TITLE: Halfway There: An Exploration of Bisexual Womanhood

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ABSTRACT:

Our identities shape who we are and who we will become, but what does that process look like? None of us are born knowing how we fit into the world and – for most of us – it takes our whole lives to understand, let alone answer, that question. Through a collection of personal essays and public essays, I explore issues of identity, specifically those of sexual identity, political identity, and mental illness. Through this investigation, I attempt to better understand myself and my role in this complicated world.

Inter-community politics can be a significant aspect of finding and understanding one’s identity, particularly in terms of the LGBT community. Through the experiential lens of bisexual womanhood, I seek to explore my place in the LGBT community, wrestling with issues of exclusion, erasure, and impossible standards. For instance, how are bisexual individuals treated by non-bisexuals? Can “safe spaces” truly be considered as such, or is that “safety” only extended to certain populations? However, rather than focusing on the history of these issues within the community, I choose to emphasize the aftermath: how are bisexual men and women today coping with these tensions, which have been building for the past century? Furthermore, how do we champion the movement for change and inspire future generations to do the same?

In addition, my project highlights what it means to be an activist and a feminist as a bisexual woman. More specifically, I ask: how does my identity shape my interactions with these communities and with the political world at large? Putting myself in conversation with bisexual and lesbian feminist scholars, I speak specifically to radical feminism and queer theory and how these specific fields do – or do not – bring their communities together. Is it possible to peacefully acknowledge female sex-based oppression while also recognizing the changing face of gender in our society? Have both feminists and queer theorists lost the ability to think critically, instead substituting it for the fear of constructive critique of one another? While considering how others have approached these questions before me, I not only analyze the current role bisexual feminists are playing in the world but also argue for the role I believe we should be playing, for ourselves and one another.

Finally, my work also focuses on the issue of mental illness within the bisexual community, specifically the female bisexual population. Compared to heterosexuals and gay men and women, bisexuals have significantly higher rates of depression, self-harm, and suicide (Barker, 2015). However, these findings, which have been consistent for the past few decades of research, have not yet prompted major qualitative studies to investigate the possible causes for the increased mental illness in bisexuals (although possible causes have been speculated). By bringing in statistics from mental health organizations and LGBT scholars, I add my own speculative logic to the conversation in hopes that I can shed some light on why and how mental illness manifests in the bisexual community. In addition, I explore how we can address these mental health concerns both individually and within the LGBT community, using this frame to consider my own experience with mental illness and how it has become another aspect of my identity.