

Bilicious and Beyond: *an international adventure of creative growth & reinvention*

By Susannah Layton

My creativity is an essential part of my identity; it's also a powerful tool to help me explore, express and understand who I am and how I fit into the world around me. As a multidisciplinary artist, producer, and director, I present personal stories through a variety of media including video, collage, and performance.

For as long as I can remember, I've been fascinated with queer arts and culture. I am grateful to have experienced this through living in a few of the world's most queer-friendly cities, including London, Sydney, San Francisco, and currently Boston. In my teenage years during the '80s, I loved watching British TV programs such as the Kenny Everett Video Show, fabulously campy sketch comedy; and Dame Edna Experience, a talk show hosted by the outrageous drag persona of satirist Barry Humphries. In the '90s I became more interested in music and found a new creative outlet, going out dancing in London's nightclubs. When I moved to Sydney in the mid-'90s, I discovered dance music on a bigger scale. One of my most memorable experiences was attending Sydney's Mardi Gras parade (their version of Pride)—an incredible evening shared with thousands of LGBTQI people from around the globe. That night I felt for the first time a sense of queer community and wanted to be a part of it, but I wasn't yet out as bisexual.

Coming out as bisexual was a gradual process for me. Until my mid-twenties, I only dated men and identified as straight. I started noticing my attractions to other women in my early twenties, although it took me a few years to develop the courage to admit that to anyone. I remember the first time I kissed another woman. I was living in London when a friend invited me to a party with some sexually adventurous creative types. That playful evening opened up my heart and mind to the potential of finding a romantic relationship with a woman.

It wasn't until I moved to San Francisco in my late twenties that I found the confidence to come out as bisexual. I met my first girlfriend on the dance floor of Club Q, San Francisco's legendary lesbian dance party. Falling in love with her made me realize it was time to quit my Internet start-up day job and redirect my career path by going to graduate school to study Expressive Arts Therapy. As part of my training, I had the opportunity to tell my personal story through many different art forms, including writing, drama, dance, movement, painting, and music. For my final visual arts presentation, I chose to exhibit two mixed-



Bilicious cast from 2014, with Susannah Layton second from right.

media, hand-made collage books which publicly displayed my coming out story, finding love with another woman for the first time.

During graduate school, I was fortunate to connect with other visual and performing artists who also identified as bi. Surprisingly, finding bi community in San Francisco outside of grad school was a challenge. I lived in the heart of the Castro district, one of the world's best-known LGBTQI neighborhoods, which was thriving with gay/lesbian culture and a growing trans community, but I was disappointed to find a lack of resources and community for bi people. That inspired me to co-create a local bi social and support group. We met regularly for potluck meals to share our stories and we all became close friends.

Susannah, continues on page 6

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Editor's Note

Poet and writer Erica Jong said, "You can't divide creative juices from human juices. And as long as juicy women are equated with bad women, we will err on the side of being bad." This issue teems with juices, as the many different voices explore what creativity means to them and how they express themselves in the world. "Being bad" comes with the territory. With the world being a particularly mean and confusing arena right now, it's been a pleasure to concentrate on bi+ women's creative spirits in their many forms while producing this issue.

As someone who has been an activist for many decades, I pay attention to those who inspire and ignite others in the cause of social change. Most recently, as social media enables people to virally spread a symbol like the pussy hat or the resistance cries of "Black Lives Matter" and "Nevertheless, she persisted," our ability to turn our creativity into social action and connection can happen within hours.

I hope you'll enjoy the range of expression our contributors explore, from prose and poetry to photography, tattooing, cartoons, and political statements. Thank you to all who submitted their work and shared their personal stories about creativity. Thanks to the proofreading squad and to Robyn for giving me free reign on the issue. It's always fun for me to step into the role for a couple weeks and revel in all the great bi+ energy.

And don't miss the information on page 11 about the Bisexual Health Awareness Month, the fourth year the BRC has led this important effort. It's an incredibly important social media campaign that everyone can help promote!

-Ellyn Ruthstrom

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



Upcoming in the *Bi Women Quarterly*

Call for writing Summer 2017 issue **Trauma & Healing**

Recent data (www.cdc.gov/ViolencePrevention/pdf/NISVS_SOfindings.pdf) indicates bi+ women experience significantly higher rates of intimate partner and sexual violence than either straight- or lesbian-identified women. What's going on? Help us learn more about the impact of intimate partner and sexual violence on bi+ women and how to address it – through opinion pieces, research, personal stories, poetry, fiction, artwork and photography. *DUE BY May 1.*

Call for writing Fall 2017 issue **Coming Out Stories**

"Speaking of bisexuality (which we weren't), that's how I identify. Please pass the salt." Please share – through prose, poetry, artwork or fiction – a coming out story. Funny, poignant, tragic, surprising, or heartwarming stories – all are welcome! *DUE BY August 1.*

Submission guidelines are online at biwomenboston.org.

Send your submissions and suggestions for future topics to biwomeneditor@gmail.com

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

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).

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. It is meant to be 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: Vivek Shraya, Toronto, Canada

Interview by Apphia Kumar

*Right after the 2016 BECAUSE conference, I found myself looking for brown bisexual badassery online and that's when I came across Vivek Shraya in a Huffington Post article. After doing a bit more research, I found out that she was an author and, from what I could see, these were books I definitely wanted to read. I started with *The Boy with the Bindi* and am currently reading *She of the Mountains*.*

The Boy with the Bindi is a beautifully illustrated children's book about a South Asian five-year-old boy who becomes fascinated with his mother's bindi. (A bindi is a decorative dot worn on the forehead by Hindus.) I remember being curious about it myself, and about the misinformed stories that I had learned about it. Reading Vivek's book was like giving the five-year-old me a second chance at learning about the bindi. I loved every single page, and highly recommend it.

She of the Mountains is a love story of a man and his body, which is intertwined with Hindu Mythology. The dual narrative explores what effects gender and sexuality policing can have on a person.

Vivek takes up space as a South Asian trans bisexual and is brilliant at it.

AK: Vivek, please tell us about yourself.

VS: I am a Toronto-based artist who works in the media of music, literature, performance, and film.

AK: Would you share with us your “coming out story”? When did you know you were bi+? What was it like, letting people see your truth?

VS: I remember brashly telling my best friend in high school that I wanted both girls and boys to like me. She responded, “Of course you do!” Unfortunately, coming out further as bi was halted as I was repeatedly told by gay men that I must either be confused or scared to come out as gay. So coming out as bisexual has been a long process, one that has involved challenging my own internalized biphobia along the way.

AK: What has it been like, coming into your own identity as you experience it today? Has it changed you over the years? Could you share things that stood out to you the most, and affected you the most?

VS: My identity has shifted and changed throughout my life, which can be beautiful, but in my case is largely due to external pressure and lack of safety. It took me over a decade to “come back” to bisexuality as an identity, to have the confidence to own my desires.

AK: Do you remember what first inspired you to be a visible voice for your community?

VS: I had been in a relationship with a woman for a number



of years and had become exhausted by the scrutiny we received by the gay community. I constantly felt like I needed to either defend myself or hide my relationship altogether. It was painful to feel like I couldn't celebrate who I was or the love I felt. This experience inspired me to write my first novel, *She of the Mountains*, with the intention of challenging biphobia, especially in gay communities.

AK: One of the things I find very interesting is how aware we are of where our identities intersect with our cultural identities. You have been able to voice that intersectionality in the work that you do. How important is it for you to have these various identities intersect with each other in the work that you do, and why?

VS: As someone who embodies a number of identities—trans/bisexual/brown—intersectionality is crucial in my art to illustrate the complexity and beauty of non-normative lives.

AK: What's your thought process like when it comes to telling stories and writing poetry that is both queer and brown?

VS: My thought process generally involves making sure I am not trying to speak on behalf of a multiplicity of experiences, and to also push against the dominant narratives in

Vivek, continues on page 15

Why Do They Have to be Gay?

By Jazmine Nieves

Every day I work tirelessly on my writing; whether that means jotting down ideas that sprung upon me during class, talking to myself loudly and animatedly about characters and major plot points both in public and in private, staring at empty space as my mind plays over scenes to be created, or actually sitting in front of my laptop and “writing like I’m running out of time,” to quote from the play *Hamilton*.

I spend most of my time on developing characters. When I watch movies, TV shows or read books, it’s the characters that draw me in, not the plot or the action or the clever writing. It’s the people I’m reading about, empathizing with, cheering for, crying over, relating to. I laugh with the characters, love them like my friends, my family. So in my writing, I take extra care with the characters I am creating. I put pieces of myself, my loved ones, and my enemies into them; and I mold them to the image of human beings that love and walk and live like they do in the real world.

And in the real world, there are gays. Lesbians. Bisexuals. Pansexuals. Asexuals. Demisexuals. All the colors and hues of every conceivable sexual orientation and identity.

So why is it so surprising that I’d write my characters to be these different, amazing, beautiful hues. Different from the classic shade “heterosexual”?

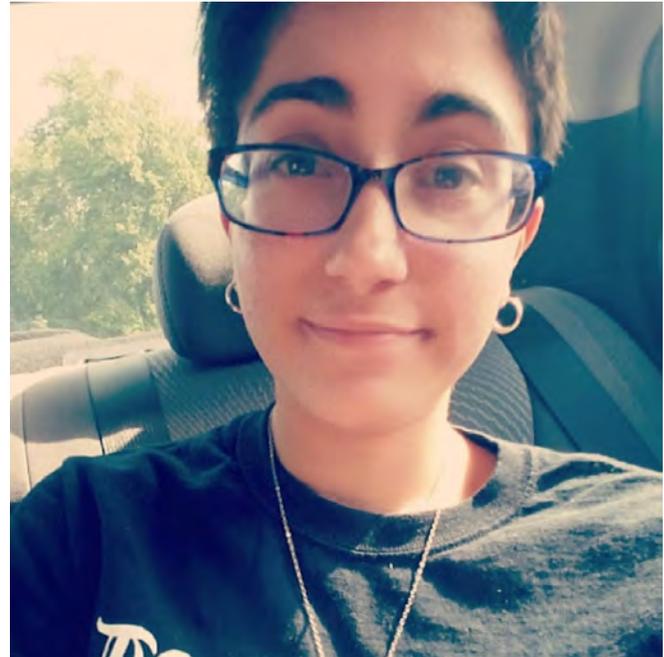
“Why do they have to be gay?”

