

## You Gayyy?

By Janie Kang

“You gayyy?!” My *eemo* drew the words out with a guttural emphasis on the last word like a woman giving birth.

Well, there was no going back now.

“Yes.” I blew my bangs out of my eyes, wiping the sweat from my face as the humidity made my “Yankee baby” hair frizz like a Q-tip around my head. My partner was sitting quietly on the couch, pretending to read her book. I swear I could see her ears perk up.

“You gayyy?” my *eemo* repeated, as if yelling the words into her phone’s speaker would clear up her confusion.

“Yes, *Eemo*.” I tried to muster as much respect as I could talking to my elder, but I could feel the tsunami of judgment and guilt about to hit.

“But you were with a guy, last time. *Aigoo*, if that man didn’t treat you bad, you wouldn’t be *gayyy*.” My auntie, or *eemo* as I

was taught to call my mother’s sisters growing up, clucked her tongue in pity.

“It doesn’t work like that—”

“It’s okay, my friend’s uncle is gay. He’s a good man. A little bit strange, but good man. Who’s the man in your relationship?” I couldn’t stop the tirade of questions that made me want to sink into the floor. Luckily, we were on the phone, so she couldn’t see the pained look on my face.

Why did I think it was a good idea to come out to my Korean aunties? They barely kept in touch since my mom died, except to complain about how all the men of my family were a disgrace and I should do something to fix it.

The irony wasn’t lost on me.

I knew why I came out. Because the person sitting on the couch pretend-reading made my heart happy in ways I never could have imagined, and I didn’t want us to hide. She made me feel safe, loved, seen. She didn’t fill up our conversations with how life was so hard for her. If I said something about how stressful

*Janie, continued on page 24*



## Building Blocks

By Martine Mussies



*Martine Mussies is an artistic researcher and autistic academic based in Utrecht, the Netherlands. [www.martinemussies.nl](http://www.martinemussies.nl)*

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**Editor's Note**

This issue's theme is "More than One Letter." The prompt was: "'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." We hope you enjoy the wide variety of responses we received.

On a separate note, I am delighted to announce that after a search process that yielded 40 applicants, *BWQ* has hired not one, but *two* new assistant editors: Avery Friend and Melissa Rorech. We will introduce them to you in the next issue.

Special thanks to board member Marya Mtshali for coordinating the search. I honestly could not have done this without her. I am also grateful to Michelle Slater-Young, who has been working with us to make the layout process more efficient. Her expertise in InDesign has been much appreciated.

I am very excited about the directions in which *Bi Women Quarterly* is growing. In addition to the growing array of talented contributors, we are expanding our volunteer base as well.

-Here are a few ways to get involved:

- Donate at [BiWomenQuarterly.com/donate](https://BiWomenQuarterly.com/donate)
- Spread the word about our existence. Share our posts on social media. Tell your friends, co-workers, family members, and random strangers on the bus about this resource.
- Submit your own writing or visual art for a future issue.

-Robyn

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



**Upcoming in  
*Bi Women Quarterly***

**Call for submissions**

**Fall 2024: Child Free**

In this very complex world we live in, there are so many reasons one might decide not to procreate. Would you like to share yours? Motherhood and womanhood are too often conflated, and choosing not to parent can carry stigma, no matter your gender. How has this decision affected the way you see your gender, your sexuality, yourself? **Submit by August 1, 2024.**

**Winter 2025:  
Teachers and Mentors**

We all have teachers in our lives that have helped to form us into the people we are today. Some of them may be traditional educators; others may be mentors, colleagues, authors/ artists, friends, relatives, or even students themselves. What roles have teachers played in your life? How have they helped shape your understanding of/perspectives on bisexuality or of yourself more generally? What is the most important lesson (or lessons) that you want to pass on to others? Tell us who has impacted you the most. **Submit by November 1, 2024.**

We welcome essays, reviews, poetry, short fiction, news articles, and visual art. Our submission guidelines on our website. Send your submissions and suggestions for future themes to [biwomeneditor@gmail.com](mailto:biwomeneditor@gmail.com). You may use a pseudonym, if you prefer.

**If you value this resource...**

Please support our work with a tax-deductible donation. Visit:  
[www.BiWomenQuarterly.com/donate](https://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: Pamela Vallejos Chavez, Lima, Peru

Bisexual, binational, bicultural, and bilingual. These words encapsulate key parts of my identity.

I was born in New York, United States to Peruvian parents and grew up in Lima, Peru, attending an American school. My upbringing was a mix of Peruvian family values, American media, and an American education. When I was a teenager, I realized I was bisexual, but I did not live openly until I was in my early twenties. I have always felt like I was “in between” identities and this has generated a lot of internal turmoil and anxiety. Now, I understand the beauty of not being one or the other, and especially of living in the purple stripe of our beautiful bi flag.

I am proud to be Peruvian, even though with regard to LGBTQI+ rights, Peru falls far behind its neighbors in terms of its lack of comprehensive legislation that recognizes human rights such as marriage equality, trans rights, protection against hate crimes, etc. It has been incredibly difficult to make a lasting change in public policy because of the stern grip of the Catholic Church on Peruvian society and the ongoing political crisis in all branches of government.



*Pamela, right, with members of Orgullo Bi Peru*



*10 meter bisexual flag at Lima Pride 2023 for the 2nd consecutive year*

Specifically, being bisexual in Lima, Peru means that you are constantly getting erroneously grouped into identities based on the gender of your partner. It means that you do not exist, that you are seen as the most privileged of the LGBTQI+ community, and that your fight is not considered important enough to be mentioned. But this is changing.

Over the last five years, I have witnessed how bisexual folks in Peru have been working arduously to build community and fight against bi erasure. One example of this change is Orgullo Bi Perú, the first bisexual collective in the country, which I co-founded with fellow bisexual activists who I admire deeply. It all started in a WhatsApp group chat that was created during Pride 2019, and it became an online safe space for bisexual people.

As the group grew and we were put into a strict lockdown due to the COVID pandemic, the chat became a necessary community space for many of us, where we would organize virtual meetups to discuss relevant topics. Our online conversations became a collective catharsis of the biphobia we have faced in our families, schools, workplaces, friend groups, etc. It also was a space where bisexuals and questioning folks could feel validated by their peers. Eventually, a smaller group of activists who were willing and able to do more decided to start organizing. We created the collective now known as Orgullo Bi Perú.

As an organized group of bisexual activists, one of our key objectives is to foster community online and offline. This led to us organizing in-person “bicnics” (bi picnics) once it was safe to do so. We have hosted and co-organized 11 bicnics in four cities in Peru, mainly in Lima. We always see both familiar and new faces. Each bicnic is unique because of the people who attend and the topics we cover. On some occasions, we have even organized educational games about bi history and



*A picnic organized by Orgullo Bi*

culture. As a member of Orgullo Bi, I am most proud of our in-person “picnics” that have fostered a community bond, the online panels we have organized every Bi Visibility Day since 2020, and the 10-meter bi flag we crowdfunded for to make our presence known during the Pride March in Lima in 2022 and 2023. On a personal note, I am grateful to have a space in which I feel that I truly belong and am able to fight for my community.

Furthermore, while Orgullo Bi was being born, I launched an Instagram blog called “[Soy Bisexual](#)” (“I Am Bisexual”), a personal project I had been brewing for quite a while. After many years working in communications for feminist and queer collectives and organizations, I wanted to have a space where I could use my own personal voice and create educational content on my own terms. The objective of the blog is to create educational content and platform diverse bisexual people, all in Spanish. The language of the blog was very important to me, as a fluent Spanglish speaker, because I noticed a lack of information about bisexuality in Spanish. What I am most proud of is having reached one million people with a post that said “[Recordatorio bisexual: Salir del clóset como bisexual no es ‘más fácil’](#)” (“Bi reminder: Coming out as bisexual is not ‘easier’”). I have received many messages from people telling me that the blog’s content has helped them come to terms with their own bisexuality or helped them understand a family member coming out as bisexual. My blog has reinforced my belief in the power of bisexual visibility and the importance of creating community.

Due to a variety of reasons, including the political instability created by the revolving door of Presidents, the [death of 50 people during the protests of November and December of](#)

[2022](#), and many other consequences of the ongoing corruption in our country, bisexual activism in Peru has become slightly stagnant.

There is a lot happening around the world, but I truly believe that hope is the fuel we need to change things for the better. To create lasting change, we must continue to work on our community spaces, engage in political advocacy, and educate our potential/future allies.

Orgullo Bi can be found online at [Instagram.com/orgullobi.pe](#). You can read Pamela’s blog at [instagram.com/soybisexual.pe](#)

### Other Resources

[Visibilidad bisexual: La ‘B’ de LGBTIQ+ también existe](#) - Presente ONG

[La B de LGBTIQ+: 5 recomendaciones para la inclusión laboral bisexual](#) - Presente ONG

[La bisexualidad entre la bifobia de heterosexuales y homosexuales](#) - UPC



*Pamela at Lima Pride 2019*

# Emulating Romance

By Taylor Raucher

I like to imagine love through the lens of a period drama. Sharing witty barbs with my love interest (who vexes me yet entices me), dancing closely at a ball, a leisurely stroll through the garden, a gentle kiss on the hand, a shocking and scandalous kiss on the mouth away from prying eyes, and a wedding at the end. Though it is sexless, it is romantic and intriguing and passionate.

Sadly, though, many period dramas are heterosexual. I don't mind terribly, but as someone who is attracted to both feminine and masculine people, it'd be nice to see a little more representation, even if it seems "improbable"—because queer people have always existed. Living hidden lives in fear of discovery, but all in the name of love.

It was through a period piece that I discovered my bi-ness. Watching Keira Knightley in *Pirates of the Caribbean* was my awakening that girls were just as beautiful as boys—seeing her and Orlando Bloom together made my brain get all fuzzy and my stomach flip. I loved the drama and the romance and the swashbuckling, that the love between characters Elizabeth Swann and Will Turner was built on trust and adventure and sacrifice. There was passion and longing, culminating in a kiss near the ocean, simple but beautiful.

Being bi didn't seem like a viable option for me, though. There was gay and there was straight. "Bi" was a joke; everyone knew that. It meant either a phase or a refusal to fully commit to coming out of the closet. I felt like I had to pick a side, gay or straight, and I went with the safest option: straight.

As I grew older, I still clung to these period dramas, and branched out into films from the 1930s and 1940s that featured romance that was believable but still rated PG. I didn't often run into queer love stories—the first was probably *Rocky Horror Picture Show*—but I was still fortunate that I could secretly envision myself with either the hero or the heroine. As my friends started to gravitate toward more raunchy comedies and films with R-rated sex scenes, I just didn't see the appeal.

As a teenager, I kept my bi attraction pretty well under wraps. I dated boys in high school and had quiet crushes on the girls around me, including friends. My senior year, I lost my virginity and just didn't really "get" it. It was...fine. But then it was all my boyfriend wanted to do. I was so bored, and kind of annoyed. Where was the romance? Where was the yearning, the pining?

I finally came out as bi in college, which I don't regret, but I do regret how it happened. I let it slip to one person, who told another, who told another, and by the evening nearly the entire tiny Catholic campus knew I was queer. But I refused to

go back in the closet. I was seeing a girl from back home who made me feel whole and seen, and I was not going to let my classmates make me feel ashamed.

Being with a woman was like seeing sunshine for the first time after living in the shade. We were so similar, yet she taught me so much. I could finally embrace all parts of myself and feel complete. Our romance was short-lived but it was delicate and gentle, nothing more than kissing. It was like a real-life period drama: we tried to keep our love under wraps and away from our parents' eyes, and we talked about art and literature and shared ideas and passions; and it was a connection of the mind as much as the heart. I was happy.

I dated a boy after, and he was nice, and we had a light-hearted romance at first that grew more passionate. But soon it was only physical with him. It exhausted me. I wanted to be seen as more than just my body. I wanted him to admire my mind, my intellect, and my passions; I wanted to be desired for my entirety. We burned out in an ugly manner, and I chose to be alone for a long, long time.

In my time alone, I reflected on what I wanted. I thought of the period dramas that I love so much and how the romances in them make me feel. I thought about how it was the intimate, sweet touches, the longing stares across the room, the words of passion and adoration—all of those things were what excited me. I actually quite liked that there weren't any sex scenes.

