

Secrets and Safety

By Fatima

As I gaze outside my window I am reminded of
my crimes
all the warning signs
my short-sighted copyrights tweets and receipts
used against me.
I could not go outside and I could not speak and I could not
stay here
alone
as I need to be
alone because I wear armor shaped like a tear-drop
crying, denying, lying, surviving, finding and fighting faceless
names
Who knows the weight of carrying this briefcase of military
secrets?
Now do you see the exploding hydrangeas? Now do you see
what I see?
After my crimes, all the warning signs, my tweets and receipts,
after thousands of eyes have seen them
Why should I go outside?
Safety is in the darkest depths of the room, so far into the
recesses of my mind but
stuck in the funnel web of Spider-Net's unforgiving venom.

I could not stay here
alone
as I want to be
alone because the reaper is disguised behind anonymity
thriving in unanimity with the troll army.
Yes, they ambush, plant booby traps and decimate
like the cruelty with which the *Five Eyes* alliance violate,
violate, violate
and no crimes there...
In Pakistan, they say, "your screws are loose"
but never, "who says you can choose?"
I say: me, I choose. I am as likely to love
a woman as I am likely to love a man.

Community. Oh, the longing for a chosen family.
I could not stay here
alone
as I told myself to be
alone because half of what I want to say
is visible in the love I receive from my community
laughter in DM group chats from WhatsApp to Telegram
validated not in trepidation but with a full embrace of my
inner celestial navigation.

All my crimes
all the warning signs
all my tweets and receipts are
mine to own.
To live in fear is what they want for me.

I walked away from the window
and walked a mile in my shoes, recollecting,
stopped and stared at the centuries-old tree standing tall,
unshaken
and then I decided
to take the tools into my own hands
and choose which seeds to sow
and choose what to feed the plants
and choose which fruits to nourish my life with
and behold, my identity, my home
that was destroyed in the war of social media feeds
has been refurbished with elegant androgyny.
I choose how I give my energy to cyberspace.
I have chosen what would grow in my life.
And what my life would grow into.
Alone, being alone
is choosing compassion for the spirit
for they are out to break you.
You—he *her*-story being written into time.

Fatima is a writer and activist navigating a double life since 1996. She is currently based in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Fragment

By Christina Geoghegan

Christina is an Irish artist based in Dublin. She graduated with a BA from Minerva Academie, the Netherlands in 2018, completed an MA Erasmus with NCAD in 2016, and has exhibited nationally and internationally, with her work sold in the U.S. and across Europe.



Editor

Robyn Ochs

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Editor's Note

The prompt for this issue on the theme of “Bi+ World Wide Web” was: “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+ peoples’ 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?”

Responses were thoughtful, numerous, and came from a record number of countries. This issue includes content from Australia, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Canada, Germany, Ireland, Kenya, Malaysia, the Netherlands, the U.K., and the U.S.

As the editor of a global publication, I am aware that many of our readers and content contributors are unsafe. The continuing oppression of LGBTQ+ people, the global environmental crisis, the rise of authoritarianism in too many countries around the world—including the U.S, the horrific conflict in Israel and Palestine—and also in Ukraine, Yemen, Syria, Sudan, Ethiopia, the Congo, and far too many other places—impact our global bi+ community. My heart goes out to every person who is harmed as “leaders” wage war and commit atrocities. Everyone, everywhere deserves to live free, and I wish for all of our readers and content contributors a safe, healthy, and peaceful New Year, with full civil and human rights. I hope that BWQ provides a bit of respite in the storm.

Finally, you can meet our amazing team of interns on page 31. BWQ would not exist without them.

~Robyn

*Jordyn, Grace, & Maggie
read BWQ. Send a picture of
yourself reading BWQ to
biwomeneditor@gmail.com.
Be creative!*



Upcoming in *Bi Women Quarterly*

Call for submissions

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**.

Summer 2024: More than One Letter

“B” isn't the only identity in our yummy alphabet soup. To those of you who identify as bi+ and *also* as asexual, trans, intersex, or anything else under the rainbow: tell us what it's like to be you! We want to hear about how your identities intersect, what challenges you've faced, or what opportunities you've been given. And most importantly, we want to know what it would take to be able to bring your whole self comfortably and proudly into these bi+ spaces. **Submit by May 1, 2024**.

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

You may use a pseudonym, if you prefer.

BWQ just turned 41 years old!

Consider supporting our work with a year-end tax-deductible donation. Visit: www.biwomenquarterly.com/donate.

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: Tawi, Kenya



Interview by Robyn Ochs
Artwork by Lulu

Tawi, some months ago you were a guest speaker at a Bi+ World Meetup on Zoom, making our conversation connected with the theme of this issue: “Bi+ World Wide Web.” I learned from your interesting presentation, and I am excited to interview you for BWQ.

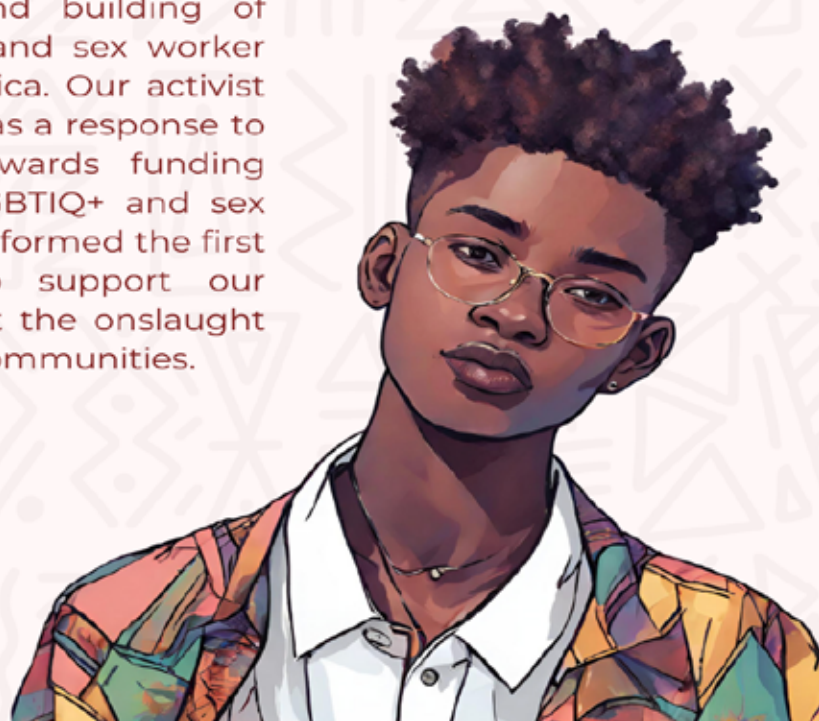
Let’s begin with a personal introduction. Would you please tell us about yourself? Where were you raised? What was your upbringing like? How did you come to your activism?

I was born and raised in Nairobi but also spent time with my maternal grandparents in rural Western Kenya. I have always loved the great outdoors; nature is calming to me. My mother was disabled, and she raised me by herself until I was eight years old. Having a stepfamily was the beginning of a deeper understanding of what diversity meant. To begin with, my siblings and I were so different, having grown up in totally different neighborhoods. My mother really took up the role of being our mother in a way that brought us all together—it was never about a “step” family, we were just a family.

My mother is the biggest inspiration to me as an activist. She never let her disability be the only thing that defined her, and she made it known to everyone around her. Her father enabled her to go to school in Kenya and the U.S., and this shaped her outlook on life: You have the power to create opportunity for yourself and others around you so that we may all thrive. Her life has shaped the kind of feminism I embody today.

Please tell us about your work, and what principles guide your work.

I work for an indigenous activist fund that resources the organizing and building of sexual and gender minority and sex worker rights movements in East Africa. Our activist fund was established in 2009 as a response to the disconnected efforts towards funding intersectional East African LGBTIQ+ and sex worker rights movements. We formed the first African activist-led fund to support our activists to push back against the onslaught on the human rights of their communities.



Our mission is to be an innovative, accessible, inclusive, and responsive activist-led fund, working to achieve equality, dignity, and justice for sexual and gender minorities and sex workers across Eastern Africa, while also being actively engaged in Pan-African movements. We are guided by feminist principles in realizing our mandate in our region and across Africa.

I remember that you spoke about the importance of not leaving behind those who are systematically silenced. You began your presentation by discussing the effects of colonialization on current perceptions of gender and sexuality in Kenya and—more broadly—in Eastern Africa. When you are told that LGBTQIA+ identities are just “imported from the West,” how do you respond?

Queer Africans exist now, and they have existed since time immemorial. Our organization has funded activists from our communities to conduct research at the Pan-African level to better understand the actions of the anti-rights and anti-gender actors on the Continent. LGBTQIA+ African activists first raised awareness of the linkages between colonial practices and ideologies (often manifesting through regressive policy and legal frameworks in our context) on one hand, and with the public's negative perceptions and attitudes towards sexual and reproductive rights. We have also undertaken region-wide research which aims to measure the impact of our fund's support of our communities, which consists of enabling activists to analyze the effect of the awareness-raising efforts that have aimed to situate queerness within the usual understanding of African communal life, now and in the past.

What is the current legal and social situation for LGBTQ+ people in Kenya?

The East African region has been burning for a long time because of orchestrated actions by powerful institutions and individuals to deny the existence of LGBTQIA+ people and the right to sex work for those who chose to undertake it as a means of livelihood. The law has been increasingly weaponized to expedite the erasure of our communities.

In Kenya, the Supreme Court made a progressive ruling in February 2023. It ruled that the National Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (NGLHRC) had the right to register as an NGO using its name which contained the words “gay” and “lesbian.” There was public outcry against the ruling, citing that the judges had allowed the erosion of African values by allowing an LGBTQIA+ organization to be registered as an NGO. Contrary to the judges' ruling, most Kenyans felt that queer people have no right to the freedom of expression and association.



This has led to increased violence towards LGBTIQ+ people with many being forced into isolation. Queer people must be extra vigilant when in public or when going about their usual business because this LGBT issue has also been used to divert the public's attention from the country's economic difficulties and political tensions. Legislators have taken advantage of the opportunity presented by the Supreme Court ruling to speak out against "the attack on the family unit by the West."

The Family Protection Bill was submitted to Parliament in March and the mover is currently consulting with right-wing anti-gender and anti-rights lobbyists and strengthening the language to ensure harsher penalties for people found guilty of homosexuality. This Bill is very similar in terms of penalties to the Ugandan Anti-Homosexuality Act of 2023, which provides harsh penalties for people found guilty of same-sex activity and for anyone who is deemed to be supporting homosexuality.

There has been an increase in refugees from Uganda to Kenya, which is concerning because Kenya is implementing the new Refugee Act which seeks to streamline the integration of refugees into Kenyan society but still not addressing inclusion issues, especially with LGBTIQ+ refugees. The enforcement of this law may prove problematic simply because refugees are expected to be in possession of their academic certificates and are expected to ensure that their professional qualifications be verified by the Kenyan National Qualifications Authority. This is not practical. Refugees would have to leave the refugee camps situated in the Northern region of Kenya to travel to administrative towns nearby for them to have this compliance check done. The nearest administrative offices are likely not easily accessible due to the distance. Refugees normally do not have time to collect their certificates, let alone other valuables, when they need to flee from their countries. There are advocacy efforts by refugee-led organizations and their allied partners to ensure more progressive laws.

Is it dangerous to be doing the work that you do? How do you keep yourself safe?

I pass for a heterosexual woman due to my lifestyle and how I express my personality. I am out only to a closed circle of friends and family. Working for an African feminist activist fund has enabled me to learn how to be safe in digital platforms and in physical spaces. We are always strengthening our safety and security mechanisms.



Is there a bi+ movement in Kenya or elsewhere in Eastern Africa? Are bi+ people welcome in the larger LGBTQIA+ movement?

I know of a few people who are part of the bi+ global network. Bi+ people in Kenya are generally affiliated with the GBMSM (gay, bisexual men, men who have sex with men) and the LBQ (lesbian, bisexual, and queer women) communities.

