

The Birth of the Bi Movement

The contemporary bisexual movement began in the early 1970s, although earlier communities of bisexuals did exist, such as the Bloomsbury community of artists and writers at the turn of the century. Early bisexual groups tended to focus broadly on sexual liberation (for example, the Sexual Freedom League); members of these groups were often more closely connected to heterosexual "swinger" communities than to gay or lesbian communities. Many bisexuals were also associated with the early gay liberation movement, which at the time advocated sexual freedom and the potential for people to be sexual with both genders. As gay activists began to adopt an either/or "ethnic" identity-based model of sexuality, however, bisexuals were faced with exclusion from parts of the gay movement, and some sought to create specifically bisexual communities and organizations. The "Ithaca Statement on Bisexuality" (by the Quaker Committee of Friends on Bisexuality) appeared in *The Advocate* in 1972, announcing the new bi consciousness to gay readers. This consciousness was influenced by the shift of activism toward personal concerns following the end of the Vietnam war, by increasing gay visibility, by the feminist and civil rights movements, and by the cultural focus on paradigm-smashing and self-discovery (often aided by mind-altering drugs). This was the era of "bisexual chic," with a rash of articles in the popular press about bisexuality, and high visibility of bisexual rock stars and artists. The media focus was on the club scene and celebrities, rather than on bisexual liberation politics.

The first bisexual groups developed in the 1970s in large U.S. cities. The National Bisexual Liberation Group was founded in New York in 1972 and claimed a large membership in the U.S. and abroad by 1975; it published "The Bisexual Expression," probably the earliest bi newsletter. New York City's Bi Forum began in 1975, and Chicago's BiWays formed in 1978. The San Francisco Bisexual Center was founded in 1976, and from the start engaged in political activism. Throughout this period, bisexuals also continued to be active in gay and lesbian groups and events. The early 1980s also saw the development of a bisexual movement in the U.K. and Europe. Though this movement paralleled the U.S.

movement in some ways, the U.K. and European groups often arose from different roots and followed different courses. The London Bisexual Group was founded in 1981 by men active in the anti-sexist men's movement. The Edinburgh Bisexual Group formed in 1984 as an outgrowth of a lesbian/gay/bisexual socialists conference. The discussion later in this pamphlet regarding trends movement refers specifically to the movement in the U.S.

Changes in the 1980s

While the groups of the 1970s were often predominantly male, many of the 1980s organizations were founded and led by women. Bisexual women had begun to experience alienation from lesbian communities as separatism and polarization around sexual orientation increased in the late 1970s. For many bi women, bisexuality was an integral part of their feminist politics and they wanted their groups to reflect this emphasis. The Boston Bisexual Women's Network (formed in 1983) and the Seattle Bisexual Women's Network (founded in 1986) are based on these principles. The formation of bisexual groups proceeded steadily throughout the 1980s.

Washington DC's bisexual group began in the early 1980s. Philadelphia's Bi Unity, the Wellington Bi Women's Group in New Zealand, and groups in Germany and Australia formed in the mid-1980s. Umbrella groups were formed to facilitate regional organizing, including the East Coast Bisexual Network (now the Bisexual Resource Center) in 1985 and the Bay Area Bisexual Network in 1987. The first groups devoted specifically to bisexual political activism were formed, including San Francisco's BiPol (1983), Boston's BiCEP (1988), and New York City's BiPAC. AIDS had a profound effect on the bisexual movement. Bi men were stigmatized as spreaders of HIV from homosexuals to the "general population." In the late 1980s, as awareness of AIDS in women increased, bisexual women began to be stigmatized as spreaders of HIV to lesbians. These developments spurred discussions about the distinction between sexual behavior and sexual identity (for example, many self-identified bisexual women did not have sex with men, while many self-identified lesbians did). Activists and public health officials alike began to emphasize behavior, not identity, as a risk factor for HIV infection. Many men who had been leaders in the bisexual movement became ill or died, and many other bi men and women turned their attention to AIDS-related activism and service work.

