

## Bi+ acceptance: From a Meme to A Tipping Point

By Alexandra Bolles

The first place I ever came out as bisexual was in a chat room on Melanie Griffith's website when I was in middle school.

Yes, you heard me.

Melanie Griffith, as far as I know, isn't bisexual and I was probably the only one in that chat room posting about LGBTQ identities (were people even saying "LGBTQ" in 2003?), but I felt confused about being attracted to women and girls when I was also so sure about being attracted to boys, unaware of any young adult resources about being bi, and uncomfortable admitting any of this out loud. During that pre-teen summer of depression and hormonally wrestling with my sexual orientation, one of the only things that made me feel better was seeing Melanie on Broadway as Roxie Hart in *Chicago*. Neither the show nor the website were about bisexuality, but they made me feel safe. That's what I needed most to get started on being myself.



Even now, 15 years later, as a *very* out bi+ (bisexual, pansexual, fluid, queer, etc.) media advocate, I've never fully seen myself represented in the media. The closest I've come was Desiree Akhavan's 2014 GLAAD Media Award-nominated film, *Appropriate Behavior*. It's about a 20-something Persian woman who had just moved to Brooklyn, was newly out, and dating a woman

for the first time. At the time, I was a 20-something Armenian woman who had just moved to Brooklyn, was newly out, and was also dating a woman for the first time. Seeing the character figure out her life while navigating her heritage was such an unprecedented "a-ha" moment for me: "So this is what it's like to see yourself," I thought. Since then, the media landscape for LGBTQ representation, including for bi+ people, has improved dramatically. But we still have quite a ways to go.

*Alexandra, continues on page 16*

## Nobody Said the Word

By Anna Schmidt

I was in my late 20s when the film *Henry and June* came out. I watched it for the first time on New Year's Eve—part of an evening of pre-Netflix-era rented videos served up with drinks and appetizers—just me and my husband and two single friends. It was still the happily-married phase of our marriage. We were into renting edgy movies then—and I think my husband prided himself on having chosen the evening's selections for their shock value. *Henry and June* was not the edgiest film we watched that night, or the most shocking. (It had stiff competition in Peter Greenaway's romp into erotic cannibalism in *The Cook, the Thief, His Wife & Her Lover*. All puns intended.)

But it was *Henry and June* that had the biggest impact on me. I watched it for a second time the next day before returning the rental. And thus began a long obsession with Anais Nin. I hunted up her diaries and read them voraciously. I found in her words expressions of things in myself I found inexpressible. I discovered her erotica, and it became possible to imagine sexuality in much more complex ways than anything I had grown up understanding. For a brief period, I even affected a "look" that was reminiscent of photos of Nin as a young woman.

But, as fascinated as I was by Nin's fluidity of affections, I was still a long way from understanding the root of this fascination. Nonetheless, I found myself seeking out and resonating with other portrayals of women loving women—not so much in popular culture (because they still weren't really there to be found), but rather subtly tucked away in the literary writing of the likes of Virginia Woolf, Jane Rule, Alice Walker, Adrienne Rich and Jeanette Winterson. I also found them in the not-so-mainstream music of the Indigo Girls and Australian folk singer Judy Small.

*"We don't see things as they are, we see them as we are."*

At the same time, I didn't really "get" what any of it had to do with me beyond a vague curiosity. Time went by, and I was still married—still, for the most part, happily. We had kids and cats and goldfish. We had a mortgage. We would have had a white picket fence, but the previous owners had already installed chain link. And so, on I went, more or less happily chained inside my predictably heteronormative life, while reading myself to sleep at night with lesbian love stories and no clear understanding of what about them interested me so much. Even when I felt an occasional twinge of attraction to an actual woman in my life,

<sup>1</sup> All quotes in italics are from the works of Anais Nin. Source: [www.goalcast.com/2017/07/25/anais-nin-quotes-inspire-deeper-living/](http://www.goalcast.com/2017/07/25/anais-nin-quotes-inspire-deeper-living/)

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## Editor's Note

The theme of this issue is "Pop Culture." I came out as bi 42 years ago into deafening silence. Since that time, there has been a slowly increasing trickle of media figures and film or television characters who could be considered to be bisexual, and the internet had yet to be invented, so bi+ people looking for public representations of people like themselves were basically out of luck. There were occasional bisexual story lines in films or television, but the characters' behavior was almost always stereotypical, and the word bisexual rarely used. Thankfully, we seemed to have reached a tipping point, and people coming out today are having a different experience. When I recently asked people on social media to help generate a list of bi+ pop culture figures, I received 50+ names of actors and singers, as well as more than two dozen fictional characters characters.

In this issue, we present the writing of Alexandra Bolles, Anna Schmidt, Casey Lawrence, Theresa Tyree, Gloria Jackson-Nefertiti, Shayna Maci Warner, Lain Mathers, Erica, Niko Firefoxy, Diane Verrochi, Jane Barnes, Mariah Cruz, Beth Innis, Alex, Kirsten Fedorowicz, Tamsin, and—via Twitter—posts from Avery F., Laurel Clarke, B As In Broke, and Erica. I interview Christine Gangstad Johansen of Oslo, Norway, and author MB Austin interviews author Cheryl Head. There's an update on the Lambda Literary and Bisexual Book awards, and artwork by WhyNotBoth Co, Jo-Anne Carlson, and a new contributor, Elizabeth Fernandez. And, of course, our calendar of events completes this issue.

I am also delighted to announce the onboarding of Katelynn Bishop as Assistant Editor. Katelynn is introduced more fully on p. 23.

Enjoy!

## Upcoming in Bi Women Quarterly

Call for submissions  
Winter 2019 issue:

### Bisexuality & Disability

We're seeking the personal stories, art, fiction, poetry, or opinion pieces of bi+ women who live with disabilities including but not limited to physical, visual, hearing, intellectual, and learning disabilities; chronic illness; or mental health issues. *DUE BY November 1.*

Call for submissions  
Spring 2019 issue:

### Firsts

What "firsts" have been significant to you? A first awareness, first kiss, first relationship, first sexual experience? A first with someone of a particular gender? A first coming out? Tell us a story about a "first" time, or about the "firsts" you hope to have. *DUE BY February 1.*

Submission guidelines are online at  
[biwomenboston.org](http://biwomenboston.org).

Send your submissions and suggestions for future topics to  
[biwomeneditor@gmail.com](mailto:biwomeneditor@gmail.com).

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

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BBWN is an all-volunteer organization. Want to host one of our monthly brunches, be the woman who coordinates the brunches, or help out with our website (we use WordPress)? Or, if you're a student, consider an internship. If you are interested in helping out, please contact Robyn ([biwomeneditor@gmail.com](mailto:biwomeneditor@gmail.com)).

The Boston Bisexual Women's Network is a feminist, not-for-profit collective organization whose purpose is to bring women together for support and validation. We strive to create a safe environment in which women of all sexual self-identities; class backgrounds; racial, ethnic, and religious groups; ages; abilities and disabilities are welcome. Through the vehicles of discussion, support, education, outreach, political action, and social groups related to bisexuality, we are committed to the goals of full acceptance as bisexuals within the gay and lesbian community, and to full acceptance of bisexuality and the liberation of all gay and transgender people within the larger society.

# Around the World: Christine Gangstad Johansen, Oslo, Norway

Interviewed by Robyn Ochs



Christine Gandstad Johansen is a co-founder of Visible, a group for bisexual/pansexual people in Oslo, Norway operating under the umbrella of Fri, Norway's national LGBTQ+ organization. I met Christine in June, when she arranged to have Fri bring me to Oslo to speak at Pride week events. Oslo has quite an impressive Pride, with 10 days of programming, including a week of programs, an art exhibition and café, and concerts at Pride House, a pop-up (temporary) community center in the center of Oslo, and nearby Pride Park, a 4-day festival that runs from late afternoon into the night. Christine arranged for me to a workshop on bisexuality for a packed room, and Christine and I participated on a panel on the International Bi+ Family. On the final day of Pride, we were both part of the first-ever bi+ contingent in the Oslo Pride parade, with Christine joyfully dancing at the front of the contingent most of the route!

**Robyn:** *Christine, please tell us about yourself.*

Christine: I'm a 27-year-old bisexual activist, and I use she/her pronouns. I'm the only child of parents with strong, old Norwegian roots, and am the seventh generation of my family to grow up on the property where I spent my childhood. It would be an understatement to say that I grew up with the expectation of becoming a certain type of person. My family's expectations were likely heightened by the fact that I have no siblings, so if I went "astray" there would be no one else to take over the family farm or provide the essential grandkids.

**R:** *How did you come to identify as bi?*

C: I fully embraced my bisexual identity in the beginning of my twenties. The process was a very slow and long one. My journey coming to terms with my identity and fully embracing the bisexual label happened in unison with my struggle with depression and anxiety, so to me my bisexual label was key to embracing my full self and becoming happier and healthier in more than one way.

**R:** *What words are used to describe lesbian, gay, bi, pan, or other non-heterosexual people in Norwegian? What is the word for transgender and gender non-binary? Are these words equivalent to their English counterparts, or do they have a different meaning?*

C: They mostly mean the same as far as I know. They are: *Lesbisk* (lesbian), *homofil* (gay), *bifil* (bi), *panfil* (pan), *ikke-heterofil* (non-heterosexual), *skeiv* (queer), *trans*, and *ikke-binære* (non-binary). The thing that comes to mind is that we use *-fil* after homo, bi, and pan, this is in contrast to homo/bi/pan-*seksuell* (sexual). The *-fil* ending emphasizes an identity that is more than just pure sex, it encompasses falling in love, holding hands, broken hearts and understanding of oneself, perhaps a bit like English speakers use "gay and homosexual" to emphasize different things. You can often spot someone who is against the queer community by how they use only *homo/bi/pan-seksuell* (sexual) to try and shame us.

When it comes to gender, we don't have two words like the English "sex and gender"; we only say *kjønn* (gender) so that when you want to differentiate between the two you have to say *biologisk kjønn* ("biological gender"). This can be a bit annoying when you are a transactivist and want to educate people.

**R:** *You recently started a group for bi/pan people that is part of Fri, the Norwegian LGBT Association. What inspired you to start the group? What is your vision for the group? What kinds of activities do you have, and how many people show up?*

C: My inspiration to start the group was, like embracing my identity, a long process. A defining moment that made me take the leap was a life-changing encounter. I was a student at the University of Oslo, and one day in my Sociology lecture, I spotted someone with very colorful hair: pink, purple, and blue. I looked again and saw that the purple line was narrower than the pink and the blue lines, just like the bisexual flag! The lecture started, but during the break I picked up the courage to walk over to this person and ask if the hair meant what I thought it meant. It did. This is how I met Natalia, and experienced the joy of finally having a friend who I could talk about all this bi stuff with! I would say the feeling was close to euphoric. Natalia didn't just inspire me and support the idea of starting a bi/pan group—meeting her also made me want to let other people experience that sense of belonging and understanding that I had felt when I met her. I focus on community building, so most of our events are café meetups, and our goal is to have one meetup each month this year. On special occasions, we arrange something extra, like on pan visibility day, during Pride, and on bi visibility day, with panel discussions on a specific topic.

**R:** *Are bi folks well-integrated into Oslo's sexual minority community?*

C: This is a hard question. Physically, bi+ folks are of course everywhere, they are in the *gay* choir (Homofonien), they are

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in the *lesbian* community (Lesbians in Daylight, Late Bloomer Ladies, etc.), they are in the *queer* immigrant community (Skeiv verden), to mention some. But as an outspoken, visible group, no, they are not. I guess this is part of why we chose to call our group VisiBle, because this was something that was important to us: that the «B» in LGBT+ be more visible, both inside and outside the queer community.

