

## Crocheting Is Affirming

By Clara



There are a couple of scenarios that come to mind in which I feel affirmed and euphoric in my bi+ identity. One of these scenarios is when I wear my handmade crocheted bi flag hand warmers. I love wearing them underneath a baggy sweater or coat in the wintertime. It feels good to wear a pride flag, and to literally wear my identity on my sleeve. Not everyone in public is familiar with the bisexual flag colors; however, those who are give you that affirming

head nod and smile in public. Others will tell you in a discreet way that “they love your handwarmers.”

The experience of buying the yarn to make the handwarmers was euphoric in and of itself. I bought a skein of yarn that had the colors of the bisexual flag, and I also bought a skein of yarn with the colors of the lesbian flag so I could make some hand warmers for my friends. I was excited to find these skeins of yarn in the craft store. The employee checking me out at the counter was a trans man, wearing a bracelet of the trans flag colors. He also had a pride pin on his apron. I was with my mom who wasn't familiar with the different flag colors. The man behind the counter ringing up the yarn pointed to the two specific yarn skeins of the flag colors and said, “I really like these ones.” The interaction in the store was an example of one of those moments where two members of the LGBTQIA+ community recognized one another in public and acknowledged it in a subtle way. I thought it was so awesome and the exchange made my day.

Crocheting and textile arts in general are affirming for me. I know there is a decent amount of queer history involved with the textile arts, specifically in relation to queer women. I see a lot of other gay women and non-binary textile artists online, which is super cool. I really love seeing other queer artists who design their own knitting and crochet patterns. It makes me feel like I am a part of a larger community of textile artists. I also really love and appreciate that stores carry skeins of yarn with different pride flag colors pre-mixed in, because of the handmade products that are generated from them. I've given my friends handwarmers and have even sold some other pairs online, which makes me feel great knowing that someone out there will be wearing something that makes them feel affirmed and proud of their identity.

*Clara, @cleekaa on Instagram, is an artist and college student based in Michigan. She enjoys knitting, crocheting, drawing, painting, writing, going birdwatching, and frequenting her city's local soup shop.*

## The Whole Made of Parts

By Mar Bogdanis



*Mar Bogdanis is a nonbinary author from Poland, working as a graphic designer / comic artist. They consider their bi identity as a vital part of who they are and how they navigate the world. They find all parts of their queer identity to be a source of joy and beauty. You can find them on Instagram at @mbogdanis.*



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Boston-area women: Join our Google group: <https://groups.google.com/forum/#!forum/bi-womenboston>

## Editor's Note

Most of the public discussion about bisexuality and other bi+ identities focuses on the vast ocean of negative stereotypes about us or on the health disparities that we experience due to the ongoing stress of holding a bi+ identity in unsupportive environments. But identifying as bi+ also has its bright side. It can also bring us joy.

Thus, the focus of this issue is “Bi+ Joy.” Readers were asked: “What experiences make you feel euphoric and affirmed in your bi+ identity? How has community belonging (or the struggle to find belonging) influenced your journey? How does your bi+ joy intersect with your other identities? Review books, shows, and other media that have wowed you.”

We hope this issue brings you joy.

-Robyn



*Jordyn, Grace, & Maggie read BWQ. Send a picture of yourself reading BWQ to [biwomeneditor@gmail.com](mailto:biwomeneditor@gmail.com). Be creative!*



## Upcoming in *Bi Women Quarterly*

### Call for submissions

### Winter 2024: Bi+ World Wide Web

The internet can be a place of community and love, as well as potential danger and fear. We invite your thoughts, reflections, experiences, and dreams related to the internet in bi+ people's lives. How has the internet, including social media, been a place of discovery and communion? How has it provided escape from the “offline” world? How has it been lacking as a place of safety and support? What potential changes would make it a positive and useful space for all bi+ people? Submit by **November 1, 2023**.

### Spring 2024: Letters to Self

Have you ever wished you could go back in time and give your younger self some much needed advice? Or perhaps you want to write to your future self about the moment you're currently living in, so you don't forget any part of it, or to provide some advice? What if you were asked to write to your present self—what would you say? Share your letters to yourself of advice, wisdom, and memories, with us for our next issue! Submit by **February 1, 2024**.

We welcome essays, reviews, poetry, short fiction, news articles, and visual art. View our submission guidelines at [biwomenquarterly.com](http://biwomenquarterly.com). Send your submissions and suggestions for future themes to [biwomeneditor@gmail.com](mailto:biwomeneditor@gmail.com).

You are welcome to use a pseudonym, if you prefer.

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, fundraise, help with our Etsy shop ([BiProducts.Etsy.com](http://BiProducts.Etsy.com)) or our website? If you're a student, consider an internship. If you'd like to help out, please send an email to Robyn at [biwomeneditor@gmail.com](mailto:biwomeneditor@gmail.com).

*Bi Women Quarterly* (ISSN 2834-5096) 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 the production of *Bi Women Quarterly* and related activities, we seek full acceptance for bisexuals and those with other nonbinary sexualities. More broadly, we work through an intersectional lens and seek the liberation of people of all genders, sexual orientations, abilities, nationalities, and racial and ethnic identities.

# Around the World: Shumi, Kolkata, India

By *Shumi*

When speaking about LGBTQ+ related topics in my country, the first word that comes to mind is “forbidden.”

I am Shumi—a bisexual writer and artist—and I live in Kolkata, India, a predominantly conservative country where orthodox older people set cultural norms. The rules are simple: blend in, be normal; and if you happen to not fit into the molds of society, God forbid if you even dare breathe a word about it. There used to be no pride parades here, but recently the queer youth of our generation have been trying to break the stigma and oppressive rules by organizing and participating in pride parades. But still, if you walk down the busy streets of India, the only rainbow-colored items you would see would be lollipops and umbrella commercials and balloons amidst the bustling concrete jungle. It’s sad, considering how our country was one of the oldest communities to include homosexual and transgender people. It was explicitly written in many Indian mythological documents and in the famous book *Kama Sutra*, too, but the purists (Brahmins, of the Hindu community) saw it as abnormal and regarded them—us—as alien and subhuman.

I am not normal. Well, not the kind of normal my culture believes I am and insists that I be.

I am queer, and if there’s anything I have learned from living here for the past decade, it’s that my country hates the very essence of who I am, and has been trying its hardest to convince me that I’m not who I believe I am.

I was raised in a strict environment: rules were followed to a tee and rule-breakers punished to make a point. The first time I heard about queerness, I didn’t feel relieved or free—I felt weirded out. I was 14 or 15 at that time, staring at the picture of a girl despite being in a relationship with a boy. It was confusing. It was scary. But there was also this “Oh” moment where for one painfully clear moment, I realized that I might be bisexual.

I was always raised to put the opinions of others before my own; my parents and those I was surrounded with growing up had ingrained the collectivistic values of my culture within me, guiding me to tread the waters of society carefully for fear of the judgment of others. It was always about other people—what would they say? What would they think? *They*. Never *me*. Never *us*. Perhaps at some point, I grew tired of it. Perhaps a dormant part of me had long begun fighting back, had begun saying “enough” when met with oppression before I even realized it. Regardless, I was fortunate to have my best friend, who came out to me not long after I had my big realization, and together we navigated the trenches of what it truly means to be queer in a country that tries its hardest to erase our existence.

Being bisexual in my country is hard. There is no easy way of putting it. It’s limiting and it’s frustrating because the only sources of information and support I could access were from my

clandestine dives into sites and online forums created by people living lives I could only dream of having: The Trevor Project, AVEN, and Stonewall Community Foundation have pages that have propelled my journey of self-discovery to greater heights. Not only that, supportive queer communities on Instagram and shows like *Heartstopper* have also validated my identity and given me the information as well as the confidence I needed to embrace my queerness.

I couldn’t talk to anyone in my life about it—not my parents, not my mentors. I had a couple of friends who were queer, but the Internet was really my sole confidante and support, especially during the pandemic. Don’t get me wrong; I love my queer friends, and we support one another in the best way we could, but there was always this... pressure, I suppose, and that looming fear of opening up because of society’s expectations for us to fit into neat little boxes that others from more liberal countries simply do not have to face. I guess that’s what I’m the most envious about and what frustrates me the most living in India: my inability to show who I am on the inside to the outside world.

I am a writer at heart; I mentioned this at the beginning. I find a newfound freedom and solace in my writing, something I do not always feel in regards to my identity. As a writer, I explore topics I’m afraid of voicing, experiences I could only put into words on paper rather than speak out loud. Every character I write contains a piece of me, and every incident is a reflection of my life, too. I am inherently fearless while writing, even more so because I know I’m not going to publish it in my country—I can’t. But deep down, I hope that the newer generation in my country might somehow find and relate to my pieces. I hope that my words can reach them despite the hurdles and remind them that they’re not alone; that together we can break the generational trauma our community faces and build a new, warm, more inclusive home for ourselves.

My country views queerness as an anomaly. In our culture, we are regarded as “homo,” a slur, kind of similar to the derogative word “faggot.” “Chakka, hijra, Shokhi”: all these words are largely used to insult the transgender community. Any man acting relatively effeminate is told, “Oh, go, why are you acting like this? Which girl will marry you, then?” A girl trying to be masculine would receive the same treatment. Personally, I always kept my hair short—even now. I always used to play the “boy character” whenever I had any dance or acting performances from my childhood. Some people used to ask me, “When will you grow out your hair? How will boys find you attractive otherwise?” It used to bother me a lot, but my parents are pretty laid back in this regard, as they let me choose how I want to be.

To this day, I continue to have the dilemma of whether I’m actually queer or just “faking it,” largely because even though



I've had romantic attraction toward boys, I've found it hard to get romantically attracted to girls, even more so when my best friend started telling me about the new girl she was having a crush on. Thankfully, as always, the Internet saved me by assuring me that bisexuality doesn't necessarily mean to have all kinds of attraction—any kind of attraction can work. Accounts like @yesweexist and many other queer and sex education platforms have helped me to gain new knowledge and know more about myself.

I guess at the end of the day, my point is that while the situation in my country remains complicated, I do believe that if the younger generation becomes more vocal regarding their thoughts and beliefs, we might be able to make positive changes in the way we as a community are viewed by the general public.

It will be no easy feat, and it will take a lot of time and effort to raise awareness.

In closing, to readers living in similar situations: this is for you: it's okay to be scared. It's okay if you're confused. You don't need to know everything from the get-go. Life is full of ups and downs, and you don't need to fix a deadline for something you're uncomfortable with. Take your time, explore yourself, talk to people you trust. You can do it. I believe in you. I love you.

We, the queer community, love you.  
Welcome home.

*Shumi (she/they) is a student in Kolkata currently studying in Grade 12.*



## Introducing Emily Solis, BWQ's New Intern



Emily Solis (she/her) is a graduate student working towards becoming a certified mental health professional. She hopes to help bridge the gap between mental health resources/services and minority groups who don't have

adequate access to them. Though passionate about mental health, she also has a love for the arts, music and writing in particular, and initially started college as a music major. Between school and everyday life, she doesn't find much time to practice her instrument, but occasionally writes poetry or short stories.

As someone born and raised in the South, the recent change to laws regarding women's autonomy has further spurred her into activism and inspired her to take a stand by spreading awareness. As a bisexual woman, she hopes her time at *BWQ* will contribute to making a positive change for those affected by these conservative restrictions on women's health, and teach her more about advocating for the bi+ community.

## Affirmed

*By strega clare manning*

slurping soft udon before  
we use our warm lips to utter the word  
“bi,” in the backseat of your  
car, idling in front of my dorm.  
the roots wrapped around my aorta  
would not budge  
until i dared to water them with shades  
of openness, the promise of an entire  
garden blooming right here climbing  
vines and thick petals brought out into  
the sunlight. this is the first time i have  
allowed myself to believe i am real.

