

## Bi+ Voices at Creating Change 2021

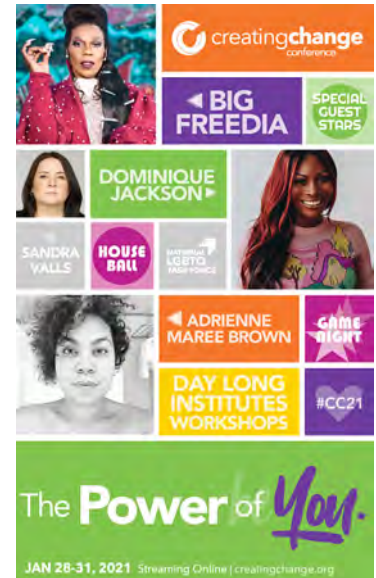
By Miles Joyner, with Emilyn Kowaleski, Alice Erickson, and Avery Staker

When I went to my first Creating Change Conference in 2018, I was almost overwhelmed by the amount of bi+ representation and community. While that conference was in-person, the virtual 2021 conference had much of the same impact for many of the attendees.

When I was asked to help run the Bi+ Caucus, and later the Bi+ Institute, I really had no expectations. I mean, a virtual Creating Change? Looking back on my time in Washington, D.C. in 2018, much of what I enjoyed about the conference was the social interaction outside of the workshops and institutes. Virtually, those events wouldn't have the same effect, or produce as much of a sense of community and networking—or so I thought.

I logged into Zoom the day of the conference and, as the “room” was opened, I was pleasantly surprised. Bisexual people had come out in force to take part in the Institute, and, later, the Bi+ Caucuses. For many of us it seemed like we were somewhat instant friends and, if given the opportunity, could have kept talking for hours. The hours spent listening to Robyn Ochs, and Institute and Caucus participants. Ping-ponging ideas during quick breakout sessions caused me to feel like I had gone back in time for a moment; back to the days of consciousness-raising sessions.

Another conference attendee, Emilyn Kowaleski, commented on their experience as a bisexual person interacting with other multisexual individuals in a dedicated space, describing their experience as a “breath of magic.”



*Creating Change, continues on page 20*

## threesome

By Nest Valorfixer

When I was young, a lady flirted with me and my then-boyfriend. I remember it seemed like having sex with her would be easy to slip into. We were all curious, but we hesitated, and then that mood didn't occur again. We were afraid, and then things changed. We saw her one more time and then she moved away.

I often wonder how my life would have gone differently if that threesome had happened. I ended up marrying that long-ago-boyfriend, and we had a conventionally bad relationship for a few years. More unconventionally bad would have been preferable! Or something more interesting that worked better, with a different distribution of needs and ways our needs could have been met.

I can't not love people, especially people who I touch, so it's not possible for me to have a threesome without feelings. I've wanted threesomes, with many people—I've fantasized about being the filling of a person-sandwich. It would be overwhelming in a sensory way and social way. But if I was resilient, maybe the feelings could be powerfully joyful! My circuits would be full, the feelings of being overwhelmed part of the ecstasy.

Now I'm middle-aged, and it's never happened. I wonder if it will. I have so many fantasies and I've seen it in porn. I want to watch someone else sexually please my spouse, and I want to share. I want the generous newness of sharing sexually. I want to be thrumming with desire for two people at once. I want to collaborate on a sexual experience with more than two participants. I want to feel new emotions, like jealousy or fear—not about something theoretical or past, but about something happening right before my eyes. Sounds masochistic, but I'm curious. I feel ready for it.

Taking a chance seems right for what I have now. I feel safe with my spouse and pushing on that seems like a good idea. But there's no one we have plans with, or with whom the friendship seems to be going in that direction. We've invited a few friends into our family over the years, but no one wanted to join. I attract people who are curious and want to research other ways of living, maybe experiment obliquely, but not actually jump in.

I experience sex as an intense, vulnerable ritual that creates veil-rendering pleasure. I see God in the beautiful sensations and union. To have that union with two people at once sounds very different and I'd like to prioritize that. But the emotions will

*Nest, continues on page 22*

## Editor

Robyn Ochs

## Assistant Editor

Katelynn Bishop

## Events &

## Calendar Editor

Sheri Hill

(with heartfelt gratitude to Chas, who served in this role for a long time!)

## Proofreaders

Andrea Miotto

Carlina Green

Cheryl Lackman

Jini Zuniga

Robyn Walters

## HONOR ROLL

*Thank you for  
volunteering:*

Asher Runion

Chas

Elynn Ruthstrom

Em LaLiberte

Gail Zacharias

Ty Thomas

All articles and art appearing in the *Bi Women Quarterly* are copyrighted by the authors and artists.

**Boston-area women:  
Join our Google group:  
[https://tinyurl.com/  
Join-BBWN](https://tinyurl.com/Join-BBWN)**

## Editor's Note

Dear Community,

The theme of this issue is *Never Have I Ever*. The prompt was: "Tell us about something you have never done. Is it something you hope to do, or something you hope to keep avoiding? If you hope to do it, what has stopped you, and do you think you will one day?"

In addition to poems and essays related to this theme, you will also find my interview with Fiona Petras from Malta in the "Around the World" column and reviews of three recent events.

Speaking of events: if you could use some community, consider joining us at our monthly "digital brunches" for bi+ women and nonbinary folks. You are invited, no matter your geographic location. Digital brunches will be held on June 13, July 10, and August 1 at 1pm Eastern Standard Time. And whatever your gender, you are invited to join us at World Bi+ Meetups. The next two are scheduled for July 11 and October 8.

*Bi Women Quarterly* has a global reach. We are fully aware that, while COVID affects every human on Mother Earth, its impact varies widely. Wherever you are, and wherever your community is in its struggle against COVID, it is our hope that you will experience *Bi Women Quarterly* as a place of joy, a shelter in the storm. Remember: You are part of a worldwide bi+ community and you are not alone.

-Robyn

**Kat reads BWQ.  
Send a picture of  
yourself reading  
BWQ to [biwom-  
eneditor@gmail.  
com](mailto:biwom-<br/>eneditor@gmail.com).  
Be creative!**



## Upcoming in *Bi Women Quarterly* Call for Submissions

### Fall 2021: Bodies

Let's return to the topic of bodies—our own bodies, our embodied connections, body image, gendered bodies, health and (dis)ability, socially distanced bodies, virtual bodies, changing bodies, attraction, and sexuality. Share your reflections on embodied experiences through personal stories, poetry, artwork, or opinion pieces. Submissions are due by August 1, 2021.

### Winter 2022: Traditions

What are the ways that you honor various traditions in your life? Are there bisexual traditions? Does your sexuality shape the way you create, adhere to, or rebel against traditions? Do traditions offer you support and meaning? Or do they feel repressive and confining? Share the multiple ways that tradition plays out in your life with essays, poetry, photography, or artwork. Submissions are due by November 1, 2021.

Submission guidelines are online at [biwomenquarterly.com](http://biwomenquarterly.com). Send your submissions and suggestions for future topics to [biwomeneditor@gmail.com](mailto:biwomeneditor@gmail.com).

Note: If you do not want your full name published, or wish to use a pseudonym, just let us know.

We are an all-volunteer organization. Want to proofread, edit submissions, host one of our monthly brunches, help us with social media, fundraising, our Etsy shop, or our WordPress website? Or, if you're a student, consider an internship. If you're interested in helping out, please contact Robyn ([biwomeneditor@gmail.com](mailto:biwomeneditor@gmail.com)).

*Bi Women Quarterly* has been in continuous publication since 1983. It began as a project of the Boston Bisexual Women's Network (BBWN), a feminist, not-for-profit collective organization whose purpose is to bring women and nonbinary folks together for support and validation. Through support, education, social groups, and the production of *Bi Women Quarterly*, we seek full acceptance for bisexuals and those with other non-binary sexualities within LGBTQ+ communities and in society generally. More broadly, we seek the liberation of people of ALL genders, ALL sexual orientations, and ALL racial and ethnic identities.

# AROUND THE WORLD: Fiona Petras, Malta

Interviewed by Robyn Ochs

*Fiona, please tell us about yourself.*

I identify as a cisgender, fluid bisexual woman and go by she/her pronouns. I was born and raised in Malta, and also lived in the U.K. and Belgium before moving to the U.S. for work. I am now 25 years old and working in foreign affairs.

During lockdown, I rediscovered my love for reading and writing. In fact, I've challenged myself to complete my first novel, which has been my dream ever since I was a child. It will mainly focus on feminist issues and pro-choice themes, and I want to use my writing as a space for bisexual characters to exist in a Maltese setting without the story revolving around their orientation.

Once gyms safely reopened last summer, I returned to my favorite hobby—pole fitness and aerial arts! I've had a complicated relationship with my body my whole life, and pole helped me appreciate what my body is capable of.

*How did you come to identify as fluid bisexual? What caused you to first start questioning your identity/sexuality?*

It's difficult to pinpoint an exact "aha!" moment. Even after I learned that bisexuality exists, it didn't click until years later. Looking back at my childhood, there were definitely moments that I now realize could have been crushes. However, it's easy to analyze your past through the prism of your current self-awareness.

*I call that "the lens of 20/20 hindsight!" Things can look very different looking backward.*

The truth is, as a child I had little interest in romance beyond playing make-believe. I think my initial attempt to prove that I have always been bisexual stems from the "Born This Way" argument.

That said, I always had an inkling that I might one day become attracted to a woman, even though I barely had any evidence at the time. I went through life inexplicably paranoid that others could sense something I couldn't. When I was ten, a playmate at the park began absent-mindedly fidgeting with my shirt collar, and I went red, certain that I would be "found out" by my parents.

*Ouch!*

While playing princesses with my sister, I once entertained the idea that a princess might kiss me instead of a prince. In my mind, I was behaving like a boy, because only boys like girls. I carried this shame into my teenage years. Sometimes, a friendly hug from a platonic friend would trigger musings about a hypothetical relationship with a girl. As a result, I had problems showing my friends physical affection—even long hugs caused me great stress. I was especially confused because I wasn't attracted to my



friends. I also knew I liked boys and therefore couldn't be a lesbian. While firmly believing in gay rights, I didn't fall under this category, so I resolved to push it all down and believed I was a broken, perverted straight person.

It was social media that opened my mind to the vocabulary I'd lacked as a child. When I first encountered the term heteroflexible around the age of 16, I felt that it described me perfectly at the time. As far as I knew, I was straight, but who was I to say what would happen in the future? As time went on, I started entertaining this idea more and more.

It wasn't until freshman year at university that I began mixing with people I hadn't known since kindergarten and finally met girls who I was attracted to. Due to my uncertainty, I dipped my toe in by thinking of myself as *bi-curious*. I made a bunch of irrational decisions, jumping into bed with the first guy I liked who gave me attention because I wanted so badly to validate my attraction to men.

Finally in my online research, I discovered the definition you coined—that bisexuality is the potential to be attracted, romantically and/or sexually, to people of more than one gender, not necessarily at the same time, in the same way, or to the same degree! The key word that struck me was "potential," and finally everything clicked into place. I had always had the potential to be attracted to women, even though I had not yet met the right person. Continuing to experiment with labels, I tried *bisexual heteroromantic*, as the flexibility of the split attraction model appealed to me. Finally, I settled on just *bisexual*, and I no longer exclude the possibility of romantic attraction to any gender. If someone were to call me *pansexual*, I would not contradict them. However, I identify more with the term *bisexual* because it is the

*World, continued on next page*

*World, continued from previous page*

first word that made me realize there was nothing wrong with me, and so I attach deep emotional meaning to it.