**R: As an activist, what is an accomplishment of which you are particularly proud?**

C: I think the accomplishment that gives me the most pride is not one thing but the feeling I get when people in the group show their big, genuine smiles, when someone feels at home for the first time, or when someone expresses joy in being able to talk about their identity for the first time at one of our cafe meetups. I think this is the reason I'm not so preoccupied with numbers. As long as the three people who showed up to one particular meetup felt comfortable and at home, I am more than happy!

If I had to choose one thing, though, it would be this year's Pride parade, which marked the first time in Norwegian history that the parade had an official Bi+ contingent! There were so many vibrant smiles of people walking with us that I could've been living off that alone this last month!

**R: Oslo is Norway's largest city, and you've created a bi/pan group there. Are there are bi groups in other parts of the country? If not, are you able to provide support to bi+ folks in other parts of Norway?**

C: Yes! Not long after forming VisiBle in Oslo, I was contacted by an activist in Trondheim, a city on the west coast of Norway, who wanted to start a group up there. The Trondheim group still isn't official, but the core people are an important part of our group! We give each other support, we talk almost daily on Messenger, and once in a while we Skype to discuss important issues. For me personally, the Trondheim group has been a big support. Even though they can't help directly, I have had many stressed days when everything seems too much, and the Trondheim gang have lifted my spirits with their support, interest, and humor (including a lot of puns). I hope that I will be able to repay them by helping support them as they work toward starting the group officially this year. My wish is that the VisiBle family spread to the whole country!

I also have a goal to be more interactive online, so that people who live far off or have problems coming to the meetings still



A page from Christine's "Bullet Journal"

can get a feeling of community from our group.

**R: What contacts do you have with bi activists in other countries? Do you see a value in transnational activism?**

C: Yes. Absolutely! I'm especially interested in science and research! Resources are hard to come by, but studies can be used across country lines. Up until this year we've had very few studies in Norway that included Bi+ people. This was part of why I wanted someone with a bit more "weight" on Bi+ issues to come and talk at this year's Pride, and why I looked for candidates outside Norway. After some futile searching, I had almost given up when I went by Robyn's website, but it was so easy to send her a message, so I thought "She will say no, but I might as well." I was surprised by Robyn's immediate answer that yes, she would "absolutely want to come to Norway!" I had first heard of Robyn in a YouTube video where her definition of bisexuality was used, and her definition really resonated with me. And I think a lot of people had a similar feeling after Robyn's talk Beyond Bisexuality 101 during Oslo Pride.

**R: When I was in Oslo, I was intrigued by the notebook you keep. Would you please tell us about it?**

C: Yes! I'm very "artistically inclined" you could say, and people have also told me I'm very tidy. My notebook, or Bullet Journal, is first and foremost made to make my days easier. Most people in VisiBle have seen my notebook because I always bring it with me, and often pull it out to review something. I'm proud to say that several people in the group have told me that they feel inspired by my notebook! It includes basic stuff like my calendar, but the best part is the sections I have on projects I'm working on. One of the sections is of course VisiBle. I put in drawings, inspiring quotes and lists of things I need to do. I do this both to be more effective as a leader and also as an important artistic outlet.

**R: Any last words?**

C: I'm so thankful! I don't know how to express this, but I feel surrounded by all these amazing people! I've made friendships that have changed my life, and I'm just so thankful for all these people living their lives just keeping up *their* amazingness every day! If anyone out there is wondering about starting a group of some kind, I'd say do it! Yes, it's hard work, but the wonderful people you meet will more than make up for it.

# I've Got 99 Problems but Brooklyn Ain't One

By Casey Lawrence

[NOTE: SPOILER ALERT]

"Everyone on this show is bisexual," I told my boyfriend when we started binge watching *Brooklyn 99*, a fast-paced, character-driven sitcom about police officers in Brooklyn's 99<sup>th</sup> precinct.

"Everyone?" he asked, taking my non-sequitur in stride, as he always does.

"Everyone except Captain Holt," I said. "Because he's gay."

In my headcanons—theories about or interpretations of fiction that may or may not be supported by the facts in the work itself—everyone is bisexual until proven otherwise. It's one of the ways that I legitimize myself in my day-to-day life. Unless someone on a TV show explicitly references their sexuality, there's no way of "proving" they're not queer; I am able to project aspects of my life onto characters I relate to.

I am forced to do this, of course, because there are so few representations of bisexuals that are explicit in mainstream media. Those that exist are often problematic. While I avidly followed Callie Torres's character on *Grey's Anatomy*, having only one character to "call my own" when my straight friends had dozens felt wrong. *Why can't a show have more than one queer character?* I asked myself. *Why should we assume that straight is the default?*

I have made a conscious effort not to assume that characters are straight. When a show does a "big reveal" of a queer character's queerness, I celebrate, of course—but I take it in stride as their "coming out" to me, not as a surprise switcheroo. I find myself picking up on subtext, reaching for evidence of my convictions. When I'm proven wrong—if a character says definitively, "I'm straight"—I don't have to be devastated, because there are so many other characters who retain their potential for headcanoning. And when I'm proven right? There is no better feeling. As much as headcanons can help me confront the lack of bisexual role models in the media, there is nothing better than having explicit representations of people like me.

*Brooklyn 99* is the perfect canvas for me to insert my queer interpretations. Captain Holt, the openly gay police Captain, frequently steals the show, and the show has remained socially conscious (while still being funny!) throughout its run. *Brooklyn 99* tackles real social issues from racial profiling to homophobia to gun control while maintaining its lighthearted, remarkably funny formula, which is no small feat.

When the show began to hint at Rosa Diaz—Stephanie Beatriz's character—getting a new love interest, I got excited. Beatriz has been a long-time favourite of mine, for her portrayal of a badass Latina cop and her LGBT advocacy on twitter. The actress herself is bisexual, but I didn't dare to hope that the showrunners would write it into the show.

But when Diaz said she was seeing someone, I jokingly said, "It's a woman." Until there was proof to the contrary, Rosa was bi in my mind. Even when the new man in her life was revealed, I thought, she could still be bi to me. And then the impossible happened:

Rosa told Charles Boyle, her awkward but well-meaning co-worker, "I'm dating a woman." There's a pregnant pause. "I'm bi."

I gasp; Boyle gasps; my boyfriend accuses me of seeing spoilers. I had been deliberately avoiding spoilers until we had caught up on the new season.

"I'm just that good," I told him. "It's like gaydar. I've got bi-focals."

Terrible pun aside, there's something profoundly liberating in recognising yourself in a character you love. As much as my boyfriend claims I'm an Amy Santiago (the nerdy, obsessively organized detective who balances out Andy Samberg's character, Jake Peralta), Rosa and I have that connection. We shared a moment, she and I, a quiet moment alone. When she said, "I'm bi," she was also saying to me and countless others, "You're not alone." She is saying, "We're in this together." She is saying, "You are real and valid and loved."

Thanks to NBC picking up the show from Fox after it's brief cancellation, *Brooklyn 99* will enjoy a sixth season, and I can't wait to see what they do with it. The coming-out narrative, while a good storyline and a necessary one, should not be the end of Rosa's story. I hope she gets her happy ending, whether it's with on-again-off-again love interest Adrian Pimento or with someone of any gender, provided they can handle her.

I relate to Rosa's character for her awkwardness in certain social situations and her desire for privacy, even though I wish I could relate to her badassness. Hell hath no fury like Rosa Diaz when she had been mildly inconvenienced, let alone wronged, and she takes no shit—even from her family. I'll admit that I'm more like Amy (I, too, go nuts for new pens, notebooks, alligator clips and colour-coded binder dividers), but Rosa's dignity and poise in the face of rejection is what I aspire to time and time again.

*Casey Lawrence is a Canadian grad student studying English Literature. She is the author of two bi+ YA novels, Out of Order and Order in the Court, and the co-editor of an anthology of poetry and short prose, 11/9: The Fall of American Democracy, all proceeds from which benefit RAINN and the ACLU. Follow her on twitter @myexplodingpen or like her on Facebook, @caseylawrenceauthor.*

# Fake

By Theresa Tyree

Queer content was hard to find when I was a kid. None of the characters ever outright called themselves gay or a lesbian, or (heaven forbid) bisexual in the media I was exposed to. The closest thing to a canon same-sex romance I was aware of was the relationship between Xena, the Warrior Princess, and her trusty partner, Gabrielle.

Even with as explicitly queer as that relationship felt, I can still watch that show with my mother and always hear her say without fail, “Aww, they’re such good friends.”

No, Mom! They’re sexually and romantically independent women who kiss each other on the lips and continually choose each other over any other partners, male, female, or otherwise, that they find on their travels! They even reincarnate together! If that doesn’t SCREAM queer, then I don’t know what does!

But because it wasn’t explicit—because it wasn’t specific and confirmed by the writers *in the events of the show*—I was never allowed to have it. Claiming it as representation in mixed company (by which I mean queer individuals and non-queer individuals) was like pulling teeth. I had to be ready to defend it. I had to be ready to go through every episode, tear it apart for every shred of evidence, and insist time and time again that just because Xena and Gabrielle experienced attraction for men, that didn’t invalidate their feelings for each other.

But all of that changed when I ran into a Boys Love manga from Japan called *Fake*.

For those of you unfamiliar with Boys Love manga, it’s a genre of manga that centers around same-sex male couples. The genre is often shortened to “BL” and is aimed exclusively at a female demographic. Because of that, some of the portrayals can fall a little far from representing an actual relationship between two men. Some of them are better than others.

*Fake* was the first BL title I encountered as a young woman that actually treated both of the main characters, Ryo and Dee, as equals. Both men were tall, both men were capable; both men were hardboiled detectives working to clean up the streets of New York. They both “wore the pants” in the relationship, and they were both “the man in the relationship.” Because there were two men in the relationship!

Dee’s characterization was the cherry on top. Usually, men in BL manga either insist that they’re not gay and it’s only the other protagonist that they’re gay for (this is usually the more “masculinely” coded partner), or they’re a trumped up ode to the stereotype of gay men. But Dee... Dee was bisexual. And he knew it, and he was comfortable in it, and he never hesitated to correct anyone who called him gay, or assumed he was straight. He corrects different members of the police force over and over.



He even goes so far as to correct someone that he and Ryo have cornered at the end of a long stakeout.

Dee was bulletproof. Not literally (he does get shot a few times in the comic), but he was unstopable. Unafraid. Unashamed. Comfortable with the word “bisexual.”

You can imagine what that meant to a fourteen-year-old-girl who believed love was love and wanted to read about relationships that transcended the boundaries people kept trying to enforce on her.

You can imagine what it meant to her as she grew, and realized there was still a lot of fighting to be done before people like that could love their partners in peace.

You can imagine what it meant to the adult woman who came back to those books, years after discovering that she herself was bisexual.

When I found out who I was, I didn’t need to search for the words. Dee had already given them to me all those years ago, when I was a scrawny teenager with big ideas and a lot to learn. I was bi—and, in the words of my role model, a “firm believer in equal opportunity.”

That’s why a lot of media today really turns my stomach. Shows, books, audio dramas, you name it; faking out their audiences, skirting the line between representation and plot hole. Yes, this character is queer, but no, we don’t want to be specific about how. Yes, this character is trans, but we don’t want to hire a trans actor to play them. Sure, this character is gender fluid, but only because it’s relevant for plot reasons and we want to make them dress two very specifically gender-coded ways.

Then there are the open-world, self-insert video games that allow you date anyone you please. Your lover of choice won’t care about your gender, no, not at all. You only get to be a man or a woman since video games have yet to catch up to having a gender-neutral option, and every romanceable character is “bi-

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sexual” tofu. Using bisexual as a blanket term for anyone attracted to multiple genders instead of taking a stance and exploring the multitude of sexual identities out there is harmful to everyone. But most of all, me.

