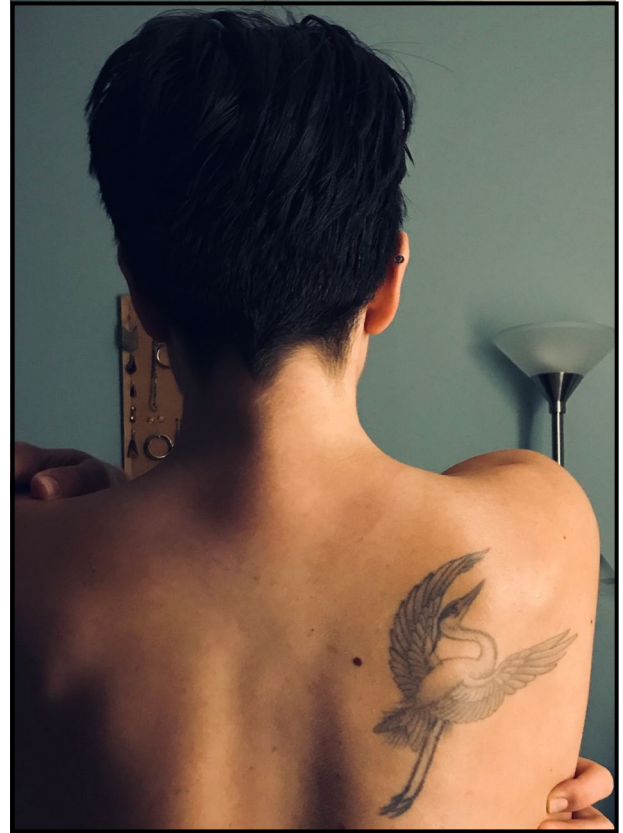


This Bird on My Back

By Emilyn Kowaleski

If someone would have told me years ago
that I was staring at the girl in college
with the raven tattooed across her back
because, perhaps, I wanted her
And less perhaps,
because I wanted to be her
I might not have this blue heron
etched on my own shoulder blade.
Now baked in red from marching in today's sun.
And I cherish this bird on my back
It reminds me of the beauty of existing
in an ever-shifting relationship with the truth of my own
being.

Emilyn Kowaleski is a queer feminist writer, director, and facilitator working towards collective healing, transformation, and liberation. A theater-maker by training, Emilyn writes in a blend of disciplines including plays, performance pieces, poetry, essays, and articles. www.EmilynKowaleski.com



I'm Fat, It's Complicated, It's None of Your Business

By Bailey Merlin

Like many people, I have never had a good relationship with my body. My fatness is a tale as old as time. My mother wasn't affectionate and worked often, but she was a baker—a good one—and she told me “I love you” with pound cakes. As I got older, I supplemented my loneliness with food. A common refrain in my house became: “You ate *all* that while I was gone? Bailey, what are we going to do with you?”

I learned how to cook from her, and sometimes it was the only thing we had to talk about. Food would always be a comfort. When I went off to college, I was probably one of the only freshmen who brought cookware and availed themselves of the dorm kitchen. Not that roasted chicken dinners on Sunday kept me from losing control of my mental health.

As my depression piled on in grad school, so did the pounds. At my heaviest, I was probably a little over 250. It's hard to say, though, because I didn't own a scale. Why hurt your own feelings when getting out of bed every day is already hard enough? Then

Content advisory: Several pieces in this issue contain references to sexual assault, eating disorders, and other potentially triggering subjects.

again, I didn't really feel my weight was a problem. Despite all my intellectual insecurities and imposter syndrome, I've never felt fat. Maybe it's because I'm tall and have always carried the weight in a socially acceptable way (full-figured, as they say), or maybe it's because I was so mentally and emotionally detached from myself that self-consciousness never had a chance to set in.

When I started a new chapter in Boston, losing weight was the furthest thing from my mind. It just sort of happened. How could it not? I was broke and had to walk *everywhere*. In my first six months in Boston, I went from a size 18 to a size 14. No one said anything (maybe because it was a gradual loss, and I was, after all, still fat).

After a year of being single, I jumped into the dating pool with all the confidence in the world, knowing that I could have anyone I wanted. It didn't happen like that, of course. People want to fuck fat girls; they don't want to date them. Fat girls are disposable. They don't have feelings. Didn't you know that?

Bailey, continued on page 24

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**Boston-area women:
Join our our Google
group: <https://tinyurl.com/Join-BBWN>**

Editor's Note

Dear Community,

The prompt for this issue was: “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—most of them poems—poured in, to the extent that we recruited three guest editors—all poets/creatives themselves—just to review poetry. Thanks to Jo-Anne Carlson, Robin Renée, and Jan Steckel for helping with this issue.

Also in these pages: a comic by Hilary Thomas; stunning artwork by Ara-Lucia; reviews of Carmen Machado’s *The Dream House*, Jen Winston’s *Greedy: Notes from a Bisexual Who Wants Too Much*, and the HBO show *Hacks*; and Chilean Estefania Sepúlveda tells her story, and that of the *BBB Podcast* in our “Around the World” feature.

Finally, very good news: Bi Women Quarterly is now an official 501(c)3 nonprofit organization, and our new website is up and running—and beautiful. We are grateful to Michelle Wheeler of PSM Marketing for her design genius, and to Alexa Beckstein, our intern, who spent the summer tweaking, linking, tagging, organizing, and getting *BiWomenQuarterly.com* ready for your enjoyment.

-Robyn and Katelynn

**Kat reads BWQ.
Send a picture of
yourself reading
BWQ to biwomeneditor@gmail.com.
Be creative!**



Upcoming in *Bi Women Quarterly* Call for submissions

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 due by November 1, 2021.

Spring 2022: Bi+ Health

Research shows that women who identify as bi+ engage in risk behaviors at a higher rate and have poorer health than do heterosexuals or even lesbians. What’s going on here? What special challenges do bi+ women face? How do you find a bi-affirming therapist? Is it enough to find one who specializes in LGBTQ+ issues? Are support groups helpful? What has been your experience? Essays, poems, artwork, and short stories are welcome. Submissions due by February 1, 2022.

Submission guidelines are online at biwomenquarterly.com. Send your submissions and suggestions for future topics to 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 (though we do pay our interns!). Want to proofread, edit submissions, host one of our monthly brunches, help us with social media, fundraising, our Etsy shop, or our website? If you’re a student, consider an internship. If you’re interested in helping out, please contact Robyn (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 for bisexuals and those with other non-binary sexualities full acceptance 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: *Estefanía Sepúlveda, La Serena, Chile*

Like many other bisexuals, I never saw myself as part of a community. I was always an ally to my gay friends, but I never felt like I was also included. It was the community I helped build that played a huge role in helping me realize that I could speak as an advocate on my own behalf.

I was born in 1991 and raised in La Serena, a coastal city in the north of Chile, a six-hour bus trip to the capital city, Santiago. Despite having spent my entire childhood and adolescence thinking I was heterosexual, I did feel attracted to multiple people, regardless of their gender identity. My family was pretty accepting of sexual diversity, and my teenage years were spent primarily with my gay friends: we would go to drag queen shows and experimented a bit by playing spin the bottle while jamming to Placebo, t.A.T.u., and Britney. Back then, being a girl who kissed other girls while being straight was considered a curiosity and not part of an identity. Also, most, if not all, of my gay male friends first came out as bisexual and then eventually admitted that they were actually gay. That built up an entire idea of bisexuality as a phase in my mind.

It took some time for me to accept the fact that I was bisexual. After a terrible, violent, and nearly life-consuming relationship with a man, I met a girl who shared my name, and I was instantly attracted to her mysterious, edgy aura. She was a lesbian, a student of Psychology, and a bartender at the indie pub I frequented. We started a semi-secret relationship in 2012. She was out of the closet with her friends, but not with her family, and I felt the gayest I've ever felt at the time. I was ready for my family to ask me about my sexual orientation, but it never happened.

By the end of our relationship, when things weren't great anymore, I met her first boyfriend who was also her distant relative. I was quite jealous of him at first, but I ended up completely falling for him the moment he showed up at a baptism ceremony we all attended. At 22, that was the moment I clearly recall thinking, "OK, this is a bit more complex than I thought. I'm bi." We ended up having a relationship that continued on and off from 2013 to 2017. In 2014, I moved to Santiago and became pretty vocal about my orientation, but I had zero success at dating women. Despite that, I never stopped feeling attracted to them as well as to guys who were straight or bi, but who were perceived by their peers as gay. Traditional masculinity not only bored me—it also scared me, so I was never really drawn to it.

2015 was a key year for my career, which I haven't discussed yet in this piece. I got my first degree in English-into-Spanish Translation in La Serena, and then I moved to Santiago to pursue my all-time dream of becoming a journalist. In 2015 I found a job at a BuzzFeed-like website. There, I met Isaías, and



we became friends almost instantly. We quickly realized we were both bisexual and that drew us closer together.