I started dating men and women roughly around the same time, at 20 years old. Before my first date with a woman, I was terrified. What if I didn't like kissing her? Would that mean I just wasn't attracted to her, or that I'd been faking all along? But that first kiss felt so natural that I no longer doubted my capacity to feel attraction towards any gender. Funnily enough, she happened to have a gender-neutral name, so for a few months I managed to keep my best friends in the dark about this new development. I felt as though once I uttered the word *bisexual* out loud, I wouldn't be able to take it back, but the relief that came with finally confiding in my closest friends took a huge weight off my shoulders that I had been carrying since childhood.

Admittedly, the first woman I dated and I did not have much in common, but as with most first times, I became infatuated (I once stayed out with her and her friends until 7am in an attempt to garner her attention). On the other hand, I was faced with the reality that if this worked out, a) my future could change drastically, and b) I would have to tell my parents. This terrified me, and I sabotaged everything, pushing her away until she gave up on me. I still feel guilty for how I treated her and for embodying the stereotype of a "bad bisexual," flaky and indecisive, as she called us.

Aged 24, I entered my first long-term relationship with a man—a Maltese American (what are the odds?). Before this, I had to experience a series of negative responses from men and women alike, calling me unreliable/untrustworthy, comparing me to cheating exes, or oversexualizing me and trying to take advantage of me sexually.

*What, if any, is your religious background, and what impact did this have on your coming out?*

Malta is a predominantly Roman Catholic country, although religious influence has steadily decreased in the past decade. I was raised Christian and consider myself as such only in so far as that is my cultural heritage, and it is so closely intertwined with Maltese life. I had to attend catechism classes to obtain my sacraments, went to Mass every Sunday, and attended a church school where I studied religion as part of the national curriculum. My O-Level finals [a secondary school exam] coincided with Malta's 2011 divorce referendum and included questions like, "What should a good Christian say about legalizing divorce and same-sex marriage?" In my teens I became disillusioned with the Church as an institution and how its teachings interfered in local politics. Realizing that I could never possibly confirm or deny the existence of God and the afterlife, I settled on the term *agnostic*, rejecting yet another binary (religious versus atheist).

My disillusionment stemmed from various factors, not least due to a family feud which unfolded around the time of my O-Levels when I was 15. I watched as my staunchly Catholic grandmother and my grand-aunt used each other's queer children as pawns against one another. Seeing them being treated like cannon fodder caused me personal distress which I was unable to understand at the time. My grandmother finally acknowledged and accepted my uncle's orientation and his partner, but a whole decade later our ties with my grand-aunt's side of the family remain severed. Before leaving for the U.S., I visited them, and it broke my heart to see that they didn't even recognize me. Today, I am only out to my best friends, my partner, and my younger sister, who is also bisexual and came out to me first (when she was 15 and I 18). My parents are much more open-minded when it comes to gay marriage, having helped my uncle come out to my grandparents. At first, however, even my parents struggled to understand bisexuality. They confronted my sister after accidentally seeing some Facebook messages and couldn't understand why, given the choice, she wouldn't simply choose "the better of the two options." I resolved then and there not to become yet another "problem."

*And now you're out to us, too, though under a pseudonym. I'm curious: what is the legal and cultural situation for LGBTQ+ (LGBTQIA+) people in Malta?*

Same-sex marriage was legalized in Malta in 2017 by a more liberal government (not without its own flaws). In 2015, Malta adopted ground-breaking legislation protecting intersex children from unnecessary medical interventions. The Gender Identity, Gender Expression, and Sex Characteristics Act recognizes the right to bodily integrity and physical autonomy. It is now also possible to not list one's gender on ID documents. Since then, Malta has been ranked first by ILGA-Europe in terms of LGBTQ+ rights legislation. EuroPride 2023 will also be hosted in Malta.

Unfortunately, our culture hasn't been so quick to catch up. While most people are now growing more accepting of lesbian



Pride March in Malta's capital city Valletta.  
Photo credit: Allied Rainbow Communities/Focus by Mr. V

*World, continued on next page*

World, continued from previous page

and gay individuals, bisexuals and trans/non-binary people still remain largely forgotten or misunderstood. In 2019, a transgender woman was assaulted in Malta as she was waiting at a bus stop. When the government adopted more gender-inclusive legal language (such as *spouses* instead of *husband/wife* and *parents* instead of *mother/father*), there was public outrage. Transphobic rhetoric was also scribbled in the University of Malta bathrooms when a gender-neutral stall was introduced in addition to the gendered ones. Groups of self-proclaimed “ex-gays” continue promoting conversion therapy, although they largely aren’t taken seriously.

*What words are used to describe lesbian, gay, bi, or non-heterosexual people in your country? Are these words equivalent to their English counterparts, or do they have a different meaning?*

Due to our colonial history, Malta is a bilingual country and people tend to code-switch between Maltese and English in everyday speech. The Maltese words for gay, straight, bi, intersex, and transgender would be *omosesswali*, *eterosesswali*, *bisesswali*, *intersesswali/intersess*, and *transgeneru*. The Maltese word for binary is *binarju*, but I have yet to come across the Maltese equivalent for *non-binary*. When we want to refer to these terms casually or fill a lacuna, we tend to simply switch to English. *Lezbjana* is the Maltese equivalent to lesbian. While it is not in itself a slur, it is still often used in a negative context or as an insult (I was called this a lot as a child when I misbehaved). The *pufta* slur for gay men is also found in Maltese and is still thrown around like it’s nothing.

*I know nothing about Maltese. Is your language very gendered?*

The Maltese language is the sole surviving descendent of Sicilian Arabic, an extinct Maghrebi dialect, and so it is a Semitic language with pronouns derived from Arabic. It is mostly a mixture of Arabic and Italian, with some influence from English and French. Maltese is highly gendered and even inanimate objects are classified as *he* or *she*. Unlike the English *they*, the Maltese *huma* has not naturally developed the function of a neutral third person singular. This is particularly difficult when endeavoring to keep someone’s gender identity private. I often need to resort to English or lie about my partner’s gender. The best I’ve managed is to avoid pronouns entirely by saying, “This person is...” While I am not non-binary myself and cannot speak for everyone, I have seen some non-binary folks choose the pronoun they most prefer.

*Are you involved with any bi+ or LGBTQ+ organizations in your country or internationally?*

I became involved in Maltese bi+ activism while in the States through an online campaign with Malta’s Allied Rainbow Communities (ARC). We encouraged people to anonymously submit their experiences, some of which shocked me. There were cases where a gynecologist or psychologist didn’t take them seriously or told them to stay away from “promiscuous bisexuals.” Once I

moved to the U.S. in the midst of the pandemic, I joined virtual bi+ discussions with Center Bi+.

*Are bi folks well-integrated into Malta’s sexual minority community?*

I am sure that if a bi person were to join an LGBTQ+ organization, they would be welcomed with open arms. As for the social aspect, dating and gay bars/events, this may vary greatly. It is quite difficult to form a community or sense of belonging because bisexuality does not usually come up in casual conversation the way it does for monosexuals who need only mention a partner or ex. The struggle to find a group of people who “get it” can be lonely. In my late teens, I often expressed feeling bisexual but not LGBTQ+, and this sentiment still sadly resonates with me since, in my experience, LGBTQ+ is too often assumed to mean *gay*. Even when discussing same-sex marriage, the terminology that is often used is *gay marriage*. When we celebrated this major milestone in Malta, I couldn’t shake the feeling that I was only there as an ally, and not as someone who could one day benefit from this law.

*This language confusion was common, for the most part, across the U.S. as well, despite efforts on the part of some of us to use the term “marriage equality.” And here’s my last question: Where would a person living in Malta find bi+ support or resources, inside or outside your country?*

Bi+ specific research remains scarce in Malta. ARC has created a private Facebook group for bi+ individuals in Malta. Anyone interested can request to join “Bi & Pan Malta Community” ([www.facebook.com/groups/bipanmalta](http://www.facebook.com/groups/bipanmalta)). Other resources are more general LGBTQ+ spaces, but ARC, the Rainbow Support Service, MGRM (Malta Gay Rights Movement), We Are, and LGBTQI+ Gozo are all great organizations to reach out to for support and information.

*Robyn Ochs is editor of Bi Women Quarterly and two anthologies: Getting Bi: Voices of Bisexuals Around the World and RECOGNIZE: The Voices of Bisexual Men.*



**SUBMIT**  
*your*  
**WORK**

#ShareYourVoice

Are you a Bi+ writer, poet, or visual artist?  
Consider submitting your work to be included in  
future issues of Bi Women Quarterly!  
Info at [biwomenboston.org](http://biwomenboston.org)



## COVID Caregiver/ Caretaker Journal Notes\*

By Lani Ka'ahumanu

Some days I want to run out of here screaming  
and then feel blessed I can run into a meadow, into a redwood  
fairy circle  
into my scattered winter garden

Some days I jump in the car and drive the short distance to  
Gerstle Cove  
to be alone facing the Pacific's crashing waves  
I cry from deep inside me  
the emotional toll of caregiving and caretaking  
takes everything I have to give  
to anyone including my self

I walk and walk and walk  
noticing how out of shape I am  
breathing the ocean air, watching the birds  
sometimes an osprey fishing,  
sometimes a giant blue heron meditating on a small unsuspecting  
rodent appetizer  
walking and shaking off exhaustion I arrive in awe of him  
again  
and how well he is maintaining with stress overriding his  
meds  
and how well we take care of each other as best we can  
and how well we are maintaining our love for one another

LK 2020  
\*for my son

*Lani is an elder activist, author, poet, educator, and grand-  
mother. She is regarded as the strategic political architect of the  
early U.S. bisexual movement.*

## Education

By Amy Beth Acker

To wrap myself in surrender,  
a smooth, satin sheet between  
the past and  
the future and  
me.

To master myself in  
the gentle release, letting  
go of every mistake and  
misstep and misspoken word.

Can I ever dip my finger  
in the sweet, sticky safety of  
the infinite? And too: how  
do I let go of  
the desire  
to be  
a better  
person?

No really,  
I'm asking you.

*Amy Beth Acker is a psychotherapist in private practice, and  
her poetry has previously been published in Dear Damsels.  
In addition, she has written the non-fiction book, The Way  
of the Peaceful Woman, and has had non-fiction articles  
published in multiple forums, including Sanctuary Maga-  
zine, Tiny Buddha, and Elephant Journal.*



# Not Yet, But Maybe Soon

By *KimtheBwordpoet*

I haven't felt what it's like to hold her hand.  
Know how our fingers will connect when our hands come  
together.  
Brush up against her shoulder for attention.

I would love to touch her nose. Boop!  
See her smile reach from ear to ear.  
Run my fingers in her hair.

I want to pamper her beautiful feet.  
Kiss her full lips.  
Lie beside her and stare into her eyes.

I imagine our nights.  
I'll laugh at YouTube. She'll cry from Netflix.  
We'll fall asleep after reading Chapter Five of our new favorite  
romance novel.

I hope my cat will not take long to love her too.  
Perhaps her pet will also quickly adjust.  
The friendships we brought along will be put to the ultimate  
test.

I think I would constantly remark on how lucky I am.  
That there's no longer "Why Can't That Be Me?"  
There's "Thank You for Sending Her to Me."

I long to really tell my coworkers about our weekend for once.  
Hear her laugh awkwardly as my parents try to wrap their  
heads around her.



Be that couple standing side by side with the "I'm With Her"  
t-shirts on at Pride.

I haven't experienced this life of love before  
And never have I ever wanted these things more  
Now in the 40s of my earthly timeline.