My sexuality is not a catch-all term for poor programming and a lack of character building. I want openly bisexual characters who deal with the feelings and problems I do every day because of my sexuality. I shouldn't have to fight with my pan compatriots for representation just because a company is too cowardly to commit to a character's identity. Specify if your character is attracted to people of the same and of different genders, or if they're attracted to people regardless of gender! It makes a difference! It affects their behavior! It affects who they pursue! It affects how they interact with potential lovers, how they interact with the world, and (most importantly) how they interact with themselves.

My sexual identity was a journey, and the only reason I got so far with it was because I had the words and an idea of what it looked like. Dee's struggles were my struggles. His behaviors were my behaviors. When I figured it out, it was less as if everything

about me had changed, and more that I finally understood who I was—like a duckling that's no good at being a duck figuring out she's a swan that's attracted to both swans of her own, and of other genders.

The whole thing is a process. It's going from a surly teenager with no idea what the world has in store for her, to not giving a fuck what society thinks of me and correcting people when they use my partner to code me or project their expectations onto me. It's going from thinking that settling for heavy homoerotic undertones is the most I can expect, to demanding better representation and watching the hell out of every new *Steven Universe* episode.

It's going from the girl who only read about people who knew who they were, to being one.

Just like Dee.

*Theresa Tyree holds an MA in book publishing, and is a freelance writer, editor, and overall book guru. Check out her blog post about Dee and Ryo at [noodlesfromtomorrow.blogspot.com](http://noodlesfromtomorrow.blogspot.com).*

## My First Bi+ Role Model

*By Gloria Jackson-Nefertiti*

My first bi+ role model was someone who didn't necessarily identify as bisexual. Let me explain.

It was the character [Emma Peel](#), a fictional spy played by Diana Rigg, from the British 1960s TV show *The Avengers*. She was a martial artist, fencer, chemistry genius, and fashion icon who would regularly wear “mod” miniskirts. (She would also frequently wear catsuits, which I loved, especially the leather and PVC ones.)

Emma Peel was very much a feminist role model, as well as an icon of British pop culture. In fact, she was what the millennials and younger people of today would refer to as a “badass.”

Neither the character, Emma Peel, nor the actress who played her, Diana Rigg, identified as bisexual, *as far as I know*. So why would I consider her character to be my first bi+ role model? It's because Emma Peel happened to be my very first female crush, and there were many more to follow! She personified strength (physical and emotional), as well as confidence. Sure, I looked up to her and admired her greatly. *But I was also in love with her.*

What I especially find interesting is that even though I developed crushes on people of all genders (still do, though not as frequently as I did during childhood), it never occurred to me that I was anything but straight. That may have been because I was in the process of becoming a fundamentalist Christian, and bisexuality would **NOT** have been okay. Besides, I was also in a bit of denial, which certainly didn't help!

But you know what? More than 50 years have passed since I watched my first episode of *The Avengers*, and became such a devoted fangirl of Emma Peel. Though I consider her to be my

first bi+ role model, I have yet to follow in her footsteps (by taking martial arts lessons, for example). But hey, would anyone at least like to buy me a catsuit?

*Gloria Jackson-Nefertiti is a bisexual activist and polyamory educator living in Seattle, WA, who is available for trainings, podcasts, panel discussions, and public speaking opportunities on various topics, including shame, bisexuality, polyamory, religion, and sex. You can find her on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.*



# The First Time I Saw Myself: How Sara Ramirez's Bisexual Characters are Making History... and a Difference

By Shayna Maci Warner

On October 8th, 2016, screams of queer elation sounded across the internet: Sara Ramirez, Tony Award-winner and star of *Grey's Anatomy*, had just come out as bisexual. Some of us had respectfully restrained from speculating about the star's sexual orientation for many years, but after viewing Ramirez's incredible speech from the 40 to None Summit in which she described herself as a "multiracial woman, woman of color, queer, bisexual, Mexican-Irish American, immigrant," I couldn't help but be among those jumping for joy. We knew it. I knew it.

Of course, Ramirez's coming out, similar to many of ours—is not a fixed event, nor is the work she did as a straight-until-proven-queer actress any less groundbreaking. She's been coming out to her family since she was 18, and has been an unapologetic activist for LGBTQ causes for years, speaking out on LGBTQ youth homelessness, HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment, queer Latinx representation, and anti-bullying initiatives. Nevertheless, Ramirez's invitation to us all to share in her identity is especially resonant considering her impressive 11-season stint on *Grey's Anatomy* as one of the most fully-developed, multi-faceted queer female characters in network television's history.

As a quiet, nerdy, Q-tip-shaped adolescent who had a terrible streak of crushes on boys, intensely close "friendships" with girls, and no knowledge of the word "queer"—and only periphery knowledge of "gay" and "lesbian"—Dr. Callie Torres, Sara Ramirez's fictional counterpart, was a straight-up godsend. As a series regular and then principal cast member of Shonda Rhimes' *Grey's Anatomy*, she was funny, beautiful, remarkably intelligent, intensely emotional, real in her flaws—and bisexual.

I would search YouTube for her scenes, hammering the rewatch button in an attempt to understand why I felt such a connection to her fumbling romances and her coming-out arc. Of course, now it's abundantly clear to me that Dr. Torres was the first, full-fledged representation of bisexuality I'd ever seen. And not only that—her portrayal was overwhelmingly positive and she was a successful adult! At that point, I had never met an out bisexual adult and I didn't know they existed.

I stuck with *Grey's Anatomy* for years, through car accidents and rogue hospital bombs and moving to Africa and divorces, and finally, a goodbye from Dr. Callie Torres that did not result in her death. While fans still argue about the tenor of the show's execution, Dr. Torres left the series to pursue love and to continue finding her own success and happiness, an unfortunate rarity in any queer female character's departure.

When I watched Sara Ramirez exit *Grey's Anatomy*, I was disappointed that I'd no longer see her in the role that allowed me to fall in love with pieces of myself that her portrayal brought to light. I actively wondered the next time I would hear the word "bisexual" spoken aloud by a bi character without a negative association. But ultimately, I shrugged, accepted that this chapter had closed, and that my own bisexuality had long since outgrown a single representation.

And all of that is still true. Since then, we have seen the incredibly funny and terrifying Rosa (Stephanie Beatriz who is bi as hell!) on the recently saved *Brooklyn 99*, the intense and complex Nova Bordelon (Rutina Wesley—queer as anything!) on the far-underrated *Queen Sugar*, her Royal Highness Viola Davis' Annalise Keating on *How to Get Away with Murder* (thanks again, Shonda!), and, thankfully, a dozen or so more bisexual side characters. Each character opens the door for an-

*Shayna, continues on next page*



Shayna Maci Warner



Sara Ramirez as Callie Torres (photo credit: ABC)

*Shayna, continued from previous page*

other unique, multi-faceted portrayal to burst through; and each portrayal increases the likelihood of some awkward kid at home on their family's Netflix account realizing that these confusing, unexplained aspects of themselves aren't so scary or weird after all.

However, there is something particularly empowering in knowing that this singular, first incredible queer fictional role model is more than a construction of a writer's room. Since that fateful day in 2016, Ramirez has fully embraced her public persona as a bisexual activist, actor, and icon. In between continuing to support LGBTQ youth, conducting Instagram-accessible lectures on the misconceptions of bisexuality, and winning hearts in Mary Lambert's "Know Your Name," the cutest, queerest music video ever, Ramirez has created another undeniably queer role through Kat Sandoval on CBS' *Madam Secretary*.

I would not be where I am today—an out, enthusiastically queer and bisexual adult, advocate, and artist—if it were not for Dr. Callie Torres. The same may be said of other queer and bisexual people when they come to witness Kat Sandoval. And the same can absolutely be shouted from the rooftops about

Sara Ramirez. Dr. Torres may have been a Grey's Anatomy fan favorite, but sometimes it's even better to know just how much a character has inspired its actress. It has always been a joy to watch Sara Ramirez act, and now watching her live her truth is another affirmation of queer, bi magic, determination, and radiant resistance.

*"The First Time I Saw Myself" is the GLAAD Rising Stars Grant-winning video journalism project consisting of written interviews and accompanying short videos that ask LGBTQ people: When was the first time you felt truly represented in media? This piece was originally published on GLAAD AMP and is reprinted with permission.*

*Shayna Maci Warner (shelher/hers) is a writer, documentary filmmaker, GLAAD Campus Ambassador, and recent graduate from UCLA in World Arts and Cultures, and Film. She will be moving on to her Master's in Cinema Studies at NYU in the fall, where she will continue pursuing the production, preservation, and programming of queer film and television.*

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## The Truth in Fiction (Or, When Your Friend Starts Writing Bi Novels)

By Lain Mathers

When I first came out as bisexual at the age of 21, it was 2011. I surprised even myself as the words fell off my lips ungracefully in the company of a friend. I was trying it on for size: Bisexual. A word I was familiar with only in the sense that it evoked imagery of lusty vampires and indecisiveness I'd seen on TV or heard about in songs, images that I did not relate to my sexuality at all (which is not to say there's anything wrong with lusty vampires or indecisiveness. Who among us has not painstakingly debated about whether to watch *Supernatural*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, or some other equally compelling story of fantasy?).

As I disclosed my recently-acknowledged sexual identity, I asked said friend for advice on where to see people like me represented in films, TV, books, and other popular media. Images that dug into the nitty gritty, day-to-day life of bisexual people while they shopped at the supermarket, had difficult conversations with family (that were not always about sexuality), got themselves into a comedic pickle and then wriggled themselves out of it. I wanted stories that took place on planet Earth, involved well-developed characters, and kept me up late into the night promising myself just one more chapter or episode. I was hungry for stories of bisexual people navigating difficult life choices or a grim work environment. I wanted bisexual characters who were lovable and flawed, not just one or the other, and while I wanted them to do lots of other things *besides* engage in action that would be

labeled "bisexual," I also very much wanted their bisexuality to be central to their stories. I wanted to see some bona-fide 3D representations of bisexuality, dammit!

Unaware of the naïveté of my inquiry, I found it odd that my friend chuckled at me and mumbled, "Good luck finding *that*," under their breath. Though I was perplexed at the time, being relatively unacquainted with the vexing conundrum of bisexual representation that has plagued popular media for decades (see, Willow in one of my, admittedly, favorite TV shows, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*), I was certain that I would be able to find what I was looking for. After all, there had been a reasonably large explosion of lesbian and gay characters in media around the time I was coming out, so I would surely be able to find bisexual characters, right?

Wrong. So wrong.

Fast forward to 2016. I was having a conversation with another trans and bisexual mentor/friend, J.E. Sumerau, lamenting the fact that, save for a few exceptions, I still had trouble finding relatable representations of bisexual characters (this being compounded by the fact that in that span of time, I also acknowledged my genderqueer nonbinary identity), when she said, "Well, that may not be such a problem soon, at least for you."

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Lain, continued from previous page

I was caught off guard by the sureness of their statement (note: J uses both she and they pronouns). Seeing that I was hanging on her words with bated breath, they said, “I think I’m going to try writing novels again, stories about people like us.” I was giddy with anticipation. *FINALLY*, I thought to myself. Finally, I will have the stories that I have been longing for since that day back in 2011.<sup>1</sup>

It turns out my excitement was not misplaced. I served as a beta-reader for J’s first novel, *Cigarettes & Wine*, a coming-of-age story about kids in the 1990s southeastern United States, and let me tell you, I gobbled that book up. When I finished it, I called J with tears in my eyes and a catch in my voice as I gushed about how much I loved it. *There I was! On the pages! A nonbinary and bisexual character! And what’s that?? The person like me is not the only one in the story?? They have bisexual and nonbinary friends, too? They deal with the complicated dynamics of growing into their teen years, loss, poverty, and love?* It was only in that moment that I felt the true weight of the lack of realistic bisexual representation in the popular media I consumed: the fact that a bisexual nonbinary narrator having other bisexual and nonbinary friends should not be a novelty, considering that it is a reality for many of us (though, not all of us, I know).