I’ve heard this complaint too many times. Whether I’m watching TV with someone and one of the side characters is revealed to be interested in someone of the same sex, or whether I’m explaining one of my own characters and stories to someone, I hear this same complaint, to which I reply, “Why not?”

But it does pose an interesting question. Why DO I write gay characters? I myself identify as bisexual and I enjoy putting myself into my characters. Am I only making my characters interested in the same sex because I am interested in the same sex? Am I just creating a mirror for myself to watch as I explore all these different adventures in my worlds, enjoying my eternal bisexuality within the pages of my stories?

No, it can’t be that simple, that selfish. There has got to be more to it.

In media – TV shows, movies, literature – there’s a serious lack of representation that has become increasingly apparent to the LGBT+ community. I only know of one current network TV show, *How to Get Away With Murder*, where the main character is confirmed on screen to be attracted and romantically involved with both a man and woman at some point. It’s an added bonus that this character, Annalise Keating played by Viola Davis, is a person of color! But that’s only *one* instance that I know of in a *sea* of content. The only other times I see representation is in side or background char-



acters, or around the clichéd tropes where the person’s sexual orientation is the focal point of the plot and of their character, rather than just one flavor to the whole of their being.

Isn’t that what sexuality is, just a piece of the whole puzzle? I’m not just a bisexual. I’m a woman, an American, a Puerto Rican, a writer, a student, a daughter, a sister, a fangirl. I’m shy, loud, self-conscious, selfish, short. All these are pieces, along with my preference in romantic partners. Why then, if I am real and here, is there a lack of characters with as much depth and complexity represented in the media, showing that someone as complex and interesting as me or you can be the main character, while also being bisexual? Why can’t I look at a character that hasn’t been confirmed either straight or gay in the canon and believe they are in love with someone of the same sex? What’s so wrong with wanting gay characters in the stories I love to watch and live to create?

This is why I write: to create characters people like me can love and look up to; characters I can laugh and cry with; characters I can relate to and learn from. There are so many children and adults; males and females and those of other genders; bisexuals, pansexuals and all flavors and hues; aching for more characters to be like them. We need more strong females, more sensitive males, more people of color with meaningful stories, more bisexuals falling in love. We need more identity. We need more representation. And why should I patiently twiddle my thumbs waiting for that perfect story or movie to come along with my perfect character? Why can’t I just create them myself? Why can’t I paint characters of the most beautiful hues and shades, with the deepest complexity and variation, with hearts

and flaws and dreams and struggles and desires just like mine? Just like yours.

I write to explain the world around me. I write to express myself, who I am, who my family is, who my friends are. I will write all the gay characters I want because gay characters are just as important and just as beautiful. We need to finally start taking the spotlight.

Jazmine Nieves is a student at Central Connecticut State University, studying English and Writing.

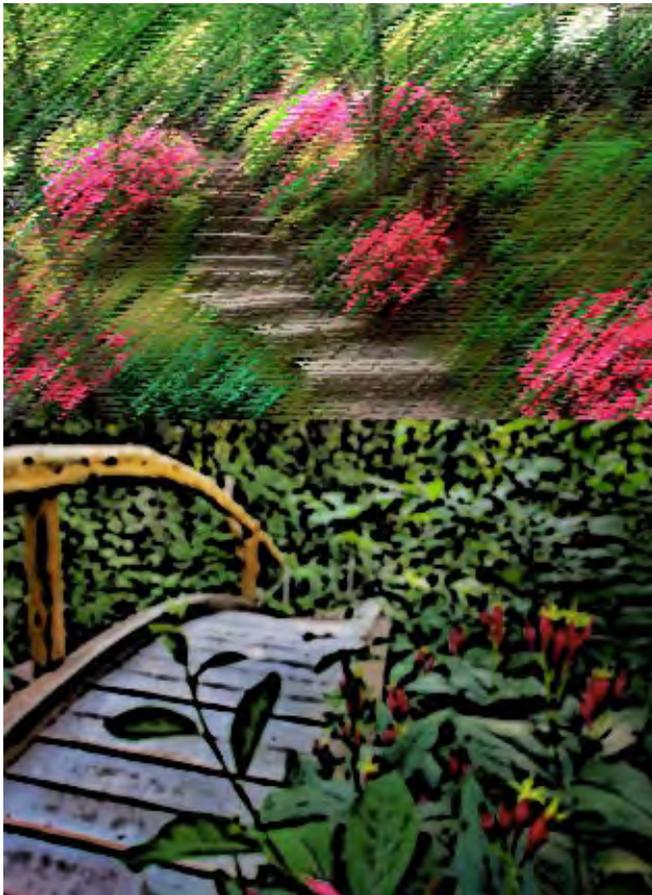
Congrats to Boston-based Tangela Roberts for being included in Boston Spirit's "Young Trailblazers" section of their Jan/Feb 2017 issue. More people need to know about your awesome bi+ research!



I Stand in the Garden

By Jazmine Nieves

I stand in the garden
Watching my sisters smell the Roses,
Plucking strong scented petals
As my brothers caress delicate Lilies,
Coaxing the snowy beauties with sugared words.



Azaleas, by Kristin Brown

I find myself drawn forward—the scent
Of Roses causing me to draw close, bending down
Until my nose and lips touch the pink head,
While the Lilies beckon me with sweetness
To caress their shivering buds, gleaming with dew.

I dance through the garden
Arms a vase for all the beauty offered,
Called selfish in my need by my siblings—
Yet my Love for Nature's entirety
Cleanses the stain off my gentle white hands.



Susannah, continued from page 1

After forming our group, we marched in San Francisco's LGBTQI Pride parade and we carried our homemade neon signs with bi-positive slogans. I'll never forget when a man from Brazil walked up to us and asked, "Where can I find your group? I didn't realize there were other people in the world like me!" It was a life-changing moment, and it triggered within me a deep desire to build a greater bi community and find ways to increase bi visibility within both the queer and straight worlds. Shortly after that, I went to an information session organized by the Queer Cultural Center to learn more about a Creating Queer Community artist commission opportunity.

When I discovered the lack of any bisexual events in San Francisco's National Queer Arts Festival, I decided to apply for the commission with my "Bilicious" project idea—a bi-themed multidisciplinary performance and panel that would bring together artists and performers to showcase bisexual comedy, music, film, poetry, and dance. Immediately following the performance, the performers and local bi activists would be brought on stage for an interactive conversation with the audience. Playfully mixing serious issues with entertainment, Bilicious would help to demystify stereotypes and increase awareness about the bisexual community.

As fate would have it, I was awarded the Creating Queer Community commission and Bilicious became the only bi-themed event in the annual National Queer Arts Festival from 2008-2010. During that time, I was also working on a variety of filmmaking projects with my cinematographer boyfriend, who helped me develop a series of videos for Bilicious. I really enjoyed getting to know the performers through spending an hour filming a personal video interview with each of them. It was an honor to be trusted with stories of how they came out, what inspired their creativity, and how their sexuality influenced their work. The editing challenge for me was to present their stories in a concise five-minute format to capture the audience's attention as a video introduction to each performer. It was a thrill for me to experience the screening of my videos onstage to bi-friendly audiences.

When I moved to Boston in 2010, I brought Bilicious with me, knowing that I had a strong template to recreate the show, and I was excited to make videos with a new cast of

performers. Without the support of a national festival, I was challenged to develop new connections to help with fundraising, marketing, and community outreach. I was fortunate to partner with the Bisexual Resource Center during their 25th anniversary year to premier the Bilicious Boston show for a special Celebrate Bisexuality Day event. Bilicious found success with Boston audiences and grew from a one-night only to a two-night annual event at LG-BTQI hotspot Club Café. However; after a few years, the extra administrative and financial responsibilities to produce the show became increasingly time-consuming and stressful. This started to deplete my creative passion and energy. Even with the support of a few volunteers to help with fundraising and marketing, I ultimately decided to stop the production in 2014.



Bilicious was a seven-year project from conception in San Francisco to completion in Boston, and I have so many wonderful memories. After the first San Francisco performance, during the panel, a male audience member delivered a comment to singer/songwriter Kalil Sullivan: "I came here with my girlfriend tonight and, until I saw you perform, I thought I was straight!" Converting audience members to bisexuality was never my intention, but I did want to help open hearts and minds through experiencing personal stories about bisexuality and to facilitate meaningful discussions about sexuality and identity. The final San Francisco show celebrated the theme of "Bisexual History," opening with the screening of a video interview I shot in Boston with bisexual activist Robyn Ochs and ending with a panel discussion which included Maggi Rubenstein, who started the bisexual movement in San Francisco in 1972. Maggie was responsible, along with others, for putting the "B" into "LGBT"!

Being the producer/director of Bilicious gave me a creative purpose, identity, and community for many years. Although I felt a sense of relief letting go of the show, it took me some time to work through my feelings of loss, guilt, loneliness, and grief. It helped me to reflect on the incredible creative growth I had experienced. In the role of producer, I selected performers that either had existing bi-themed material, or I commissioned them to create new material. As director, I learned that every performer has a different creative process. I found myself in the role of collaborator, mentor, editor, performance coach, and technical consultant, depending on the needs of each person. I am thankful to have worked with so many talented and passionate people who helped to make Bilicious possible, and to have made some close friendships that remain in my life today.

Currently, my creative spirit is feeling more energized after some much needed rest. I have shifted my focus to reinvent myself as an artist, which includes letting myself be more experimental and taking time to enjoy the creative process. I'm continuing to explore the themes of desire, sexual identity, and gender expression through a few new personal video projects. My creative identity is still a work-in-progress. I am learning to trust that if I follow my artistic curiosity, it will lead me towards a more joyful connection to creativity.



Susannah Layton is a British-born, Boston-based multidisciplinary artist, producer, and director. She is the recipient of a Creating Queer Community commission from the Queer Cultural Center and an Unsung Hero award from the Bisexual Resource Center, for her outstanding behind-the-scenes work within and for the bisexual community.



Tangela Roberts painting a bisexual phoenix rising from fire at the EuroBiCon in Amsterdam in July 2016.

My Muse is Bi *By Laurie Wolfe*

Being bisexual is inextricably linked with my creativity, my art. And my art has benefited and flourished from being bisexual. Bilicious was a gift in that regard. In turn, Bilicious gifted me with a muse, that creative flow that comes when I write, which I gratefully call my Muse. I was also helped by inheriting my family's sense of humor, and by developing a clear sense of storytelling, which was shaped through a decade plus of speaking gigs with SpeakOUT, Boston's LGBTQIA speakers bureau. But that muse is something else.