*strega clare manning is a 25-year-old poet based in Baltimore, Maryland. her work has been accepted and published by various presses and literary journals, such as Indie Blue, Fifth Wheel Press, and Voicemail Poems. she writes primarily about the complicated nature of interpersonal relationships and her queer identity.*

## ARE YOU THE ONE?

We are looking for:

- volunteers to proofread and/or edit *BWQ* articles
- folks interested in helping us with fundraising
- a new assistant editor
- donors to support our work.

Write to Robyn at [biwomeneditor@gmail.com](mailto:biwomeneditor@gmail.com) if you are interested.

# The “Bi Pride” Baseball Jersey

By Kaliisha Cole

My mom and I walked into Spencer’s this past April with a couple of shopping bags in hand. I rarely ever felt the need to splurge on clothing. Any purchases I made for myself were typically reserved for books.

That day, I went into Spencer’s with one goal: find the Pride Month collection.

Rewind to last year around that time. I was in the same store with my two friends. I had seen a shirt that was a sheer black crop top with the saying, “It’s not a phase” in the bisexual colors. Part of me was desperate to take it home with me while the other part of me was embarrassed to purchase it. I held it close to me for a few minutes as my friends browsed.

On our way out, I made a split-second decision and hung it back up on the display.

What held me back? Was it because I was dating a guy and might be called a faker? Was I too worried about what my boyfriend’s family would say to me if they saw me wearing it? It was a bit too revealing for my level of comfort. Knowing I would have to wear something underneath to cover my boobs further influenced my decision. I might have looked great in it, but I could never wear it out beyond specific LGBTQ+ events or safe spaces. I asked myself: *Why bother?*

Fast forward to this moment where my mom and I walked into Spencer’s a year later in April 2023 and, front and center, there was a display of this year’s Pride Month collection. Some pieces were the same as before. Pieces were stamped with transgender, asexual, gay, and lesbian colors. My eyes didn’t take long to rove over the rainbow wall before seeing exactly what I had hoped was there. In the center of it all were shirts and shorts with the bisexual colors. *My colors.*

“They’re here!” I had exclaimed to my mom with a full-tooth smile on my face. I grabbed the shorts with Bi Pride hearts popping out over each butt cheek. I debated about the shirts for a while. The one I had seen last year wasn’t there, but the store had a few more options. I wondered whether they would have the Bi Pride baseball jersey in my size. I never wore baseball jerseys before. It had never seemed like my style.

I asked the green-haired attendant anyway if she could pull down a specific size for me. She departed momentarily to get her hook.

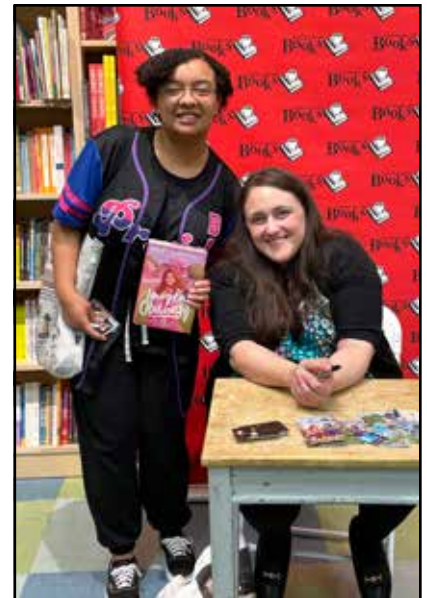
Returning, she asked, “What size are you looking for?”

“Medium,” I answered after a beat.

She accidentally pulled two shirts down. Thankfully, one of them was the size I had hoped they had in stock.

Thanking her, I admired the shirt in my hands. This was less revealing than any others I had contemplated before. Why did a baseball jersey appeal to me now over the generic ones representing

the Boston Red Sox that I could get at nearly any store in Massachusetts? It was merely because this one was personal. I could express who I am through this compilation of colors, queerness, and stitches. The two-piece set took up \$58 of my \$100 limit for the day, and it was worth every cent. I went home with my assortment of outfits and threw the pair on immediately.



Kaliisha with bi author Becky Albertalli

The jersey hung perfectly, stopping mid-thigh. The colors decorated my shoulders and biceps, and the colored bands of the shorts circled and hugged my thighs. The white sneakers I had bought from Forever 21 completed the ensemble. I threw on some music and danced in front my bedroom mirror for hours.

I sent pictures to my boyfriend who was at work. He was so excited for me. The desire to own clothes that would allow me to outwardly express myself was a constant topic of conversation between us. I hated to remove them from my body once he returned home. At that point it was 10 p.m. and time to get into my pajamas. With another second of hesitation, I probably would have worn them to bed. However, knowing that this set would always be there for me gave me enough reassurance that I could put them away for this one night.

I’ve never dated a woman. I came to the realization that I was bisexual in my freshman year of college. I drew many women in doodles, enveloped in each other’s arms gazing at the stars. I had a crush on many video game and cartoon characters in my youth, from Talim in *Soul Caliber III* to Musa in *Winx Club*. There was a friend in seventh grade who I would say was my first-ever female crush.

With my boyfriend, I feel accepted and safe. Feeling secure in my sexuality does not equate to my lack of female-dating experience. I can talk about my attraction to men and women without being judged for it with my friends and family who accept me wholeheartedly. I know who I am. I know who I’m attracted to. Something inside of me solidified from purchasing that jersey. In that moment I had felt empowered, not ashamed.

*Kaliisha Cole is a Senior Bookseller and Bookstagrammer. She reads, reviews, and gushes over diverse Young Adult books and takes many photos and videos of them. She is a bi-racial bisexual and is currently navigating life outside of college.*

## Bisexual Love

By Amber McLaughlin

As a bisexual, being in a relationship with another bisexual provides me with a unique sense of bi+ pride and joy. My boyfriend and I have been together almost a year and a half and in that time I have found that being with him gives me a sense of queer pride that I had lacked in the past. He is not only my partner, but also one of my best friends. He is able to relate to and understand me in a way that no one else in my life can because of the way his personality intersects with his sexuality and mine. He not only respects my multiple, evolving identities, but he puts in the effort to understand them, and me. He knows what it is like to be bi+, which has led us into many interesting conversations. We have been able to discuss our individual experiences and attractions, and talking with him about those topics has given me perspective, laughs, and a deeper understanding of each of us. He makes me feel proud in my queerness and helps me to be confident in always being myself. Even though I am still figuring out who I am and growing as a person, he stands by me and works to elevate me and my queer identity.

Along with being bisexual, I also identify as fluidflux and non-binary. My gender identity has taken me more time to understand, articulate, and present publicly than my sexual orientation. My boyfriend knows and respects this, partly because he is a good and kind person, and partly because he knows from firsthand experience what figuring out one's own queer identity is like. He constantly affirms my identity and reminds me that being out and proud is a pleasant way to live. He encourages me to take steps toward my dreams and toward being my authentically queer self. Having someone like him in my life who not only understand me, but is truly there for me brings me more joy than I can describe. Because of him, I have become more myself over the past year and a half and have learned to love all the queerness that is within me. There is no shame or doubt with him, only pride and joy. Having this unique and wonderful connection in my life lifts up my spirits and makes me even happier to be oh so queer.



*Amber McLaughlin is a University of California, Davis graduate working to make the world a queerer place.*

## Writing a Love Poem at Taco Bell About

By Michaela Mayer

how your smile is backlit  
with the radiance of the purple  
now hiring sign, no wage  
advertised, and how you tell me  
write something different  
as you bite into the golden shell  
of your chalupa—you're poor  
and i teach, so we're eating  
here today. how you sit back  
against the plastic seat as you  
talk, one hand entangled  
with your hair. the angular  
bend of your arm. you say,  
if i were an editor i'd want  
something new, a bump of writing  
that doesn't center trauma,  
and i nod, but i think of the story  
you read for me this afternoon  
about how moderation breaks  
its laborers and wonder  
about our appetite for pain.  
you begin to speak about your  
panic attacks and suddenly  
i'm grateful that you're here  
where i can hold your hand as if  
to fend off any shaking,  
the way i held your body against  
mine as you cried on our first  
date. i say, i'll write a love poem.  
yes, you affirm. yes, i think  
they'd like that.

*Michaela Mayer is a 27-year-old poet and educator living in North Carolina. She has a chapbook out with Fahmidan Publishing & Co., a gorgeous cat named Sappho, and can be found on Twitter @mswannmayer5.*





# The Present

By Nicole Swisher

In my daydreams, I see her:  
a woman as round as I am,  
as soft,  
with an awkward, nervously overtalkative charm  
that matches my own.  
I am sitting at my desk,  
penning another novel  
(the word another here is important,  
because in this daydream, I have already  
published one, or two, or ten),  
and she knocks on the door  
and carries in a yellow mug that says  
Hello, sunshine!  
from which a fragrant curl of steam  
rises.  
She sets the mug next to my keyboard,  
leans over my shoulder  
to sneak a peek at what I've written,  
wrapping her arms  
around my shoulders  
and pressing a kiss to my cold cheek.  
We are wearing matching rings  
on our left hands,  
gold bands,  
engraved with something poetic—  
but the exact words change  
depending on how I measure romance  
that day.  
She wears her brown hair in a pinned-up mess.  
Her face is bare of makeup.  
A spattering of freckles makes  
a star-filled sky  
of her face.  
She laughs with abandon at my acerbic wit,  
snorting piggishly when I really get her going,  
and it's the most beautiful sound  
I've ever heard.  
She makes me laugh, too.  
At night we tangle our unshaven legs together,  
rubbing thighs and calves like crickets  
making music,  
and I play with her hair,  
smelling of honey and amber from her shampoo.  
I've taken off my rings—  
the yellow-gold halo  
and the ring she proposed to me with,  
a sunflower of citrine and brown quartz—  
and I've stashed them carefully  
in the drawer of the bedside table.  
In the morning,  
the first thing I do

will be to put them back on.  
We live in a yellow house.  
There are plants everywhere.  
In the corner: a dozing cat  
on a bed much too big for her,  
and a sweetly confused dog,  
wondering why her favorite place to nap  
has suddenly been usurped  
by a little purring monster.  
The rooms smell of  
citrus  
and lavender.  
On the weekends, we sleep late,  
lulled to a deep, velvety rest  
by a full night of lovemaking  
and gently self-deprecating laughter.  
And all of this is possible  
because of one thing,  
a beautiful truth we share:  
that we are both women,  
and we are both women who love women,  
and we are both women who love each other.  
Emerging from the daydream—  
hazy, idealistic, representative  
of the thousand futures I have envisioned,  
the thousand outcomes I have desired,  
the thousand happily-ever-afters  
with a thousand imagined women,  
but the one thing they all have in common  
is that in them there is a woman,  
and that woman  
is my wife.  
Someday, the daydream will cease to be  
a dream.  
And when that happens,  
I will have much to thank—  
many people, many things,  
many experiences that will have led me  
to that earth-stilling moment  
(Do you take this woman to be your lawfully wedded wife?  
I do.)—  
and the thing I will thank above all  
is the gift I was given at birth,  
a gift so profound  
and so simple  
and so profoundly simple  
that it can be encompassed  
in just a little two-letter word:  
and that word is  
bi.



*Nicole Swisher lives in Northeast Pennsylvania with her precious dog and adorable cats. Nicole is delighted to be a bi woman, thrilled by the possibilities her orientation affords her, and excited to meet the woman of her dreams.*



## Joyful Peek

By Lara Zielinsky

My most joyful experiences occur as moments of self-revelation. I experienced joy recently when I felt self-confirmed as a bisexual and polyamorous woman.

