

## “Good”

by V. F.

A couple of years ago, I broke up with my girlfriend and prepared to be devastated for at least the next year. I knew I had made the right decision, but I had a hard time believing I could feel such passion for another person in my lifetime. It was a difficult time for me, but all of my friends were there to support me. My straight friends reminded me of the aspects of our relationship that were problematic, and applauded me for making the right decision. My lesbian friends consoled me by reminding me that there were many great women out there in the world. In this respect, I was fortunate: I had all of my friends to rely on during a trying time.

Not long after my breakup, I went out one evening and a charming man asked me to dance. I smiled, in that “I’ll humor you” kind of way, expecting to be disappointed and go home missing my ex even more. But my assumptions were wrong. This handsome and fun-loving man swept me off my feet that night, and before he said goodbye, asked if we could see each other again. I gave him my phone number, and chatted away into the night with my girlfriends, trying to figure out whether he would call.

The next day, he did call. I remember the palpable flutter of my heart when I answered the phone. I liked him. We went

“Good” continues on page 8

---

## Semantic Wars

by Kim Westrick and Amy Andre

*Bisexual friends Kim Westrick and Amy Andre got together to have a conversation about the semantic challenge of “bi” vs. “queer” as identity labels.*

**Amy:** Recently, a friend asked me about my reluctance to identify as queer (as opposed to my standard bisexual identity), in light of the fact that I have trans/genderqueer partners who don’t identify as male or female. The reason is because “queer” is a complicated term with a history of violence for many elders (and some non-elders, too) in our community. I understand the impetus to reclaim the word “queer,” but I’m not especially interested in being part of that movement toward reclamation. And although “queer” works for me as a self-label in certain contexts, “bi,” on the other hand, is always an appropriate self-description.

But my friend’s question got me thinking: given the fact that so many bisexual friends and community members reject the idea that gender has to have a relation to attraction and behavior, why *should* I reject the bi label? Why did her question even come up? How relevant is gender to the concept of bisexuality? If

Semantic Wars continues on page 6

## Bi Visibility at the LGBT Human Rights Conference in Copenhagen

by Di Ponti

I really wanted to go to the LGBT Conference on Human Rights that happened in my city, Copenhagen, from 27th -29th July 2009, as part of the World Outgames. Registration was expensive, and gave rise to protests and to alternative DIY human right gatherings, because it should be a human right to go to human rights conferences. I found a solution, and signed up as a volunteer.

While the whole city vibrated with LGBT people, and with competitions and celebrations of alternative sexualities, about 800 people met at the new concert hall and the fancy IT University to discuss LGBT rights, fights, strategies, freedoms. There were 25 keynote speakers, from grassroots activists to politicians, speaking in twice daily plenary sessions—and plenty of workshops, about 20 parallel sessions, also twice a day.

The atmosphere was quite emotional. Svend Robinson (first openly gay Member of Parliament in Canada and a conference co-chair) kept using words like ‘sisters and brothers,’ and ‘us,’ making it feel inclusive. I was moved to witness and feel part of such an important movement. In the first session I cried when Virginia Apuzzo (feminist, politician and activist, USA) mentioned that there is no reason for our community to be discriminatory, after all of us have been discriminated against in one way or another. I thought immediately of being bisexual, and not having felt entirely welcome in some lesbian/gay settings. Later, Kemone Brown (a young lesbian activist and feminist from Jamaica) also

Copenhagen continues on page 7



At the Copenhagen conference: Hilde Vossen (see p. 3), Di Ponti, Yemisi Ilesanmi, & Robyn Ochs

## HONOR ROLL

*Katelynn Bishop,  
Malkah Feldman,  
Deb Morley,  
Robyn Ochs,  
Ellyn Ruthstrom,  
Lisa Silveria,  
Gail Zacharias,*

And many more  
fabulous people!  
You know who  
you are!

**Bi Women is  
published quarterly.**

### STAFF

Editor:  
**Robyn Ochs**

Calendar Editor:  
**Ellyn Ruthstrom**

Proofreader:  
**Katelynn Bishop**

All articles and  
art appearing in  
this newsletter are  
copyrighted by the  
authors and artists.

**Boston-area  
women:  
Sign up for our  
new email list!  
Send an email to:  
biwomenboston-  
subscribe  
@yahoogroups.  
com**

## From your editor

The theme of this issue is "Visi**BI**lity." Related to this theme, we offer essays by Lindsay and V. F., a short play by Tracy, and an article by Di on bi visibility at the LGBT Human Rights Conference in Copenhagen, July 24-27, 2009. Also on theme is Amanda's report on the Bi Media Summit held in NYC on May 30, 2009.

In addition, Kim and Amy discuss semantics, Neelima asks, "Where's the B in LGBT?", Lara reviews *Love You Two* by Maria Pallotta-Chiarolli, and Lindsay offers us a new poem.

Our "Bis Around the World" feature takes us to The Hague, Netherlands, our Bi of the Month is Elissa Ortiz, and of course, we offer our fabulous calendar of events in the Boston area.

And for those who are curious: in addition to more than 550 subscribers in the United States, we now have subscribers in Australia, Belgium, Canada, China, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, India, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Portugal, St. Thomas (USVI), and the UK. And our mailing list is growing!

