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Saying “Bi Bi” to Exclusive Feminism

L. F.

In modern feminism, we see many influential women coming forward and utilizing social media to spread awareness on prevalent issues, such as rape culture and male gaze. These leading voices are strikingly different than the ones that came before them in terms of diversity. The struggle to include many minority groups in feminism has been long fought and still continues today, but one of the forgotten is the LGBTQ+ community. Though lesbian women have led past feminist movements, the trans and bisexual community has been shut out just as much as gay and bisexual men and everyone else in the queer community. These groups are consistently ignored because they are seen as contrary to the feminist movement just by their identity, especially bisexual women who find themselves excluded from both the LGBTQ+ community and the heterosexual community. Luckily today many women like Roxane Gay, who identified herself as a Haitian-American, bisexual, feminist, and writer in an NPR interview, are leading feminism and exposing millions to its principles through media (*Raz*). Her TED talk and book captures the attention of millions of educators and students and exposes them to the good and bad of feminism. She pushes the idea that no one in the feminist movement is perfect and that's okay. This line of thinking is a relief to so many feminists who feel threatened by call out culture and those beginning to recognize implicit sexism they have engrained in them. She also shows that anyone can be a feminist, even if you indulge in sexist media every once in a while, or don't fit the cookie cutter mold of what a perfect feminist is and looks like. Though she brings up her identities and unique differences openly with the world while remaining an amazing spokesperson for intersectional feminism, she doesn't directly interconnect her bisexuality and feminism. This missing link is preventing a more complex and motivated feminist movement that we all desire. Though they have been historically excluded from feminism and harmed by its heteronormativity and cisnormativity, the bisexual community and the LGBTQ+ community as a whole are crucial to feminism as they present diverse experiences of gender, sexual violence, and more that

drive the modern feminist movement. This essay will examine the intersection between sexuality and feminism with a focus on bisexual women.

Bisexuality has consistently been excluded from the feminism movement in the past. Though it was prevalent in Ancient Greek and many other historic settings, it wasn't fully shamed until Sigmund Freud detailed heterosexuality as positive and homosexuality as negative. In *Invention of Heterosexuality*, the author highlights Freud explaining his subject Dora's sexual encounter with a female figure as "a passing pubescent phase- a stage on the road to heterosexuality" while her male sexual encounters are deemed legitimate (Katz). This not only began the idea that bisexuality is temporary, but it attached negative feelings toward any type of homosexual interaction. Though they were societally unacceptable, these communities still began to unite and flourish within itself. In fact, the bisexual community was involved in the 1963 Stonewall riot, along with other LGBTQ+ members at the time, and lead multiple marches and early alliance groups at universities (Rosenblum). When the time came, the bisexual community wanted change and supported the feminist movement, but the women called "lesbian feminists" soon pushed them away. In an archive of published bisexual works, one section introduces two phenomena to this exclusion. They observe a growing distance between bisexual women and lesbians, along with lesbians being closeted of any bisexual feelings ("Bisexuality", 39). Women who initially identified as lesbian during this movement but dated men afterwards were seen as "lesbians gone straight" instead of bisexual or whatever they wanted to identify as. This resentment lesbian feminists held towards those who are attracted to men is bitter, unproductive, and long lasting, which led to consistent exclusion and erasure of their opinions and ideas. It hasn't been until the current feminist movement that bisexuality was even partially included in feminism. Though pansexuality has been embraced by most recent social justice movements, others in the LGBTQ+ community are still pushed aside and ignored. Gay, bisexual, and straight men take much of the criticism feminism offers on the basis of using their power as males to rise in their careers and society, which stratifies women further. Trans and non-gender conforming folks are also criticized by the feminism movement. Past and some present feminists view transitions as either taking advantage of male privilege to become female or avoiding gender-based discrimination by transitioning to male or not conforming to gender at all. Asexuality isn't even acknowledged by some feminists. There are so many more people who find themselves comfortable in the LGBTQ+ community but not in the feminist community because of their history of exclusion based on power structures they can't control and identities they hold close. They have been consistently pushed away by feminists and their opinions were silenced. Intersectionality and inclusion of everyone has recently become more crucial to achieving any efforts. Roxane Gay supports this by claiming, "I reject the mainstream

feminism that has historically ignored or deflected the needs of women of color, working-class women, queer women, and transgender women, in favor of supporting white, middle- and upper-class straight women. Listen, if that's good feminism – I am a very bad feminist" (Gay). If we endorse the belief that these individuals are counter to our ideas of "good feminism", then we should not be feminists at all.