After many years discussing and designing projects that never saw the light of day, we finally took a big step in early 2019. We went for coffee and ended up creating the first Spanish-spoken podcast about bisexuality: *BBB*. Those three Bs stand for "Bueno, bonito, y bisexual" (which could be translated into "Good, cute, and bi"). We started out discussing bisexuality in pop culture and analyzing several myths regarding our sexual orientation. We felt the podcast format could be more useful for people who could listen to it on the go—especially bisexual Chileans who had never had a bi companion in the form of media or non-profit organizations. *BBB* was meant to be an educational platform, but it became so much more. I consider it to be a form of activism.

2019 was a key year for Chilean society. After decades of broken promises by past governments, and still wounded by the brutal dictatorship we endured for 17 years, we took our rage to the streets and demanded systemic change. Most of us felt the need to join forces and to get to know each other face to face. That's how we held the first Chilean bisexual encounter, and to this day we've organized digital meetings and workshops to discuss books and educational material about bisexuality not only with Chileans, but also with anyone who spoke Spanish and wanted to be part of our initiatives. Our goal with *BBB* is to consolidate our community as much as we can and join forces with activists and allies from all over the globe.

Both 2020 and 2021 have been all about expanding our horizons and trying our best to provide access to bisexual studies from all over the world. We have gotten in touch with bisexual individuals and communities from Argentina, Perú, México,

World, continued on next page

World, continued from previous page

Colombia, Spain, Honduras, and the United States. I've personally translated many resources into Spanish so that we can offer information and workshops to anyone who wants to learn a bit more. My aspiration is to create a solid community and to not only read about "first world" bisexuals, but to also encourage research in this region. Knowing the Chilean bisexual experience is key to making the general public understand us and take us seriously, as we deserve. There's so much work yet to be done in terms of mental health and education in our country, but I have faith that things will be different in a not-so-distant future.

Becoming a bisexual activist feels a lot like walking on eggshells at times, as there's not much in terms of information or manuals to make sure our efforts are effective, but I believe education and community will fuel us to finally break away from our historical silence. We've spent enough time in the shadows. I'm convinced that together, we'll finally be able to see the light.



2019 BBB event. Estefania is 3rd from right, holding the bi pride flag. Isaías is two people to the left.

Estefania Sepúlveda and BBB Podcast can be found online on Spotify, Apple Podcasts, iVoox, and Google Podcasts. Find them on social media at: [instagram.com/bbb_podcast](https://www.instagram.com/bbb_podcast); twitter.com/bbb_podcast; [tiktok.com/@bbb_podcast](https://www.tiktok.com/@bbb_podcast) and [youtube.com/bbbpodcast](https://www.youtube.com/bbbpodcast). If you want more specific information, or seek to contact BBB directly, e-mail them at buenobonitoybisexual@gmail.com.

Mind over Matter

By Martine Mussies

Growing up, I did not even know bisexuality existed, let alone know anyone who was bisexual. Consequently, I often felt that I had to make a choice: did I fancy boys, or did I fancy girls? For me, this was a question based purely on physical characteristics. It felt like such a silly question: how can you generalize whom you like better: people with a willy or people with a pussy? To me, that would be like stating that you will only date blonde people for the rest of your life. I couldn't make such a big statement—and still can't and won't. For years, I have struggled with labels like straight, gay, and bi, because they seemed to be purely about the relationship of your self to your body. Moreover, they seem to reduce the colorful spectrum of gender and sex to a socially constructed binary in which a dominant group is being regarded as normal, natural, superior, and even required. Since my late 20s, I have therefore identified my sexuality on another axis, as "sapiosexual."

By definition, a sapiosexual is someone who finds intelligence sexually attractive or arousing, but as with any concept, there are many nuances to this. While I indeed often find people attractive when they are intelligent, in my experience that is not the whole story. Moreover, this notion of intelligence does not necessarily have to do with IQ. A creative solution to a problem, a witty

remark, wise advice, a humorous play on words, an original angle or observation, resourcefulness, a strong imagination, a well-stocked bookcase, lively discussions, a fascinating musical performance, or a far-fetched hobby—these are often the things that do the trick for me. Nor is it about knowing lots of difficult words, as some comical videos and memes about sapiosexuality suggest. A knowledge bomb can be nice, but it's much more about the complexity of someone's thinking and the way they make me think, as if they tickle my brain. On a forum, someone once called me a "nymphobrainiac," and that person scored brownie points with that, also because I often find the suffix "sexual" problematic. For me it's not necessarily about sex; it's broader, I think, because it manifests itself mainly in a general desire to be with this person. Maybe 'sapioophilia' would be a better word, as I have this desire in (platonic) friendships as well. Recently, I noticed it when a good friend and I talked about an acquaintance of ours who is a real copycat. My friend used the term "mimetic desire," and—in line with what the French social scientist René Girard calls "The Romantic Lie"—I was so delighted by the beauty of this idea, that it made me super joyful. A surprising dialogue makes me happier than a box of chocolates.

My attraction goes beyond the classic four principles of social psychology—similarity, proximity, reciprocity, and an increase in attraction under conditions of anxiety and stress. Of course, things like physical beauty, similarity, and familiarity can also

Martine, continued on next page

be important to me, but it feels like all of that is more a part of an overarching attraction. I find someone physically attractive if they look smart, and it feels familiar and similar if we can learn from each other—so there is always a strong mental element to my attraction. On the geeky contact site OKC, you can also fill it in as an orientation and funnily enough, I often find the other people who have filled that in interesting and fun.

If the conversation is clearly about sex and gender (or if I don't want people to think I'm a snob), I still also call myself pansexual or bisexual or bi-romantic. But there is another layer on top of that because our brains are, in my experience, the most powerful sexual organ we humans possess. I usually fall for nerds and geeks, because I can do the most interesting things with those people. Writing a scientific article, building a complicated chemical model from Molymod, hacking a computer game, playing Renaissance guitar duets from the original notation, learning obscure languages...activities like that make me happy, for then I experience a connection, a bond. That works just as well platonically, by the way; it doesn't have to be sexual at all, and I also long for this in friendships, which has often made me an outsider. Fortunately, in my mid-30s, I have surrounded myself with extraordinary people, for instance in the Domcantorij (the choir and orchestra of the Utrecht Dom cathedral, with its accompanying activities such as the Gregorian chant class and more) and in my dojo (the sports clubs where we learn and practice all kinds of Japanese martial arts).

Intellectual stimulation quickly manifests itself in excitement for me, and sometimes this is sexual as well. My partner is very intelligent, analytical, and versatile—I find that extremely sexy! Once, I joined my lover in creating homework for his new course; we sat together discussing scenario planning, Ishikawa diagrams, Block's models, and network analysis. To be stimulated and challenged like that was very sexual for me; I felt it in my whole body. Studying together has always been a very good prelude for me. Dates that excite me are going to libraries, lectures, and museums. Doing a workshop together usually works very well, too, but then you run the risk of me liking the teacher more than my date, and I often develop crushes at conferences. My body needs my mind to get aroused, so no deep penetration without deep conversation.

Looking back, this seemingly “non-bodily attraction” (although the brain is part of the body as well) has always been one of the threads of my love life. I fell madly in love with my maths teacher when I was 16, because of the clarity of his logic, with which he approached the whole of life (which once led to a hilarious discussion when I complimented him on that, about whether the whole of life wasn't just applied maths as well). I also had crushes on people who made beautiful music, wrote good books, and read Old Irish the way I read the newspaper, for instance. This admiration was not about looks at all but was more like Plato's description of Socrates: no money, no power, no

beauty, but so much charisma and a brilliant way of reasoning. When I was studying in Russia, I wrote a thesis on *Lolita*, and I noticed how I developed feelings for the nutty professor who supervised this, for example. The other side of the medal was that my juvenile admiration for Harrison Ford quickly faded when I found out how *Indiana Jones* “reads” hieroglyphics the wrong way round. An example I often use to explain sapiosexuality is Stephen Hawking, whom I also found insanely sexy, because of his brilliant mind, his zest for life, his humorous one-liners, his activism (e.g., in the fields of disability and climate issues) and forceful political opinions, the performances in shows like *Star Trek* and *The Big Bang Theory*, and the ‘hacks’ he performed to outlive expectations in different areas of life—the most striking example being that curious voice, a fusion of personality and machine.

Yet this is not a story that ignores the body or an anti-body manifesto. Although I'd plead not to judge a book by its cover, for me the body is a canvas full of identity markers, not only in the way it is dressed, but also in the way it moves and articulates, for example. How you present your body says something about how you see it—just like how you present your home. In a way, people are not so different from the male arboreal bird, which tries to make its nest as beautiful as possible with brightly colored, hard-to-find objects from the surroundings. By doing so, it shows its intelligence and fitness, as it is difficult to find scarce objects and protect them from being stolen by other birds. Very occasionally there are bodily aspects that I find less attractive, because they seem to indicate the priorities that someone has in life (a super muscular person may have read fewer books, someone with a beer belly may have engaged less in sports) but prejudice always lurks around the corner, so talking is always better for me.