**Remember, you fabulous women: this is YOUR newsletter. Please consider supporting us with your dollars (if you have any). Please read the important announcement on page 15, and read the insert (if you're receiving a print copy) or the attachment (if you're receiving the electronic version). And please consider writing something for the next issue!**

Bi for now,  
Robyn



*(For info about Robyn's speaking tours, visit her at [robynochs.com](http://robynochs.com) or friend her on Facebook. Or both.)*

## Next in Bi Women

The theme for the Winter 2009 issue:

### Bi Health

Here are some specific suggestions for articles: \*Bi Health project at Fenway \*Report on the Bi Health Summit \* Write about the recent study that found that bi and trans folk have more health issues than our L/G counterparts \* Give your personal account of coming out to medical providers as bi, finding a good therapist, etc. \* What else does "Bi Health" mean to you?

Submissions for the next issue are due to [biwomeneditor@gmail.com](mailto:biwomeneditor@gmail.com) by November 5th.

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

Upcoming themes will include:

The Youth Issue; Trans/Gender; Fantasy; Choice; Out at Work; and more.

## Submit to Bi Women!

Send articles, calendar entries, letters, poems, black-and-white art, news, and views to:

Bi Women:  
[biwomeneditor@gmail.com](mailto:biwomeneditor@gmail.com)

If you do not want your name published, or wish to use a pseudonym, please tell us.

**Bi Women can be found online  
at [biwomenboston.org](http://biwomenboston.org).**

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.

# Bis Around the World: Hilde Vossen, The Hague, Netherlands

by Robyn Ochs

*It is an honor to feature Hilde Vossen, a long-time activist who has had a major impact on both the Dutch and international bi movements.*

*Robyn:* Please tell us about yourself.

*Hilde:* Hallo! Ik heet Hilde Vossen... Hi! My name is Hilde Vossen and I live in The Hague. My twin brother and I were born on International Women's Day, 8th March 1967. Besides my full-time job as a communications officer for the Dutch government, I play field hockey and enjoy my volunteer jobs. Creative writing, photography, hiking and reading books are things I should do more. Instead, I'm busy volunteering as referee for my local field hockey club, as assessor in acknowledgement of prior learning for immigrants and refugees at Vluchtelingenwerk, as coordinator of the Queer Kick-off BiTransdag, as publicity officer for Queer aan Zee-meetings, as a board member of Homosport Nederland, publicity officer for the Dutch Hockey Divas, a nationwide group of gorgeous lesbian and bisexual women, and moderator for the European Bisexual Network.

*Robyn:* Yikes! That's a *lot* of activism! Hilde, please tell briefly the story of your coming out as bi.

*Hilde:* The first time I understood that lesbian or bisexual identity was about me was when, at 19, I left my parent's house in the village where I grew up and started to live on my

own in the city of Nijmegen. An ad in a newspaper led me to a weekend for lesbian and bisexual women of all ages. A 50+ woman who was just out of the closet as lesbian felt so happy for me that I already "knew." She puzzled me, because I didn't know what she meant. I didn't label myself like she did. There I met the first person in my life who openly identified as bisexual.

A few days later I visited my parents and told them where I had been. Mum said, "I hope you aren't a lesbian, because my colleague is and the students call her bad names and harass her. She's always depressed." And Dad said, "Do you still like men? Because if you do, a relationship could also be with a man." I didn't respond.

Another magazine ad led me to the first meeting of the bi women's group of GoBi in Nijmegen. I knew I belonged and started labeling myself as bisexual at 21. Coming-out as bi is something I still often do.

*Robyn:* When did you first become a bi activist? What caused you to get involved?

*Hilde:* At 21, I invited the members of GoBi's bi women's group to meet at my place for its second meeting. I got involved because I wanted to experiment with taking responsibility. Although I lacked self-confidence at that time, I thought, "Yes, I can do this." I once heard somebody say that being a bisexual activist is simply "showing up at meetings that are bi-inclusive." That made me smile. For me it's more than that. It's a commitment to myself and to an organization. I give a helping hand as often as I can. I take this seriously, and at the same time enjoy the fun that it brings.

*Robyn:* Please tell us about a recent bi-related project that excites you.

*Hilde:* Coordinating the Queer Kick-off BiTransdag was really hard work but *big* fun. This event took place in The Hague on June 13th, 2009. For the first time in the Netherlands a nationwide group of queer, bisexual and transgender people organized a day all together. It was so rewarding! At the first meeting I was the only one who I was certain would attend. I prepared the meeting. My stomach ached. "If you can," I asked the nine people who showed up, "and if you like, please tell us your sexual identity and your gender identity." Recognition, laughter! This happened to be the icebreaker the group needed. Some of the organizers had multiple identities, like "I'm bisexual and transgender." We decided to become allies and to work together. We also had two allies, a heterosexual transgender woman and a lesbian, who volunteered.

The day was organized in just a few months. Because of the worldwide economic crisis, we had little money. We co-operated with the local COC, the Dutch Bisexual Network and the Dutch Transgender Network. The program consisted of an opening speech by the famous Dutch author Karin Spink, a powerful debate with representatives from the European Parliament, COC Netherlands, an organization offering special programs for transgender youth, an umbrella organization for Dutch anti-discrimination offices, a trade union, etc., eight workshops, dinner and a party. Over a hundred people showed up and we were delighted with this unexpected high number of participants. People gave us a lot of positive feedback. "It was an inspiring day, very well organized. Thank you, thank you, thank you!"

