

Excerpt from:



A HISTORY OF BISEXUALITY



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INTRODUCING BISEXUALITY

In any case bisexuality merges imperceptibly into simple inversion.
—Havelock Ellis 1901

BISEXUALITY—a state that has no existence beyond the word itself—is an out-and-out fraud, involuntarily maintained by some naive homosexuals, and voluntarily perpetrated by some who are not so naive.
—Edmund Bergler 1956

It is my opinion that while the word *bisexual* may have its uses as an adjective . . . it is not only useless but mendacious when used as a noun.
—John Malone 1980

I'm not sure that because there are people who identify as bisexual there is a bisexual identity.
—Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick 1991

Doubts about the veracity of bisexuality as an identity are not new. Various characterized within dominant discourses of sexuality as, among other things, a form of infantilism or immaturity, a transitional phase, a self-delusion or state of confusion, a personal and political cop-out, a panacea, a superficial fashion trend, a marketing tool, even a lie and a catachresis, the category of bisexuality for over a century has been persistently refused the title of legitimate sexual identity.¹ Yet, as is all too familiar to scholars of sexuality, the same cannot be said with regard to homosexuality. Since its invention as a peculiar human species in late-nineteenth-century scientific discourse, the homosexual as a modern identity has been the object of a rig-

orous, frenetic, indeed paranoid, discursive essentialization. Far from having doubt cast incessantly upon its veritable existence, the homosexual has been mapped, measured, and monitored in what can only be described as an interminable and insane reiteration of the supposed ‘essence’ and ‘truth’ of its being. On a much smaller scale, but with as much scientific zeal, has been the cataloging of myriad other psychosexual ‘deviations’. From the perverts invented by nineteenth-century sexology to the seemingly endless list of twentieth-century paraphiliacs, Western science has placed sexuality in a privileged relation to truth with regard to human subjectivity.² As Foucault put it: “Between each of us and our sex, the West has placed a never-ending demand for truth: it is up to us to extract the truth of sex, since this truth is beyond its grasp; it is up to sex to tell us our truth, since sex is what holds it in darkness.”³

Curiously, however, the category of bisexuality seems to have been spared the rigors of this “never-ending demand for truth.” Bisexuality continues, in fact, to represent a blind spot in sex research.⁴ This apparent oversight by our all-consuming regime of sexuality is particularly puzzling in view not only of the rather long history of research suggestive of the prevalence of bisexual practices in most human cultures, but also of the emergence, in many Western countries within the last two decades, of burgeoning and highly politicized bisexual movements. On the surface this may come as no surprise, given the common association of bisexuality with (self) deception and unreality. Perhaps bisexuality is *unnatural*, without ‘essence’ after all? Is it the antithesis of truth, an *untruth*? Or is it an imaginary or nonexistent state? And what would it mean to answer in the affirmative to these questions: Would bisexuality therefore be without history, even outside of history? And might this explain why so little ink has been spilled establishing its veracity, historicizing its (lack of) meaning? Opting for this explanatory path is for me, however, wholly unsatisfactory. For one thing, if so little critical attention has been accorded to bisexuality, how can anyone so confidently assume anything about its meaning, let alone arbitrate its ‘truthful’ existence?

Marjorie Garber’s *Vice Versa: Bisexuality and the Eroticism of Everyday Life* is one of the first comprehensive studies of bisexuality to engage some of these questions.⁵ In an encyclopedic account of eroticism within a wide range of cultural and literary texts, Garber sets out not just to put bisexuality on the sexual map, but to challenge common assumptions that have long structured its meaning. Her concern is not with theorizing or politicizing bisexuality as the latest identity “now finding its place in the sun” (65–66). Instead, she seeks to inquire into what bisexuality can teach us about

sexuality in general. The lesson, according to *Vice Versa*, is that the ‘nature’ of sexuality cannot be located in the fixed identities of *gay* and *straight*. It is, rather, mobile and mutable: The “nature of sexuality . . . is fluid not fixed, a narrative that changes over time rather than a fixed identity, however complex. The erotic discovery of bisexuality is the fact that it reveals sexuality to be a process of growth, transformation, and surprise, not a stable and knowable state of being” (66).⁶ Garber urges us to dispense with the hetero/homosexual opposition as our starting point for understanding sexuality. Why not begin just with the category of sexuality? she asks. Proposing a framework based on the Möbius model, Garber visualizes sexuality in terms of a three-dimensional figure. This kind of “topological space” makes redundant any concept of sexuality as either/or, as “two-versus-one” (30). No longer radically distinct, the categories of heterosexuality and homosexuality flow in and through one another.

Garber goes even further to suggest that, far from being a third sexual identity, bisexuality is a sexuality that “puts into question the very concept of sexual identity in the first place” (15).⁷ The logic behind this idea, as I mentioned above, is that she identifies the *nature* of sexuality to be a kind of unpredictable fluidity, uncontainable within the fixity of hetero/homosexuality. However, this unpredictable fluidity, this ‘sexuality’, is for Garber none other than bisexuality. That is, in constructing her Möbius model, she actually conflates sexuality with bisexuality, and substitutes the notion of ‘sexual identity’ with that of bisexual eroticism.⁸ The concepts of heterosexuality and homosexuality are thus subsumed by a bisexuality she argues “is neither the ‘inside’ nor the ‘outside’ but rather that which *creates* both” (526; my emphasis).