How does the idea of bi or bi+ identities translate to Kenyan culture?

Like everywhere else—as I'd imagine—the sentiment is that bi+ people are confused, we do not understand what we want, and above all we are not to be trusted.

Do you have contact with bi activists in other countries? Do you see a value in transnational activism?

Across Africa we have LBQ activists and movements making the case for more sustainable funding for organizing led by LBQ women. For us, the national borders that exist do not hinder movement building in our region—they are part of the colonial legacy. For us, ubuntu emerges as a value that guides our Pan-African work that seeks to facilitate the building of the agency of all queer African and African sex workers so that together they can stand up to the structural barriers that perpetuate the multidimensional poverty their communities face. These movements are underfunded and yet they provide much of the healing that the broader African LGBTIQ+ movements need. There is a huge gap left with the exit of the Coalition of African Lesbians in key human rights advocacy spaces on the Continent—in 2018 the African Union Commission gave in to political pressure from African countries and withdrew the observer status of this regional LBQ-led organization. This left a huge gap in the leadership of LBQ women activists and there have been efforts to revive regional LBQ organizing as a response to the ongoing opposition to the sexual and reproductive rights of the African people.



What are your hopes for the future?

I long for a future where queer people and sex workers are genuinely happy and free of the worry that characterizes their daily lives. A future where they are no longer driven by their trauma. A future where they no longer must prove themselves worthy of life. A future where they can exist and thrive on their own terms.

Any last words?

Our activist fund holds a biennial conference that brings together African LGBTIQ+ and sex worker activists, funders of these movements and allied partners supporting the work they do. It is a space that focuses on educating funders on the lived realities of LGBTIQ+ people and sex workers and the intersectional communities they are part of, to increase the amount and quality of funding going towards resourcing the organizing and mobilization needs for these communities. The next iteration is scheduled for mid-2025.



Robyn Ochs is editor of Bi Women Quarterly.

Pixels paint a path // Binary fades to hues // Online souls connect

By Martine Mussies

The journey of discovering one's bisexuality is often a complex and nuanced experience, filled with moments of both uncertainty and revelation. For many, it's a process of shedding societal expectations and embracing the fluidity of their desires. This was certainly true for me, a teenager from the Netherlands who embarked on a path of self-discovery around the year 2000.

Growing up, I found myself drawn to both men and women, but the societal narrative insisted on a binary choice: you were either straight or gay. This rigid dichotomy left me feeling confused and isolated, unable to fully comprehend the spectrum of my emotions. It was as if I were trapped in a world of black and white, while my heart yearned for the vibrant hues of a wider spectrum. As I delved deeper into the labyrinth of my identity, computers became my trusted companions. In the hushed stillness of the library near closing hours, I bathed in the soft glow of the computer screen and embarked on a digital odyssey that would forever alter the course of my life. The internet was still in its nascent stages, a wild frontier of uncharted knowledge and unexplored connections. Fueled by a burgeoning awareness of my own desires and a yearning for understanding, I hesitantly typed the words "how to know if you are lesbian or not" into the search engine, AltaVista, seeking answers that seemed elusive in the offline world.

The screen flickered, and with bated breath I awaited the results. What materialized before me was a revelation, a trove of information and narratives that resonated with the depths of my soul. I found stories of women who felt the way I did, who navigated the intricate maze of their identities with the same uncertainty and hope. It was as if I had stumbled upon a clandestine meeting of kindred spirits, a gathering where the language of the heart transcended the barriers of pixels and code. To me, the blogs and articles I discovered were like ancient scrolls, illuminating the uncharted territories of human emotions. They spoke of the complexities of desire, the beauty of diverse love, and the courage it took to embrace one's true self. A profound sense of recognition washed over me. It was a moment of communion, not just with the voices behind the words, but with my own essence. In those digital pages, I found echoes of my own story, mirrored in the experiences of others who had dared to embark on similar quests for self-discovery.

In the years that followed, the internet continued to be my beacon, guiding me through the intricacies of relationships, self-acceptance, and love. Through the virtual tapestry of shared experiences, I discovered that my journey was not solitary but part of a vast, interconnected web of human stories. For the first time, I felt seen and understood, loved, accepted, and included. The internet had become my guide, a lighthouse illuminating the stormy seas of my emotions. The internet has given me the language to articulate the kaleidoscope of my desires, allowing me to embrace my bisexuality with newfound confidence. My encounters with the

digital realm were transformative. Anonymous pen pals on ICQ and MSN became trusted confidantes with whom I could explore my identity without fear or judgment. In the vast expanse of the online world, I found not only answers but also the courage to ask questions, to challenge norms, and to celebrate the beautiful complexity of my own being.

The flickering screen became a portal to a world of shared experiences, where others like me were grappling with the same questions and uncertainties. Through online forums and chat rooms, I discovered a community of individuals who embraced the fluidity of their attractions, defying the rigid labels imposed by society. This revelation was both liberating and empowering. It was as if a weight had been lifted from my shoulders, allowing me to breathe freely for the first time. I realized that my identity was not defined by a single label, but rather by the tapestry of my experiences and emotions. I was not confined to a binary choice; I could embrace the full spectrum of my desires without apology or explanation. The journey of self-discovery is often a lifelong process, filled with twists and turns. But the revelation that I didn't have to choose, that I could embrace the fluidity of my bisexuality, was a pivotal moment in my journey. It allowed me to shed the burden of societal expectations and embrace the authenticity of my own unique identity.

However, amid the digital euphoria, shadows loom large. The internet, for all its magnanimity, can be a treacherous terrain, especially for bi+ individuals. Online spaces, much like their offline counterparts, can be plagued by prejudice, ignorance, and discrimination. Hate speech, biphobia, and erasure seep through the cracks of the digital world, reminding us that the internet is but a reflection of the society from which it is born. The lack of safety and support in online spaces is a bitter pill to swallow. For the internet to truly serve as a positive and useful space for all bi+ people, there must be a collective endeavour to foster empathy, understanding, and acceptance. Education is the cornerstone upon which this new paradigm must be built. By dismantling stereotypes and amplifying diverse voices, we can create a digital landscape that is as inclusive as it is informative.

Martine Mussies is an artistic researcher and autistic academic in the Netherlands. She is a PhD candidate at the Centre for Gender and Diversity of Maastricht University, writing her thesis on the Cyborg Mermaid. Her interests include Asian studies, autism, medievalism, mermaids, music (ology), (neuro)psychology, karate, King Alfred, and science fiction. www.martinemussies.nl



My Heartstopper Moment

By Karina

The sea lay flat in front of me. It had been foggy in the morning, but the humidity had dissipated under the brilliant sunshine. I sat under the canopy of a large pine tree in Sweden and contemplated what to do next.

When on holiday, I usually had a lot of plans. I did not make up a detailed schedule beforehand. Opportunities just presented themselves to me and I accepted them.

On this day, however, with a view of the sea and pathways left and right, I found myself occupied with a singular insistent urge that had come and gone in waves for the past two weeks—an urge to consume every piece of *Heartstopper* content I could get my hands on.

What started as a web comic had evolved into an incredible-in-numbers-and-interaction online fan base—and then a Netflix show. It was the show that had grabbed my attention and that I could not, despite my resolutions, resist for long.

I had watched Charlie develop a crush on Nick so many times that I'd stopped counting. I accompanied them from a first tentative "Hi," to their need to spend more and more time together. I imagined myself in Nick's shoes when discovering his feelings for Charlie, feelings he had never before had for a boy. And I admired Nick for his fast and helpless acceptance of simply liking Charlie, even as he struggled with what it meant for his own sexuality.

On top of that, there was the friend group. Elle, who had a rough time coming out as trans, processing her experiences through art; Tao, a fierce protector of Charlie; and Isaac, whose love for books is intense.

To say I loved the show would be an understatement. Starting from the story that immediately pulled me in, the show addresses critical teenage and LGBTQ+ topics while keeping up an unwavering positivity. It became a place I wanted to return to, reminding me of the good times I'd had as a teen. It made me reflect on the loss of passions I used to pursue which, in the busy schedule of day-to-day grown-up life, had been pushed aside.

When I was working, I felt the need to return to the show. I watched it at the gym, balancing my phone on the bike. I watched it on my lunch break, during my coffee break, when going to bed, when getting up in the morning—even if it was just for five minutes. The pull to relive the story again and again was overwhelming and seemed to make no sense.

And even on holiday, I felt the irresistible urge to watch it.

So, I did—and I came up with a plan to take home with me. On the journey back, under a sky so blue, it made me feel like everything was possible, I knew I was going to change central

parts of my life. I wanted my life to feel as wholesome as the show, and I was going to spend the rest of my holiday working to ensure the realization of my plan before "real life" hit again.



Starting with long overdue conversations with friends, I channeled Nick's energy when he talked to Charlie in crisis situations. Before I had been struggling and unable to help, Now I had tools to work with. Before I had always had plans of someday going to an art course or paint more at home, Now I picked up a brush and went to an art forum. I scheduled sports sessions and began to feel fitter. I also picked up a new book—another passion of mine that had been suffering in the chaos of life.

It was going great. Everything clicked into place. The show had changed my life for the better in a way I would have never expected any show could. Its intensely positive "can do" attitude made me feel like I could do anything, be anything.

The constant urge to watch *Heartstopper* had slimmed immensely. That is, until a few days later, when it returned and completely threw me off guard.

This time, I decided to focus on my emotions. I cried when I imagined how it would feel when you thought you had your sexuality figured out, thought you were straight, and then realized there was more. I watched Nick take an online test to verify his suspicion and I thought, "Well, I haven't tried that." So, I took out my phone, looked for a test and started going through the questions. The results page displayed an error. I tried again, another error. I almost stopped right then and there, thinking: "It doesn't matter anyway." But a sneaking suspicion made me look for another test.

Looking back, if I am completely honest, this step had already given me the answer. Seeing the result, though, was a punch-in-the-gut feeling of surprise, freedom, and total rightness. It read: "You are bisexual and you probably already knew it. It's part of your life and it's perfectly fine for you." This was my *Heartstopper* moment.

I laughed out loud and said to the kitchen: "I'm bi, actually."

And then I cried. In the days that followed, the internet was my main source of information, the bisexual subreddit community my major pillar to lean on, and *Heartstopper* episodes my home whenever anxiety threatened to overwhelm me.

I began to understand the story on a deeper level, learned about bi erasure, and the importance of the sentence: "I'm bi actually," that Nick frequently dropped when assumed to be gay. I also came across a critique of the *Heartstopper* books that made me realize one important thing: If it had been up to traditional

publishing houses, it would have been entirely possible that *Heartstopper*, with its “poorly drawn graphics”—as one critique stated—would never have seen the light of day, at least not on a larger scale. It was the internet community that made it big—and it took Netflix, a large streaming provider that focuses on shows that include representation, to make it visible to me.

Back in my hometown now, I sit under a golden autumn beech contemplating the start of my own journey and how it all came to be. It took a while for me to understand the opportunity that presented itself to me. It is thanks to *Heartstopper*'s addictive nature and relentless positivity that I was finally able to discover and embrace my true self.

I lean back with my iPad in my hand and watch Charlie and Nick lie in the sun at the seaside—and I know that I will forever be grateful for my very own *Heartstopper* moment.

Karina (shelher) lives in the north of Germany and loves a cup of tea in the traditional local style. She works in IT and Marketing, is currently creating her first novel, and loves to travel. Find her on Instagram as kabeeeeee86.



Curating my spaces

By Ollie

In my adult years, I've always made sure to curate my spaces, both online and offline. Initially, it was easier to curate my online space—I could simply block someone who was bothering me or report individuals spewing nationalist, racist, misogynistic, homophobic, biphobic, or transphobic rhetoric, and be done with them. There was no obligation to interact with such individuals in any way. However, curating offline spaces is more challenging, as avoiding conflict without compromising one's safety or comfort can be difficult, whether it be at school, work, home, or in public.

