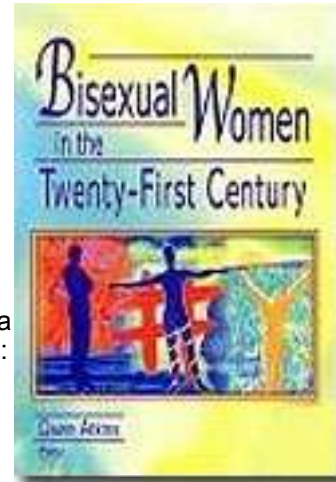


## Book Review: Bisexual Women in the Twenty-First Century

By Amy Andre

In *Bisexual Women in the Twenty-First Century* (2003), editor Dawn Atkins, bi-academician extraordinaire, offers readers a collection of some of the finest research coming out of the bisexual academic community in the last few years. In each chapter contributing authors focus on a different element of the experience of bi women. Part of the book's power and appeal comes from the fact that most of the researchers are bi women themselves, representing viewpoints from diverse members of bi communities. This is a key feature of the book: analysis of the bi women's community is being conducted by its own members.

Writing styles vary from informal to highly academic, but there is a little (or a lot; see Elizabeth Whitney's essay "Cyborgs Among Us: Performing Liminal States of Sexuality") of each author's personality in every piece. Certainly, each woman touches on the way in which her research resonates personally. In connecting with her research in this intimate way, each author connects with the audience as well. It is clear that this book was written for bisexual women, by bisexual women, and about bisexual women's lived experiences. As a bisexual woman, student, educator, and researcher, I saw myself in every page of the book, even as I, at times, disagreed with an author's analysis or conclusions.



The book covers a wide variety of topics, including: the ways in which bi women define "bisexuality" as a word and concept; relationships between various members of the LGBT community; the experiences of bi women in intimate partnerships with men; the role of bi women in sex work communities; analyses of bi women in film and literature; a bi women's community in England; the difference between queer theory and bisexual theory; and much, much more.

The most notable chapters were those by Carol Queen, Loraine Hutchins, Kristi Ketz and Tania Israel, and Stephen T. Russell and Hinda Seif. Dr. Queen's essay "Lesbian Love in the Swingin' Seventies: A Bisexual Memoir" takes us on a very personal journey through her experiences coming of age and coming out in a community where sexual activity with men was frowned upon by lesbian-feminists.

Loraine Hutchins, in "Bisexual Women as Emblematic Sexual Healers and the Problematics of the Embodied Sacred Whore," delves into the historical and cross-cultural notions of sex workers as sexual healers; she pays special attention to the ways in which some bi women, as women who often have, or have had, lovers of more than one gender, adopt roles as healers, whores, and priestesses. Her point is that we need to start paying attention to the contemporary emergence of sacred sexuality communities and the place of bi women in them.

Kristi Ketz and Tania Israel wrote about bi women's health in, "The Relationship Between Women's Sexual Identity and Perceived Wellness." In this work, they show that women who have sex with male and female partners and identify as bisexual seem to have a similar perception of wellness as women with identical sexual behavior and monosexual identities. This finding seems to contradict the hypothesis that women whose behavior is congruous with identity will have a higher level of perceived wellness than women whose lives incorporate incongruity.

Finally, Stephen T. Russell and Hinda Seif pieced out information from a national survey on adolescents to bring us "Bisexual Female Adolescents: A Critical Analysis of Past Research, and Results from a National Survey." In this chapter, the researchers provide much-needed insights into the lives of bi teen girls, many of whom fall off the radar screen of other research on adolescent sexuality. The book's one disappointing feature was the lack of information on bi women of color and the intersections of race and sexual orientation in the experiences of bi women. This may be emblematic of the fact that bi women of color academic researchers are (a)

few and far between, (b) poorly funded and overworked, or (c) both. Clearly there is a need for more funding opportunities to conduct affirming and community-centered research on the experiences of bi women of color.

This is a volume whose time has come, and I look forward to seeing more of its kind. Biphobia, racism, sexism, and sex-negativity, among other categories of oppression, have long prevented us from hearing the voices of bi women. Bi women in academia - as well as our supporters and collaborators - have an opportunity to change that pattern for the better. I hope this book will mark the beginning of a new chapter.

Published in *American Sexuality Magazine* (July 7, 2004). Copyright reserved.