Considering prejudices, sadly, I have often encountered people who find sapiosexuality arrogant and pretentious, but I have little choice in the matter. I see my sexuality as an extension and continuation of my autism—I can't do anything with small talk but can do a lot with smart talk—combined with my infinite curiosity, two elements of me that also resonate with my bisexuality. I often think that I am looking for people who can explain to me a fascinating new vision of the world. And that I therefore don't select on “preconditions” like whether someone has a dick or not—that is much less important and interesting for me. So, although beautiful hair is a plus, a grammar mistake (e.g. omitting the Dutch -dt ending) in the dating phase is often disastrous.

Although it is always difficult to fall outside the norm, I don't really have a judgement on my sexuality. It's just a part of who I am and, because I'm aware of it, I can now take it into account better. So: don't stare blindly but be careful that the person in question doesn't have a rotten character. I also find it an interesting phenomenon and therefore think it would be fun to map

Martine, continued from previous page

out exactly what happens during intellectual stimulation and how it is possible that this can lead to sexual excitement in sapiosexual people. I study neuropsychology at the University of Chicago, and the professor (a very attractive woman, by the way) often shows things on the fMRI. We already know quite a lot about how a brain can become excited and what happens around adrenaline, dopamine, and serotonin (which make us find someone attractive) and around oxytocin, vasopressin (especially for bonding), and related processes around norepinephrine, etc. These processes are the same in me as in most people, only my brain starts them when I read a study book, while most others would do better to flip through an erotic novel. Why these triggers are different in me remains the big puzzle. Maybe I am just less sensitive to estrogen and testosterone, the substances that are involved in pure lust, and more sensitive to the hormonal systems in the neuronal networks around attraction and bonding? If someone can explain this to me, I'm sure I'll fall in love again....

Martine Mussies is a professional musician and a PhD candidate at Utrecht University, writing about the Cyborg Mermaid. Her other interests include autism, (neuro)psychology, Japanese martial arts, video games, King Alfred, and science fiction.
www.martinemusies.nl



Martine Mussies, self-portrait with her cat

Substance

By Mycah Katz

First it was an injection
The nurse telling me she wanted to be part of my journey
But the suicidal thoughts were like an anvil I couldn't stop
The gel

was gentler
sometimes my mind was calmer
But every moment of anxiety became hours of anguish

My body never wanted new hormones
I just thought that I was a problem to be fixed
An earthquake to stabilize
Little boys never wanting the tremors I gave them
While I twisted myself into a substance they could handle

I want to be seen
But I have to know that I can see myself
That I don't need approval to exist as I am
I don't need to be different to be special

I'm a person who has the privilege to evolve
To show up in whatever form I choose
For I am not grieving

I
AM
HERE

Mycah Katz is a non-binary therapist and soon-to-be PhD student in social work at the University of Ottawa. They write poetry and blog about love, gender, and identity.

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

Two Poems by Cel Sanel



Plant Baby

Compost me
I know you read the ingredients as you kissed my back
and can judge accordingly
Shovel me in little heaps and wrap me around a seed
so I'll mean something, my decay will be a service
and I'll use the oxygen that once emphasized how hard it was
to breathe
to create something more
Roots will spurt out my belly button and hug me until
I'm no longer myself
Self-less ((service//cervix))
To serve as your next meal
I hope you like me more than your microwave chicken wings
and that the fruit I produce satisfies your hunger
I am only trying to provide because you were //
Useless
Pot me in with my pot
Then I can get high while I disintegrate for you



Cel Sanel is a nonbinary femme, currently in their senior year at Boston University, who has been inspired by their teacher Leanne Hoppe to submit their work.



Swamp

tufts of moss on my skin
squelching in the wet places it likes to hide
perhaps I have a mossy heart
to pair with my misty eyes
and that place between my thighs
that no one seems to want to address
except for me
all wet, in my mess

Little Tornadoes

By Jess Berg

A singular right hip—
aches dull and constant like a toothache
until
it
doesn't

(I roll over one night there
is no spike it has suddenly surprisingly slipslid away
like the bending is working
like I'm not
even
break
ing)

Weak wrists grow strong
Bearing weight from ample
body
and
Burdens

(this is what marks the beginning not a line
but an absence of sensation then a deepening of it then a
sinking
into the simple and objective
awareness
of
it)

The entire husk, well—
It opens, it peels,
opens
and it
peels

(this the first of many mantras
repeat them so many times use beads to keep track just re-
member
to repeat repeat repeat repeat repeat
repeat
repeat
rep-)

And inside the husk is a girl
A girl with another girl
deep down inside
but
not
Quite

(so she
—suddenly removed from herself—
decides to keep the girl burrowed to
keep her inside the husk
to keep her to herself
this becomes a
pattern to
repeat
repeat
repeat
a

lock-and-key kept annual glitch to hold
deep in her
belly
then-)

Look!

A
twister!

She's a husk!
No! An onion!
She's peeling
away and away
until at long last the girl
Unrolls
from

Deep
Inside
TheGirl
(Th e
g
ir
l)

*(it's me it's I and my footprints on bedroom walls racing around
them in circles then the window flies open the shutters bang and
scrape tearing pages from all the books what a mess oh what a
wonderful mess)*

What is left:
A trembling cord
Food body fidgets and shakes
All of it now nude with no hands
And on the outside

Jess, continued on next page

Jess, continued from previous page

In very broad daylight,
finally
on the outside.
There is a lightness, even in the quaking
in her body
and in the air and
all the tornado purges
(the girl and I both we both finally clean well now I know I
have loved this way all along)



Jess Berg (shelher) splits her time teaching Hatha yoga and working as a visual merchandiser, and has a B.A. in English Literature from Governors State University. She's a spouse and cat mom, identifies as bi, and loves jogging, drawing, and baking too many vegan cookies.

Middles and Other Spaces Between

By Gabryelle Iaconetti

Rocking the boat, I fell into the sea
The confinement of the vessel was suffocating me

I move through spaces between one shore and another
They boast soft sand but hidden beneath are sharp rocks
Treading ocean water, I float on my back looking up at the
endless, expansive sky

People on the sandy shores call to me from both sides
"Come here!" "No, come here!"
"You can't stay floating in the middle forever!"
"You'll have to swim to the shore sometime, either here or
there!"
The words catching on the salty sea breeze, they fade out over
my head

Sometimes I simply pretend not to hear them
Other times, I let them know their words have landed
And I turn away in defiance, dipping beneath the ocean's
surface
Floating in the expanse

I like to feel untethered in the middle of the ocean, between
shores, between lands
Swimming among all the other creatures just like me who
don't want to come ashore
I don't see many of them - maybe they're taking a break under
the waves
Maybe they're also tired of hearing the yells of disapproval
coming from both shores, too
Tired of the commotion, wanting to just float, just be, in
peace

Another boat glides by in the distance
Is it a beacon of safety?
Or yet another uncomfortable, too-tight vessel to be shoved
into?
I let the waves between the shores keep me afloat instead
The ocean, the space between, never confines me

Gabryelle Iaconetti (shelthey) is from Montreal, Canada; she proudly identifies as bisexual. They have a background in library and archival work. She is also extremely passionate about history, bi activism, and veganism.

When I am old

By Skyla Allen

When I am old with violet veins
Like the purple petals in the garden
My skin akin to a butterfly's wing
Crinkling, clinging, and laid
Over my soft breakable bones
As a blanket of snow
Covers a sleeping town
That's when I know my voice
Will quaver with all the years of use.
My hair once amber, now turned ash
As my freckles fall into etched lines
Carved in deeply—it's not lost on me
It actually seems, I've absently drawn
A map of all the things
I've ever felt.



Skyla Allen (they/she) is an artist and writer based in southern Indiana. Their passions lie in the in-between spaces of genres and are often explored in her writing. They have recently graduated with their M.A. in creative writing and have had their work published in Allusions magazine.

See Me

By Nomi Siegelman

I have a physical existence in this world
I am standing here on solid legs
That hold up a solid body
And a head with a mouth
Screaming
For your attention
Screaming
For your acceptance
Or at least
Your acknowledgement



I can feel my form when I touch it
I can see it when I look down
I can witness its reflection
When I gaze into the mirror
Yet somehow I possess
The unwanted power of
Invisibility

In P-town
One of the hearts of queendom
I quested for a token
Of bi pride
Of bi representation
Found none
And rode away on a ferry
With empty hands and a broken heart

But I could still feel my heart beating
In my very real chest
And though my hands held nothing
I could still see them
With my very real eyes

I am standing right here
Solid and real and taking up space
Being who I am—
A bisexual woman
So just look at me
Even for a second
Just tell me
I am seen
Then go about your day

Nomi Siegelman is a writer, artist, and crafter in her late 30s. She lives in Worcester, Massachusetts, with her cat Lucy. She collects crystals and stuffies, and she loves animals, nature, imagination, and binging media with queer representation.

Three Poems by Elise Salsman

Our Lady, Star of the Sea

I, the derelict and the mother
You, the faithful

The oblation of my body is common thought
And common law.

All this hungry world does is affirm me,
My breast buds, your eucharist;
This immaculate heart of Mary forgives you
For your trespasses.

If I were warrior woman Judith
I'd get life in prison for beheading

The slaughterers of my people,
My pariah femininity condemned to let
The beast savor and taste
The girl just cries.