It's important to me to have friends with whom I don't have to feel like I'm constantly defending my identity. Surrounding myself with curious and hopefully non-judgmental people allows me to explore the nuances of our identities. This requires a level of openness about myself when I first meet someone, but it also demands an understanding that not everyone will like me or feel a connection with me, and that's absolutely okay, even if it's a little scary.

I purposefully assert my presence in spaces where I might feel diminished specifically because of my bi+ identity, while also recognizing and avoiding spaces where my safety is at risk. In a way, I apply the same principle to my offline spaces as I do to my online spaces, with nuances tailored to the specific requirements of each space.

Having been out as a bi+ woman for almost a decade, I've had the opportunity to figure out what works for me. In that time, I've been fortunate to find amazing friends and great co-workers, which means I no longer have to censor my identity to live comfortably. It's important to acknowledge that everyone has different backgrounds and capacities, so not everyone's experience will mirror mine. I may even be unaware of how fortunate I am for my circumstances.

Ollie is an NGO worker living and working in Bosnia and Herzegovina. She is 30 years old, loves talking about LGBTQIA and women's rights, ecology, sustainable living, and vegan food, and is an avid crocheter.

Am I Still Bisexual? A Quiz

By Yolande House

Still questioning your sexuality? Here's a handy test. Choose A, B, C, all, or none as your answer.

Am I still bisexual if I haven't "practiced" since university? Or if I never date another woman?

- A. Maybe your mom was right: it was a phase you grew out of by thirty.
- B. Most people assume virgins or celibates are heterosexual. How is this different?
- C. Is sexuality based on someone's sexual experience or on how they identify?

As the co-coordinator of my university's Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgendered Centre, how would I have answered these questions?

- A. You would have said you don't care what people do. It's how someone feels.
- B. Ignore people—straight and gay—who insist you must choose or that your current relationship posits that choice.
- C. It's not how you appear to others. How do you define yourself? Queer? Questioning? Open to seeing where the night goes?

How have I always defined my bisexuality? Has any of that changed?

- A. You've always considered yourself bisexual because in high school you fell in love with your best friend. If you can do it once, you can do it again.
- B. You don't believe in gender; you're interested in the person, not the genitalia. As Ani DiFranco sings, "I've got no criteria for sex or race/I just want to hear your voice/I just want to see your face."
- C. You still believe sexuality is a spectrum and most people fall somewhere in the middle.

What kind of bisexual am I?

- A. According to the queer theory article you read years ago, you were a queer-identified bisexual. Most of your friends and your community were queer.
- B. You are most definitely a straight-identified bisexual at this point, meaning most of your cultural context and community is heterosexually oriented.
- C. There should be more than two choices! You grimace and hunch your shoulders.

What if, after twenty-five years, I decided to call myself heterosexual? How would that feel?

- A. Heat rises up your throat as a lid shuts over your lungs and you struggle for thin breaths. You're suffocating. This box is too small.
- B. Since the rape at twenty-one, you've barely dated anyone anyway—male, female, trans, nonbinary. So what if, as a shy female, "opposite sex" attractions are easier to initiate and play out in a rural area? Even when you dated more, you always felt that strange bi invisibility: too tough for straight boys, too feminine to ping girls' gaydar.
- C. You haven't thought of yourself as heterosexual since you were sixteen. Those were not your formative dating years. You still forget heteronormative rituals like checking the ring finger of cute guys.

When did I go back in the closet?

- A. You're trying to remember. It's all fuzzy.
- B. Your family knows. Most of your friends are bisexual; you always seem to find each other! You were quiet about it at your last job but never tried to hide it. A co-worker once confided, "I'm bisexual, but don't tell the boss." You asked why, since another colleague frequently spoke about her female partner and the boss was warm and supportive. "That's different. She's a lesbian. People don't understand bisexuality." You nodded. That's why you were quiet.
- C. It was when you moved to South Korea. One foreign teacher told her Korean co-worker she was bi and lost her job a few days later. Even after marching in Ottawa, Toronto, Fredericton, N.B., and Houston, Texas, Seoul Pride felt the most confrontational. A cacophony of techno music from the fenced grounds tried to drown out the traditional Korean hymns blasted by Christian protestors outside. Your gay friend still in Korea says it's getting better; with more celebrities coming out, the public is coming around. You hope so.

How do I feel when I see bi- or pansexual representation in pop culture?

- A. A loosening. Heat in your throat, releasing as you swallow. Wet eyes dripping relief. You feel seen. Like you can exist.
- B. Janelle Monáe's video, "The Way I Feel," always has you clapping and hooting, wiping tears. You

immediately add any bisexual songs to your YouTube playlist: *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* (musical TV show), “Gettin’ Bi,” The Pipettes, “I Like a Boy in Uniform (School Uniform),” Frank Ocean, “Chanel, Peaches, “I U She,” Ani DiFranco, “In or Out.”

- C. It makes your heart dance whenever Sarah from *Legends of Tomorrow*, who is usually partnered with women, flirts with a man. She’s bisexual, like me!

How do I identify now?

- A. You’re pretty sure you’re still bisexual.
B. Even if that label no longer fits, you’re most definitely not straight. You’re a picture frame off-center. (You and your bi roommates attached angled magazine clippings to the walls in undergrad, hooting, “We can’t do anything straight!”)
C. In university, you found out one of the women on your residence floor was forty-five. You were shocked until you realized she was queer. Then it made sense—she was living outside the bounds of normative time markers and societal expectations. At Toronto Pride you saw an adult you wanted to emulate: alongside her boyfriend after a semester of later-in-life study nights, her leather-clad shoulders pulsed to a heavy bass beat. Her ripped jeans glowed in blinking dots of pink, purple, blue. Bisexual lighting from the glint of a disco ball.

No answer key here. Reflect on your choices. Now, define yourself.

Yolande House’s essays have appeared in The Rumpus, Grain, Joyland, and PRISM international. Currently, she’s living in Toronto, Canada and completing a childhood memoir.



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Finding My Lifeline

By Jeanne Bjorn

After living most of my adult life, bouncing back and forth between lesbian and heteronormative—at great internal and emotional cost—I came out as bisexual. It was during the isolationist period of COVID. Most of my lesbian friends accepted me—but only if I never, ever discussed it. (I’m still not sure how that works.)

I found myself becoming more and more isolated during this time. I also started educating myself about bi erasure and biphobia and I realized that as a lesbian I had participated in this practice.

I ordered the book, *Bi Any Other Name*, from my local women’s bookstore because they did not stock it. In fact, they didn’t have one book in the LGBT+ section that was dedicated to bisexuality. When I went to pick up the book, there was an employee (a young woman) reading it. She whispered to me that she had been secretly reading it.

The more I read, the angrier I became. I finally went online and searched “Bisexual Support Groups.” I found there was a whole world of support out there that began for me with Robyn Ochs and the Boston Bisexual Women’s Network’s monthly digital brunch. I found many other groups across the country, in San Francisco, Portland, New York, Chicago, and Washington D.C. Some were exclusively for women, where we can discuss those specific issues, and some were mixed, where I am fortunate to hear from men and how they experience being bi, as well as how they are impacted by erasure and phobia.

The growth of online meetings and support spaces—something rarely available before the COVID years—has made it possible for me to easily find like-minded folks who require no explanation or justification for my bi-ness. I can finally “breathe out.”

I so love bi+ folks! We are an eclectic collection of people who don’t tend to fall into conventional boxes. We don’t fit into heteronormative culture. We don’t fit into lesbian culture. We don’t fit into gay male culture. Yet, we tend to seize this as an opportunity for growth. Instead of having an “either/or” mentality, we try to see all points of view.

It’s been three years since I came out to myself as bisexual, and I still attend many bi+ support groups online and make new friends all over the world. These folks have been and continue to be my lifeline. They help me to be able to stand on my own, solidly, as a content bi person.

Jeanne Bjorn is an artisan/instructor, natural health practitioner, and author.



Find out about the monthly digital brunches at BiWomenBoston.org.

The Green Couch

By Sydney Glide



The bi+ community had major mainstream visibility in one of the weirdest internet memes: the couch. Now, this isn't to be confused with the Ikea couch, a.k.a. the other bi couch. Wow, the internet has truly been obsessed with talking about bi folks and couches. No, I am talking about the green couch meme.

If you're unfamiliar, [celebs](#) and regular folks alike took to TikTok and Instagram to seemingly come out as bisexual by showing off their green, sometimes velvet, couch. This was prompted by a TikTok from the account @nourishedwithtish that posed the question "If you identify as bisexual... do you have a green velvet couch?" We love observational humor and a good icebreaker, too!

Admittedly, my cynicism about the internet took hold of me, especially when a meme that is all fun and games turned into what I can only assume is another moment of rainbow capitalism. Soon I saw [articles galore](#) flooding my feed about which green couch is best for your home. The *Harper's Bazaar*

article "The 27 Best Luxury Couches to Elevate Your Home," written by Tatjana Freund states, "Green velvet couches went viral on TikTok this year, so it's no surprise that they're now coveted pieces." This description conveniently does not credit the community who made them famous, all the while winking at those who *get it*. I guess I know what the "green" in green couch stands for: \$\$\$\$. Is this just *Big Furniture's* attempts to sell more green couches to a targeted audience? There was finally visibility, but of course as consumers. America.

Can we ever have something without a price tag? For a community whose validity is questioned and labels limited, society found a way to reduce bi+ folks once more. Everyone is simply here to buy stuff, especially on the internet where media and commerce are so inextricably linked. As a group often plagued by the question "Am I enough?", these shopping guides tell you that you are bi+ enough—upon purchase, of course. We all know there isn't one way "to be" but sometimes those thoughts creep in and are perpetuated by institutions we interact with daily.

As I imagine a world free of bi erasure, prejudice, and injustices, I think to myself how much laughter a meme like this would bring me: rich models with their high-end green couches, middle-class folks with their department store sofas, and everyone in between sharing pictures. I could envision a *Notes on Camp Pt. 2* where bicon Susan Sontag exclaims, "Bisexuals on green velvet couches, now that's camp!" and feel a smile curl up on my face.

Sydney Glide (she/her) works in the entertainment industry in Los Angeles and moonlights as an indie comic book writer. She loves cooking, watching sports, and buying new hats.



Bisexual Harry

By Lan

2020. The year I started my transition, not knowing it would be with a broken heart.

The pandemic, police brutality, and Potter grief hit like a triple punch. I felt isolated in my crisis as a trans Harry Potter fan because J.K. Rowling's transphobic screeds were nothing compared to the enormity of the year's events.

I found my medicine online: opinion pieces, podcast episodes, video essays, blog posts, boycotts, fundraisers, and fanworks of all types. There were so many resources and ways to take back our power, so I began to heal through queer fandom.

But my life changed for good when I first listened to wizard rock.

Wizard rock is music inspired by Harry Potter, an indie tradition started in the early 2000s by bands such as Harry and the Potters, Draco and the Malfoys, and The Whomping Willows. It has grown to encompass hundreds of bands internationally.

In 2020, the wizard rock community organized a compilation album called *Transfiguration: A Wrock Comp for Trans Rights* to raise money for Camp Lilac and the Black Trans Advocacy Coalition. I listened in awe to the 16 defiant, relatable, deeply moving tracks that expanded what it meant to do fandom, especially now. I needed to hear more.

I dove into the world of wizard rock, finding a huge selection of music with a rich history and explosive DIY creativity, as well as dozens of artists who are still active. Songs span from hilarious to incredibly emotional, to weird as heck. No matter the genre or production value, as long as it's magical, it's wizard rock.

That night, I wrote my first song. I got right to work on making my own wizard rock project: Bisexual Harry. (Harry James Potter is a bisexual disaster—something we have in common.)

The community loves new voices, and it welcomed me enthusiastically. I've since released a full-length album about Harry's bisexual exploits called *Yer Bisexual Harry* and collaborated on several tracks and compilations. Now I have an entire community of online friends who help me make liberatory music, express my authentic self, and speak truth to power.