Anything but immature, peripatetic, erroneous, illusory, unnatural, bisexuality in this scenario is human sexuality itself. By extension, then, bisexuality is coterminous with human ‘nature’, with ‘truth’ itself. The effect of Garber’s intervention is thus not so much a disruption of what Foucault would call the *scientia sexualis*—the “procedures for telling the truth of sex”⁹—although she certainly wants to deconstruct ‘truth’ in the form of fixed and oppositional sexual identities. Rather, and working within this regime of truth, Garber effectively inverts the terms of the *scientia sexualis*: the untruth becomes the sole truth. Such a move of reversal is, of course, not without its uses. Like the first part of any deconstructive movement, it is essential to effect a strategic reversal of any binary opposition in question. It is equally important simultaneously to displace the negative term of this opposition from its position of dependency on the positive and to situate the former as the latter’s very condition of possibility.¹⁰ This much Garber

has done, and the concept of 'sexual identity', and thus the binarism of hetero/homosexuality, may appear on the surface to be momentarily disrupted. Yet it is this very move that leads her to claim bisexuality's status as inherently deconstructive. Bisexuality, proclaims Garber, is but a "sexuality that threatens and challenges the easy binarities of straight and gay" (65). In order to make this claim, however, Garber remains reliant upon the very opposition which underpins that of hetero/homosexuality: (sexual) identity versus (fluid) difference. The only difference is that the hierarchical relationship between the two terms is reversed, *difference* (which in Garber's model is fluid bisexuality) now elevated at the expense of *identity* (hetero/homosexuality). To leave the deconstructive project at this point is a little frustrating, however. In reifying bisexuality as a *sexuality*, Garber has given it a positive ontological or truth content, even if this content is viewed as fluid, uncertain, and in constant flux. Merely inverting bisexuality's status within conventional figurations of sexual identity, Garber redeploys heteronormative logic and thus remains squarely within the terms of the hetero/homosexual opposition she seeks to deconstruct.

At this point it would appear that Garber's reinvocation of an essentializing oppositional logic comes dangerously close to fulfilling the prophesy of which Eve Sedgwick lamented in an internet discussion list only months before the publication of *Vice Versa*. In just such a discussion of bisexuality's politicodeconstructive potential, Sedgwick wrote:

There are ways in which the political concept of 'bisexuality' seems to offer a *consolidation and completion* of an understanding of sexuality that can be described adequately [sic], for everybody, in terms of gender-of-object-choice . . . as though, once you've added "goes for both same *and* opposite sex" to "goes for same sex" and "goes for opposite sex," you have now covered the entire ground and collected the whole set.¹¹

These comments of Sedgwick's rehearse, indeed intensify, the seemingly irresolvable debate as to whether the concept or identity of bisexuality reinforces or ruptures our binary epistemology of sexuality. Both sides of the political divide have received sufficient airing since the mid-1980s.¹² And Sedgwick is certainly not alone with her characterization of what I call the 'impotence' model of bisexuality. Donald Hall, coeditor of a recent collection of essays, *RePresenting Bisexualities*, agrees: "I . . . especially dislike the term 'bisexual,'" he says, "for it inescapably encodes binarism" (11). On the basis of this kind of logic Elisabeth Däumer urges us to resist constructing bisexuality as another sexual identity. For, "rather than broadening the spectrum of available sexual identifications," she too argues that it merely

“holds in place a binary framework of two basic and diametrically opposed sexual orientations.”¹³

On the other hand, however, these claims of bisexuality’s political impotence compete with a chorus of theorists and activists who have been arguing that the politicized category of bisexuality represents a fundamental challenge to the gendered structure of hetero/homosexuality. Bisexual theorist Amanda Udis-Kessler, for instance, argues not only that bisexuals “unintentionally” threaten the “meaning systems by which lesbians, gay men and heterosexuals live,” but that bisexuality as a category “inevitably” poses “crises of meaning” for our binary epistemology of sexuality.¹⁴ Like Garber, Udis-Kessler figures bisexuality as inherently deconstructive, subversive, revolutionary, and undermining of the binarized logic and structure of gender and (mono)sexuality.¹⁵

I have never been comfortable with the ‘impotence’ model of bisexuality and its rather tidy political prognosis. Nor am I satisfied with the opposing, and rather utopic, position that bisexuality is somehow inherently subversive.¹⁶ Aside from the seemingly obvious fact that within Western culture in general the “easy binarities” of which Garber speaks appear anything but under threat, it strikes me as equally premature to discard the category of bisexuality to the scrapheap of theoreticopolitical sterility; especially in view of its long history of critical neglect within discourses of sexuality. In my view, framing the analysis of bisexuality in binary terms represents a false antithesis. It serves to mystify rather than elucidate the complexity of bisexuality’s discursive and political intervention in the 1990s and beyond, just as it misrecognizes the ambiguous and contradictory epistemological history of bisexuality itself. So instead of remaining within the terms of this existing political dispute, I would like in this book to refuse its dichotomous framing and subject it to critical examination *by turning to this epistemological history*. Just as our political and theoretical analyses of homosexuality required the historicization of the very concept of *homosexuality*, so too would I suggest that any political and theoretical analysis of bisexuality is impoverished (if not useless) without an adequate account of its historical construction.¹⁷ Yet a sustained and contextualized account of the history of sexuality and bisexuality’s place in it is absent not just within the debate, but within our entire archive of historical knowledge.