I'm Narcisse's self-image in the pool
My face accreting clay shape,
A Venusian paradise; one empty shell as
A life raft parsed from land.
I'm Scylla, I'm Charybdis
With a cherry dehisce.

Let Them Eat Cake!

A modern Marie Antoinette would be
The first to pay to have her head cut off; vaginoplasty.
She could do it over the tub with a bit of teflon floss.
Uranus' severed genitals dissolved into spermatic seafoam
green.
Venus was first blood and semen before flesh,
The divine inception of oestradiol.

Maybe, you think her a jejune ingénue,
Too spoilt from time spent
Entertaining catholic princes snipped
Too short by their own mothers,
Who've subscribed to enlightenment pseudo-science
Minimalism.

The Apple, Your Eyes




Mine serpentine thighs
Birth monsters in your eyes;
Two ophiophagus asps rasp
The other 'round your neck,
Clasped by primality's gasp.

I'm that succubus slag
You saw nude through
Pink rhubarb in your garden;
Soggy August air
Wetting citric juiced fruit.

I peel my face off
With an acid-washed cloth
Nightly by vanity light.
All I did was shed,
And informed you to.

Elise Salsman (she/her) is a trans woman. "Elise" means "God is my oath" or "my God is abundance."

Identity Development Model (Brown, 2002) for Non-monosexuals aka Bi+ Community

 <p>am i bi?</p> <p>First Stage: Initial Confusion</p>	 <p>i am probably bi.</p> <p>Second Stage: Finding and Applying the label</p>	 <p>I am bi.</p> <p>Third Stage: Settling into the Identity</p>
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Fourth Stage: In previous models, the final stage was called "Continued Uncertainty." In Brown's model it is called "Identity Maintenance."



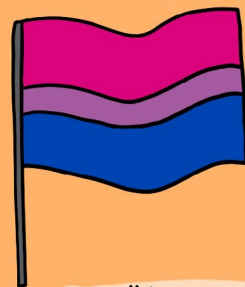
Non-monosexual individuals are firm in their identity. They may feel challenged to figure out how to honor their full identity. They often experience erasure from monosexual individuals who observe and then guess their orientation ("they're lesbian" or "they're gay" or "they're straight") based on the assumed gender of their partner.



"I call myself bisexual because I acknowledge that I have in myself the potential to be attracted - romantically and/or sexually - to people of more than one gender, not necessarily at the same time, not necessarily in the same way, and not necessarily to the same degree."

- Robyn Ochs

In conclusion,



...still bisexual.

a mini comic by:
Hillary Thomas

Untitled - '19

By Miles Joyner

I am a woman

Not the kind to call
Ma'am or Miss
While kissing my hand.

I am a woman

Because the world sees
Flowers, a Venus
Emerging from the sea

I am a woman

In appearance alone, I sit
Uncomfortable
Atop a throne

Draped in femininity,

Hesitantly owned
Unsure how
I will shred the burden

Of Womanhood

Men touch, feel
Welcome to my body
Like the ocean on sand

Eroding me

All I want is
To be still, a wave
Without a crash

I am a woman

I dress like a man
I'm bold, I'm told
I do not feel it

Not woman,

Not man
I'm unfinished, a part
Of a universal plan

I am a flood

No longer at bay
I raise my hand
Out flows "They"

Miles Joyner is a bisexual activist in South Carolina. They enjoy attempting poetry in their free time.

Hillary Thomas, whose comic is on the facing page, is a bi+ woman in Los Angeles, California, and also a Licensed Clinical Social Worker. She attended a training on Bi+ Affirmative Psychotherapy by Dr. Mimi Hoang. She was inspired and felt so validated by her words that she decided to capture some of the information in a comic art panel.



Body Ally

By Lila Hartelius

In January, I started charting my menstrual cycle. Every day, I write a few lines expressing thoughts and feelings that have characterized my day. For years, I've experienced cognitive, emotional, and physical wellness challenges that have made daily productivity and realizing my dreams and goals feel elusive. I hoped listening to my body in this way might offer insight into these difficulties and how to overcome them.

As a participant in dialogue around LGBTQ+ issues, before embarking on this daily writing practice I was already aware of the importance of promoting inclusivity wherever marginalization is at play. LGBTQ+ communities frequently engage in conversations about inclusivity, both in terms of promoting inclusion of LGBTQ+ people within broader society and in terms of improving inclusivity of diverse LGBTQ+ people within LGBTQ+ communities. So, as I began reading the book that inspired me to start charting my cycle (*Wild Power*—a book [which I'm still reading and absorbing] on menstrual cycle awareness as a spiritual practice)—I was sensitive to the importance of inclusivity around the question of who menstruates (because not all women menstruate or ever have, and some people who menstruate are not women—and I was pleased to discover that the book, while not placing a specific focus on it, does at least acknowledge some of these points). However, I was yet to discover that this simple cycle-tracking exercise would add another layer to how I think about inclusivity on both individual and collective levels.

Long before embarking on my monthly charting adventure, I was painfully aware of the many days I couldn't achieve the focus, inner calm, and productivity necessary to stay abreast of tasks at hand. My agenda was often a near-illegible bramble of chaos as I struggled to tread the waters of the seemingly unpredictable shifts in my moods, energy levels, and ability to focus. I felt shamefully flawed yet simultaneously feared I simply wasn't trying hard enough.

It's been years since my first enthusiastic attempt at realizing my dreams and goals by chunking them down into action plans. I couldn't tell you how many times I've abandoned those action plans. One reason for this recurrent "failing" was the monthly arrival of my period. Any self-care regime I'd enthusiastically start with the hope of achieving the well-being I longed for and felt would help me live my best life was almost systematically interrupted by Aunt Flo—because of physical pain, fatigue, or changes in mood that undermined my motivation. Self-help discourse about daily practice as essential to new habit formation translated into my all-or-nothing thinking tendencies as: "One day missed = you've failed on that goal; pick a new one, because you obviously don't have the mental stamina to reach this one." Seeing myself fall off the bandwagon repeatedly, I became increasingly discouraged and frustrated by the monthly

limitations my body placed on my functioning. I came to believe I lacked the follow-through and discipline necessary to reliably achieve my goals.

Through charting my cycle, I've come to recognize the changing nature of my physical, cognitive, and emotional being. Experiencing day-to-day fluctuations in my energy levels, moods, and capacity to concentrate on specific tasks in specific ways doesn't mean I'm flawed or undisciplined; it simply means I'm a multifaceted being in dynamic movement—like a kaleidoscope. Now, when I have trouble focusing or being productive, when I feel extra tired, irritable, or discouraged, I can often relate it to patterns of how I experience myself in different parts of my menstrual cycle. This helps me gain perspective, because I know that whatever difficulty I'm experiencing will likely eventually give way to a moment when a given task will feel easier. Adapting to my body's changing rhythms supports my productivity, because it invites me to align what I'm doing at a given time with what I feel best able to do at that time.

And even when what I'm feeling on a given day seems out of sync with the general tendencies I notice in the part of my cycle I'm in, regarding my body as my ally makes it easier to accept and adapt to whatever I'm experiencing in the moment. My self-esteem is restoring itself, and the energy I'd been investing in trying to keep up with the productivity and live-your-dream status quo is giving way to an inner authority and, with it, an inner peace.

Moving in step with my body's shifting states also inspires me to consider my priorities in how I spend my time. If the sole purpose of allying with my body is to accomplish things I feel pressured to achieve but don't believe in, I'm essentially working with myself to work against myself. Some of the physical, cognitive, and emotional difficulties I've experienced are, I've realized, not only about how and when I'm doing something but also about what I'm doing and why. When it comes to a personal passion or hobby, I'm much more likely to find myself engrossed in an activity for hours with the kind of focus that can often elude me in tasks I dislike or care less about. Instead of berating myself for struggling with tasks I "should" do, I'm recognizing these personal challenges as my body's voice expressing not only its own shifting rhythms but also the song of my values, passion, purpose, and vision. Sometimes I don't understand the lyrics, and it can feel scary to let my body sway to the music; but my ears are open, and I'm learning to listen, trust, and include my body—and my priorities—in my agenda and action plans.

Shifting from a framework of personal brokenness or inadequacy to one in which I regard my body as a source of wisdom is liberating and reaffirming. With the help of the aforementioned

Lila, continued on next page

Lila, continued from previous page

book (*Wild Power*), I've begun to see how much modern society imposes a relentless, one-sided set of values and beliefs about productivity that essentially tend to ignore even the very existence of the menstrual cycle and, at best, pathologize its ebbs and flows, proposing—even pressuring—to medicate it rather than listen to and honor it. The book's authors, Alexandra Pope and Sjanie Hugo Wurlitzer, have begun to help me envision a world where we listen to our bodies and take them into account in all areas of our lives, whether or not we menstruate or have ever menstruated, and whatever our gender identity. I want to help dispel the shame and guilt around listening to and honoring our bodies' rhythms, menstrual and otherwise. My hope in writing this is to inspire others to realize that such a shift is possible and that it is our birthright to tap into and reclaim the wisdom in the voices of our bodies.