From the beginning, the unapologetic anti-authoritarian themes set a community ethos of fierce inclusion, profound love, and good trouble. Original wizard rockers were instrumental in founding Fandom Forward, the nonprofit leader in fan activism.

Nowadays, wizard rock continues to be more than a collective of fan artists, and deeper than a shared love for the same music—it's a grassroots mutual aid movement. Wizard rockers pool resources to jam, crowdfund money for healthcare needs, and support minority artists through programs like Yes All Witches.

Together, wizard rockers amplify important queer counternarratives and build people power. We reclaim Potter

energy for something good.

Through wizard rock, I was able to find my place and transform the depression and anxiety of 2020 into a real confidence and love for life, making these past few years the most magical (and bisexual!) yet.

Listen to Bisexual Harry on Bandcamp, YouTube, Spotify, and all music streaming platforms.

Lan is a founding member of Bisexual Harry, a Milwaukee-based wizard rock collective for trans liberation and Azkaban abolition. They work at the ACLU, coach running, read too much Drarry fanfiction, and volunteer with Wizrocklopedia and Fandom Forward.



screen time for two

By Sarah Patterson

it all comes down to a comment
below, i'll be lower still
who am i if not split in two?
subscription to someone else's life
somehow both are me
somehow both are you

i am a follower, not an interaction
link to every want, a never need
jia tolentino where are you?
was presence made for multitudes
what gives, what takes my share
when the internet is so imbued

this ad says it was made for me
how does siri know I like girls
how does she know
they don't follow me through
we're all false lashes
on eyes of every man's view

i'll scroll to my demise
down in crowd commentary
two shreds of self, but who
is saying what's true, not new
algorithms need to be fed
reflections of my hue

screens can't protect me
from all this self-hell
signal me something true
mirror me this dysmorphia
save me from having to be
myself, my own, my you

Sarah Patterson is originally from New Mexico. She currently resides in California and studies foreign languages. She is the author of What Color Am I?, a small collection of poems,

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What Has the Internet Ever Done for Me!

By Riley Quinn

Here's how the conversation in my head goes:

Me: Oh God, the internet, as a subject!

I'm fifty something (53). I remember an entire life without the bloody internet.

Also, Me: And, how good was that?

Me: Well, it was simpler. Life wasn't influenced (except by glossy magazines and TV), it was definitely zero scrolling, it was more settled (or so it seemed), a day was a day, and it wasn't turned on 24/7/365, it was healthy (define healthy again?), it was quiet (I had to save up for records and tapes and music and a record player and a tape player and a discman... it was very quiet).

Also, Me: It was a bit scary though, it was also a bit lonely. It was a lot of being just on my own...

Me: But it was also much safer (or so it seemed), more imagination, more time (yep, the time I waste now), more unknown adventure, more in person, more committed (ugh, why did I say yes to going out...), more... you know, real (in my case, that is debatable).

Also, Me: It was also more doubt fairy, more confusion, more self-destruction, more self-loathing, more pretending to be okay, more fitting in, more catastrophizing, more sacrifice, shittier ill-informed decisions. More alone.

Me: Has the internet, really, stopped all that awful stuff for me? ... (deep breath in), Yep, well, a lot of it, plus so much work on yourself.

Pause

Me: OK, we'll write about the internet.

And here we are, writing about the internet, as a 53-year-old, non-binary, pansexual, silver-haired, educated, informed and supported by an amazing community and beautiful friends like me, human. I now have language that helps me to articulate how I feel and think about myself and who I am. I now know that I have people like me out there in the world, in my workplace, in my national community, in my local community, in my friend circles.

I know that I am not alone. I know that not only is my difference mine and it's a beautiful part of me, I'm also proud of my difference (well, most of the time). I know that I can speak with and listen to kind-hearted, compassionate, complex, and incredible humans like me and have us all be comfortable in each other's company. I can tell my stories. I can be involved with my community and be a leader and speaker—and this is all because of the internet.

The internet has many sides and many faces. It is a place of wonder—mind-opening, eye-opening, and life-opening essential human experiences. All at my fingertips, to find out about and decide to do something with—to aim for, to explore, should I want to. It is a place to find out more. It is also a place to find support, friends, lovers, good information, education, connection, confidence, and access. Maybe if I had had the internet sooner, I might have found all my Beautiful Humans earlier. Those Beautiful Humans have saved my life on more than one occasion.

It's not Everything though. Not saying it isn't an important tool. But it is a tool.

As with all of life, balance is important. (Yes, it has taken 50-odd years to figure this one out.) As a teeny tiny little thing growing up in the 1970s in the far west of Queensland, Australia, I could have used some of the information about being different that I now know, and the connections I have made to not feel so on my bloody own. But hey, it was the 1970s. In Queensland. In the outback and, did I mention, it was the 1970s.

How could life have been different if the internet had exploded in an earlier decade? Such a speculative question. God, it could be anything. It could be worse. Because we all know that as optimistic as the early internet was, humans unfortunately are humans and although the internet does so much good, it also has the potential to do so much harm. Use it wisely and build balance with people who are supportive of you.

In reality, I don't think the internet in the 1970s would have done me much good. It came along at the time that it did and at the time in my life when I was ready for it. I mean, I am exactly who I am, who I am meant to be, even with all the trauma, pain, joy, and adventures. Everything. I wouldn't be me if the internet had been available in the 1970s.

Trust me, even as an informed, educated "Adult," the internet has led me down paths that I look back on now and think, oorf, I'm really glad that time and that behavior has worked itself out of my system. Online "Dating" ... I have had a life, that's for sure—I'll not say more.

Here we are at the end of a tough year and I'm writing about the internet. As a pansexual non-binary person, even as old as I am, the internet has been a pretty damned good invention. My close circle of loved ones, friends, and chosen family are all in my life because I looked up "Bisexual support groups" on the internet over five years ago.

I discovered the language I needed to be confident to be me—100% me—non-binary at 49—words to dissolve the seesaw in my brain about not being/feeling like the assigned female at birth that I had spent my life fighting and trying to control.

Tomboy was the closest word I had and that wasn't working at 49. Butch (well sometimes, but not all the time). I discovered my voice. I found out that my rage over injustice and discrimination has a place.

I discovered I could write. I have always written, but like, I could really write and be published and articulate not only my stories but also write for those without a platform, for others in our community.

I discovered my activism. I am part of networks and organizations that are there for our community.

I discovered my advocacy and my desire to work with so many people speaking up for themselves and for others.

I discovered the calm in knowing what I know now. The calm in being with people who are like me. The calm of care from those people as I travel the remainder of my life with the grief that I have.

I discovered the care I have for our community and their struggles, their heartaches, their humanity, and their joy. We are all just human beings traveling through the years, trying so hard to be the best of ourselves.

I discovered the joy of our community all over the world. Hello, Robyn. Hello, Peg. Hello, Elisabeth. Hello, Stephen. Hello, Misha. Hello, Ripley!

What has the internet ever done for me...

A beautiful and magnificent bloody lot!

P.S.—

Remember: it's just a tool, use it well and wisely; use it to find those who care about you and support you; use it to find your community. Oh, and use it to find amazing music, and art, and adventures, and your Beautiful Humans!



Riley Quinn lives in a quiet village in New South Wales, in a comfy house with a great view and five rescued kit cats. Riley is 53, pansexual, non-binary, tattooed and wanting more tattoos, and living with DID. They are a writer, painter, speaker of lived experience stories, the Vice President of the Sydney Bi+ Network and founder of BOLDER, a community for Bi+, Pan, Omni, Poly, MGA, and Queer humans who are 40+ all over the world.

Reading Suggestions from the BBWN Book Swap Brunch

Compiled by Ellyn Ruthstrom

Each year at the Boston Bisexual Women's Network's Book Swap, we go around the circle, and everyone mentions at least one book they have read and would recommend to others. Here is the list that was compiled at the recent book swap brunch on October 22. We hope it gives you some good ideas!

Fiction

The Hero of This Book: A Novel, by Elizabeth McCracken
The Glass Castle, by Jeannette Walls
A Lot of People Live in This House, by Bailey Merlin
Small World, by Laura Zigman
Women Don't Owe You Pretty, by Florence Given
Crying in H Mart: A Memoir, by Michelle Zauner
The Book of Lost Names, by Kristin Harmel
The Little Paris Bookshop, by Nina George
A Discovery of Witches, by Deborah Harkness
Above Ground, by Clint Smith
There There, by Tommy Orange

Memoir

You Could Make This Place Beautiful: A Memoir, by Maggie Smith
Fly Girl: A Memoir, by Ann Hood

Nonfiction

Ace: What Asexuality Reveals About Desire, Society, and the Meaning of Sex, by Angela Chen
1491: New Revelations of the Americas Before Columbus, by Charles C. Mann
Dawnland Voices: An Anthology of Indigenous Writing from New England, by Siobhan Senior
Project 562: Changing the Way We See Native America, by Matika Wilbur



In September, Ellyn & Steph hosted our annual backyard bi+ women's bookswap brunch.

Role models (online)

By Lejla Delalić

My entire personality and existence are carefully crafted pieces of every person I've met, learned from, watched on TV, followed on the internet, or listened to on the radio.

You know how when you watch a new movie in the cinema, you exit the theater and the personality of the main character is etched in your memory and bone marrow for the next two days or—if the film is really good—for life?

In the same way, every person, feeling, and event that impresses me at a certain moment of our shared journey is etched into my core, and very often these are women on the internet.

The strong and intelligent women with whom I work online have taught me respect, honor, and almost everything I know today in certain aspects of my life. I see them as mothers and aunts. They are my biggest role models in fighting for their and other people's rights.

Friends are my role models in the love I provide and spread. Because of them, I've learned that I should allow others to love me, and that love is not a one-way street, with many improperly parked cars blocking the way.

My queer and bi friends have left our country to find a better life. Now, they are also my online refuge.

The fictional greatest role model in the galaxy, who in my head is bi+, is Princess and General Leia. A badass.

Lejla is a 24-year-old bisexual woman from Bosnia and Herzegovina, who is building her career in genetics and biological sciences. She's ardently fighting for LGBTI+ and women's rights in her homeland.



Digital awakening

By Bojana

In the shelter of the web's embrace,
A realm both vast, both virtual and base,
I wandered, lost, in forums, chats, and sites,
Seeking self amidst the countless bytes.

In the glow of screens, both young and old,
A question loomed, a story yet untold.
Was my affection for dear Una true?
Was it friendship, or a love anew?

The world wide web, it held the key,
Reflections of countless souls like me.
Blogs and posts, stories raw and real,
Gave voice to feelings I'd long concealed.

In the daycare of our past, so far and gone,
Society's rules, they played us like a pawn.
Pink for girls, blue for boys stage,
Yet, why can't trucks and dolls engage?

Even then, a spark inside me grew,
Against the norms, a voice that knew.
Una's laugh, our shared snowball fights,
Challenged the roles and set things right.

But the net gave us a world to see,
Beyond our small town's decree.
Together we'd surf, and stories we'd find,
Of love that doesn't confine.

For in this digital world so vast,
We found our answers at long last.
No longer adrift, no longer alone,
our truths are finally shown.

Bojana, born in the heart of Bosnia and Herzegovina, finds her joy in the world of arts and crafts of all sorts. Mostly she crafts things to turn her living space into a cozy, personalized haven where she can write and be free.

scroll

By Kelsie Taylor

another day. i scroll on instagram.
a girl tells me of cops and mental health,
while underneath, the default pfp
calls her “attention whore.” i woke at 4

pm. i scroll some more. a boy wearing
“girl’s clothes” (i checked the bio for he/him)
gave two people a brand-new ipad air.
a user said they wished to gun him down,

for he had bought it with bikini pics.
i like the swimsuit. it reminds me of
the one i bought myself. a comment says
to stay away from kids. i scroll some more.

i find a streetside interview that asks
for people’s unpopular truths. one guy
hates bars. another hates new songs.
the last one hates “woke” people and would fight

a “bio” man if he saw that she went
into the women’s bathroom. i had to go,
myself. i left the phone behind. but far
within my mind, i scrolled the comments still.