This pattern only continued when J sent me their next novel, *Essence*, a story of four people who fall in love and have to make challenging choices about how to live in a way that is best for all of them. *What??* I thought to myself, *A positive and genuine portrayal of polyamorous relationships that involve bisexual people instead of the vague and/or fetishistic representations I’ve grown accustomed to??* When J sent me the final draft of *Homecoming Queens* (which turned out to be a 2018 Lambda Literary Award Finalist in Bisexual Fiction), I could not stop laughing. I snuggled into my worn couch cushions and devoured the combination of mystery and comedy that, again, centered on realistic representations of polyamory, bisexuality, and the complexity of returning home after a long time away. My longstanding hunger for seeing people like me, who identified as bisexual, had multifaceted lives, weren’t perfect yet were completely lovable, in popular media, such as novels, was finally being satiated, but only because I had a friend who was doing the work to create those stories, and thus, I knew immediately where to find them.

<sup>1</sup> And you can, too! Check out [jsumerau.com](http://jsumerau.com) for more information on her books.

This past semester, I assigned one of J’s books in the class I was teaching. After discussing the novel in class, a student timidly, but with a smile, approached me. I asked them if they had a question about the book or our discussion. They shook their head, still smiling, and said, “No. This is just the first time I’ve seen a bisexual character that I can relate to. It’s just pretty cool to finally see that.” “Ah,” I said feeling both happy and disappointed, “I can relate.” I was overjoyed that this student was able to finally see themselves represented, but I was—and still am—disappointed because it is 2018 and bisexual people younger than me are still hunting for themselves, often unsuccessfully, in the media they consume.

The point of all this is simple: It is not news to any of us who identify under the bisexual umbrella that our representation in popular media is wanting and has been for a while. For those of us who desire to be validated through stories we can relate to, we are often met with profound disappointment at the dearth of validation from stories like the ones we seek. However, there *are* awesome, talented bisexual artists doing this work to make our lives visible in a way we recognize. So if you are a bisexual person who has found popular representations of us that you think are validating, share them! Take a note out of the playbook of A. M. Leibowitz and construct lists, with others or independently, of these popular representations (check it out: <http://amleibowitz.com/the-big-bi-list/>)! Pass along films, TV shows, music, any art to a friend, blog about them online. Tell others that, in fact, our stories are being told.

And if you are a bisexual person sitting there reading this and you’ve been thinking about writing a story, creating a TV show, making any form of art that tells our stories in a way we don’t see right now, DO IT! We need you now more than ever. We are the largest group in the LGBTQ population with the least (or at best, least accurate) representation of the nuance and complexity of our existence. Write more narratives of bisexual people of color. Film the stories of bisexual men. Paint the loving embraces of bisexual people with disabilities. I know some folks are already doing this (fantastic!), but we still need more, and we cannot wait for others to tell the stories we long to hear.

*Lain Mathers is a doctoral candidate in sociology at the University of Illinois at Chicago. Ze is currently in the process of completing zir dissertation on bi+ identity, community, and politics and is the author of numerous academic articles on bi+, transgender, and LGBTQ experience broadly.*

I’m a black woman and I identify as pansexual, I was raised in the church and didn’t really see a lot of women who represented me until the show R&B Divas. Seeing Monifah bring her girlfriend (at the time) Terez Mychelle to a function with her churchgoing friends, and then seeing Monifah discuss her upcoming wedding with her very religious daughter gave me hope for my own future.

-Erica @reececup (from Twitter)

# What pop culture hasn't done for me

By NekoFirefoxy



So far pop culture hasn't done anything to make me feel better as a bisexual woman. What it has done is disappoint me by misrepresenting bisexual individuals or completely ignoring our community. After coming out as bisexual, I started looking for role models to look up to, no matter if fictional or real. Sadly I didn't find the representation I was looking for. Whenever I came across some bi representation in TV shows, movies, books, etc., they all fell victim to the same

portrayal: sexually driven, manipulative, egoistic bad people. Or they were killed off.

My hopes to see bisexual individuals leading normal lives, struggling with relationships, coming out, etc., were destroyed. Every single time I came across a bisexual character I got my hopes up, and was plagued with anxiety about how they would play it out. I've been disappointed over and over again. I know this is changing slowly and I appreciate it, but the false representation of bisexual characters has done a lot of damage. It helps to strengthen the harmful clichés that are still haunting us of being constant cheaters, manipulators, creepy power hungry jackasses, in short the villains of sexual orientations.

And even pieces about our own LGBTQ+ history like *When We Rise* have forgotten us. When bi activists and other people mentioned the lack of bi representation to Dustin Lance Black, he said that the term "bisexual" hadn't been used in the 70's. Well, it took one Wikipedia article on the matter to correct the false statement. So this felt like another letdown to me.

I also found it difficult to find any bi heroes among media per-

sonalities. They live completely different lives than I do and so different are our struggles. So how could I look up to them and put my hopes for better representation on them? It's not always useful to idealize a person who can handle discrimination or false representation through channels unavailable to everyday people. And often I got the feeling that they were using bisexuality and exploiting our community to further their own fame.

After dealing with so much disappointment, a thought occurred to me: why can't I be my own role model? Why should I strive for an ideal in another person when I can do it for myself becoming the best person in general and bisexual terms possible? My actions shape others' perceptions of me. Why can't every single one of us be the source of inspiration for each other? With the backlash we often still receive from the straight and LGBTQ+ world, we could grow stronger as a community if we encourage each other and serve as role models ourselves. Looking up to strangers whose lives have very little or nothing in common with ours presents the danger of being let down.

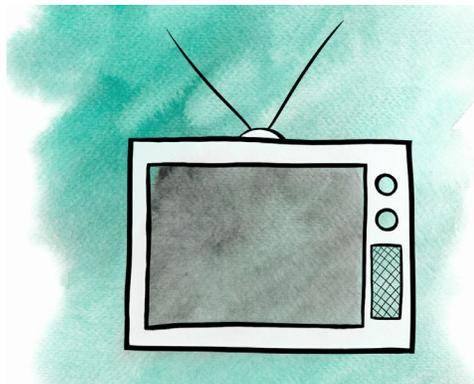
If I look up to someone, it's to everyone who fights for our rights and recognition, is courageous enough to call out biphobia and bi-erasure and is dedicated to defend our rightful existence in the LGBTQ+ community.

I wish we, and this includes every member of our very diverse community, could be role models and idols for each other. I believe we can inspire each other through our actions and tireless efforts to make our voices heard, be seen and to overcome the false narratives we've been—and are still—confronted with. I truly hope our voices and our presence will be strong and loud enough that we can serve as role models and heroes to look up to not only for young bi people but for everyone around us.

*NekoFirefoxy, 38, lives in Zurich, Switzerland. She identifies as bisexual and never hid it cause how you love isn't a threat to anyone else.*

I was already out by the time a friend introduced me to Kehlani's music, but it was the first time I'd really seen a bisexual woman in the media who just casually did her thing, was firm in her queerness, and left no room for questions.

~B As In Broke @buzzinhoneyB  
(from Twitter)



Artwork by Elizabeth Fernandez

# Thoughts on a Couple of Bi+ Heroes

By Diane Verrochi

I frequently blame the lack of bi+ representation in media for the fact it took me until well into adulthood to come out to myself, much less anyone else. The only mention of bisexuality in media I can remember from my early teens was a George Carlin joke that didn't exactly inspire self-reflection of any kind. If anything, the idea that a bisexual person "might as well just walk around [with] the *White Pages* under your arm" to keep track of all the phone numbers your hookups gave you was so far removed from my experience, I'd say it contributed to my inability to recognize the word even *could* apply to me.

The pop culture figure who *did* inspire that sort of self-reflection was in the realm of science fiction, the omnisexual Captain Jack Harkness from *Doctor Who* and *Torchwood*. Not, alas, a bi+ woman, but still the character I have to credit with prompting me not only to embrace my bisexuality but also to be more open and out. Admittedly, considering he flirts with almost everyone sentient, regardless of species, he falls into some of the less favorable stereotypes out there. He does, however, have actual relationships, all while saving Wales from the latest alien threat.

That last bit is important. Often, it seems when we do get an LGBT+ character in media, that is their defining characteristic, often played for comic relief. They're generally not the hero. That's not particularly useful representation. In the case of Captain Jack, sure, it's a big part of his characterization, but it's not his most defining characteristic. The fact that he can't die (or, more accurately, can't stay dead) is the actual big secret, and a secret weapon, not his sexuality, which he's quite open about.

Wait, he's bi+, it's not a big deal, and he saves the world on the regular? That's huge! In my case, I saw something of myself in him and thought, "I can be myself openly and that doesn't have to get in the way of making a positive impact in the world." While I wish I'd had this epiphany much younger, I remain grateful to Russel T. Davies, Steven Moffat, and John Barrowman for creating this character and bringing him to life.

It's somewhat surprising not to see more bi+ representation a la Captain Jack in the realm of science fiction and fantasy (sf/f). Even the ambisexual aliens in Ursula LeGuin's *The Left Hand*

*of Darkness* are disappointingly heterosexual when they actually engage in sexual relationships. It's as though many writers' imaginations stutter over the notion of non-monosexual (or even non-heterosexual) orientations, even when inventing completely new worlds and species.

While Harkness has not appeared on *Doctor Who* in years and *Torchwood* appears to have finished its run, there are other similar characters emerging, such as the character of Sarah Lance of *Arrow* and *Legends of Tomorrow*. (Interesting that Lance, like Harkness, also has a foot in each of two shows.) The character has been shown in sexual relationships with both men and women, but most recently has appeared to be exclusively attracted to women. Caity Lotz, the actress who plays her, has been known to remind people on social media that Lance is, in fact, bisexual. It's wonderful she does that, but it's a shame it's necessary. Viewers do fall into the trap of defining Lance by who she has most recently flirted with or seduced, something made more likely by the relative dearth of bi+ representation in the genre.



Sara Lance, left, in *Legends of Tomorrow*

Still, had Sarah Lance been a character I watched on television in my teens, I like to think I'd have figured myself out a bit earlier. I hope there are young women watching her and recognizing something of themselves in her. I hope their takeaway is that they can be themselves, openly, and make their mark on the world, possibly even become tomorrow's legends.

*Diane Verrochi is an Assistant Professor of Nursing at the University of Hartford where her colleagues are frequently bemused by the sff aesthetic of her office.*

**If you live in or around Boston, or are visiting, please consider attending and/or hosting one of our brunches, which are held more-or-less monthly in members' homes.**

**The next two brunches will be on July 14 and August 12, and are listed in our calendar on p. 24.**

**You are welcome to reach out to Char ([avon.alger@gmail.com](mailto:avon.alger@gmail.com)) for more info about hosting or attending a brunch.**

# Love In Novels: The Art Of Reading Bi (1966)

By Jane Barnes

Heidi and Nancy Drew smart girls like me got  
into trouble then saved the day but my Judy-love  
was soft and willing we sewed in 4-H together and  
lay in her bed after threading our hair on one pillow

our love stitched tight hands making the sign for *woven*  
then quick! boy-girl parties where wet-lipped males  
splashed kisses on our *chic* mouths then they packed  
Judy off to a Catholic girls (ahem) school and

boys like Elvis smiled out of the fan magazines  
*Seventeen* sold pimple cream but nothing about  
*both* until I found Colette in a library and her own  
Claudine (and Renaud) the French so broad-minded

then came Margaret Anderson of The Little Review and the  
lady couples between the wars going to college and gay boys  
became novelists but stayed in the closet and Virginia Woolf  
(bi) wrote for Vita Sackville-West her fluid Orlando *who was*

*a girl/boy/girl/boy*. Then Violet Trefusis and Vita's love  
letters blazed they snuck over to France away from their  
imposed husbands lured back by heir trust funds Couldn't I  
be on be on I could see myself on Le Train Bleu in cloche and

flapper dress near two girls necking a bundle of love letters from  
him or her in my little pink clutch please God, don't let my girl-love  
marry that rich queer man who needs her for his cover give her to me  
even if biographers lie that I'm "like a sister," or "her companion of

many years" and if it's a man don't say I'm straight when my  
previous love was a woman and furthermore I happen to like  
dark men and blond women men who cook, women I can cook for  
I listen to my heart it is my *bi-story*\* how in the end it's *either*.

