

DYKE PSYCHE
by esther rothblum



Lesbians and Bisexual Women — A Growing Alliance?

How do lesbians feel about bisexual women? Have these feelings changed over time? I asked Paula Rust, a professor of sociology at the State University of New York at Geneseo, who has conducted research on bisexuality ever since she was a graduate student.

that most heterosexual women keep their relationships with other women hidden. The similarity really struck me."

The relationship ended, but the result was that Rust began to study prejudice and boundaries within the lesbian community. Her dissertation was on "controversial issues within

relationships with men. "Being bisexual was not only keeping your foot in the door of heterosexual privilege, but even worse, wanting the best of both worlds. So bisexual women were in some ways even more suspect than heterosexual women. With heterosexual women you could

"With younger people, the word 'queer' is close to what 'gay' meant to women who came out earlier, before lesbian feminism," Rust said. "One of the goals of gay liberation was to work towards the goal of sexual orientation no longer mattering. The whole point was not to be proud of being a lesbian, but instead there was a focus on breaking down the distinctions so that it doesn't matter who you sleep with. But in fact, societal discrimination proved that the distinction does matter. So lesbian feminists built up categorical boundaries between heterosexuals and lesbians, and that left bisexual women out in the cold."

Rust feels that the idea of queerness is somewhat similar to the original idea of gay liberation, of working toward a time when the boundaries don't matter, and where who you sleep with doesn't define

ditional sex and gender categories.

The other meaning is almost in contradiction to the first. This meaning focuses on queer as a way of breaking down those very categories. So the question is, is 'queer' a way to include bisexuals as one of many groups, or is bisexuality part of the queer movement which has as its end goal the removal of all categories?"

In general, Rust thinks that lesbians are a little less threatened than we used to be about bisexuality, and therefore more able to open up our own boundaries.

Also, she sees bisexuality becoming more of a political identity and so there is less concern that including bisexuals will "water down" the politics of lesbians.

For further reading, see Paula Rust's books: *Bisexuality And The Challenge To Lesbian Politics: Sex, Loyalty And Revolution*, New York University Press, 1995 and *Bisexuality In The United States: A Social Science Reader*, Columbia University Press, in press. ▼

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For that generation of women, heterosexuality is 'sleeping with the enemy.' "Being bisexual was not only a foot in the door of heterosexual privilege, but worse, wanting the best of both worlds."

"I had been out five or six years by the time I was in graduate school," she said, "and what interested me was how the world looked different when you're in a different social location. All of a sudden I could see heterosexual privilege everywhere. The world looked different. But once I was in the lesbian community, I began to see the same kinds of dynamics. Some people reject other people because of their social location."

At a personal level, Rust began having an affair with a man and identifying as a lesbian. "I was keeping that relationship hidden the same way

the lesbian community," including how lesbians felt about bisexual women.

"The tension is strongest among the lesbian feminist generation," she said. "These are the women who came out in the 1970s. They came out in a feminist context where they viewed lesbianism and feminism as interrelated. Becoming a lesbian wasn't just a personal stance. It had to do with a political awakening."

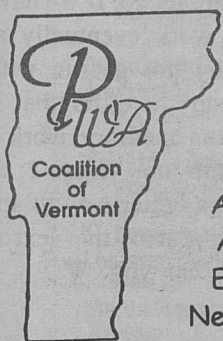
Rust feels that for that generation of women, heterosexuality is 'sleeping with the enemy.' Heterosexual women were not to be trusted; they had benefits due to being in

always come up with the excuse that they don't know any better yet. But a bisexual woman is more threatening because she knows what the alternative is but still chooses to be involved in heterosexuality or to say that she's willing to go that way. And that's threatening to [those] lesbians who [saw] sexual orientation as a political decision. So bisexuals were labeled as traitors, as fence-sitters, make-up-your-mind-you-haven't-come-out-yet - that's where those stereotypes come from."

But with younger generations of women, there is more adherence to queer politics.

your sexuality.

"Queer really has two meanings. One meaning is that it's an umbrella term. It includes anyone who doesn't fit into what might be considered tra-



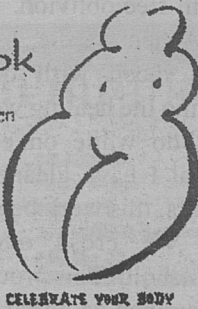
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