My spouse, J, and I decided to take a vacation. We love vacationing in out-of-the-way places close to the water. Our destination was a small town on the Gulf of Mexico about six hours from home. The only goal is to be a world away from our daily grind.

I also have a girlfriend, G. She travels a lot and lives only part-time near me. We had talked several times about taking a trip together. I asked her to join us. She couldn't go for the whole trip, but could drive out and join us for several days. Joy!

We walked around town, saw some tourist sights, ate seafood, waded in the Gulf, climbed a lighthouse, held hands, kissed, and talked. And talked some more. We cooked in our Airbnb's kitchen, sharing nibbles and wine. Then we snuggled on the couch and watched movies before snuggling up in sleep. Happy sigh, joy!

It was far too short. For three days, it was a wonderful peek at what living together would feel like. It wasn't enough for me to silently feel this way, though, so on our last day, I expressed my joy and love. It was more of a gush, really. Rather embarrassing for a woman who makes her living with words, I definitely babbled. But both G and J reflected all my feelings back to me.

Overwhelming Joy! (Yes, I teared up. LOL)

*Lara Zielinsky is a bisexual, cisfem, married, and polyamorous author and editor living in Florida. [linktr.ee/LaraZielinsky](http://linktr.ee/LaraZielinsky)*



## To My First

By Kasma

*An open letter to the first female crush I ever had as a bisexual woman.*

I still remember back in seventh grade when I met you again. We had known each other sometime back in first grade, but I don't think you remembered. We got close and I started to feel about you as they would show in the movies what it felt like to be in love. Although I had already figured out my sexuality by that time, you are the first girl I ever loved. You were such an important part of my life: you led me to who I am right now. I know you won't believe me, but I don't have a shortage of reasons to love you.

I have admired you forever. You're always, unforgivably, yourself, even though you don't know who you are. Your thoughts, your ideas, your creativity, it's you, it's all you. I love you for your sense of humor because, God forbid, I fall for someone who isn't funny. I can't believe we went from first grade silly puns to knowing each other again, skipping to eighth grade and the dirty jokes. I hate the fact that I missed so much of you in between, maybe I would've figured myself out sooner if I hadn't. You're fluent not only in the way you talk but even in your silence. I love how you can't even walk straight yet you can dance like a pro. You're the incarnate of sunshine itself, my love, you're a storm that cannot be contained.

You're all the impossible in the world.

*Kasma is a 14-year-old bisexual woman from Jaipur, Rajasthan in India. She loves writing and posts it on her Instagram account @kas\_.writes.*



# Accepting the Authentic Me

By Linda M. Crate

I grew up in a small, conservative town in rural Northwestern Pennsylvania. I went to church every Sunday with my parents and went to many youth group programs on Wednesday.

I realized I was queer when I was a teenager, but I saw them bully the one openly gay kid until he took his own life, so I kept this truth to myself. I wanted to live! I also didn't want people to discriminate against me. I was afraid that somehow someone was going to know my secret despite my never telling anyone at church. I was terrified that I would be struck down by the heavens for being who I was.

I prayed for years for God, Jesus, and the Holy Ghost to take the "gay" out of me. But that never happened.

I stared out of stained-glass windows, searching for an answer or a sign that I never received. I didn't get anything either when I looked at the cross, begging to be anyone but me.

It was easy enough to hide most of my crushes on women, as a lot of them were fictional: Lydia Deetz, Morticia Addams, Mina from Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (the book version—the movie version did her no justice), and Medusa, among others.

However, when I moved to my college campus I became friends with one of my roommates. She was unlike anyone else I had met before, and we also had a lot in common. I respected and adored her. She was "a character," as my grandmother says, but I always had loads of fun on our adventures.

I fell in love with her. I don't know if I can pinpoint an exact moment when, but I fell for her. I wasn't sure how to react because my mother had told me not once but twice, "You better not be a lesbian." I wasn't, but I also wasn't straight, so it stressed me out a bit.

I never plucked up the courage to tell my friend because I knew she probably didn't feel the same way, and she always had some significant other when I thought about addressing it with her. It just made me feel awkward inside, and I ended up pushing her away.

I was still deep in my faith at that point in time. I was confused, afraid that I was going to be punished by the Holy Trinity for being who I was. I didn't know how to tell anyone who I was. Not my parents, my sister, my other family, or my friends. It was something that I kept hiding because it felt safer that way.

But when I admitted that I was pan to my best friend, she accepted me for who I was straightaway. All that anxiety that she would've rejected me because of her faith in God dissipated immediately. She loved me for who I was. She didn't yell at me or expect me to change. Nothing changed in our relationship.

It made me so euphoric to know that despite having a similar upbringing to mine and her continuing faith in said God, she

accepted me for who I was. It was probably the most liberating moment in my life because, prior to telling her, only some of my friends online knew about my truth. It felt good to finally be who I truly was without fear of repercussions.

Her unconditional acceptance of me made me able to accept my authentic self. It made me realize no matter what I was taught, there was nothing wrong with me for being who I was born to be. Society is unkind to those of us who are different, but that doesn't make them right and us wrong.

I'm not an abomination for something I cannot even control. For years I tried to fit into heteronormativity, but I'm tired of swallowing down my rainbow heart for fear it might offend someone.

*Linda M. Crate (she/her) is a Pennsylvanian writer with 12 published chapbooks, the latest being: Searching Stained Glass Windows for An Answer (Alien Buddha Publishing, December 2022). She is also the author of the novella Mates (Alien Buddha Publishing, March 2022). Her debut book of photography, Songs of the Creek (Alien Buddha Publishing, April 2023) was recently published.*



## Budding Bisexual Disaster

By Annelies Mohle

I want boys to think I'm tough and the girls to think I'm pretty

And I want them all to think I'm smart and fun and witty

This much self-consciousness is maybe vanity but I'm fifteen, so it's allowed

Let me preen before karate class, read old books with my head in the clouds

*Annelies Mohle is a 23-year-old writer from rural Canada who loves scribbling words that sound great at 3 a.m. but go fifty-fifty in the light of day. She has previously been published in the student-run magazine Kaleidoscope at the University of Guelph.*

# Finding Bi Joy in the Unexpected

by *VeronicaOfOsea*

As a bisexual woman who has experienced and still encounters a lot of biphobic resentments and bi-erasure, it felt quite impossible for me to think of what I consider to be my “Bi Joy.” But sometimes one finds joy in the most unexpected places and situations. I’m out at work because I never liked to tell white lies about my sexuality, and I don’t want to walk on eggshells and be super cautious when I talk about former or recent partners. I consider myself lucky that I get to work in a very open-minded and tolerant environment.

On July 10<sup>th</sup> I went to work pretty early, and I wondered about a Pride flag in front of our building. I couldn’t pinpoint if it was new or if I had suffered from tunnel vision as an early bird at work. I like to complain about corporate Pride as much as the next queer person, but in this particular moment I felt a bit safer than I usually did. I wanted to express my feelings and the next logical decision was to take a photo and post it on our company’s own social network—explaining what visibility of diversity, and acceptance of queer sexualities and identities means to me. I also wrote about the history of Pride, its flag, and the influence of the bi community, ending with a thank you note to our boss for creating a workspace where people, regardless of their gender, gender identity, sexuality, skin color, religious affiliation, etc., can feel safe.

What I didn’t expect was the reaction, which was overwhelmingly positive. Likes and comments, which I appreciated, but what moved me the most were the people who popped up in my office and asked questions about what certain terms mean, the history of Pride, and my personal experiences. My answers were met with curiosity, interest, and respect. As someone who considers herself an activist, it’s quite rare that our words and points of view find such open ears, especially when these ears belong to a generation we didn’t originally expect to be so open-minded. Bi discourse among our queer circles can be rather daunting and frustrating, as we often feel that we constantly have to repeat ourselves and tear down the same walls over and over again.

So, my “Bi Joy” is the unexpected affirmation of my bisexuality and others’ willingness to learn about our community. In hindsight, I have to admit that I had experienced this a few times in my life but as we all know, the human brain tends to remember the negative things more prominently. Another moment of that “Bi Joy” will have its fifth anniversary this year. I had been asked to speak at a local Pride event, and of course I wrote about the specific issues and prejudices the bi community faces. I think it’s only fair to thank Robyn Ochs, who gave me good advice about how I could engage the audience without unleashing my anger and frustration upon them. I remember my anxiety the moment I realized that the audience in front of that stage was mostly gay and lesbian. For a second, I imagined rotten

tomatoes being thrown at me as if I were a lousy performer. But everything that happened was quite the diametrical opposite: cheering, intermittent applause, standing ovations, and words of affirmation afterwards for shining a light on the so often invisible struggles of my fellow bi+ community.

Being an out and proud bisexual, it’s important to find joy in these moments, regardless of how small they might seem in the grand scheme of things. As much as the negative events and comments we encounter on social media and in person push us forward to keep up the fight to highlight our right to be a part of the LGBTQIA+ community, it’s also every word and action that affirm and accept us that should motivate not only me but every single one of us. It’s not only our partners or queer peers or adored bi+/bi+-supportive celebrities who keep us going; it can also be a neighbor or colleague who all of a sudden sports a bi pride symbol or who speaks up in support of us.

As with so many other things in life, joy is often found in the little things and moments and “Bi Joy” is no exception. And all those small acts of joy will most likely pile up and push us through fear and times of despair.



*VeronicaOfOsea is a bisexual woman, using she/her they/them pronouns, living in Northern Germany in a monogamous bi relationship, battling the cliches against m/f-presenting bi couples.*

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

*(See our calls for writing on page 2.)*

# I Could Love Her

By joce leo

i.

girlhood in your mid-twenties is  
braiding your friend's hair  
brushing it back  
holding soft strands between careful fingers  
asking over and over *sorry, does this hurt?*

i ask her for help zipping up the back of my dress  
and she's so careful with me;  
i do not love her – but i could love her.

we sit on her bed cross-legged  
we're laughing so hard that the bed shakes and  
i am running out of ways not to say  
*i could love you i could love you i could love you i*

*could*

i want to mold dragonflies into the creases  
of her palms; take a gold leaf pen  
to each one of her scars;  
take her to the church i grew up in  
tell her *i know shame, too;*

i sleep in her guest room below her room  
and in the morning i make the bed  
leave everything how i found it  
leave when she is still asleep upstairs.  
(her floors creak and i do not want to wake her,  
it takes hours for her to fall asleep.)

her being is authorless prose

*joce leo (she/they/he) is an MFA student, abolitionist, researcher, and queer lover. joce is passionate about creating spaces of abolition of systems of power that no longer serve us and providing hope to survivors of long-term psychiatric institutionalization as well as sexual violence.*





# Taking Up Queer Space: A Story About Taking Back My Bi Identity

By Mo (Monique) Balistreri

I still remember pacing back and forth outside my mother's bedroom door. It was 1997. I knew I liked girls and boys. I was in middle school and already had my first girlfriend, Cle (now Johnny). We would hold hands, make out, and talk all night on the phone. We'd talk about what NSYNC song was "our" song. I wanted to come out to my only parent. Seeing me pass the door many times, my mom called me in. I stuttered and then the words came out of my mouth. "Mom, I am bi." She was so quick with her response. She said "Monique, it's just a phase. Lots of people experiment at your age." Little did I know that that would only be the first time my queer identity would be questioned and challenged.