Kelsie Taylor is a queer, trans woman who grew up in Texas, New Mexico, and California. She is interested in using formal poetic structure to better express and understand the difficult experience of being queer in the modern world.



Kierra Johnson, [Bi+] Executive Director of the National LGBTQ Task Force, at the March on Washington on August 26, 2023

Family, I am so thrilled to be here today. My name is Kierra Johnson. I am a daughter of the South, a mother, and the first Black, pansexual, woman to lead the National LGBTQ Task Force. It is an honor to celebrate the MOW’s 60th and the Task



Force’s 50th anniversaries in the same spot Audre Lorde spoke from in 1983. The March Bayard Rustin helped organize in 1963.

This opportunity is more than a dream realized for me; I AM—WE ALL are the product of our ancestors’ wildest dreams.

Our lives are literally under attack. Our trans, gender queer and non-binary children are being targeted. Religion has been weaponized to deny care and rights to our loved ones. The erosion of voting rights, the dehumanization of immigrants, the policing of black and brown bodies, and attempts to erase the contributions of our people.

Yet here we are.

We are manifesting the solidarity that is the cornerstone of progress. Of Liberation. The causes we are marching for will impact generations. This is our country. This is our democracy. We have the power to demand what we want.

- We deserve a community that affirms, values, and celebrates Black Trans women instead of one that seeks to eradicate them.
- We deserve a government that values human rights while uplifting the marginalized and forgotten, regardless of immigration status.
- We deserve a community that invests in the health and wellbeing of its people and welcomes a society of learning and love.
- All people deserve bodily autonomy and liberation that extends across party lines, religions, and the federal and state agencies that our tax dollars fund.
- We deserve Congressional leaders that will pass essential lifesaving and affirming legislation like the Each Act, the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act, the John Lewis Voting Rights Act, the Renewing Immigration Provisions Act, and the Equality Act.

Let us move forward with determination and hope as we honor the legacy of those who paved the way for us. Let’s continue to build bridges of solidarity by reaching out to those who love us but may not understand the importance of our cause.

As I look out, I see an unstoppable force capable of dismantling the barriers that hinder our collective progress... a multigenerational, multi-racial and cultural movement cemented in the pursuit of equity, liberation, and justice. For all. Together, there is nothing we can’t do!

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Friends in Abstract Spaces

By Jeiselynn N. Rios Rivera

When I think about internet spheres and communities, I think back to when I was 11 years old, sharing a family desktop in the living room. It was a magical time, where I could chat with others online about the latest novel we were reading. We'd talk about the things we would do if we were characters in these fantastical worlds and, though I was an Egyptian mythology kid, I was talked into reading Percy Jackson and fell instantly for Annabeth.

During high school, the magic of the internet was at my fingertips. I had an iPhone, group chats with friends, and late-night calls with first loves. That's how I first stumbled upon the word *bisexual*. I remember it being a strange word to say, to even think about. And still, there was something about the concept, the mere shape of the letters that seemed to beckon more questions than answers. I had wonderful friends who helped me talk it through, and it did not take too long for me to own my bisexuality as a part of me that made me whole—that felt encompassing.

By the time my senior year in college rolled around, I felt unsettled knowing that even though it had been almost four years of pursuing a degree in sociology, I had yet to read anything on bisexuality. It didn't seem to make much sense; I had read about womanhood, transness, and homosexual attraction. Bisexuality was bound to be in the curriculum somewhere, right?

I had questions. So, when it came time to practice our skills as sociologists by writing a research proposal, I was clear on what my research topic was going to be. As I was born and raised in a primarily Christian environment, and a few times throughout my journey tried to “pray the gay away,” I wanted to know if others in my situation faced the same thing. How long did it take them to understand that being bisexual brought them closer to God? Did they ever?

Though my professor shared that he'd rather I ask about homosexuality, I endured and went for a deep dive into my literature review to finally—*finally*—learn more about bisexuality.

I remember coming up empty at my institution's library, skimming everything I could find with LGBT or Queer in the title, only to be disappointed when it proved to just be a focus on same-sex attracted people. I remember feeling defeated.

That, however, did not mean I was. I sat in front of my computer with a mission to find everything I could find on the internet relating to bisexual theory and the experiences of bisexual people. I searched for forums, magazines, online articles, anything that would expand on the lived and embodied experiences of bisexual people. After about a year and a half of diligent searching, I had compiled a decent digital archive of literature focused on bisexuality—with some general books on LGBT studies and

queer theory for good measure. Something in me felt satisfied, but not complete.

Few spaces were engaging in understanding the lived and embodied experiences of bisexual people. I had begun graduate school in the middle of the pandemic, and having these kinds of conversations became way harder than I anticipated. In-person connections and discussions were difficult to make happen, let alone sustain. Something needed to be done for my own research and for my own sanity.

In late 2020, I began a virtual bisexual book club. I shared the information as widely as I could with people at my university and all sorts of online forums and groups. I felt fear that nobody would resonate with my own experience. I felt fear that because I had not been able to find a space to connect and talk about bisexuality, I wouldn't be able to create it either. I feared I would be alone in my own journey of discovering, revealing, and connecting.

This wasn't the case. The bisexual book club began with around eight people, and dwindled down to five very persistent, very enthusiastic bisexual folks who wanted to learn more about their own bisexuality and understand how it framed their interactions and everyday experiences. Only two of us shared a time zone. I grew hopeful in our commitment to ourselves, our journeys and experiences as bisexual people attempting to experience the world in a way that made us feel complete and connected.

During and even “after” COVID-19, I would listen to the mourning of interpersonal connection and intimacy. While there were more conversations happening around accessibility, especially for those of us with “invisible” disabilities, I don't think we've collectively shown the respect and honor for virtual spaces as sites for connection, compassion, community, and liberation.

Just as bisexuality opens a conceptual “in-between” space, where connections and interactions happen based on mutually shared agreements, virtual spaces can present a site for connection and interaction that is less limited by geography and ability.

Had I needed to find a physical place to meet with others, and been forced to advertise my small book club only to university students, thus increasing my own exposure risk, I would not have had the enlightening conversations and reflections I shared with people from California, United Kingdom, New York, and beyond. Had I not been able to find these people or been pushed to learn about bisexuality on my own, I would not have created a digital archive full of bisexual literature, the study of which has led me to continue academic studies in bisexualities.

It is this abstraction of a space that has allowed genuine interaction to take place among those who wish and choose to share themselves and their time with others like them. Virtual spaces are an extension of ourselves and our willingness to be vulnerable with each other.

professional. The friends I have made “through a screen” represent a commitment that is intentional and actively pursued. The conferences I have participated in have, once again, affirmed to me that we are a legion of “professional bisexuals” who know in their bones that our experiences are queer, radical, and revolutionary.

I continue to be impressed by the impact of online social spaces as sites for connection, community, and growth. While the bisexual book club is no longer active, I’ve found a group of bisexual writers that use Discord as a space to provide support and encouragement. I’ve made friends with bisexuals who live far away and who have committed to speaking regularly about our bisexual projects and revelations. My dear childhood friend from back when I still shared a family desktop (and the first person in my life to come out as nonbinary) writes to me every year on my birthday, and we remind each other that friends are more than just the people you see in class (or work) every day.

Online conferences and world meetups have provided a wonderful space to share academic insight and the real-world applications that our bisexual queerness brings. True synergy is made possible when our commitment to showing up is facilitated, and geographic, physical, and economic barriers are removed. It is precisely in our showing up, commitment, warmth, and the transformative nature of our own bisexual spaces as they continue to thrive out of pure passion that I am actively reminded of the power found within virtual spaces and the relationships that grow out of them. We are a large, passionate, and interconnected team that spans the world—and we’re the better for it.

Jeiselynn (Lynn) N. Rios Rivera is a Women’s, Gender & Sexuality Studies graduate student at SUNY Albany, a 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 in plurisexualities, identity, and non-monogamy.



Lynn (left) with Robyn Ochs at SUNY Albany on International Pronouns Day

Creating A Buzz

By Jen Bonardi

Talk about a disaster! It was 2008. I was on the board of the Bisexual Resource Center (BRC) and our website was hacked. This was one of our best resources for bi+ folks, so we needed to get it back up immediately. Once we did, I started a bi+ advice column in the hopes that it would drive traffic to the site. And it did—in fact, the *Ask Tiggy* advice column eventually led to even more resources for the bi+ community.

Being hacked was a drag, but it ended up furthering our reach. Each new incarnation of the worldwide web—listservs, social media platforms, the MeetUp app—assembles a wider community of bi+ people and allows the BRC to serve them in a more direct and tailored fashion.

The COVID pandemic was an even bigger drag, but it did normalize meeting over Zoom. In many ways, this was advantageous for the BRC’s support groups and especially for its board meetings. When the board went nationwide, it could strategize around bi+ programming needs all over the U.S. However, it’s not simply reaching community members that matters; an organization needs the capacity to serve the people it reaches.

With that in mind, the BRC launched its Honeycomb volunteer corps this year. The Honeycomb infrastructure, which includes critical elements like Zoom and Discord, yielded more than 20 active volunteers in the first six months. BRC board members are now proposing projects they never even considered before, because they can now count on skilled, motivated assistance. Not least of the Honeycomb’s benefits is that it gives bi+ people across the country an outlet to give back. Teamwork makes the dream work and, for certain, the internet enables our team to work.

I wonder whether we could have come this far without the internet. I’m reminded of Martin Luther King Jr.’s right-hand man, Bayard Rustin, who organized The March on Washington where King delivered his historic “I Have a Dream” speech. Here’s the kicker: he did it with nothing but landline telephones.

Well, I’m bi...but I’m no Bayard. I need the communications superpowers that the internet provides. It allows us to jump the hurdles of time and space to connect with each other in organizing, in community, in friendship. What a time to be alive!

Jen Bonardi is the BRC’s Volunteer Manager. If you are in the United States and would like to join the Honeycomb, please apply here:

<http://bit.ly/JoinHoneycomb>.



What the internet told me about bisexual women

By Jessica Skultety

When I came out to myself, I began looking
For information
Because I only knew two other bi people
And I hadn't come out to them yet.

Private mode—I didn't want the
Algorithm to see what
Only I knew.
No one around.

"Leave your husband, and how to do it!"
(many like this),
Divorce lawyers,
Stories of marriages falling apart,
High statistics of domestic and sexual violence—
Some of the highest are for bi folks.
"I'm afraid my partner will leave me,"
A few queer elders discussing their regrets,
More divorce lawyers.

What if I hoped my marriage would stay intact?
What if I dreamed of a life where I could
Share my identity safely with the people who mattered
And maybe even the world one day
So another queer kid in my life wouldn't have to go through
What I did?
What if I was looking for joy,
Some confirmation that the life I love
Wouldn't burst into flames?

"I was an ally for years,"
"Try out the Kinsey scale!"
"How to have a polyamorous relationship,"
"How to tell your husband you want a threesome
With a woman,"
"How to come out to your kids,"
And the quizzes—"How bi are you? Are you
Actually a lesbian?"

If I had to write a piece, I'd write about
The feeling of knowing yourself, coming to terms
With the ridiculous culture
of compulsory heterosexuality and how that
Wasn't my fault. How I wish I'd figured myself
Out earlier and come
Out earlier but now that I know, I'm the happiest
I've been. How the assumptions about
Bi folks are unending, and they mean nothing because
We're all so gorgeously different.

I'd write about how lovely, luckily, my friends and family
Have been, the support and community
I've been able to find, the way I sob through every
Queer TV show more than ever
Because I see myself there, and the
Characters are finally there, too.

The way I walk up to my house, where
I'm feeling safer and
Proud enough to hang up a Pride flag,
The way I feel when I spot little rainbows
On my bookcase, swag from the parades,
The way my husband runs up to me and squeezes me, saying:
"Look! I found a bi!"

It's funny how much can happen in a year.
How much can change, how much I changed
How much my life changed—it was scary and awful
And anxious at times, but it doesn't change the reality that
I feel the most true to myself right now
On July 28, 2023 than I ever have, and
The internet had little to do with it.