*KimtheBwordpoet is a bi Poet and writer from Cleveland, Ohio. She runs Bisexual Initiative of Ohio, an up-and-coming organization for Bisexual and Pansexual Ohioans, and is a member of Alpha Zeta Gamma Sorority, a bisexual women's non-collegiate sorority, and is the new Storytelling Coordinator for Still Bisexual, an organization dedicated to sharing the stories of bisexual people everywhere.*

---

# Not Like You

By *Mia C*

*This is a prose poem about how much pain questioning my sexuality has caused me. I am and have been comfortable with identifying as a bisexual woman, but recently I've begun to question who I am and it one of the hardest experiences of my life.*

I don't know where to begin. Burning tears against salty skin.  
The never ending void seen from the bed. An internal non-stop  
pounding. Poisoned words fabricated from nothing. I can't like  
her. I can't like him. Do I even like anyone at all? The guilt of  
wondering what another girl's lips would feel like on my own.  
The confusion of desire. He would hold my hand and brush  
my hair behind my ear. She'd call me beautiful. I'd be happy.  
I yell into the nothingness. Why is this so hard? How can I be  
so uncomfortable in my skin? I want to cut it off. I itch until I  
bleed. The silence is deafening. The uncontrollable feeling to be

held is painful. Pajama pants roll up to my knees. It rubs roughly  
against the backs of them. Do I even have free will? Do I know  
who I want? The indecisiveness burns a cigarette wound into  
my heart. So full of lead, it doesn't want to beat. Eyes are wet  
with tears. Cheeks are flushed and sticky. The feeling is stagnant.  
The cloud that hangs over my head. No one would get it. My  
friends just joke. My parents wouldn't listen all the way. I feel  
entirely alone. Loneliness is a drug. A friend. It never leaves. I  
want the soft brush of knuckles against my cheeks. I want to  
hear intertwined laughter. I want saccharine kisses exchanged  
underneath the moon. The stars being the only witness. I will  
find you. I will find me. Impatience is a curse. The fairytale  
ending I prayed for as a child will be mine.

*Mia C is a 19-year-old rising junior studying Elementary Education and Literacy Studies and hoping to be a third-grade teacher after she graduates. She lives in Bergen County, New Jersey, and has considered herself bisexual for about five years.*

# The Heron Knew What the Herring Did, Too

By Anne Marie Wells

It was an odd story,  
but also common, of a herring and a heron  
meeting where air and waves greeted flotsam and jetsam.  
The fish in awe of the bird's span of wings, reeled under  
the sheen of its dance, lured by its legs in the expanse  
of salt water.

The heron no stronger  
couldn't help but wonder what it'd feel like  
to play those scales that shined at sunrise like prisms, to learn  
the right tempos and rhythms, to know the texture  
under feather just sitting together like  
a blind man knows every letter  
in braille.

More truth set sail  
through eyes than spoke on tongues. No longer young  
or naive, the herring knew the heron could feast on its fins,  
pull the pin  
bones from its beak, and never speak of the herring again.  
A precarious leap. A bird and a fish can fall  
keel over peak, but at the end of the day,  
where would they  
sleep?

Despite the appeal,  
the herring stayed in the sea and the heron  
stayed on the shore. Restraint lived their lives until  
the moment they died, always having wanted,  
but never having  
more.



*Anne Marie Wells (she/her) of Hoback Junction, Wyoming, is a queer poet, playwright, and storyteller navigating the world with a chronic illness.*

# Am I a Bad Bi+?

By Dani Banani

My name is Dani, I'm 33 years old, and never have I ever been to a Pride Parade or any pro-LGBTQ+ event. Now that the hardest part is out of the way, I need to know if I'm a "bad bi+" for not having been to such an important event for our community yet. Does attending Pride validate my status as a bisexual woman, or does it place shame on me for my absence? Lastly, I often wonder to myself if the possibility of backlash from the entire LGBTQ+ community has been a contributing factor to my absence.

To answer myself on the first question: no, I do not think I'm necessarily a "bad bi+." I don't think that my attendance at Pride events or parades has any impact on my presence within our small, yet mighty community. I have seen the photos friends have taken, watched the videos with so much greed in my soul I felt like I was turning into an actual monstrous troll, and I know that I belong there. Most of the time, I've simply had to work, or had no ability to arrive at the event. Those hurdles have certainly kept me from going, but they're not the only ones, if we're being honest. A big obstacle to my attending a Pride event is the fear I've grown within myself based on other experiences I've had.

Quite frankly, the majority of my experience as a bisexual woman has been people saying I'm "mostly just straight but like girls too." When I came out to my own mother, she thought about it before responding with, "That's fine, just don't date women." As if my own sexuality were acceptable as long as it remained mostly repressed. We all know how abusive language like this can be to those of us who just want to be validated and recognized as part of the community. It's even worse when it comes from heterosexual people who claim to be allies while debating people on her own sexuality. Perhaps this has contributed to my absence: fear that I haven't shown enough of my "bi side." My natural instinct has always been to hide anything that hinted at my interest in women because of the reactions to who I am. Eventually, I grew to be more open, but it has never stopped the unusual and hurtful comments people don't realize they're saying (or maybe they do). Anyway, the fact that I've met with so much negativity doesn't give me additional excitement about going. Hearing comments from my own community like, "You don't have it as bad, everyone loves a bisexual woman," worry me because I feel I'll never be entirely accepted anywhere. Is Pride where that is different? Would it be a safe haven for me there? I've never asked anyone, I guess. I tend to be paranoid, and my paranoia has led to my giving less of an effort about ensuring a visit because I'm not sure how I'll be perceived, especially if I were to find a female I enjoyed interacting with. I've actually upset women when they've discovered I'm bisexual because they prefer women who have never had men. I suppose I've worried that my treatment or acceptance there won't be as good as I'd hoped it would be. I might be afraid to even mingle

*Dani, continued on next page*



# Never Had Niicy Ever—Until Jessica

By Jen Bonardi

Jada Pinkett-Smith: “Is she the first woman?”

Niicy Nash: “Mm hmm.”

Jada: “So you’ve never been attracted to women in your life?”

Niicy: “Uh uh.”

*Red Table Talk*\*, you never disappoint.

For over 25 years, actress Niicy Nash has hosted and acted in dozens of shows from *Reno 911* to *Clauss*. But not even her role as Dr. Jamie Ryan in *Never Have I Ever* could have prepared her for a second act like this. After marriages to and divorces from two men, Niicy surprised her friends, family, and fans by marrying soul singer Jessica Betts. As the Smith women gathered around the series’ eponymous red table, Niicy joined them and revealed the real scandal: “I’m going



Niicy Nash

to say to this everybody who’s been in the community or is community-adjacent: I haven’t gotten a welcome packet.” Somebody light up the bisexual bat signal because we gotta answer the call!

Sweet Niicy, the bi+ crowd was waiting to see how you chose to identify before sending you a tri-color bi pride flag and a “visibility” button. I see now that we were remiss in delivering a prompt and warm embrace. But I disagree that you don’t know what you’re doing. When a woman says, “I gave myself permission to feel what I felt in the moment and to

be unapologetic about it,” that woman is doing everything right. On *Red Table Talk*, you told us: “A lot of people said at the beginning, Niicy Nash has finally come out. And I said, ‘Well, come out of where?’ Because I wasn’t in anywhere, I wasn’t leading a sexually repressed life... I mean, I liked [men]. I liked ’em real good!” So many bi+ people have had to explain this same thing. We look forward to commiserating with you on how such a simple concept is, inexplicably, so difficult for some to grasp.

“The other thing I think is harder for people is when you don’t fit in the box we put you in,” you said wisely. Bi+ folks can sure relate to this. We’re not on either end of the sexuality spectrum, a limbo that makes society nervous. This is why the identities that fall under the bi+ umbrella (e.g., pansexual, omnisexual, fluid, et al.) are referred to as the middle sexualities.

Your youngest daughter was so kind to try to help you navigate these and other labels. You sped through them: “binary, non-binary, cisgender, this thing, bah bah bah, butcher, baker, candlestick maker.” You know, you’re right, these *are* confusing. But you don’t need a sexuality label to understand who you are. The no-label label works just fine in the bi+ universe.

I think your chosen term—*free*—is beautiful and fits nicely under the bi+ umbrella, if you don’t mind me saying so. More than anything, I want a bumper sticker with the new name for our entire community: LGBTQ+Niicy! You instinctively knew that the plus was there for you to hang your hat. Live in that plus, Niicy. It’s where we thrive.

And it’s where we’ll be sending the welcome packet.

*Jen Bonardi served on the Bisexual Resource Center (BRC) board for five years and created bisexual character extraordinaire, Tiggy Upland.*

---

\**Red Table Talk* is an American talk show hosted by Jada Pinkett Smith, her mother and her daughter. All quotes are from this interview.

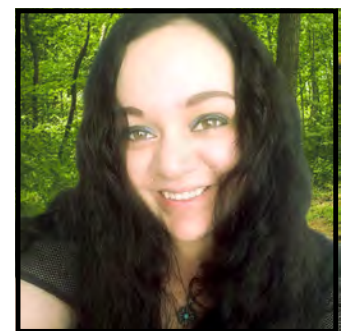
---

*Dani, continued from previous page*

or interact and send the right or wrong signals at the wrong or right times. For me, there is just too much to over-think.

Maybe I’m wrong. Maybe my assumptions are all based in paranoia. In any case, I look forward to the first time I finally try and prove myself wrong, because I bet I will. I just like to create the worst-case scenarios in the most dramatic ways up until I get there. That’s not a bi thing, that’s just a “me” thing.

*Dani Banani (Danielle) is a Hoosier-raised woman living in Colorful, Colorado with her partner and their four children. She has a passion for the Scarlet Witch and Skyrim and spends most of her time writing.*



# Never Have I Ever, New and Old

By Neen Chapman

Never have I ever—oh so many experiences, so many wonders, so many purposeful and silly actions yet to do. I love this, I get to explore all the goals and dreams I have with you, the reader. Some, you may very well say, “I’m just gonna leave that one with you, Neen,” in some kind of, y’know, silly voice you reserve for humans you think are a bit over the edge. Others, you may think, “Oh, that’s something I’d love as well,” as a warm and wonderful tenderness and awe spreads across your heart and person.

What are all the experiences, travels, destinations, self-discoveries, and aha moments, I have never had? Mmm, really thinking about this, there are millions. Well, at least a couple hundred. I need to say here, I’m so grateful for my incredibly privileged life that I do not need to do or see another thing, and at this moment in time, I am immensely grateful for everything I have done, that I have seen, that I have experienced. I most definitely am immensely grateful for everything my white skin, education, country of birth, and finances have privileged me to do and experience. ... but, oh, there are a few more that I definitely want to do and some I will force myself to do.

Life is for the living as they say—whoever *they* are.

Here are my never have I ever top two:

I have never seen the aurora borealis. I have been fascinated, awed, confounded, and just plain desperate to witness the art of the universe over the vast and deep midnight blue sky of the Arctic Circle. My fascination began when I was in Year Two at school (so about age seven). Sister Mary, my teacher, whom I loved, showed us pictures of this phenomenon in a class about the wonders of the world. This was in 1977, mind you, so the quality of photography was sketchy at best. But I was hooked. The way that Sister Mary spoke of the Sun’s cosmic particles colliding with the Earth’s protective atmosphere, like a blanket

covering the globe and causing a dance of color over the Arctic Circle’s winter sky was mesmerizing (I’m injecting adult language here). She probably said something akin to, “The Sun sends rays at the Earth and the Earth has a blanket which turns all the rays into beautiful colours of the rainbow”—or something like that. (I must say, I feel I do Sister Mary a disservice by explaining it that way).