---

\* *sic*

Jane Barnes is a long-time New Yorker, currently living in Staten Island.



Human Condition 4.  
Acrylic piece by Jo-Anne Carlson.

Stephanie Beatriz has been such a powerful voice and presence both onscreen and off. Her commitment to telling an authentic coming out story on B99 and making sure bisexuality was treated as a distinct, complete identity led to a touching, entertaining, & thoughtful portrayal of a bi woman on a show with a huge audience. Her being bi herself, her outspoken advocacy of the bi+ community, and her openness about her experiences as a bi woman of color in a relationship with a man make Rosa's story even more powerful because I know that kind of representation is as important to her as it is to me and to so many bi women I know.

-Avery F @averyintheopen  
(from Twitter)

Anna Paquin made me feel as though there was room to be a femme and in a relationship with a man and still unapologetically bisexual.

~Laurel Clarke @xxxLaurelClarke (from Twitter)

# How to Play Dead

By Mariah Cruz

When I was a kid growing up in a small steel town in the early 1980s, the only “out” public figure I knew about was Martina Navratilova, the champion tennis player. Trying to figure out my own gender identity and sexual preference was pretty tough without any friends, relatives, or teachers to talk to about the subject. I didn’t know any gay, bi, or genderqueer people and the internet hadn’t been invented yet. Musicians, sports heroes, and fictitious characters in a few books were the only guides I had in trying to navigate the maze. In my pocket-sized world Martina was the definition of a nonheteronormative woman for me—muscular, sporty, and driven.

I wasn’t muscular, sporty, or driven so maybe that meant I wasn’t gay. But why couldn’t I stop staring at the blonde girl who played trumpet in my junior high school band? Why did I wait by my tennis partner’s locker every day after class so I could talk to her even though it meant missing the bus home half the time since my locker was at the opposite end of the school?

Well, if I wasn’t like Martina, maybe I was like Martina’s girlfriend. Rita Mae Brown was an author and I was a writer so... but no. I didn’t see myself gazing back from her image either.

When I finally got to college and met actual in-the-flesh women who identified as gay or bi, I still didn’t find the feeling of recognition I assumed I would. I didn’t look like them. I wasn’t attracted to any of them. And I didn’t want to be like them.

Years passed and I continued to ping-pong my way from side to side—attraction to men, attraction to women, finally settling into a bisexual space as a good enough place to land. I’m not *this*, I’m not *that*, but maybe I’m something in between. Or maybe I’m none of the current choices. I don’t really know, but at least I can call “it” something for now.

And that worked well enough until I heard the first snarl of Sleater-Kinney’s “Start Together” from their 1999 release *The Hot Rock*. The ferocious pounding drive was like a dark star pulling me into its unyielding grip. Feverishly digging up any information I could find about the band (thank you internet for being invented), I learned about the intimate relationship Carrie Brownstein and Corin Tucker had with each other in the band’s early days.

And then everything started to make sense. Staring at Carrie’s dark, smokey eyes, taut profile, and 100-watt smile, I finally saw myself. That’s what I look like! In Corin’s curvy, gutsy, doe-eyed pose I saw the blonde trumpet player from junior high band, my tennis partner, and every other girl I had ever had a crush on. In listening to their songs, written by women about relationships with other women, I finally heard what I’d been waiting to hear all of my life. My feelings. My wants. All real. Finally, I found the affirmation I had searched so hard to find. That was enough for me!

But what was I supposed to do with this...this... information. It wasn’t exactly a revelation since I’d known about it for a long time, but it was somehow closer to the surface than it had ever been. I listened to “Good Things” every day on my drive home from work and felt my heart squirm. I scoured YouTube for clips from S-K’s CBGB’s performance where Carrie puts her head on Corin’s shoulder towards the end of the show. I couldn’t look away.

When the band went on official hiatus in 2006, I breathed a huge gasp of relief. Safe at last! I could finally close this chapter and get back to real life—my marriage and living on a farm in rural New England. Sure, there were occasional crushes (my ice hockey coach and the dairy farmer’s wife down the road) which seemed to spring up every few years or so, but for the most part, I felt I had made a “decision” I could stick with.

After an unexpected economic upheaval forced me to relocate for work, I found myself living alone in another city. It was then that I heard the angsty gut wrench of “Nineteen” by Tegan and Sara and I started to cry. And cry. Buckets and buckets of years of tears came flowing out over the lyrics to that song. I might have been way past the age of 19, but my heart sure wasn’t. It was still full of teenaged longing for... *her*. I could feel “her” in my legs. In fact, I could feel “her” everywhere, but who was she? Where was she? How could I find *her*?

I stayed up late every night until two or three in the morning watching T&S videos, reading about the Quin twins, inhaling their song lyrics, gazing at their beautiful faces. In their unapologetic, bold postures I felt myself growing a little more courageous. More solid. Something was gathering strength in me.

By this time, I knew plenty of other gay/bi women, played hockey with lots of them, and worked with several daily. But I still didn’t identify with them or feel a sense of kinship. My sorting out was still being played out in song, images, and TV shows. Bette and Tina’s relationship on *The L Word* seemed more real to me than any of the ones I casually observed around me. I saw myself in Piper on *Orange is the New Black* and definitely could imagine myself with someone like Alex, but where were those people in my day-to-day life? How do I know there even is a “her” out there for me? How do I know she’s real and not something that’s only on TV? And if she really does exist, would she even be interested in me?

As more and more out and outed celebrities began to make their way into media headlines: Kristen Stewart, Annie Clark, Kate McKinnon, the list goes on—I felt my spirits lift. Maybe there were a lot of awesome queer women out there after all.

And then it happened. I fell hard and fast for a cute girl at the local bike co-op where I volunteered on Wednesday nights. She was smart, funny, totally adorable, and, best of all, queer. A bike nut just like me. Half my age. And living with her boyfriend.

*Mariah, continues on next page*

*Mariah, continued from previous page*

“It’s so embarrassing,” I cringed to my born-again-Christian friend Jennie over lunch one crisp fall day. “She’s *HALF* my age. And she has a boyfriend.”

I didn’t expect her to understand at all, and I’m not even sure why I was talking to her about it, but she surprised me with her reply.

“How long are you going to wait to be happy?” she asked. I didn’t have an answer to that question since it had never occurred to me that I wasn’t already happy. I mean I knew I was tormented, sure. And conflicted, definitely conflicted. But not happy? I had a pretty good life, why wouldn’t I be happy?

The crush felt more like a curse that was crushing me. I tried to make it go away. Listed all of the reasons why our situation could never work out. Told myself to just get over it. Scolded myself for being foolish (after all, she’s half your age, unavailable, and probably NOT interested anyway) but nothing I did seemed to stop my heart from dropping into my stomach when I saw her. Nothing stopped my hands from sweating when she was wrenching on a bike in a stand next to me. Damn, damn, damn.

I told my therapist, expecting her to almost laugh at the implausibility of it all. But she didn’t. Instead, she read me a poem. I don’t remember the title, or the author, or even what the poem was about, but when she read it, I felt the tenderest acknowledgement of the importance of this crush to my life, as if a feather was being used to anoint it. My crush was being blessed, not judged or scorned. The Bike Shop Girl, as I referred to her, was my catalyst. She was the zephyr that moved the cold pile of leaves, rocks, and roots from the top of my daily tomb. Once I started to feel the warmth of life within me, I couldn’t go back to the frozen existence I had endured for so long. I knew there was more for me and I went on the hunt for it like a wild animal and I didn’t stop until I found... *her*.

And yes, she is real.

*Mariah Cruz, a pseudonym, lives, writes, and bikes in Portland, OR.*

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## Don’t Think Too Hard

*By Beth Innis*

I said I’d go see Ani DiFranco with one of my straight friends who was a huge fan, when I still thought *I* was straight. She seemed like a cool feminist with rad hair, awesome lyrics and a good band. I knew she identified as bisexual and didn’t think too hard about it. I had grown up on Queen and Freddie Mercury, also loving his flamboyant, bisexual presence, somehow approved of by my uber masculine father and brother, “because he’s an unbelievable musician.” I accepted his greatness and his sexuality mostly because I didn’t think too hard about it. Dear reader, I imagine you are starting to sense a theme.

I was not totally prepared for when Ani came on stage, with her big hair and her big presence. It was then that the recurrent thought started: “I can see why a woman would want to sleep with a woman.” It was college, I thought I was just being free and experimental, opening my mind a bit. I thought a little bit about it, just not too hard.

However, I did start listening to her music more, really listening hard to her lyrics. Slowly, I allowed myself to think a little harder. And each time I saw her in concert, I was a little closer to figuring myself out and a little closer to feeling like a weird obsessed fan, thinking she was my actual friend. Each time I was awed by her presence and by how many people in her audiences looked at her like I did, as if she was singing to them, understanding their inner voices. I was surprised when I didn’t mind sharing her with them, that great varied group of fans, in different stages of their process. Each time I was a little more out, a little more me and a little more free.

When I am feeling weak, different, or tired of being different, I remind myself how important it is to be out as bisexual so that the people who need us have a positive celebrity or every day role model. That is what Freddie and Ani did for me, and that is what I will try to do for those around me. My



daughters are now old enough to discuss celebrity crushes, and it blew their tiny minds a bit when I admitted, yes, of course, mine is Hugh Jackman, but then, also, Ani DiFranco.

*Beth lives in Arlington with her husband, two daughters, two dogs, and cat. She is a small business and animal health provider and psyched to be writing again!*

Bi+ people have long created unique spaces for ourselves in digital, print, and broadcast media. Such spaces—like this publication, social media groups, and more—are vital resources for our community, providing support, validation, information, and representation. They empower us to organize, connect, and heal. We need them and we also need the mainstream media to humanize us to the general public by telling our stories fairly and accurately.

Bi+ people make up the majority of the LGBTQ community, but are significantly less likely than gay and lesbian folks to be out to the important people in our lives. Therefore, the general public's understanding of bi+ people is heavily shaped by the mainstream media, which tends to perpetuate harmful tropes about who we are. When I say harmful, I mean it literally: stereotypes about manipulation, lying, deceitfulness, destructiveness, and so on are often invoked in moments of violence against bi+ people. In short, poor media representation can fuel and attempt to justify the physical, sexual, social, and emotional abuse, rejection, and erasure that bi+ people face. And we face them at significantly higher rates than gay and straight people.

But this doesn't mean we can write the media off all together. To end these multifaceted forms of oppression and abuse, *we need the mainstream media*. While Hollywood's history on bi+ issues isn't great, the media's been telling some bi+ stories super, super right lately. So right, in fact, that I feel confident declaring this snapshot of pop culture history a full-blown media moment for our community.

This media moment is largely home-grown by bi+ people who both entertain and advocate. Award-winning bi+ activist and actress Sara Ramirez was instrumental for ten years in shaping her groundbreaking *Grey's Anatomy* character Callie Torres. Callie is an out bisexual Latina surgeon who learns to love her identity in the face of rejection and antagonism, builds a nontraditional family, and excels in her profession. She also happens to be the longest-running queer TV character. Sara went on to play a vital role in building her well-rounded *Madam Secretary* character Kat Sandoval, whose resonant dialogue about her queer identity and gender expression will go down in bi+ television history. *Brooklyn Nine-Nine's* Stephanie Beatriz, who's been publicly "bi and proud as hell" since 2016, equipped the show's writers to portray her character Rosa coming out as bisexual in the acclaimed comedy series' 100th episode. *Grey's Anatomy* and *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* have both received GLAAD Media Awards for quality LGBTQ media representation.