And, in my reflection, I came upon the word "asexual." I stumbled over it at first, worried that it was too big and frightening for me to wear. I weighed how it would pair with being bi. And eventually I realized that it was okay for me to be more than one letter in the acronym. It was my truth and I wanted to embrace it. I desired romance and passion that was emotional, not physical, and it didn't matter whether it came from a male- or female-presenting person.

I tend to gravitate toward the word "queer" as my identifier, because it is simpler and all-encompassing and doesn't reveal, to those I've just met, more of myself than I want. But those I trust know that I contain multitudes, and that I am many-layered and complex, just like my love.

*Taylor Raucher is a queer writer from Massachusetts, U.S. She has her MFA in Creative Nonfiction and is the proud mother of two cats.*



# Trivial

By D.D. Deischer-Eddy

If I were a more self-centered person, I would claim that the arrow of the demisexual flag is and always has been pointing directly at me. But I hate seeming so vain, so I would prefer to be more metaphorical in saying the arrow has always been pointing me in a certain direction.

I followed a distinct pattern growing up: I only had crushes on boys with whom I first became relatively close friends. The recurring one, of course, being my best friend. (In my defense, he gave me a series of confusing signals in high school.) While I found other classmates cute or attractive in some vague sense of the word, I would never actually pursue them. I originally chalked it up to not being brave enough or not liking them that way.



*Demibisexual pendant*

I was about 16 when I first learned the term “demisexual.” While I felt a certain kinship with the word, I was still a silly teenager, i.e., stubborn. I felt too normal—whatever that means—to even consider that I was anything but straight. Even when a good friend of mine said she would take care of me if we ever dated, and I started to consider it, I didn’t face the music until college. When I finally did, a lot of things made sense—especially my relationships with some of my best girl friends. Of course, that’s the usual story, isn’t it?

How about something a little more unusual? As odd as it sounds, I’ve always been more attached to fictional characters than to real people. While I love my friends deeply, I’ve almost always felt a disconnect with them, something I couldn’t explain that didn’t always click. Although I would have loved it if my friends had invited me out to places more often than they did, I enjoyed sitting at home reading or watching anime. The characters I read about or watched felt more real to me than the people in my life, and they ran much less of a risk of breaking my heart—unless they went out with another girl who wasn’t me—and they know who they are.)

My running list of fictional husbands has become a personal joke, something to break the ice when talking online. But truthfully? I like them far more than any real man. It’s easier to imagine relationships between these characters and some idealized version of myself than to imagine a relationship with any potential romantic interest. Even with an imagination as hyperactive as mine, one that immediately pictures something I read or hear, I can’t look at a stranger and see a fictionalized future life with them.

About the time I finally realized that maybe demisexual was more than a term I appreciated, I was realizing the age-old truth: women are hot. Frankly, so are nonbinary people. Honestly, everyone is hot! I have video games to thank—*Danganronpa* and *Monster Prom* specifically—for helping me realize this, because otherwise I might have gone on believing I was straight for much longer. My entire world opened to appreciate more than just two-dimensional men. I decided I should probably figure out a way to express this in terms of my identity. I could no longer convince myself that I was heterosexual.

I settled on demisexual and biromantic, though I often shorthand this to demibisexual, thanks to a lovely pendant I got from an Etsy creator. (The arrow over the bisexual flag just feels so right, even more so than having two separate symbols.) While I didn’t face many obstacles to this “announcement,” there were the annoyances. Perhaps the moment of greatest frustration was the well-meaning, but ultimately ignorant, “Well, aren’t you bisexual?”

If I were different, I would have proudly said “Yes, yes I am bisexual.” I did not enjoy the assumptions and the attempt to stuff me into one solitary box. No one can tell me how I identify, and I wasn’t going to let anybody do it, either. Yes,

I have the capability of being attracted to multiple genders, but the demi part is important to me. It's an identity I'm not willing to let go of, nor should I.

"But everyone is demi," people love to say. "Everybody prefers being friends first before dating."

*No, you don't understand,* I say to myself every single time. That's not what it means. Or maybe it is. But that's not what it means to me. While I can appreciate someone's physical appearance, I won't be interested if I don't know them. Unless, of course, they're fictional. I've always been more attracted to my close friends than friends I've known for a brief time. I could never join a dating app because I wouldn't know anybody and therefore wouldn't trust them. So no, not everyone is demisexual. To say otherwise is to trivialize something that affects the way I think about everyone in my life.

So, yes, I think Dick Grayson is the perfect male specimen, and yes, I find Kyoko Kirigiri to be my dream girl. But outside of

fiction, in real life, I cannot bring myself to think too deeply, to fantasize, unless I know someone well. My greatest crushes have been the stirrings of affection originally intended for a friend. Touch-starved as I am in this world forever changed by COVID-19, I will probably never go on a blind date or dating site. The connection I need to consider such a thing is lost in that way. I would rather watch anime and swoon over a fictional man whose hand I can never hold.

And when I put it that way, it doesn't sound so trivial, does it? I'm much more comfortable with my fictional dates—at least they'll never try to tell me that my identity is trivial.

*D.D. Deischer-Eddy is an aspiring writer living in the Philadelphia area of Pennsylvania, U.S. She has a B.A. in English and Creative Writing and loves writing the queer characters she has never met.*

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## My Alphabet Soup

*By Robyn Walters*

Well, it isn't all that bad. Of the LGBTQI+ acronym, I only use the L, B, and T. However, there is another acronym that serves to explain more about me and my history/journey: AMAB. It's meaning, not always appreciated by some here, is Assigned Male At Birth. It adds another dimension to my membership and volunteering at BWQ.

I was a rather typical young lad until I discovered something at age nine: lingerie. It spoke to me at various levels in the beginning, but eventually became a major factor in my life. In my late fifties, the lingerie rationale finally became clear: in my heart of hearts, I was a woman. I told my then-wife. Our marriage crumbled. When I retired and moved—alone—to the Seattle area, I was able to be Robyn full time. Cross hormone replacement therapy changed me in ways other than my body. I looked at men in a completely different manner even though I had never been gay. My attraction to women didn't change, so I was suddenly bi. I joined two online transgender groups: the ElderTG list serve and Susan's Place (now on Discord). I have been a moderator of each place for over 20 years. I met my transgender husband on ElderTG. Shortly after we married—with our old gender markers on the marriage certificate—I had my gender confirmation surgery. My husband's surgery came a year later. His letters are G and T, as well as AFAB.

So here we are. An 80+ year-old, apparently heteronormative, couple. Only our children, friends, and doctors know some of our alphabet soup.

Our challenges have been few—mostly familial—and easily overcome. Well, some of the paperwork changes were a touch bothersome.

But the result—living as one's true self with proper passports—is nothing short of outstanding.

Bringing myself into a fully functioning, bi+ space where I can explore my bisexual feelings through action, however, will have to wait until my next lifetime. Hopefully, I'll remember what I now know.

*Robyn Walters is a married, non-practicing bisexual transgender woman. She is a BWQ proofreader and regular content contributor.*



*Robyn and Emery*

# how to be the good kind of fat girl

by Grace Hedin

talk as little as possible and when you do  
use a soft voice, barely there—  
if your voice is light maybe the other parts of you will seem  
light too.  
don't be talkative, or—god forbid—opinionated.  
freshman year, you said your body was your own—  
proclaimed it in front of your class.  
the boys in the back of the room called you a stupid feminist  
for the rest of the year  
and when your cheeks got red from rage,  
eyes starting to water,  
they smirked and called you sensitive like it was a *bad* thing.

when in doubt, slouch.  
make your body small as you can—that's the goal, right?  
the shorter you are the less chance someone will notice you  
making yourself invisible is key,  
fat girls shouldn't be heard, nor seen.  
you used to sit in the front of the class  
raise your hand high with curiosity about everything in  
particular  
one day the group next to you pretended to gag—  
retched and pointed at your stained armpit  
you lowered your hand,  
and learned to hunch your back.

wear long sleeves, even when hot out  
but not anything colored  
sweat stains are displeasing to the eye  
(and you're doing enough to the eye already)  
black is suitable—tight enough so your arms feel a constant  
pressure  
when you were in second grade you wore a pink short sleeved  
shirt with a princess on it

a boy sat next to you and hit your arm for an hour  
when you asked him why  
he said he wanted to see how much the fat on your arms would  
jiggle.  
a shame filled your body that has never fully left—  
it was the first time you heard *that word*.

never question.  
not the arguments against you  
the answers you know are wrong  
the seeming certainty that  
you will end up alone.  
happiness isn't an option for a fat girl, not really.  
not when the boy you have a crush on tells you to eat more  
salads and less cake  
not when your girlfriend sees you naked for the first time and  
you start to cry in shame  
not when the guy from tinder says that fat girls always give the  
best head  
not when the kind-eyed doctor makes your entire physical  
about a healthy BMI  
not when the most acceptable response to your presence is to  
ignore it.

you never liked the word fat,  
and you never  
liked  
cake.

*Grace Hedin is a poet based in Portland, Oregon, U.S. Their work has been published previously through the Portland State University public catalogue, titled The Weak, the Wicked, the Divine: A Collection of Poems.*

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## WE NEED YOU!

Seriously, we need you. You are the fuel that keeps us going, and we are always looking for volunteers. Areas of need include: fundraising, marketing, and outreach—we are trying to increase our readership and our base of content contributors GLOBALLY. We also welcome fuel in the form of donations: [BiWomenQuarterly.com/donate](https://BiWomenQuarterly.com/donate). Contact Robyn at [BiWomenEditor@gmail.com](mailto:BiWomenEditor@gmail.com) for more info.



# Torch

*a reckoning in the wake of the Charlottesville, VA protests, Aug 12, 2017*

By Nicole Miyashiro

- 1 A portable means of illumination. A stick.  
In a sweaty hand. Head ablaze.  
Mouth open.
- 2 Raised by a mob, hunting  
variations in pigment, the melanin we all began with  
to shield us  
from the burn.
- 3 Flames to threaten. This skin  
that covers this land, this body breathing, bearing  
new life, deepening in sunlight; slick  
thighs parting. An infant  
calling for his dark mama's milk. Is this the threat?  
Which of these?
- 4 Where did you find her? My Polynesian light, Lady  
lifting flames for you and all, because this  
is America, is where  
we meet  
and meld.
- 5 Carved in Tiki, stoking  
the goddess light of Pele above heads that chase  
my skin, her truth aglow despite all those fingers  
forgetting how to hold her, how to touch  
her fire. Her heat  
of fertility raised. Luminous.  
A beacon.
- 6 Lit in backyard porches, at barbecues, bordering  
your neighbor's pool, flickering on the 4th  
of our July. Do you mean to burn me with it? To ravage  
my soil?  
Ours?
- 7 To set to fire.  
A spectrum of cells replying to the sun  
in our hair, in thin layers of tissues  
shaping our curves, in the iris  
of the eye. Bring the light, the dark, the illuminated  
rainbows. Lady Liberty, goddess of freedom, Pele of light.  
Lift that torch  
and grip  
whom it is meant for, the united flames  
still being born.



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*Nicole Miyashiro is a biracial, cis femme, bi and married mama and adoptee living in central Pennsylvania, U.S. Her work appears in BWQ, CALYX, The Hudson Review, Nasty Women Poets: An Unapologetic Anthology of Subversive Verse (Lost Horse Press), and elsewhere.*

# Queer Beginnings: B + AA

By Rebecca Keating

As far as understanding my identity, I often think of this joke: I wouldn't want to be part of any club that would have me as a member. If I am going to explore the genesis of who I am, I would begin at my birth. I was born female, identified as a girl and, eventually, as a woman. At six years old, I identified as bi-curious, recognizing that my attractions did not align with the binary. By adolescence, I was a young person struggling with the confusing awareness that I was attracted to someone I was told I shouldn't be attracted to, and I was labeled in my community as a member of a divorced family, or in other words, a 'broken home.'

Soon after, I became a member of another club: a victim of a drunk driver. My injuries were severe: I was temporarily disabled due to severe spine and brain injuries. I spent one month in the hospital and several months nursing my body back to health through different rehabilitation modalities.

Progressing through and beyond high school was challenging, and my graduation into higher education was fraught. I was struggling with what it meant to be bi-curious while simultaneously dealing with the emotional and physical aftermath of my accident. To cope with the confusion and pain of holding my identities, I tried to escape using drugs. My drug of choice became alcohol. I trained myself to become a drinker, and in the process, became a black-out drunk for 20 years.