I was six when I sat on the red brick stairs of my home and contemplated the vastness of the Universe and, perhaps, that we are all just an experiment in a jar. So, you can see how the iridescent greens, royal purples, intense and angry pinks and reds, and deeply calming blues could capture the heart and mind of a seven-year-old.

No, I didn’t go on to become an astrophysicist or any type of scientist. In fact, I went on to work in retail, customer service, hospitality, adult education, and construction. All careers and pursuits so effing far from the Arctic Circle as a human can get, unless you were born in Iceland or the Arctic Circle, of course. But I have held my awe of this phenomenon all my life.

I have a plan... a cunning and devious... no, just a plan to travel the Arctic Circle from Canada to Alaska, then to Iceland, Norway, and Scotland. To do an arc of the latitude and experience the aurora for myself. You might say, “Eh, sure, easy...” and it is, absolutely. With money and good organization anyone can do anything. I am talking about hiking to remote places in the dead of winter in the Northern Hemisphere. (I’m an Aussie, so the dead of winter is 12 degrees Celsius in a good hoodie). I want to be pushed to my limit to see this incredible wonder of the universe. I want to be bloody freezing and severely uncomfortable to witness this phenomenon. Why do it in comfort? Why do it the easy way? Just because I’m 50-something, why take an easy path? (What am I saying...). No, no, I want to lie on an expanse of white snow, isolated from civilization, and stare into the abyss of the night sky, listening to an amazing soundtrack which I have been DJing and preparing for years and hear and see the vastness and unique beauty of the Universe.

That was Number 1... it gets a bit more mundane after that.

Never have I ever emigrated to Ireland. Yes, this is my heart’s desire. I want to leave the country of my birth to settle in the country of my ancestors. This one is going to be tricky. With global political changes, Brexit, and just generally the lack of required documentation, it is going to be tough to emigrate. Prior to Brexit (honestly, U.K., who thought to ask this ridiculous question in the first place?), I could have held two passports—one to Oz, the country of stolen lands, horrendous atrocities, and colonialism, and also the land of my Irish ancestors when



Aurora Borealis, Alaska

*Neen, continued on next page*

*Neen, continued from previous page*

they were forced to emigrate as indentured servants in 1853, as well as an Irish passport. Easy peasy.

But now, wow, I'm certain I'll find a way, but it may take longer than I could have ever imagined.

You see, my family, my Mum and Dad, always talked about our Irish heritage. I'm extremely proud of this heritage. They would regale us with stories and with idiosyncrasies we have as a family of our Irishness. They also mentioned our Spanish and French heritage, but it has always been the Irishness of my family that has intrigued me. As it turns out, through DNA testing, I found out that I am mostly Irish, Norwegian, Scottish, Welsh, a bit British, and then Spanish and French. But hey, why let facts get in the way of a good story? And DNA was not a thing when my Mum and Dad were telling these stories, so, eh... whatever.

I have wanted to go to Ireland since I was seven (hmmm, seems to be an age of awakening for me). I remember very clearly one Christmas, it was hot as Hades (as an Aunt used to say after a few beers) in Brisbane and the extended family was around the glass and wrought iron table in the rumpus room, drinking shandies and beers, talking of life on the land, how we came to be in Australia and about our Irish family. No actual facts can I say here, people. Just stories of old. Memories passed down through four generations to me, a wide-eyed and wide-eared little blond thing. Sitting as close as I could, pleading for a beer to be like the grownups. Don't worry, they never actually gave me a glass of beer, but I do love a shandie to this day. (If you don't know what a shandie is—it's 50/50 beer and lemonade in a pot or schooner glass, mmm, tasty).

So, I tried to travel to Ireland when I finished school. Nope, didn't happen, and I travelled the Australian continent instead. Incredible, life-changing experience as that was, I still wanted to go to Ireland. To County Kerry. To Dingle. Then again, when I had some dosh behind me at 37, FAIL. I rocked up in the U.K., at a friend's place in Manchester with every intention of catching a train and ferry to Ireland but they could see I needed care and mending from a broken heart and insisted I stay with them. It was the best month of my life, recovering and sorting myself out. Thank you, Rod and Aylan. I needed to stop and just be. Not to travel to my heart's home. Not just yet.

Third time lucky at 47. Yep, I made it. I was overwhelmed my first night during the Irish Summer in Wicklow. At a little BnB, after dropping my bags off after a day's journey on two trains and a ferry (I am terrified of ferries may I say, utterly terrified), I went out to the local pub. I sat in what the Irish call a beer garden and marvelled at the sheer fact that I was in Ireland. I'm emotional now just remembering that moment. A 40-year journey, and Ireland was/is as green and fresh and beautiful as I could have ever imagined.



I travelled to a long-time friend in Wexford: oh dear, dear Donal. I hired a car and drove to Cork, getting lost on the way and being rescued late at night by a beautiful family who put me up and shared their dinner, stories, and whiskey. Then on to County Kerry. This was the big one. Killarney was sweet and beautiful.

I caught a sort of local bus to Dingle. With all the anticipation of 40 years and family weight on my shoulders and in my head. I alighted from the bus, collected my pack and bags, and surveyed Dingle. I cannot describe how I feel, how it felt. Have you ever been somewhere you have never set foot in before and yet, the moment your feet touch the ground you are home? Truly and undeniably, home.

I cried. I do that a lot, but this time not for myself, not because of anything, but because as a human being I was back in a place of complete and utter belonging. I was safe and I was home.

My time in Dingle and the rest of Ireland is another entire story, except to say I am still looking at homes to buy there, to take up a holding in the name of my ancestors. To reclaim their and my heritage and a place in my homeland.

Never have I ever... yet.

*Neen Chapman is bi+ pan and out in all aspects of life and work. Neen is 51, silver-haired, and loves being the Vice President of Sydney Bi+ Network, founder of BOLDER, a mental health awareness speaker, activist and speaker, maid to lovely kitty cats. Neen is deeply into history, reading, geology, documentaries, art, painting, poetry, music, equality, bi+ activism, politics, and kink.*

# Something Tookish

By Marie Diane Perrault

Never have I ever followed my heart.

I understand that this might not be the most liberating or inspiring note on which to start an article destined for a journal with a liberating and inspiring mission. However, I will be honored to share a train of thought that goes from a flat note on an untuned piano to what I hope may be more musical. It is my belief that many young women go through a pivotal point in their lives, where their world comes to a screeching halt. It is amidst the delirium, the dust, and the din that a thought comes to the modern woman: “What am I doing, and am I doing this for me?”

From the outside world, the social commentary doesn't stop: “Why don't you give him a chance?” “Why don't you tone it down a little?” “Why are you so sensitive?” It's as if everyone has something to say about how you run your life except yourself.

Me, I like to think I'm competent. I have a Master's degree in Theoretical Linguistics from the University of Toronto, where I spent hour after painstaking hour picking apart how *can*, *could*, *must*, and *should* work in French and how to mathematically represent them for my thesis.

Around the beginning of the pandemic, one of my professors passed. This was a professor, a very famous professor, of historical Romance linguistics. He had studied the history of French, Italian, Romanian—you name it. He even had something akin to an order of knighthood awarded to him by the European Union. He had contributed more to intellectual heritage than anyone I had ever known, and I'd like to think I have many more people to meet.

When I was an undergrad, I wanted to be his research assistant. Actually, I wanted to be a research assistant for the professor with whom he was writing a book. Unfortunately, this never came to be, and I took this very personally. I said several unkind things that I refuse to repeat, even in print, and I behaved very immaturity. When I graduated, I did not wish him well, although I did end up finding another research assistantship. That summer, I was presenting at a conference on the history of the titles, *Madame* and *Monsieur* in French, and I had to dedicate the talk and subsequent publication to him. It was the least I could do, now that there was nothing left to talk about.

When he passed, I felt it was my duty to live up to be the person I could never be in his eyes, or the eyes of the other professor, the friend he had left behind, the mentor for whom I wasn't good enough. At the time, I was immersed in the history of French and the evolution of Latin to Romance and was preparing for a field trip to the south of France to study regional languages like Occitan with native speakers. I had it all figured out: I would fuse together talking to people, learning about their lives, hear-

ing their stories... fieldwork... with theoretical and historical research.

Ah, fieldwork. You may hear it, reader, and think, “the grunt work of social sciences.” Oh, but you'd be wrong. It's anything but that. The field is where science is born. Social sciences are born of socialization, and though we rummage through social niceties to get there sometimes, there is gold at the bottom of that river. But that was not the only heartbreak that summer. I broke up with a dear friend—a Spanish-speaking fieldworker—on the grounds of not unrequited, but poorly communicated, feelings and incompatible life attitudes. It was a messy, disgusting situation from which nobody emerged the better. This person too had contributed to my project on *Madame* and *Monsieur*, and every time I went in to edit the paper for publication, I felt my chest tighten when I passed their name in the acknowledgements.

There was a day when the grief overwhelmed me, and I had to excuse myself in the middle of class in September. When I returned, I was hardly paying attention. I hid behind my hair so the professor wouldn't see. She droned on and on, a dull buzz somewhere in the back of my mind when suddenly, I reacquired the human capacity for speech. I heard, “Seventeenth-century Jesuit's grammar of Nahuatl, an indigenous language spoken in Central Mexico.”

I wrote to her that very evening to look at that manuscript, a virtual copy of a turn-of-the-century reprint, but even so, somehow, the age of the book leapt off the screen. I was looking at the yellowing, wrinkled pages of history, at a record of colonialism and feigned exploration with an oppressive Catholic dogma looming over the near future. Once upon a time, I had been forcing myself to go to the library on Saturday and to church on Sundays. In fact, I still know most of my prayers in English, French, and Latin. Once, I had bottled up the critical need to question my elders and those in power to please them. I had long since forgotten my objections, my questions, until the opportunity for time travel suddenly presented itself to me in my very course. The call to action was clear, though ironic, since, at the time I couldn't bear to hear a single Spanish song on the radio. Yet instead of contracting, my heart was expanding and beating at a musical pace, warm with fascination at the cadence of a slow habanera.

A few weeks later, I was at a virtual party with other members of my doctoral cohort. I had just entered the PhD program, and two of my colleagues were still in their respective countries—China and Mexico—due to travel restrictions. After some small talk, some colleagues excused themselves and eventually it was just me and the lady in Mexico. We spoke for a while and got to know each other, and then she casually mentioned that she had been taking Nahuatl courses online during the pandemic. I told her that I had been tangentially interested in the language, and she invited me to come to a session.

Marie, continued on next page

*Marie, continued from previous page*

Within a week, I was reviving a language I hadn't spoken since high school and refused to speak because of my broken heart, to study *another* language that I had only ever heard about in anthropology textbooks. All this was virtual on Zoom, so it constantly felt like a séance with a bad internet connection. Yet somehow I felt that, in the words of J.R.R. Tolkien, "something Tookish" was waking up inside me, and I wanted to go see hills and rivers and forests and... people.

My colleague was surprised that I had come to the class, but she was cordial in her welcome, something I very much appreciated with my terribly rusty Spanish. Running through the list of social niceties was the possibility of writing a paper together someday—OMG! Naturally, I was eager to find a topic, but all I knew was Latin, Romance, French. What could we possibly write about? There was nothing being discussed in class, but in the networking and fieldwork meetings we had every now and then we never stopped talking about how much colonialism ruined things for everyone involved—and it's true: it did. But nobody ever really talks about how people made do with the changes in their lives and whether there was anything among the mess that colonialism left behind that could be transformed from something painful into something useful. The answer came to me in a library database search on "Romance and indigenous language contact."