Additionally, Asia Kate Dillon from Showtime's *Billions* is pansexual and the first non-binary person to play a non-binary character on a major television show. *Jane the Virgin*, *Schitt's Creek*, *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*, and *Legends of Tomorrow* are also among those telling engaging bi+ stories across platforms.

Outside of TV, Janelle Monae brought much-needed understanding of pansexuality to the national conversation when she and her iconic visual album *Dirty Computer* came out this year. A self-proclaimed (though no arguments here) "free-ass motherfucker," Janelle's interview telling *Rolling Stone* that she's part of the bi+ community

trended across social and news media. It even led to "pansexual" being Merriam-Webster's top-searched term of the day and sparked coverage of the identity in mainstream news outlets like *The Washington Post*, BBC, *Harpers Bazaar*, *USA Today*, and more. *Dirty Computer* paints a multidimensional picture of being a queer Black woman in America today while also being filled with solid bops.

Social media is a double-edged sword, but it's an invaluable home for bi+ affirmation and organization. In 2014, national bi+ advocacy organization BiNet USA teamed up with GLAAD and other leading activists to co-found #BiWeek, a week-long digital campaign to celebrate bisexuality+ and educate folks about our community. During #BiWeek, bisexuality+ has gone viral by trending on social media every year. Groundbreaking Obama-era White House bi+ community briefings took place in D.C. and bi+ people make ourselves heard loud and clear. In 2017, the number of posts on social media about bisexuality+ **nearly doubled** during #BiWeek from the week prior. Social media is quite literally growing and shifting the worldwide narrative about our community.

Current bi+ media representation is not only educating the general public about bi+ people's unique experiences, but it's also *actually entertaining*. Across demographics, media consumers are getting introduced to fleshed-out, authentic bi+ characters of various races, gender identities, and ages. It's humanizing bi+ people to middle America...I mean, *Madam Secretary* is on CBS. *My parents watch CBS*. Yours probably do, too.

Bisexuality+ has become so much a part of contemporary pop culture that "bi+ lighting" – essentially, any scene tinted with the pink, purple, and blue colors of the bi+ flag – is now a common meme (thanks in no small part to Janelle's heart-stopping "Make Me Feel" video about her love for people of more than one gender). Even the colors of the bi+ flag are becoming so ingrained in the cultural lexicon that many can recognize them on sight.

This is all good news. Our community needs this. The obstacles bi+ people face are heavily rooted in how poorly understood bi+ people are. Now the question for the bi+ community is, how do we elevate this media moment from a meme into a life-saving tipping point?

There is no silver-bullet solution to all the bi+ community's disparities. What I want to see, and what our community needs to combat the myriad of struggles we're up against, are better research that's specifically about our community (not lumped in with our gay peers), and more funding for bi+ programming and organizations. Any funding at all would be a big improvement right now because there's virtually none. GLAAD proudly has a budget line earmarked for bi+ advocacy and I hope one day, all LGBTQ organizations do. I also know that, if history teaches us anything (and it does), we're going to need quality media representation to make those things happen.

"The media" sounds big and amorphous and untouchable, but there are actionable steps we can take as consumers to ensure this bi+ lighting moment doesn't flicker out. If you spot bad representation, speak up. The stick loses its impact when there are no carrots

*Alexandra, continued from previous page*

though, so if you spot good representation, speak up about it. Entertainment executives actually pay attention to social media. Online fan support has the power to save shows like *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* and *The Mindy Project*. Pop culture can be more than a guilty pleasure; it's an opportunity to show the world our opinion matters. And you don't have to do it alone! Reach out to advocacy organizations, including GLAAD. We can use our resources and relationships to celebrate folks doing it right, and work with others to help them do better. GLAAD can even help you effectively tell your own story. Celebrating our heroes and even our allies is key! Proving to content creators and decision makers that the movement for bi+ acceptance is a well-attended party helps them understand that thoughtful inclusion is worth their time.

I am so grateful for everyone fueling this media moment. I'm grateful to the trailblazers who are doing this work so publicly. I'm grateful to networks like Freeform for telling bi+ stories to young viewers through shows like *The Bold Type*, *Shadowhunters*, and *Grown-ish*. I'm grateful to Robyn Ochs for her decades of advocacy work and for facilitating spaces like *Bi Women's Quar-*

*terly*, in which otherwise ignored perspectives and voices can be appreciated. I'm grateful to Emma Gonzalez, Blair Imani, and other influential advocates who make sure their bi+ queerness doesn't get erased from their innovative, culture-changing work. I'm grateful to BiNet USA and GLAAD for renewing their commitment to #BiWeek every year and I'm grateful to you for diving deep into all of it.

With the fifth annual #BiWeek right around the corner (September 23-30 this year), I'm asking you to stay invested and make your voice even louder. We're in an extremely trying political climate and pretty much every day feels like screaming into a void while trying to climb out of a dumpster fire. Believe it or not, though, our efforts are working. We're having a moment. Let's grow it into a bigger and better movement.

*Alexandra is a bi+ media advocate spearheading GLAAD's bi+ programming. She co-founded #BiWeek, the viral annual digital campaign, and received PFLAG Queen's Brenda Howard Award for her bi+ advocacy. Follow Alexandra on Twitter at @anorianb."*

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## Are You My Mirror?

By Alex

Representations of bisexuality in pop culture never tell my story.

I don't say this to say that my version of bisexuality is the "right" or "true" way. I can acknowledge that the majority of bisexual people don't identify with my story. I can also acknowledge that my privilege in terms of race, body size, economic class, and able-bodiedness mean that biphobia doesn't intersect with elements of my identity in the harmful ways that many people experience.

These truths can coexist with the truth that it is achingly lonely to never see your story within the expanding wealth of bisexual tales, and that never seeing your experience represented as even a possibility results in a lot of questioning, doubt, and isolation.

My bisexuality is expressed in attraction to multiple genders. TV, movies, celebrity news, and books would have you believe these genders are men and women (often with a transphobic implication of "cis" added as well). This is not the case for me. I am attracted to men and women and nonbinary people. But my attraction to different genders is not always the same—and this is the cause of much label-oriented stress in my life.

I have never dated a woman. I have only dated one man and one nonbinary person, who is my current partner. Prior to dating my current partner, I was assumed to be a straight ally. My attraction to men at that point and time was much more intense than it is currently. Since beginning to date my current

partner, everyone from my family to my queer friends has assumed my previous relationship was meaningless and invalid. And though my attraction to women and nonbinary people is much more intense (compared to my waning attraction to men), it still has resulted in the feeling of my queerness only "counting" now that I have deviated from heteronormativity.

I can't blame anyone for this. What else are we supposed to think, when every queer-woman-centered piece of media centers on finding that one other woman to love, as well as the "gay realization" being expressed through a leaving of one male/masculine partner for a woman/femme one (and never an expressly nonbinary one, of course).

No offense to bisexual people in pop culture; your stories are valid, important, and healing for so many. It would just be nice to find validity, importance, and healing in my own story as well.

[Title is a poor reference to the children's book *Are You My Mother?* by P.D. Eastman.]

*Alex is an East Coast bisexual femme who struggles to write about herself in bios. Main goals include learning self-love and deconstructing oppressive structures.*



I approached it with the same detached curiosity with which I approached my cultural interests. Because, I reasoned, I was still attracted to men, so must therefore be straight.

*"We do not grow absolutely, chronologically. We grow sometimes in one dimension, and not in another; unevenly. We grow partially. We are relative. We are mature in one realm, childish in another. The past, present, and future mingle and pull us backward, forward, or fix us in the present. We are made up of layers, cells, constellations."*

When my daughter came out at 14, I was ready to be the cool mom. The mom who understands. The mom who volunteers to take her kid to her first pride march and walks along with her. I saw myself as a great ally. Meanwhile, at my workplace, the opportunity arose to take LGBTQ awareness training. I jumped at it. At the first session I introduced myself as an ally and said I was there because I wanted to make our workplace safe and welcoming for people like my daughter (translation: for people other than me).

I *didn't* say that I had recently found myself deeply attracted to a woman I had known for many years. I didn't say that after decades of denial I was beginning to question a lot of the assumptions I had always made about my sexuality. I didn't say I was beginning to wonder if I might be bisexual. Because I had never learned how to say those things.

But then the instructor started talking. He went through the alphabet soup of LGBTQ vocabulary term by term, and when he came to the "B" he flashed Kinsey's scale up on the screen. He talked about sexual orientation as a continuum. He talked about fluidity, about how we might find ourselves at different places on a spectrum at different points in our lives. He explained what bisexuality was, and what it wasn't, and he gave words to the wordless thoughts and feelings that had swirled in my head and heart for so long.

It took a few more months for me to be able to say the word myself, about myself, out loud to other people. But now every time I say the word out loud it feels a tiny bit less like stepping off a cliff.

*"And the day came when the risk to remain tight in a bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom."*

I wonder how different my life would be today if the writers of the stories I read and the movies I watched and the songs I listened to as a young woman had actually said the word. If representations of my sexuality had not been relegated to the shadows and the margins, even within the growing mainstream representations of gay and lesbian sexualities. I grew up in an era when, although it became increasingly easy to see diversity of sexual orientation reflected in popular culture, it was still predominantly an either-or representation. You were gay or you were straight; everything else was deemed confusion. For the record, I'm a whole lot less confused now than I was all those years I believed I was straight.

*"My mission, should I choose to accept it, is to find peace with exactly who and what I am. To take pride in my thoughts, my appearance, my talents, my flaws and to stop this incessant worrying that I can't be loved as I am."*

Popular culture has only just recently started to say the word "bisexual." Recently enough, that it is still an event whenever it happens. My dream is that we say the word often enough, and make it ordinary enough that future generations will not have to wait until their hair is grey to see themselves reflected in the stories that surround them.

*"Life shrinks or expands in proportion to one's courage."*

*Anna is a Canadian adult educator in Winnipeg, Manitoba—a friendly, vibrant city that is the object of a lot of mean jokes, most of which are terribly unfair. Except the ones about how cold it gets in winter. Those are all based in truth, but she loves her city just the same.*



**Dear Reader:** If you rarely see people who look like you, think like you, or share your experiences and perspectives represented in print, then your voice is especially important. You can increase representation of people like you by lifting your own voice, so please consider submitting your writing and/or artwork to *Bi Women Quarterly*. We are committed to expanding representation and to making sure that the pages of this publication encompass a wide range of diversities, including (but not limited to) age, race, geography, relationship choices, ability, spiritual practice, family configuration, and so much more.

# How Web Series Helped Make My Bisexuality a Truth Universally Acknowledged

By Kirsten Fedorowicz

My journey towards bisexual representation started as many great pop culture journeys start: with an adaptation of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*.

More precisely, the journey started with a modern version called the "Lizzie Bennet Diaries" made for YouTube. In the first episode, Lizzie Bennet looks directly at the camera while holding a t-shirt, from which she reads with scorn the famous lines: "It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune..."

Two minutes later, when a red-haired Lydia Bennett rushes into Lizzie's room shouting, "Have you heard about who bought that mansion in Netherfield?", I was hooked. I loved the way these classic characters were reinvented: Jane Bennett as an overworked individual in the fashion industry, Lizzie as a communication grad student, Lydia as a party girl community college student.

At 17, I was rediscovering my feminism and a love for subverting the white heterosexual patriarchy, and was intrigued by the way Mr. Bingley became an Asian-American man named Bing Lee and Colonel Fitzwilliam became a gay black man who casually mentioned his boyfriend throughout his time in the series. When the writers reinvented these characters, they didn't hold them to constraints of sexuality and race, but allowed their identities to be negotiable.