One of the most esteemed clubs of which I have become a member is that of sobriety. It was as simple as waking up one Monday morning, after years of living the same way, and realizing that if I didn't make a change, I was going to die—spiritually, emotionally, physically. Maintaining membership in this club is a priority in my life; however, it is not innate. Being sober at times requires a concentrated effort; there is a diligence about sobriety that is the polar opposite of identifying as a bisexual woman. I am bisexual in a way that is uniquely different from being an alcoholic. Drinking each night into oblivion was a choice. I chose to drown my confusion and insecurity and pain in beers with a high ABV and Canadian whiskey. I never had to choose to be bisexual; this is who I am.

This realization that my bisexuality was never a choice, but a reflection of my core self, led to a point where I had to come to terms with several important truths. I was finally prepared to elevate my relationships with women beyond experimental dalliances to meaningful relationships characterized by substance and vulnerability. This period of self-reflection brought healing, as well as reconciliation of painful reminders of missed opportunities in the past. Any opportunities presented or proffered were ignored or engaged with passively—passive

to the extent that they were not acted upon out of fear, feelings of inadequacy, fear of failure, and fear of exposure—you name it. As painful as this truth was to confront, it contributed to my healing.

My revelation, my absolute freedom, happened when I was able to tell myself in all honesty that I am—and had been my entire life—bisexual. I was able to tell myself that is not shameful. Once I was able to accomplish that I was able to tell others who I was. I was able to present myself as my true self. It was exhilarating to identify myself and hear people say, "That's great," "Congratulations," and "You must feel so much better." I was receiving support for being who I have always been. The key factor at that stage was that I had a grounded idea of who I was to share with the world.

Being comfortable in my own skin, with my owned identity, is a new but cherished feeling. Being comfortable and proud in bi+ spaces, however, is still not my current reality. As I have been on my journey to accept myself, being dismissed in LGBTQIA+ spaces has added extra hurdles. As in the straight community, bisexuality is believed to be a choice by some in the LGBTQIA+ community. Thus, I felt rejected from all angles. I felt interrogated, often judged by the gender of my partner at any given time, and unsafe in a community that was supposed to understand me. The intersection between my bisexual identity and former identity as an alcoholic has also led to complex experiences of isolation, such as navigating the never-ending alcohol-centered social events within the community. Because of the disdain of or dismissal from the community of which I feel I am a member, I felt confusion, but also deep pain. To feel safe and proud in bi+ spaces, I imagine a community that reevaluates the deep-rooted biphobia that has infiltrated the LGBTQIA+ community, a removal of hierarchies within and across identities, and a reckoning related to harm done.

The intersection among my identities, and the journey to reconciling those pieces of myself is now the lens through which I see people. Whether it is through my work with individuals experiencing mental health crises, people who are on their own journey of understanding their sexuality, or those battling their pain with unhelpful coping, I see myself and my layers in all of them. My empathy and commitment to those facing such struggles is a testimony to my own healing journey.

I have been a member of many clubs, and in most, an unwilling member. The most important label in my life is Rebecca. That is my name, my club, and finally, my identity.

*Rebecca Keating is a crisis worker in mental health in the Pittsburgh area. She is beginning a doctoral program in the fall and hopes to bring biphobia into the spotlight.*

# Queer

By Alexandra Steahly-Jenkins

Maybe I was born this way  
I'll never know  
I find myself  
two-tongued and ten-handed  
I like either both  
this hidden hybrid  
The first time I descended  
into her wet everything the velvet sanctuary between  
cheek and collar bone  
lips and knees and my entire everything quivers  
into belonging  
but I don't  
belong  
I am too much cardamom and blush another way not enough  
This complex identity stays hidden unless  
Are you like me?  
Please let me show you  
all my many-mouthed  
desire.

*Alexandra Steahly-Jenkins lives in San Francisco and works as a nurse. She is a voracious reader and aspiring poet.*

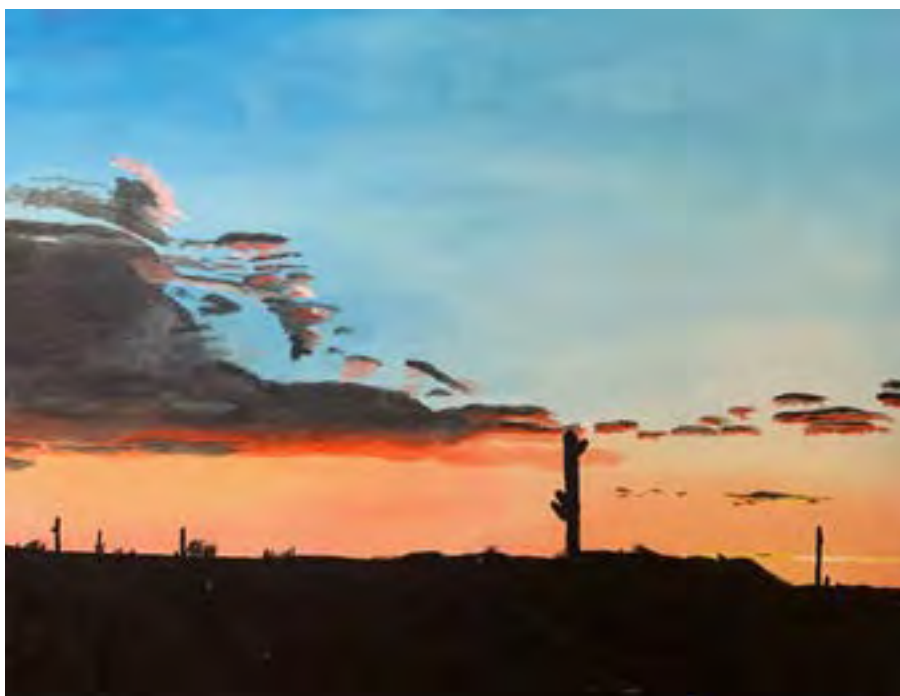
# What Does Queer Mean?

By Family



*Family is a gender/inclusion consultant in San Francisco, California, U.S.*

# Arizona Sunset #1



*Colleen McTigue is a musician, composer, and visual artist living in St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada.*



# Dandelions

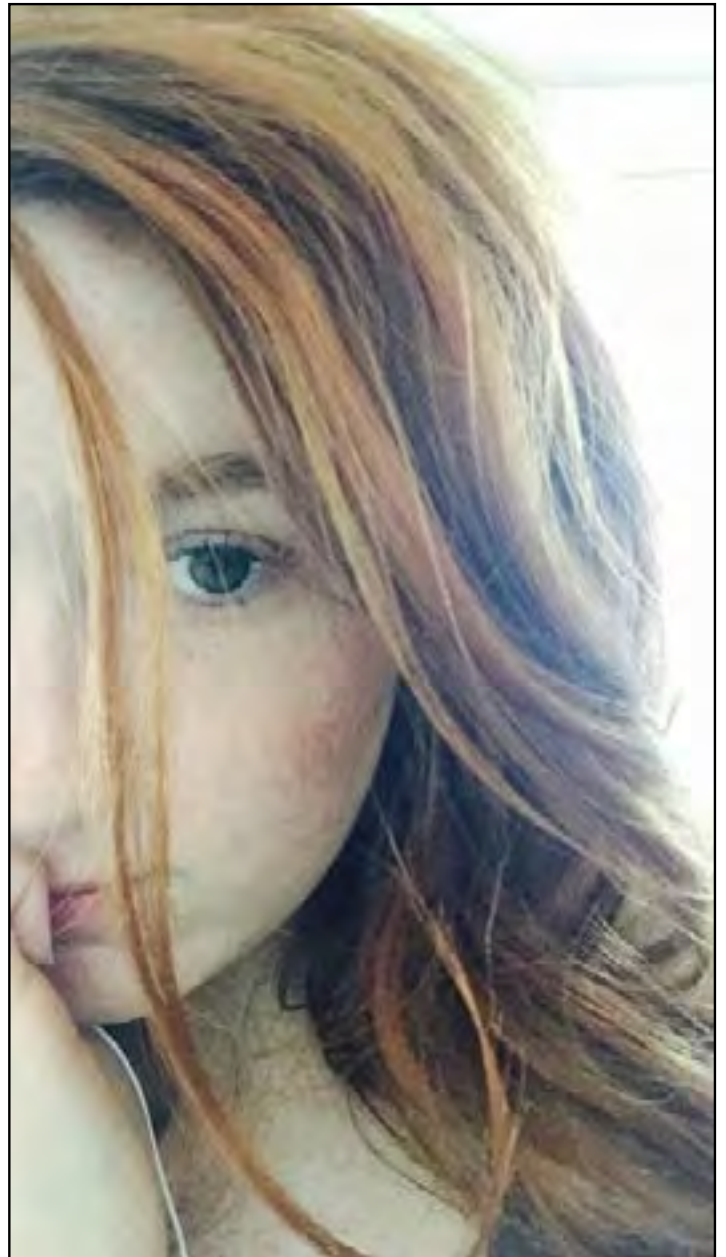
By Aurora Jane Wells

they say we are pests  
we appear everywhere  
take up space  
corrupt all we touch  
we have chosen a life of evil  
deviant, deficient, parasitic, infectious

but we rise  
we are brave  
we look them in the face and we tell them  
you were wrong  
we continue to grow

we blossom  
we embrace ourselves in the face of hate  
give ourselves what we have been denied  
or what was taken from us  
and we grow  
and each time one of us stands up to a world that doesn't want  
us to exist  
somewhere out there is a little baby dandelion  
who now knows that we have a right to simply be  
and we are not broken and they were wrong about us  
this is why we are proud

*Aurora Jane Wells is a bisexual feminist writer living in Ontario, Canada. "My writing is for the reader and its meaning is what it means to you," says Aurora Jane. "If it gives you pause or makes you feel seen, I have done my job."*



## Butch Bi

By S. Jack

My fashion sense features baggy sweatpants, a baggier Fall Out Boy shirt with a smudge of paint right between the boobs (but without the band name anywhere on it!), and fucking Velcro sandals. So, let's be real here: if I hopped on the nonbinary bandwagon because I wanted to be trendy, then I might as well jump off into the dirt now. I also don't think being murdered would be very cool, and that seems to happen a lot to the trans folks of the world.

Being bi and nonbinary isn't a contradiction. It makes ten times as much sense as economics. *Make up your mind*, they say to both. *Gay or straight? Man or woman?* I never know how to answer. *Both. Neither. More.* I'm more of a woman than a man, but more of a boy than a girl. I've fallen a little or a lot in love with quiet nerdy men, women with tattoos, and enbies who cosplay. I'm transmasculine, I guess, but I'm also every gender. I contain multitudes, and it feels like heaven and hell every single day. Still, I don't really care what sounds you make with your mouth when you want to refer to my purgatory gender, unless you're an asshole about it.

It took me a while to get here, you know. Way back when I was just a baby bi falling in love with my girlfriend as they shared their baby nonbinary self with me, I wanted to call myself *butch*, but the Internet told me that was for lesbians only. Of course I can let lesbians have one little word to themselves! Lesbians could have both my kidneys without so much as saying please. But until recently, calling myself trans felt too dangerous, as if the word was the real threat (and as if butch women don't get hate-crimes too, which is also ridiculous). Imposter syndrome plus fight-or-flight meet in an explosion that some have informed me is generally known as generalized anxiety disorder.

Speaking of imposter syndrome, do I get to take up space in a magazine called *Bi Women Quarterly*? Do I even want to? Right now, I'm banking on womanhood being so full of contradictions already (see America Ferrera's *Barbie* monologue) that I can claim and reject it at the same time. Maybe it can be my summer home, even if some people don't think I belong in it any time of year.

I looked in the mirror and swore I saw myself looking back for the first time after chopping off my hair, and it turned out those feelings I had for Han Solo as a kid might've been gender envy all along. I don't know who wouldn't want to give the middle finger to a society that wants to determine our lives by our genitals, because apparently the factions in *Divergent* were *understating* how much humans like tiny boxes. I'm not going to lie, it can be fun! But sometimes, white as I am, I look in the mirror and swear I see Nex Benedict looking back. Sometimes,

I want to claw open my throat and my chest until I reveal something new beneath: a new voice, a new body. The joy and the pain, the trans and the bi, the woman and the man and the something entirely different—they all depend on each other to exist inside of me.

