizer in addition to her co-founding the group. For Dana, then, her passing left a gap in the organization that needed filling if it was going to continue on. She recalls: "I felt like nobody else was going to stand up and [take over organizing] because the other people who had been facilitating had already pulled back in a way. So once Karol died, it was like 'somebody's gotta do it and I have experience facilitating groups, so let's do that.'"[228] Margaret also remembered that receiving news of Karol's death had immediately changed the dynamic of BIWOT. In the midst of arriving at the 519 and hearing the tragic news, she said:

> […] I think in that moment, we all kind of grew up a bit in terms of being bi activists because when we left that night, BIWOT could have just died. Like, there could have just been no more BIWOT. But we had to say okay, what's gonna happen now? Like, someone is gonna have to show up and facilitate this. Does anyone know how to facilitate? Yes, we do, okay […] I think that gave us a new sense of responsibility that we didn't have before […] Before I had just been going to somebody else's support meeting, event, or you know, parties at their apartments. And so suddenly it was our group and we had to do something about it, or it was gonna disappear and I think that changed things a lot.[229]

Taking what they had learned from Karol and other facilitators, the women of BIWOT were able to keep the support group going, adapting it to a new structure and dynamic. Without them having taken the reins in the face of such a loss, BIWOT may not have been able to continue

[228] Shaw, interview.
[229] Robinson, interview.

serving the bisexual women's community. As a space for obtaining support, getting involved in political queer issues, discussing sexual identity and forming various meaningful relationships amongst each other, the members of BIWOT demonstrated that "the bonds formed through activism […] are particular and special," thus enriching the lives of bisexual women, and bisexual people as a whole, in Toronto.[230] Krista's final words in our interview are especially poignant here, and reflect sentiments from BIWOT activists that I spoke to while conducting my oral history interviews: "It provided the structure for me in a time in my life when I really, really needed to feel like I belonged somewhere and I got that. I really got that."[231]

[230] Cvetkovich, *Archive of Feelings*, 173.
[231] Taves, interview.

Conclusion: Bisexual Activism, Past and Present

Exclusion from gay and lesbian communities following the peak years of gay liberation pushed bisexual activists in Toronto to form support and advocacy groups later on. These organizations were established with the intentions of creating safe, affirming spaces for bisexual people to discuss their issues and participate in political action that promoted bisexual inclusion in the larger queer community. In addition to creating spaces for engagement and community building, bisexual activists made great efforts to educate gays, lesbians and heterosexuals about bisexual-specific issues and experiences through various workshops, panels and tabling at Pride, sexuality conferences and other queer events. Promoting understanding through education and advocacy were the primary means towards an end goal of having bisexuality be seriously considered and included as a valid queer experience that was both similar *and* different to that of gays and lesbians.

Some of the support groups established in Toronto in the 1990s continue to serve the bisexual population today, signalling their ongoing relevance and necessity. This begs the question of where bisexual activism and the acceptance of bisexuality within the queer community are at in their present moment. The recent controversy with the LGBTQIAS2+ Google glossary outlined in the introduction to this thesis reminds us that, despite many efforts from activists, bisexuality is often still erased when considering the needs and demographics of the queer community. The question of whether bisexuality is more tolerated and accepted nowadays differed amongst the activists interviewed for this thesis. On the topic of bisexual women activists hiding their identities due to judgement throughout the 1990s, Dana stated: "[…] there was and still is a lot of judgement from queer women towards bi and bi+ women, and trans, of course. But I don't think it's really changed a ton. I think it's getting better but it's a

very slow process."[232] On Leela's part: "I also see a lot more visibility right now, I say, in the last 10 years of bisexual women and so I think the conversation has shifted and I'm glad to see that […] I'm happy to see there's less rigidity within the LGBTQ community. There's less rigidity around bisexual presence and voices."[233] In essence, changes in attitudes towards bisexuality, leaning more positive than negative, have definitely occurred since the early 1980s in Toronto; but the degree and speed to which this acceptance has occurred depends on who you ask.

Ensuring that the fight for inclusion and visibility continues, many of the activists with whom I spoke with remained involved with the bisexual and queer community at large to this day. Cheryl was engaged in bisexual health research as of the early 2000s, and is still engaged in bisexual research projects that come up on her radar, big and small.[234] Stephen reported that he has a newfound interest in figuring out what he can do to support "bi+ people who identify as seniors and elders."[235] He also expressed excitement at being able to attend Pride events again following the COVID-19 lockdowns. He concluded our interview by saying: "I've marched, I think it's 26 years as a member of a bi group. I want to keep on going as long as my body can do it."[236] Krista works as a unitarian minister whose congregation is actively working towards being more bisexual and trans inclusive.[237] All of this demonstrates that bisexual activist work is never finished, and why understanding the historical foundations laid out by these organizations is crucial. It helps us see not only what the issues of the time were, but how the need to address those issues remains relevant.