Bisexual theorist Michael du Plessis has argued recently that in the current climate of sexual theory and politics it is crucial to examine *how* notions of bisexuality and bisexual identity have “come to be unthought, made invisible, trivial, insubstantial, irrelevant.”¹⁸ This imperative is the starting point for this book. *A History of Bisexuality* explores the complex

conjunction of issues framing the discursive relationships between bisexuality and modern sexual identity, between bisexuality and figurations of human 'nature', and between bisexuality and the construction of sexual 'truth'. The question of how bisexuality and bisexual identity have been erased is, I suggest, inextricably bound up with the broader history of bisexuality as an epistemological category. I will analyze how bisexuality as an epistemological category has functioned both to foreclose the articulation of a bisexual identity and to reproduce the hetero/homosexual opposition.

WRITING A QUEER HISTORY OF (BI)SEXUALITY

As indicated by the subtitle, the project of writing a *queer history of (bi)sexuality* draws heavily on the interlocking fields of gay and lesbian history and queer theory. So what might this form of history writing look like? In order to expound the methodological contours of this approach, it might first be useful to examine how bisexuality has been figured until now within these interlocking disciplinary formations.

Throughout the last two decades or so, the field of gay and lesbian history has expanded rapidly. Histories of sexuality—of homosexuality, and increasingly of heterosexuality—have been and continue to be published at an astonishing rate. Yet, for the most part, bisexuality scarcely figures within this burgeoning historiographical field. At first glance it would appear, then, that bisexuality has said very little, and has very little to say, to this historical archive. However, I would argue that one of the primary reasons for bisexuality's apparent insignificance might be the fact that the defining mark of gay and lesbian history writing has been a methodological reliance on an identity paradigm. Central to this paradigm has been a distinction between sexual behavior and sexual identity. Constructionist historians, cautious of conflating homosexuality and homosexual identity, have found it useful to examine the history of sexuality through this distinction. As a guiding methodology, this has been effective, as Jeffrey Weeks has observed, as a way of distinguishing "between homosexual behaviour, which is universal, and a homosexual identity, which is historically specific."¹⁹

For reading bisexuality, however, this approach introduces conceptual problems of its own. While homosexual identity is not universalized, a homosexual act is. The problem of identity is thus only deferred and displaced. Neither an act nor a palpable cultural identity—at least until the late 1960s in the case of the latter—bisexuality merely vanishes into the categories of

hetero- or homosexuality. The identity paradigm is thereby reified and bisexuality is completely erased from the historical record. Chris Cagle describes this approach as “monosexual gay historiography.”²⁰ Where bisexuality does rate a mention, it is almost always rendered an epistemological and incidental by-product, aftereffect, or definitional outcome of the opposition of hetero/homosexuality. It is therefore not seen as in any way significant to the diachronic construction of this opposition. For instance, as historian George Chauncey has noted in his most recent work, “Even the third category of ‘bisexuality’ depends for its meaning on its intermediate position on the axis *defined* by those two poles.”²¹ Erwin Haeberle, in his introduction to the recent anthology *Bisexualities*, reaches a similar but more historically inflected conclusion: the modern concept of bisexuality “did not arise,” indeed, “*could not come into existence*,” he argues, until after “the simple opposition” of homo/heterosexuality had been invented.²²

Within the field of queer theory bisexuality is also figured as rather incidental to the hetero/homosexual structure, this time in terms of synchronic deconstructive analysis. Queer theorists such as Eve Sedgwick, Diana Fuss, and Lee Edelman, among others, have produced many useful studies that serve to work the hetero/homosexual opposition, as Fuss puts it, to the “point of critical exhaustion.”²³ Powered by a desire to expose the relational construction of identity, one would expect an analysis of bisexuality—hovering as the category does somewhere around the two poles of hetero/homosexuality—to form a part of this rigorous deconstruction. Yet in spite of occupying an epistemic position *within* this very opposition, the category of bisexuality has been curiously marginalized and erased from the deconstructive field of queer theory. In many ways this appears to mirror the marginalization of bisexuality within gay and lesbian history. On the surface, it seems that one of the reasons for this is the assumption that, as Lee Edelman notes, the hetero/homo binarism is “more effectively reinforced than disrupted by the ‘third term’ of bisexuality.”²⁴ However, it would seem that this idea functions as a corollary of the historical assumption that bisexuality is a by-product or epistemic aftereffect of homo/heterosexuality. Just as bisexuality is seen to be of little interest or use to the historicizing project, within queer theory the implication of Edelman’s claim is that bisexuality is seen to offer little critical leverage in deconstructions of the hetero/homo polarity. But I suggest that there is more structuring this assumption than appears at first sight. It seems to me that the marginalization and erasure of bisexuality within queer theory is not just a theoretical question, just as bi-

sexuality's marginalization and erasure within gay and lesbian history is not just a historical question. These particular figurations of bisexuality are, importantly, symptomatic of the relationship of gay and lesbian history to queer theory. And, as I will demonstrate in this book, such figurations occlude much more than they illuminate.