For me, art is born out of sharing something deeply personal. It can be something that you sense is unique, or something that is shared by many but is unique in the way it manifests in your life, in your perception. We are all different; we are all human. It is the human element that I portray in my stories and poems, whether it's about my experience of gender, attraction, desire for parental approval from parents long gone, or desire in and of itself amidst the social and political landscape and the landscape of my body. These are where I set loose my artist's gaze and examine my feelings, subject to the play of word and wonder, and humor and heart. It always helps that I do this with an eye to hold and enlighten others in my experience.

I am a part of humanity, and it is sacred duty to open my life up to help others to relate better to their own selves. Like when I looked at what it felt like the first time I shaved my chest hair. How others responded to a part of me I couldn't relate to. How I related to it and how it ultimately impacted me (objectified by some, fun to flip up and down for me, and a tense yet disturbing rite of passage to selfhood and wonder). Or when (and why) I decided I was actually a lesbian, and life hit me over the head with an intense attraction that floored me and sent me reeling, revealing the choice of convenience was not mine to make. Not that it isn't the right one for you, whether you're bi like me, now, sometimes, or never. Ultimately, it's the journey that is remarkable, and the hearts and minds we touch along the way. And, when the muse sends you something, your blessings are magnified.

Laurie Wolfe was one of the featured performers in Bilicious Boston for four years.



The Big Bad B

By Meagan Kimberly

The first time I came out as bisexual was through poetry, in my workshop class as a sophomore in college. I read my piece out loud, voice shaking, to a room full of strangers who hadn't known me for years. Yet it felt nerve-wracking and exhilarating. These people didn't know me in childhood, middle school, and high school. It was a clean slate. I was proud of myself for the symbolism, imagery, and confession. Then came the comment that deflated that balloon of pride.

"Um, okay, so I'm not one of these people, but there are those out there who wouldn't take kindly to your comparison of being bisexual and gay as the same thing." I wasn't aware that I'd said they were the same. I'd made a parallel, yes, but did not equate them as synonymous. Isn't that what comparison means?

After the class another peer came up to me and said, "Hey, I really appreciated your poem. I know what it's like to struggle with your sexual identity. I'm bisexual, too, but the way I've gotten through my struggle is by taking my therapist's advice and just not trying to place labels on those kinds of things." This person had good intentions, but now I was being told my identity would be easier for others to swallow if I left it as vague and undefined as possible.

Through sharing my poetry that day, I'd learned two major issues that occurred with being bisexual: the LGBTQ+ community reject us as not queer enough, and heterosexual people are okay with us as long as we don't actually use the B-word. It wasn't the reaction I expected. I mean, I wasn't waiting for parades and confetti and cheers, but I hadn't realized the world thought of bisexuals as stuck in limbo.

Truthfully, it makes me as frustrated as being Latin-American and being thought of as one or the other at any given point in time. I'm never both simultaneously, or—what an idea—just Latin-American as its own individual identity. So now it seems I'm either brown or white, and not gay or heteroflexible. Culturally and sexually, I am this emoji: 🌈(?)_/_.



It took me a few years, but I finally came out to my friends and a few close cousins. Once again, I did so through poetry. I shared that same poem from my workshop class on my blog and sent it into the world with

the same knots and butterflies in my stomach as when I had read it out loud. This time though, I felt more confident in my bisexual label. It didn't feel like I was pretending or that I'd be rejected or laughed at. My gamble paid off, and now my best friends, whom I've known for years, are totally supportive and never even batted an eyelash at my revelation.

I started following blogs and adding books to read on my Goodreads account, voracious for as much information and representation as I could find. I felt emboldened to use the word for myself more and more often. I tested the waters by making jokes, saying things like, "If I'm Puerto Rican and bisexual, does that make me Biricua?" People responded. They loved it. They related. They shared the sentiment and the humor with others. I felt like I belonged to this community that had not existed for me as a college sophomore.

Then I started saying it out loud, casually dropping the statement, "Ya know, 'cause I'm bisexual," in conversation with my best friend. That moment propelled me to write a poem about how it felt to say it out loud for the first time, and how mundane the environment was, but how high stakes it seemed.

After that, a snowball effect took place. I began writing more and more poetry about identifying as bisexual. It's still something that's new to me because I only started embracing it a little over a year ago, but writing personal essays and poetry on my blog helps me work through the emotions I felt in the past, how I feel now, and continue to affirm my label if for no one else but myself.

Maybe it's silly, but I know what I'm doing is the same thing I did as a kid who was afraid of the dark. To get over my fear and move through it, I'd walk into the dark hallway of my house, walk to my room, without running to turn on a light. I'd hold my breath and release it when I made it to the end without any monsters reaching out and grabbing me. I became accustomed to the thing that terrified me until I realized I had nothing to fear at all.

So I keep using the B-word. I keep saying "bisexual" when I write poems. I write bisexual characters in short stories. I make bad puns with the word bi, and sure enough, I'm getting so used to it that one day I hope to say it out loud to my family. Maybe I'll write them a poem.



Meagan Kimberly is a young professional who grew up in Hollywood, Florida, and is influenced by her Latin-American roots. She is an alumna of the University of Central Florida and has had previous work published in her alma mater's literary journal, The Cypress Dome, and in her local library's literary publication, The Portal, with upcoming publications in Lady Lit Magazine.

“Indeed, I would venture to guess that Anon, who wrote so many poems without signing them, was often a woman.”

~Virginia Woolf

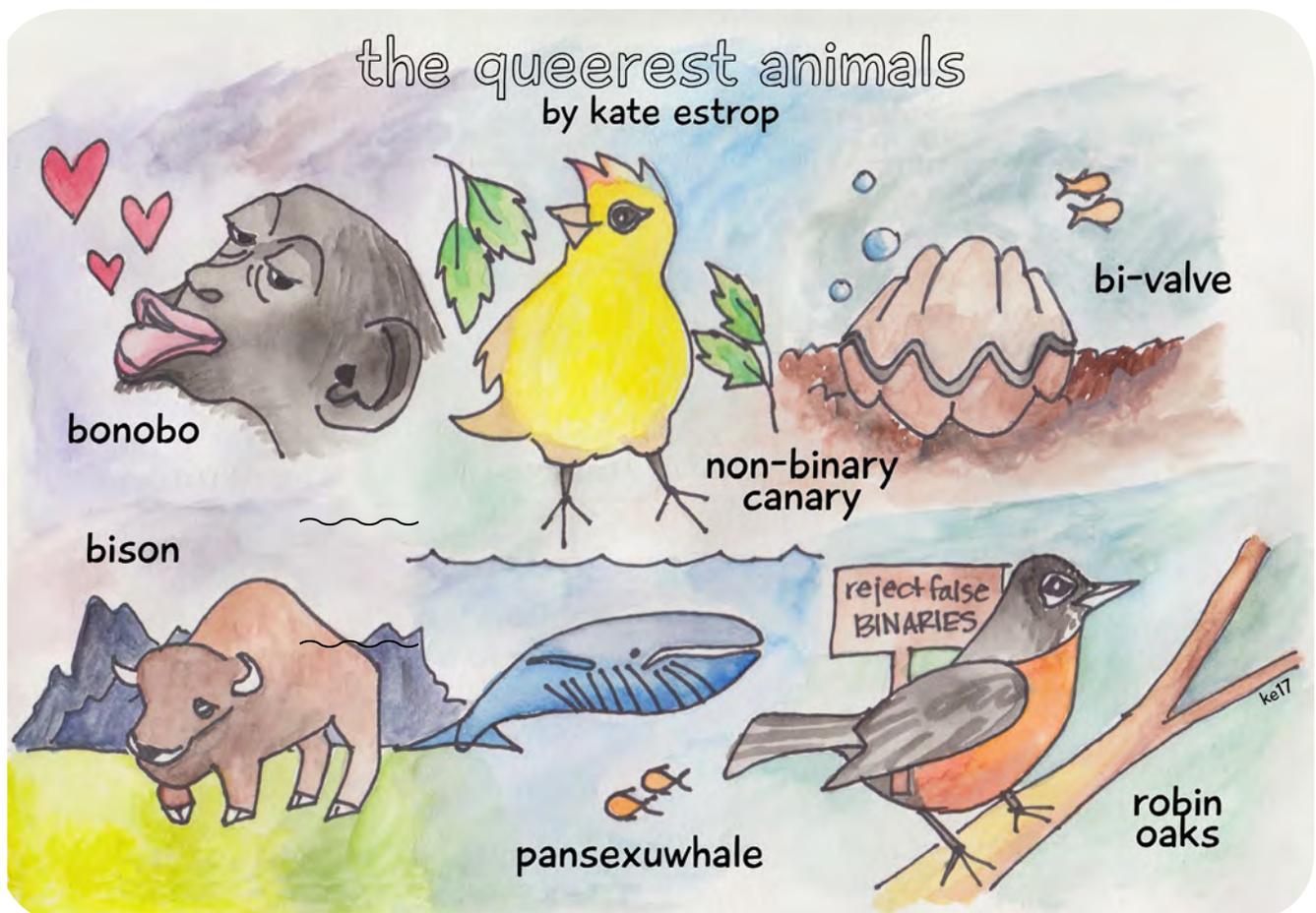


LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Robyn,

Thank you for your ongoing work to produce the *Bi Women Quarterly*! I know it's a vital support for many who would otherwise feel isolated.

All the best,
Laura Berol
Falls Church, VA



The bi+ community is diverse, imaginative, creative, and, most amusing to me, pun-rich. I mean, look at our books: *Getting Bi*, *Bi Any Other Name*, and for our Spanish-speaking punsters, *BiSibilidad*. We have groups called AmBi (LA) and BiLocal (Columbus, OH). And most recently, the Bisexual Resource Center has adopted a pink, purple and blue bee as its mascot: the “bee” in LGBTQ.

So there was so much to choose from when I was thinking of incorporating bi+ puns into a comic. I could have done song titles (like “Stand Bi Your Man,” “Stand Bi Me,” and “I Can See Queerly Now”), celebrities (Amanda Bines and Benedict Cumberbatch), or locations (like Queerwater Beach). But creatures are the most fun to draw, so that’s where I landed: “The Queerest Animals.” If you’re reading this in print, be sure to check out the full-color version online at biwomenboston.org/newsletter/current-issue/. ~*Kate Estrop*

Existing as Bi, Age 19

By Kirsten Fedorowicz

You ask me which way I swing,
I say that I like swing dancing on Tuesdays,
Bodies pressed together in a mess of twirling skirts
Tapping shoes
Boys who ask you politely to dance,
Girls who meet your eyes and smile,
Teeth glittering under warm city lights,
With the aid of tender moonlight.