The decision to regard my body as my ally has produced significant benefits in my personal life. It has also inspired me to be my own proud and enthusiastic drop of water in the ocean of a revolution seeking to dismantle toxic productivity. Yet it wasn't until recently that I discovered a thought-provoking connection between this body-listening philosophy and the question of inclusivity as I had conceived of it within the LGBTQ+ communities I'm part of.

During a virtual brunch I attended this summer that was organized by the Boston Bisexual Women's Network, participants were invited to consider inclusivity as a discussion prompt for breakout sessions. Through conversation with those in my breakout room, it occurred to me that the practice of inclusivity is something we can extend personally to our own bodies. The idea of including my body in the decision-making process about how I spend and organize my time suddenly became not only a process of self-acceptance and an act of resistance against toxic productivity but also a concern of diversity and a lever of inclusivity. The more inclusive we are personally toward our own bodies—by listening to them, taking them into account, and, essentially, being allies to them—the more aware we can be of our own needs and the better equipped we can thus be to seek adequate inclusivity around our needs. With minority stress being a reality for anyone with marginalized identities and experiences, I think it's even more important for us as LGBTQ+ individuals, and as individuals who may also have other intersecting marginalized identities, to be allies to our own bodies. Minority stress is stress, and stress is a physiological phenomenon. Minority stress can and does impact mental and physical well-being. Learning—each of us—what being an ally to one's own body means for us personally seems to me an essential component of the self-acceptance journey so many of us are on, and of the work of diversity and inclusion so many of us have been putting our hearts and souls into—sometimes to the point of burnout.

Being an ally to your body might look like charting your menstrual cycle if you have one and wish to chart it, or it might mean tracking another aspect of your embodied experience or simply checking in regularly with how you're feeling—physically, emotionally, cognitively—and letting that awareness inform in whatever way feasible how you move through your life and the world. Whatever form it may take for each of us, I feel that being inclusive toward our own bodies has the potential to transform our lives—and our world—for the better.

Lila Hartelius is a bilingual (English & French) multidisciplinary artist and writer who is honored to have had the opportunity to be a EuroBiCon workshop leader. She loves cats, dancing, singing, improv acting, and brain-friendly approaches to anything from folding laundry to becoming an Olympic ice skater. Read more from Lila at lilahartelius.wordpress.com.

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Bodies Store Secrets but Art Reveals Them

By Fiona Petras

I have often lamented how difficult it is to look back on our lives and assess which life events were truly tell-tale signs of our sexual orientation. When it comes to looking back on our childhoods, things get especially hazy. Our memory begins to fade, and we aren't quite sure which narratives our minds made up along the way to fill in the gaps. It is therefore hard to sort through the minefield of forgotten thoughts and feelings to tell whether you really had a crush that you were repressing, or whether it was something else entirely. We must come to terms with the fact that we will never know for sure. Those memories have been whisked away by time.

Yet something dawned on me when I was poring through my early writing. It held the answers to so many questions I now have as an adult, and to secrets I was not aware I was suppressing at that age. The poem which struck me most was entitled "The Way I Wish He Looked at Me" and was meant to express my feelings towards a man (well, really a boy at that age). At the time, I saw it as an opportunity to be selfish, to take the pen out of a man's hand and write what I wished his feelings were towards me. "This is how you write about a woman," I'd thought at the time. "This is how you appreciate her beauty and her body." It was a classic case of "If you want something done right, you'd better do it yourself." Now, you might be thinking, as I was at the time, "how self-indulgent of her." Or perhaps you're thinking how sad it must be to have to write a poem about yourself.

But knowing what I know about my body image at that age, this "self-indulgence" seemed quite out of character and didn't make much sense to me now that I was re-reading it. I had been so infatuated with this man, so imagine my surprise when I quickly realized from the depictions in the poem that I could not have been describing myself. I had gone into so much passionate detail in describing this fictional woman that it cannot but be worth some self-reflection. Suddenly, this writing took on a new layer of meaning for me. It revealed the potential that I had yet to discover, did not *want* to discover, but would nonetheless experience with a woman once the kettle finally boiled over in later years.

After stumbling upon this revelation, I first considered changing the title to more accurately reflect the reality that I was speaking about my appreciation for the female figure, and not necessarily my own. It would be disingenuous, however, to claim that it was not my yearning for a man that initially sparked the urge to write this piece. I couldn't possibly choose one version over the other, because both attractions had to come together to bring this writing into existence. I therefore concluded that the title should not be replaced, but rather that the poem should have more than one title. After all, isn't that what we bisexuals do best?

"The Way I Wish He Looked at Me" or "How I Would Come to See Her"

Like a violent typhoon
You stormed into my life
And there was no taming you
For the uncontrollable nature
Of the place from whence you came
Burst through you with intimidating glory
And your sheer presence made me feel
That I had seen the world
And yet that I'd never left home.

I saw the iridescence of the ocean
Reflected in your shimmering eyes
And the sun's golden rays tightly woven
Into every fibre of your olive skin.
I found the cracks of the cliffs
In the lines on your face
And then I knew you'd lived enough
To know loneliness, remorse, and pain
And that I wanted to live it all with you,
Crumbling like boulders off mountain sides
With a reverberating sigh
Into the reliable embrace of your solid ground.

The souls of the shrubs of your land
Echoed in the depths of your dark, wavy hair,
The curve of the vines
Shaping your sleek waist
Meandering down a long path
To calves sculpted like breathing marble art,
And in every shout and laugh
And late-night conjecture
Of your paranoid mind
Rang the cheery, uninhibited song of your people.

And like a fool made wiser through travel,
After some time, I came to realise
That like a siren you could lure me
To new corners far and wide
And that I would willingly come.

This poem, which I wrote when I first began dabbling in creative writing, remains dear to me, as I wrote it at a time when I had just experienced being away from home for the first time in my life. My homesickness had a strong part to play in the fact that I drew comparisons between the features of a human body and the Mediterranean landscape of the Maltese islands which I fondly call home.

Fiona, continues on next page

Fiona, continued from previous page

Besides noticing how deeply I had suppressed my bisexuality, certain other poems I had written evoked great sadness within me as they exposed my own insecurities and negative perception of my own body. As much as I seem to recall exuding confidence at that age, my poems told a different story and read more like a journal entry chronicling my deepest fears. They revealed a need to gain male approval from whomever I was infatuated with at the time, for fear of otherwise feeling incomplete, insignificant, or neglected.

“Unfinished”

You saw me in the frigid marble
And released me from my prison
Pulled me out as from corbel
To trace and mould your vision.

You made love to your art
As you sculpted its outline
And gave it your heart
To pour blood through like wine.

You kneaded my waist
Into shape for support.
Though you never made haste
Our run was too short.

There was a time you'd boast
Smilingly that I'm yours
But all that remains is the ghost
Of admiration once pumped through my pores.

You once kissed my nose into shape
Brushed my hair into being
Eyed your neck work down the nape...
Couldn't believe what you were seeing.

I suppose the glint in my eyes
Looked much too real and
Fearing I might come to life

You abandoned me mid-strife
Left me in darkness to stand
While others posed in the light of day
And my skin dwindled stone grey.
Corroding.
Despite all my goading
I learned what it was to feel humble
And you never even knew
That I
Began

To

Crum

Ble;

So there went all my charms
Half-living sculpture
With no arms.

The fault was finally my own
And to be fair on you, I should've known
You'd wake and lose interest.
A mark of great minds no doubt, too.
You always wished to be an artist,

Didn't you?

When it comes to my gradual realization about my sexual orientation, as well as my relationship with my own body, I cannot but grieve the lost time which becomes increasingly evident as I discover more of these clues. I often find myself thinking, *if only I had realised sooner just how many of my actions were a cry for help*. But it is useless to mourn the past, as that is how denial works—it strives to waste your time and eat away at your valuable energy which could be better spent deciding what you want your future to look like. This time capsule opened a crack through which a myriad of forgotten emotions and anxieties managed to ooze their way out. I have come to know and understand myself that much better as a result.

Fiona was born and raised in Malta. She was featured in the “Around the World” feature in the Summer 2021 issue of BWQ.

Bi+ World Meetup

Bi+ people from all over the world are invited to join our 4th meetup on Zoom. We'll be using breakout rooms to give folks an opportunity to meet each other and keep in touch, in a friendly and free setting. The meeting is in English. Organized by Barbara Oud (Netherlands) and Robyn Ochs (U.S.)

Date: Friday October 15, 2021 Start: 10 pm CEST (UTC+2); End: 11.30 pm CEST (UTC+2)

Cost: free, but *registration is required*. Register at tinyurl.com/BiPlus15Oct

The Digital Age

By Michelle Y.

Back before you changed your mind
about me you held up your phone
to blinding parking lot lights
to digitally show
where the stars should be
had civilization's light
not censored them

"Cassiopeia," you say
as if you were kissing its red
giant
into my mouth
as if we were on our backs
gazing in the dark

The red giant
was not the hardest pill
for me to swallow
when we digitally made love
It was knowing that I
have no real-life use for you

Michelle Y. is a graduate student pursuing licensure in psychology. She is passionate about issues of sex and sexuality and believes in the coping power of creativity.