The queer intervention in critical theory and cultural studies has certainly held out enormous promise in its deconstructive critique of identitarian frameworks. With its emphasis on demystifying the shifting and relational construction of identity categories, and of exposing the rhetorical and ideological functions that these categories serve, queer theory seems aptly situated to strengthen and revitalize the historicizing project of gay/lesbian history. Yet, as Lisa Duggan has suggested, these queer "critiques, applied to lesbian and gay history texts, might produce a fascinating discussion—but so far, they have not." Outlining the "strained relations" between the fields of queer theory and gay/lesbian history, Duggan goes on to argue that the former has too often failed to acknowledge its debt to the latter; while the latter "have largely ignored the critical implications of queer theory for their scholarly practice."²⁵ The editors of *Radical History Review's* queer issue mention something similar, detecting a "sense" that the respective methods of gay/lesbian history and queer theory are thought to "exist in sometimes uncomfortable tension." This appears to reflect the fact that "there has been remarkably little dialogue between these two presumably related projects."²⁶ This strikes me as rather odd. Despite queer theory's overarching desire to deconstruct Identity in all of its forms, both queer theorists and gay and lesbian constructionist historians are indeed united in the quest to denaturalize categories of sexual identity in order to reveal the contingency, the historicity, and the political processes of their production. In spite of this obvious affinity, however, fruitful dialogue between the two fields has not been forthcoming.

Expanding on Duggan's analysis, then, I would suggest that what in part informs the relationship between the two fields is an implicit and unproductive distinction between social constructionism and deconstruction; this, despite the fact that it is history or, more specifically, an understanding of the historical specificity of Identity, that conditions both of these fields. Put another way, deconstructive critique of all kinds presupposes the historicity of identity categories. Historicization and deconstruction ought, therefore, be part of the same process. One might thus expect the two fields to form a mutually enriching historicotheoretical relationship. After all, queer theory's prized deconstruction of sexual identity is reliant upon, and

indeed derivative of, constructionist analyses that traced the historical invention of the hetero/homosexual dualism in the first place. So the neglect or “condescension” Duggan points out in queer theory’s (lack of) engagement with gay/lesbian history framed squarely around the identity paradigm is all the more puzzling, especially given queer theory’s rigorous attempts to dismantle such a paradigm. Yet what appears to have happened is that ‘history’ has been in some ways bracketed out as the proper object of constructionism, and ‘theory’ the proper object of deconstruction, with little critical reflection on their complicitous interlacings.²⁷

I hasten to point out that a reliance on constructionist history is not a bad thing by any means. Social constructionist history has been, *and is*, an extremely positive development, without which I and the many other scholars in gender and sexuality studies would not be able to do the work we are doing. Constructionist historians have produced many brilliant histories that have been informed by a desire to denaturalize and historicize those categories of sexual identity long assumed to be ahistorical and universal. On the other hand, no historical account is ‘complete’; no one work is able to address the many and varied ways of approaching questions of historical method and interpretation. Constructionist history has been concerned primarily with tracing the emergence of homosexual identities, less often with tracing the epistemological processes informing their production. One of the effects of this, as I have mentioned, is that bisexuality has made only a fleeting appearance in the historiography of sexuality. The emphasis on identity and the fact that, as far as we know, bisexuality has been barely (if at all) visible as a palpable cultural identity until recent decades have meant that in constructionist histories bisexuality is mentioned only in passing by a few theorists of sexuality. It has also meant, I will argue, that the identity paradigm, and thus the hetero/homosexual opposition, have been unwittingly reproduced in a queer deconstructive theory derivative of such constructionist historical accounts. This will be examined more fully in chapter 7. My reason for preempting this argument now is not simply to set out the structure of *A History of Bisexuality*, but to reveal one of the primary assumptions of this work: Although queer theorists and lesbian and gay historians have made a relentless assault on essentialist notions of identity, their efforts to denaturalize and deconstruct the hetero/homosexual structure and its concomitant notions of identity have not gone far enough. And it is around the question of bisexuality’s relationship to figurations of sexual identity that both queer theory and gay/lesbian history have in some important ways fallen short.