You asked me which way I swing
I said I love fall mornings and my sister's
hair has always curled better than mine.
She likes it short, likes when it rains
Because her locks become as bouncy as the trampoline
We used to have in our backyard.
I cut my hair to look like hers
Because I thought it might better fit my identity
Grazing shoulders rather than
Falling past them and listen,
I never liked flannels until I went to college,
their way into my wardrobe has stopped feeling like coincidence.

You ask me which way I swing
I say my father still refers to gay people as "living an alternative lifestyle" and
I've always liked alternative music
It reminds me of my best friend from high school,
Who always asks about crushes and
My family always asks me if there are any boys in my life,
And I have responses prepared like
I'm busy. I'm not interested. I'm too scared.

You ask me which way I swing.
I say I've already told you.
I can't hit the ball right, I always strike out,
Drop my dribbles,
Stray from the questions,
Stray from heterosexuality but I
Spent most of softball season plucking grass in the field.
I tell you I don't like math,
That percentages don't fit in my poet's mouth right,
Feel clunky as they are pulled from my tongue.
I am trying not to make myself my own secret.

You say I am going through a phase,
I agree.
I remind you that I am the moon
On a starry night,
Who falls in love with the ocean
Waxes and wanes
With the brilliancy of every smile.
You do not tell the moon
Her affection is not worthwhile.
You tell the moon her love is beautiful,
No matter what shape it takes.



Kirsten is a student at Aquinas College in Michigan, studying English and Women's Studies. She is passionate about feminism, environmentalism, running, and flower crowns.



Re-Memories

By Pamela Strachman

I close my eyes, drifting, dreaming.
Where did I leave your image?
I search through memories: colored bits
of tissue-paper childhood, crumpled, torn,
yet vivid; tests and school papers,
black, white, red-inked; paintings of friends
and former lovers in water colors or oils,
a few rough sketches in charcoal; postcards
of places visited and unvisited; a sand-painting,
each grain a new experience; your face is gone.
I open my eyes, see you watching me; mix my colors
with blood and paint your memory again.

Pamela Strachman has been writing poetry her entire life. She attended the New Orleans Center for Creative Arts and Boston University.

REVOLUTIONARY CREATIVITY

As I was putting together this issue, I mused about how creativity is an essential part of the street activism that many of us will be partaking in during the coming months and, yes, years. The creative spirit arises in the political insights, the turn of phrase, the artistic representations, the chants, and, as always, in the music. Google [“I can’t keep quiet DC Women’s March”](#) and you’ll find a kick-ass new anthem for this generation. Thanks to Jen Bonardi and Heron Greensmith for their contributions to these photos. *-Ellyn Ruthstrom*



Bisexual Health Awareness Month Highlights Social Health Issues



year, the campaign focuses on social health disparities and steps to build social support and resiliency. The campaign will run on the BRC’s Twitter @BRC_Central (using #Bi-HealthMonth and #BHAM17), Facebook, Tumblr, blog, and campaign website. The BRC invites individuals and organizations to participate in the campaign online and within their own communities.

Throughout the month, the BRC will partner with various LGBTQ+ organizations, including the BiCast, BiNetUSA, Bi Tennessee, COLAGE, GLSEN, the Movement Advancement Project, the National Coalition for LGBT Health, and Vanderbilt’s Program for LGBTI Health to feature statistics,

The Bisexual Resource Center (BRC) will celebrate Bisexual Health Awareness Month (BHAM) in March for the fourth consecutive year with the launch of a national social media campaign. BHAM aims to raise awareness of health disparities within the bi+ community and promote resources and action. This

resources, and action across various spheres of social health:

- * March 1-3: Background information on social health
- * March 6-10: (Friends) Social/geographic isolation, finding bi+ community, volunteer opportunities in bi+ organizations
- * March 13-17: (Family) Chosen family vs. family of origin, coming out to family, resources for family of bi+ folk
- * March 20-24: (Partners) Mixed-orientation relationships, characteristics of healthy relationships, bi-specific resources for healthcare providers
- * March 27-30: (Community) Showcasing bi+ experiences of community relationships, resources to improve bi+ competency in schools, workplaces, healthcare settings, etc.

“Now, more than ever, communities need to come together to offer support, stand up to injustice, and plan our continued efforts to survive and thrive,” said BRC Co-Presidents Heather Benjamin and Kate Estrop in a joint statement. “This year’s Bisexual Health Awareness Month, focusing on the social health of the bi+ community, will help followers do just that.”

For more information, visit the BHAM campaign website: www.bihealthmonth.org.

The Bi Bookshelf

Books that might be of interest to readers of the *Bi Women Quarterly*

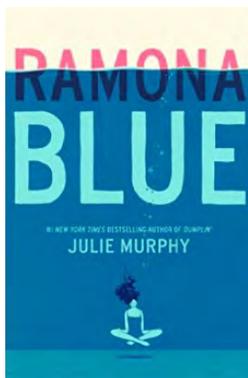
By Sarah E. Rowley

New Book from One of Our Own!

Ann Tweedy, a BWQ contributor, has published her first full-length collection of poetry, *The Body's Alphabet*. Her poems explore human vulnerability and the need for belonging, family relationships marred by mental illness, complicated romances and friendships, and connections to the natural world, often using her own bisexuality as a lens.

New Fiction Featuring Bisexual Women

There's a new middle-grade novel—in other words, one aimed at readers aged 9-12—with a bisexual heroine: *Star-Crossed* by Barbara Dee. It follows Mattie, an eighth-grade girl cast as Romeo in a school theatre production, who is confused to discover her crush on her girl co-star, especially since she's recently been crushing on a guy. US publication date is March 2017.



Many women identify as lesbian before coming out as bisexual, but their experiences are almost never represented in fiction. Julie Murphy, the out bisexual author of the much-awarded young adult novel *Dumplin'*, has addressed this lack in her latest novel. *Ramona Blue* follows a young Southern lesbian teen (and Hurricane Katrina survivor) who comes out as bisexual. Self-identified lesbians who have not read the book have attacked it

online with low ratings & hostile reviews; bi readers should read it and decide for themselves.

A Darkly Beating Heart, the latest novel from young adult author Lindsay Smith, has won praise for candidly and directly discussing the bisexuality of its Japanese-American teen heroine. When the angry and self-destructive Reiko is sent to Japan for the summer, she finds herself slipping back in time into the life of a 19th century girl just as intent on revenge as she is.



Labyrinth Lost, by Zoraida Córdova, centers on bisexual teen heroine, Alex, whose spell to get rid of her magical powers accidentally transports her entire family to Los Lagos, a Latin American-inflected alternate world. It's the first in

a young adult trilogy called the Brooklyn Brujas from the Ecuadorean-American author, who has already published six other urban fantasy novels.

On the adult shelves, comedienne Erin Judge has released her first novel, *Vow of Celibacy*, a coming-of-age novel about Natalie, a 30-year-old, plus-sized bisexual woman. The book—not a romance, but a sympathetic exploration of bisexuality and body positivity—centers on the friendship between sexually-experienced Natalie and her best friend, Anastaze, who had no sexual experience, without shaming either of them. Reader reviews are glowing.

Ellen Klages's novel *Passing Strange* bills itself as a tribute to lesbian pulp novels, film noir, and screwball comedy. It follows six women, including a bisexual character, through 1940s San Francisco and a tour of queer history in that city.



Out Canadian author M-E Girard has won high praise for her debut young adult novel, *Girl Mans Up*, about a gender-nonconforming teen struggling with her identity and traditional Portuguese immigrant family. Protagonist Pen has a solid, healthy and long-standing relationship with a bi girl.

New Work from Out Authors

When the Moon Was Ours by Anna-Marie McLemore, a book of magical realism focused on the friendship between a queer Latina teen and a trans Italian-Pakistani boy, was longlisted for the 2016 National Book Award for Young People's Literature. The Mexican-American McLemore used to identify as bisexual, but now prefers the term queer, and has recently come out as demisexual; she was a 2011 Lambda Literary Fellow in Fiction.

In Audrey Coulthurst's young adult novel, *Of Fire and Stars*, a princess betrothed since childhood to a handsome prince has to hide her fire powers while falling unexpectedly in love with her intended's sister. First-time author Coulthurst studied with Malinda Lo, the prominent out lesbian young adult author who used to identify as bisexual.

Tomboy Survival Guide by Ivan Coyote is a memoir told in stories about growing up a tomboy in 1980s Yukon, Canada, and life as a gender-defying adult.

Qiu Maojin, one of the first openly lesbian writers in post-martial-law Taiwan, became a household name after her suicide in 1995 at age 26. Now, thanks to translator Bonnie Huie, English readers can for the first time read *Notes of a Crocodile*, the novel about a group of queer students at a prestigious Taipei university that posthumously won her the China Times Honorary Prize for Literature. US publication date is May 2017.

Also out in May, comics author Colleen Coover publishes *Small Favors: The Definitive Collection*, which has gotten rave reviews for its warm, affectionate treatment of explicit lesbian sex.

Look out for the US publication of Kabi Nagata's *My Lesbian Experience With Loneliness*, a one-volume autobiographical manga, released in Japan last year, that explores the author's mental health, queerness, and sexuality.

Other Books of Interest:

The Weaver by Emmi Itäranta is a lyrical fantasy novel about a girl who comes into conflict with the rulers of her island world after she falls in love with a mysterious girl made mute by a violent attack. This is the second novel from the feminist Finnish science fiction writer, after *Memory of Water*, a post-climate change dystopia nominated for several awards.

Kellen Anne Kaiser has published *Queerspawn in Love: A Memoir*. Raised by four lesbians in the San Francisco area, Kaiser met the man of her dreams as an adult, but had to wrestle with matters of sex, gender, and empowerment.

Sarah Rowley is the co-editor of Getting Bi: Voices of Bisexuals Around the World.

You Shouldn't Litter

By Mary Rawson

She takes the last drag and stubs the butt out on the concrete path, squatting on her haunches to do so.

"I should bin this," she says, picking up the squashed butt and unsquatting herself. She looks around. There isn't a bin, but she doesn't want to be a litterbug, so she slides the butt into her coat pocket.

"You're a good girl," Simone laughs. "I would have just left it there."