*Robyn:* Why do you continue to participate in bi activism? What do you get from doing this? Why do you stay involved?

**Hilde,** continues on next page



Photo: Elza de Bruin

Hilde Vossen, continued from previous page



Hilde with fairies at Queer Kick-off BiTransday

*Hilde:* Coordinating the Queer Kick-off BiTransday was a welcome test for me. Am I still an activist? Is this something I can enjoy again? In 2007 I stepped back from activism and now I had that mysterious longing for a big project that combined two topics I personally love to bring into the light: sexual identity *and* gender identity. I wanted to continue participating in bi activism, because my answer to the question, “Will you do better than before?” was a hundred percent positive. I was fully aware of pitfalls I’d experienced in the past, like too much hard work, too little joy, or taking on too much responsibility when others don’t. Because the role of sole coordinator was unexpected—my transgender counterpart had a medical emergency shortly after the first meeting—I learned a lot about leadership.

The day is over now, but I’ll stay involved. This new, creative combination of queers, bisexuals and transgenders working together makes activism perfect for me again. Roze Zaterdag (Pink Saturday, or Pride Day) moves to a different city in the Netherlands each year, and the Pride organization in Amersfoort, the city organizing the 2010 event, invited us to come over and organize something similar for queers, bisexuals and transgenders. They want to be certain to have these target groups covered. I’ll also nominate this project for the Diversity Prize 2009. Of course, I want us to win. I keep my fingers crossed!

*Robyn:* You started and oversee an email list called EuroBiNet. Can you tell us a bit about it?

*Hilde:* Yes... the European Bisexual Network, EuroBiNet! Laurence Brewer from the UK, Hanna Bertilsdotter from Sweden and I founded this email list in 2001. It was a result from my workshop, “How to create a strong and sexy European Bisexual Network” at the 1st European Bisexual Conference in Rotterdam, June 2001. The list—like any list—has had its ups and downs, but it still exists and provides, for example, people who contributed to the book *Getting Bi* and stops for your European book celebration tour, Robyn. The current moderators, Lars Naesbye Christensen from Denmark, Laurence and I, are now preparing for the international conference to be organized in the UK in 2010. We’d like the list to be up-to-date, so we can be of help for the organizers of this conference. I’d also like to welcome bi activists from Poland, because in 2010 there’ll be EuroPride in Warsaw. Recently the young, feminist bi activist Shiri Eisner from Israel joined us. Her activist story is wonderful! That keeps the spirit going.

*Robyn:* You’ve personally done a huge amount of international networking. Why is this important to you? What do you get from it?

*Hilde:* International networking is important to me. I learn a lot from it for myself. I meet bi activists from other countries at conferences or when I visit their countries. I listen to their stories and look at their qualities. Who are they and what do they prefer as an activist? For example, in 2006 I met a girl in Norway. She assured me that she wasn’t a bi activist. “I just live my little life,” she said. That made me question myself. Why am I moderator of EuroBiNet, for example? Who on earth is waiting for such a thing?! Well, it’s something I like. I really enjoy keeping the flock together. That’s me. I’m the networking type. I’ll never forget the moment of gathering during the evening before the 1<sup>st</sup> European Bisexual Conference. People from all over Europe were arriving. Within minutes they were talking and laughing with each other. Safe space. Happy people. Love it!

*Robyn:* What value, if any, do you see in international activism, in keeping in touch with bi activists in other countries? Do you think the movement in the Netherlands was inspired/influenced by movements in other countries, or has been an inspiration/influence on others?

*Hilde:* The value I see in international activism is the information exchange between people. Tell others what you know about media, grants, resources, researches and events. Share your best practices and activists. Empowered, self-confident bisexuals make stronger communities.

I don’t know if or how the Dutch or European bisexual movements influence foreigners. I think so, but how precisely? I prefer to share what influences me. I know for sure that international bi-conferences and gatherings do! There I learned how lesbian, gay and transgender people can put the B in the LGBT, how your identity can feed your activism, how it works for somebody to be bisexual and disabled, how you can have fun when you’re interviewed in the media, the history of pride days from a bisexual perspective, and how cooperation between bisexuals and transgenders can be successful. Thanks to Cheryl Dobinson whose workshop influenced me at the international conference in Toronto in 2006, I didn’t have to reinvent the wheel. It was one of the best sessions during the Queer Kick-off BiTransday!

In 2007, when I walked side by side with Lars Naesbye in the Copenhagen Pride Parade, a Spanish guy and a Portuguese girl joined us, because they recognized the international bi flags that we carried with us. It was great to see their joy when they took the flags for a while. My bi flag was ordered from the US. It was a gift from bi-activist Sólver Sólversson from Iceland while I visited that beautiful country. Talk about international influence!

*Robyn:* Yours is one of the very first countries to have an organized bisexual community. Why do you think that is?