But they also exist outside of me, so enough of my dumbass metaphors and me. The myth that bisexuality is inherently trans-exclusionary is possibly one of the most insidious in queer internet discourse. Worse, hate groups like the LGB Alliance in the United Kingdom treat trans people as perverted and rewrite our history while probably making plans to axe the B next. As I said before, trans people are being murdered, and the killers aren't just cis men. (For the record, I believe that bullying someone to the point of suicidality, directly or indirectly, is essentially murder.) From where my trans friends and I are standing, *Leave us the fuck alone* looks like a much better queer slogan than *love is love*. So, what I have to say to the cis members of the bi community is this: *please* either stick up for us or shut up for us. Either works fine. That's how you support us. Thank you, next.

*S. Jack is a bi and nonbinary college student who lives and writes in Southern California's Inland Empire in the U.S. She may not be sure of many things, but she's sure of her love for her family, dog, girlfriend, the queer community, and Fall Out Boy.*



# Dancing in the Grey

By Rae

We're spinning 'round in this room  
No one knows what's going on  
We're dancing in the grey  
And on a route to the moon  
Masked by the overcast  
Dancing in the grey in this place  
In this place

*Excerpt from the song "Dancing in the Grey"  
by Michael Malarkey (2015)*

Maybe you're right. Maybe I am confused. I'm torn between men and women and masculine and feminine and horny and sex-repulsed.

Maybe it is all because of big T (Trauma), and what I feel is my identity is actually all just because what I went through literally changed the chemical make-up of my brain, tore my trust into shreds, and left me as desperate to forget myself as to find approval and love from anyone who would offer it.

Maybe some days I feel weird about my breasts because I don't want to feel sexual and I don't want people to look and I don't want to remember all the things that happened. Maybe I don't feel attracted to strangers because the idea

of someone I don't know very well touching me fills me with dread and panic. Maybe I am drawn to women because I want to avoid *him* and drawn to men because I want to avoid *her*.

But why does it matter *why*? Can't I have the space to be those stereotypes? To be a bisexual demisexual non-binary human-fucking-being without you questioning my "truth" and ignoring what I say? Isn't it enough that I feel this way? Why must you refuse to see what I see in myself?

Take your black and white and leave me be.

Let me dance in the grey.

I'm twirling in the in-between spaces of gender and sex and sexuality and I don't need you to join me. I would be fine if it was a solo routine but I've found my partner (it's not you) and he is spinning around with me and holding my hand and he casts light into the shadows when I can't even see the edges of my own silhouette anymore.

And, you know what, he still lets me be blurry and change shape when I need.

Maybe you're the one who is confused.

*Rae lives in Oxford, United Kingdom, where they research bisexual culture and history. When they aren't studying, they're playing and designing games, painting, or spending time with found family.*



## Hot Chocolate

By Niamh Griffiths

I'm sitting  
in the coffee shop  
where I saw you second  
maybe third  
when I was his and you were hers  
before our conversations about  
master's degrees and plays we'd seen  
before subtle hand grazes  
and "does she like me back?" squeezes  
(I did, by the way)  
before you showed me pictures  
of your dog and we found out our  
favourite songs were the same  
when you thought that I was straight  
but were wondering if there was something  
a little bit...about me

*Niamh Griffiths is a poet from South Wales. She predominantly writes poetry discussing sexuality, mental health, and religion.*

# Tumulus

By Flare

## Aftermath

The land was left barren.  
It was a wasteland of our own making.  
I was left naked, bleeding and bruised.  
Violated in ways I never thought possible.  
I gave my heart, soul, my life blood to save the others.  
It wasn't enough, the air was stolen from their lungs.  
Their bodies and bones lined up in piles ready to go onto the ever-growing pyre.  
I grew so weary the earth welcomed me.  
And I slept.

## Lover's Call

I was sleeping within the cool dark earth.  
Moss my pillow and the soft grass my blanket.  
When I heard your sweet voice from above cry.  
"Come back to me, please come back to me."  
Even with my lichen-filled ears, I could hear the desperation in my lover's voice.  
It has been a long time since I've seen the surface. What will I find there?  
A verdant green land or the desolate wasteland I left behind.  
All I knew was that they were calling to me.  
I started to stir in my earthen bed, wiped the mud from my tear-stained face and began to dig.

## At the Surface

My lover's hand was the first thing I felt when I found the surface.  
Their face was the first thing my eyes saw as they pulled me from my grave.  
They were thinner, gaunt even as if they had been sitting vigil for as long as I had slept.  
When their lips met mine, I could feel the oxygen return to my starving lungs.  
They clutched me to their body not willing to let me go from their side even for a minute.  
The sun warmed our skin as we reveled in each other's presence.  
The soft grass was once a blanket, now a bed for our lovers' embrace.

*Flare is a 31-year-old gender fluid individual who lives in the Pacific Northwest of the U.S. with their two wonderful partners and three dogs. They are a full-time registered nurse and uses poetry to explore themes of love, depression, disassociation, and returning to oneself after the COVID-19 pandemic.*



# Why Still Bi?

By Sheri, Sheri—a.k.a. Virtual Zoom Brunch Goddess

A couple of years ago, my oldest godchild (a high schooler at the time) came out to me about a crush of theirs. I asked, “Oh—are you bi like Tia Sheri?” “Oh, no,” they said (was that an eye roll I saw?), “I’m PANsexual.” Their mom (who had marched in Pride parades as a straight ally for the Seattle Bisexual Women’s Network for years) later asked me, “What is the difference between bisexual and pansexual?” I could give an accurate definition for each. However, the why of my holding tight to the B while my godchild clearly felt that was “old-fashioned” eluded me. Was I just 20 years behind the times?

Fast forward to October of 2023 and I wrote a message to the group of bi+ individuals from our monthly virtual brunches. What follows is that letter, edited and tweaked for publication.

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Greetings, all,

I was thinking about our bi/pan discussion and generational influences on the struggle for bi+ visibility and bi+ identity. As the universe would have it, soon after that meeting there was a Radio Lab podcast on KUOW on this very topic. I am clearly a product of the movement for bi inclusion in the 1990’s during the height of the ‘born this way’ movement. I encourage all to listen to it: [radiolab.org/podcast/born-way](http://radiolab.org/podcast/born-way).

## Why my queer self still holds tight to the B in my LGBTQ2SIAP+ family tree

During the summer of 1992, I had my first experience with a woman while backpacking overseas. I promptly panicked. I spent the next year trying to cope with the conflict between this and my fundamentalist religious upbringing. I even briefly tried to solve it by getting engaged. (Luckily, that fell through.)

Living in Charlottesville, Virginia, I became friends with the first open lesbians I had ever met. In the spring of 1993, they took me to the March on Washington, DC. My future girlfriend even bought me a “straight, but not narrow” button I still have. In fact, it was on a trip to San Francisco that summer where I found the anthologies, *Bi Any Other Name* and *Closer to Home*. Those books saved my life. There were more letters! There were other people like me! B was more than one letter in a very short string, a temporary aberration! To me, it meant being seen and heard and part of a larger community—I felt I could at long last be folded into the chorus that sang “We Are Family”!

But there wasn’t any B in anything really, though Charlottesville did have several quite famous lesbians, including author Rita Mae Brown. A librarian and I had to start the first bi group in town ourselves. At the same moment in time, on the national

level, the hunt was on for the “gay gene”—folks were pushing to change the frame from “lifestyle” to a way you were born. At the same time, the gay marriage movement was really hitting its stride in the courts. I faced a lot of challenges holding on to being bisexual.

I came out as bi to my mother. And she (weeping) said, “I believe now that god made some people (born this way) who just are not attracted to the opposite sex—but you like boys, so why are you not choosing boys?”

The Unitarian church (happily hosting the gay/lesbian Metropolitan Community Church which my girlfriend and I attended) kicked the bi group I had started out of renting their space. The minister felt compelled to read me the complaint letter that led to the church voting to boot us. The letter compared us to pedophiles and Nazis and said we promoted bestiality and were all promiscuous. This was clearly a bad choice we were making because we were not “born this way.”

My lesbian “friends” in Charlottesville said I was sleeping with the enemy and questioned my welcome on women’s land for that reason, because I wasn’t “born this way” and “had a choice.”

In 1995, I came to Seattle for my doctorate and was a teaching assistant in graduate school for Human Sexuality and Gender Studies. I kept challenging the current academic understanding. Advocating that while this “born this way” approach was helpful in making headway against the evangelical church view of homosexuality as a sin, it really kept bi women in the *Basic Instinct* insane violent stalker box.

I marched in a Pride parade for the first time in 1996 with the Seattle Bisexual Women’s Network. Dan Savage, popular sex advice columnist, was emcee for the parade. At the time, he did not believe bi men existed at all, and announced our group this way: “Here comes the Seattle Bisexual Women’s Network—they will sleep with anybody!” I guess we didn’t count as really queer?

I didn’t participate actively in the gay marriage campaign, because I was in a triad wherein no one was considering marriage ever because it would make our relationship bigamy and prosecutable.

For over 15 years, I was partnered with a man (not married) and paid thousands of dollars for health insurance so I could attempt to not “pass” and not access heterosexual privilege.

In the summer of 2022, I was attacked in a work meeting for identifying as bi/queer. And I faced pushback from folks who were fine with lesbians at work.

So why, three decades later, am I still coming out as bi as well as queer?

Why have I been managing the Zoom hosting for the monthly virtual brunches for three years and counting?



Why do I still hold tight to the BI?

Because the **BI** is the **Basket** that holds my **Identity** and my **herstory**.

Warmly,

*Sheri—a.k.a. Virtual Zoom Brunch Goddess*

About this photo: Prompted by the “Crochet is Inspiring” article in *BWQ*’s Fall 2023 issue, Sheri decided to make a shawl with more pastel bi flag colors. In this photo she is “reading” that article, while her pink yarn is being wound. (The blue and purple yarn is already wound and on the table.) She made the shirt with the womxn of the Charlottesville Bisexual Women’s Support Network to wear to the local Women’s Music Festival.



*Sheri—a.k.a. Virtual Zoom Brunch Goddess, is a cisgender bisexual/queer woman in her mid-late fifties living in Seattle with her partner. She loves gardening, supporting pollinators, being out in nature, reading sci-fi and fantasy, going to farmers markets, and crocheting. She participates regularly in a queer stitching group both virtually and in person.*

## Weaving Identities Together

*By Gia Choquette*

I am writing this two days before turning 30, which I feel is an especially important transitional moment to reflect on my life and my identity. In addition to being a bisexual woman (I use pansexual and queer to describe myself, too, but feel most happy and at home with the bi label), I am also on the asexual spectrum. Holding both these identities together has informed the way I move through the world and see myself. While I am able to experience strong romantic and aesthetic attraction to people of all genders, I feel extremely neutral toward sex and always have. I could absolutely go my whole life never having sex with anyone and be very happy, and I would probably prefer that. A likely early sign of my asexuality was when I wrote an entry in my journal at age 13 in which I imagined my ideal life as an adult in my thirties, planning to live alone in a cottage by the woods with some cats and be a writer. I did not picture myself partnered, married, or sleeping with anyone. Now that I am approaching the age I imagined in my journal entry, it turns out I am partnered and living with my boyfriend. We don’t live in a cottage by the woods, but we do have a cat and I do enjoy writing. So, I am not too far off from the life I imagined at 13.

What I did not realize about myself at age 13 that I do know to be true of my identity now is that I am both bi and ace. I think an important and beautiful part of bisexuality is its ability to create space for and hold seemingly binary and contradictory

concepts and weave them together in a way that proudly and creatively allows for the complexity of bothness. There is a lot of power and radical potential in the word “both,” especially in a world that often uses binaries to categorize and control people. In a similar manner, this worldview has empowered and enabled me to incorporate “bothness” into many aspects of my identity. I am attracted to both people with genders similar to and different from my own. I am both bisexual and pansexual. I am both bi and ace. I absolutely adore Robyn Och’s definition of bisexuality in which she says:

“I call myself bisexual because I acknowledge that I have in myself the potential to be attracted, romantically and/or sexually to people of more than one gender, not necessarily at the same time, not necessarily in the same way, and not necessarily to the same degree. For me, the “bi” in “bisexual” refers to the potential for attraction to people with genders similar to and different from my own.”

This is how I define my own bisexuality, emphasizing each part of the definition and particularly, in regard to my asexuality, the “romantically and/or sexually” part. I hope that as I enter my thirties, I will continue exploring the many multifaceted ways of being bisexual, asexual, and human.