At this transitional time in my life, moving from high school to college, I was starting to navigate what it meant to be bisexual. My freshman year of college, I became close friends with two women who proudly called themselves lesbians, and they were the first people I ever talked with about queerness. One of these friends mentioned something about the web series "Carmilla," and I found it on YouTube.

The routine was familiar; a perky woman talking into the camera, narrating each plot of the show from her room, the other characters visiting her in her chair. The plotline is a mix of adventure and romance between a young college student and her lesbian vampire roommate. Carmilla was made, unlike the Lizzie Bennet Diaries, with the express mission of being queer; the main characters are queer without question, without ever having to explicitly say it.

It was in the web series Carmilla that I saw two women kiss on screen for the first time. Sitting at my desk, in the cave that was formed by my lofted bed, when I was sure that my roommate was going to be away, I watched the final episode. The final episode where, after 35 eight-minute episodes of unbelievable tension, the two main characters kiss.

And... man, what a kiss. The kind of kiss that sent shivers up your spine to watch, so enthusiastically passionate; the way her

hand touches the other woman's cheek, the way the dialogue is interrupted by a series of kisses. I had never seen anything like it, and it gave my curiosity a face; *this* is what it would look like to kiss a woman.

By the end of my freshmen year, I had come out to those two lesbian friends, as well as another close friend who I would define as "enthusiastically straight and incredibly supportive."

At the time I came out, I was watching another literary web series called *All For One*, an adaptation of *The Three Musketeers*. In the first episode, the main character, Dorothy, looks directly at the camera, her dark eyes shimmering with mischief. "She's cute, right," she says, referring to her roommate, who has temporarily disappeared from view. Then, referring to the chemistry between her and her roommate, she comments, "It's not all in my head."

A few episodes later, after the female roommate refutes her advances and tells her she has a girlfriend, Dorothy is prancing around her living space waiting for a gentleman caller. She tells the camera, in no uncertain terms, "I like guys as much as girls. I'm a *bisexual*, remember?"

I felt like I had finally struck web series gold. This character, the fluid way her sexuality is handled throughout the show, was something I had never encountered before. It was new, fresh, and most importantly *relatable*. I am not the spitfire person that the Dorothy character is, but I was able to relate to her in a way I was never able to relate to any other character in my media-consuming life; she is bisexual, and so am I.

I know I'm not the first queer woman to find her representation in small, indie media, but I am part of the generation who are increasingly finding our identities online. For us, it is easier to stumble across diverse media, and often that diverse media sends you down a rabbit hole just by looking at the "YouTube recommendations" page.

For a girl who was figuring out what it meant to be queer, web series were a naturally explorative form. Put on a background of familiar stories and literary canon, hallmarks of our pop culture, the form takes characters that often already have sentimental meaning and infuses them with an identity they can share with the watcher. Web series, for me, help give queer people room to exist in a long-established pop culture; we might not have been visually represented in Jane Austen's time, but we're sure here now.

*Kirsten Fedorowicz is a student at Aquinas College in Grand Rapids, Michigan, studying English with a minor in Women's Studies. She loves embroidery, feminism, and podcasts, and especially embroidering feminist slogans while listening to podcasts.*

# Representation at the Intersection of Race, Gender, and Sexuality: An Interview with Cheryl Head

By MB Austin

Cheryl Head is the author of the Charlie Mack Motown Mystery series. Charlie, the named partner in Charlene Mack Private Investigations, runs the Detroit firm with two other ex-law-enforcement professionals. In the first novel, *Bury Me When I'm Dead*, they travel to Alabama in pursuit of a suspected embezzler and tangle with a murderer. In the second, *Wake Me When It's Over*, a suspicious death that may be linked to industrial espionage brings Charlie and her team the formidable task of protecting the Detroit Auto Show from the threat of a terrorist attack.

As we ride along on Charlie's fascinating and often dangerous work days, her professional relationships with Gil and Don (and others on her staff and in her community) reveal her intelligence, compassion, and integrity. Charlie's relationship with her aging mother, her ex-husband, and her girlfriend Mandy Porter give us additional insights. Since these are crime stories and not romances, we aren't guaranteed a tidy happy ending with Mandy. Instead, the realistic development of this relationship makes Charlie a character many bi+ women will find easy to relate to.

You can find the novels at Bywater Books and at all book vendors. To learn more about Cheryl's own intriguing background and other work, visit [www.cherylhead.com](http://www.cherylhead.com)

**MB:** Reading the first Charlie Mack mystery, I felt as if I had just walked in on one moment in the characters' lives—and that you know what they were doing all the years up to that time. (None of them feel like placeholders or props.) How do they become real to you?

**CH:** My characters *must* be real for me, so I can write dialogue that seems authentic to their voices. That's especially true for the principals in the series: Charlie, her partners, her new lover Mandy, and her mother. Each of those characters has something in their personality that's an aspect of Charlie's own personality. When I'm lucky, my characters tell me things and "gift" me their dialogue. That's when I fall in love with them.

**MB:** In the cast of characters, we see a reflection of the diverse population of Detroit (and other parts of the U.S.). And each character feels very much like an authentic individual. How do you get inside the heads of those with backgrounds different than your own and bring the realities of their lives and perspectives forward?

**CH:** Diversity is very important to me. Understanding it, celebrating it, following in the dynamic stream where it travels. I'm fascinated with what makes people tick. If I could have a superpower, I might want to be an empath—you know, like Spock when he does a mind meld. Ha ha. Even the secondary



Cheryl Head

and tertiary characters are important to me, and are compilations of people I know, have worked with, or have run across—their mannerisms, dress, world perspectives. I want readers to recognize the frailties, biases, fears, prejudices, and hopes all human beings share from time to time. To understand my characters, I usually just sit with them—sometimes a long time; and in a few cases, they come to me whole. In my first book, which was a coming-of-age novel set during World War II, one of the characters literally woke me up from sleep to reveal who he was.

**MB:** Charlie does not doubt how she feels about Mandy Porter; but falling in love with her unsettles Charlie on several levels. There's the changing of her own idea of who she is; changing how her community sees her; and deepest down, being scared to love fully.

**CH:** Yes. You've captured her struggle. She also eschews the labels around sexual preference. But being afraid to fully love herself is her greatest challenge. In the series, Charlie will be presented with constant opportunities to witness, and experience, various presentations of love. I hadn't realized that's what I was doing at first. I was more conscious of showing her ability to be empathetic. But what I'm doing in developing her character is to move her along the path of accepting her own, complex feelings

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about her sexuality. To feel okay about them, as one facet of her uniqueness, so she can enjoy success in all parts of her life.

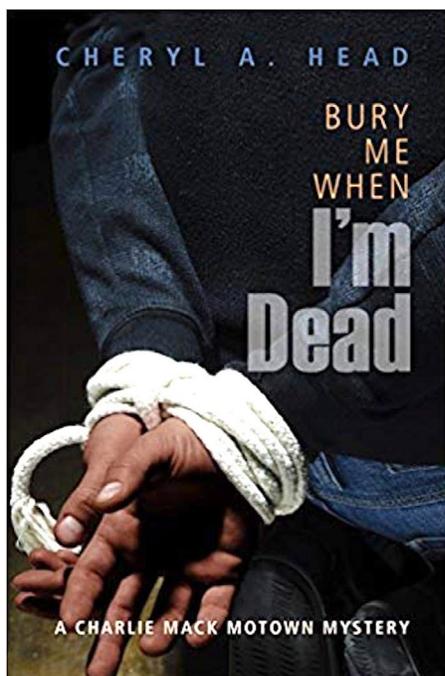
**MB:** Charlie Mack is so cool, some readers will want to be her when they grow up. Some will want to date her. And some will want to be her friend. What aspirations did you have for Charlie when you dreamed her up?

**CH:** She is cool, isn't she? An overachiever, smart, a good human being, and as one of my favorite songwriters has penned: "able to leap over bullshit in a single bound." I want to be Charlie too. I am her in many ways. But she's a better version of me. My aspirations for Charlie are to present her in a way that gives readers additional insights into what it is to be a black woman in America. We are not all the same, and I hope readers will embrace that diversity.

**MB:** Can you give us any hints about Charlie's next adventure?

**CH:** Book 3 finds Charlie taking on an informal case that escalates into a full investigation of the murders of the homeless in one of Detroit's iconic neighborhoods. Book 4 is set within a grand jury trial setting. There's always mischief afoot in Detroit. The most revealing storyline in the next two novels is the trajectory of Charlie's relationship with Mandy. *Wake Me When It's Over* has a bonus chapter that tees up the internal conflict Charlie still carries around her feelings for Mandy.

Writer MB Austin has been bi all of her life, and graced by the love of her wife for half of it. Her first two Maji Rios thrillers, *Strictly Need to Know* and *Running Off Radar*, are available from Bold Strokes Books and everywhere books are sold. Learn more at [www.mbaustin.me](http://www.mbaustin.me).



## And the Winners Are...

### 30<sup>th</sup> Annual Lambda Literary Awards

Awarded June 4, 2018 in New York City:

Bisexual Fiction: Barbara Browning, *The Gift*, Coffee House Press

Bisexual Nonfiction: Roxane Gay, *Hunger*, HarperCollins

### Sixth Annual Bisexual Book Awards

Awarded June 1, 2018 in New York City:

Non-Fiction: *Unconditional: A Guide to Loving and Supporting Your LGBTQ Child* by Telaina Eriksen, Mango Media

Memoir/Biography: Tie: *First Time Ever* by Peggy Seeger, Faber & Faber and *What the Mouth Wants: A Memoir of Food, Love and Belonging* by Monica Meneghetti, Dagger Editions/Caitlin Press

Fiction: *Her Body and Other Parties* by Carmen Maria Machado, Graywolf Press

Romance: *By the Currwong's Call* by Welton B. Marsland, Escape Publishing/ Harlequin Enterprises Australia

Erotic Fiction: *Rescues and the Rhyssa* by TS Porter, Less Than Three Press

Speculative Fiction: *The Rules and Regulations For Mediating Myths & Magic* by F.T. Lukens, Duet Books/ Interlude Press

Teen/Young Adult Fiction: *In Other Lands* by Sarah Rees Brennan, Big Mouth House/Small Beer Press

Mystery: *Suspicious Behavior* by L.A. Witt & Cari Z, Riptide Publishing

Poetry: *Truth Be Bold—Serenading Life & Death in the Age of AIDS* by Julene Tripp Weaver, Finishing Line Press

Publisher of the Year: Tie: Duet Books/Interlude Press and Less Than Three Press

Bi Writer of the Year: Peggy Seeger (Memoir/Bio) *First Time Ever*, Faber & Faber

*The BWQ* team extend our sincere congratulations to the awardees.

# Better than Nothing

By Tamsin

In preschool, I never understood what the fuss was about the firetruck. All the boys would go on the truck-shaped jungle gym, pretending they were the coolest, and all the girls oohed and aahed. But I was the only “one of them” who went on the firetruck. *See? My body language suggested. No big deal.* Also, *Hey, look at me! Aren't I cool, too?* And yet no one bestowed upon me any playground mystique—none of the boys wanted to be my friend, and none of the girls wanted to be my girlfriend.

Sadly, my playground dilemma has repeated itself over the years in different formats. Often drawn to so-called boys' hobbies, professions, attitudes, and *cough* practical *cough* clothes, I was (am) nevertheless relegated to second-class status. Only men could (can) be glamorous doing *those* things. That *I* did them rendered me vaguely acceptable at best, and threatening at worst, on those rare occasions when I managed not to get ignored. This process of identification followed by rejection is profoundly alienating.

This sense of alienation has often been exacerbated by my experiences with popular culture. Mainstream media implies that there are only two genders—men and women—and prescribes narrow and polarized roles for men and women's sexual and romantic behavior. Not identifying as a man or as a woman made it hard to navigate popular culture growing up, because there really were no role models to be found.