Jess Skultety is a poet, crafter, and author working on a queer romantic fantasy series. She lives in northwestern NJ with her husband and cat-shadow-writing-buddy. @jessskultetyauthor



A Safe Web of Community

By Lara Zielinsky

I've been bisexual all my life. I only labeled myself bi, though, after connecting with other people on the World Wide Web. I'm older than the web, grew up in a rural area, and attended a rural college. When I finally got to a city, the web was ubiquitous enough that I found like-minded people online for all sorts of things. The first people I came out to were online. The bulletin boards and forums, email lists, and nascent websites for fanfiction became my community places.

It was only after this online beginning that I found a physical and local Gay and Lesbian Center. There were not a lot of bisexuals, but there were others who struggled with some of the same issues. The fact that I'd found people like me online led me to help the Gay & Lesbian Center's outreach to bisexuals. I figured there were more people like me, hiding behind screen names or straight-passing in their daily lives, who might be able to become more visible if they felt supported in real life.

For twenty years now, I have lived my authentic self, thanks to the confidence gained from my safe and welcoming start online. Now though, there's a conservative right-wing nut (not the orange one, but the one in our governor's mansion) threatening LGBTQ lives and livelihoods, criminalizing our rights to free assembly and free speech, and making real-life spaces unsafe.

My local community canceled several Pride events because they could not be assured by local police or governments that their list of activities wouldn't bring down the state on their heads.

Books about our experiences are being banned from public libraries and schools. School Gender & Sexuality Alliances (GSAs) are being disbanded, and teachers are told sponsoring one will lead to dismissal.

I'm also an author and participated in a promo encouraging signups to author newsletters. On social media, I wrote, "Due to book bans, signing up for an author's newsletter may soon be the only way some writers can reach you with their stories."

It's not a comfortable way to live, but at least online we can organize to get our rights back. With open carry laws being what they are now, showing up at a protest in some areas may literally mean someone shooting and killing us. We'll still do it, but like those who organized the Civil Rights movement, it's a reality we must prepare for.

The internet has been a safe place for sharing our experiences, circulating books, organizing protests, and so much more community-defining activity. While there are trolls, I find far more love than hate online. I have no doubt that the World Wide Web will serve as an underground railroad for helping those in the queer community (and those who are questioning) move to safer places and bring in those willing to help us fight for our rights.

Lara Zielinsky lives in Orlando, Florida.

Discovery and Communion on the Internet

By Lisa Quark

When I began using the internet, I did not know there was a bisexual community. I lived in a small town, where I knew of no other bisexuals, except for those I read about who had died before I was born, for example, Anne Frank and Virginia Woolf. But with the internet I found my siblingren (a gender-inclusive term I created as a gender-inclusive alternative to brethren). Not only did I find them, but I was able to share in their knowledge. Before meeting my bisexual friend Cindy, I never even knew there was a bisexual flag!

The internet helped me discover so many things about my bisexual heritage. For the first time I was able to celebrate Bisexual Pride Day. But the people on the internet were the real treasure. They were able to encourage me in my coming out and sympathize with me when coming out to my parents didn't go quite as well as I'd hoped. (My parents are cool now, don't worry.) They were able to point me to dating websites

that accepted bisexual people. Some of them became my close friends—and all of them helped me navigate my bisexual life.

Even without the internet, I would probably have met some bisexual people in my "real," away-from-keyboard life. Which, eventually, I did. But I couldn't meet them when I was still living in my small town. And I could never have met those who lived far away, across the globe. For making the bisexual community truly global and within reach of even the most unaccepting and provincial areas, I—and we all—have the internet to thank.

Lisa Quark is an autistic bisexual woman living in the eastern U.S.

My Bi Origins Have a URL

By Maedbh Pierce

All major points of my selfhood lead back to a URL that sparked the journey. The first time I had sex? The internet. Kink? The internet. ED [eating disorder] content? The internet. Love? The internet. Heartbreak? The internet. And so, my bisexuality, too, even when I failed to know how I should name it, found hearth in the digital.

In the covertness of the internet, a place where concealment was a ready commodity, there was solace. And, as I became further dissonant and dissociative of the falsity of my day-to-day, I initiated a pattern that I would continue when feeling dissatisfied with the immediate—the gestation of a secret dream, one for which the internet has been a willing host, one in which I simulated who I might one day have the autonomy and concomitant chutzpah to be.

Although I recognized early on that my desire diverged, Wattpad was the first place I attempted to articulate and accept this. Considering this (and being 14), my cognitive capabilities to critically represent the complicatedness of coming to address festering stigma and self-denial left me desirerate. Embedded within my characters were heteronomous stigmas I misconceived as autogenous—that I was hypersexual, capricious, and needed a man—that secretly, I was either straight or gay, and that there was no way I could calmly exist donning this cloak of multidirectional desires. On this website, marketed as the enabling connector of a globe-spanning writing- and reading-community, my 14-year-old baby-bi self discovered an anchor where my particular skill set, the capacity to write and love those of all/null genders, constituted a significant quotient of the going social currency. And so, I released myself to this strange technocracy, where the digital mimicked the real in a more—to my taste—satisfactory manner.

To my—albeit non-exhaustive cognizance—the vessels through which my bisexual dreams might digitally actualize were interminable, each cybernetic pitstop providing its personalized brand of refuge. Tumblr was for the kids who had mastered aesthetics and for the queer kids for whom navigating an algorithm was an unconscious—or perhaps cognizant—gift. Though a casual feature of a renaissance of Big Tobacco marketing and ED content, it gave me Shannon and Cammie (though I favored YouTube's Lucy and Meghan.) Vine was for those who were funny or theatrically gifted, and I never watched through the immediate medium but via coalescing vessels Facebook or Instagram. And while Instagram is the only one that remains in my radius today, in those years, my Instagram feed, not then so algorithmically attuned or fixation-curated, was merely a linear representation of how much less

cool I was than my peers and Facebook, a legacy which then and now poses the existential inquiry: Were any of us truly unwelcome? Or were some (present writer included) merely more willing to wallflower than others?

The internet has remained a place of particular importance throughout my life. With age, the forums I utilized transitioned, from AMINO and Chatroulette to, eventually, dating apps and apps promoting friendship and bridging the space between the digital and the real. Going back further, the places in which I had been my most authentic self had always been cyber. I had perused Stardoll, Monster Island, Club Penguin, Monster High, Nintendo Chat, and IMing—all in the hopes of finding a space I wholly belonged, but also recognizing that part of the draw was that it would always be liminal, I would always be free to leave—it wouldn't be sensible not to.

Wattpad was abandoned as the rest were, and though there is a record of everything we do on the internet—if we have the means to find it—the only difference is the physical, accessible history, and the stable URL. Any work team I have been a part of has been digital—cutting out the small talk I do not know how to satisfactorily make, or the work friendships I can't quite determine the haptics of. It is hard to determine, if I would have been different, had escape not been available—if this is really a case of radical autonomy or if my avoidant personality has been on a wild trip I will eventually disembark.

I do know, however, that when nobody else can aid me, the internet and I are ready, albeit enabling, accomplices. And, as I move into writing an MA thesis exploring some of these themes, I consider my time on Wattpad, of those before me whose worlds were so much more compressed, of digitalization, globalization, localization, and all the arguments for, against and through. But really, critical as I might be, as a woman and a queer born somewhere safe yet distant to everything I am, I think, thank god for the internet.

Currently studying an MA in Journalism, Media, and Globalization, Maedbh Pierce (she/her) is an English and Philosophy graduate (UCD, Dublin) and freelance writer. Her writing explores and celebrates queer identity, life, and culture and has been featured in Unicorn Magazine, Shameless Magazine, Coven Berlin, and The Single Supplement. Find her on Instagram (maedhbblouise) or on LinkedIn (maedbh-pierce).



Finding Bi+ Identity Through Memes

By Kelsey Goeres

Memes make us feel like we're a part of something. They say: I am for all who understand me. For the bi+ community, they mean a lot.

A meme is “an element of a culture or system of behavior passed from one individual to another by imitation or other nongenetic means,” as defined by *Webster's Dictionary*. Online, we know memes to be funny little images, videos, or text that sum up a cultural moment or experience. Bi memes speak specifically to the bi+ experience.

[One meme](#) from the account [sagalgbtsupport](#) shows a photo of a pair of jeans that read “RELAXED STRAIGHT” on the inner hem. “These jeans and I could not have less in common,” is written below in a white text box. Under the text, an edited version of the original photo shows the inside hem to read “STRESSED BISEXUAL.” “Now these are the pants for me. :D” is written underneath. Feeling stressed is a universal experience, but it's part of the bi+ identity. A [2017 review of 52 studies](#) found that bisexual people had higher rates of depression and anxiety than heterosexual people, and higher or equivalent rates to people who identified as gay. No one *wants* “perpetual stress” attached to their identity. But if it is, statistically, laughing about it and commiserating with other bisexuals online can make it more bearable.

Another point of identity for bisexual individuals is our fashion. Flannel button-downs, cuffed jeans, and, of course, tucked-in shirts are considered staples. In [this meme](#) from an account called [lgbt got your back](#), a tweet from [karen from finance](#) reads: “months ago i saw a tweet that said ‘bi people take so long in the bathroom because they're tucking their shirts back in’ and i think about it every single fucking time im in the bathroom tucking my shirt back in.” The comments contain several sentiments of: “So we all are just the same person?”

Bi-specific memes are also appealing because of their exclusivity. Non-bisexual people do not relate, or at least, not as well. An element of exclusivity builds community.

From the same account, [another meme](#) shows a picture of Fred from “Scooby-Doo” revealing the identity of a bad guy the gang caught. The cover over the tied-up person's face has text on top of it that reads: “BISEXUAL.” Fred says, “Alright Bisexual, let's see who your real identity is.” In the next picture, the text box over the now-exposed bad guy's face reads “Still Bisexual but now annoyed.” Bi+ individuals are accustomed to having our identities questioned. We're faking that we're gay. Or we're faking that we're straight. We're assured our spectrum of romantic feelings are just a phase. We are constantly having our imaginary masks pulled off.

In a culture that thrives on putting people into boxes, bi+ folks are often met with confusion and frustration. Our attractions



are vast and varied—there is not a one-size-fits-all experience of being bisexual. For these reasons, community is imperative. And for many bi+ individuals, online community is all that's available.

According to [Pew Research](#), 7% of Americans identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual. Of all LGBTQ+ folks, 58.2% identify as bi. That's a significant bisexual presence! But while bi+ individuals may feel as though they're in good company in LGBTQ+ spaces, it's not unusual for us to feel alone in our everyday lives. According to a [2019 Pew Research Center analysis](#), only 19% of people who identify as bisexual are out to their close friends and family, whereas 75% of gay and lesbian adults are out in their close circles. One possible reason for this may be that 82% of bisexual individuals are married to or living with a partner who is of a different gender. We are in a time when simply identifying as anything other than heterosexual is divisive—it's no wonder so many people opt out of those potentially uncomfortable or even, in certain cases, dangerous conversations. But online, where we can set our profiles to private, and where older conservative technology-challenged family members may not thrive, we can pass our memes back and forth and be free.

At the end of the day, we just want to feel like we're not alone. The internet, with all its infinite horrors and oddities, can at least provide us that.

Kelsey Goeres is a journalist, essayist, and poet based in California's Bay Area.



Afterlife

By Jess Whetsel

I did not learn your name
until I was a teenager. It was
an accident, a slip of another
relative's tongue, something
I wasn't supposed to hear—
or at least not from their lips:
my secret grandfather,
the villain of the family story.

The rest came later, in pieces.
You left because you fell in love
with a man after three children
with your wife. You left because
you could no longer pretend
you were the man you claimed to be.
But I am the author of the family
and I am rewriting this story.
You left because you had
the audacity to choose yourself.

I doubt my father meant to
keep his queer daughter
from her only living queer kin,
but that is what he did. And now
you are dead, your ashes interred
in a scenic cemetery states away
from this hole in my heart and
the corn fields and country roads
you left behind. But that is not all you left.