When it comes to being a bi woman, I always think of the negative characters that I was presented with. A perfect example is Tina from *The L Word*. She was of course a cheater: she's bi. I have felt bi erasure coming from all forms of media and from the gay bars I go to. More out of anger, I made a choice last fall to start making a space for myself. I am bi and I have every right to be in any queer space. I was 36 and knew what I wanted to do. I started going to queer karaoke at a local bar. I started making new friends. I made new goals for myself. I made the goal to dance at our Pride Fest. Thanks to a new friend Rai, I was able to reach my goal. I was able to talk to amazing people named Jinx and Micah. They manage a dance group. The Milwaukee Space Cats perform at Pride Fest in Milwaukee. I was told I could join open dance. This meant I could just go up and do my thing. I didn't have to learn any choreography. I went to two practices to meet the members of Space Cats. I was welcomed and everyone was so kind to me. I went on to have the best weekend I can remember in a long time. Then I was welcomed onto the parade float. My youngest came along as well. It was a dream.

Since then, I have been invited to start doing burlesque. I was asked to model clothing for a fellow Space Cats' clothing line. I have been asked to join the Space Cats next year at our Pride fest. I am now a regular at queer karaoke. I have also joined a bi women's group in my city of Milwaukee. As my queer identity changes and evolves, I am here to remind people that we are here. I am a bi woman who is a mother and so much more. The lesson in all of this is that when you live your authentic self you will find joy. I've found my bi joy and I wouldn't trade it for anything.



*Mo is currently living in her hometown of Milwaukee, Wisconsin. They are mother of two boys, one of whom is pan. She dances in Milwaukee under the stage name Frankie Moonshine.*

# I Love You, You Know

By Olivia Catharine

I whisper into the crook of his neck  
he replies I know.  
And that's all I get.  
But somehow, it's fine. Somehow, I don't mind.  
I do love him, but I also don't find myself missing him  
at night, when everyone in the world is missing someone.  
I think he is beautiful and I want him to kiss me,  
but I can't picture him when I close my eyes.  
Not his mouth at least, not his jaw under my thumb.  
When he chooses someone else I cry, when he grows up  
and gets married I entertain a fantasy of fucking him at the  
reception, just to ensure I'm never forgotten. Not because I  
want to.  
I think maybe I am not made for desire and deep understanding.  
I think maybe I will never get what I want.

Then you

Then everything  
is new and makes sense  
Oh, this is it  
This is all the lights turning on at once  
This is the world's largest disco ball rainbowing, this is everyone  
you love shouting "Surprise!"  
This is first taste of spring air after winter, this is food when  
you're starving, this is fucking  
Eureka!  
This is fever breaking, cry laughing, scream singing, eyes  
widening, hands reaching  
This is God's real, this is God's real, this is God's real

I promise myself to love you forever  
to say your name ten times out loud each day just to feel you  
on my tongue.

I touch my own cheek and imagine your thumb,  
I close my eyes and you're smiling at me.  
I say your name out loud and it turns into a promise  
God's real, God's real, God's real

and for the first time I feel it  
for the first time, I pray  
that this time, I will get what I want.

*Olivia Catharine is a writer and an educator, and has been published in the Connecticut River Review, Funicular Magazine, Black Fox Literary Magazine, and Devastation Baby.*



## Seam

By Flynn O'Brien

scuffle of  
ears perk/  
  
hands that make you grateful for air  
folding the universe into the gravity they make  
pouring the tea  
cutting a soft piece of lemon cake  
smoothing pages in a book  
sacred fading parchment  
  
words surface delicate as minnows  
each a chorus of consonants  
riffing the heart  
Ss patter like rain on pines  
Bs as smooth as pistachio shells  
Ts that tell you this moment alone you need  
  
to be this  
but until then  
to be around  
take shade in a presence  
relax in the music of simple sounds and gestures  
deliberately placed  
  
like the sandalwood and cedar making her bones  
the forest wind across her vocal cords  
the softly cooing doves that live in her hands

*Flynn O'Brien is a poet who lives in Portland, ME. O'Brien's poetry collection, Cast (with drawings by Mary Hart) was published in 2022 by Elsewhere Press.*

## Her Breasts

Karen Schnurstein

The woman's breasts  
were large, and  
I watched with interest  
when she placed  
both hands  
over them  
while she bounced  
through the children's hopscotch  
mapped onto the cement walkway  
in blue chalk.

A light wind ruffled her  
sandy hair and mint green blouse  
as she completed  
the game.

That night, in bed, I thoughtfully  
rested my own hands over my aging breasts,  
something I'd never done before.  
"How much of me has belonged  
to others?" I wondered.

And my breasts felt suddenly  
like they were mine.

*Karen Schnurstein is a budding poet whose work has appeared in print and online publications. She holds a B.A. in Creative Writing and resides in Indiana. This poem first appeared in Edition 11 of Steel Jackdaw Magazine.*



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## Joy of Spaces in Between

By Jeiselynn N. Ríos Rivera

My bisexuality has shaped me in more ways than I can count. A large part of this is that I have made it into my career. I'm a sociologist who is eager to learn about the ways in which bisexuality has shaped individuals' perceptions of themselves and others. It's been the source of self-made community. I led a bisexual book club back in 2020 with virtual online meetings, organized a bi+ discussion group on campus, and will soon be facilitating conversations within the Bisexual Resource Center. It's been the catalyst for all the knowledge I've gained on relationships, radical responsibility, and radical Knowledge of Self.

It seems strange to look back and attribute so much of myself, my life trajectory, and my relationship success to a sexual orientation. However, the influence became clear when I realized that, in the journey to incorporate more joy into my life, I found myself coming back to these communities, these people, resource centers, literature, and online spheres.

I've found that there is **more** excitement for possibilities, the moment those possibilities are *actually* seen, imagined, and made available to the self. This is a necessary step before going out into the world and searching them out. The range of unique possibilities afforded to me because of the potential for boundless expansion is a core component of joy—joyful anticipation, excitement, wonder, intrigue.

My bisexuality is not about reckless or unruly desire, but rather, the ability to foster, look forward to, and allow all kinds of connections at all degrees of intensity to become a *possibility*. In this openness, there is a release of complicated expectations, social games and scripts designed for the pre-coded interactions individuals are expected to have with specific groups and/or categories of people depending on gender, race, class, sexual orientation. . . .

There is expansion when we bond with others over the openness to possibility, connection, and unrestricted definitions of intimacy. Affinity on the basis of bisexuality holds a high tolerance for ambiguity. There is no space for careless interaction or thoughtless behavior—instead, there *must* be a radical understanding of limits and a profound recognition of the uniqueness inherent to a moment in time, a conversation, a person. The lack of need to define an interaction before it happens allows us to dispense with the triviality of shallow

connection based on appearance, sex, or performance. In return, we are rewarded with the ability to actively embrace the distinctiveness that comes with each human experience, allowing that same humanness to wrap around us in a genuine exchange unencumbered by assumptions, shaped only by our own mutually shared agreement and limits.

Bisexuality and polyamory have both come to take the shape of radical responsibility in my life. One where Knowledge of Self and the borders that it reaches are determined on a case-by-case basis. The mindfulness that comes with that kind of awareness and feeling requires presence, authenticity, responsibility, awareness, connection, and introspection. Bisexuality is a catalyst for all this, in that it requires blurring the lines of what attraction means, how it's experienced, how it can be possible, and how it can be fostered. This is both conceptual and literal.

Bisexuality is a challenging framework, standing actively against artificially crafted binaries. Bisexual people are those consistently replacing “or” with “and,” opting for “and/or” when the powers that be are too overbearing. It is all too easy to slip into binary assumptions, and this is also recognized. There is a gentle solution: curiosity. When exclusionary frameworks and theories fail, and the need to find the contours of something is still prevalent, replacing our impulse to *deduce* with an impulse to *ask* can be one of the most bisexual strategies ever deployed. Visibility can be gained by creating the space for yourself and others to simply *be*. The question is never “Are they gay or straight?” The question is “I wonder what kind of person they might be attracted to?”

Bisexuality challenges practice as well: How can connection with one be fostered where there is the possibility for connection with many? By embracing the singularity of a moment, a person, a connection, an interaction.

There is always the possibility for connection with many—regardless of sexual orientation. Experiencing attraction to more than one is possible in the way it always has been for everyone else. Fostering any one (or multiple) of these connections is about choice, agreements, and limits specific to that connection, by actively rejecting limited understandings of intimacy only meant for safety (rather than expansion). The choice to foster connections requires responsibility, awareness, and introspection of the agreements and limits established and negotiated. This sounds difficult, as un-learning social scripts always seems to be. It is through that unlearning that the most joy is to be found.

Expansion can only happen when there is *desire* to expand and approach experiences with mindful and deliberate presence. Joy happens in the spaces in between, as expansion is sought. My bisexuality allows me the space and flexibility to feel overwhelmingly joyful by holding space for my own and others' ambiguity, as new agreements are drafted. To think that bisexuality has brought so much joy into my life by being the catalyst for Knowledge of Self, expansion, introspection,





uniqueness, and acceptance can *seem* strange. This, however, is the most powerful thing I've tapped into.

Joy has been synonymous with expansion and the breaking of self-imposed confines and constraints. Therefore, it is not strange to realize that embracing bisexuality as more than just a descriptor of potential partners; it is accompanied by something much more purposeful and blissful. It has become the basis for community. It has become the basis of personal and intellectual growth. It has become the very foundation upon which my expansion continues to thrive.

Perhaps, this is why bisexual spaces, though underfunded, continue to fight for themselves—staffing with volunteers, organizing regular gatherings, and writing books. Collectively, we know we're creating something that holds great potential for acceptance, uniqueness, expansion, and resilience. It is there,

in the spaces in between, that we find ourselves surrounded by laughter, greeted with warmth, and embraced with joy.

*Jeiselynn (Lynn) N. Ríos Rivera is a Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies graduate student at SUNY Albany, connections peer educator at the Gender and Sexuality Resource Center, and a volunteer at the Bisexual Resource Center.*

*They're always looking for ways to connect with bisexual activism and eager to have interesting conversations. Their work covers a wide range of LGBT topics, specializing*



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## this queer love

*By Elizabeth Goldberg*

i want to show him sweetness.

men are forgotten,

he deserves my softness.

we are neutral in this bond: no masculinity, femininity, nor divinity, just simplistic —

“you are a beautiful person.”

i let it slip from my lips,

kissing him without contact;

collisions all over

without an inch of my touch.

the way he protects me is innocent, silky.

i don't need to talk

(he knows),

but i just want to say

it.

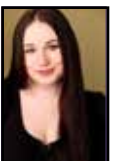
we are delicate and connected,

interlocking and satin.

the wind might take us away and we won't even notice.

not ever.

*Elizabeth Goldberg is a fifth-year student at Boston University, majoring in English and Classical Civilization with a minor in Psychology. Elizabeth hopes to pursue poetry and psychology in their graduate schooling.*



# Another Kind of Liberation

By Denarii Grace

When I travel—for a doctor appointment, a grocery run, a trip to the park with my dog named Dog—I stop, as often as I can, to admire the flowers. Not *just* flowers, but also trees, certain grasses, bushes, a bunny once, birds if they stay still for me. Mostly flowers though. I love the colors, and they bring me joy.

Nature makes me feel connected to something bigger, deeper, and older than myself. It makes me feel steady in a storm—a life jacket when my troubles are regularly exacerbated by the torrential rains of both interpersonal and systemic trauma. As a Blitch (Black witch), nature is spiritual for me. I gather strength from it. I am alive because of it. *Literally, they say as they drink water, eat bananas, and breathe oxygen.*

But it is only one source, one kind of joy in my life. Dog brings me joy. His little sister, Cat (yes, she is), also brings me joy. Cooking and baking bring me joy. Music, which I've been doing my entire life, *is* joy to me. I often stim to it.