Between preschool and middle school, I had blessedly limited exposure to pop culture, since my parents were too cheap to spring for cable. To a certain degree this made me feel apart from my peers, but things really came to a head during puberty. At this stage, the girls I knew were increasingly interested in things I didn't care about, or even actively disliked: Britney Spears, makeup, hair products, boys, shopping, lip gloss, etc. At the same time, my body was immutably changing to align me, in society's eyes, with a gender that meant little to me, and that society actively devalued. If I felt different before, I felt alien now, because as imperfectly as I had fit in before, now I had no chance. No one would believe me or tolerate me claiming to be anything other than a girl. The world was polarized. Yet despite all this messaging, I never 100% bought the idea that I was a girl. I was in limbo.

My puberty coincided with the dawning of the internet and geekdom's flowering. Always a bright kid, the semi-intellectual pastime of computer games (as opposed to console games) drew me in and provided escape from the twin miseries of school and family. The games I played and the media surrounding them (websites, magazines) were geared towards straight men and were not especially progressive. Women characters in games—if they were even present—had minor, stereotypical roles and were passive, highly sexualized, and objectified



in ways male characters were not. Given my situation—of not being accepted, or being told to be something I wasn't which was also (unjustifiably) denigrated—it was easy to start hating myself. I also began to actively *hate* anything “feminine,” as if that would somehow separate me from my assigned gender and gain me acceptance into the male elite. It was a fool's last resort. Since I didn't identify as a girl, I couldn't take rebellious pride in it. I had no options. I did not exist.

Since pop culture links sex and gender in very specific ways, I also began to hate the idea of sex, which society had taught me could only consist of a penis in a vagina. To be on the receiving end of penetration was portrayed as akin to violation, so naturally this idea made my blood boil. Apparently in addition to not being a person, men were now entitled to denigrate me in profoundly personal, bodily ways. No wonder I was angry and confused. Maybe this is why I was first only attracted to women—they were not only beautiful, but *safe* to be romantic with. Yet I knew I couldn't be a lesbian, because I wasn't a woman. And the term never felt right. So I wondered if I was asexual and stumbled upon AVEN (the Asexual Visibility and Education Network) sometime around 2005. I learned a lot on those forums—including how many people separated the sexual and the romantic—an idea I still find to be very helpful in understanding my sexuality. But I eventually learned I was not ace.

(It took me years to decide that the best terms for me were first and foremost, *queer*, and secondly, *non-binary* and *pansexual*. I was at least 24.)

Eventually, I stumbled upon some media that was less straight-jacketed—most notably, the anime TV show *Revolutionary Girl Utena*. It tells the story of Utena, a female middle school student who dresses in the boys' uniform, uses male pronouns, acts boldly, is athletic, espouses the noble virtues of a *prince*, protects her friend Anthy, is successful, and just so happens to have bright pink hair. It contradicted so many of those dumb binaries I had been taught, and it gave me an example of someone being themselves without regard to what their body looked like. (Despite my gender dysphoria, I've rarely wanted to physically transition.) To this day I have not found the

Tamsin., continues on next page

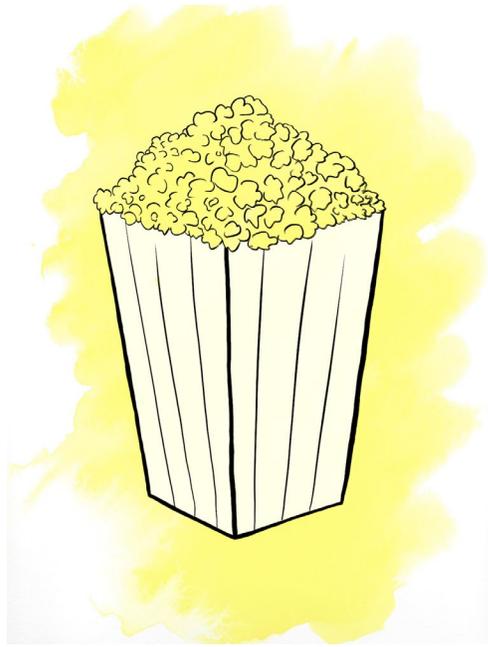
Tamsin., continued from previous page

same level of resonance with any other TV show. There are minor characters who are great: Stevonnie, a non-binary character from *Steven Universe*, and Petrichor, a trans woman from the comic series *Saga*, are the only two I can name.

I haven't found many empowered women characters that I can relate to, although I admit I haven't looked too hard. *Lost Girl* is one exception. It tells the story of Bo, a bisexual succubus who fights crime (it *is* pretty cheesy). I liked that Bo was legitimately tough and not over-the-top feminine. Secondly, she was kind of polyamorous (although that term was never used). Finally, she was not passive or servile when it came to sex and romance—physical touch was her superpower and she used it for good. What I dislike about the show is that while Bo is never intimate with anyone against their will, she does seduce them sometimes to advance the plot (by touching their arm or stroking their hair). This is creepy, but more germanely, it is deceitful, and deceitfulness is a tag we bi+ folks are too often labeled with. I also dislike the pressure put upon Bo to “choose” between her two main partners, and that her sexuality is never labeled in the show itself. I was older, confident, and more experienced when I watched *Lost Girl*, which let me think about it critically. But young people desperate for something to relate to might not always be able to detach.

I think my self-serving sob story is a great example of the effects of toxic masculinity, as well as why good queer representation is important. In my youthful desperation to prove I was a guy, I engaged with the closest thing I could find to something that “felt like me.” What I found, and what was available at the time, unfortunately helped me engage with hurtful messages and thought patterns. These biases took a long time to disentangle. I hate the idea that someone else might get caught in the same trap, especially someone young who hasn't had much of a chance to go out into the world. It's a given that some people will need to explore more than others when they are uncovering their identity. But if I had had examples of bisexual+ and non-binary characters, *and* if so-called men's media was more responsible in basically every conceivable way, I would have been better off no matter how much time I spent wandering.

*Tamsin is a data analyst in Boston. Their interests include public health, social justice, and computer science.*



Artwork by Elizabeth Fernandez

## Introducing BWQ's New Assistant Editor!

BWQ's editorial team is now bi-coastal—joining us from Northern California is Katelynn Bishop. Katelynn has been a *Bi Women Quarterly* proofreader and occasional contributor since 2009, when she was Robyn's summer intern. She recently completed a PhD in Sociology, with an emphasis in Feminist Studies, from the University of California, Santa Barbara. Her sociological research centers on gender, sexuality, and the body, and she is currently working on a book manuscript based on her dissertation research, entitled *Imperfect Fit: Bras, Embodied Difference, and the Limits of Consumerism*.

As a researcher, writer, educator, activist, and a bi+ woman who still ponders how best to label her sexuality, she is passionate about encouraging critical, intersectional thinking about the complexities of sexuality, gender, and other social experiences. She is excited for the opportunity to further these goals as Assistant Editor for *BWQ*, and I am excited to be working with someone with Katelyn's brilliance, competencies, and commitment.

~Robyn



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## The "Bi Office"

is the Bisexual Resource Center, located at 29 Stanhope Street in Boston, behind Club Cafe. Call 617-424-9595.

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### Ongoing Events

**Come to our monthly bi+ women's brunch! See calendar for dates.**

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#### 2nd Mondays:

Tea with Bi Women Partnered with Men. 7pm. Info: kate.e.flynn@gmail.com.

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#### 2nd Wednesdays:

Bisexual Resource Center Board Meeting. 7-9pm at the Bi Office. All are welcome.

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#### 2nd Thursdays:

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

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#### 3rd Saturdays:

Bi Brunch. 11:30am at The Burren, 247 Elm Street, Davis Square, Somerville.

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

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

**We offer FREE electronic subscriptions to this publication. Sign up at [www.biwomen-boston.org](http://www.biwomen-boston.org).**



# CALENDAR

## September

**5 (Wednesday) 7-9pm, Bi Social & Support Group (BLiSS).** All bi & bi-friendly people of all genders & orientations welcome. Meetings are peer-facilitated discussion groups, sometimes with a pre-selected topic or presenter. Meets 1<sup>st</sup> Wednesdays. Info: [bliss@biresource.org](mailto:bliss@biresource.org)

**8 (Saturday), 4:30-6:30pm, Bi Women's Potluck & WaterFire at Julia's in Providence, RI.** Bring a potluck item to share. Plenty of street parking. Dog in home. After the potluck, we'll attend WaterFire, a free art installation in downtown Providence (starts at 7pm). RSVP: [julik.77@gmail.com](mailto:julik.77@gmail.com)

**9 (Sunday), 2-4pm, Tea with Bisexual Women Partnered with Men (BWPM).** A peer-led support meetup. We will discuss a wide range of issues related to attraction, sexuality, & gender in a supportive safe space for only trans & cis women & non-binary folks of all races & ethnic backgrounds. RSVP: <https://www.meetup.com/Bi-Community-Activities/events/ftvxgmyxmbmb/>

**10 (Monday) 7-9pm, Straight Marriage, Still Questioning.** A peer-led support group for women in a straight marriage/relationship struggling with sexual orientation or coming out. Meets 2<sup>nd</sup> Mondays. RSVP/Info: [kate.e.flynn@gmail.com](mailto:kate.e.flynn@gmail.com)

**13 (Thursday) 7-9pm, Young Bisexual Social and Support Group (Young BLiSS).** If you are in your 20s or mid-30s (or thereabouts) and identify somewhere along the lines of bisexual/omni/pan/fluid (or are questioning in that direction), please join us 2<sup>nd</sup> Thursdays for discussion, support, &/or the eating and drinking of delicious things. Info/RSVP: [youngblissboston@gmail.com](mailto:youngblissboston@gmail.com)

**15 (Saturday) 11:30am, Biversity Brunch.** This mixed gender bi group brunches at The Burren on Elm St. in Davis Sq., Somerville. Meets 3<sup>rd</sup> Saturdays.

**23 (Sunday) 12-3pm, Bi Women's Book Swap Brunch hosted by Ellyn & Steph in Arlington.** Please bring a potluck item

to share & 1 (or more) books for the annual book swap! Audiobooks are also welcome. Info/RSVP: [smiserlis@gmail.com](mailto:smiserlis@gmail.com)

**23 (Sunday) Celebrate Bisexuality Day, Everywhere!**

## October

**3 (Wednesday) 7-9pm, BLiSS.** (See 9/5)

**11 (Thursday) National Coming Out Day, Everywhere!**

**12-14 (Friday-Sunday), BECAUSE Conference, St. Paul, MN.** The annual conference of the Bisexual Organizing Project, dedicated to building empowered bisexual, pansexual, fluid, queer, & unlabeled community in the US. Info: [www.becauseconference.org](http://www.becauseconference.org)

**15 (Monday), 7-9pm, Straight Marriage, Still Questioning.** (See 9/10)

**11 (Thursday) 7-9pm, Young BLiSS.** (See 9/13)

**20 (Saturday) 11am-2pm, Bi Women's Poetry Brunch at Frances' in Roslindale.** Bring a potluck item to share. A great way to meet Bi- and Bi-friendly women in the area! Guests are encouraged to bring a poem they have written or a favorite poem. Info/RSVP: [frances@gardenofwords.com](mailto:frances@gardenofwords.com)

**20 (Saturday) 11:30am, Biversity Brunch.** (See 9/15)

## November

**7 (Wednesday) 7-9pm, BLiSS.** (See 9/5)

**8 (Thursday) 7-9pm, Young BLiSS.** (See 9/13)

**19 (Monday) 7-9pm, Straight Marriage, Still Questioning.** (See 9/10)

**17 (Saturday) 11:30am, Biversity Brunch.** (See 9/15)

## December

**2 (Sunday) 4-7 pm, Stuff n' Stuff Potluck at Robyn's in Jamaica Plain.** Please bring a potluck item to share & help with the mailing of this publication. Cats in home. Info/RSVP: [robyn@robynocho.com](mailto:robyn@robynocho.com)