National and International Consolidation

In 1987, a call was put out for a bisexual contingent to the 1987 March on Washington for Gay and Lesbian Rights. Seventy-five people participated in what proved to be the first U.S. nationwide bisexual gathering. Discussion began about creating a national or continental organization of bisexuals. Networking continued following the march, and the North American Bisexual Network in formation (NABN) was born. In June 1990, BiPOL organized the first U.S. National Bisexual Conference in San Francisco, with over 400 attendees. The conference was comprised of over eighty workshops on a broad range of subjects, including organizational meetings; as a result of these meetings, NABN was formalized as the North American Multicultural Bisexual Network (NAMBN). After a year of discussion and re-organization, NAMBN was renamed in the summer of 1991 to BiNet: the Bisexual Network of the USA. In October 1991 the First International Conference on Bisexuality was held in Amsterdam in the Netherlands, and in October 1992 the Second International Bisexual Conference took place in London, bringing together bisexuals from Europe, the U.K., and the U.S. The second U.S. National Conference on Bisexuality is being held in April 1993 in conjunction with the March on Washington for Lesbian, Gay and Bi Equal Rights and Liberation, and the third international bisexual conference is planned for June 1994 in New York City in conjunction with the celebration of the 25th anniversary of the Stonewall Riots (widely considered to be the birth of the modern gay rights movement).

New Directions in the 1990s

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, students and youth became more active in the bisexual movement. College students began to include bisexuals by name in campus gay and lesbian organizations, with over 100 such groups in existence by the end of the decade. At the same time, a new "queer movement" had begun to take shape. Young activists, many of whom were involved with the AIDS activist group ACT UP, formed Queer Nation in the summer of 1990. With its emphasis on diversity, radical politics, and direct action, this movement brought out people who had become disillusioned by the assimilationism and apoliticism of existing gay and bi organizations. Parts of the new movement

emphasize the inclusion of bisexuals, transgenderists and other sexual minorities under the queer umbrella; other parts are less welcoming to those who are not exclusively homosexual.

At the turn of the decade, there was a marked increase in the appearance of new books on bisexuality, which until then had been scarce and rather clinical. Groundbreaking anthologies included *Bisexual Lives* (Off Pink Publishing, 1988), *Bi Any Other Name: Bisexual People Speak Out* (Alyson Publications, 1990), and *Closer to Home: Bisexuality and Feminism* (Seal Press, 1992). In 1991 the bi movement gained its first glossy national magazine, *Anything That Moves*:

Beyond the Myths of Bisexuality, which joined many long-lived local newsletters such as Boston's BiWomen, Seattle's North Bi Northwest, and Philadelphia's Bi Focus. The early 1990s saw a proliferation of appearances by bisexual people in the U.S. and U.K. media, including such popular national talk shows as "Donahue" and "Geraldo." Universities have begun to include bisexuality in their gay and lesbian studies courses, and a few have even introduced courses specifically devoted to bisexuality. National and international bisexual networking has been aided by the creation of electronic computer mailing lists such as the BISEXU-L and BIFEM-L lists, the soc.bi newsgroup on Usenet, and numerous private bulletin boards. There are ongoing projects to record the history of bisexual movement and promote networking, such as International Bisexual Archives in Boston and London, and the International Directory of Bisexual Groups.

Looking Ahead

Moving toward the mid-1990s, several issues are on agenda for the bisexual movement. There is a growing emphasis on multicultural organizing and activism, and many are working actively to increase the participation of people of color in bisexual communities. Transgendered and differently-gendered people have long been active within bisexual communities, but have often remained hidden and been excluded where only single-sex groups exist. Today, their concerns are receiving more explicit attention, and many transgendered and non-transgendered bisexuals are focusing on breaking down polarized

gender categories. There is persistent tension within the movement between the desire to proudly claim a bisexual identity and build strong bisexual communities, and the desire to lessen society's divisive emphasis on labels and categories. Some bisexual activists focus on the category-smashing aspect, insisting that sexuality and gender should be viewed as a spectrum, that there is no "us" and "them." Other bi activists emphasize the need to fight societal homophobia, as well as fighting biphobia among gay men and lesbians. As the bisexual movement has grown, so too has the number of strategies and perspectives on bisexual organizing. Many bisexuals have focused on increasing bisexual inclusion within the lesbian and gay movement and communities; this is especially true of bisexuals who formerly identified as lesbian or gay themselves. The 1993 March on Washington was the first U.S. national action to explicitly include bisexuals, and is seen as a big step forward for the bisexual movement. Other bis are interested in creating a broader movement for sexual liberation (including all sexual and gender minorities) in which bisexuals will be equal participants, rather than seeking integration into existing gay and lesbian organizations. Some wish to create a movement that will focus on bisexuals and their unique issues, while at the same working in alliance with gay men, lesbians, and other oppressed groups when our struggles coincide. Still others are interested in organizing and mobilizing bisexuals who do not identify with or have ties to gay and lesbian communities. All these strategies can make a contribution as the bisexual movement and its many communities grows and diversifies.

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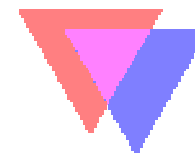
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A Brief History of the Bisexual Movement

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