*Gia Choquette is a special education teaching assistant, currently working on her M.A. in Counseling Psychology with a focus on School Counseling at Lesley University. She lives with her boyfriend and their cat, Nyx, in central Massachusetts, U.S.*

# The “F” in LGBTQ, a.k.a., What the Letters Actually Stand For

By Mica L. Rich

L— stands for:

Let boys like dolls,  
and clothes, and colors.  
It really wouldn't kill a man  
to have grown up learning  
a little bit of nurture,  
creativity, love, joy,  
or how to change a diaper or two.

L— stands for:

Let boys like boys, and  
let's all remember  
that masculinity  
is not the rejection  
of anything feminine.

L— stands for:

Let girls like cars  
and trucks  
and mud  
*and other women.*  
Let them get a little messy 'cause  
“act like a lady”  
should never have meant  
“behave like you're made of porcelain.”  
No more running now  
It's time to grow up.  
Little boys will be boys  
forever, but you  
are a woman now.

L— stands for

Let girls cuss. 'Cause  
they've lots to cuss about.  
And let's be honest,  
there is nothing sexier  
than a woman who says “fuck”  
with the same fluidity she flicks  
her hair back with,  
and the same confidence she carries  
with her up to the mic when  
she's finally found her voice.

G— stands for:

Get over yourself.  
My pronouns are not dependent  
on your comfort level with them,  
nor does my gender expression require  
your comprehension in order to be valid.

I see that empathy and compassion  
are also concepts beyond your grasp and yet,  
they too exist.

I will not be made to wear a costume  
Just so that you  
feel more comfortable in your clown suit.  
And by the way, those big-ass shoes  
do not convince anyone of the size of your feet.  
Or of anything else.

Maybe

If you spent less time compensating  
for what you don't have, you might discover  
what values you could bring to the table.

G— stands for

Go fuck yourself.  
There is nothing “unnatural”  
about my “homosexuality.”  
There is, however, nothing natural  
about bathing in Axe body spray and running  
on Mountain Dew and Monster Energy.  
That smell could kill brain cells  
from a mile away, and I'm guessing  
You don't have a lot to spare.

B— stands for

Bisexuals. And Pansexuals. Because  
you deserve to be  
acknowledged, included, and reminded  
that your queerness is not a job application,  
You do not have to provide  
your relevant work history in order  
to qualify.

B— stands for:

You are beautiful, you are brave.  
You belong here.

Sometimes

B— stands for buh-bye and back the fuck off  
because I did not ask  
for your opinions on how I dress.  
You are not entitled to my attention just  
'cause I caught yours while minding  
my own business.

B— also stands for bitch

I guess

Because that's what you called me  
When I told you “nice tits” isn't a compliment.

T— stands for:

Trans rights are human rights, and

That is a hill I will proudly die on.  
T— stands for they/them/theirs  
and it sure as shit  
doesn't stand for TERF  
T— stands for THE tea.  
It is hot.  
I will spill it.  
I have wasted too many years  
with my mouth shut  
watching you make stupid choices.  
Life is too short not to speak up  
and you will not  
be an asshole in my presence.

Q— stands for  
Quit whining.  
My identity is not a “lifestyle”  
And you cannot “disagree” with it.  
Q— stands for queer.  
We are here.  
We are not going anywhere  
get used to it.

The F in LGBTQ you  
Might not have known was there.  
F— stands for  
figuring it the fuck out.  
Because let's be honest,  
learning about yourself is complicated.  
Sometimes you've always known,  
Sometimes you guess until you get it right,  
and that's okay.  
F— stands for phases... well, kind of.  
But let's stop belittling them  
as if life isn't

just a series of beautiful phases,  
of the moon, of the seasons, of the tides  
Phases are what move us forward.  
F stands for moving forward.

F— can also stand for fucking tired  
as in  
“I am so fucking tired  
of defining myself to you”  
But sometimes  
F— stands for—

Fine. Well. I came out as bisexual in high school though I'm probably actually pansexual and I'm definitely not cisgender but maybe it's nonbinary and maybe it's genderfluid I'm not really sure what the difference is or why it matters and I might also be demisexual because I couldn't care less about sex unless you make me feel safe but also maybe that's just a response to being sexually assaulted, or maybe people just kinda suck sometimes I don't know Sir just call me a fag at this point, you'll save us both some time.

F— stands for faggot.  
Yeah.  
I am.  
What of it?

*Mica L. Rich (they/them) lives in the Boston area and is the author of “This Is How Wildflowers Grow,” poems about living and growing through trauma. See Mica read at Stark Brewing Company in Manchester, NH, U.S., every Thursday night at 7 p.m.*



## Connections

*By Deb Morley*

**Artist's statement:** For me, Connections did not come together until I added the pink lines that connect one shape to another. Pink was the obvious color choice as for me pink signifies queerness, and through these individual connections from one to another, we connect and build bi and queer community.

*Deb Morley lives outside of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, U.S. with her wife Gina and kitty cat Everett. She has been engaging in a variety of art modalities since recently retiring from her career in academic librarianship/IT.*

# Fluidity as a Part of My Queer Identity

By Amber McLaughlin

I knew I was bisexual by the time I turned 18, but I did not acquire the vocabulary to accurately describe my gender until years later. I have never felt 100% like a woman, as my birth certificate would argue, but I also never really had a way to understand or articulate those feelings. Now, at the age of 24, I identify as a fluidflux transmasc femme bisexual.

When nearly everything shut down due to COVID, I was living in an apartment at college. It was my first time living away from home. This unique experience of combined independence and isolation actually benefited me by giving me a deeper understanding of myself. When I was alone and didn't feel the need to be anyone but my pure self, I realized that those feelings I have always felt inside me were linked to my gender identity. I started to explore, conduct research, and test new things out. Without fear of judgment, just me inside my room, I began to think about my connection to masculinity.

After a year and a half of self-discovery, I came to find that my gender is fluid. I do not always feel like a woman, and I do not always feel like a man. My gender itself fluctuates, and so does its intensity. Because of this I have found the labels *transmasc femme* work best to describe me. I am *transmasc* because I identify heavily with masculinity and I have a deep connection to that part of myself that is not aligned with the gender assigned to me at birth. I use *femme* because that is how I present much of the time. I am not fully a man, nor always one, so the term *femme* affirms my femininity and female identity connection, without losing the masculinity I hold so dear.

This can be tricky sometimes, because I do not always fit into an easily identifiable category. This can make people confused or uncomfortable. *Are you a boy or a girl?* So many people have asked me this. My initial thought is to reply "Both," "Yes," or "It depends," but most of the time, I fall back into whatever they assume me to be. This is the easier path, and not one I always want to take. I choose this response out of both worry and weariness. I worry about what others might think of me, but also about what may occur if I do not fit into a box.

Also, I feel so tired of explaining myself to everyone. Responding the way I want comes with follow-up questions that end up with me trying to explain my whole self to someone. Plus, having to do that for those who do not understand, and sometimes do not want to understand, can be exhausting for my mental health. I have already gone through a journey to learn about myself, and do not always want to put everyone around me through that journey just because they do not like that my vocabulary is not what they expected. I can still be male, even

when I wear a dress or makeup, but in my experience, people seldom agree.

Being bisexual in addition to my fluid gender identity tends to be both positive for myself and difficult to navigate. When going on dates, I found myself leaning into my femininity whenever I would go out with a woman or a straight man. This never left me feeling good about myself. I was scared to present a more masculine side when seeing a woman, who was expecting to be going out with another woman. I was also nervous to come off as "too queer" to straight men. Being bisexual did not faze anyone, but not being a clear-cut cis or trans person raised some complications. I did find that when interacting socially with other gender-diverse people and non-straight men that I was more immediately accepted for who I am. Luckily, I eventually met a wonderful person to be my partner.

My boyfriend is a cisgender bisexual man, and he wholly accepts and respects my identity. He has always been open and caring towards me, completely supporting my identity in every way. Having him beside me has helped my confidence, and has taught me that I can be loved exactly as I am. Though I am grateful for my support system, presenting myself to others is still a struggle.

When I am in queer spaces, I tend to feel not queer enough. I feel this way when my own insecurity meets the fluidity of my identity. Being a bisexual person, who is often thought of as a woman, in a relationship with a man, I tend to feel not queer enough even in bi+ spaces. In addition to this, when I am feeling more masculine and am trying to present as such, but am still thought of as a woman, I end up feeling like a fraud within the very spaces that I thought would embrace me. I feel "not trans enough" because I am still a woman, and "not queer enough" because I am a woman dating a man. Although I know myself, within queer spaces I often end up feeling like an outsider. To be able to be in a queer space where everyone understands and respects that some people's identities are fluid, and that they are still mighty queer, would be a dream for me.

I want to make queer friends that I can talk to, relate to, and spend time within queer spaces where no one feels less valid for who they are. I believe that I will be able to enter such a space, but I also believe it will take time. Until then, I know who I am and that I have great people by my side to support me.

*Amber McLaughlin is a graduate student in California, U.S., who loves to write about all things queer.*

# Greetings From the Three of Us

By Karen Schnurstein

I'm going on 49, and I've only just realized that I'm trigender. At first, I'd concluded that I'm bigender, but then I remembered this other, "third" genderless part who's always been inside of me. I know this because I've seen her in photos going all the way back to my childhood, and I do feel her, rather often.

I didn't face my bisexuality until the time immediately following the Orlando shooting in 2016, in which 49 people were killed and 53 wounded in a mass shooting at Pulse, an LGBTQ+ nightclub. That event compelled me to stand and speak up, though at first just politically. My overwhelming feelings and thoughts were, "These are my people; I am one of them. I must come out for the sake of all of us." I simply could no longer deny the truth about my sexual identity.

Being both bisexual and trigender, for me, is a little bit worrying because of the hostility many people have towards those of us who are different in these ways. Add to this the fact that I'm in remission from severe mental illness and have experienced recovered traumatic memories, and I'm even more of a minority.

Living in conservative northern Indiana makes me feel unsafe even just placing a bi pride sticker on my car's bumper, especially since it looks like someone's tried to chip away at it. But I'm gradually realizing there is a growing safe space for the LGBTQ+ community. I can turn to this space now, and I have done so already as a contributor to *Bi Women Quarterly*. The feelings of belonging, of being wanted and accepted, are available to me in such spaces, and they are critical to my quality of life and well-being.

Currently, I'm feeling a bit isolated, and I don't even know how typical my experience of trigenderhood is. I've gone through phases where I've behaved and looked rather masculine and felt very much in touch with my definitions of male identity and energy. I've also had the sexuality that most would consider to be of a bisexual man, and this adds an interesting layer to my sexual psyche.

I'm mostly my idea of girly-girl on the inside, and I've the body parts from birth to match that. But there truly is this third part of me with absolutely no gender at all. She can feel at times like an "it" of some kind, and that can feel confusing and unpleasant when it comes to my experience of my public self. However, this part of me feels quite comfortable privately. Hopefully, soon she can engage with the world more comfortably.

I refer to this part as "she" because I'm still a woman who chiefly identifies as one. This third part is contained within my understanding of "her." My experience of all of this corresponds with the concept of gender fluidity, and I'm very curious to eventually know others who are like me.

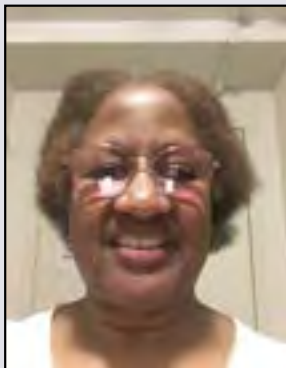
*Karen Schnurstein (shelher) is an emerging bi+ poet and writer living in northern Indiana, U.S. Her work can be found in Bi Women Quarterly, New Feathers Anthology, The Dawn Review, Steel Jackdaw, and elsewhere. Read more about her at [karenschnurstein.com](http://karenschnurstein.com).*



## Disclosure

By Cheryl Williams

I'm Cheryl—or Che—Williams, from Boston, Massachusetts, in the U.S. I'm in my sixties. I'm an artist, poet, singer, and actor. I'm in the process of deciding about life changes, like whether to go back to school.



I'm bisexual, and I'm also asexual. Some have asked me how I can be both. I've told them I have dealt with enough nonsense to know what I want and what I don't want. I don't want drama, conditions, excuses, games, or lies. I'm trying to deal with the feelings I had from my last relationship! I just don't see myself with anyone. Also, I have a lot on my plate!