*Hilde:* The bisexual community in the Netherlands started off with many highly educated people in a left-wing political environment. They knew quite well how to influence the media. When I read about the first bi-groups and saw interviews with the first Dutch bi activists, I realized it was quite extraordinary to identify as bisexual at that time. The behavior was common, but not the identity. The local and nationwide magazines from the LGBT organization COC, the feminist magazine *Opzij*, and some big newspapers wrote about it.

*Hilde, continues on next page*

Hilde, continued from previous page

We had the openly bisexual famous writer—now First Chamber member of the Dutch government—Anja Meulenbelt, who took invitations from bi groups for panel discussions seriously. We had a bi foundation that organized the first scientific research about bisexuality and made a documentary about bisexuals in the Netherlands. We had the people, politics, media and money. Need more?

*Robyn:* What similarities and differences to you see between the bi movement in the Netherlands and that in the US?

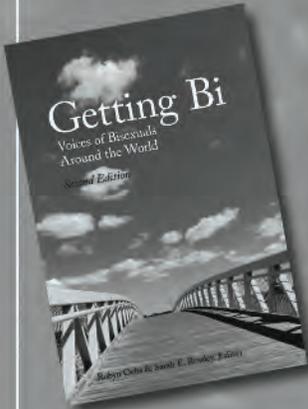
*Hilde:* The Netherlands is geographically small. You can travel almost anywhere in the country in a couple of hours. That makes it much more possible to coordinate a national movement. Activists know each other. Another difference is the level of development. The US has more money for bi research: Fritz Klein was one of the founders of the first fund dedicated to bisexual projects. The last difference is the level of humor. You have the extremely funny *Bisexual's Guide to the Universe*. Tears of laughter run over my face while I read that book. Over here, we finally have two female, openly bisexual stand up comedians: Sara Kroos and Claudia de Breij. That's great, for a start. Now our chances for laughter increase.



*Editor's note:* Lars, Sölver, and Shiri can all be found in the second edition of *Getting Bi*, and Hilde can be found in the first edition.

#### INTERNET RESOURCES IN THE NETHERLANDS:

Queer Kick-off BiTransdag: <http://bitrans.hyves.nl/>; Landelijk Netwerk Biseksualiteit: <http://www.lnbi.nl/>; European Bisexual Network: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/EURO-BINET/>. And you can find Hilde on Facebook.



**New! Just Published!**

## Getting Bi

Voices of Bisexuals  
Around the World  
Second Edition

This international anthology of personal narratives, written by teenagers, grandmothers, and everyone in between, presents a compelling look at contemporary bisexual experience.

**In the Second Edition, you'll find:**

- 42 countries represented, including 10 additional from Iceland to Pakistan
- 220 first-person narratives, including 36 new entries
- Updated features and articles
- New design, more photos

**Buy your copy now at [www.biresource.net](http://www.biresource.net).**

## HELP WANTED

### Brunch Coordinator Invites You to Host

BBWN potluck brunches are a great way to meet other bi women in the Boston area. We try to hold a brunch in a member's home each month so that people can relax and share food and experiences in a safe space. Deb Morley is the brunch coordinator, so please contact her at [debmo345@gmail.com](mailto:debmo345@gmail.com) if you are interested in hosting a brunch. And check out the calendar on pages 15-16 for upcoming activities. We hope you can join us.

### Want to Get Involved With *Bi Women*?

I'm looking for someone to help produce *Bi Women*. Possible roles include: Arts & Culture editor, Guest Editor for an issue on a specific theme, or Assistant Editor (if you want to learn the ropes). Thanks to the miracles of modern technology, you do not have to live in Boston. Contact Robyn: [biwomeneditor@gmail.com](mailto:biwomeneditor@gmail.com).

### Do You Know Web Design?

We're looking for someone to maintain [biwomenboston.org](http://biwomenboston.org), our new website, which uses WordPress. If you are interested, please contact Robyn: [biwomeneditor@gmail.com](mailto:biwomeneditor@gmail.com). It's the perfect volunteer job, as you can do it from home, in your pajamas, or even in your birthday suit.

### STUDENTS:

### Looking for an internship?

Are you looking for an internship during the school year or next summer? BBWN and the Bisexual Resource Center may have something for you! Contact [president@biresource.net](mailto:president@biresource.net) and [editor@biwomenboston.org](mailto:editor@biwomenboston.org).

**Semantic Wars**, continued from page 1

bisexuals like me don't care about gender in the way that monosexuals do, why would my identity label exclude my lovers' gender variations? How queer (unusual) am I?

**Kim:** It seems like this is a big issue in the community, so I'm glad you brought it up. Like you, I'm a bi person who sees gender as fluid rather than fixed or dichotomous. In addition to bi, I identify as queer because of its theoretical rejection of body hierarchies, its inclusion of multiple genders and sexual expressions and how it connects me to a larger, political community.

I've also felt outside pressure to reject my bi identity based on the idea that it perpetuates the gender binary: woman/man. However, this idea reduces *bisexual* to "bi" and "sexual" and disregards the fact that it represents a history, a community, a substantial body of writing, and the right of the bi community to define "bisexuality" on its own terms. Most importantly, this idea disregards how vital these things are for countless bi people. Identifying as bi doesn't *inherently* mean anything, and it definitely doesn't inherently mean a person only recognizes two genders. However, to assume that bi-identified people exclude transgender, gender nonconforming (GNC), and genderqueer people also assumes they are not trans, GNC, or genderqueer themselves, when in fact, many are.