Cate feels a worm of irritation squirm in her belly, the belly that ten seconds before was a mass of quivering desire butterflies. She definitely wants to kiss her, but the comment holds her back.

"You shouldn't litter," she mutters, not looking at Simone; looking away from those green eyes, which minutes before, she couldn't get enough of. Her face feels hot. Why did she have to be such a stickler?

Simone laughs, stepping in and brushing Cate's hair back behind her ear. She cups Cate's jumper clad breast and squeezes gently. This is the moment Cate dreamed of, minutes before, her belly full of desire butterflies, but Cate is such a total, absolute stickler.

"You shouldn't litter. I can't touch a girl who litters," she whispers, the knot in her stomach twisting like a coiled, venomous snake. She brushes Simone's hand away and steps back, a childish sob rising inside.

"What the HELL?" Simone says, not getting it, really not getting it.

Cate avoids her bewildered stare; her face feels hot, her nipple aches from the squeeze: lingering desire and anger

compete, clash: a war for supremacy.

She turns and starts up the hill, hot tears pricking her eyes.

"Mad, fucking bisexual bitch!" Simone yells after her.

Cate is running now, cresting the summit. She can see her house from here. Her mother has left the front porch light on.

She hears a tui chortle in the Manuka* tree ahead of her. The Kaikoura* a light is fading fast; the ocean sparkles in the distance, stretching to the snowcapped, pink sunset-tinged Southern Alps*. She stops and drinks it all in. She has never tired of this stunning beauty.

She starts the downhill jog towards home.

"I'm not a mad, fucking bisexual bitch," she whispers. "I just don't kiss girls or boys who litter."

She jogs on, tears running down her cheeks...from Simone's comment or from the sheer magnitude of the beauty before her...or maybe both.

*Manuka: also called Tea Tree.

*Kaikoura: a town on the South Island of New Zealand.

*Southern Alps: a mountain range on the South Island of New Zealand.

Mary Rawson loves bringing bi characters to life through stories. She has one novel published in Australia called All of Us, which features bi characters.



One Week in Bangkok: The 2016 ILGA World Conference, Bi Style

By Misty Farquhar

After two overnight flights on a budget airline, I was feeling more than a little bit rough when I arrived in Bangkok in the early hours of Sunday, November 27. Still, my spirits were high in readiness for the week ahead at the 2016 ILGA World Conference. When I arrived at the Sukosol Hotel, it was clear this would be a reasonably comfortable immersion for me. From the jam-packed program to the careful matching of roommates, a great deal of care had obviously gone into organising the most significant event in the LGBTI rights calendar.

A full-day pre-conference was scheduled, dedicated to developing a global agenda for the Bisexual Secretariat to work toward with the support of ILGA. Representatives were also invited to discuss the unique issues affecting bi people with Vitit Muntarbhorn, the newly appointed inaugural Independent Expert on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity for the United Nations. And behind the scenes, Hilde worked tirelessly to build connections with bisexual activists from around the world, who will contribute to the development of the Secretariat going forward.



ILGA (The International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Intersex Association) is an enormous member-based organization with global reach. Although it started out almost 40 years ago as a Eurocentric gay rights organization, it now has chapters in six regions and is inclusive of all rainbow identities. At the organization's 28th global conference, almost 700 activists from over 100 countries came together to discuss contemporary issues impacting LGBTI people around the world.

As an Australian researcher and activist with a particular interest in all things non-binary, I was very keen to learn more about the dialogue on these less visible issues outside of my faraway home. I certainly wasn't disappointed, as there was trans and intersex content woven throughout the conference, and a seemingly new focus on bisexuality. In particular, the first ever Bisexual Secretariat was established, with newly appointed representatives Frank Evelio Arteaga (Manodiversa, Bolivia) and Hilde Vossen (LNBi, Netherlands) taking the lead.

The highlight of the entire conference for me was the bisexual pre-conference. After an intensive day of presentations and workshopping with over 50 activists and allies from around the world, four main recommendations from the bisexual pre-conference were reported back to the ILGA Word Board:

VISIBILITY: Acknowledgement that a substantial number of people are attracted to more than one gender, and that bisexuals want to be equally visible in ILGA's work.

HUMAN RIGHTS: Acknowledgement that bisexuals are also suffering from laws which criminalize same-sex sexual conduct, and face extra burden because legal systems

around the world do not understand bisexuality.

RESEARCH: Support for more research on bisexuality, particularly in understudied regions and populations, and involvement of the bisexual community in research design to be sure bisexual data is captured.

GLOBAL FUND: Make arrangements for foundations and charities working on LGBTI issues to establish specific funds for working on bisexual issues.

Of course, none of the recommendations reported back to the ILGA World Board will be new to bisexual activists. Hilde confirmed that, "The work we will do as the Secretariat will be similar to the work we all already do in our own regions, but for the first time it will be approached on a global scale." But the discussion and shared understanding resulting from this forum was invaluable.

Of these recommendations, visibility is still considered to be the priority issue by many activists. Zeynab Peygham-

barzadeh (Spectrum, Iran) said, “I think invisibility is still our main problem, and promoting an inclusive non-binary language should be our main task.” This was somewhat evident in the main conference, which had minimal bisexual content and plenty of non-inclusive language. However, there is hope that the remit of the Bisexual Secretariat will result in a dramatic improvement in this area at the 2018 conference in Wellington, New Zealand.

For me and for many others, the conference was an important time to connect and renew our passion. Sally Goldner (Bisexual Alliance Victoria, Australia) said that networking with other bisexual activists was the highlight of the conference for her. “I felt more connected at this conference than at conferences in Australia, where overall I know more people.” And I have to agree; there can be a certain sense of isolation in bisexual activism even within the LGBTI community.

While there may still be some hurdles to overcome (for example, Frank and Hilde do not speak the same language), events like this should give all of us the strength and solidarity to continue working in the face of adversity. Now more than ever, the LGBTI community needs to continue to

Vivek, continued from page 3

ences, and to also push against the dominant narratives in relation to brownness and queerness.

AK: *The Boy & the Bindi* is a fast favorite here. What inspired you to create that? How does it feel having made it?

VS: I was on a jury looking at children’s picture books and I was disappointed by the whiteness of these stories. During lunch hour, I ended up scribbling what would become *The Boy & the Bindi* on a napkin, as a response to this experience. It has been a fantastic experience putting it out in the world, especially hearing from brown parents who are thrilled to have a book featuring a dark-skinned brown boy to share with their children.

AK: I adore your work and I’m slowly working through *She of the Mountains* right now. Thank you for the work you do! What’s next for you?

VS: Right now, I am in a bit of an incubation phase, taking in ideas and just exploring.

Follow Vivek on Twitter and tumblr or visit vivekshraya.com.



A warrior, survivor, and a poet who loves to sing, Apphia Kumar has been a bi+ community leader in India and New York City. They currently reside in Boston and are contemplating their next move.



focus on collective impact: globally, regionally, and nationally. And bisexual activists must be a part of that.

FOOTNOTE: Following the ILGA World Conference, Vitit Muntarbhorn held a public consultation at the United Nations offices in Geneva on 25 January 2017. A small number of bisexual activists were able to attend, with Hilde Vossen once again taking the role of spokesperson. Footage of her speech can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o0eomx3d4I> from 2:07:40.



Misty is a proud non-binary bisexual and passionate advocate for inclusion. Misty has a Master’s in Human Rights, a Bachelor of Psychology, and an adorable little brown dog for keeping it real.



GLAAD Media Award Nominees Reflect More Bi Characters

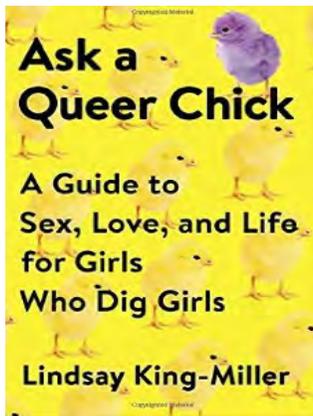
The GLAAD Media Awards recognize and honor media for their fair, accurate, and inclusive representations of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer community and the issues that affect their lives. Amazingly, 2016 saw more accurate and powerful representations of bisexuality, in film, television, music, and other categories than ever before.

The musical number on The CW’s *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* where Darryl Whitefeather happily announces his bisexuality to his coworkers was an Internet sensation. Bisexual lawyer Annalise Keating on ABC’s *How To Get Away with Murder* (played by Viola Davis) is a complex main character, while *Shadowhunters* features ancient warlock Magnus Bane. Bisexual people also showed up in Netflix’s *Black Mirror* and *Easy* series. Amazon’s *Transparent* gets a lot of credit for trans representation, but the show has also explored bi+ identity. On the music front, Lady Gaga, Sia, and Frank Ocean all received nominations for Outstanding Musical Artist this year.



Ask A Queer Chick: A Guide to Sex, Love, and Life for Girls Who Dig Girls, by Lindsay King-Miller

Reviewed by Ellyn Ruthstrom



Raise your hand if you've ever picked up a dating advice book for women who date women and somewhere in chapter one you somehow realize your bi-ness is not being acknowledged and it may even be mentioned negatively. Yeah, me too. The great news is that *Ask a Queer Chick* (Plume, 2016) is the best dating book for bi women that you will ever find!

Having the term “queer” in the title may be the first hint that the advice will come from a younger generation of inclusiveness. And then knowing that Lindsay King-Miller is a b-girl really helps to assuage any fear that you'll have to wade through the usual casual biphobia that can pop up in such spaces. King-Miller started *Ask a Queer Chick* on The Hairpin website in 2011 (you can still find some of the older pieces there), and you can now find her column at fusion.net.

So what does a queer chick need to know these days? Lots of the same things we've needed for the last few decades: how to come out, how to find other queer folks, sex tips, and advice on breaking up. The first two-thirds of the book offers a lot of sensible advice on all these topics, such as succinct coming out tips: “First, tell them what you call yourself. Next, tell them what that means. Then, tell them what's going to change. Finally, tell them how you expect them to behave.” After that, she offers a couple possible scripts for you to use from this strategy.

And, with her awesome perspective, King-Miller adds some insights about why coming out as bi is distinctive. Some people don't believe you, others you end up having to come out to multiple times, and still others don't understand that your orientation isn't about the sex or gender of your current partner. In a wonderfully witty way, King-Miller explains how we have to deal with bi invisibility: “I wish I could tell you there's a way around it, but frankly, your best bet is to be prepared to gently, but firmly, correct people for the rest of your life or until the heat death of the universe, whichever comes first.”