In this book I would like to initiate a productive exchange between the two fields of queer theory and gay/lesbian history. What I am endeavoring to work toward is what I will call a form of *deconstructive history*; or more specifically in this case, a *queer deconstructive history*. I hope to extend the work of gay/lesbian historians by opening up the history of sexuality to queer analysis and to extend the scope of queer theory by opening it up to history. In order to do this I want to situate bisexuality not as *marginal* to discourses of sexuality, as has been the dominant tendency throughout the last 130 years or so, but as *central* to any understanding of the historical construction of binary categories of sexuality.²⁸ I am not concerned with the historical reclamation of ‘bisexuals’ in history, although the analysis that follows may have profound implications for that kind of restorative historical project. Nor is it my intention to offer the definitive word on bisexuality or bisexual identity. Indeed, an underlying motivation for this study is to evacuate both the concept of sexuality and our categories of sexual identity (including bisexuality) of any ontological content. In this way I differ from Garber, who would like us to begin our analyses with the category of ‘sexuality’ rather than the hetero/homosexual opposition. I do not want to begin with the generic category of sexuality any more than I want to begin with the hetero/homosexual opposition. Both, it seems to me, not only naturalize a range of identifications, pleasures, and desires (among other things no doubt) into a reductive ontological entity, but also marginalize and erase *difference* and the fundamental indeterminacy at the heart of what we so uncritically call ‘sexuality’ or ‘sexual orientation’.²⁹ This caveat notwithstanding, my genealogy may nevertheless provide a useful framework through and against which to explore the fraught issues surrounding sexual definition. With a focus only on Western discourses and theories, I will not be offering a comprehensive account of all that has been written on the subject. Instead, I intend to identify some of the fundamental epistemological tendencies that have structured dominant Western representations of sexuality and identity.

In the wake of the ‘performative turn’ in critical theory and cultural studies, I too am interested, as Eve Sedgwick has implored, in asking of bisexuality not “‘What does it *really* mean?’ . . . but ‘What does it *do*?—What does it make happen?—What (in the ways it is being or *could be* used) does it make easier or harder for people of various kinds to accomplish and think?”³⁰ The more tangible objective of this study, then, is to employ bisexuality as a heuristic device for rereading and rethinking some of the critical moments in the history, theory and politics of sexuality. A (*queer*)

deconstructive history is a form of history writing that takes as one of its primary political aims the deconstructive project of problematizing “the very idea of opposition and the notion of identity upon which it depends.”³¹ Such a project, as Mary Poovey points out, can provide the basis for a “genuinely historical practice” (58). By tracing the important, and heretofore ignored, role of bisexuality in the construction of the hetero/homosexual opposition, I will invert one of the common (mis)readings of bisexuality’s epistemological construction. Far from being ‘defined’ by, or reduced to an aftereffect of, the ‘two’ poles of the opposition, as Chauncey, Haeberle, Edelman, Fuss and others might have it, I will show how these two poles have in fact been defined in important ways by bisexuality.

This study begins as an attempt to reframe contemporary discussions of (bi)sexual politics and theory by opening them up to a more theoretically self-reflexive history. Here I draw on the work of Michel Foucault, whose methodological innovations have been groundbreaking in reorienting the discipline of history. In particular, my study is informed by his notions of *problematization* and *genealogy*. This refers to the practices by which something is brought into “the play of truth and falsehood” and set up “as an object for the mind.”³² For Foucault the question of present politics is inextricable from the question of history. And, no doubt, questions of politics and history are inextricable from the question of theory. Problematization is a strategic intervention in present politicotheoretical contests through the deployment of an “effective” form of history. As Foucault describes it, “I start with a problem in the terms in which it is currently posed and attempt to establish its genealogy; genealogy means that I conduct the analysis starting from the present situation” (238).

In Foucauldian terminology, I seek to write a genealogy of what Marjorie Garber has called “the bisexual moment.”³³ This is a “history of the present” that attempts to problematize contemporary struggles around the question of (bi)sexuality.³⁴ As a form of *historiographical intervention*, I hope this book will provide a framework oriented toward opening up possibilities for thinking (bi)sexuality more effectively *as history*, *as theory*, and *as politics*.³⁵ Thus, the call to inquire, as Sedgwick urges, into what bisexuality *is doing* or *can do* within the “prevailing discourse” of sexuality is not enough without inquiring simultaneously, and more comprehensively, into what bisexuality *has done* within this discourse. Any deconstruction of historically overdetermined identity categories ought to engage rather than presume the history on whose behalf it speaks. And only when we have historicized the conditions of bisexuality’s emergence as both epistemological

concept and political identity can we begin to clarify some of the complex issues conditioning bisexuality's various and contested meanings and functions.

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"Like all sexualities, 'bisexuality' has a history," declares Jo Eadie, in what might appear at first sight to be a statement of the obvious.³⁶ Yet as Eadie himself is fully aware, this history has scarcely even begun to be told, even within the nascent "politically and theoretically confident discourse of bisexuality."³⁷ Eva Cantarella has written on the history of bisexuality in the ancient world.³⁸ However, there has been no sustained account of the history of bisexuality in the modern West. Garber's *Vice Versa* is less a study of history than an examination of particular instances of bisexuality as they have appeared in a wide range of historical texts. She is not so much concerned with historicizing bisexuality as an epistemological category or identity as she is with invoking bisexuality as a universalizing metaphor for understanding the truth of human sexuality. In this way *Vice Versa* reads more as a theory of sexuality constructed out of history than a history of (bi)sexuality's construction. In a recent article, "Identity/Politics: Historical Sources of the Bisexual Movement," Amanda Udis-Kessler has attempted to begin the task of historicizing bisexuality as a modern political identity.³⁹ "There are many points where I could begin this story," she says, "but it seems that going back before the late 1960s does not add much to this discussion" (53). For Udis-Kessler the political identity of bisexuality owes its emergence primarily to lesbian feminism in the 1970s. The overriding concern appears to be with the historical documentation of a somewhat autonomous bisexual movement and identity. However, it seems to me that this kind of approach, while important for the groups it is representing, is problematic in at least two crucial ways. First, to use the words of Foucault, it represents "a form of history that . . . [is] secretly, but entirely related to the synthetic activity of the subject."⁴⁰ The history of bisexuality is thus construed as the recent unfolding of individual bisexual consciousness. Second, it ignores the much older history of bisexuality as epistemological construct. As I will demonstrate here, however, it is this history that has in large part conditioned and constrained the historically specific emergence of bisexuality as a political identity. Just as important to the discussion of why this identity has emerged when it has is the question of *why it did not emerge earlier*. Construed through an identity paradigm, Udis-Kessler's historical and theoretical framework leaves this crucial relationship unexamined.