Of course, there are plenty of cisgender [those whose gender identity matches the behavior or role considered appropriate for their sex] bi people who are transphobic or assume there is little variation in gender expression, just as many gay, lesbian, queer, and straight people do. This is a prevalent and problematic attitude we should all be working against, but not by abandoning the word bisexual and all the good things it represents. What do you think?

**Amy:** I think I love your point about bisexuals not necessarily believing there are only two genders!

Assuming that the "bi" in bisexual means a person thinks there are only two makes as much sense as assuming that monosexual (gay and straight) people think there is only one gender. The prefix doesn't relate information about how many genders a person thinks exists. At the most, it gives an indication of how many genders a person might be attracted to. But, in the case of bi, I don't think it even does that. Because, like you, I identify as bi in part to connect to a particular community, and in part because gender is not an overriding factor in my capacity to desire others.

So, let's take this to a meta-level. What impact do you think these semantic wars have on the development of the bi community?

**Kim:** I think it's really good for the community to reject the idea that there are only two genders, and to be proactive about calling out transphobia. A wide open and inclusive perspective of gender should be a permanent part of our work. In fact, I find that by identifying as bi, I have many opportunities to challenge people on their assumptions. The scene:

**Q: Are you straight or gay?**

A: I'm bi.

**Q: Who do you like better, men or women?**

Sample Answers: "I like all genders the same." "I prefer feminine people, but I don't care what gender they are." "I prefer butch women, but I also date other genders." "I like androgynous people of any gender." "As long as they'll top me, I don't care."

In one sentence you can break down their assumptions and maybe spark a conversation about gender expression and identity.

These semantic wars divide us and distract us from organizing around other important issues. As a white woman, I see that racism and white supremacy are pervasive in queer/LGBT/bi communities and issue prioritization. Yet this glaring problem seems to go mostly ignored.

To begin reaching an inclusive movement, white bisexual and queer people should be spending time and energy recognizing white privilege, and calling out racism and white supremacy. Bi people of color (BiPOC) are vastly underrepresented in bi events, and racist and classist comments go unchecked. Semantic wars sidetrack us from this.

**Amy:** I think you're right about the sidetracking. To me, the focus on what we should or shouldn't call ourselves is a product and reflection of internalized biphobia. The right to name oneself – and have that name be respected by others – is so fundamental to the very start of the movement-building that needs to happen. When we get derailed from building this foundation, we lose sight of the bigger picture. And isn't that just what an oppressive system, a system of classism and racism and sexism, would want us to be doing? In-fighting?

I'm continually fascinated by the interplay of the concepts of love and war. The war around semantics boils down, in part, to us bisexuals and queers finding common (or uncommon) language to describe our capacity to love other human beings. As long as we can love, isn't that enough? And as long as we are loving, haven't we already begun to engage in dismantling the system?

As a person of color, one of the things I value about the bisexual community is the fact that, at least historically, it has been led by women and people of color, and often by women of color. Our bi-icons, such as Lani Ka'ahumanu and Loraine Hutchins, have been leading the community for decades now, and are still two of our strongest voices. I feel privileged to be part of a colorful matriarchy. I share your concern about the current underrepresentation of bi people of color at bi events, and/

**Semantic Wars**, continued on next page

**Copenhagen, continued from page 1**

brought me to tears when she explained her own path to becoming open to her bisexual sisters.

I was going around this warm environment when I noticed Robyn Ochs with Miguel Obradors and Lars Næsbye Christensen (Copenhagen bi-activists), and I felt even warmer. I felt even happier and more touched. Now I wasn't alone, I felt that now I was fully part of the conference. Both the city and the conference were challenging the 'norm': there were plenty of same-sex couples, and people assumed from the outset that one was gay. Felt like fresher air when this minority was so visible, a contrast with the heavy clouds of typical heteronormativity. But when I saw my bi friends, I realized that I still needed to be seen as bi, to be fully respected (because it is who I am). Our struggle is still huge: what about our visibility? Who was to assume that I was bi? I was glad for the bi pins Robyn had brought to sell, and wore them proudly for the remainder of the conference.

The "B" was, of the 4 letters in LGBT, the least represented officially, and also very soft-spoken vocally. At the end of the first day, a number of angry Trans activists kept asking "where is the T?" and questioning why only two of 25 plenary speakers were trans-identified. The T though was still more represented than the B. The B had three workshops, no keynote speaker, and only our Robyn as moderator of one of the sessions. But, overall, our presence and the discussions raised an awareness

in some of the old-school gay activists: I would guess some of them learned something and that in the future we will be more and more included.