Heteronormativity has had a negative impact on bisexuality and feminism as a whole, which we still see today. Modern feminism tackles many issues but one of the most notable is sexual violence, especially with the #MeToo movement (Reynolds). A significant percentage of these acts are projected towards bisexual women and men. By only looking at sexual assault, rape, and domestic violence as a male taking advantage of a female, you completely ignore the estimated half of bisexual women that have been raped, the six in ten bisexual women who have encountered intimate partner violence, and the one-third of bisexual men who have faced partner violence (Kates). These voices matter and need to be heard to tackle this problem and end the harm it causes on all walks of life. Yet, "because queer sexual culture or 'way of life' is what violates social norms, *culture* becomes the material of queer resistance" (Ward, 417). This dissonance caused by violating social norms also causes cisnormativity. Cisnormativity has an even worse influence on feminism, especially for trans men and women. In our modern praise of women, we tend to highlight struggles only cisgender women face, such as menstruation, breastfeeding, and birth control. Though these issues are important for cisgender women, there is so much more to feminism than these struggles and only talking about these issues completely eliminates the contributions of other gender identities. Trans women are women. We need to stop the preconceived notion that they are lesser than us because their journey was not the same as ours. We also need to stop excluding trans men or other gender identifying individuals who deal with menstruation, breast feeding, and birth control. These issues aren't just faced by cisgender women and these issues don't make us more of a woman than anyone else. This unspoken exclusion is detrimental to advancing the feminist movement and will lead to its demise if we don't recognize that all genders are valid, and their stories need to be heard.

In more recent feminist discourse, we see a great portion of the LGBTQ+ community taking charge on hot topics. We value the idea of including different women in feminism and recognizing the intersectional oppression they struggle with throughout their life. We see individuals like Ellen Degeneres, Ellen Page, Harry Styles, Laverne Cox, Ruby Rose, Cara Delevingne, and so many more LGBTQ+ celebrities taking the media by storm and publicly identifying as feminists. Bisexual inclusion in the feminist movement especially has increased in recent years, with many influential celebrities, such as Demi Lovato, Miley Cyrus, and Lady Gaga, identifying as

LGBTQ+ and feminist. Though these individuals are not representative of a range of socioeconomic class or race, they have become role models both for young LGBTQ+ folks and young feminists who are exposed to them through media, which encourages growing acceptance and progress with each generation. This push towards having access to a role model through media can help others realize they are not alone in their struggle and they can be successful, even with their adversities. These celebrities also use their platform to normalize feminism and show how diverse feminists can be. They have become spokespersons that are pushing forward the feminist movement to inclusivity and commonality.

Though these celebrities have catalyzed recent growth of the feminist movement, they rarely put their sexuality and feminism together. The modern feminist movement involves a large portion of bisexual women, yet our sexuality on the basis of gender and the social construct behind it is never criticized or even discussed. We need to start talking about how sexuality is based on this, how it can lead to enforcing the gender binary, especially for the bisexual community, and how we have pushed towards pan/polysexuality in recent years because of it. We need to talk about how sexuality and belief systems such as feminism are seen as phases in our lives that we will grow out of. We need to start talking about how slut shaming is a common phenomenon for the LGBTQ+ community, especially bisexuals, and for sex positive feminists. We need to highlight works such as *Mulan* that show badass women taking on masculine traits and how attraction doesn't have to be based on gender. We need to highlight drag queens and how their shows throw ideas of gender, sexuality, and power out the window (Taylor and Rupp). There are so many more issues and discussions that combine both LGBTQ+ struggles and feminist struggles in modern society which are often ignored. Though many figures in both movements deal with the same issues, we have yet to work together cohesively to make change. If we keep ignoring these hot topics, we will never make progress towards a better society. But if we begin teaching our ideas of sex and gender through both an LGBTQ+ perspective and a feminist perspective, future generations will eliminate the toxic norms we grew up with. Publicly uniting these two movements would provide more support and change for not only the issues we face together, but issues we face separately that are just as important.

Including bisexuals and the entire LGBTQ+ community in the feminist movement is necessary in moving forward with modern feminism. In the previously mentioned archived literature, the authors bring up the point that lesbian and bisexual women are working towards the same social changes, such as violence against women, AIDS, and discrimination (“Bisexuality”, 40). The focus of the current feminist movement is still violence, discrimination, and sexualization. To achieve our goals of ending sexism, objectification, and sexual and domestic violence, the LGBTQ+

population needs to be heard. Instead of using privilege to speak on behalf of others, we need to provide these platforms to members of the LGBTQ+ community and other minority groups so they can tell their stories and experiences themselves. These voices are just as important as the voices of cisgender, heterosexual, Christian, middle- and upper-class white women who tend to lead feminism. If feminism promotes the equality of men and women, it also needs to promote the equality and inclusion of everyone. As best said by Roxane Gay in *Confessions of a bad feminist*, “We are not just women. We are people with different bodies, gender expressions, faiths, sexualities, class backgrounds, abilities, and so much more. We need to take in account these differences and how they affect us, as much as we account for what we have in common. Without this kind of inclusion, our feminism is nothing.”

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