Indirectly referencing the Klein Scale of sexual orientation, she writes, “Your orientation isn't just your history, it's your

wishes and desires as well. You can be queer if you've never kissed a girl; you can be bisexual if you've dated only one gender; you can be asexual if you've had sex.” How refreshing! Her writing is also trans-inclusive, so yet another plus.

When she advises about dating, I found her tips on red flags to look out for to be spot on. Watch out for women who hate all their exes. Don't date someone all your friends loathe. Don't stick around people who persuade you to do things you don't want to do. Scary tempers are a no-no. And a few more that I'll leave you to find out by reading the book.

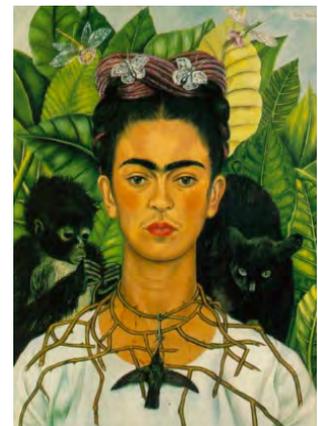
The breakup chapter has all sorts of excellent advice on how to make your decision, how to make the plan to move out, and how to move on emotionally. Best tip ever: Put all the sentimental trinkets and photos, etc., into a box and seal it. Don't open it for at least six months.

And guess what? There is a whole chapter on being bi+! I'll just give you a few subheads so you know what to expect: There's No Such Things as Bi Privilege, Everyone Gets a Gold Star, and The Problem with “Born This Way.” And the best damn thing about this chapter is the last paragraph, which concludes: “If we want strength in numbers, we've got to stop prioritizing the needs of monosexual gays and lesbians over the needs of the rest of the community. We're all here, we're all queer, and it's time to get used to each other – and start working together to take over the world.”

Chapter seven is for straight allies, so you can hand it to a friend or family member with a bookmark and let them know you'd consider it a positive step if they read it. Chapter eight deals with discrimination and how to deal with family rejection.

“I paint my own reality. The only thing I know is that I paint because I need to, and I paint whatever passes through my head without any other consideration.”

~Frida Kahlo



tion, workplace harassment or closeting, partner violence and other challenges of being part of the LGBTQ community.

Chapter nine covers marriage and why just because we can get married doesn't mean we should. Snap! Plenty of people, of all orientations, have no interest in marriage and it's nice to have that acknowledged. It's a necessity to have equality of marriage rights—and thankfully we have it now—but King-Miller makes the strong point that marriage is not the endpoint. There are other rights to work for and blending into hetero-normative models is not for everyone.

King-Miller has a delightfully intelligent and irreverent style of writing. Her humor keeps the pages flying by, but the advice is solid and meaningful. It's much more than an advice book, too, so if you are a newbie to queer culture it's a fun way to learn the lingo and the secret handshake. Oh, you didn't know about that?

Ellyn Ruthstrom is feminist as fuck.

Biographies and Other Stories

By Courtney Carola

All my words are painted with shades of pink, purple, and blue
I tell the story of people I once knew
Of people who I will meet one day
Of people who left, of people who are here to stay
I tell the story of me, a girl constantly being told to “pick a side”
With every “It’s a just a phase” leaving her truth to be denied
I tell the story of a girl whose favorite color is purple
Whose favorite joke to make is “I’m as straight as a circle”
But won’t dare to utter the “B” word because of years of internalized hate
And external erasure and a denial so great
I tell the story of a girl who loves purple, but only sees blue
Because that’s what’s expected, that’s what she has to do
I tell the story of a girl who loves purple, but she also loves pink
But doesn’t dare to let it show because what would people think?
I tell the story of a girl who learns that the world isn’t completely black and white
Or blue and pink, and that love is not limited to what’s “wrong” or “right”
I tell the story of a girl who learns to embrace the “B” word
As she learns her sexuality is not something to be cured
I tell the story of a girl who loves the color purple, and she loves blue and she loves pink
I tell the story of the girl who loves more than one gender and doesn’t care what anyone has to think
I tell stories like this with every stroke of my pen
With every ‘clack’ of my keyboard keys, I tell it time and time again
I tell this story over and over because it needs to be told
Because my story is the story of everyone who doesn’t fit in a heteronormative mold
Because my story is the story of everyone who was once afraid of their sexuality
Who feared hate and rejection because they lack “normality”
I keep telling this story so one day I won’t have to
So one day the “sexuality crisis” won’t constantly be a plotline—or two
And so I tell stories with characters who are canonically bi
I tell stories of people, and for people, who feel the same as I
I tell stories like these because I am continuously inspired
I tell stories like these because bisexuality is something to be admired



By day, Courtney Carola is a 23-year-old college student, high school librarian, and indie author. By night, she fights against bi-erasure and for bi visibility.

Notes from a Desert, or Why I Have Nothing to Say

By Lila Hartelius

When I first looked at the “Creativity” prompt for this issue’s theme, my mind was a complete blank, a beautiful desert. Then I tried to start filling it with anything I could pull out of you-know-where to answer the questions we were supposed to talk about. But all it did was pollute the desert and none of it was interesting or original enough to be worth wasting anybody’s time reading.

After a few weeks of grappling with the fact that, as a creative person, I really wanted to have something to say about this theme, and that, despite this, I didn’t, some thoughts began bubbling up which caught my interest. “Would you read this short piece I just wrote?” I asked my partner one evening after having just finished what I thought was a really tight, two-and-a-half-page piece of prose. My partner thought it was a piece of sh*t. “It’s empty,” he said. His words finally pushed open a door I’d been tapping on the whole time I’d been writing the piece, and what I found behind it was what I’d suspected I would. Underneath all the gratifying, self-preening pride I took in my carefully-placed words, a question had been gnawing at me: “What do I really want to say, and does it matter to me to say it, or do I just want the attention?”

Funny, you can try all you like to write your way out of a desert, but in the end all you’ve got is a desert. Not that a desert is a bad thing. There’s just not much to say about it.

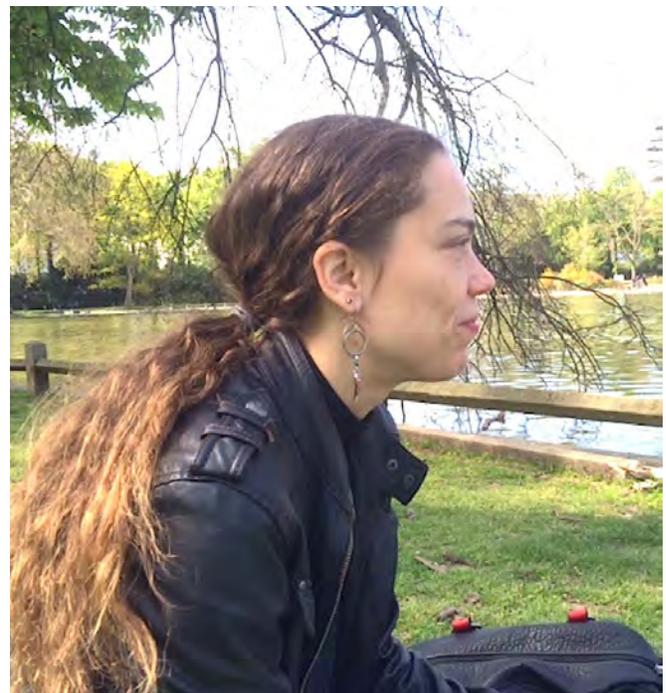
In essence, I am a creative person who happens to be bisexual – or a bisexual person who happens to be creative. What I do in my art must have some relation to the fact that I like people of more than one gender, because reflections of the people I fall in love with or become infatuated with tend to end up in my art, as do my feelings for them.

But honestly, I have no idea what that relation might be or whether it’s even important. It just is, like the rocks and trees outside my house. We could hypothesize that they are situated in relation to each other exactly in the way that they are because... because... I can’t even come up with a make-believe reason why. They’re just two aspects of the same landscape co-existing, sometimes peacefully, sometimes a bit violently if a really heavy branch falls down and cracks a rock in half, or if an exceptionally strong root manages to explode a rock in slow motion along those fissures that always break in the most beautiful patterns. I’m trying to think how a rock could hurt one of those trees... maybe if I threw one at it.

If you really want to know, I’ll tell you a secret. Nearly all of the songs I’ve ever written have been for men, and nearly all of the collages I’ve ever made have featured women.

Now, I could start psychoanalyzing what this means and say that it’s because my dad wrote songs when I was a kid and that I probably admired my dad way too much for my own good but that this wasn’t my fault as he made me psychologically and emotionally dependent on him. Or I could say that it’s because I prefer women’s bodies aesthetically over men’s bodies and that that’s because I grew up with a mom who, when I was a kid, brought me weekly to a nudist hot springs spiritual retreat center where the naked female body was exalted as the ultimate form of perfect unity of sex and spirit (a piece of jargon whose meaning becomes more and more empty to me as the years go by).

Yet, at the end of the day, while writing down these postulations might make me feel I merit having people read my words, it doesn’t stop bisexual people from killing themselves or developing addictions to cope with minority stress. As a bisexual person, I do want my voice to be heard, given that bisexual experiences and perspectives are so often silenced or usurped. But if I’m merely using my bisexual identity to get attention and make me feel special, what good does that do anyone else?



So, in two words (well, five), I have nothing to say.

But I really want to tell you how I love to dance and sing and write... and paint – when I have paint and brushes at my disposal. They’re all in storage back in California, except

for a dumb watercolor kit somebody who knew who I used to pretend to be gave me. And I'm too much of a snob to go out and buy all the goddamned supplies I found out you need in order to do just one lousy oil or acrylic painting. Actually, I'm too crotchety and nervous about spending money on myself for such a "frivolous" thing.

My partner said I didn't know my talents yet, didn't know I'm an exceptional person. Maybe he's right. Of course I'd never admit that in print; I might look narcissistic – and god forbid I should look like my parents, especially after spending eight years at a fundamentalist Christian elementary and junior high school that taught me it was bad luck to pride oneself – pride comes before a fall, you know... hmm, where have I heard that before?

I don't know what this has to do with my bisexuality except that I've taken solace on countless sleepless nights in the folds of my journal; the grains of college dance floors; the sinking, thick white and black keys of pianos in hidden places; the soothing vibration of my own voice resounding through my bones and muscles; and the messy gliding wetness of a brush to mollify the ache of loving someone and being scared shitless to tell them – to testify to my love for them, to make it real so that it doesn't drive me crazy alone in my head – to love myself for loving them, him, her, it, ze, se, or whatever.