My Neighbor

By Mariya Shcherbinina

I never got help until it was too late. In fact,
The one who got help was my mom.
The doctor said I didn't have to come if I didn't want to
And I gladly grabbed on to that brief liberation
In time of destruction and blood and starvation
And I stayed at home while he talked her into
Letting me go to study abroad, and carry the load
Of the pain of sharing my body with somebody else.

My neighbor is calm only during the night. At daylight,
She's contradictory, self-important and violent,
She talks over noises of streets and of people
It's simple: she talks and she takes over everything
A tight ring of iron constricting around the ash of my spine
And the chopsticks that I use for legs.

I beg her to loosen her hold on me, but the devil so made her
That I cannot be free, cannot bear living without her con-
trolling
Owning a part or the hundred per cent of me,
And I've forgotten what it's like to be without her
Every words that she says, it is gospel
And the spell that she casts only recedes at night, and the
hunger sets in
And I lean over the table and spill all my tears cause I know
If she hears the rustle of wrappers and the screech of the fork,
I'm done for. But I don't want to go back to before,

I was out of control. I didn't know numbers,
I was a bad student and the sum of my food was

Nothing to me and I was a pig and the real girl who everyone
says that is me

Was sick, she was the real hopeless case because
She reached for a taste and took the whole spoon
And she groomed herself for a life of freedom
But who wanted freedom when you could have Her,
Living inside that body of yours
And squelching the yearning for what you thought good
I would live without her, and with her I would
Rise to the heights of existence and perch on the crutches
Of legs that support half my weight,
She's stayed way too long in this body of mine,
Sometimes I feel she is pushing me out,

After all that is what my neighbor's about,
She gorges on hunger and guilt from my fridge
And sings off fat with a flame of desire
To be better, faster, and stronger...

I'm dying.

She stands in a veil like a widow in mourning.
She looks for a new spouse, I'm never returning,
She's killed me but the gun is still in her pocket
And there is no force that's able to stop it
From happening over again to another
Because she is poison, one hell of a lover

If you can't have food,
You'll at least have each other.

*Mari is a writer and psychologist based in The Netherlands.
Her work focuses on the experience of mental health within the
LGBTQ+ community*

A Form(ing) of Love

By D. W.

I wanted my body to get away from me
I was tired of living in a crime scene
My skin didn't feel like mine anymore
I am not sure it ever did

I always felt like I was playing dress up
Wearing the echoes of society's ideals
Putting on a drag show even when alone

What does it mean to be (wo)man?
Am I insecure because I feel like I don't fit in
Or do I not fit in (to myself)

Then the thought of them arrived
I came to meet them with a soft and tender kiss
Slowly drawing myself into their skin

I found me
I molded myself together
Chiseled away the excess
Carved myself out

And underneath it all,
I was beautiful
Underneath it all,
I was me

D.W. (she/they) is a survivor of domestic violence and recently came out as gender fluid. This is a poem dedicated to them, their body, and all that they have been through together.



Stuff & Stuff at Robyn's, June 2021

“Did you come or fake it?”

By Lani Kā'ahumanu

The *Mothertongue Feminist Reader's Theater* formed in 1976 out of the Women's Speakers' Bureau at San Francisco State University. Scripts were collectively composed from life experiences of members and women in the San Francisco community. Every performance ended with a performer/audience discussion where we'd sometimes collect new pieces for the script. I wrote and performed with this group from 1977 – 1994. *Mothertongue* is still active.

Following are two pieces from “Did you come or fake it?,” a women & sexuality script which was performed from 1981-1994; and one from “Body Image,” another *Mothertongue* production.

One day when I was 9 years old
I dashed into the house and ran down the hall
concentrating on getting to the bathroom in time.

I opened the door
and plopped onto the toilet
just in the nick of time.

It was then that I noticed my startled mother
in the bathtub
trying to get her legs down from the wall
turn off the water faucet and
pretend I hadn't caught her doing anything at all
out of the ordinary.

I knew that look;
I had had it many times my self
But this time the tables were turned.

I don't remember anything being said
she blushed
I flushed and ran out to play

For the next few nights my bathtub routine
was full of experimentation
... it wasn't too long before I figured it out

Thanks mom!

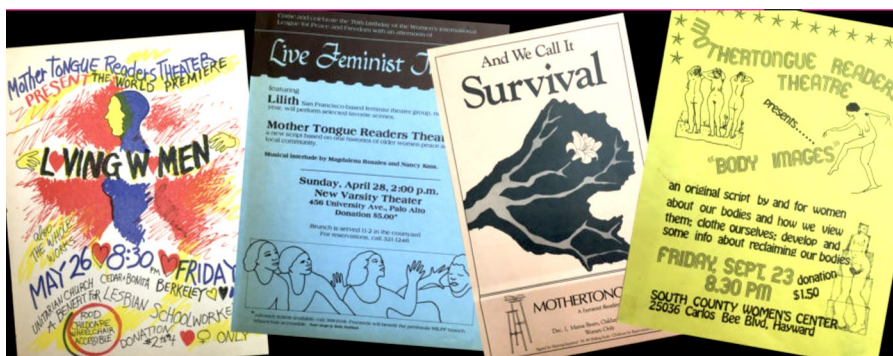
Pat Sherman as told to cousin Lani
© 1988 Lani Kā'ahumanu

Several years ago, on my 15-year-old daughter's invitation
We spent a Sunday afternoon in bed
Snuggling, massaging and talking about sex
Orgasms, masturbation, the problems of oral sex and braces
What we did, what we liked, who we'd been with
Questioning, answering, laughing and just loving one another

She'd tried everything she was interested in but intercourse.
She and her steady beau took turns having orgasms!
She told me she felt it was time; she wanted to go all the way
They had already talked about birth control, and had decided
abortion would be the back-up in case of failure.
We went from amazement to shock, unable to believe we were
talking with each other like that.

I lent them my home for a day and night.
It was a first time with no guilt, no shame,
no fear of discovery or time limits.
That's a freedom we all deserve.

© 1982 Lani Kā'ahumanu



Source: mothertonguefeministtheater.org/

A Map of My Life

By Lani Ka'ahumanu

There is a ritual I do when I remove my clothes with someone
whether it's to sunbathe, sauna, massage or to make love.

I tell the stories of my scars.

**MY BODY IS A MAP OF MY LIFE
A PATCHWORK QUILT
THAT IS WARM AND SOFT AND STRONG.**

I didn't always appreciate my body.
I used to be ashamed and embarrassed.
I had a difficult time baring my self with
or even without other people around.

I would avoid looking at myself, I mean really looking beyond
the self-hate, beyond the media image that I should be, and
that I could be if only... There was no real sense other than I
wasn't good enough.

I was constantly comparing my self with others.
The more I denied this closet character the more control it
had over my life.

It was a drag. I wanted to be free; so I practiced.
I practiced being nude dancing, walking, sitting, laying,
playing all while looking in the mirror at myself from every
possible angle.

It wasn't easy but as the months and year passed
I became more comfortable and accepting. You could even say
I developed a nonchalant attitude when in the nude.
I began to feel at home in my body and in the growing sense
of well being SCAR WOMAN emerged from the closet.
All imperfections exposed, I claimed the unique, distinctive
markings, making them perfect in the showing.

**MY BODY IS A MAP OF MY LIFE
A PATCHWORK QUILT
THAT IS WARM AND SOFT AND STRONG.**

LK 1980

Performed in BODY IMAGE
a Mothertongue Reader's Theater Production

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

Beyond Bodies The Knowing

By Robyn Walters

Two spirits meet, before all time.
As spirits can, they intertwine.
And the knowing comes.

Born then on earth, but worlds apart,
The knowing hides within the heart.
But it will come again.

Through years all filled with joy and pain,
Of searching for the truth in vain,
The knowing does not die.

And then a spark in fear's dark void,
Remembrance of life enjoyed.
The knowing seeks to wake.

Chance meeting then, against all odds
Of men, of course, but not of God's.
And knowing stirs anew.

Meeting then, as meet they must.
Developing a soul-deep trust.
The knowing shares its love.

Eyes open wide, and hearts do sing
As peace flows through this opening.
The knowing sings its song.

And then it ends, as earth time will.
Hearts just slowing – finally still.
The knowing sheds a tear.

Two spirits meet, beyond all time.
As spirits do, they intertwine.
And knowing turns to one.

*As a transelder, Robyn knows quite a bit about
moving from one sense and form of body to another.
Some occur only once. Others can occur in any large
body of water.*

The Angels Are Near



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5. Make a one-time donation in any amount or—better—become a monthly sustainer. Visit [BiWomenQuarterly.com/donate](https://www.biwomenquarterly.com/donate).

Surrender to Our Memory



Ara-Lucia is a graduate student in Rehabilitation and Mental Health Counseling at Illinois Institute of Technology and is an Intern seeing clients at MindBody Connections at Estuary Center. She lives with her husband of 27 years in Chicago. About "The Angels Are Near" she writes: "I connect through time/space with a woman in another plane. I use phrases from love letters and the text from quantum physics papers to bridge the gap and to explore longing and intimacy."

Find more of Ara-Lucia's work at ara.re/folio.