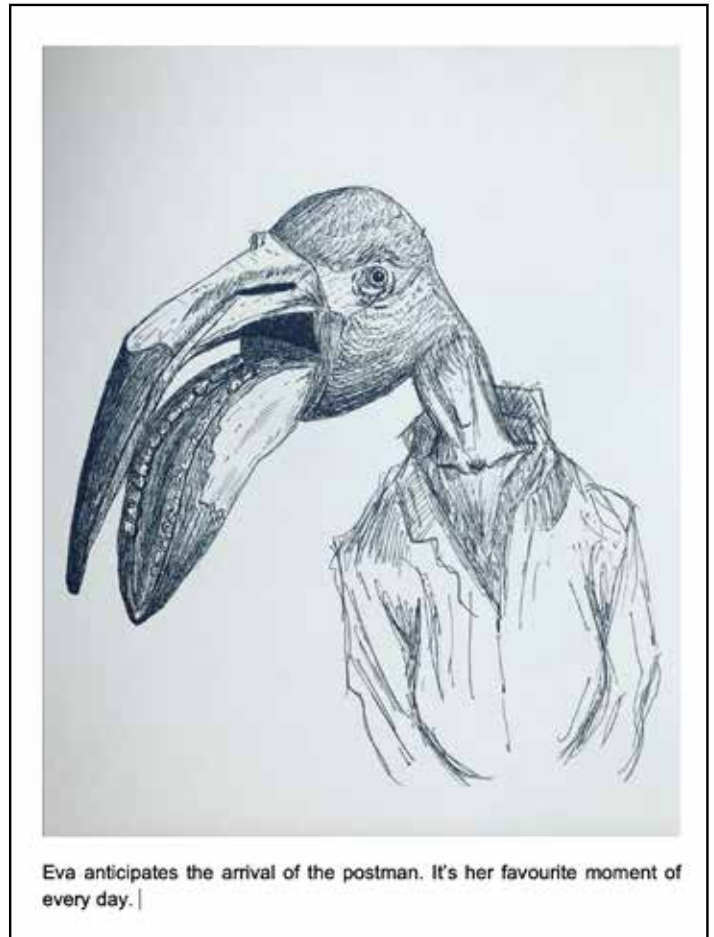
When I miss you the most, I look
in the mirror. Here is your Mona Lisa
smile on my mouth, your blunt-tipped
nose on my face. I place my hand on
my heart and feel the swagger of your
footsteps. I reach out, skin on silver,
to stroke the arch of your cheekbone.
No one can take you from me.
You are still here because I am
still breathing, and I promise
you will not be erased.

*Jess Whetsel is a poet, writer, editor,
and public speaker based in Toledo,
Ohio on Erie, Kickapoo, Seneca,
and Odawa land. Find her at
www.jesswhetsel.com, on Instagram
[@jesswhetselwrites](https://www.instagram.com/jesswhetselwrites).*



Eva

By Alice Wilson



Artist's statement: My work looks at “ugliness” and how it is elided with scariness. I am interested in how beauty is weaponized against women, to trap and distract us. I draw ugly, scary monsters and then write sweet little vignettes to accompany them. For example, I draw the creature called Pamela who has just enjoyed watching a *Cash in the Attic* omnibus. Or the toothless monster called Heather, who is thrilled because she has just learned how to purl stitch.

Through inviting a reconsideration of the attributes that we subconsciously assign to the ugly, I hope to bring a sense of warmth and connection to ugliness in ourselves and each other. My aim is that this can slightly loosen the chokehold of the cult of beauty.

Alice Wilson is completing her PhD in York, U.K., on women who build tiny houses. Her illustrations were selected for a feature in Gaze Magazine in 2021 and were featured on the cover of WrongDoing Magazine in 2022.

Love & Death on the Internet

By Jane Barnes

Oh, that first love note sent in 1988 on AOL! The thrill of the whirling connection on that gigantic beige Apple computer, before iPhones, texting (and blocking) when words (especially to a writer—this writer) were practically proof of love, attention, bagging the game, or not. You don't have to be well-groomed, dressed in cumbersome "street clothes" to woo or be wooed. Hired or fired. Dated or dissed. Then as now, tears can be rolling down your face, but your tone is cheerful, tasteful—even falsely optimistic.

Nowadays, you can go on Skype or Zoom and make 100 friends. Some actually call and they mean much—in the face of old age (nearing 80, with walker), dishevelment; or otherwise, in perfidy and blatant lying. The epidemic taught us this. No need to sneeze on any *real* faces. Rescue some, it did. Expose the bad. Speaking of the bad, who, reading this—raise your hand—has not stalked an ex online, or checked who's following you, seen that X never answered you back, or seen that old wedding photo taken *before* you came out as bi? Businesses know what I like and tell me, Remember that blue card you glanced at for a second? Even well-meaning friends say "Wow. For an—er—elder, you sure know your shit."

Groceries, lists of bi books, submitting bi poems, bi flirtations, bi snubs—I do it all online. Social insecurities, direct deposits, food counting apps—all on that oblong thing (iPhone) above my shoulders where my head used to be, where nimble feet without a GPS used to walk.

I've been scammed by late-night impulse purchases, in love (yeah, *sure*) with strangers (possibly lodging in Fort Worth or Bangladesh)—and done chair yoga to YouTube, and come upon my brother who, with reason, blocks me because I really did boss him as a kid.

Bulletin: struggling with online virtual therapist, dress came in the wrong size, or, conversely, enjoying a nice text life with a sister 3,500 miles away. And the kicker? I worked 60 years ago at that tech giant, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, on the U.S. Army's ARPA Network, which eventually became the You-Know-What.

Way back in Cambridge, MA in 1968 at 25, I sent to "our" 48 Multics programmers (male, in cargo shorts and hand-made leather sandals) a missive. And sent one also to the two women savants, one in sensible slacks and the other in a minidress. We would call that missive an *email*. I wrote it in rhyming PL/1, as a concrete poem (poem in a shape, in this case, a valentine), and blasted it off from a noisy beige teletype the size of an upright piano.

Then Viet Nam stopped. Hippies stopped. Feminists started. McCarthy lost. (I'm dating myself.). Laptops started. Most of

us now—clasping our cell phones, etc., in 2023—have been responsible for our love and hate relationships with the internet.

Jane Barnes has published work in BWQ for over 12 years, and has poems in Gay & Lesbian Quarterly, Ploughshares, The River Styx, The Mass. Review, Epiphanies, and Wrongdoing. Her work appears in the anthologies Bi Any Other Name and Getting Bi. She taught English at NYU and Medgar Evers College in NYC where she lives and is writing a novel with a bisexual heroine.



Café with mirrors

By Sue Vickerman

In the back corner by the old iron radiator
we discuss which we'd go for
of the two women at the next table gazing into each other,
one in a sculpted hat, one in a tightly-belted mac.

When I reach up to prink at your lovely felt petals
her astonishing florette turns its eye on me.

When you lean over to lick milk-froth from my upper lip
a flick-knife movement in the corner of my vision
is a pink stamen, a quick snaking-out, a side-view of a mouth's
aperture pronged-at then entered into.

I bite, seeing you looking right past me
at the glint of a buckle, a killer heel.



Sue Vickerman is a writer and literary translator working in the north of England where she edits for indie literary press Naked Eye Publishing. She is happily in an interesting throuple with M (a man) and J (a woman).

Making Space for Bi+ Identities: Exploration of Genders, Identities, and Relationships, by Rosie Nelson

Reviewed by Michelle Davies

In a world that is gradually progressing toward greater acceptance of LGBTQ+ identities, it's vital to recognize the diversity within the community itself. Rosie Nelson's book, *Making Space for Bi+ Identities: Explorations of Genders, Identities, and Relationships*, takes a significant step toward achieving this by providing a comprehensive exploration of bi+ individuals and their experiences. It is a valuable addition to the growing body of literature that seeks to deconstruct stereotypes and misconceptions about bisexuality and related identities.

Nelson's work does not just appeal to academics or those within the LGBTQ+ community. It offers something for everyone, whether you identify as bi+ or are an ally seeking to better understand the challenges faced by your bi+ friends, family members, or colleagues. As someone who has navigated the path of living as a bisexual/pansexual woman in the British context, this book speaks to me on a deeply personal level. It not only validates my own experiences but also shines a light on the often-neglected intricacies of my identity that have been erased or misunderstood for far too long.

A major theme throughout the book is the prevalence of biphobia. While society has made considerable progress in recognizing and addressing homophobia and transphobia, biphobia still lingers in the shadows, often unrecognized and unchallenged. Nelson's work confronts these prejudices head-on and calls for more accurate and positive representations of bi+ people.

Making Space for Bi+ Identities addresses stereotypes in mainstream media and showcases the unique experiences of various segments within the bi+ community, such as bi men, people of color, gender diverse, and transgender individuals, whose experiences are often marginalized even within the LGBTQ+ community itself. These intersectional experiences are often unheard and unseen but are crucial to understanding the full spectrum of bi+ identities.

Nelson delves into various facets of the bi+ experience. One aspect that particularly stands out is the author's exploration of the complexities of relationships within the bi+ spectrum. Romantic and sexual lives are often oversimplified in mainstream discussions, but Nelson's work acknowledges the richness of our community and the unique challenges faced by bi+ people in their relationships.

One often-overlooked aspect of the bi+ experience is how individuals navigate flirting and sexual expression. The book explores this topic, shedding light on how societal expectations and stereotypes can influence these interactions. It calls for

more respectful and open-minded attitudes within our societies, encouraging a more inclusive and accepting environment for bi+ people to express themselves authentically.

What sets *Making Space for Bi+ Identities* apart from other works on the subject is its strong advocacy for specific inclusion measures tailored to the bi+ community. It argues that recognizing the unique experiences and challenges faced by bi+ individuals is a crucial step toward a more inclusive and equitable society.

This is a perspective that speaks directly to my own experiences. It can be disheartening to feel lumped together with other sexual orientations when your own experience is uniquely distinct. This book calls for a more nuanced approach, one that acknowledges the particular needs and challenges of the bi+ community.

Making Space for Bi+ Identities is an indispensable resource not only for the LGBTQ+ community but also for a wide range of professionals and researchers. It offers insights that can benefit students, policymakers, and healthcare professionals, helping them understand the specific needs of the bi+ community.

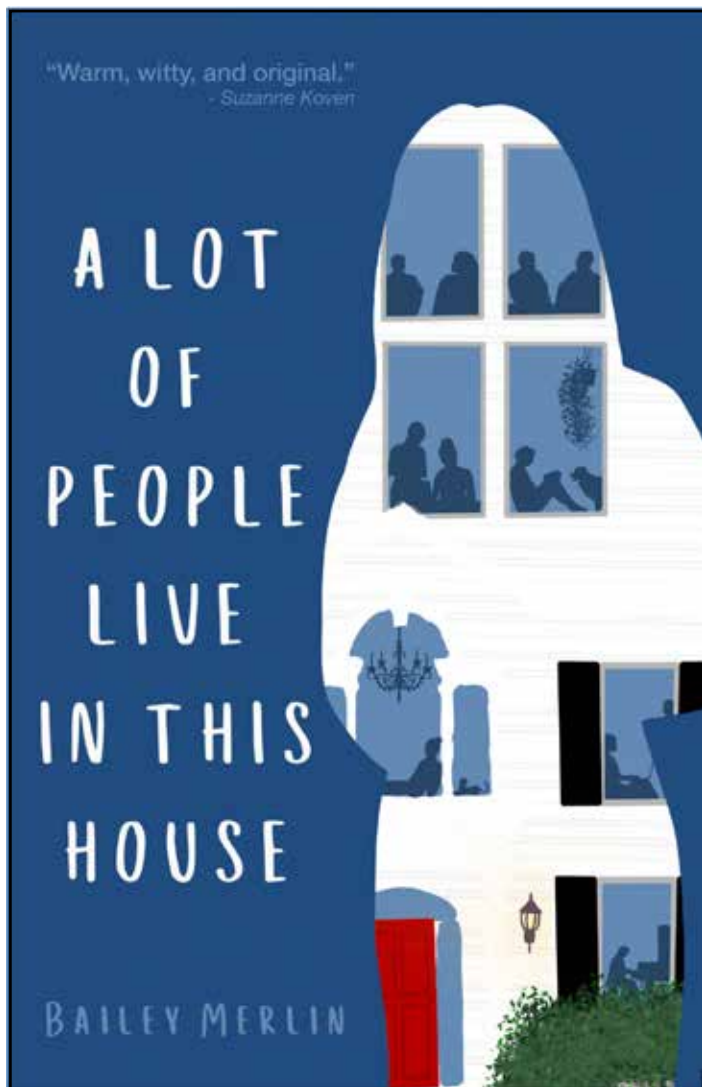
Rosie Nelson's work is a testament to the importance of recognizing and embracing the diversity within the LGBTQ+ community, and it provides a compelling voice for bi+ individuals and their allies. Whether you are exploring your own bi+ identity, seeking to support someone within the community, or just looking to better understand the experiences of those around you, *Making Space for Bi+ Identities* is a must-read. It shines a light on the path to a more inclusive and equitable world for everyone.