And this is what makes me feel really alive.

Just like ice skating when I start to feel my body remembering what it does, what it's supposed to do, when it finds the rhythm it thought it had lost, forgotten, as it slides along the grooves it creates in the water that makes the air so cold no one in their right mind would believe that anyone in their right mind would be so dumb as to glide along in

next-to-nothing outfits that are supposed to be sexy and are supposed to win the hearts (or at least the eyes) of the Olympic judges.

But I used to watch that sh*t, used to watch it on TV in my grandma's den. She called it the TV room, but I like calling it a den. It sounds so much more cozy and romantic than something practical like calling it what it is. But then, my grandma was a practical woman. She always used to tell me she had practical hands—short, stubby fingers and wide palms that could grab weeds in her vegetable garden and pull them out. I used to watch those tiny dancers twirl and whirl on the ice and wish that I could be like them. I watched them in their backstage training rooms with the blue crash pads with their training partners and their coaches, and wish that I could be like them. One day, I thought, I'll be able to whirl and twirl like they do, to dance and prance across the ice as if nothing was stopping me. I'll be able to be free. I'll be able to fly.

And so I find myself in this desert. Maybe that's what flying is all about.



Lila Hartelius (lilahartelius.wordpress.com) is a published writer and editor who has written funded grant and business proposals and served as editorial assistant for the International Journal of Transpersonal Psychology. Her work has been published in Weird Sisters West and Tendrel (Naropa University's diversity journal). She was a workshop leader at EuroBiCon 2016 and has contributed to the efforts of Bennington College's Queer Student Union, Naropa University's GLBTQ student group, and Boulder Pride.

The Bee in LGBTQ By Jen Bonardi

A little over a year ago, I got a tattoo of the "bee" in LGBTQ, as designed by Kate Estrop for the Bisexual Resource Center, on the back of my thigh. It's my first tattoo and I got it the day before I turned 39. On the day of the inking, I described what I wanted to the artist, Candace. She asked me about the colors so I explained that they were the bi flag colors, and the bee represented the "B" in LGBTQ. She paused and then said, "I'm so psyched that you just told me that. I'm about to ask this woman to be my girlfriend, and she's the first bisexual woman I've ever dated." She asked me questions about bisexuality while she did the tattoo, and I told her all about the BRC and Tiggy Upland. In the end, I gave her a bee button to give to her new girlfriend.



Caution: Contents May Explode!

By Julie Petry

Creativity and the strong need/desire to express emotions are two elements that appeared embedded inside me from the time I was born. My mother informs me I was always “creating messes,” but that she could never be upset once she found me with that “huge smile” on my face—so proud of my exploration/creation at hand. Dumping out entire boxes of cereal onto the kitchen floor, knocking plants off our living room ledge to land down below on the basement stairwell, and smearing my messy diaper on the bathroom wall were stories she often retold me that seemed to capture my very early desire to explore and create unabashedly, without boundaries or rules.

By age seven, the dress-up box was my favorite toy, where I would spend hours being whomever I wanted—gender and status carefree. When I wasn’t busy there, I was likely crafting pretty cards from scratch, embedded with lace and buttons, and/or magazine cut-outs, telling people how much I loved them and cared about them.

Being expressive and creative was always extremely natural for me, as it is for many young children, but I seemed to do it fearlessly. Was I born different from others? I wondered. What stops people from reaching toward creative fearlessness? Why did I keep getting LOUDER as I developed my creative voice into adulthood, and what stopped others from raging against such inner repression?

I looked to a poem I had created in my young twenties (*Bottled*) to answer this. Though I haven’t touched it/edited it much since then, I appreciated the passion in this young woman’s voice saying, “Let me be me, whoever I am.” It

made me proud of her—my younger self. Writing this poem when she was so right for shouting, “I am in charge of my body,” and could love whomever she wanted, however she wanted, though the political beasts in all her young years told her not to. She kept fighting the good fight to be who she was when she didn’t really even know who she was at the time. She didn’t care, though. She knew instinctively she wasn’t just fighting for her own rights, but also for the rights of everyone around her. She got louder because she felt a calling to put words into space so that we all could look and fundamentally know we were allowed to grow, change, and unfold into ourselves as our birthright. So we could all know we had the power to create, design and reveal our own contents.

Flash forward years later, and this now older woman looks at the two questions posed by the *Bi Women Quarterly*: “Does your bisexuality affect your creativity, and how do you express your identity and/or sexuality in your writing, art, photography, dance, music?” I scream, “Yes!!!! Absolutely, yes!” It is infused in everything I do. Even when I didn’t know completely who I was—sexually or otherwise—my instincts and experiences of living loudly in the middle of the creative power revealed the intersectionality of self-expression with political activism/sexual orientation/the right to be free/and the right to be me. My life as it was then, and my life as it is now, was and is always ticking to the beats of these ideals. My desire to be free as a child, to create without rules and pour the Cheerios onto the floor, to dress up like a man, or to state I was not to be bottled like a cheap wine and labeled without my permission, was the intersectionality of my creative inner self fighting for the



Bottled (circa 1998) By Julie Petry

Do not put me in a bottle—labeled and corked for your convenience,
Wrapped around me with absurd details of what you think’s inside.

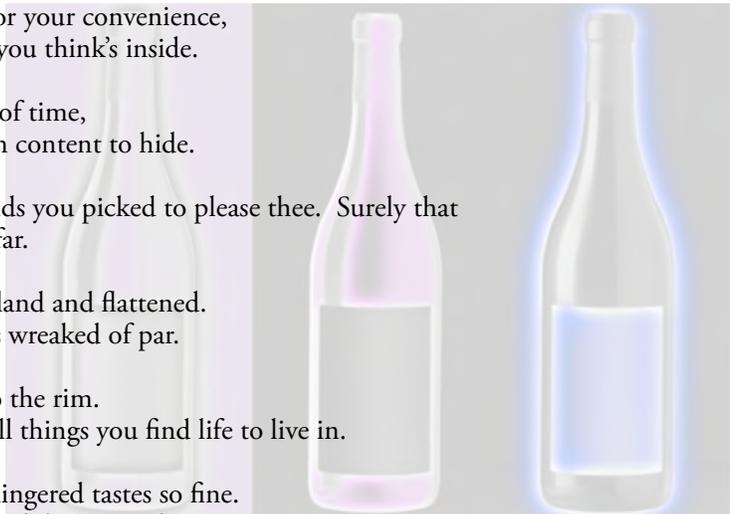
Do not plan to stick me on the shelf for 50 years of time,
Formed from dusty grapes of wrath, dreaming I’m content to hide.

Do not hope to drink me with the meal and friends you picked to please thee. Surely that
will find you in the sediment from one gone too far.

Do not cry when tastes go bitter, soured or just bland and flattened.
That will take us only to the place where love dies wrecked of par.

Rather, be you merry in your own goblet, fill it to the rim.
Drink from your source, make your toasts from all things you find life to live in.

Let my heart grow open, stronger—unique with lingered tastes so fine.
Then we’ll dance a life together making true joy and damn good wine.



right to love who I wanted, and be who I wanted.

Yes. All parts of myself have always shown up in my artwork and creations, ever since I was born! If you look closely now, my artwork whispers that I am an experienced 41-year-old bisexual, theatrical dancemaker who loves to push the envelope and challenge her audiences. Sometimes my artwork even bluntly screams my statuses, depending on my mood; I create dance characters that speak to all walks of life, romantic relationship types, and life situations, which often reflect the personal love journeys I have walked. But, what really feels rewarding is to look back in time and see that the path and the voice of this woman has really always been

there along the way fighting for everyone; she was a Nasty Woman—ever since the day she was born, though, thank goodness, she came to eventually see (in full glory) there were so many others, too!

Associate Professor of Theatre and Dance at Bloomsburg University, Julie Petry has spent her entire life in the arts, exploring the Creative Fire. She relishes each day spent with her uniquely created Family Tribe, and representative mascot, the amazing Zelliecat!



BBWN Newsletter Digitized by Schlesinger Library



The Boston Bisexual Women's Network is extremely proud to announce that the Schlesinger Library at Harvard has digitized our beloved newsletter and it is now accessible to all online! The first issue of the *Bi Women* bi-monthly newsletter was produced in September 1983 by the newly-formed BBWN organization. It is such an honor to have the writing, artwork, and photography of hundreds of bi+ women and allies preserved within a collection of such high renown.

Now named *Bi Women Quarterly*, it is the longest-lived bisexual women's periodical in the world. Staffed entirely by volunteers, and containing essays, poetry, artwork, and short fiction on a wide range of themes, *Bi Women Quarterly* provides a voice for women who identify as bisexual, pansexual, and other non-binary sexual identities. But you know that, you're reading it!

Robyn Ochs, editor of *BWQ* since 2009, donated a complete collection of the publication to the library several years ago with the agreement that it would be preserved, and digitized in a searchable format. The digitized collection covers the years 1983 to 2010. It is now available to researchers and to the general public through Harvard's catalog at <http://id.lib.harvard.edu/aleph/014138036/catalog> and directly on the Web: <http://listview.lib.harvard.edu/lists/drs-424386995>. Issues of *BWQ* from 2009 to the present can be found online at BiWomenBoston.org. These more recent issues will be added to the Library's collection in the near future.

Bird on a Wire By Kara Ammon

I was flipping through artwork on my friend's Etsy site when one item caught my attention. It was a bird sitting on a wire glazed and fired onto a thin, round, clay pendant. Clean, stark, provocative. How does the song go? "Like a bird on a wire, like a drunk in a midnight choir I have tried in my way to be free." But that was not really true, was it? At least, it wasn't true then, when the image of the bird was in front of me for the first time.



Have you ever noticed a bird on a wire high above the street? She is in the scene, but not part of it. I guess that was where I was at the time. One foot in my life and one foot out. How can you be fully present when you are working so hard to hold part of yourself back? Living a straight life and keeping a little distance so no one sees the bisexuality behind the curtain. Leonard Cohen's bird on the wire was courageous. Mine was tepid and aloof.

I bought the pendant from my friend. Then I found a little bit of courage and had it tattooed onto my wrist, an ever present invitation to myself to be "all in." I've been making my way down from the wire and into the whole-hearted midnight choir ever since.