The first bi workshop was centered around the book *Getting Bi: Voices of Bisexuals Around the World*. Unfortunately, because the books were not released by Danish customs, we were unable able to purchase copies during the conference, or even the day after, when the LBL-BI (Danish LGBT organization) group organized an afternoon with free workshops, on bi creativity, bi self-help and bi history. At the Getting Bi workshop, people read essays from the book, followed by a spirited discussion. At the second bi workshop organized by Australian bi activist Holly Hammond, two caucuses were called, one for bis and one for allies. And the third was a presentation on bisexuality in Danish film. In all of them, there was a mix of bisexuals and other curious people, not self-identified as bi/variant, with their typical questions: "They can leave you for someone of the other gender! Yes – and also for someone of the same gender!" "They must want both genders at the same time!" Bi and poly are different dimensions, but no wonder some bis feel more welcome in a more inclusive poly-movement. It was endearing to see a gay man presenting on bisexuality in Danish film admit that many instances of homosexuality in modern film are indeed bisexual, and that the forerunners in old film are forerunners to different sexual

identities and preferences of the present days.

Then, in the plenary session moderated by Robyn, Yemisi Ilesanmi, an amazing, clear-headed and outspoken bi-activist from Nigeria, asked, referencing the previous day's protests about the underrepresentation of transgender speakers: "Where is the B in the LGBT?" Robyn acknowledged that bisexuals were underrepresented at the conference, while crediting organizers for the fact that this year's conference had substantially better bi representation than the last one. She charged organizers of the next conference to continue this trend.

And bis are essential to keep LGBT and allies from splitting, working as a glue. Instead of grounding a movement in fighting – us, them, the good and the bad – we contribute to change by practicing inclusion. I do wish and hope that an inclusive, kind and caring way of tackling bisexuality in and out of the movement will prevail, and that it will become easier and easier to be bi. Or for that matter, that it will be easier to be whatever one is or wants to be.

I've really enjoyed these days, my rainbow-colored city, deep and thoughtful discussions and a sense of pride in diversity. These days re-awoke in me a sense of community, of change, of sharing. I look forward to more.

*Di Ponti is a Portuguese woman living in Copenhagen.*

**Semantic Wars, continued from page 6**

but I'm hopeful for the future, because of the past.

*Kim is a recent graduate of the University of California, Davis where she helped start the school's first bi student group, The Bi Visibility Project. Together with the LGBT Resource Center, Bi Vis put on the campus' first bi education and community week, Beyond the*

*Binary. She is currently working at Centro de Atención Psicológica, a domestic violence prevention center in Monterrey, Mexico.*

*Amy is the co-author of Bisexual Health (2007: National Gay & Lesbian Task Force), and the author of over 30 articles and essays on bisexuality, race politics, and social justice issues. With a master's degree in sexuality studies and an MBA*

*in nonprofit strategy, Amy works in the LGBT nonprofit sector and does public speaking on bisexuality. She has presented to thousands of people at over 100 organizations, conferences, and schools, including Stanford University Medical School, the Gay & Lesbian Medical Association, UCLA, and Brown University. In other words, she's a professional bisexual (or "pro bi")! Visit her online at [www.amyandre.com](http://www.amyandre.com).*

on our first date, and the energy between us was electric. He was smart and funny, thoughtful and kind. I felt on top of the world when I was with him. I soon learned that he was about to move out of town, and I reluctantly accepted the time-limited nature of our romantic relationship. I thought I would make the most of my time with such a wonderful person, and I did. We spent several wonderful summer months together and then, despite my efforts to be “sensible,” I was quite heart-broken when he left. I couldn’t believe I could feel love for someone so soon after losing my girlfriend. But it was true: I was again feeling that pain of losing someone with whom you feel connected in an indescribable way.

But this breakup turned out to be different. I hadn’t had the courage to tell my lesbian friends that I was dating a man, for fear that I would no longer be seen as “one of the girls.” So, consequently, they didn’t know the joy that was suddenly ripped from my life when he left. My straight friends, because they had been out with me the night I met this man, knew what he had become to me and consoled me through my loss.

While I took comfort in most of my friends’ encouragement and support, I became increasingly upset about the fact that I had hidden this aspect of my life from my lesbian and gay friends. One evening stands out in my mind, when I felt the shame and frustration of being a closeted bisexual person. I had just had a difficult day, feeling sorry for myself that I was pining away for a man that was not coming back, when a lesbian friend asked me to dinner. I said yes, thinking it would be nice to spend the evening with a good friend.

But as we sat down to the table she asked, with the sincerest interest, “So how ARE you, my dear?” And without hesitation I said, “Good!” And with that one word I realized instantaneously that I was denying my authentic identity and integrity as a person. I became disheartened during that meal, and many others, because I was afraid to tell my gay friends that I was upset and broken-hearted over a man. I felt torn. I wanted to tell them the truth, but I thought I would lose the inclusion and support of the gay world that was so important to me.

My inability to tell the truth about my life and my loves has been a reflection of my own process of self-acceptance, but it is also a mirror of the gay community and the message it often sends to bisexual and transgender persons. I have heard enough disparaging comments about people who are “not really gay” to know that if I want to be part of the club, it is better that people think I am a lesbian.

But I am not a lesbian. I find myself attracted at times to both men and women, and can have fulfilling relationships with people of any gender. This issue of *Bi Women* is about me and so many other women who have hidden their authentic selves for fear of being left out and misunderstood. Even more importantly, it is about the choice to make ourselves visible so that others like us may feel the power of understanding and community. Harvey Milk said that the greatest political action a queer person can take is to come out of the closet. I believe this to be true and I am proud to say that with the publication of this short essay, I have decided to personally come out to my lesbian and gay friends. Who knows, maybe I can still be part of the club, with a few changes to the bi-laws.