This drawing, *Flower Arrow*, came out of a meditation—it came from my heart!



# Moons

By Kaz

Everything I see comes to me in shades of blue, purple, and pink.

It's not a surprise. I'm quite possibly the furthest thing from artistically inclined that my family has produced in multiple generations. For me, visually, colors are significant. Symbolic. Everything is the way it is for a reason.

## Blue.

Blue becomes synonymous in a way with the pain I've experienced, but more than that, that I've *survived* said pain and that I am still alive. The dark blue reminds me of bruised knees and the shadows in the corner of my room, and over time, getting up when I hit the ground and wiping the tears from my eyes in my hardest moments, because I can't afford a moment of vulnerability—not now. That time will come later, when I'm sitting alone. The light blue of the sky on a sunny day is a vivid reminder of the good days that have passed, and the good days left to come. I learned once that blue is the rarest color to find in day-to-day life and the older I get, the more I understand the sentiment that follows that. Blue is a reminder of everything—good and bad—that has helped to make you who you are today. The hardest challenges one faces in life don't come every day, and the importance comes with the days in between, and how one chooses to take control of one's lives. Seeing blue takes on the exact same meaning for me of seeing how far I've come and how far I still have left to go.

Except that distance seems a little less vast, a little more possible, when everything seems to shift just a little, and I see the world from a new angle.

## Purple.

I like to think that I see the purple of the world in a different way than everyone else around me. Of course, it's a foolish notion—no two people see the world in the exact same way, so *obviously* I do, but in my eyes, purple is so self-assured, so natural. Purple is the color of a single dancer in a crowd filled with every other color of the rainbow, unafraid and unapologetic as they seek their own passion, and it is the color of someone who is fearless with their wants and beliefs, willing to die for them. It is complex and always-changing, and it has a heartbeat of its own that it dances to, and try as hard as they may, no one can stop it. Purple is a sentient creature of its own, with its own feelings and emotions, and while it can be overwhelming at times, it can also be healing. It's what I want to be—the sharp, gut-wrenching pain that overtakes me every time I'm told I *can't* do something.

It is the color that people will follow, will spend their entire lives seeking, and never come any closer to reaching because it dances just out of their grasp. And that's the beauty of it.

## Pink.

Pink is so soft and so gentle that every time I see it, my heart aches. I grew up surrounded by jokes about it. My mind has come to associate with it with kindness. It's the color of dresses to fancy parties and nail polish on hands that hold one another tightly, in the stolen moments that one thinks of fondly, days, months, years later. When I'm most unsure of myself and who I am, I come back to it. It's an experience of self-identity and coming to terms with who I am. I think of it now as I stand alone from the crowd, watching the people I call friends gather and wave, and know that I'm a little less alone when I'm with the people I love, the representation of pink itself.

It's the beauty of colors.

*Kaz is in southwestern Ohio in the U.S. and is a first-year English student with a certificate in Copyediting and Publishing.*

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## Abstract 20



Acrylic art on canvas board by Jo-Anne Carlson

Jo-Anne Carlson is a writer, artist, and musician from Yakima, Washington, U.S. who believes that who you love, how you love, and how many you love, shouldn't matter. She serves on the Board of *Bi Women Quarterly*.



# The Demon, The Cookie, and the Daughter on Fire

By Mary Salome

...rather than negating passion, desire, and sexuality, one can transmute them. This... is indeed what allows the bodhisattva, in various Buddhist scriptures, to indulge in sex without being defiled by it. In the *Suragama-sutra*, for instance, a bodhisattva makes love to the daughters of the demon Mara in order to save them.

—Bernard Faure, *The Red Thread: Buddhist Approaches to Sexuality*

## Part I: The Demon

I glazed one nipple with honey,  
the other with warm butter.

I cupped my breasts.

I offered him sweet.

I offered him salty.

He had no tongue.

Reality was more tepid: a modest admission, my arm brushing his. I was coming out—to myself first—as bisexual rather than lesbian in my fourth decade. He jerked away as if I had burned him. I felt contaminated in some way, and sad, because I was sure that what I had to offer him was pretty cool.

I took my little sadness and slinked away, thinking about the demon Mara and his daughters. Mara sent his three daughters to tempt the Buddha as he sat under the bodhi tree nearing enlightenment, but the Buddha was not distracted from his goal. Mara's daughters are rarely named, their identities hidden behind their father's. I wanted to know their names because they deserve to be known, but I also wanted to know if I am named after one.

## Part II: The Daughter

In some places, Mara's daughters are named Craving, Aversion, and Passion. I'd like to suggest a fourth daughter: Purity. There is something that feels pure about the heat I feel when it accompanies love. It feels to me like it can burn away fear, denial, and shame. Purity does not demand reciprocity, and Purity does not abhor Craving, Aversion, or Passion. Purity accepts them completely, transforming them in the process.

If I were to touch my own arm, I would not pull away.

I felt humiliated when I showed up full of love and desire and the object of my affection wouldn't touch me. Looking back, though, I see my actions shine. Being brave in the face of desire, asking for what I wanted, and being willing to live with the consequences of not getting it: these were fine efforts. I prefer to live my life, take risks, and not be afraid to look the fool. I'm willing to try, to change, to be seen, and to be vulnerable in my changing. I think it's beautiful and I feel like I'm alive.

## Part III: The Cookie

I admit to clinging to a scrap of the idea that he would have been perfect for me if only I could have gotten around his unavailability. But he is his unavailability. He does not exist without his barriers to me. Since what I'm talking about here is partly appetite, I'll put it this way: he's not a cookie that I could eat if I could only get it out of the wrapper. The cookie and the wrapper are one. The wrapper is the cookie.

I want, and I dare say I deserve, a cookie that will unwrap itself for me.

I just compared a person to a pastry, so perhaps my purity is clouded after all. If he's the temptation, though, maybe I'm not Mara's daughter. Maybe he is, stopping to erect his charms in the formerly lesbian Pure Land of my morning meditation. It certainly was a simpler life without men in it, but the complication can't be disentangled now. True to form, Purity demands that they be integrated, and heat is the only force that can bring about that alchemical change.

When Mara's daughters couldn't seduce the Buddha, what did they do? Where did they take all that heat? I'm no bodhisattva, but I know enough to at least ask the names of the demons I invite to bed. Of all of Mara's children, I think I'll recognize Purity first. She'll be the daughter on fire.

*Mary Salome (she/her) is a queer Arab- and Irish-American writer and media activist who lives in San Francisco. Her prose and poetry have been published in Food for our Grandmothers: Writings by Arab-American and Arab-Canadian Feminists, Solstice: A Winter Anthology Vol. 2, Archive of the Odd, and SPROUT: An Eco-Urban Poetry Journal, among others. Her short story "Okami in the Bayview" was nominated for a WSFA Small Press Award.*

my work was, I wouldn't be told to "change jobs if I couldn't handle it," or "Guys put up with stuff all the time." She would listen, ask questions, challenge me, but most of all, *be there*. I could talk to her about everything and nothing, sit in comfortable silence, or get into steamy, fun mischief and it all felt as natural as breathing air. This was the person I wanted to spend the rest of my life with. How could I explain all this to my evangelical Christian, Korean aunties?

Oh, that's right—I couldn't.

"So how do you guys, you know..." My *Eemo* kept ploughing through questions oblivious to the hamster wheel of thoughts cranking through my brain.

"*Eemo*, I don't feel comfortable—"

"Send me a picture of her! I want to see. Show your *Eemo*."

Reluctantly, I found a picture of the two of us, grinning from ear to ear, our faces relaxed, our heads close enough to kiss. I remember when we took that picture at our first concert together. We seemed so happy. The cool September breeze caressed our faces. A bit of that fall chill started to set in, the sun setting in the background. I hit send.

A few minutes went by. Silence.

"So, you're the girl in the relationship." She made some additional comments that turned to barbs, cutting my heart.

My face became hot.

"Hey!" My voice was firm. For the first time in my life, I spoke up against my elders.

My heart hammered in my chest. This was something you did *not* do. Not in my culture. Doing so would result in a shame suicide of being berated and called names behind closed doors. But worse, there was the pity. "*Aigoo*, you are pretty and smart. Why couldn't you find a good man?" was Korean code for "What's wrong with you?"

"Your words hurt. If you can't be respectful, I will end the conversation." Hot tears edged the corners of my eyes.

Stunned silence. I held my breath.

"Okay, okay. I just saying—I should have found a nice guy for you. But it's okay, you gayyy. Okay. My friend's uncle is gay. He's a good man."

I hung up the phone, resignation in my heart. I gave my relatives five minutes before all of a sudden they came out of the woodwork to "friend" me on Facebook, curious to see what an oddity we were. Family who was never there for the important moments, but anxious to zero in on my "screw-ups,"

leaving me naked to the elements. But then, I guess it's better than the other half of my family, in which I became the Dalai Lama representative of queer people everywhere. "How do I support so and so who's gay? Do you think if I wear a pride pin to the wedding, that's good enough support? Oh, and when did you decide to become gay?" As if it was something as simple as ordering a triple shot Venti latte at Starbucks.

I brought myself back to the moment, a patchwork quilt of emotions spreading itself out in my mind and heart. "Hey, that meant a lot that you came out to them," my partner said, getting up from the couch and pulling me into a hug.

I wish I could say my partner and I beat the odds and that we went on to marry and live happily ever after. But things ended. I found out later on that she didn't tell her family or friends about me, even with her wanting to move in, even with almost getting engaged. While I couldn't blame her for wanting to avoid the pain, it hurt all the same to know that I wasn't worth the risk, even though I thought she was.

Was the risk of coming out worth it? I was left with the shrapnel of my being *gayyy* rumbling through my family for years to come. Whispers behind my back, side glances, and not-so-subtle ignorance, and the familiar ache of being an outcast. But then, I started to rest in the freedom of not having to hide anymore. Slowly, I picked up friends who survived their own battles when coming out. They became family. So maybe coming out was the rite of passage, the wound that I needed to air out to find healing. Within the bittersweet aches of rubble that was and is my past, I found family; I found myself.

*Janie Kang (she/her pronouns) lives in the Pacific Northwest region of the U.S. She writes short stories and poetry as a means of healing herself and others by knowing we are not alone.*





## From A to B?

By Delphine RL

From a young age, I was taught to move from point A to point B in life, following a right and logical path.

Trying to follow that path led me to amazing discoveries, beautiful people, and a precious family of my own. But I never was able to find point B. My quest was still in progress. I was looking for something to fight, like a dragon, in order to be able to go back to my home as a hero like one of Joseph Campbell's. I didn't know I could follow the cycle of the heroine and become true to myself like one of Iris Murdoch's, instead.

Then, one day, I read a story about a person who fell in love with a person of their same gender while still experiencing their usual romantic and sexual attraction to other genders. It was like being punched in the stomach and seeing dazzling sparkles from the impact; I kept my teeth clenched in order to endure. I was hurting badly and having butterflies at the same time. My entire being felt something was happening but I couldn't say what, except that it was so unexpected and that it was a listen-to-your-soul moment.

As time went by, I started to feel a powerful warmth in my chest.

This warmth stayed in my body. My nights were filled at last with good sleep. My heart began to follow its own beat and dried my long-lasting tears as this sensation spread from my chest to the rest of my body, making me feel relaxed and confident. The fears that had torn my guts apart had suddenly vanished, cleaned up by this powerful stream.

Finally, I allowed myself to accept this warmth inside of me and, shortly after, it gave me the confidence to talk to friends about it, each of them confirming my boldness with the sweet feedback I so needed.

As I spoke with friends, I began to accept that these conversations were in fact a coming out of sorts. I was letting go of pieces of a burden I'd been carrying, without realizing how heavy it was to try, no matter what, to follow the teachings of my youth.

But then I had an epiphany: I wasn't *supposed* to go from A to B. Instead, I had to circle back, because, in my case, B was actually my point of origin.

To follow the path to my true self, B was the powerful letter with which to begin.

As soon as I tore up this veil of normativity with my unclenched teeth—at last—I gasped new air and felt like the letter B had landed on the surface of my chest, empowering me in a new way.

Thanks to that, my heart began to beat at its right pace, my cape flew above my shoulders, my hands rested on my hips, and I kept my chin up: I was ready to embrace this super-power, which gave me a wide-open perspective and the ability to think in new and different ways. I am so lucky!