Advice From A. Rose Bi



In addition to being an out bi woman, A. has a degree in Cognitive Science, has completed trainings for LGBTQ+ and sexual assault survivor advocacy, and has experience answering calls for an anonymous LGBTQ+ help line. She is passionate about feminism, the bi+ community, LGBTQ+ and female representation in the media, and helping others.

A. Rose Bi's column relies on questions from readers like you! You can send any questions you might have or suspect other readers may have to the author directly at askbwq@gmail.com. All questions are anonymous, nothing is off-limits, and anything related to upcoming issue topics is extra-encouraged!

Dear A. Rose Bi,

Every day I wake up and it seems the world is crashing down around me. I keep vacillating between wanting to quit my job to spend all my time protesting, volunteering, and running for office and just curling up in a blanket fort under my bed. I feel so lost and helpless right now. I'm having trouble focusing at work and I'm constantly worried. Are there things I can do to direct my energy in a productive way? How do I handle the news that keeps coming out from the current administration and still live my life?

Sincerely,

*What the fresh f*ck is happening right now?*

Dear fellow human being,

I FEEL YOU. I totally have the Hunger Games/dystopian reality haze clouding all my thoughts throughout my day. I think there are more than a few ways to channel that haze, a few of which I've listed below:

1. Call your congressperson, state reps, local politicians, etc. You can find these people really easily at <https://callyourrep.co/> and they have easy scripts to use if you don't know where to start.

2. Volunteer! Time or money or stuff—Everyone has different constraints on their lives and resources and that's okay. If you're looking to volunteer your time, as a starting point, check on Planned Parenthood volunteer opportunities around the country (<https://www.plannedparenthood.org/about-us/jobs-volunteering>), or if you're in the Boston area, you can apply to volunteer for Fenway Health's LGBTQ+ Anonymous Help Line by emailing Jo Wisch at jjwisch@fenwayhealth.org or check it out online here <http://fenwayhealth.org/give/get-involved/>. (Bonus points: See if your company matches donations to charity.)

3. Look at the opportunities that exist in your life already where you can make a difference. Are you a parent? Teach your children about inclusivity and kindness. Do you help hire people at work? Write inclusive job descriptions and focus on hiring diverse employees. No matter what your

professional and personal lives look like, support other women and support other disenfranchised groups. You can make so much difference just in the circle in which you already exist.

4. Take care of yourself. Let me say this again for the people in the back: Take care of yourself. Self-care is crucial; if we spread ourselves too thin or run at 100% until we're drained, we are no help to anyone. Remember the airplane rule: Secure your own oxygen mask before helping others. Unplug from the news, meditate, read a book, go for a run, have a politics-off-limits board game night with your friends, or just watch cartoons while snuggling your cat (my personal fav).

Regardless of how you decide to move forward, I want to stress one more thing. This is not just a women's fight or a queer women's fight. This is also a fight for the whole LGBTQ+ community, for blacks and African-Americans, for Hispanic and Latinx people, for Native people, for students, for the elderly, for Muslims, for immigrants, for people with disabilities, and more. When we fight for progress, we have to fight for the progress of all people.

Take actions that make the most sense for you! There are a lot of people in our shoes right now feeling the same way—reach out to those people or communities and lean on each other. I can't promise this will get better or easier, but we have a helluva lot of people who are already raising some serious hell, and that gives me hope.

Best of luck and lots of love!

A. Rose Bi



By Jen Bonardi

The "Bi Office"

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

Ongoing Events

Come to our monthly bi brunch! All women are welcome! See calendar for dates.

2nd Mondays:

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

Straight Marriage, Still Questioning. 7pm. Info: kate.e.flynn@gmail.com.

1st Wednesdays:

BLiSS: Bisexual Social & Support Group. 7pm. All genders welcome. Info: bliss@biresource.net

2nd Thursdays:

Younger Bi Group. 7pm. For bi folks 20-29. Info: Kate at youngblissboston@gmail.com.

3rd Saturdays:

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

4th Thursdays:

Social BLiSS, Jamaica Plain. 7pm at Café Nero. Info: Mia at youngblissboston@gmail.com

Metro-Boston women: Keep up with local events. Sign up for our email list! Send an email to: biwomenboston-subscribe@yahoo.com.



CALENDAR

March

1 (Wednesday) 7-9pm, Bisexual Social and Support Group (BLiSS). All bi and bi-friendly people of all genders and orientations welcome to attend. Meetings are peer-facilitated discussion groups, sometimes with a pre-selected topic or presenter. Meets 1st Wednesdays. Info/RSVP: bliss@biresource.org.

8 (Wednesday) 7pm, Boston Queer Poly Women's Group, Blue Shirt Café, 424 Highland Ave, Somerville. Meets every second Wednesday to discuss poly issues and to socialize.

9 (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 on the second Thursdays for a few hours of laughter, discussion, activities, and/or the eating and drinking of delicious things! Info/RSVP: youngblissboston@gmail.com.

12 (Sunday) Noon-3pm, BBWN Potluck Brunch at Kate's in Somerville. Bring a potluck brunch item to share. This is a great way to meet other bi and bi-friendly women in the area! Cats in home. Info/RSVP: thewriterkate@gmail.com.

12 (Sunday) 2-4pm, Tea with Bisexual Women Partnered with Men (BWPM). A peer-led support meetup co-hosted by BIWOC and the BRC. We will discuss a wide range of issues related to attraction, sexuality, and gender in a supportive safe space for only trans and cis women and non-binary folks of all races and ethnic backgrounds. Meets at Blue Shirt Café in Somerville. Info/RSVP: <http://www.meetup.com/Bi-Community-Activities/events/229651329/>.

13 (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 2nd Mondays. Info/RSVP: kate.e.flynn@gmail.com.

17-18 (Friday-Saturday), True Colors LG-

BTQ Youth Conference on the University of Connecticut's campus in Storrs. Ourtruecolors.org for info.

18 (Saturday) 11:30am, Bi Brunch. This mixed gender bi group brunches at The Burren on Elm St. in Davis Sq., Somerville. Meets 3rd Saturdays.

22 (Wednesday) 7:00pm, Bi Book Club, in Somerville. Newcomers welcome! The group meets every other month and this month it is reading Jane Ward's controversial nonfiction book *Not Gay: Sex Between Straight White Men*, a finalist for a 2016 Lambda Literary Award. RSVP at <https://www.meetup.com/Bi-Community-Activities/> to get address.



23 (Thursday) 6:30pm, Social BLiSS, Jamaica Plain. This group is now for all ages who are interested in some tasty snacks and discussion with like-minded bis. Feel free to bring any topics you're interested in discussing! Info/RSVP: Mia at socialblissboston@gmail.com.

30 (Thursday) Bi+/Trans* Support Group. The BRC's bisexual+/transgender* support group is a peer-facilitated, safe space in Jamaica Plain where individuals can discuss many different topics. Info/RSVP: <https://www.meetup.com/Bi-Community-Activities/events/hnwxslwcbj/>.

April

5 (Wednesday) 7-9pm, Bisexual Social and Support Group (BLiSS). (See March 1st)

8 (Saturday) 6pm, The Fenway Dinner Party at Boston Marriott. Join over 1,000 queer women and allies as they support the work of the city's premier health center for queer women (and others). It's a major fundraiser, so tickets aren't cheap. Dinner, dancing, and this year's MC is Lea DeLaria. Visit Dinnerparty.org.

9 (Sunday) Noon-3pm, BBWN Potluck Brunch at Charlotte's in Dorchester. Bring a potluck brunch item to share. This is a great way to meet other bi and bi-friendly women in the area! Info/RSVP: avon.alger@gmail.com.

Calendar, continues on p. 24

Calendar, *continued from p. 23*

10 (Monday) 7-9pm, Straight Marriage, Still Questioning. (See March 13th)

13 (Thursday) 7-9pm, Young Bisexual Social and Support Group (Young BLiSS). (See March 9th)

15 (Saturday) 11:30am, Bi Brunch. (See March 18th)

20 (Thursday) 7pm, Paint the Town Red, China Pearl. The annual fundraiser for The Network/La Red, the local survivor-led social justice organization working to end partner violence in LGBTQ communities. Tnlr.org for more info.

27 (Thursday) 6:30pm, Social BLiSS, Jamaica Plain. Meets on 4th Thursdays. (See March 30th)

May

3 (Wednesday) 7-9pm, Bisexual Social and Support Group (BLiSS). (See March 1st)

8 (Monday) 7-9pm, Straight Marriage, Still Questioning. (See March 13th)

14 (Sunday) 2-4pm, Tea with Bisexual Women Partnered with Men (BWPM). (See March 12th)

11 (Thursday) 7-9pm, Young Bisexual Social and Support Group (Young BLiSS). (See March 9th)

20 (Saturday) 11:30am, Bi Brunch. (See March 18th)

21 (Sunday) Noon-3pm, BBWN Potluck Brunch at Robyn's in Jamaica Plain. Bring a potluck brunch item to share. This is a great way to meet other bi and bi-friendly women in the area! Cats in home. Children welcome. Info/RSVP: robyn@robynochs.com

25 (Thursday) 6:30pm, Social BLiSS, Jamaica Plain. Meets on 4th Thursdays. (See March 30th)



Carla Imperial and Megan Jewett, long-time BBWN members, carried this sign with their daughter, Kai, in the Boston March for Women. When Carla asked Kai why they were marching, she thought for a moment and then replied, "Because we are the people, and they can't take away our rights." From that, Carla created their sign.

Alexandra Bolles Receives the Brenda Howard Memorial Award

The Queens Chapter of PFLAG is awarding the Brenda Howard Memorial Award to Alexandra Bolles this year for her spearheading of GLAAD's bi+ advocacy work where she serves as Programs Senior Strategist - Global and US South. Alexandra's work includes coordinating the online #BiWeek campaign at GLAAD; helping to coordinate groundbreaking White House policy briefings for bi+ advocacy leaders; and creating resources for media reporting on the LGBTQ community, including the guide "In Focus: Reporting on the Bisexual Community." Alexandra is also recognized for her management of projects including Spirit Day and the Southern Stories Summer Tour, and her work to amplify diverse voices among the LGBTQ community.



The Brenda Howard Memorial Award was the first award by a major American LGBTQ organization to be named after an openly bisexual person. The award is given annually and recognizes an individual or organization whose work on behalf of the bisexual community and the greater LGBT community best exemplifies the vision, principles, and community service exemplified by Brenda Howard, and who serves as a positive and visible role model for the entire LGBTQ community.



January's BBWN brunch at Gabby's was a welcome retreat on a snowy day. Check out the calendar to stay connected through the winter months.