Merl Storr takes some productive first steps toward historicizing bisexuality in its mutually constitutive relation to other axes of identification. In a chapter in the recent anthology *The Bisexual Imaginary*, Storr traces the construction of ‘sexuality’ in relation to ‘race’ within a few key nineteenth-century sexological texts.⁴¹ Other writers have made cursory mention of bisexuality as it has inhered in discourses of sexuality before Stonewall. For instance, in recent anthologies such as *RePresenting Bisexualities*, *Queer Studies*, and *Bisexuality: A Critical Reader*, it is not uncommon to read references to sexologists, to Freud, or to Kinsey in theoretical discussions of bisexuality. However, such references are couched largely in terms of synchronic analyses of the failed attempts to theorize bisexuality as an identity in its own right. There has been a tendency to presume rather than to explain the theory and history of how and why these attempts have not succeeded. While I do not question the notion that a bisexual identity has been repeatedly refused at the level of theory, I suggest that it is important to provide a clearer historical picture of the discursive processes of bisexual erasure. *Bisexuality: A Critical Reader* does in fact attempt to document the historical production of thought in relation to bisexuality in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In a section entitled “Genealogy of a Sex Concept,” chapters are devoted to the works of Havelock Ellis, Sigmund Freud, Wilhelm Fliess, and Alfred Kinsey. However, in offering only extracts of some of the works of these thinkers, these chapters are not historicized analyses of such work—they are merely compartmentalized presentations of certain notions of bisexuality. This reflects the editorial objective of the entire collection, which is, as editor Merl Storr points out, an exploration of the question of “what bisexuality is” (3).

By conducting a genealogy of bisexuality as an epistemological category, this study departs from these existing, ‘historical’ readings. This is not a social history of the bisexual movement, a history of bisexuality as an autonomous sexual identity, a reading of bisexuality in historical texts of sexuality, or an attempt to determine what bisexuality is. This is a genealogical history, a refusal of the search for origins and truth in favor of an analysis of the very production of (sexual) truth. As genealogical analysis, or, perhaps, as performative diagnosis, my interest lies with analyzing the discursive *function* of bisexuality in the historical construction of knowledge about sexuality. What did and what does bisexuality *do* in and for discourses of sexuality? What purpose has it served as a category of thought? How can we use bisexuality to rethink the history, theory, and politics of sexuality? By employing bisexuality as a category of historical and theoretical analysis, I will attempt to link the existing synchronic analyses of bisex-

uality to a loosely diachronic account of the history of sexuality in general. This, I hope, will reflect Jonathan Dollimore's suggestion of using history to read theory and theory to read history in an effort to offer new perspectives on both.⁴²

THEORIZING HISTORY, HISTORICIZING THEORY

Queer theory shares with poststructuralism and deconstruction a profound distrust of identity. Categories of identity are seen to be exclusionary and normative, falsely unifying and universalizing, contingent and illusory. Their construction, moreover, is seen to rest on classical binary logic that fails to do justice to the representation of difference. This form of reason or logic represents identities by way of a dualized structure and relation of otherness: a relation, as Val Plumwood has observed, of "separation and domination inscribed and naturalised in culture and characterised by radical exclusion, distancing and opposition between orders constructed as systematically higher and lower, as inferior and superior."⁴³ Such accounts of dualistic logic are by now commonplace in feminist philosophy and critical theory, particularly given the widespread influence of poststructuralist and deconstructive theories, which provide useful tools for analyzing the play of difference and the workings of binary logic. As I will demonstrate, such theories are suitably calibrated to analyze the historically specific articulations and transformations of binary classifications.

In splicing queer deconstructive theory and gay/lesbian history, a queer deconstructive history would try to avoid straightforwardly reinscribing this binary logic within its own categories of historical analysis. Therefore, rather than read history through the identity paradigm, I aim instead to read identity, as Joan Scott suggests, as a historical and "discursive event."⁴⁴ This involves an analysis of the discursive processes that enable binary notions of sexual identity themselves to be produced and reproduced over time. In other words, my queer deconstructive history is not a history of the social construction of sexual identities, but a history that traces the epistemic logic and discursive operations within and through which these identities were relationally produced within psychomedical discourse. My genealogy is a historicotheoretical intervention somewhere at the threshold between queer theory and gay/lesbian history, rather than a substitute for constructionist history. Diana Fuss has suggested that "identity always contains the specter of non-identity within it," that "identity is always purchased at the price of the exclusion of the Other, the repression or repudiation of non-identity."⁴⁵ Taking this deconstructive insight as a point of