*On the Intrusion of the Spanish Preposition de into the Languages of Mexico by N. Hober*

There it was, staring right back at me—my eyes could have fallen out of my head! I had a similar situation in France with the regional languages there, but for some reason that situation hadn't fascinated me so. But why not? After all, I had dedicated so much time and energy to becoming that student studying minority Romance languages... but at the end of the day, what was I saying that I hadn't already learned in a book? What was I saying that wasn't just regurgitating what my professors had wanted me to say, and where was I even going with anything? None of my projects to date ever spoke to me—they were always about my trying to reach out to someone else and live up to institutional and societal expectations that I accepted out of intense social anxiety. Now, in the words of Rumi, it felt like

there was light shining through the wounds of professional and personal rejection.

I'll tell you what: I finally had something to say about how language tells our story through its structure, not just the words we use. Linguistics isn't just about seeing who says what in which context: several branches of linguistics look at how words are formed and how they then come together to build sentences. Sometimes, it's hard to tease apart what rules there are that govern word and sentence formation, and, frankly, I don't think we'll ever really agree on what's the same (debates can get quite heated in higher academia), but what everyone seems to agree upon is how different languages are in the elements they use to weave a tapestry of communication, of thought, and of storytelling. Looking from this lens especially, Mexico has one of the most diverse, dynamic, and dichotomous histories of any nation state. It is true that it is often divided into eras: the Pre-Hispanic, the Colonial, the Contemporary, etc., but there is so much more nuance than that. Discrimination persists even in the eyes of cultural recalibration: even after a handful of revolutions and mixing European and Indigenous traditions and values. Even among populations fighting to make their voice heard, discrimination against an "impure" form of expression persists. That's where I come in. So many young people are trying to reclaim their identity but find it increasingly difficult when resorting to the language spoken at school is frowned upon at home, and the home language frowned upon at school. How can any kid growing up straddling a multitude of different cultures and languages not empathize? How can any young woman told to shrug off her concerns not empathize? How can someone who's lost their way, and lost so many people on the way, not empathize?

So, there you have it. I've finally bridged the gap between what I was trained to do and what I've never been able to do. Never have I ever followed my heart before, but now, I've at least got a motive. Now if only this pandemic can finish so I can go listen to some more stories, over the hills, rivers, and forests.

*Marie is currently doing her PhD at the University of Toronto. She likes mille feuille as much as she likes beavertails, and Beethoven as much as the Gorillaz.*

## 5 WAYS YOU CAN SUPPORT BI WOMEN QUARTERLY:

1. Help us spread the word. Tell your friends about BWQ and invite them to read and subscribe.
2. Follow us and signal boost us on social media. We're at @biwomenquarterly on Instagram, and @biwomenqly on Twitter.
3. Submit your own writing and/or artwork to BWQ.
4. Shop at BiProducts, the Etsy shop that exists to support this publication: [BiProducts.Etsy.com](https://www.etsy.com/shop/BiProducts).
5. Make a one-time donation in any amount or—better—become a monthly sustainer. Visit [BiWomenQuarterly.com/donate](https://BiWomenQuarterly.com/donate).

# How To Herd A Thousand Points of Light

By Jen Bonardi

Even the most well-known bi+ organizations are likely to use faithful volunteers to do all of the work. As LGBTQ+ philanthropic groups give bi+ organizations less than 1% of their funds to serve over 50% of the queer community, paid positions have historically been elusive. Or, you know, imaginary.

So, we soldier on, money be damned. While we are certainly, uh, *grateful* for this opportunity to develop grit, and tenacity, and...um, lemme think...*character*, we've developed a lot of character...we're also burnt out. How can small bi+ groups consistently recruit and retain volunteers without wringing every last drop of energy out of them?

To find out, I interviewed women from two queer community groups that have volunteer management down to a science. Eve Alpern and Jen Langely volunteered for and then helmed a project called The List after founding director Hannah Doress left. Belle Haggett Silverman, president of the Bisexual Resource Center, has been inducting volunteer members to this working board for several years now. Here are the best practices that they have adopted to cultivate a solid cadre of—ahem, unpaid—supporters.

## Provide an indispensable service to the community.

Jen remembers that when The List resurrected the queer women's scene in the 1990s, it quickly acquired responsibilities to the local press who expected the organization to regularly alert them to events.

But Eve notes that allegiance to The List went much deeper than its media responsibilities. "The List began managing volunteers through Hannah's live events company. By the time we transitioned to solely the listserv, we had a long history of amazing events. People felt deeply indebted to us." Eve continues, "We didn't know anyone who hadn't gotten some benefit from The List. It was a whole social and dating scene. Lots of people were invested: it solved a problem." Jen, who met her future wife through The List, agrees. She says, "We didn't want this thing to go away. It became a part of our lives, like...a cousin." I think we all have that cousin, bless her heart.

## Give the people what they want.

"I learned clearly why each person was volunteering and what was in it for them," Eve reports. "Are they lonely? Do they want to meet people? Learn Boston? Get a job? Get laid?"

Jen concurs. "You'd get someone who really wanted to, for example, run the Housing List and they would stay for a long time." She and Eve were extremely busy with their own tasks at

The List, but this worked in the volunteers' favor. "We didn't micromanage someone once we got them going," Jen explains, "because we didn't have time."

This is an important tenet in managing volunteer board members. "I'm good at thinking about how to make sure that folks are not only doing the work but also doing it *sustainably*," Belle says. "Are people enjoying their work? That's the worst thing about burn out: the resentment."

## Take it easy.

In order to avoid the dreaded Volunteer Burn Out affliction, Belle helped institute board term limits and a vice president position. The latter takes some work off the president's plate and learns the President's job in order to eventually move into it. At the annual retreat, she includes as a standing agenda item that everyone write down all of the things they do for the board and star which items they would like to hand off.

Belle feels that all this, plus a formal sabbatical policy, "allows for conversations around taking a break. It gives the volunteer a light at the end of the tunnel, and the board sees where it needs to recruit. We need institutional practices *and* cultural norming."

Eve has a similar perspective. "We were not the most ambitious versions of ourselves, but that meant we could stick with it longer. We created systems and worked with volunteers on whom we could depend."

## Create a space for them to be their whole, best selves.

When the BRC recruits board members, there are no expectations for new members for about four months. "Try us on; see if you like it; we'll see what your skills are and where you're needed," offers Belle. She regularly checks in with new recruits until the annual retreat, where they have a chance to choose a focus. This freedom has led to many more potential board members, particularly across the gender spectrum.

Eve thinks that The List's success in consistently recruiting a large and diverse cadre of volunteers came from "[founder] Hannah Doress's need to make everyone feel like they were in the in-crowd. She was doing programming for trans, genderqueer, and butch/femme people before we even had words for it." She goes on to attest, "Hannah had a B and a T in everything she did. All of the conversations I've had about intersexuality were at The List."

The bittersweet reality, says Eve, was that The List was the only place that felt like home to many of the trans people volunteering there. "The List definitely attracted quirky people who...wanted to try out parts of themselves."

*Jen continued on next page*

## Develop a good reputation.

Looking back on those days at The List, Jen recalls that there were far fewer ways of connecting with potential volunteers. “We were often able to advertise for volunteers through The List itself and via word of mouth,” she shares. In fact, when Jen saw *Scent of a Butch* at Ryles Jazz Club, a performance produced by Hannah’s event company, she approached Hannah after the show and begged to volunteer in any capacity.

When asked how the BRC is recruiting so much new energy to the BRC board, Belle replies, “By being known in the community for good work and broadening our reach.” She reveals that the new members primarily know the BRC from its online presence, thanks to excellent social media management and one board member’s exquisite graphic design skills. “We’re a pufferfish!” Belle exclaims, referring to the organization’s ability to appear like a much larger operation. “That attracts talent.”

## Change with the times.

Belle feels strongly that the BRC should shape the volunteer roles to the people and the organization, rather than maintaining what already exists. Jen and Eve demonstrably feel the same, as volunteering for The List changed dramatically with each shift in leadership. When founder Hannah Doress left in 2000, The List remained while her events production company, Hanarchy, dissolved. Volunteers who had been mostly helping with events had to pivot to the more solitary work of The List.

And yet, there was “no mass exodus” of volunteers. Eve and Jen were able to build on the goodwill that Hannah cultivated among volunteers. After a thoughtful leadership transition, they upgraded their systems and recruitment around these changes. Eve explains, “We’d meet with [new volunteers] and give them the passwords and the six steps to post to The List... We could go months without interacting with them.” Some much preferred this environment for reasons ranging from safety and privacy to the comfort and convenience of helping from home at any hour.

When The List’s leadership transitioned once again—this time to Kristen Porter, who continues to run it today—they faced the increasing technology demands of subscribers. I caught up with Kristen, who feels that it “was so different from the text-only List that Eve and Jen managed, in some ways comparisons are hard to make.”

Modifications included adding a social media presence, a Google calendar of events, a website, and an app-based submission mechanism. “We gave several surveys to subscribers to address their developing needs and the changing demographics of The List,” says Kristen. “As a result of all these additions to The List’s offerings, our volunteer needs grew, as did the technical skills required.” Currently, The List has traded out volunteers for community partners: 23 related organizations who, in Kristen’s

words, “carry on The List’s mission by expanding the platform to many different voices.”

\* \* \*

Success does not mean perfection; these organizations face common challenges in volunteer management. Both criticize the institution of volunteering as fundamentally exploitative. Both lack a proper application and assignment process. When I tell Jen and Eve how I wish I could manage volunteers as deftly they did, Eve assures me, “We burned people out, too, sometimes. It was messy.”

Having served on community boards and worked for many non-profits, I know how hard it can be to recruit and retain volunteers. I wrote this article because I was intensely curious as to how folks from The List and today’s BRC board have done it so well. Belle reminded me that the viewpoint of a group’s leaders may be the most important element. An abundance mindset teaches us that the more we give to the community, the more it will provide for us. Collectively eliminating a fearful, zero-sum attitude among your leadership is the first step to drawing the impassioned, loyal following that enables your very own bi+ organization to flourish.

*Jen Bonardi served on the Bisexual Resource Center (BRC) board for five years and created bisexual character extraordinaire, Tiggy Upland.*



Jen Bonardi

# New: World Bi+ Meetups

On November 18, 2020, Barbara Oud (Netherlands) and Robyn Ochs (U.S.) co-hosted the first Bi+ World Meetup. Stephen Harvey (Canada) provided technical support.

Five months later, on April 30, 2021, we hosted a second event. Sixty-six people attended from 20 different countries, including Bolivia, Kenya, Iceland, and Uzbekistan.

Planning has begun for a third MeetUp. If you are interested in attending, and/or if you would like to join the Bi+ World Network Facebook group, email Robyn at [biwomeneditor@gmail.com](mailto:biwomeneditor@gmail.com). The next meetups will be on July 11 and October 8.

Below, two participants describe their experience at this event:



## What Attending My First World Bi+ Meetup Meant to Me

By Anna Kochetkova

I was born and lived in Russia for the first 22 years of my life. I am now an Australian citizen based in Sydney.

Joining the Bi+ World online gathering was an interesting experience, and it was well worth getting up at 5am to join so many others at 6am—in my time zone—on Zoom.

My experience was colored by the fact that I have recently become an activist, supporting the local community of bisexual, pansexual, and omnisexual fellow humans in Greater Sydney. I joined the online conversation with this burning curiosity to hear about other people's struggles, pursuits, and insights. And, of course, I had also heard of Robyn Ochs, albeit somewhat vaguely. I was excited to meet one of the heroes in the space of sexuality rights.