*V.F. is a social worker in Chicago, Illinois.*

## Visibility

by Lindsay Pratt

Monday, two weeks ago, my lunch date with a beautiful young woman ended with her wanting to leave early for time to “process” before a meeting and my feeling like I must be denser than prison cell walls for not picking up whatever signals I apparently missed. After stewing over my failings for a couple of days, spending an inordinate amount of time making emo hipster leather cuffs while blasting riot grrl music and pretending to be tough, she called and asked if I was free that Saturday for a party. A family party. Not wanting to ruin my chances for a second time, I said I would be “delighted to attend” and even offered to help with the set up. And for the next few days I had fantasies of being her strong butch and doing all the heavy lifting for her, completely ignoring the fact that she is several inches taller than I and the only heavy lifting I have done recently has involved the O.E.D. But, come Saturday, I was excited for what the day had in store.

The party was located at her parents’ house two hours outside of San Francisco, and as I drove, the scenery around me shifted from cityscape to suburbs to vast rolling hills and sprawling ranch houses complete with pools and stables. I drove up the dirt driveway and found her hanging colorful Chinese lanterns around the patio with her younger sister. Her parents greeted me kindly, and I was put to work assisting with the party prep. All signs pointed to an enjoyable evening. But as guests began to arrive – mostly family members, and more cousins than I had ever seen in one gathering – it began to dawn on me, like Dorothy when suddenly blinded by technicolor, that I was not in San Francisco anymore, and a girl presenting as male was not something that was seen as normal or acceptable in this town.

The male members of the family eyed me suspiciously while their girlfriends and wives made comments in not-so-hushed voices while gathered around the food-laden kitchen island. They used male pronouns and elongated the “eeee” to emphasize my ambiguous gender, and the twin Stepford wives entertained themselves by flirting with me and making lewd gestures, giggling like they were 14 again. I felt exposed. They had, without their knowledge, sensed something about my gender identity that I was not planning to share, and their laughter left me, for the first time, feeling the beginnings of shame.

And while all eyes were on me, and I felt like J. Alfred Pruffrock “sprawling on a pin,” I realized that I was completely invisible. Yes, they were watching me, sizing me up, but they were not seeing me. They saw my identity, or rather what they perceived that identity to be. I was a “dyke,” or “transboy,” or whatever it was that each one saw. My name, my interests, my personality were all meaningless: I was merely the queer that had crashed the party.

I spend much of my time focused on what parts of my identity I will share and what I will keep closeted. I dress so that my identity will be more visible and out myself on a constant basis. I do this with pride, and, at times, frustration with the need to be so explicit. But I glimpsed, that day, the smallest fraction of the invisibility that comes with being visible that so many of my transgender friends experience on a daily basis. And what did I do? I ran. I hid. I was afraid to cause a scene even while the deepest part of me was yearning to yell about the ridiculousness of discrimination, because the truth is I can laugh at what happens to me, but the hate that I witness lurking in their eyes is systemic, a wound in our society that long ago went septic. And while it may be easier

*Visibility, continues on page 10*

## NEWS BRIEFS

### More on Micah Kellner: NY's Openly Bisexual Assemblyman

*Micah Kellner was interviewed recently by Mizz M on bisocialnews.com. Here's an excerpt:*

When I first ran for office, a group of my friends, mostly gay men, decided to sit down with me to determine "what Micah was going to be," because he couldn't be bi. They felt no one would ever accept a bisexual, so some said "say you're straight," and others said "say you're gay". Someone suggested that I should state to the Stonewall Democratic club that while I've had sex with men in the past, I just don't identify as a member of the GLBT community, which I took to mean that I was openly on the "down low," which made no sense. We finally decided honesty was the best policy, but sadly, too often I've found as a public official that bisexuals are the last group that are easily held up to ridicule.

*The full interview can be found at <http://bisocialnews.com/my-interview-with-new-yorks-openly-bisexual-assemblyman-micah-kellner/>*

#### Hidden in Plain Sight, continued from page 11

**Maggie:** You do?

**Leslie:** You are attracted to BOTH men and women...

**Maggie (interrupts):** EXACTLY!

**Leslie:** ...but since you can't make up your mind, you need to have both a man and a woman at the same time!

**Maggie (exasperated):** So CLOSE! And yet so far away!

**Leslie:** What? I thought there were plenty of bisexuals who are polyamorous – that is, who want to have more than one partner.

**Maggie:** Well, there are some *heterosexuals* who want more than one partner.

**Sarah:** Yeah – they're called straight men!

**Maggie:** But, of course, not all straight people want to be poly. Bisexuals are no different. Being polyamorous works well for some people. But it's not for me! I'm a "one at a time" girl.

**Sarah:** And your partner could be any gender?

**Maggie:** Exactly!

**Sarah:** I get it... I think.

**Maggie:** Well, it's a lot to think about.

*(Pause)*

**Maggie:** Wow! It's getting late. I'd better get going.

**Sarah:** Me, too! My parents are arriving in a few days, and I haven't found all the dust bunnies.

**Maggie:** We should do this again sometime!

**Leslie:** Okay. Stay in touch.

**All:** Bye!

*All except Maggie exit*

**Maggie (to audience):** You see what I mean? And people say I'M the one who's confused!

*Curtain*

### Dr. Anita Kozan Receives 2009 Lavender Pride Award

Standing for "People Rallying Individuality, Diversity, and Equality," the PRIDE Awards six individuals or organizations working within and for the GLBT community of Minneapolis/St. Paul. One of this year's award recipients is Dr. Anita Kozan.