Bailey, continued from page 1

Perhaps the most embarrassment I've ever felt is when I went home with a very thin man. When he took off my shirt and filled his hands with my breasts, he said, "Oh, yeah, look at those fat tits." Like it was a compliment. Like I should be so seduced by his sensuous murmuring. I put my dress back on and left his ramshackle Brookline duplex. When he asked if he should walk me to the T, I laughed and told him I had a big girl job and could afford an Uber. When he texted me a few days later, he said that he wasn't ready for a relationship but would be totally willing to hook up. I told him that I wasn't interested in seeing him again. When he texted me the following month, I told him the same.

I may be fat, but I'm not desperate. It's: Treat me like a goddess or keep on moving.

Flash forward to the pandemic. I'm in a relationship with a man I met in January 2020 and was engaged to before Christmas. We're getting married next September. When you know, you know. He worships my body in a non-fetishist sort of way, making me feel like a beautiful person, not a beautiful object. The only drawback to our relationship (and it isn't even really a drawback) is that he weighs all of 130 pounds. Sometimes it is hard to be next to him and his flat stomach and his toned arms without feeling cumbersome.

I knew I wanted to hire a photographer friend of mine I met in college for our wedding. The wedding photos she takes are of these gorgeous, waifish women that make me feel bad about my arms, legs, and chin. Even still, I hired her because of her artistic eye and flair for drama. We spent a lot of money on photos.

So here it is: I don't want to be a fat bride. I don't want to be relegated to the back of the wedding dress shop where size 14 and uppers are swathed in scraps of burlap lace that designers heap over us to hide the disgusting lumps of our bodies. We deserve better than that. We deserve more fat-inclusive shapes in bridal clothes, preferably made by a fat designer. Deliver me from A-line dresses that somehow do nothing for me. I don't want people to ask why my partner has decided to marry a marshmallow, and I wish I loved my fat body enough to not care about those opinions.

Of course, I didn't know what to do about losing weight. I'm no runner. I don't like the idea of dieting because, ultimately, you return to your normal weight when you stop. Keto kept me constipated. So, I've been doing intermittent fasting (which is simple in practice: you set an eating window and don't eat outside of it. I've been fasting 16 hours a day) for almost two months. Without changing my diet too much (a little less bread and a little more kale), there have been some changes. I've lost 12 or 14 pounds, depending on the day. I can fit into dresses that were too tight a few months ago. I'd like to lose more.

I feel proud of myself because I've actually followed through on something I said I would do, not because I've lost weight. Cue everyone else's fucking opinion. It started when a woman I haven't seen in a while told me, "I don't know if I should say

this, but you're looking good. Keep it up!" And then, for the rest of her visit, she would keep chocolates and cookies away from me. "Not until after the wedding," she'd chirp. People started catcalling me again. My best friend told me that she was surprised by my progress.

And you know what? It hurt my feelings. Maybe more than that, it made me angry. Because all of a sudden, people started to notice me. People started to tell me how beautiful I am. People started to applaud my progress and "support" my weight loss journey to become "the best version" of myself. You know what my best version is? The one that's alive. The one that's moving. The one that gets out of bed.

I don't feel bad for being big. In fact, the only time I think about my weight is when somebody points it out. It is not morally wrong to be fat. Body weight bears no morality. Why is it a "good" thing that I'm losing weight? I don't feel any better. I don't have more energy. I do everything that I did before.

My reasoning for wanting to lose weight is entirely informed by the fact that I paid a lot of money for a photographer to capture me on my wedding day, and I don't want to completely dwarf my fiancé. I want to lose weight because social cues tell me that being small is the only way to be beautiful. What I don't want is for people to applaud my progress or to comment on how "good" I look. I look good at every weight. I feel good at every weight.

I've never been thin. I've never thought to be thin. I have a big body, broad shoulders, strong bones, an hourglass figure. I will never be a small person; this is a fact. But I've always been beautiful. The back and forth is hard, I know that. It's made even harder when outside voices tell me that I get to exist now that I'm smaller. It's bullshit. It's double bullshit when a part of me agrees with them. When people ask me what I'm doing to lose weight, I tell them: "Thanks, I have a tapeworm."

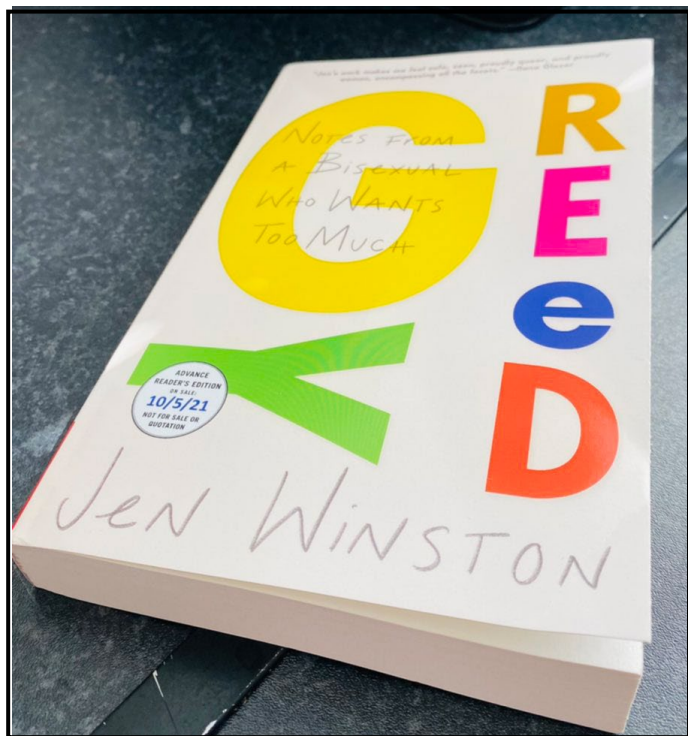
This body has kept me alive for 28 years, and you don't get to have an opinion about it.

Bailey Merlin is a writer living in Boston, MA, in a communal household with seven other people, a baby, a dog, and a snaggletooth cat. She has spent the pandemic working on creative projects, including an opera and a spoken word/jazz album Bug Eyes.



Greedy: Notes from a Bisexual Who Wants Too Much

Review by Family (aka Emily Meghan Morrow Howe)



Note: The author goes by either shel/her or they/them pronouns; I'll be using they/them in this piece.

I jammed through this book in 20 hours: a Big Deal for me since I usually have 12-15 feminist non-fiction titles going at once that take a collective year to read.

But *Greedy* was different. As soon as I read the dedication—”To my parents, who promised they wouldn’t read this”—I was obsessed with the author’s free-spirited, self-accepting tone. I was greedy (ha ha!) for more of this intelligent, timely read by newly “out” bisexual (and anti-racist and she/they pronoun user) thought leader and influencer—Jen Winston. You may know Winston as the person who started the viral feminist account GirlPowerSupply (now retired) or by @jenerous (on TikTok, IG, and Twitter).

In *Greedy*, Winston shares their innermost thoughts (and emails and texts!) on how the patriarchy shapes—and how we make sense of—our orientations, genders, pronouns, ideal partners, friendship, and our #bestlife. I loved being a fly on the wall of the boardroom and bedroom, watching Winston make all kinds of juicy explorations and feminist findings. They cover a wide range of urgent yet not-often-discussed topics, from coming

out as bi at work to the art of dating a couple. Winston retains their on-brand frankness in all things, including (un)learning racism and owning up to their white privilege.

While Winston’s book technically reads like a one-person memoir, it’s also so universally relatable. In the cover quote, Broad City’s (bi) star Ilana Glazer says that *Greedy* made her “feel safe, seen, proudly queer, and proudly woman...” As bi women who are so often partially invisible, depending on the relationship or circle we’re in, Winston’s story gives bi readers a permission slip to be seen and celebrated in all of our intersecting complexities. And they acknowledge *Greedy*’s power to do so: “It’s the book I wish I had growing up—I wrote it on the off chance that you might need it too.”

Winston says the algorithms show that their fans are “bisexual, social justice warriors, or sluts (if you’re lucky all three!)” I couldn’t agree (or relate!) more. As someone who “came out” in 1997, I loved *Greedy* for giving me an updated look at how the next queer generation is making sense of identity and self in 2021—especially given the tools of online dating, texting, TikToking, and digital nomad life—and amidst a greater acceptance of queer identity and sexual exploration.

This book absolutely made me smarter, more current, and more in tune with my (bisexual) self.

Family is Silicon Valley’s Gender/Inclusion Advisor and founder of the wildly popular “From Bi Curious to Bi-Confident” video course featuring in-depth interviews with 8 millennial bi women of all colors (<https://www.familyonthego.com/bi>).



Family

An Intimate View of Domestic Violence

A review of *In the Dream House* by Carmen Maria Machado

By Laura Berol

Years ago, when I was a college student and a virgin, my favorite fantasy was of a soft-sided pit, the kind that trampoline parks fill with blue foam blocks or brightly colored balls. In my version, the pit contained naked women, as sleek and lustrous as plastic balls and as soft as foam blocks, gently holding and supporting me. It was the patriarchal ideal of femininity—eternally youthful, infinitely available, simultaneously motherly and erotic, utterly without concern for self-expectations that would become unsupportable when I entered parenthood and middle age. But to the teenage me, learning to inhabit my same-sex desire, this fantasy felt like rebellion against the system, a pure escape.