Breaking into four-person conversations provided a great opportunity to hear other people's stories. I met people who were hiding while living in conservative small towns feeling invisible and alone, people who have been fighting for the right to exist longer than I have been alive, and those who are now joining forces with elder activists, following in their footsteps.

I felt simultaneously heartbroken and inspired by the challenges participants face in their hometowns. It reminded me how much more work there is to be done. At the same time, being a part of a Bi+ World gathering felt like a hopeful sign, because this would have not been possible for me back in Russia.

In Australia, I found out about the event on social media through other people's shares. I think the reason I even came across such a share is because I am the creator of the Bi & Prejudice account on Instagram, which connects with amazing people who encounter and notice information that is important and useful for myself and my community. I have been actively seeking out

and connecting with organizations and communities all around the world, which has been adding to my understanding of myself and of the world around me.

Joining the Bi+ World MeetUp reminded me that I am not alone. It reminded me that my struggles aren't weird or lonely, that my life is valid and worthy, and that I have friends all around the globe.

*Anna Kochetkova is a Russian-born Australian author and poetess, social media strategist for not-for-profits all around the country, and a passionate bi+ activist based in Sydney. Anna is the creator of the Bi & Prejudice Instagram space, which celebrates multisexual attractions and human diversity. Anna's book on bisexuality is coming out in October 2021.*





# My First World Bi+ Meetup

By Nicole Swisher

Bear with me for a moment as I walk you through some disheartening statistics: According to the 2010 National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey conducted by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention in the United States, bisexual women are at an increased risk of rape, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner (61.1%) compared to both lesbians (43.8%) and heterosexual women (35%). The Bisexual Resource Center reports that approximately 40% of bisexuals have considered or attempted suicide, compared to just over 25% of lesbians and gay men. As recently as 2019, a survey conducted by Stanford University and analyzed by Pew Research Center found that, while bisexuals make up approximately half of the total LGBTQ+ population, only 19% of bisexuals can report being out to everyone closest to them, compared to 75% of lesbians and gay men. According to the same survey, 26% of bisexuals are not out to *any* of the important people in their lives, compared to 4% of lesbian and gay adults. Bisexuals are frequently isolated, stigmatized, and subjected to mistreatment by heterosexual and gay communities alike; bisexual women in particular are denied agency as both bisexual people and as women, accused by heterosexuals of only “claiming to be bisexual” because it’s “trendy” and maligned by an incredibly vocal fringe of the lesbian community for “centering men” and “fetishizing” the experiences of women-loving women.

I’m sure I don’t need to overstate the importance of community and a strong support network, especially for those who are marginalized in some way, such as through racism or ableism. This goes double for bisexuals and perhaps *triple* for bisexual women, who are forced to contend with the unholy combination of misogyny and biphobia in both heterosexual and gay spaces. As a young bisexual woman living in conservative and rural Northeast Pennsylvania, I don’t have much of a community to speak of. Certainly, there are extremely few people with whom I’d feel safe and comfortable discussing my bisexuality! That’s why I immediately jumped at the opportunity to attend an international Zoom conference for bi+ people on April 30, 2021.

The Bi+ World Meetup, hosted by *Bi Women Quarterly*’s Robyn Ochs and Bi+ Nederland’s Barbara Oud, was advertised on Facebook as a low-key affair, intended for bi+ people of all ages, nationalities, and orientation labels to meet and make merry for an hour and a half. Forty-five minutes of the conference were spent in the main space with casual discussion directed by Robyn and Barbara, interspersed with three fifteen-minute sessions during which the 50+ people in attendance were split up into groups of three or four and given fun icebreakers to get the conversational ball rolling.

I learned of the meet-up through a post made by Robyn on Tumblr. It instantly struck me as a fantastic opportunity to do



something I’d been yearning to do for years, ever since I realized I was bisexual in my late teens: meet and talk to other bisexuals to establish connections in the bi+ community. And the meet-up did not disappoint! During it, I had the privilege to speak with a number of fellow bi+ women of all ages and from many different countries; each one brought to the table their rich experiences, courageous outspokenness, and charming senses of humor. At the end of the meet-up, Barbara asked everyone to share how they felt, and the word that echoed loudest in my brain was *held*. I felt held, and warmed, and connected in a way I had never experienced before. I had known, of course, that there were other bi+ people out there—many of us! But it wasn’t until the meet-up, when I had the opportunity to meet some of those lovely people face to face, that the knowledge truly struck me and left me feeling reassured and brave: reassured because surely the bi+ community, full of such strong and vibrant people as it is, can weather anything the world throws at it, and brave because that strong and vibrant community includes *me*. Who would’ve thought?

If you would’ve liked to attend the meet-up but didn’t or couldn’t, fear not: This was the second one, and there will definitely be more events like this in the future. I encourage anyone interested to contact either Robyn or Barbara on Facebook and ask for an invitation to join their Bi+ World group. You can also find Robyn on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn or Tumblr (@robynochs) or email her at [biwomeneditor@gmail.com](mailto:biwomeneditor@gmail.com).

The second Bi+ World Meetup was a profound and heartwarming experience that I will cherish for the rest of my life. I very much look forward to attending the third this summer. Will you be there?

*Nicole Swisher is a bisexual woman in her early twenties living in Northeast Pennsylvania. She enjoys reading, creative writing, and talking with others about bisexual feminism.*



# Never Had They Ever, Until...

By Robyn Ochs

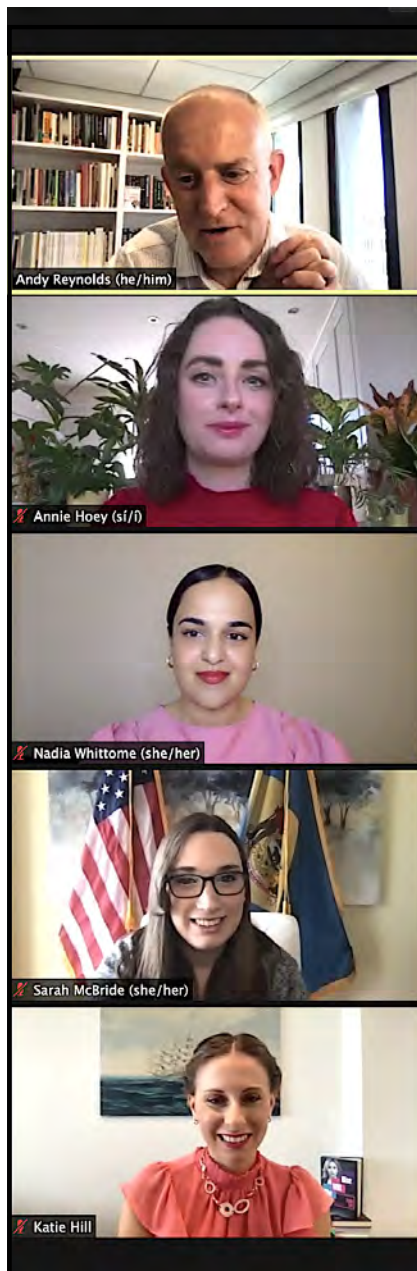
On Thursday, April 22nd, the Queer Politics Webinar hosted a panel on Bi/Pan Women Parliamentarians moderated by Andy Reynolds, Senior Research Scholar at Princeton University's School of Public and International Affairs. This program was part of a series co-sponsored by QP@P (Queer Politics at Princeton) and the UK All-Party Parliamentary Group on Global LGBT+ Rights.

The panelists were Katie Hill, former U.S. congresswoman from California, USA; Nadia Whittome, MP from Nottingham East, UK; Senator Annie Hoey from Ireland; and State Senator Sarah McBride of Delaware, USA.

The conversation was lively and covered issues including heterosexism, bi erasure, being a role model to youth, and navigating identity.

Katie Hill (she/her), who was partnered with a man while in office, discussed heterosexual assumptions that were made about her. While running for office, she consulted with other LGBTQ+ leaders, specifically a few lesbians with long-time involvement in politics, and they advised her not to come out because she was running in a conservative California district that had voted against marriage equality in 2008 by a 2-1 margin. She summed up their argument: "Why would you do that? There's no reason to. You don't need to." She chose to come out anyway, making the case that "Doing so is what it made it possible for other queer people to feel it's possible to run, too." She said she found herself explaining what bisexuality was to "a lot of wealthy women in their sixties, seventies, and eighties who simply had not been exposed to it before." As a member of the House Equality Caucus, she was sometimes left off the list of Caucus members. People would forget she was a part of the LGBTQ+ community. "We're still often overlooked," she said.

Sarah McBride (she/her), who identifies both as queer, bi+, and as trans, started off by noting that she has been on hundreds of panels focused around LGBTQ+ equality, and this was the first time in her entire career she'd ever been included for her sexual orientation, not her gender identity. "The interplay between the two is that one completely eclipses the other." She says this is something she thinks about daily. "Every time I am thinking about engaging in a conversation about relationships, anytime I'm engaging in any kind of conversation about my social life



with colleagues, I always wonder if this added information is just going to blow their minds? It's so hard for so many people ... to wrap their brains around my gender identity, that when I throw in that I'm a member of the bi+ community, I can see their heads almost literally exploding. It's a difficult dynamic to navigate." She said she is always hesitant to bring in her sexual orientation or the fact that she is a sexual assault survivor because she can see it confuses people. Annie Hoey (sí, i), the first out bi person elected to the Irish Parliament and only the second out LGBTQ+ person, described having to work very hard to remind people sí's part of the LGBTQ+ community. Si says, "I'm always very aware of the joke, 'How do you know if someone's bisexual? They tell you.'" Similar to Katie Hill, Hoey provides an example of people forgetting she's part of the LGBTQ community. Sí feels it is important that bi+ people—when they choose a partner—aren't pushed into a monosexual identity, and that that young people see someone who is LGBTQ, who clarifies their pronouns, and who will bring up LGBTQ+ issues on a regular basis.

Nadia Whittome (she/her) started off by saying, "I never consider it coming out just because someone discovers something about me. I was never in." She said her queerness is integral to her identity as a woman of color, and discussed the challenges of being part of a smaller Asian community in Nottingham East, which is unlike London or New York. Her district has more conservative forces that can make it hard to come out. But she said, "When I thought about the people who don't have the privilege I have—as someone with a huge platform—I thought it's absolutely my duty to be here as my full self." She said that being a queer person and a person of color, there's quite a small constituency of people with whom you can sometimes feel completely safe. She makes the case that we are marginalized in different ways and we have to come together to unite and stand with each other in our different struggles:

*Queer Politics Webinar, continued on next page*

“The class war and the culture war are one and the same and we have to fight both of them together.”

One might ask, why does it matter that bi+ people hold elected office? Sarah McBride answers this brilliantly: “Representation itself doesn’t achieve change. But in order to address the multitude of challenges we’re facing, at minimum we need a diversity of voices at the table.”

After the webinar, I reached out to convener Andy Reynolds and asked him what inspired him to organize this panel. He replied, “As an out bi man myself, I think we would do well to pay much more attention to the emergence of a bisexual/pansexual community that is now, by far, the largest part of the LGBTQ+ community but largely invisible. The political and policy implications of identifying as bi are huge, but we know very little about the issue.”

Andy generously provided me with a list of national legislators around the world he has compiled, that includes 22 out bi+ people in nine countries, 13 of whom presently hold office. Of these, there have been a total of 16 bi+ women, 11 of whom are in office today.