One of the greatest joys of my life has been my 36-year journey to finding community. It's one reason I love attending conferences. (Another reason being that I'm a big ol' nerd.) Finding my people, like nature, has kept me floating on this blue orb when I could've been swept away.

But, over the last several months, I've found myself reveling in a *different* joy. This kind of joy comes not just from *knowing* who my people are, but *celebrating* and *centering* who we are and what we represent.

In other words: tapping into the *freedom* of limitless attraction, where what my romantic and sexual life could look like is a kaleidoscope of possibilities, has had me tumbling into the unexpected joy of #Bi4Bi (or #Bi4Pan or #Bi4AnyoneAttractedToMultipleGenders).

To be both clear and sure, I'm *not* suggesting nor implying that people who are straight, gay, or lesbian are somehow “less free” because they're monosexual/romantic. Anyone who basks in the beauty of themselves is free, as far as I'm concerned, particularly those who are systemically marginalized. I'm a living testament to the fact that being yourself is liberating on a level that you can't understand unless you've felt trapped by who you're expected to be.

However, in a world that insists that I—all of us—must eventually “choose” one or the other (and, preferably, choose straight), **intentionally uplifting bi+/mspec [multi-gender spectrum] experiences of attraction is a radical act.** This is particularly salient for me as someone who is not only bi but also non-binary and polyamorous. As a “bad bisexual,” as fellow bi activist Miles Joyner calls it, I'm reminded that it's imperative to our very ability to thrive that the fullness of our lives be regularly reflected back to us. Not that we simply “see ourselves,” in

some 101, surface-level attempt at representation, but that our identities—and our experiences of those identities—are seen as potent examples of what it can mean to be ALL the way free.

There are two things that we must establish before we move on. First, the ability to be attracted to, interested in, or build with multiple (a)genders—romantically, sexually, platonically, queerplatonically—does not make you *inherently* radical (sheeeeeeeit, ask me how I know...). Second, as a Black, fat, non-binary/agender, trans, darker skinned, multiply disabled, poor, witchy femme who isn't getting any younger, my politics have been about centering and preferring people as close to myself as possible for quite some time. I'm not new to this.

I am not exclusive about it—if I were, my dating and dalliance pools would be *extremely* limited—but, as best as possible when I'm actively dating (and/or fucking), I try to cultivate an experience that feels as safe and peaceful as possible. And that means decentering people with any modicum of social privilege as much as I can, without denying myself... joy.

Now, where were we?

People will misunderstand me because they misunderstand mspec identities (often, but not always, intentionally). “Uplift the experiences of attraction of BISEXUALS??? So you mean CENTER CISHET MEN??? The GALL! Gon' somewhere with all yer PRIVILEGE!” Many bi+ folks, too often disconnected from our community, cultural production, and history, will feel the same way. For many of us, regardless of our (a)gender, our interests include attraction to or affinity for men, but being mspec does not in any way *require* an attraction to men, cis or trans. Yes, that includes for people who use the specific label “bi” to identify themselves. Shocker, I know.

What does it mean, then, to “tap into the freedom of limitless attraction” and “intentionally uplift bi+/mspec experiences of attraction?” More importantly, why is it necessary and what the hell does it have to do with being free?

The freedom afforded people attracted to or interested in multiple (a)genders goes beyond basic notions of sexual or romantic attraction based on arbitrary designations like biological sex, gender identity, or expression, though I'd personally argue that *is* an important part of it. This is particularly important to highlight because being bi, pan, or any other kind of multiply attracted identity **is not an automatic guarantee that one will gravitate toward further societal transgression.** Indeed, there are many monogamous, vanilla, capitalist, politically moderate, neoliberal bi+/mspec people out there. And this is true of *any* transgressive identity (which is why celebrating politicians based on identity alone, indeed celebrating politicians, period, is regularly disastrous).

I said that this issue is particularly salient for me because I'm also non-binary and polyamorous. Like being mspec, these identities exist outside of a very rigid paradigm to which we're expected to adhere. While “gay” and “lesbian” are certainly also transgressive

identities, when you exist or assert your identity in the “in between,” when who you are is considered ill-defined or too expansive, you’re set up by society to fail. There is, quite literally, no space for you. It explains our treatment and placement in the world. This reality for bi+/mspec folk is regularly borne out by study after study. Certainly, our community’s statistics regarding our physical, financial, social, and mental health reflect this reality in a distressing way. We are regularly in trouble.

But we are so because our very existence *causes* trouble.

When the world demands that you are *either this or that* and you defy that “logic” by being, as Spongebob once said, some other third thing (or fourth or fifth thing)? You upend everything that most people (think they) understand about the entire world. And that’s fucking terrifying.

But there is **power** in that—and that’s where our freedom lies. We can unmake the world, but only if we’re tapped in.

Once you’ve wrestled with that first level of understanding, a reimagining of the world is possible. What if there were no boxes? Chains? What if there was no black or white, but a rainbow (and I *don’t* mean that in the “we’ll all be one tan racial blob one day” way)? What if we busted through the binaries and made space for *everyone*? What if we lived in a both/and world, abandoning either/or, embracing multiple universes of possibilities? What if people could just... *be*? Fucking terrifying, I know.

But Nina Simone told us: “I’ll tell you what freedom is to me: no fear. I mean really, no fear!”

A world that is not afraid of the undefinable, the unknown, the

expanse, the many instead of the one, is a world that is safer for people like me. That, to me, is liberation. That is what I’m striving for. That is why these conversations specifically about bi+/mspec community are important. None of us are free until we’re all free. All.

After you’ve activated your imagination, it makes it that much easier to celebrate both the *what is* and *what can be* of who we are. To celebrate is to uplift. To uplift is to honor. When something is honored in one’s life or work, it is visible—all the time. And when you get to a point in your journey where you *consistently* honor the unique experiences of your majority minority community, guess what? You *value* it more. And when you value it more? You *center* it more, actively seeking it out. That is how I got to the point where I regularly dream of specifically being with bi+/mspec folks, romantically and sexually, more and more. I want *us*. Not just as comrades or fellow culture creators. We’re magical, deserving of love (all kinds) and being seen... and we’re fucking hot.

In 2017, I wrote a song called “Femme for Femme.” It really sums up the *joy* I feel about the unique queerness of multiple gender attraction, and what happens when we find and love on each other: “We’re two peas in a pod—you get me.”

*Denarii Grace (she/they) has an activist for more than 15 years and is a multi-hyphenate creative New Yorker. They are the Editor-in-Chief of Disability Rights Washington’s Rooted in Rights blog, dedicated to stories for and about disabled people.*

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## To Be Bi+: A Poetic, Joy-filled Musing

By Kandi Zeller

I have a rainbow of possibility before me  
I connect to a spectrum of labels around me  
I inhabit liminal spaces of community, ever-forming

For me, being bi is about more than who I love  
It’s about my orientation of possibility  
In sex, romance, faith, etc.—I could never pick just one

I’m both married to a man and attracted to other genders  
I’m both a Christian and a witch  
I’m both disabled and whole

For me, to be bi+ is to be enough  
To be a prism  
As I am

*Kandi Zeller (she/her) is a disabled, witchy, and bi human who writes and edits at the intersections of spirituality, creativity, and justice. You can learn more about her work at KandiZeller.com, on her Instagram (@Kandi.Zeller), and in her Substack newsletter (AllTheThreads.Substack.com).*



# Following My Bisexual Joy to the Forest

By Anna Kochetkova

In the process of stepping into my sexuality and proclaiming it every chance I got—other parts of myself started to heal as well. In my book, *Bi & Prejudice*, I spoke about how accepting the queer parts of myself started to shift everything in my life. Truly loving and embodying my bisexuality has helped me pursue my dream... of living in the forest.

Since the last time I wrote for *Bi Women Quarterly*, I have moved up the New South Wales coast (in Australia), settling on the [Yaegl Country](#), also known as the Clearance Valley, part of the Northern Rivers.

For a number of years now, I have wanted to live in the forest, surrounded by trees, native birds, and bees, horses, and acres and acres of land. In May 2023, I finally found such a place and settled on a small farm away from the big city (and small towns!), between Sydney and Brisbane.

Although I host bi+ social gatherings in Sydney and seem loud and bubbly, I am also a quiet gentle introverted bisexual who loves solitude, nature, and forest regeneration. I also fiercely fight for the native bats. And I love writing; which requires a lot of mental space and inspiration to think, feel, and create.

I've been suffocating in big cities all my life. I didn't know that until I knew I was bisexual. Although there is no causal correlation between the two, accepting my bisexuality made me feel a little braver every year, and eventually, I made the move I was terrified of.



Here, my overall well-being, sense of safety, confidence, clarity, and self-assurance are stronger than ever. I feel this unshakable 'knowing of myself' for the first time in my life, even as I start to face small town bigotry and gaslighting.

My mental health didn't just skyrocket because I rented out a tiny cottage in the middle of nowhere. I have also been attending to the wounded parts of self for years, with the help of somatic therapy, body healers (like chiropractors), leadership coaches, books, nature walks, and my beloved bi+ community—all of which led me to where I am today, physically and mentally.

I planted a large rainbow flag on the land I am residing on and got to work getting to know the local communities and also writing this article. I needed to quiet down the sensory overload of the big city, breathe in the eucalyptus air, and watch bandicoots rush across the forest floor before I was able to continue writing about bi+ joy.

Over the last five years, before my move to the countryside, I was going away every couple of months, traveling all around New South Wales, staying in tiny houses and cabins in the forest or by the sea. I didn't know yet but I was *trying on* a lifestyle that I was yearning for.

I don't live in the forest, like the participants of the [Alone TV-series](#). I share the acres with a wonderful retired couple, a bunch of friendly neighbors (a short drive away), rescue cows, horses, and ducks, not to mention all the wildlife.

Here I've met rural queers who often possess impressive building skills, great tattoos, and a love for self query. I am in awe of all the ways queers are.

Today, when I am in the forest, I feel alive, energized, safe, loved. I feel like I belong. Forest and wildlife within make me feel at home. And the joy of being queer soars.

*Anna Kochetkova is a Russian-born Australian author and poetess, and a passionate bi+ activist based in Northern Rivers on the Yaegl Country. Anna is the author of *Bi & Prejudice*, one person's story connecting the dots of identity and sexuality across years, continents, and cultures; and the creator of the @biandprejudice Instagram space, which helps celebrate multisexual attraction and human diversity. Anna is also the founder of Sydney Bi+ Social Club @sydbclub, which hosts monthly social gatherings for bi+ people in Sydney, Australia.*

# Ceremony

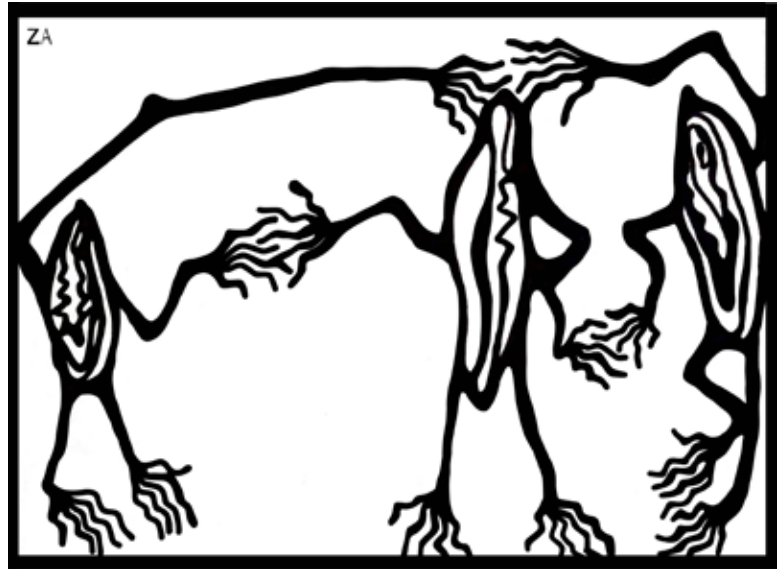
By Zineb Allaoui

## ARTIST STATEMENT:

I believe that my art is a window into the depths of my identity and the complexities of my emotions. While words often fall short in capturing the essence of who I am, my artwork effortlessly communicates the intricacies that reside within me.