B is the Origin—artwork by Delphine RL

*Delphine RL lives in Brittany, France. She is an artist who uses doll-making and story writing to help people improve their daily autonomy. She believes that being creative is the best way to access our inner resources.*

**“Every time a bisexual person makes their bi+ identity known, that is a form of activism.”**

*Robyn Ochs*

# You with Your Fears, Me with My Fantasies: *Vita & Virginia*

Reviewed by Nicole Swisher

Do not start. Do not blush. Let us admit in the privacy of our own society that these things sometimes happen. Sometimes women do like women.

— Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*

I'm betting you didn't learn in your tenth-grade English class that Virginia Woolf—that dazzling icon of literary genius—was bisexual. Neither did I. When I first heard of *Vita & Virginia*, a film about the extensive and passionate love affair Woolf shared with fellow novelist Vita Sackville-West, I was one part shocked, two parts ecstatic. I'm always looking for historical queerness to sink my teeth into, always searching for myself and my experiences in the annals of human lives lived long ago. To find just such a thing in Virginia Woolf of all people—one of my literary inspirations for as long as I can remember—was nothing short of electrifying for me.

Released in 2018 and directed by Chanya Button, *Vita & Virginia* is a romantic drama that opens with Vita Sackville-West, a notorious and gleeful troublemaker, doing what she does best: scandalizing the nation with her outspoken feminist and gender-nonconforming ideals. Vita exudes such an air of brash confidence and alluring sultriness that the viewer would be forgiven for thinking nothing could ever possibly unseat her...until she meets brilliant “madwoman” Virginia Woolf at a party that very same night, and you can practically *hear* all the oxygen escape her lungs. A chance meeting of their eyes across the room soon leads them to a somewhat more intimate encounter, and then another, and another—until it isn't long before Vita and Virginia are so desperate for each other's touch, each other's breath, each other's lingering look that they're nearly going mad with it. “I've settled down to wanting you,” Virginia says in a letter to Vita after the latter leaves England with her diplomat husband. “I hope at last this pleases you. It's damned unpleasant for me.”

And speaking of letters: early all of the dialogue shared between Vita and Virginia in the film is taken from the numerous letters the two exchanged in life, from their fumbling words of unprecedented passion to their first argument as a couple to the soul-baring conversation that caps off the film. Virginia, in all her stark vulnerability, speaks often of fear—the fear of what Vita makes her feel, the fear that she is not allowed to desire in quite the same way as her heterosexual sister, the fear of what should happen should Vita's proclivity for flights of fancy tear them apart. Vita is far more concerned with fantasies—lavish daydreams of taking Virginia away from her gloomy little writing room in Bloomsbury, putting her in the sun, letting all the world see what a stunning creature lurks behind the screen of her self-defeating doubts. And yet, in the very end, it



becomes abundantly clear that Vita is not quite so devoted—or Virginia quite so distant—as either one of them thinks.

In my opinion, there are very few words that can do *Vita & Virginia* justice. I've seen it probably half a dozen times and have yet to tire of it even a little bit. The audacious charisma of Gemma Arterton's Vita, the haunted half-light in the eyes of Elizabeth Debicki's Virginia, the sheer magnetism that pulls them toward each other despite so many people in their lives trying to warn them away—all of it is entrancing, captivating, breathtaking. As the film that introduced me to the reality of Virginia Woolf's bisexuality and showed me a gorgeous example of what the love between two women can look like, it holds a very special place in my heart that I doubt it will ever be dethroned from.

In light of all that, if you—like me—are constantly on the lookout for period romances of the sapphic sort, *Vita & Virginia* might just be the Holy Grail you've been searching for!

*Nicole Swisher is an out-and-proud bisexual radical feminist living in northeast Pennsylvania with her precious pets. She enjoys reading and writing fantasy and sapphic romance, playing MMORPGs (massively multiplayer online role-playing games), and learning new languages.*

## *Bright Lines: A Novel* by Tanwi Nandini Islam

New York: Penguin Books, 2015. 296 pages.

Reviewed by Sarah E. Rowley

[Cautionary advice: spoilers ahead!]

Tanwi Nandini Islam's first novel, *Bright Lines*, focuses on three members of a Muslim Bangladeshi family living in Brooklyn, New York City. We first meet Anwar Saleem, an apothecary who appears to be living the American Dream, having converted a brownstone from a crumbling crack house to a vibrant home for his family, tenant, and a variety of guests.

Anwar, a happy-go-lucky pothead who lost his Islamic faith during the 1971 war in Bangladesh, is indulgent with his younger daughter, 17-year-old Charu, who is intent on losing her virginity and starting her own clothing line. But he is especially fond of elder daughter Ella, the child of his best friend and brother-in-law, whom Anwar and his wife adopted when her parents were murdered in Bangladesh for their political beliefs. Ella, a 20-year-old student at Cornell's agricultural school who shares Anwar's passion for plants, returns home at the beginning of the novel, whose first act takes place over her summer vacation.

When the novel switches to Ella's point of view, we learn that she has been hiding two large secrets from her family for years: nightly hallucinations she has suffered ever since her parents' murders and her relocation to the U.S., and a longtime crush on her straight cousin Charu, who thinks of her as a sister. Gradually, both character and reader slowly discover that Ella is also struggling with gender identity, and in the novel's final movement, when many secrets are revealed, Ella adopts a new name and a male identity.

But for most of the novel, Ella and the other characters live in a state of confusion, never quite understanding themselves or each other. Anwar and his wife, Hashi, don't realize that Charu's omnipresent best friend, Maya, has run away from her strict Muslim father and is hiding at their house, having begun a chaste romance with Ella. The girls have no idea what Anwar's sexual obsession with their tenant, Mexican nurse Ramona Espinal, is doing to their parents' marriage. Anwar longs to share with Ella the horrors he and her birth father saw as guerillas in the 1971 war and also to share an important family secret, but can only commit his memories to writing. And as the tensions between devout Hashi and her rebellious daughter build to a boiling point, Charu drafts the resentful Ella into covering up her sexual adventures.

At its best moments, *Bright Lines* brings the chaotic Saleem household to life, allowing readers to understand the whole in a way none of its parts can. All three central characters—Anwar, Charu, and Ella—suffer from “misdirected love,” romantic obsessions that blind them to their real bonds. There's also a

recurring theme of hallucinations, which affects characters in addition to Ella. Anwar, who spends most of the novel high on hash or ganja (especially when he wants to connect with others), is haunted by visions of Ella's murdered father, Rezwan. And the elusive Maya is named for the Buddhist concept of “man's illusion, which kept him separated from the truth.”

Arguably the book's main character is 111 Cambridge Place, the Saleems' Brooklyn brownstone. In its beloved gardens, Anwar and Ella labor to create a lower clock, which will tell time as different flowers open and close at different times of the day. The house encompasses both Hashi's hairdressing salon and optimistic Anwar's expansive vision of home, sheltering (at least temporarily) the orphaned Ella, the runaway Maya, the immigrant Ramona, and Anwar's divorced brother Aman. It symbolizes a generous vision of family and belonging, a vibrant and multiethnic Brooklyn, and perhaps America itself.

But stories about the brownstone's original inhabitants, the Brights, foreshadow disaster. Abraham Bright, a Black police officer whose house was attacked by his own community whenever other cops killed young Black men, eventually succumbed to madness after his wife's tragic suicide. The Saleems' harboring of Maya similarly isolates them within the Muslim community, and sets off a chain of events that may repeat that history.

Islam is especially skilled at portraying the setting, and her Brooklyn—a world apart from the gentrifiers Charu describes as “white women with strollers and tattooed brown queers with oversized glasses”—is a vivid place, where the lavender awning of Anwar's Apothecary nestles between Ye Olde Liquor Shoppe and A Holy Bookstore.

In the book's last third, when the family travels to Bangladesh over winter break, the author economically evokes the country's varied landscapes, from the sprawling city of Dhaka to the hills where the despised Pahari peoples live to the coast of Cox's Bazaar. There the family sneaks into a graveyard at night (local mullahs will not allow women to visit openly) to see the graves of Ella's parents, unmarked because the annual floods have destroyed their stones.

In Bangladesh, Ella at last confronts the illusions of her life—both the hallucinations and her female identity—and gains the strength to move forward as the trans man El. His relatives have similar epiphanies, but at greater cost.

The same could be said of the novel as a whole. *Bright Lines* bursts with characters, incidents and plot—so much so that the reader doesn't know where to focus, and many characters and subplots feel underdeveloped. For much of the novel, El's story, particularly his relationship with Maya, feels crowded out

by other dramas. It makes sense that while El is disconnected from his true self, suffering insomnia and depression, he can't properly connect to anyone else, but the sudden shift in focus to his identity and his relationship with Charu in the final 50 pages comes as a shock.

Maya, one of the most intriguing characters, remains a cipher for most of the story, which hurts the book, given the importance of her actions to the plot; the same could be said of Ramona. Charu, with whose perspective the book spends far fewer chapters than those of Anwar and El, feels under-explored, and perhaps dismissed as shallow due to her femininity; it's unclear how her very different sexual awakening is supposed to connect or contrast with El's. A few scenes in the point-of-view of Charu's unscrupulous uncle, Stalin Bhai, are so extraneous they should have been cut.

Other subplots—like Anwar's desire to better understand his best friend, Guyanese marijuana dealer Reshaud Persaud, whom the reader and other characters know is a trans woman—fizzle out. Another subplot, about bigotry against the indigenous Pahari peoples of Bangladesh, concludes predictably, but lacks the space appropriate to the depth of its themes.

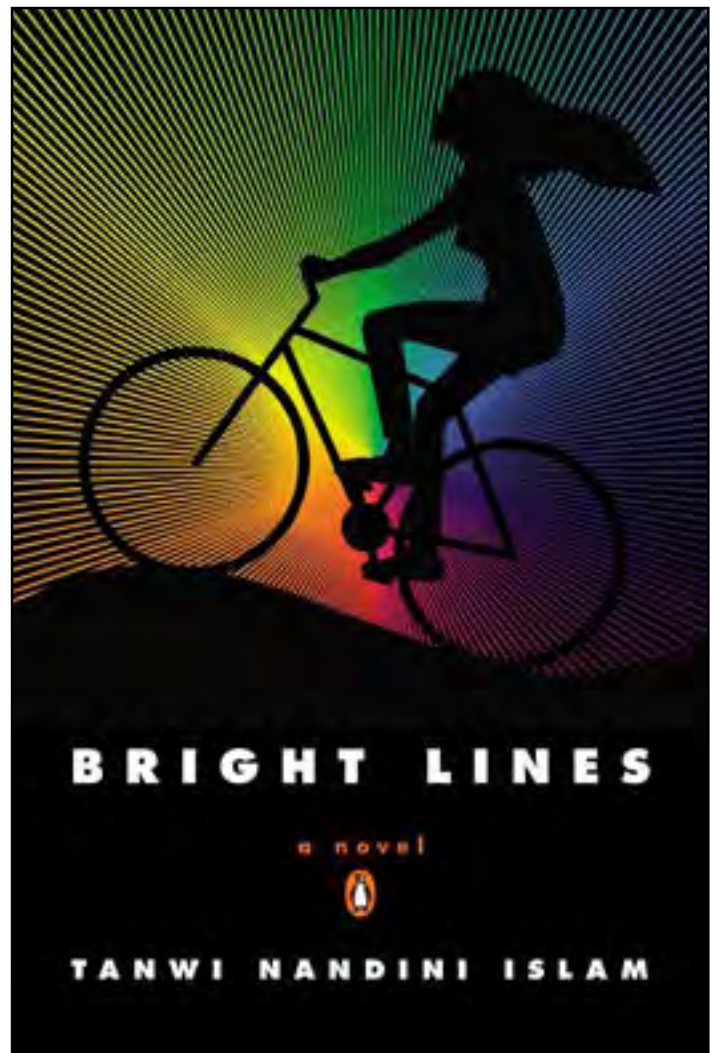
In the end, the book feels overstuffed. A great deal happens, but because much of the plot does not feel grounded in the characters, some events tip over into melodrama. Islam is adept at capturing daily life, but her writing weakens noticeably in action scenes, which include a firebombing, a suicide attempt, a deadly traffic accident, and a near-drowning.

But this lack of focus, complicated by the density of symbolism, is a common problem in first novels, and the fact remains that very little fiction explores the experiences of young trans men, especially from a contemporary perspective, or those of Bangladeshi-Americans, or of more-or-less secularized cultural Muslims.