A recording of this panel can be found on YouTube: <https://youtu.be/s62n6L2ZW5o>.

Robyn Ochs is the editor of Bi Women Quarterly.

## OUT BI+ STATE OR NATIONAL LEGISLATORS/PARLIAMENTARIANS

Libbie Davies, Canada, NDP, 1997-2015

\*Simon Emil Ammitzbøll, Denmark, Liberal Party, 2005-

Guðfríður Lilja Grétarsdóttir, Iceland, Left Green Party, 2009-2011

Alfonso Pecoraro Scanio, Italy, Green Party, 1992-2013

Daniele Capezzone, Italy, Italian Radicals, 2006-2008

Astrid Oosenbrug, Netherlands, PvdA, 2012-2017

Krista van Velzen, Netherlands, Socialist, 2002-2010

\*Marieke Koekoek, Netherlands, VOLT, 2021-

\*Chloe Swarbrick, New Zealand, Green Party, 2017-

\*Tobias Billström, Sweden, Moderate, 2002-

\*Cassandra Sundin, Sweden, Green Party, 2014-

\*Maria Ferm, Sweden, Green Party, 2010-

Simon Hughes, UK, Conservative, 1983-2015

Ron Davies, UK, Labour Party, 1983-2001

\*Daniel Kawczynski, UK, Conservative, 2005-

\*Cat Smith, UK, Labour Party, 2015-

\*Michael Fabricant, UK, Conservative Party, 1992-

\*Charlotte Nichols, UK, Labour Party, 2020-

\*Nadia Whittome, UK, Labour Party, 2020-

\*Olivia Blake, UK, Labour Party, 2020-

\*Kyrsten Sinema, US, Democrat, 2012-

Katie Hill, US, Democrat, 2018-2019

\*currently in office

Source: Andrew Reynolds, QP@P, School of Public & International Affairs, Princeton, 4/26/21



**QUEER POLITICS WEBINAR**

Cutting edge scholarship and conversations with leading LGBTQ politicians and advocates.

Thursdays at 12 noon  
(Eastern Daylight Time USA)

Zoom Link: <https://princeton.zoom.us/j/99470847646>

**Bi/Pan Women Parliamentarians**  
THURSDAY APRIL 22nd



**Katie Hill**  
(former Rep. CA25 USA)



**Nadia Whittome MP**  
(Nottingham East UK)



**Sen. Annie Hoey**  
(Ireland)



**Sen. Sarah McBride**  
(Delaware USA)

Hosted by QP@P (Queer Politics at Princeton) and the UK APPG on Global LGBT+ Rights

Emilyn wrote:

*I was invisible to myself for a long time. I believed that loving one gender precluded me from loving others. Society has a way of teaching us to be simpler, tidier than we could every possibly be. It loves to presume that we are always on one side of a binary just waiting to decide. When I finally began to see myself, a new sense of freedom emerged. Yet, I felt like an imposter in every world I was in. Too “straight” for the queer world. Too queer for the straight world. I kept falling into traps of attempting to ensure that who I was was palatable for everyone around me. I laughed off biphobic comments on dates, or worse, believed them. I attempted to split and mold myself into multiple people so that I could exist palatably in multiple boxes.*

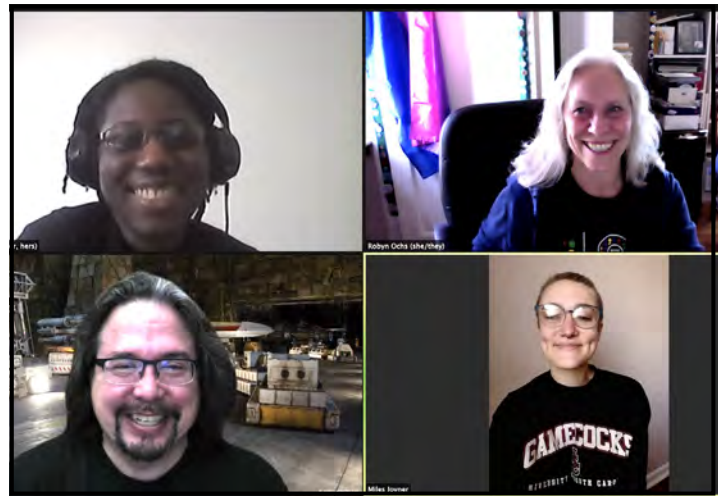
*What a breath of magic it was to find myself in a place where I could just be and belong and belong as I am. The Bi+ Caucus at Creating Change offered to me the rare gift of feeling seen in my wholeness, in community with others who know what it is to live in the ‘Both-And.’*

Emilyn is not alone in finding a sense of kinship at Creating Change. Another attendee of the conference shared sentiments similar to Emilyn’s, commenting that CC ’21 gave them a sense of “homecoming.” Alice Erickson goes on to describe her experience with the Bi+ Institute specifically, discussing trauma and religious barriers in her testimony.

*Attending the Creating Change bi+ institute was like coming home to my community and myself. I felt present, connected, and reflected in the expansive language, statistics, and stories that were shared. As someone coming back to myself in my 40s—negotiating trauma recovery and religious deconstruction, redefining my queerness and re-engaging with the LGBTQ+ activist community for the first time in over 18 years—I felt at home in the virtual conference rooms, at home in my skin, and very much less alone. I began to truly believe that I have a home in the LGBTQ+ community. I realized that I can share my story with others or choose to keep it close.*

*I understood that I get to define my identity; that I am queer enough. In seeing others, I felt seen. In listening to others, I felt heard. By gathering with other bi+ individuals, I realized that I am not alone and that I deserve a supportive community in which to thrive.*

Avery Staker also discusses the struggles with religion and how Creating Change has helped her continue her path of self-love and true religious community. In her testimonial, they discuss how the Unity Church session reminded them that religion was “not meant to be oppressive and hateful” and how if religions



Angel Gravelly, Robyn Ochs, Victor Raymond, & Miles Joyner, co-facilitators of the Bi+ Institute at Creating Change 2021

can pull from each other, “why shouldn’t we as individuals?” Here are Avery’s own words:

*I have known about my identities for as long as I can remember. As a kid, I didn’t think anything of it. I thought everyone felt the same way as me—no boxes, no labels, just love. Unfortunately, I grew up in a Catholic community that quickly made me realize that not everyone thought that way. My relationship with religion has been broken ever since.*

*Coming into Creating Change, I had repaired a little bit of that relationship through religious friends and by learning about the true meaning of religion. I attended the session with Unity Church hoping to connect with my community on their relationships with religion. What I got was something so much more than that. Talking with the leaders of Unity helped me realize that I can believe in a higher power, and that religion was not meant to be oppressive and hateful. My perspective became so enlightened when we discussed reclaiming religion and spirituality as a means to give ourselves hope. Now, I have regular discussions with my friends on religion, and our bond has grown so much closer. I learn and adopt beliefs from them and vice versa. Creating Change taught me that there does not need to be a line between religions and other systems of belief—they all feed and learn from each other. So why shouldn’t we as individuals?*

The experience was truly something I could not have expected. Breakout rooms were filled with laughter and the scheduling prowess of the LGBTQ Task Force’s volunteers helped every timeline stay tightly met. People traded everything in the chat rooms anyone could have wished for: contact information, continued reading, and direct links to the statistical source material when data was referenced. The event was truly a feat of virtual connection, academic and real-life source sharing. It

*Creating Change, continued from previous page*

allowed all individuals to contribute in ways that made them feel comfortable: talkers talked, lurkers lurked, and texters kept the real-time chats updated and lively.

Creating Change 2021 truly proved to be a weekend about finding ourselves and finding the parts of ourselves we had lost: religion, community, self-love, even simply the ability to confidently define who we are. It may have just been a simple virtual conference, but it gave those that were able to participate so much more than a weekend's worth of informational classes could provide—it gave them a new hope.

However, I did not walk away completely content or filled with the same invigorated sense of hope that my fellow conference-goers experienced. The LGBTQ Task Force went to so much effort to make this virtual conference accessible, yet in my eyes they slightly missed the mark—in such a way that I believe the feeling of community so many others delighted in might not have had the full impact the conference tries so hard to achieve year after year.

ESL and ASL interpretation continued to act as a barrier this year, with multiple attendees commenting on spotty translations and attendees speaking in ways that did not hold those that were deaf and hard of hearing in mind. These barriers can be minimized by frequent reminders to everyone to speak slowly and distinctly. While the LGBTQ Task Force did provide a slew of interpreters for those in the Hard of Hearing and Deaf communities, as well as those requiring ESL interpretation, faults in execution remain that limited accessibility for many.

For disabled community members, accessibility is a daily challenge. Those, like myself, who do not regularly face accessibility issues have to understand the urgency of creating an environment that allows all members of the LGBTQ+ community to be able to engage without difficulty or prejudice. Limited accessibility is a problem not just at Creating Change—which does better than many other events—it is a widespread problem in community events and meetups, and one that will require our attention and efforts to resolve.

The fact of the matter is, the disabled bisexual community (and all it intersects with) largely does not have consistent accessibility to large LGBTQ+ events. The largest barriers for events like these are usually travel costs (planes, trains, automobiles, and housing), so removing those variables made this conference more attainable for a large group of multisexuals, who make up a majority of the LGBTQ+ community yet are underrepresented at events and community gatherings. An event with lower costs, easier access for those in wheelchairs or with disabilities that making roaming hotel lobbies difficult—what a dream!—unless you ended up in a room where little attention was paid to the needs of those requiring interpretation.

Accessibility matters for both bisexual and disabled representation: 36 percent of bisexual women and 40 percent of bisexual

men report living with a disability (Disability Among Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Adults: Disparities in Prevalence and Risk, 2012).

Ultimately, I'm so pleased by the showing of the community that I did have the opportunity to see. My only hope going forward is that more individuals have the chance to experience what Emilyn experienced as that "rare gift" of being one with a community that often seems stuck on the outskirts, what Alice described as "coming home," and what Avery described as enlightening: community expression, love, fellowship, and translation efforts.

*Miles Joyner is a South Carolinian bi+ educator and activist, as well as a writer and Southern historian. While their focus is on the bi+ community, they also advocate for nonbinary education and expression. They can be reached at [milesjoynerk@gmail.com](mailto:milesjoynerk@gmail.com) or on social media as Miles Joyner or Miles the Bisexual.*

*Emilyn Kowaleski is a writer, facilitator, and multi-disciplinary advocate for social transformation and collective liberation. Emilyn can be reached on Instagram: @Emilynwithan\_N and @Love\_Notes\_For\_Liberation.*

*Alice Erickson is an artist, advocate, mom, and survivor, currently living in Western Massachusetts.*

*Avery Staker is currently a college student from Iowa obtaining a major in Journalism and Mass Communication, and a minor in Sociology and Gender Studies. They love astrology and personality tests.*



Miles Joyner

*Nest, continued from page 1*

matter, and it will change my life in a big way to let someone else into me, besides my spouse, whom I know so well.

Life feels exciting and I hope to live another forty years. There should be plenty of chances. Maybe the ways I do sex are too strange and if I try a threesome, I'll get my heart broken really fast, by someone who signals they want emotional connection, but really doesn't. It's happened like that before. I would believe for a few months that someone was earnest, as advertised. Then they couldn't keep up the illusion, and things fell apart.

Maybe my spouse really is once in a lifetime—someone who walks their talk. Or maybe someone else who could fit into this family will come along, when we least expect them. Two people seems unsteady, like a chair that needs to be balanced just so.

When my mom died last year, I learned how stabilizing she was.