In my artwork, the characters I paint are not human in the traditional sense. They represent concepts and ideas rather than specific individuals. By portraying genderless bodies, I challenge the societal norms and beauty standards that have been ingrained in us. I want to question and disrupt the conventions that shape our understanding of identity and beauty.

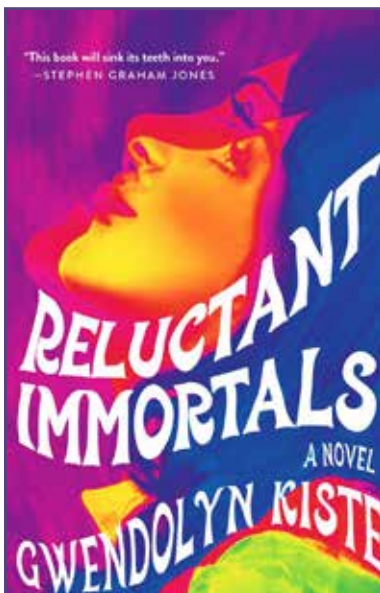
This piece, "Ceremony," represents joy. It's about three vaginas celebrating their freedom of simply being.



*Zineb Allaoui (she/her) was born and raised in Morocco and is currently studying in Ottawa, Canada.*

## 2023 Lambda Literary Award Winners

On June 9, at an event in New York City, Lambda Literary announced its award winners. Of the 25 award categories, three are bisexual-focused. Here are this year's winners:



**Bisexual Fiction:**  
*Reluctant Immortals*, by Gwendolyn Kiste (S&S / Saga Press)



**Bisexual Nonfiction:**  
*Appropriate Behavior*, by Maria San Filippo (McGill-Queens University Press)



**Bisexual Poetry:**  
*Real Phonies and Genuine Fakes*, by Nicky Beer (Milkweed Editions)

# Intrinsically Me

By Christina Fialho

“Intrinsically disordered.” That’s what I heard growing up. I hadn’t felt particularly disordered, though. A little messy, yes. My closet could definitely have used some re-ordering. But intrinsically disordered? That just wasn’t me.

So that morning, I stood there, my right arm outstretched, fingers touching the toes of the off-white ceramic statue of a woman before me. The stormy skies had opened from darkness and a single ray of sun shone through the stained-glass window illuminating the statue, illuminating her.

I had come to church to ask forgiveness. What else was I supposed to do? I had nowhere else to go. I was a seventeen-year-old girl in love. It should have been an ordinary love, but my love had brought uncomprehending shame to my family.

“Carolina, I cannot condone sin under this roof,” Mom had said, as she took down the posters of Shakira in my room to replace them with icons of Jesus. I think she had hoped the more I stared at Jesus, the more ordered I would become. She had found the letters between Nyna and me, under my bed. She threw them away, in silence. The necklace made of dandelions that hung on my bedpost, she removed, tore apart, and discarded out the window. I watched Nyna’s gift swing peacefully to the ground. Its pieces reabsorbed by the earth. The natural order of things perhaps restored.

Mom never yelled. She hadn’t even cried. She had just proceeded, as if checking off a preordained to-do list, passed down through the generations. “You haven’t even had a boyfriend before,” she had continued with calm certainty in her voice. “I remember being your age. You don’t know who you are yet.”

*Was she right?*

The church had a familiar, comforting smell that had begun to quiet the butterflies practicing aerial acrobatics in my stomach. I had been baptized in this church, had First Holy Communion in this church. Every Sunday, I had lit votive candles in the dark nooks of this church, told secrets to friends in the pews of this church. I had listened to Gregorian chants in this church, and watched the music sculpt the air, bridging the spiritual world with the sensual world. But I had never noticed this statue before.

At first glance, I had thought she was Our Blessed Mother of Jesus, her eyes cast down on me from above like the Archangel Gabriel before her. Was this moment to be another annunciation of sorts?

No. She was no Virgin Mary.

The roses in her arms gave her away. This was a statue of St. Thérèse. She was standing there with me, holding her lifeless

flowers, symbols of an unnoticed girl who still flourished in God’s glory.

I locked eyes with hers, as everything around her began to disappear, slowly. The staircase behind her collapsed out of sight. The doors to our left leading into church and the doors to our right inviting us into the sunlight dissolved. It was just her face, there, glowing.

Then I heard it. Three simple words, heard as less than a whisper but more than a thought.

“I see you.”

Who said that? I looked around. But no one was there. It was just me and her.

“I see you,” I repeated aloud. She had not posed a question. No. She had invited an answer. The answer I had always known.

*I. Am. Bi.*

Almost instantly as if these words had been perceived by the Church as a gunshot signaling the beginning of a race for my soul, incense began seeping out from deep within the church, flooding my nose as if it were water suffocating me. The ocean air from beyond the church knocked at the door, entered, and comingled with the incense in the narthex of this Catholic church.

And I was trapped.

Trapped between two open doors, asked to enter through only one of them, asked to turn my back on half of me.

*Of all the places, why come out to myself in the narthex of a church?* Originally, penitents were confined to the narthex until their reconciliation with the Church. Not quite inside, but not quite outside.

I began to try to inch my way to the door, the one leading to the outside. But my legs stiffened in place as if the floor were quicksand grabbing hold of me. The more I fought to leave, the tighter the quicksand liquefied around my limbs. Any progress I made reversed instantly.

Am I doomed to remain in the narthex forever? It is surely the location the Catholic Church has prescribed for people like me. Mom could still love me if I remained here, for it was not a sin to like another woman, only a sin to express it. I could be comfortable enough in the narthex.

The church bells in the distance brought me halfway back into my body. Were the bells welcoming me or warning me? I felt as if I were in a very faraway country that was once my homeland.

Was I to be the Catholic who the Catholics have disavowed—compassionately, of course—the happy prisoner who dutifully and despairingly attends mass, confesses sins, drinks from the cup of life but who is never seen at the altar, smiling?

Mom never smiled. Perhaps this was our ancestral curse.



I looked up at St. Thérèse, as if to ask, are we obliged to stay in this jail? She was not smiling. I wondered: When the church is sealed at night, when all Catholics are removed, does she sway from side to side? Does she weep or does she laugh? Does she ever think about escaping the narthex?

The Catholic Church had become both my judge and jailer. It set the rules, prevented me from living outside of them, and pretended to show me love, but only if I stayed in the jail. In the name of unconditional love, it extended me the most conditional distortion of love.

St. Thérèse's colorless complexion was cracking. The Church had kept her in this position for far too long. I looked for any indication of the child St. Thérèse, the girl who played outside. I sought in vain for the pieces of this fragmented woman, for the affiliation between this carved contortion and the woman who had long since died.

But all I saw before me was a familiar stranger. Why could the Church not just say to me, I love you and that is all.

If the Church had said that to Mom, she would have said that to me. She would have left the Shakira posters on my wall, the letters under my bed, the handmade flower necklace intact. She would have hugged me. She would have asked me questions about Nyna. We would have talked for hours.

I would have been welcomed in my home.

She would have watched me graduate high school and college. She would have let me cry on her shoulder when I broke up with my first girlfriend. We would have eaten our favorite mint chocolate chip ice cream together, cuddled on the purple sofa in the family room of my childhood. She would have taken me out to dinner when I got my first job. I would have taken her to get lemon poppy seed muffins on the weekend. For no reason, just because I could. She would have helped me pick out a wedding dress and stood proudly beside me as I married my wife. She would have been a grandma, teaching my daughter our family history. She would have smiled.

I love you, and that is all, she would have said.

The grip of the church's cold grey floor began to loosen, and the heels of my feet extended upwards, then back down. I was beginning to feel my body. I was beginning to notice my body, as if for the first time.

The door swung open as a parishioner walked across the threshold, blessed herself, and proceeded toward the altar, passing painlessly from one plane to another. She made it look so easy.

I struggled to regain the flexibility in my legs, my knees locking and unlocking to the rhythm of the woman's ta-tap ta-tap ta-tap—the sound of her high-heeled shoes bouncing off the walls, absorbed by my body.

I was afraid to see how my tangible self would move in the world beyond the narthex. But I knew I did not belong in the narthex,

between the beloved and the unabsolved.

No, I would not remain half-wanted.

The world God created for me has no walls. It is ready to receive me. It was ready to receive me even before the pavement was laid, before the building was constructed, before the doors were put on their hinges, before St. Thérèse was disembodied and cast in ceramic for eternity.

The world God created for me is an open plane.

So, I stepped forward. And I kept walking. Intrinsically me.

*Christina Fialho (shelher) is a bi+ activist, social entrepreneur, attorney, and writer whose essays have appeared in The Los Angeles Times, USA Today, Salon, and InStyle Magazine, among others. This is her first work of short fiction. Catch her on Twitter @ChristinaFialho.*



## Abstract Hair



### ARTIST STATEMENT

I created the "Abstract Hair" series as an homage to hair, particularly the afro. There is joy in being free, and not letting societal norms dictate what one's hair or clothing or personality should be. I find joy in my hair, as is, without shame.



*Jo-Anne Carlson is a writer, artist, and musician who believes that who you love, how you love, and how many you love, shouldn't matter. She lives in the Pacific Northwest and loves hearing from friends and making new ones, so please drop her a line at [josexpressions@yahoo.com](mailto:josexpressions@yahoo.com).*



# I Wish I'd Seen *XO, Kitty* When I Was a Teenager

By Kelsey Goeres

Netflix viewers first met Katherine Song-Covey (Anna Cathcart), aka Kitty, in the trilogy *To All the Boys I Loved Before*. She's the younger sister to Lara Jean (Lana Condor) and Margot (Janel Parrish), and she's always been interested in love. While *To All the Boys I Loved Before* focuses on Lara Jean, the series *XO, Kitty* tells the younger sister's story.

Kitty has decided to spend her junior year of high school in South Korea at the school her deceased mother attended as a teenager. Not only does Kitty crave to connect with her mother's memory, but the school located in Seoul, and appropriately called KISS, also happens to be where her long-distance boyfriend, Dae (Minyeong Choi), attends.

The series is about Kitty's yearning to learn more about her mother. She does. She also learns a lot about herself. While it's not the entire story, for Kitty, discovering her bisexuality is a prominent part of her journey. It was this part of the series that both comforted and pained me to watch unfold.

I grew up Catholic. And while I've always liked girls, and even had my fair share of physical experiences with them, I didn't allow myself the label of bisexuality until my late 20s.



My first kiss with a girl took place when I was nine. My neighbor and I would “practice” for when we were older, for boys. But it never felt like practice. It felt like kissing. It also felt like I was doing something especially wrong—not a feeling I got when I kissed boys. And why *would* I feel bad kissing boys? Entire films, TV series, and books were dedicated to how sweet, romantic, and special it is to kiss a boy.