departure, this study represents an attempt to reread the history of sexual identity through the very specter of nonidentity. That the category of bisexuality has occupied this position suggests that it provides a useful analytic lens through which to undertake this task. Where Foucault's genealogy sought to historicize the *scientia sexualis* and its production of sexuality and sexual identities, my genealogy aims to go inside the *scientia sexualis* in order to examine how this production of sexuality and sexual identity was made possible through an incessant repudiation of the Other, of nonidentity, of bisexuality. By situating bisexuality at the center of our historical analysis a new and important dimension is added to our understanding of the history of sexuality and to the relationality of identity, and thus in turn, to our deconstructions of binary sexual identity.

In *A History of Bisexuality*, I propose that it is necessary to rethink the methodological foundation of the disciplines of both queer theory and gay/lesbian history. The hetero/homosexual dyad can no longer be employed *prima facie* as an axiomatic departure point.⁴⁶ For, as I will demonstrate in what follows, this is no simple dyadic structure. Rather, it is, or perhaps more accurately, *it has functioned*, as a triadic structure in modern representations of sexuality. What I will thus be proposing is that within Western discourses of sexuality, defined as they have been by classical logic, bisexuality as an epistemological category is part of the *logical or axiomatic structure* of the hetero/homosexual dualism—even if only as this structure's internally repudiated other. To claim this is to claim that bisexuality as a concept cannot be said to postdate those of homo- or heterosexuality. Whether explicitly defined or not at the moment of homo- and heterosexuality's scientific invention, the notion of a dual sexuality, let us call it bisexuality, is without doubt a logical or axiomatic component of such a dualistic structure. Being *either* heterosexual *or* homosexual implies the conceptual possibility of being *both* heterosexual *and* homosexual. Even where the 'law of the excluded middle' might prevail, it can only prevail to the extent that it repudiates the possibility of a dual sexuality, or the third term of bisexuality. Yet such an act of repudiation can take place only by acknowledging in the first instance the conceptual existence of that which is being repudiated. This suggests to me that the concept of bisexuality as a dual sexuality (both/*and* instead of *either/or*), as the conjunction of hetero- and homosexuality, or as the epistemological threshold between the two, must emerge as a logical and conceptual possibility *at precisely the same moment* at which hetero- and homosexuality emerged as dualized identities. Of course, it is widely known that the concept of homosexuality was invented before that of heterosexuality.⁴⁷ But what I am trying to suggest is that within the binary epistemology of

sexuality the *conceptual* possibility of both heterosexuality and bisexuality as modes of sexuality emerged at the moment of homosexuality's invention, despite the fact that these terms were not explicitly named and defined until some years later.⁴⁸ I am not suggesting that what I am referring to as "bisexuality" is literally equivalent to the conjunction of hetero- and homosexuality, and that it thus has some positive epistemological content; only that this conjunction is a logical presumption of the hetero/homosexual structure. This theoretical claim will be put to the test of history in chapter 2 and then theoretically elaborated upon in chapter 8. For now, suffice it to note that whether or not this conceptual possibility I am referring to can be identified as "bisexuality" is beside the point. What I am trying to tease out is the logical paradox structuring bisexuality's marginalization and erasure from both queer theory and gay/ lesbian history.

Identifying bisexuality not simply as a pivotal player, but as the third term that structures the hetero/homosexual opposition, also demands a reformulation of an important queer poststructuralist insight. Where queer theory posits the mutually constituting nature of hetero- and homosexuality (i.e., the one term requiring the other for its self-definition), my analysis posits instead a trinary relationship. Within our modern epistemology of sexuality, any figuration of homo- or heterosexuality *necessarily* entails—wittingly or unwittingly (and as my genealogy will show, it is usually the latter)—a figuration of bisexuality. In other words, to invoke and define any one of the terms hetero-, homo-, or bisexuality is to invoke and define the others by default. Each requires the other two for its self-definition. The effect of this logical, or axiomatic, structure is such that shifts in any one of the terms hetero-, bi-, or homosexuality require and engender shifts in the others.⁴⁹ If such a proposition is to stand the test of historical analysis, it just might, at the very least, further the interminable project of deconstructing our inherited sexual identity categories and dispossessing 'sexuality' of any positive ontological content.

TRAJECTORY OF THE TEXT

This book is divided into two parts. The central theme unifying parts 1 and 2 is the argument that, historically, bisexuality represents a blind spot in hegemonic discourses of sexuality. Bisexuality has functioned as the structural Other to figurations of sexual identity and has represented the very uncertainty of the hetero/homosexual division. I will provide historical and theoretical support for the idea that, to use Michael du Plessis's words, a theoretical engagement with bisexuality has been continually postponed,

“never to interrupt the present moment.”⁵⁰ That is to say, a particular temporal framing of sexuality has cast bisexuality in the past or future but never in the present tense.⁵¹ Part 1 is entitled “Constructing Sexual Identity” and explores some of the critical moments in the production and reproduction of the hetero/homosexual opposition within dominant psychomedical discourses from the mid-1800s to the late 1960s. Far from being marginal to this process, I will suggest that the category of bisexuality played a pivotal role in constructing and maintaining this oppositional framework. My argument is that the elision of bisexuality from the present tense has been one of the primary discursive strategies employed in an effort to avoid a collapse of sexual boundaries—a *crisis of sexual identity*.