Michelle Davies lives in the U.K. and is a queer leader and a Trustee for LGBT+ affirmative housing for older people.



A Lot of People Live in This House, by Bailey Merlin

Reviewed by Jen Bonardi



If a novel could be an ad, then *A Lot of People Live in This House* would be a successful campaign to turn us all onto communal living (as if we needed convincing in this economy). After traveling abroad with her husband, Job, Rachel moves in with an eclectic array of ten roommates in Boston while he finishes a retreat in India. She and Job expect to be separated for only a short time but, as the Yiddish adage goes, “Man plans and God laughs.” Rachel arrives at her new abode on March 1, 2020.

It’s great fun to experience dramatic irony not because you remember other parts of the book, but because you actually lived through the events. I found myself yelling at the book as if I were watching a horror movie: “No, Job, don’t wait! Get a flight to Boston *now!*”

The novel’s dramatic irony mirrors the way that other characters—even animals—pick up on Rachel’s tells. They sense what she is going through, sometimes before even she realizes. Learning about the intriguing yet wholly believable cast of characters

she lives with is utterly enjoyable—even after you recognize that Rachel is kind of a pill, and before you can appreciate the past traumas that prompt her constant state of agitation.

While her husband is the one named Job, it’s Rachel who has been put through the wringer. Like the biblical character, she can find no reason why terrible fates have befallen her family. I suspect that the word “Lot” is also symbolic, from the book title to the line in the first chapter and echoed in the last: “We can be a lot all at once.” It starts as a warning but feels like it concludes as permission. When you draw lots, you take a gamble, just as Rachel took a gamble on living with a pile of strangers, and they likewise. From another perspective, sometimes you draw the short straw in life, and you need to grieve the loss.

In the Old Testament, when Lot fled his home and then turned back to see his wife, she had turned into a pillar of salt. The reader wonders early on whether Rachel will dissolve and wash away like so much salt if she cannot be reunited with Job. Or is it he who will break under the weight of remaining abroad too long? Salt is often a symbol of permanence, the kind that Rachel desperately wants in a family but also struggles to accept. We see this every time she puts off downloading the calendar app that the house uses.

In broad strokes, *A Lot of People* is most reminiscent of the classic play *Waiting for Godot*. Although *Godot* leaves much room for interpretation, playwright Samuel Beckett revealed that he was writing about symbiosis. It’s important to note that all the love languages in the novel are beneficial to both the takers *and* the givers, *e.g.*, sharing tea, cooking (there’s that salt again, not to mention drawing lots), renovating, and solving logistical problems.

Rachel excels at helping, but at every turn resists others’ offers of assistance. In her journey to connect with people other than Job, grieving becomes a love language, too, and requires reciprocity of vulnerability. *A Lot of People* is a warm and charming novel, promising that the best of humanity will come shining through if only we give it a chance.

Jen Bonardi manages the Bisexual Resource Center’s volunteer corps, The Honeycomb, and is proud to count author Bailey Merlin among its members.



RESEARCH CORNER

The Cost of Doing Business: Social Media Use among Bisexuals and Pansexuals

Summary of [Full article: Social media use among bisexuals and pansexuals: connection, harassment and mental health \(tandfonline.com\)](https://www.tandfonline.com)

By Kallie Strong and Nicola Koper

Studies of LGBT+ individuals and their internet and social media usage have been of particular interest in recent years. We've talked before in *BWQ* about research that has shown the importance of social media in connecting bi+ and other queer people, by providing support and community, and for the importance of virtual social and informational connections in helping folks who are exploring different identities using online educational resources. But this article points out a darker side.

The Australian research study reviewed here looked at the relationship between social media use among groups of LGBT+ people in an attempt to see its connection with harassment and mental health. They compared the experiences of bisexual and pansexual folks, and lesbian and gay folks. In all, 1,304 LGBT+ people, spanning the gender and sexuality spectrums, were surveyed as part of the larger Scrolling Beyond Binaries study for individuals aged 16-35. Social media platforms surveyed included Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Tumblr, Twitter, and Tinder.

All groups of LGBT+ people reported similar motivations for using social media. However, bisexual and pansexual folks showed higher reported rates of harassment, with 51% of the lesbian and gay group reporting online harassment compared to 63% of bisexual and pansexual respondents. Rates of frequent harassment were also higher for the bisexual and pansexual group. Only one third (33%) of the bisexual and pansexual group reported never experiencing harassment, in comparison with just under half (45%) of the lesbian and gay folks.

There was a statistically significant association between sexuality and harassment on all platforms except Tinder. Facebook was the site where an individual was most likely to experience harassment, but bisexual and pansexual people were found to be significantly more likely to experience harassment on Tumblr, Snapchat and Instagram as well. The researchers also found that

bisexual and pansexual people tended to report poorer mental health experiences on Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, and Tinder.

Despite this, the participants' own words highlight the importance of support from online communities in their coming-out journeys. As highlighted in the article, one respondent said, "Yes, I wouldn't have been able to come out, or even have a name to put to how I felt about my gender and sexuality, if it wasn't for social media and I think that outweighs the harms I've experienced. (19, non-binary, bisexual)." Bisexual and pansexual folks also noted that they expected to experience harassment in online spaces, almost as a "cost of doing business," and noted that despite that risk, the benefits of building connections with other queer folks were of greater importance than the risks.

Social media always carries a risk for non-heteronormative and non-cis folks, but all in all, clearly more LGBTQ+ positive spaces, like *Bi Women Quarterly*, are needed. As we normalize conversations about bi+ and pansexuality across our broader society, we hope that, one day, people with nonbinary sexualities won't have to risk harassment to make social connections online.

Kallie Strong is an undergraduate 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, focusing on increasing equity, diversity, and inclusion in academia and public education.

Article referenced:

Rosie Nelson, Brady Robards, Brendan Churchill, Son Vivienne, Paul Byron & Benjamin Hanckel (2023) Social media use among bisexuals and pansexuals: connection, harassment and mental health, *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, 25:6, 711-727, 10.1080/13691058.2022.2092213

5 WAYS TO SUPPORT OUR WORK.

1. Submit content for publication.
2. Tell people about BWQ & BiProducts (our Etsy shop).
3. Share our social media posts.
4. Volunteer (see p. 2).
5. Make a donation: www.biwomenquarterly.com/donate/

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

Meet the BWQ Intern Team!

As a direct result of the generosity of our donors, we have been able to increase our intern staff from one to two, and now three! Our amazing interns, Vincy, Lejla, and Emily, hail from three different countries. Vincy and Lejla are focusing on social media (follow us on Facebook, Threads, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn) and also on global outreach. Emily's focus is on *Bi Women Quarterly*. She is part of our editorial team, participating in the entire editorial process as well as providing administrative support to the process. She also coordinates our fundraising campaign. We are grateful for these three individuals, who are working so well together to provide a fresh perspective to *BWQ*.



Vincy (they/he), Social Media and Outreach Coordinator, is a trans creative from Hong Kong, currently based in so-called "Australia." They are particularly keen to connect with queer global majority populations around the world.

"During a time where we're simultaneously seeing advancement in Queer rights, as well as the intense backlash against the community globally, it's all the more important to build solidarity with communities around the world. I am excited about connecting bi+ voices globally.



Lejla (she/her), Social Media and Outreach Coordinator, is a 24-year-old bisexual woman from Bosnia & Herzegovina, who is building her career in genetics and biological sciences. She's ardently given her time to fight for LGBTI+ and women's rights in her homeland.

"One thing that excites me the most about working with BWQ is the profound sense of connection and representation I've experienced since I began following them years ago, on a friend's recommendation. Engaging with the stories and perspectives of the numerous women who have contributed to the publication over the years has been an incredibly validating experience for me. The idea of contributing to BWQ's mission and potentially helping someone else see a reflection of their own experience—to think that I could be a part of someone else's journey toward acceptance and understanding, in the same way that *BWQ* was a part of mine, is deeply inspiring."

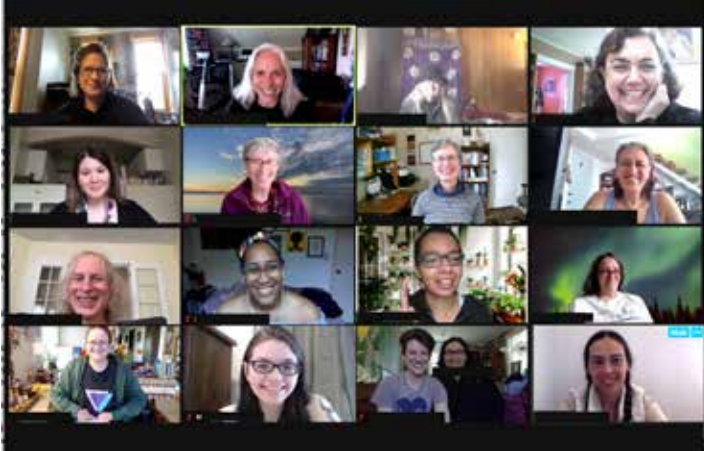


Emily is a U.S. graduate student in her 20s who is studying to become a certified mental health professional. As a bisexual woman from the South, she hopes her time at BWQ will contribute to making a positive change for those affected by conservative restrictions on women's health, and teach her more about advocating for the bi+ community.

"Working with BWQ to help amplify voices from the bi+ community through art and writing is so exciting for me. Each issue is so unique and highlights different people I would have never been exposed to otherwise. I love bringing our bi+ community together and being able to help maintain this safe space for anybody and everybody who wants to find their place under our umbrella."

If you are reading this and are interested in an internship with BWQ, either during the academic year, in the summer, or year-round, please send an email with your resume to biwomeneditor@gmail.com.

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., Jan. 6
Sun., Feb. 4
Sat., March 2
Sun., April 7

Please join us! Info/RSVP: BWQEvents@gmail.com.

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

*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 February 9 & 10

Join us at the 11th Bi+ World Meetup! To accommodate people in various time zones, we will have TWO meetups each time: Meetup #11 will be Feb. 9, 4 p.m. EST/ 10 p.m. CEST and Feb. 10, 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. Subscribe to our Google group: <https://groups.google.com/forum/#!forum/biwomenboston>

Here's info about our next **in-person** event for women with bi+ (bi, plan, fluid, and other non-binary) sexualities:

The **Boston Bisexual Women's Network's Poetry Potluck Brunch!** Co-hosted by Beth and Fennel in Belmont, MA. Please bring 1-2 poems to read (written by you or a writer you love). We'll take turns reading the poems out loud as we share yummy food and enjoy each other's company: . For more details visit BiWomenBoston.org.

The perfect stocking stuffers to show your support



Our pride earrings, flags, and pins are beautiful, affirming, affordable, and -- on top of all this -- support a nonprofit organization!

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