Indeed, one of the great pleasures of the book is spending time with multi-faceted Muslims like Anwar, Charu, and El, who are all but invisible in American literature. Islam's protagonists avoid religious services and use drugs and alcohol—yet live in a multiethnic Muslim community, recall Qur'anic *surahs* like poetry, and reach for faith in times of trouble, whether reciting a quick *du'a* on forgetting a bicycle helmet or enacting funeral rites.

In other words, they have the same complex relationship to their religion, ancestral or present-day, that U.S. literature often assumes for Christians or Jews, but vastly simplifies for Muslims. Islam's Bangladesh is as religiously complex as her Brooklyn; she notes the land's Buddhist past, the Hindu victims of the 1971 genocide, and the persistence of Christianity, Hinduism, and tribal religious practice among the Pahari today, even as we feel the Muslim majority's power.

Anwar, the son of an anthropologist who converted from Islam to Buddhism, is a non-believer who, like El, avoids religious



services, but his devout wife Hashi wants to pass Muslim values on to their children. Boy-crazy Charu meets Maya, her North-African-American best friend, in a *masjid* Arabic class, and aggressively pursues extra-marital sex while designing a clothing line of “haute hijab.” They live their faith, or lack thereof, like real people.

The depiction of Islam is most complex and interesting in Maya, who prays five times a day, violates an Islamic taboo by getting a Qur'anic verse tattooed on her hip, wears hijab when she feels like it, and socializes with a mostly queer crowd. For most of the book, readers don't understand why Maya has run away, and believe she is escaping the strict religion of her father, an Islamic cleric. Eventually we learn that Maya is fleeing the complicated family dynamics created by her mother's lupus, forcing the reader to re-examine their own Islamophobic assumptions.

And while a certain melodramatic plot twist prevents El from sharing his trans identity with his adoptive parents, other events—including a touching scene in which Hashi gives still-feminine-presenting El a male makeover—leave little doubt that if he had, they would have accepted him, as other family members do.

*Bright Lines* invites comparison with Kim Fu's *For Today I Am a Boy*, the acclaimed 2014 novel about a trans girl growing up as the only boy in a Chinese-Canadian family. Like *Bright Lines*, that novel is about a trans character in the complicated years before claiming a trans identity, and the intense dynamics of an immigrant family. But Fu, an exceptionally skilled writer, is able to focus on Audrey while showing how her three cisgender sisters react to the same family pressures. Islam's lack of focus means that Ella's story is often lost among others, until El emerges as the lead character in the final 50 pages. The novel's chaotic variety of incidents makes it more similar to Felicia Luna Lemus's 2003 *Trace Elements of Random Tea Parties*, in which a Mexican-American young adult grapples with her heritage and genderqueer identity—but that book is also more focused on its protagonist.

In her refusal to focus solely on El, Islam emphasizes the importance of family in Bangladeshi culture, which she shares with Bengal writers. It's hard to read *Bright Lines* without

thinking of Tahmina Anam's masterful Bengal Trilogy, which chronicles three generations of a family in Bangladesh from independence to the present. Islam's work, which explores how those conflicts reverberate decades later and thousands of miles away, is an intriguing addition to the growing shelf of Bangladeshi literature.

*Bright Lines* remains an absorbing, thought-provoking, flawed novel on an important topic which many, especially in the overlapping LGBT and Muslim communities, will be glad to read. The ambition displayed here suggests Tanwi Nandini Islam's work is worth looking out for in the future.

*Sarah E. Rowley lives in Boston, Massachusetts, U.S. She is, among other things, a prolific reader and co-editor with Robyn Ochs of Getting Bi: Voices of Bisexuals Around the World.*

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## Bieautiful

By Ami Rathmill



**Artist's statement:** Although I came out as a lesbian 24 years ago because I knew I was attracted to women, I was also attracted to men. I presumed this was normal, having no idea that bisexuality was an option—where I grew up you were either straight or gay. Was I both? I have now been openly bisexual for many years and been married to my husband for 14. Every day I struggle with bi erasure and shame. I created this artwork, choosing tulips because they contain both male and female reproductive organs and are known as bisexual flowers, to help me celebrate a part of myself I sometimes struggle to feel connected to and proud of. But I am proud, and we all should be, because being bisexual is beautiful.

*Ami is a 39-year-old bisexual woman from Kent, United Kingdom. She is a wife, mother, and artist.*



# News Briefs

Compiled by Dylan Fee



According to new polling from Gallup, the percentage of U.S. adults who identify as LGBTQ+ has more than doubled since 2012. In 2012, 3.5% of adults aligned themselves with the community compared to 7.6% in 2024. According to the survey, most of the increase comes from younger adults, specifically Millennial (1981-1996) and Generation Z adults (1997-2021). Gallup found that 22.3% of Gen Z identifies as LGBTQ+. Bisexual is by far the most common queer identity among Gen. Z, at 15.3% of all Gen Z adults.

Brandon Cooper was an umpire for the Major League Baseball's minor league baseball team in Arizona known as the ACL. He was fired in October of 2023 in retaliation for reporting a fellow umpire who made "derisive" remarks to him after she found out he was bisexual. After reporting said remarks, he was told that the staff would be put through sensitivity training, but he was benched from playoffs and fired in October. He filed a lawsuit against the MLB and an affiliated entity, PDL Blue Inc., for wrongful termination and/or retaliation due to sexual orientation under New York state law. The lawsuit is currently underway.

The Emmy award winning show *9-1-1* had one of their main male characters, Evan "Buck" Buckley (played by Oliver Stark) come out as bisexual. They sealed the deal with an on-screen kiss between Buck and Tommy Kinard, played by Lou Ferrigno, Jr., who is a recurring guest star on the show. Oliver Stark spoke out about the character, saying that he wanted the coming-out to happen in earlier seasons after he saw the fans ship him with another male character, and, when he was presented with this bisexual storyline, he happily agreed.

The biggest annual bi+ event in the world is taking place this summer. The 6th annual Bi Pride UK is happening on Aug 31, 2024 at The University of West London. The location holds significance to the bi+ community, as UWL was the university that Freddie Mercury attended. Over 1,300 people attended the 2023 event, and the event's organizers are planning for an even larger turnout this year.

Alexandria Bellefleur is a Seattle-based author known for writing queer romances. This year she released a romance novel called *Truly, Madly, Deeply*, an enemies-to-lovers story featuring two bisexual characters in a mixed-gender relationship. There are points throughout the book where the characters discussed being bisexual within their straight-presenting relationship. This book adds to the long list of queer romances by this author.

In 2024, 30% of WNBA players identify as queer—37 women in total. This is a great win for the LGBTQ+ community and for women in the realm of athletics.

As of November 2024, Germany will have implemented a law making it easier for transgender and nonbinary people to change their names on legal documents. The law, called the Self-Determination Act, will allow people to change their names without medical proof or 'expert' opinions being required.

In a historic feat, the United Nations passed the first resolution involving the rights of intersex people. The resolution addresses the problematic "normalization" of harmful intersex surgeries performed worldwide, and encourages nations seeks to work to realize the "enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health for persons with innate variations in sex characteristics."

Sources:

[Fired umpire sues MLB, claims harassment, discrimination \(msn.com\)](https://www.msn.com)

[Number of U.S. adults who identify as LGBTQ+ has doubled since 2012 : NPR](https://www.npr.com)

[Lou Ferrigno Jr. on Returning to '9-1-1' for Buck's Bisexual Awakening \(msn.com\)](https://www.msn.com)

[Seattle-raised author on latest book, romance novels and queer love | The Seattle Times](https://www.seattletimes.com)

[Here's where the world's 'largest bi event' is happening \(advocate.com\)](https://www.advocate.com)

[Meet the current 37 queer women of the WNBA \(advocate.com\)](https://www.advocate.com)

[Germany makes it easier to change gender and name on legal documents \(advocate.com\)](https://www.advocate.com)

[United Nations adopts historic resolution on intersex rights \(advocate.com\)](https://www.advocate.com)

*Dylan Fee is a bisexual sophomore at Tufts University in Medford, MA, U.S., majoring in Math and Latin. She also writes for her student publication: The Tufts Daily.*

## Research Corner

# Bi+ Discrimination is Higher for Trans and Racialized People

By Nicola Koper

Discrimination, and its associated mental health issues, is a significant concern for many queer folks, and this problem is magnified for people who have more than one queer identity. This is especially an issue for people with bi+ identities, as the greater societal discrimination that bisexual folks face results in us experiencing more mental health problems—including substance abuse, depression, thoughts of suicide, and more—than either straight or gay/lesbian people. So, for this issue focused on intersecting identities, we wondered, how does being trans or racialized\* compound the challenges of being bi+?

2024 is a complicated time to be queer. There is some good news out there: for example, there are more folks who identify as queer on American surveys than ever before: [LGBTQ+ Identification in U.S. Now at 7.6% \(gallup.com\)](#) (although let's not forget that queerness has always been a part of human societies; we just haven't been able to quantify the proportions of populations who have been queer before). In addition, a strong majority of Americans in both Democrat-leaning and Republican-leaning states support non-discrimination laws that protect LGBT folks ([PRRI](#)).

But we all know that there is a dark side to the 2020s, too. There has been a massive increase in violence against queer folks, particularly individuals who identify as trans, in the last few years. Even though more than three-quarters of Americans support nondiscrimination laws, this actually represents a *decline* in support over just the last couple of years, coinciding with these increases in violence (also according to the PRRI). And these challenges are not just occurring in the U.S.; for example, Alberta, Canada recently announced numerous prohibitions on gender-affirming care, especially for children, CBC News has reported. So queer folks are in many ways under severe attack and subject to increasingly negative attitudes in our societies.

Research published last year by the National Institutes of Health has shown that trans and racialized bisexual folks are subject to particularly strong discrimination. These researchers found more negative attitudes toward trans bi+ people than cis bi+ people. They also found more negative attitudes towards Black and Hispanic bi+ people than White bi+ people. These results show that intersectional identities, in which an individual identifies as being a member of more than one minority group, result in even greater challenges, risks, and vulnerabilities. The fact that 32% of trans people identifies as bisexual or pansexual, according to the National Center for Transgender Equality, illustrates that there are many folks out there who are in this vulnerable position.

When we learn of research like this, many of us wonder what we can do to counteract these challenges. The authors of this study suggested that *positive interactions* between the public (presumably they mean straight community members) and minority group members, *accurate information* about sexual and gender minorities, and *multicultural-based education* have been shown to reduce discrimination against people who are members of sexual or gender minorities. Perhaps this is cynical of me—but I'm not sure I want to wait for our society to integrate those solutions into our education systems before we see real change. I suggest that we start looking to solutions that are closer to home. Our bi+ community is deeply and personally aware of what it is like to be a member of a minority group. We are discriminated against, sometimes even by other queer people. We face greater risks of workplace harassment than our gay/lesbian colleagues. So, I hope this means we are also particularly sensitized to caring for the most vulnerable, at-risk individuals within our own community. What does this caring look like? I hope that readers, such as yourself, will share your ideas.

\*any racial identity other than the dominant one; in USA, any racial identity other than White

\*\* Hyperlinks to citations are available on the website version of this article.

*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.*



# CALENDAR



May 2024 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., May 4**  
**Sat., June 1**  
**Sun., July 2**  
**Sat., August 3**

Please join us! Info/RSVP: [BWQEvents@gmail.com](mailto:BWQEvents@gmail.com).

(Note: Dates are subject to change. Check [BiWomenBoston.org](http://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 Sept. 6

Join us at the 13th Bi+ World Meetup on September 6th at 4 p.m. EST/ 10 p.m. CEST. Bi+ people everywhere are invited to join us on Zoom. We'll use breakout rooms to give folks an opportunity to join each other in a friendly and free setting. The meeting is in English and is facilitated by Barbara Oud (the Netherlands) and Robyn Ochs (U.S.). Pre-registration is required.

Register at <https://biplus.nl/biplus-world-meetup>.

**Metro-Boston Bi+ Women and Nonbinary folks:** Keep up with local events. Subscribe to our Google group: <https://groups.google.com/g/biwomenboston>

Check out [BiWomenBoston.org](http://BiWomenBoston.org) for info about upcoming **in-person** events for women with bi+ (bi, pan, fluid, and other nonbinary) sexualities sponsored by the Boston Bisexual Women's Network.

## Show your pride!



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