Kitty, naturally, was surrounded by straight kiss hype growing up, too. We find her laser focused on getting her first kiss with Dae upon surprising him at school. But when she finally sees him at the welcome dance, there's another girl on his arm, Yuri (Gia Kim), the ultra-wealthy, ultra-cool daughter of the principal. We learn that Yuri is essentially paying Dae to act as her fake boyfriend to hide from her conservative parents that she is dating a girl named Juliana (Regan Aliyah). But Kitty doesn't find that out until later. Eventually, the confusion is remedied and Kitty and Dae get back together. But along the way, Kitty starts to develop feelings for Yuri. It all starts in episode six when Kitty is hypnotized by the sight of Yuri DJing at an under-18 club. At the end of the episode, Kitty has a sexy dream about Yuri. The dream is just as exciting and romantic as the moments Kitty shares with Dae. Tonally, the feelings she has for both people are very similar. One is not presented as “better” than the other.

As Kitty struggles with her feelings for Dae and Yuri, she's not portrayed as a greedy bisexual heartbreaker (a tired stereotype often slapped on bisexual fictional characters). She's still the same charming protagonist we met in episode one when the audience assumed she was straight.

It isn't often we get to witness a sweet, innocent portrayal of budding bisexuality in the media. Bisexual individuals by no means need to be sweet or innocent to be worthy of love and understanding. But I can't help but think about what my teenage years would have been like had they been colored with more characters like Kitty—a young girl who is simply discovering herself as she grows up, and who is trying her best.

The first time I heard the word “bisexual” was when I was 12 and in a theater production of *Fiddler on the Roof*. I and my play “sister” were the only young people in the cast, which was mostly comprised of conservatory students in their 20s. I loved listening to them talk. They were so different from the adults I grew up around. One handsome male dancer with big muscles in a tight white tank top mentioned during a rehearsal break that he was bi. I asked what that was, and he simply said, “I like both girls and boys.” A warm flash of light bolted throughout my body. My heart sang “me, too.”

As the years went on, I pushed down the label I'd learned. Bisexuality was certainly not common vernacular in the circles I was in. “Gay” and “lesbian” came up in hushed tones from

time to time in the hallways of my Catholic school, but they were not “good” things to be. I remember one specific morality worksheet I completed in class in which being gay was literally the wrong answer. Bisexual people have the privilege, and the pain, of being able to shut off part of themselves to allow the societally acceptable version, the safe version, to face forward.

In the final episode of the season, Kitty calls her father searching for a comforting, listening ear. She tells him she’s confused because she has feelings for both Dae and Yuri. He tells her that confusion is a part of growing up, and it certainly sounds like she’s growing, which is a good thing.

In the end, Kitty and Dae go their separate ways. And Kitty never gets the chance to tell Yuri how she feels because Juliana arrives back in Seoul—an apt metaphor for an experience many bi (and

queer) folks have, missing out on the chance to be completely honest about ourselves for one reason or another.

I’m just so glad this generation of young people has characters like Kitty to validate their experiences and their confusion, and that they have labels and role models to apply to themselves. It’s one small area in which it actually feels as though things are getting better, not worse, for young people.

*Kelsey Goeres is a journalist, essayist, and poet based in the San Francisco Bay Area of California.*



Joyful scenes from pride celebrations and demonstrations. Courtesy of the Bisexual Resource Center.



# Our Flag Means Death: A Celebration of Queer Joy

By Taylor Rose Raucher



From the opening scenes of HBO's 2022 cult hit *Our Flag Means Death*, it is clear that it is not going to be your typical pirate show. This is no *Black Sails* or *Pirates of the Caribbean*. These pirates are not swashbuckling. They are not cutthroat. Their first "raid" is on a small fishing boat where they steal a plant. And our captain Stede Bonnet (Rhys Darby) is not your typical pirate captain. He is finely dressed, pays his crew a weekly wage, keeps a daily journal of his exploits, and is not particularly murderous. He is a gentleman from Barbados who upended his life to run away to sea and become a pirate without having the first clue about what being a pirate means. And everything changes when he meets Blackbeard (Taika Waititi).

When *Our Flag Means Death* was airing in March and April of 2022, it was quietly making a splash as a charming workplace comedy. The unique spin on the pirate genre, described as a "hard to move genre" by showrunner and creator David Jenkins, was fresh and funny. But when the final two episodes of the first season dropped, the internet was ablaze with excitement: this show was unabashedly queer. And what made the storytelling particularly intriguing when it came to the queer narrative was that, while the love story was central to the plot, the characters' sexualities were not.

The most stereotypically queer character, Lucius (Nathan Foad), flirts and has a budding relationship with the macho Black Pete (Matt Maher), but there is never a conversation about where they stand with each other—it is simply understood. The nonbinary pirate Jim, played by nonbinary actor Vico Ortiz, has a moment with the crew—who think they might be a mermaid—where they simply say, "Keep calling me Jim," and so the crew obliges. And Stede, who spends the season discovering his own power as a captain and as a man, realizes he loves Blackbeard not by coming out in a lengthy speech, but by simply admitting that the person he loves is named Ed.

As a queer viewer, watching *Our Flag Means Death* was like finally being embraced by the media that I love. It was a bold and welcoming statement of acceptance and celebration of queer joy.

These characters were able to simply exist without fear, and those who were cruel to them got their comeuppance. There is no internalized or even externalized homophobia, even in 1717. It may read more like a fantasy, but isn't media meant to be escapism?

Watching Stede and Ed fall in love over the course of the ten-episode season is charming, heartwarming, and refreshing. They find what they have been seeking in the world in each other: a sense of belonging. They are friends first and lovers second. And, in a remarkable move for queer media, they are older. The actors and characters are in their mid-40s, proving that it is never too late to find love.

Many viewers were skeptical of the show's writers, having fallen victim to queerbaiting many times over in the past. It didn't seem like Stede and Ed were really going to be a couple, especially with two other queer couples, Lucius and Pete and Jim and Oluwande, in the supporting roles. But when they sealed their relationship with a kiss on the beach, the audience breathed a sigh of relief. We hadn't been reading the signals wrong. These two characters were just as crazy about each other as we were about them.

Finding representation—especially such unbridled joyful representation such as *Our Flag Means Death*—is challenging. Queer stories are often laced with tragedy or left to subtext through 'queer coding.' Being able to see a queer love story, one that doesn't rely on tropes, big speeches, or a tired coming-out arc is like being able to breathe deeply for the first time. The weight of shame is lifted, and all that's left is the path to happiness. Seeing characters celebrated for their queerness and celebrating their identities without pretense is a welcome reprieve from the ugliness of the real world.

*Our Flag Means Death* is affirming in its queerness. It lets the audience know that you can be loved for who you are, where you are, and how you want to be loved. Though the season ends on a cliffhanger—Ed and Stede separate after a confrontation with one of the show's villains—there is unquestionable hope. Hope that they will reunite, that Stede will find Ed and confess his feelings, that they will be happy together. Because this show is about joy, acceptance, and, above all else, love.

Taylor Rose Raucher is a queer writer from Massachusetts. Her work has been featured in *Historic Northampton's "Covid-19 Stories,"* *The DG Sentinel,* and *Free Spirit.*



# Research Corner: Don't Worry, Bi-Happy!

## Research Shows Bi-Positive Feedback Improves Our Mental Health

By Kallie Strong and Nicola Koper

Most academic studies on bisexual individuals have focused on our higher risk for mental health challenges, such as depression and anxiety. The research study reviewed here, though, looked at the positive side of things, evaluating how bi-positive events might benefit mental health of bi+ folks. Researchers Dr. Christina Dyar and Dr. Bonita London wanted to understand whether and how the frequency of bi-positive events affected three variables: stressors (including internalized bi-negativity, sexual identity uncertainty, and rejection sensitivity), bisexual identity (identity affirmation and the strength of that identification), and finally, symptoms of anxiety and depression.

With that aim, they asked participants to complete one survey a week for three weeks in which participants recorded whether they experienced any bi-positive events—either as a result of self-reflection, or through a conversation or other interaction with someone else. In all, 172 cisgender bi+ women, 20-35 years old, participated.

There are many positive messages in the authors' results, as more than 95% of participants reported at least one bi-positive event. Experiencing bi-positive events decreased stressors such as internalized bi-negativity and depression, and also increased bisexual identity affirmation and strength of identification as bisexual. Bi+ women also had less anxiety if they received bi-positive messages from other people. Interestingly, the researchers noted that bi+ women who experience a larger number of internal events (such as thinking about bisexuality in a positive way) also experienced more bi-positive events in interactions with *other* people. While the authors suggest that this might occur because experiencing internal bi-positivity might lead to more bi-positive interactions with other folks, there are a lot of other reasons why this might occur; for example, more bi-positive feedback from the folks who surround bi+ women might lead to more internalized bi-positivity, or bi+ women who are more bi-positive might surround themselves with like-minded allies.

Like any academic study, this one has limitations that are worth keeping in mind. Firstly, it only considered the experiences of cisgender bisexual women—gender identity is known to have unique impacts on mental health due to different experiences with antibisexual stigma. Secondly, the demographic was relatively homogenous, with most participants being self-identified as “[...] well-educated, middle class, White, living in the urban and suburban areas of the United States and relatively open about their bisexual identities.” Other studies on bisexual individuals of color have shown unique impacts of stigma due to their intersecting identities—something that could not be

examined in this study due to its low number of individuals of color.

Perhaps the biggest problem with the study design was that participants did not complete assessments on weeks when they had no bi-positive events—this makes it much harder to know how much of a difference bi-positive events might have on overall mental health. Longer-term studies would also be important, especially for helping bi+ folks learn how to deal with internalized bi-negativity.

Nonetheless, the study still makes it clear that bi-positive events improve the mental health and self-identification of bi+ women. Perhaps the most interesting result is that internal bi-positivity had almost as many benefits as bi-positive feedback from people around us. This suggests that while there are important benefits of surrounding ourselves with allies and bi+ support networks, we can also improve our own mental wellbeing by learning about and focusing on bi pride and bi knowledge. Resources that can help us increase our internalized bi-positivity include podcasts, interviews with bi+ activists, novels, and other media with positive portrayals of bi+ characters, and personal essays by bi+ folks—many of which can be found in *Bi Women Quarterly!* This study lays the groundwork for future studies delving into bi-positive experiences and their potential for helping bisexual individuals gain more self-affirmation and pride in their own identities. This can help us work towards a world with more internal and external bi-positivity—what could be better than that?

Source: Dyar, C., and London, B. (2018) Bipositive Events: Associations with Proximal Stressors, Bisexual Identity, and Mental Health Among Bisexual Cisgender Women. *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity*. Vol. 5, No. 2, 204–219.

*Kallie Strong is an undergraduate microbiology student at the University of Manitoba. She lives in Winnipeg with her dog, Hobbes.*

*Nicola Koper is Dean of Environment at the University of Northern British Columbia in Canada, and a strong advocate for making research results accessible to everyone.*

**Research Corner articles are written to make academic research about bi+ folks accessible to everyone.**



## *More from the Research Corner:*

# **‘Femme it up or Dress it Down’: Personal Experiences and Research on Bisexual Women Pushing Back Against Normative Interpretations of Gender and Sexuality**

*By Lindsey Thomson*

As a (cis, white) bisexual woman, my gender expression has become more intentional and varied as I have come into my bisexual identity and navigated different romantic relationships and social contexts, all while trying to hang onto and express my bisexuality.

As I grew up and discovered my queer identity in my early 20s and fell in and out of romantic relationships with people of different genders, I noticed some curious preferences for my own gender expression began to emerge. Shortly after getting together with my first girlfriend and coming out to myself and others for the first time, I felt a real desire to be read as queer and integrate into queer communities and cultures. My hair eventually got shorter, yet I was still often doubted as queer when I went to queer clubs. On the other side, my girlfriend and I received a lot of unwanted attention from men in mainstream bar scenes who assumed our affection for one another meant that we were seeking their attention.