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[232] Shaw, interview.
[233] Acharya, interview.
[234] Dobinson, interview.
[235] Harvey, interview.
[236] Ibid.
[237] Taves, interview.

Bisexual Women of Toronto and Toronto Bisexual Network's mandates and guiding principles of forming connections, advocating for the bisexual community and providing resources have stayed the same. However, they are also operating in a different queer landscape than when they were established in 1994. For example, both organizations have adopted a plus sign to the term bi (re: bi+) in order to explicitly account for the inclusion of other sexual identities attributed to multigender attracted people such as "pansexuals, omnisexuals, 2 spirit, fluid and other non-monosexual people (**the bi+ umbrella/mspec**), as well as people questioning their sexuality."[238] The name changes reflect, I believe, the bisexual community's commitment to inclusivity upon which its institutions were founded.

In addition to the continuation of social services and advocacy upheld by these organizations, the celebration of the bisexual community's creativity culture also persists. The Bi+ Arts Festival of Toronto, which was founded in 2016, is heralded by an "all volunteer group of visual and performing artists, authors and community activists [who] produce an annual arts festival every September"[239] which "celebrates bisexual visibility, culture and history."[240] Their 7th edition will be held this coming September. In recognizing the intersectionality of identities, the festival organizers highlight the work of those specifically marginalized within the bi+ community due to intersections of race, class, gender, ethnicity, religion, etc.[241] The celebration of bisexual history and culture within the festival also seeks to forge connections across generations, emphasizing the power of continued engagement with community histories.[242]

[238] "About Us," Toronto Bi+ Network, accessed May 27, 2023, https://www.torontobinet.org/about. Emphasis mine.
[239] "Who We Are," Bi+ Arts Festival, accessed May 27, 2023, https://www.biartsfestival.com/about/.
[240] Ibid., "Vision & Goals."
[241] Ibid.
[242] Ibid.

This has made me reflect on the process of this thesis as a whole. Indeed, the shaping of this work was ultimately made possible through connecting with bisexual activists from generations past. It is through these ongoing entanglements that we can recognize and appreciate where our communities have been, where they are now, and point ourselves in the direction where we should go next to ensure that visibility, inclusivity, advocacy and support remain priorities. For bisexual activism in Toronto, these ideologies were paramount, allowing for the claiming of space and creation of a community predicated upon an experience that had been mostly elided in the gay and lesbian community prior. Whether through involvement with activist organizations, literary projects or queer events, bisexual peoples' demand for visibility and refusal to be erased throughout the last decades of the twentieth century cultivated spaces that many were ultimately able to call theirs with pride.

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Appendix 1: Oral History Interview Questions

1. In what city were you active in bisexual organizing/activism/support groups?
2. Which years/decades were you most active in?
3. Were you previously involved in the larger gay liberation movement in Canada?
4. How and why did you come to get involved in bisexual-specific organizing and activism later on?
5. What were some of the common meeting spaces for bisexual groups that you were a part of and why were these spaces chosen?
6. What were some of the main goals and mandates of the bisexual organizations/associations/support groups you were involved with or participated in? What were the reasons they were formed, essentially?
7. Can you describe some of your feelings surrounding being more connected with other bisexual community members?
8. Could you tell me about one or two things that the group(s) you were involved in did for bisexual people in your area that you are particularly fond/proud of?
9. If relevant, can you tell me about how you perceived or experienced relationships with others in the queer community, especially in regard to queer politics?
10. Before finishing, is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences in activism that my questions didn't address?

Appendix 2: Certificate of Ethics, 2022-2023

CERTIFICATION OF ETHICAL ACCEPTABILITY
FOR RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

Name of Applicant:	Gabryelle Iaconetti
Department:	Faculty of Arts and Science\History
Agency:	N/A
Title of Project:	The Politics of (In)Visibility: Situating Bisexual Communities in Canadian Gay Liberation
Certification Number:	30016179

Valid From: February 24, 2022 To: February 23, 2023

The members of the University Human Research Ethics Committee have examined the application for a grant to support the above-named project, and consider the experimental procedures, as outlined by the applicant, to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.

Richard DeMont

Dr. Richard DeMont, Chair, University Human Research Ethics Committee