I hadn't known she was doing so much to help me feel safe. I keep looking for sweet, trustworthy family love in the world, and people can be bewildered, when I seek that. So, this essay comes back to family, not just sex. I want to care and be cared for by multiple people, in many ways. That feels like the point of life, for me. Everything else is just messing around.

Sex is my favorite way to care and be cared for, but only a few people enter that inner sanctum, so it's always strange to welcome a new person there. The new, shining being is a unique miracle. Love to all of us who do family, feel a lot, change, and take risks with the deepest parts of ourselves.

*Nest Valorfixer is a queer writer living in Nevada who loves community, ecstatic states, and doing intimacy in many ways. She blogs at [fallingintothelblissfulsublime.com](http://fallingintothelblissfulsublime.com).*

## Never Have I Ever...

*By Robyn Walters*

At 84 years old, there are a lot of things I have done: flown a Navy jet trainer at 20,000 feet, been in a nuclear submarine at [classified] feet down, crawled around a couple of Navy ship reactor compartments, managed the boiler and turbine plant of an old guided-missile cruiser, designed and built warships, become a certified flight instructor and women's gymnastics judge, and scuba-dived to a depth of 125 feet.

I've also been married three times and have four biological children—all girls, who have blessed me with ten grandchildren and six great grandchildren.

But there is a major life accomplishment that I have never ever experienced. I've never been pregnant!

Despite the four daughters who share half my genes, I have never carried a zygote, embryo, or fetus in my body. Despite having been present at all four births, I've never had morning sickness or a contraction, and my vagina has never stretched for delivery. My breasts have never been swollen with milk.

Never ever have I done any of that. Yet I contributed half the genetic material of all my four daughters, and a portion on down through the generations.

No in vitro fertilization was involved. No surrogate parent contractual arrangement, either.

The root of this conundrum lies internally. You see, I have no uterus and no ovaries. I was shortchanged in this lifetime.

A riddle? Enigma? No. My genetic contribution, beginning 60 years ago, was in the form of sperm.

Twenty-five years ago, in my second marriage, I began my transition from male to female. That is anathema to some, but for me, it was lifesaving. Life finally began to make sense, and in my early sixties, I gladly invested the time, effort, and funds to bring my body into as close a match to my brain, to my identity, as medical science could attain.

My third spouse, who had not yet fully transitioned from female to male, walked alongside my gurney to the operating room door and wailed, pathetically, "Who's going to fix my dinner?" A year later, I walked alongside his gurney to the same operating room, where he had his gender confirmation surgery.

Years and years ago, before Robyn came out of the lingerie drawer, I had a past lives regression, which was an interesting experience. In one of those few lives, I had apparently been the wife of a Flemish artist. I'm sure there were children in that little cottage.

If there is anything to reincarnation, I am hopeful that there will be a fertile female person as my next life.

*Robyn Walters is a trans-elder. Her interests range from amateur radio and scuba diving to LGBT support, perpetual college classes, editing her husband's 50+ novels and stories, and helping to proofread BWQ issues.*



# Rx: A Staff Training on Sexual Orientation & Gender Identity

Daphne Kanellopoulos

Never have I ever expected to hear assistants in a medical office do a training on sexual orientation and gender identity.

“So, wait, what does bisexual mean?”

“It means being sexually or emotionally attracted to both genders.”

“What’s non-binary again?”

Ugh. I’m going to fail this test!” It did me a lot of good to hear that as a bisexual woman working as a temp in a medical office. Some people there seemed very conversant in these areas, so I find that very encouraging.

I also overheard, “It is important for us to know if someone is trans, because a trans man still requires pap smears.” That did me a lot of good to hear. It really made me so happy on a sunny, cool Friday. The weather was nice, people around me sounded knowledgeable, and it was Friday. I didn’t hear any bigoted comments, so that was nice too.

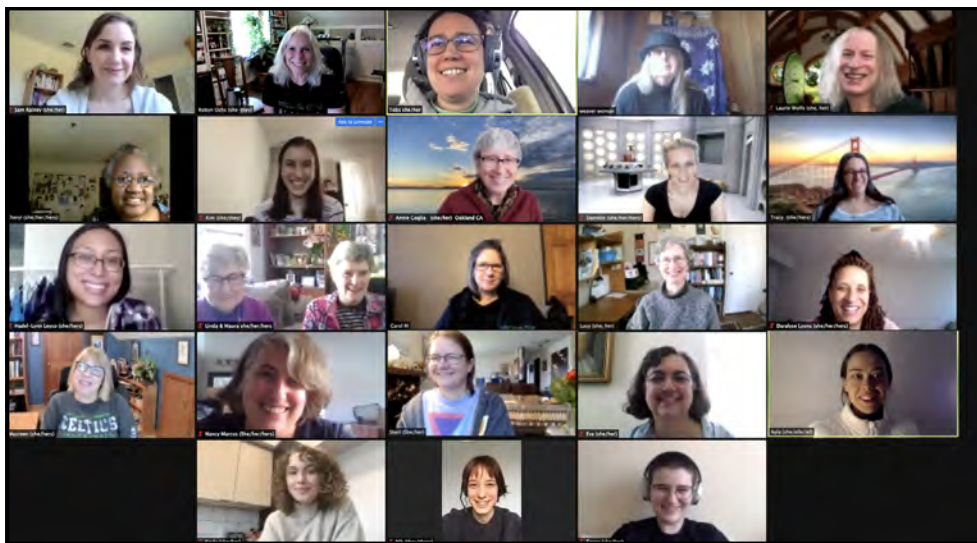
I also never thought I’d remain quiet about my own orientation, hearing that. I used to feel like I had to throw my orientation out there up front for everyone in case they decide they’re going to reject me. My feeling was, “Get it over with. If they’re going to reject you, let them do it early on when it hurts less.” I would pay close attention to people’s reactions, particularly in a dating context. If the reaction is anything other than “Oh, okay,” then I consider that a disqualifying condition for continuing to see the person.

Reactions can range from, “Oh, I would never date a bisexual woman. She’d leave me for a man. I can’t trust them,” to, “Hey,

so you’re into threesomes?” No and no. When I’m with someone, I’m with someone. I feel like it shouldn’t be “a thing,” so I shouldn’t feel the need to announce my orientation. It’s a small part of who I am anyway. I have also felt less need lately to share my identity when applying for work. My involvement with the Pride Center of New Jersey was on my resume for years. I removed it recently because I had enough experience to fill one page, and including that detail did not feel important enough to justify another page. In the past, I felt it was *very* important to leave that there so bigoted employers could rule me out before I even have a chance to talk to them. However, I don’t think people always read resumes before interviewing. I’ve had a couple of occasions where prospective employees were clearly surprised to see my Pride Center involvement. One went so far as to ask about the other volunteer experience on my resume because she felt it was important to get to know who I am as a person, but completely bypassed my Pride Center involvement. I didn’t get that job. I was more than okay with that. I didn’t want to work for her. I don’t want to work for someone for whom it may present an issue.

We’ve really come a long way from when hearing someone say slurs such as “faggot” was very commonplace. Now, sexual orientation and gender identity are becoming less of a “thing.” I look forward to the day when someone’s orientation is not interesting, where it’s as ordinary as having brown eyes. I have hope that we will get there.

*Daphne Kanellopoulos volunteered for many years at the Pride Center of New Jersey. She has also submitted articles to Out In Jersey Magazine.*



Our digital brunch, April 14, 2021

## The "Bi Office"

is the Bisexual Resource Center. Address listed at [biresource.org](http://biresource.org).

### Ongoing Events

During COVID-19, check the bi community calendar (right), or MeetUp, or check with the listed contact person to find out if an event is happening online.

#### 2nd Mondays:

**Straight Marriage, Still Questioning.** 7pm. Info: [kate.e.flynn@gmail.com](mailto:kate.e.flynn@gmail.com)

#### 1st Wednesdays:

**BLiSS (Bisexual Social and Support Group).** 7pm. Info: [bliss@biresource.org](mailto:bliss@biresource.org)

#### 2nd Thursdays:

**Young BLiSS Group.** (20s & 30s) 7pm. For bi folks 20-29. Info: Gabby at [youngblissboston@gmail.com](mailto:youngblissboston@gmail.com)

#### 3rd Saturdays:

**Biversity Brunch.** 11:30am.

#### 3rd Sundays, alternate months:

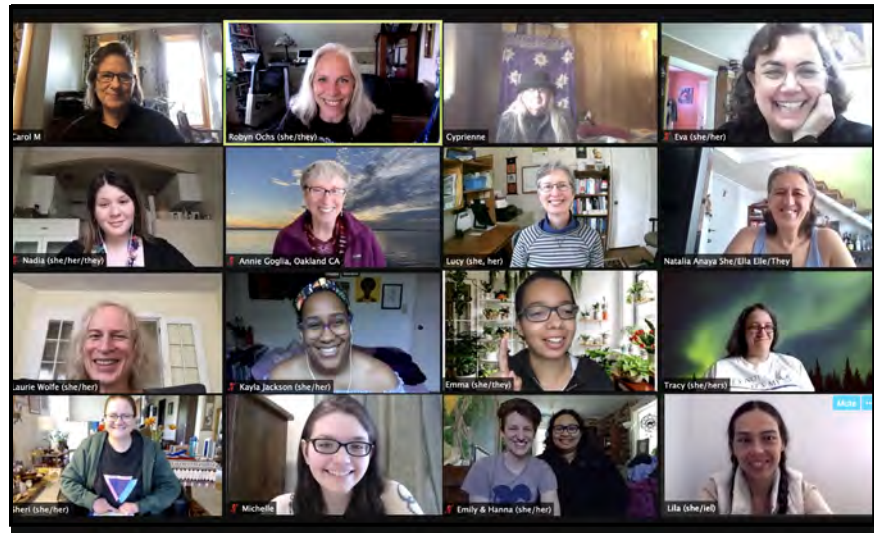
**Tea with Bi Women Partnered with Men.** 7pm. Info: Debbie at [debbsma@gmail.com](mailto:debbsma@gmail.com).

More about Boston-area groups: [biresource.org/boston-groups](http://biresource.org/boston-groups).

**Metro-Boston women: Keep up with local events by subscribing to our Google group: <https://groups.google.com/forum/#!forum/biwomenboston>**

**We offer FREE digital subscriptions to this publication. Sign up at [biwomenboston.org](http://biwomenboston.org).**

# [not your usual] CALENDAR



Our Digital Brunch, May 8, 2021

Did you know? Bostonia-area folks can find all kinds of bi+ virtual events at [meetup.com/Bi-Community-Activities](https://www.meetup.com/Bi-Community-Activities). Some of these events are gender-specific, and some welcome all genders. You can also find great bi+ virtual events on our own calendar at <http://biwomenboston.org/calendar>.

### Here's a special invitation to our readers outside the Boston area:

Please consider joining us at one (or all) of our digital brunches—just be aware times listed are US Eastern Time. We are proud of our community of women (trans and cis) and nonbinary folks, and we would love to make friends across the country (and globe). Grab your coffee or tea and some food while we chat about bi issues and other fun topics. You can find more details below!

**Sunday, June 13, 1-2:30pm US Eastern Time**

**Saturday, July 10, 1-2:30pm US Eastern Time**

**Sunday, August 1, 1-2:30pm US Eastern Time**

To R.S.V.P., email: [BWQevents@gmail.com](mailto:BWQevents@gmail.com)



*Consider this: If you rarely (or never) see people like yourself represented in print, your voice is especially important. When you lift your voice, someone, somewhere, will FINALLY see their own experiences reflected, perhaps for the first time. (See our call for writing on page 2.)*