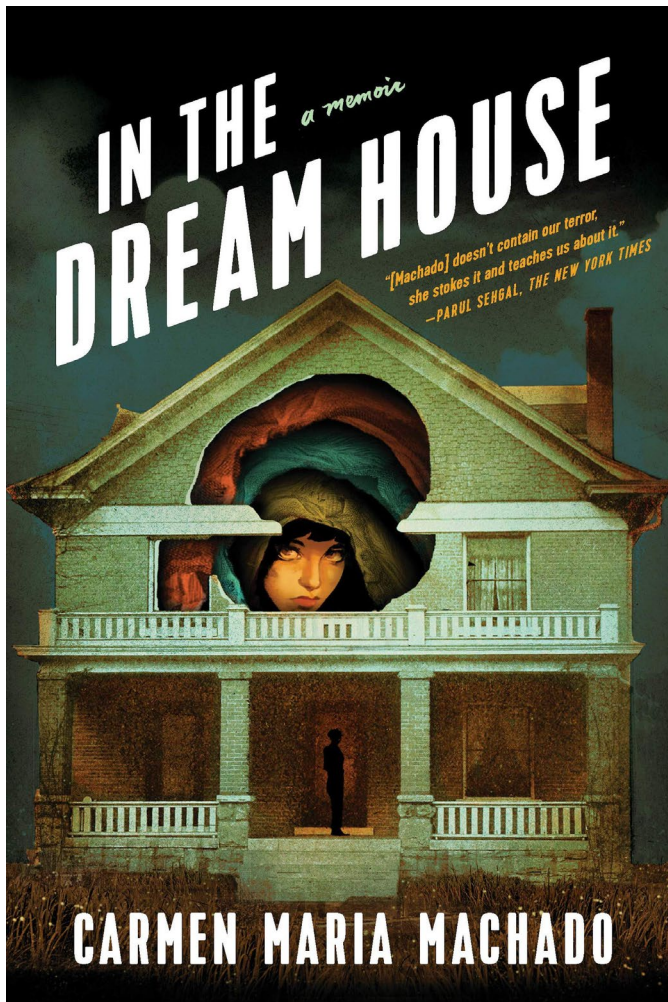
The equivocal character of my teenage fantasy, its dual function as both lock-pick and jail bars, came to mind as I read Carmen Maria Machado's 2019 memoir, *In the Dream House*. Machado, a survivor of psychological abuse, conjures the power and danger of the imagination as few writers can. *In the Dream House*

chronicles her relationship with an abusive girlfriend, winnowing through memories, not only of violence done to her, but of her psyche's collaboration with the abuser. One potent weapon used against her is the demand that she name her own faults. Another is repeating her words back to her, until she finds herself apologizing for saying them. There are her intimate confessions of past experiences and desires, hurled against her as accusations. But the deepest source of misery is something the abuser has no control over: Machado's own capacity for love, evident in her precise rendering of what makes her girlfriend marvelous. That is what traps her for so long, as well as what saves her in the end.

Machado's writing captures the psychological fragmentation that abuse engenders, the crumbling of the self into isolated nodes of thought and suffering. Like a crystal, her memoir grows from a lattice of separate units, each section of text autonomous yet intricately connected to the rest. Some of the book's passages are rawly autobiographical, some deftly honed with critical insight. In one segment, Machado is a reflective analyst of social forces; in another, a creature bewildered by pain; in yet another, the protagonist in a choose-your-own-adventure that loops claustrophobically back on itself. Even the authorial persona is internally divided, the survivor occupying the first-person position of "I" while the victim takes the second person "you." At one point, the stronger addresses the weaker, declaring, "I thought you died..." It may be an admission of fear, or of hope.

What does not fragment the author's identity is her bisexuality. Machado is refreshingly unconflicted about her varied erotic interests. She also calculates the psychic damage of biphobia without casting it as intrinsic to bisexuality itself. The skittishness of lesbians toward dating her has made her feel lucky to have a female partner. Her lack of experience with women leads her to second-guess her own judgment when a relationship turns abusive. Even as alarm bells in her brain alert her, "*This is not normal,*" she defers to her girlfriend's claim, "*This is what it's like to date a woman.*" Monosexual bias has contributed to putting her at risk.

At the same time, bisexuality offers Machado a key to unlocking the mental prison in which she finds herself. As she notes in the section titled, "*Dream House as Fantasy,*" discovering same-sex relationships in a heteronormative world can feel like achieving transcendence and leaving the problems of straight society behind. The possibility of domestic violence can become unthinkable under the force of the longing to inhabit utopia, leading observers of abuse, and even its victims, to deny what is happening. Yet bisexuality, by encompassing both same-sex and different-sex relationships, exposes the continuity between



Laura Berol, continued on next page

Laura Berol, continued from previous page

them and undermines the myth of pure separation. In Machado's case, experiencing compassion from an ex-boyfriend helps her recognize her girlfriend's cruelty and reject it without drawing conclusions about what to expect from all women or all men.

As she ponders the tendency to idealize queer relationships at the expense of acknowledging domestic violence, Machado reflects, "Maybe this will change someday. Maybe, when queerness is so normal and accepted that finding it will feel less like entering paradise and more like the claiming of your own body: imperfect,

but yours." *In the Dream House* is Machado's practice of claiming her body, liberating it from abuse and from the mental constructs that have made abuse seem acceptable. Her writing models a path to freedom for others who are similarly trapped, and for all of us who know how easily the mind can become a cage.

Laura Berol lives in Northern Virginia with her husband and three teenage children.

Hacks Is Fresh and Original

A Review by Jen Bonardi

In HBO Max's *Hacks*, newcomer Hannah Einbinder is Ava, a 20-something social media phenom turned comedy writer who crossed the line online. In an effort to save her career, her agent assigns her to write jokes for Deborah Vance, played by the spectacular Jean Smart. With a background that's a little Joan Rivers and a little Cher, Smart's character has a career that spans the decades in which being a woman in comedy was lonely and rife with humiliating hurdles. Suffice it to say, Deborah is a force to reckon with. Meanwhile, Ava considers the idea of moving from glamorous Los Angeles to sweltering Las Vegas to work on a live show for an aging star to be the seventh circle of hell.

Throughout the show is woven a push-pull between the two women that mirrors that of L.A. vs. Vegas, networks vs. friendships, young adults with progressive values vs. older folks with the wisdom of experience. Ava is the rare bird who is both funny and politically correct, but it comes with tendency to be a bit of a judgmental know-it-all. Her ex-girlfriend brings it to her attention: "This is exactly why we broke up. You think that you know everybody better than they know themselves."

Deborah is easier to read: she's a wealthy woman of a certain age who wasn't taught to care about the feelings of vulnerable people. Certainly, no one cared about her as a woman in comedy, and clawing her way to the top has made her into a bully. As much as Ava doesn't immediately appreciate what Deborah had to do to achieve success as one of the only women in comedy, Deborah doesn't quickly grasp that Ava didn't just fall ass-backward from internet fame into a sustainable writing career.

Ava's bisexuality serves as a subtle conduit for the overarching theme of inching toward intimacy. Neither Deborah nor Ava will let anyone within ten emotional feet of them; even casino owner Marty is someone Deborah holds at arm's length, their undeniable chemistry notwithstanding. But as the two women



slowly let each other in, we receive the message that this relationship is as important as any romantic relationship.

Hacks realistically depicts Ava's bisexuality as an intrinsic part of her character but not central to the plot. In an early episode, she gives Deborah a wonderfully pithy yet precise description of her own bisexuality. The show includes uniquely bi experiences—including our ultimate nightmare: being outed on a date—and doesn't shy away from using the B-word. Call it the Bisexual Test* for bi+ representation: *Hacks* passes with flying colors.

(*like the Bechdel Test https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bechdel_test)

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

The "Bi Office"

is the Bisexual Resource Center in Boston. Address listed at 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

1st Wednesdays:

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

2nd Thursdays:

Young BLiSS Group. (20s & 30s) 7pm. For bi folks 20-29. Info: Gabby at 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.

More about Boston-area groups: 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.

[not your usual] CALENDAR



Did you know? Botton-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 EVERYWHERE:

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 connections across the country (and globe). Grab your coffee or tea and some food while we chat about bi issues and other fun topics. Info/RSVP: BWQEvents@gmail.com.

Brunches are from 1-2:30pm Eastern Standard Time, on the following dates:

2 FREE VIRTUAL INTERNATIONAL EVENTS:

25 September 2021:

The International Bisexuality Research Conference is a free, online, daylong conference for anyone who wants to learn more about bisexual, pansexual, polysexual, plurisexual, queer, fluid, and unlabeled experiences. Info: <https://www.bisexualresearch.com/conference>.

15 October 2021:

Also, you are invited to attend the next World Bi+ Meetup on October 15. More information on page 17.

11 September (Sat.)

17 October (Sun.)

6 November (Sat.)

4 December (Sun.)

8 January (Sat.)

6 February (Sun.)

5 March (Sat.)

3 April (Sun.)

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.)