Fast forward to my next romantic relationship, which happened to be with a queer man; I was faced with the new challenge of my bisexuality being erased in a different way. I was assumed to be straight again—only this time my queer identity, which had come to mean so much to me, was ripped away. I joined bisexual social and support groups and made a point of going to queer clubs with my newfound bisexual friends and experimenting with clothing in a conscious way—sometimes “femmeing it up” with a dress, and other times “dressing it down” with a t-shirt and vest and jeans. No matter who my partner was romantically, or where I was, I tried my best to be seen as bisexual, which often required deliberately coming out to be read accurately.

Recent research investigating gender expression and the experiences of bisexual women in same- or different-gender relationships echoes and validates many of my own experiences. A 2018 study by Daly, King, and Yeadon-Lee asked 19 bisexual women in the United Kingdom to keep a diary and take part in phone interviews about their gender expression over time. All participants were in a monogamous relationship at the time, or “desired to be in one.”

Women in different-gender relationships were more likely to wear clothing and hairstyles that could be interpreted as “butcher” or more stereotypically lesbian, to make their bisexual identity visible. Many women intentionally chose these gender expressions because they wanted to be “read and decoded” as queer, despite being with a different-gender partner.

On the other hand, women in same-gender relationships were

more likely to feminize their appearance, choosing clothing and hairstyles that pushed back against stereotypes of lesbian women as butch, and enjoying the idea that this may be disorienting for people with binary expectations around gender and sexuality. At the same time, women were aware that appearing in traditionally feminine ways may be read as less “authentically” queer, and in the context of queer clubs they often felt compelled to physically demonstrate affection for their same-gender partner to concretely display their queerness.

This shows that many bisexual women intentionally use varied gender expressions as a tool to “keep alive” a bisexual identity across relationships and social contexts. The stereotypical (and monosexist) ideas that masculine/butch gender presentation equals

lesbian, and feminine gender presentation equals heterosexual, motivates bisexual women to make strategic choices that shift across social contexts depending on which aspects of their sexuality they wish to highlight for which “audiences.” The authors note a distinct challenge in presenting a clearly bisexual gender expression given that there is no one distinctly bisexual style or common gender expression. Bisexual women were also considered “chameleons,” showing fluidity in their gender expression. Bisexual women deliberately chose when, why, and with whom to embody femininity in particular ways to authentically express different parts of their sexuality. Overall, many bisexual women seem to be comfortable switching between gender expressions deemed femme/heterosexual and butch/lesbian.

Participants also spoke to varied levels of comfort in being “out” as bisexual across different contexts (e.g., family or work) and made intentional choices in their gender expression as they navigated anticipated homophobia and/or biphobia. This led the study’s authors to wonder if bisexual women were reinforcing assumed binaries of straight and gay (and therefore bisexual “invisibility”) by switching gender expressions to “match” a heterosexual or lesbian “aesthetic.” I don’t agree with this interpretation. It is clear that bisexual women used gender expressions that were the opposite of what may be expected across social contexts and pushed back against norms. In my view, bisexual women use different gender presentations to carve out new space for non-monosexual queer identities while employing gender presentations that are recognizable across heterosexual and homosexual contexts alike.

Regardless of the gender of one’s partner, being read as bisexual is clearly important for many bisexual women. Playing with

feminine and masculine gender expressions are intentional ways of resisting and disrupting binary assumptions of heterosexist and monosexist cultures. This is a very intentional and complex process that demonstrates sophisticated understandings of others' automatic and mistaken assumptions which conflate gender expression and sexuality in stereotypical ways. Bisexual women's gender expressions are more complex and varied than mainstream heterosexual and homosexual sub-cultures account for. Our gender and sexuality exist in relation to other people who are romantic partners, "audiences" who make up the social contexts which we move in and out of, the social norms that govern how others interpret us, and where we live and belong as undeniably queer people.

## References

Daly, S.J., King, N., & Yeadon-Lee, T. (2018). 'Femme it up or dress it down': Appearance and bisexual women in monogamous relationships. *Journal of Bisexuality*, 18(3), 257-277.

*Lindsey Thomson lives in Guelph, Ontario, Canada, with her wife CJ, two dogs, and a 29-year-old turtle. She is a white settler, identifies as queer and bisexual, and is also a late-discovered autistic woman. She is a PhD student in Social Practice and Transformational Change. Lindsey works as a specialist in community-engaged teaching and learning at the University of Guelph.*



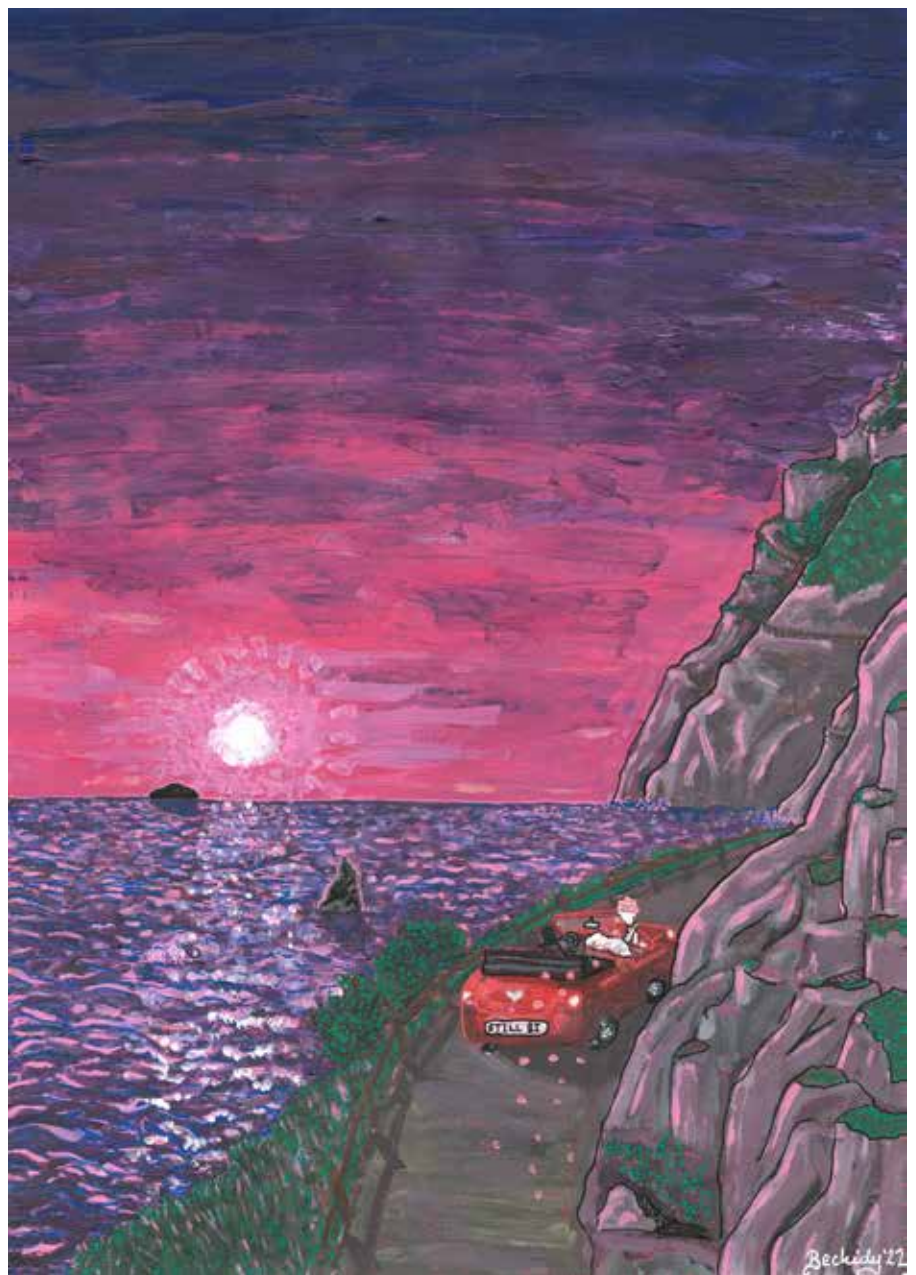
## still bi

By Becki Smith

### ARTIST STATEMENT:

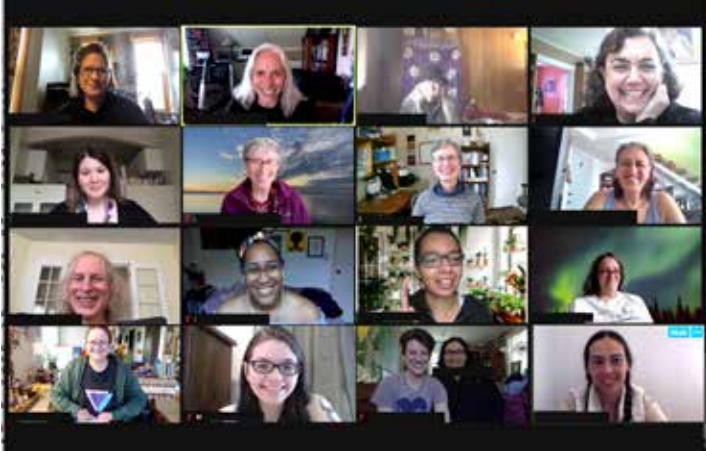
"still bi" (2022, acrylics and posca pens on paper) is an artwork inspired by the artist's wedding last year. It shows a couple driving into the sunset in an open-topped car. One is wearing a top hat, the other has a veil and a bouquet, and the number plate of their car reads, "still bi." Much has been said about so-called "straight passing" relationships, and it is certainly true that couples who appear to conform to heteronormativity face less discrimination. In fact it is because of the challenges faced by the rest of our community that we queer people in M-F relationships and marriages need to stay visible, refute assumptions about what and who bi+ people are, and stand in solidarity with others.

*Becki Smith is a multimedia artist from Wales who uses her art to explore themes of belonging, identity, neurodivergence and mental health. She shares and sells her art under the moniker Creatrix Cymraes; see more at [creatrixcymraes.com](http://creatrixcymraes.com) and [instagram.com/creatrixcymraes](https://www.instagram.com/creatrixcymraes).*





# CALENDAR



Digital Brunch

## A special invitation to our readers EVERYWHERE:

Please join the Boston Bisexual Women's Network at one (or all) of our digital brunches. 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.

**Digital brunches will be held on the following dates starting at 1 p.m. EST:**

Sat., Sept. 9  
Sun., Oct. 1  
Sat., Nov. 4  
Sun., Dec. 3

Info/RSVP:  
BWQEvents@gmail.com.

(Note: Dates are subject to change.  
Check BiWomenBoston.org to confirm date.)

**Please join us!**

*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 calls for writing on page 2.)*

## Bi+ World Meetup October 20 & 21

Join us at the 10th Bi+ World Meetup! To accommodate people in various time zones, we will have TWO meetups each time: Meetup #11 will be Oct. 21, 4 p.m. EST/10 p.m. CEST & Oct. 22, 4 a.m. EST/10 a.m. CEST. Bi+ people everywhere are invited to join either or both meetups on Zoom. We'll use breakout rooms to give folks an opportunity to meet each other in a friendly and free setting. The meeting is in English and is organized by Barbara Oud (the Netherlands) and Robyn Ochs (U.S.). Pre-registration is required. Register at <https://biplus.nl/biplus-world-meetup>.

## Metro-Boston Women & Nonbinary folks:

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

**We offer FREE digital subscriptions to BWQ** to people of all genders and all orientations everywhere. Subscribe at [BiWomenQuarterly.com](http://BiWomenQuarterly.com).



We had a beautiful backyard bi+ women's brunch at Bailey's on August 5.