In chapter 2 I trace the emergence in the second half of the nineteenth century of what I have called *the economy of (hetero)sexuality*. This refers to the invention of the category of ‘sexuality’ in general, and the opposition of hetero/homosexuality in particular. I suggest that this new ontological framework can only be understood in the context of profound shifts in the categories of gender. I will argue that the category of bisexuality was central to the structure and coherent maintenance of this new discursive economy. However, I will demonstrate that bisexuality also simultaneously subverted the oppositional categories of man and woman, heterosexual and homosexual. As a result, it was erased in the present tense and remained a necessary blind spot in sexological thinking.

Chapter 3 offers a detailed examination of one of the most influential theorists of sexuality, Sigmund Freud. Freud’s extensive oeuvre served to expand and reinforce the emerging economy of (hetero)sexuality. Bisexuality was the centerpiece of his psychoanalytic account of gender and sexuality. However, not unlike its effect in sexological discourse, bisexuality was also a concept that profoundly undermined the identificatory categories of masculine, feminine, heterosexual, and homosexual. I will argue that, in order to ensure the viability of the Oedipus complex, bisexuality was not only a necessary mystery, its articulation in the present tense was an impossibility. Chapter 4 traces a fundamental shift in the theorization of sexuality within psychoanalytic discourse. The radical implications of bisexuality led to a determined effort to secure the troubled boundaries of the hetero/homosexual division. I will suggest that a two-pronged discursive strategy was employed in this task. First bisexuality was repudiated as a scientific anachronism, and second homosexuality was pathologized, the latter made possible by the former. I will argue that this discursive shift was the effect of another crisis: the crisis of (hetero)sexual identity.

Part 2 is entitled “Deconstructing Sexual Identity.” In this section I ex-

amine some of the significant theoretical and political attempts to contest the hetero/homosexual opposition. Chapters 5 and 7 detail two such attempts as they have been articulated through the movements of gay liberation and queer. Both of these movements have sought in different ways to incite, rather than to avert, a crisis of sexual identity. Chapter 6 examines the emergence of social construction theory, primarily Foucauldian, as a significant theoretical force shaping postliberationist and queer contestations of sexual identity.

Chapter 5 begins part 2 with an analysis of gay liberation in the early 1970s. Drawing from the movements of antipsychiatry, relativist sociology, cross-cultural anthropology, radical Freudianism, the counterculture, black power, Civil Rights, and women's liberation, gay liberation theorists and activists sought to challenge the economy of (hetero)sexuality and its binary taxonomy of gender and sexuality. The concept of bisexuality was revived as the appropriate concept for this task. I will argue, however, that despite its political and theoretical redeployment, bisexuality was reduced to a nostalgic and utopic dimension and elided in the present tense of gay liberation also.

Any account of the history, theory, and politics of sexuality would be deficient without a sustained analysis of Foucault's enormous contribution to the field. Chapter 6 begins with a brief account of the emergence of labeling and symbolic interactionist theories before launching into a detailed examination of Foucauldian social constructionism. As we will see, with the shift to antiontological accounts of sexuality, and to constructionist and post-structuralist assaults on essentialist notions of sexual identity, the category of bisexuality was rendered irrelevant, losing its political and theoretical appeal. I will evaluate the utility of Foucauldian theory for deconstructing sexuality in general and the hetero/homosexual opposition in particular, arguing that despite his productive and influential intervention, Foucault's theory is limited for undertaking this task. In addition, however, the function of this chapter is to subject Foucault's work itself to a Foucauldian genealogy. In so doing, I will reposition his work as itself caught up in the very deployment of sexuality he sought to escape. What this has meant for my genealogy of bisexuality is that, although irrelevant to his project, one of the effects of Foucault's intervention and reception has been yet another foreclosure (albeit in very different ways and for very different reasons than those occurring in psychomedical discourses) of any consideration of the category of bisexuality. This will provide the basis in the following two chapters for a reconsideration of bisexuality as a useful and indeed necessary tool of deconstructive analysis.

Chapter 7 traces the recent intervention of queer theory in the project of deconstructing sexual identity. While it would seem that queer theory has developed Foucault's work in important ways, I will argue that in certain problematic ways many queer theorists unwittingly reinscribe binary categories of sexuality. One of the reasons for this is poorly historicized deconstructive frameworks, or, to put it another way, an uncritical reliance on a historiography of sexuality that has ignored the role of bisexuality. I will suggest that in order to further the project of queer deconstruction, a historicotheoretical engagement with the category of bisexuality is essential. For what will become clear in this study is that if the category of bisexuality has been pivotal to the construction of sexuality and of the hetero/homosexual structure, then by corollary, it ought also be pivotal to their deconstruction. Through a rereading of a number of recent genetic studies of homosexuality, chapter 8 will then attempt to demonstrate the value of bisexuality as a critical tool for furthering the (queer) deconstructive project.