There is no doubt that Dr. Anita Kozan deserves recognition for her long-time commitment and service to the LGBT and bi communities.

She is the co-host, with Dr. Marge Charmoli, of BiCities, the nation's only bisexual community TV show. Shown on local cable TV, this half hour show is excellent. I have been a guest on this show twice, and I can personally attest to the quality of the interviewers and the show's amazing volunteer staff.

Dr. Kozan states, "We are bringing information that people otherwise might never have access to. I think resources



Photo: Hubert Bonner

about bisexuality continue to grow, but people who are bisexual are invisible in the way that, if I am with a woman, I am assumed often to be a lesbian, and if I am with a man, I'm assumed to be heterosexual. We are people, and we look like other people, and we're well-adjusted. I'm very, very proud of the work we've done."

But her work on BiCities is just one of her projects. She is also a voice and speech specialist for transgender individuals. She explains, "I want to try to help the person develop the ability to communicate in a way that is consistent with their gender, and most people want to be perceived as either male or female, so we work on voice and speech and mannerisms and gestures, but there's a lot of focus on voice and speech for both groups." She has worked in this field for more than 35 years and helped more than 50 people transition.

She is former President of L'GASP, the GLBT Caucus of Audiologists and Speech Language Pathologists (affiliated with the American Speech Language Hearing Association).

She currently runs a small private practice, the Kozan Clinic for Voice, Speech and Spirit, LLC, working with people across the transitioning spectrum, in addition to her full-time job as a speech and language pathologist at Arlington Senior High School in St. Paul, where she helps facilitate the Gay Straight Alliance.

"I feel like it's a blessing in my life," she says about her work. "I feel like I'm really doing God's work. It's phenomenally rewarding and thrilling to see people change."

*Source: Information taken from an interview with Dr. Kozan, and an article by Chad Eldred in Lavender Magazine #366.*



Did you know that Robyn and her wife Peg represented BiNet USA and the Bisexual Resource Center at a special, first-ever LGBT reception at the White House on June 29th? Robyn was proudly wearing her “This is what a bisexual looks like” pin, and both Robyn and Peg had the

opportunity to shake hands with Barack and Michelle Obama and even chat with the President for a couple of minutes!

### Visibility, continued from page 8

for me to lick my superficial scratches in silence and hide behind my (usual) ability to pass, it would be a betrayal of my ideals to do so. It would be a validation of people’s discomfort with what, for them, is different. So until the time when I can walk into a white, suburban household and have everyone there see me for who I am, not what I am, it is my task to be unashamedly visible as what I am, because who I am is too valuable to let myself give up.

*Lindsay lives in San Francisco and studies Psychology and Queer Studies at City College of San Francisco. Ze has many interests, including acting and poetry.*

---

## BOOK REVIEW: *Love You Two* by Maria Pallotta-Chiarolli (Random House Australia, 2008)



*Reviewed by Lara Zielinsky*

*Love You Two* is the story of teenage Pina’s discovery that her parents’ loving marriage—and the relationships all around her—are far from “normal” or “idyllic.” Her assumptions shattered, her journey through *Love You Two* is her process of coming to terms with how the many sexual and relationship permutations she encounters are encouraged or discouraged.

Guispeppina, Pina to her friends and family, is a typical teen girl. She has friends with fighting parents, and sees her own parents as embarrassingly “woggy” (a pejorative term) in their loving relationship. She is on the verge of first-time sex with her own boyfriend, and has an antagonistic relationship with her younger brother.

At the start of the story, Pina accidentally reads an email her mother left open on the family computer, signed off with a phrase her mother uses often for expressing love to Pina and her brother Leo, “Love you t(w)oo.” Her mother appears to be having an affair with a family friend, “Uncle Nathan,” and her father seems to be aware of it, as the email her mother, Gianna sent to Nathan was copied to Pina’s father, Renato.

Pina then pilfers her mother’s journal searching for more clues, horrified by the revelation that this has been going on for years without her knowledge, and curious/bothered that her father can be “all right” with it. Through her mother’s words of uncertainty, Pina is sent into an emotional tailspin, trying to figure out what is real in her “normal, envied” life. Pina can’t confide in her friends, and she has a bad experience with her boyfriend while searching for the emotional truth.

Escaping to her Uncle Don’s home by taking an overnight bus to Melbourne, Pina tries to get her head

around everything and learns her Uncle’s own hidden truths, as a bisexual man committed to a Vietnamese woman, Wei Lee. Her uncle has named his home “Narnia,” and like the world discovered through the wardrobe in the C.S. Lewis classics, it is a place where everyone lives openly. Their friends represent the full spectrum of sexuality and through encounters with these friends Pina’s eyes are opened to the many ways people express their love. She becomes more aware there are ‘borders’ and people hide their true selves—and the many different reasons why.

She works through the why by turning resentful and sad for those hidden lives, when she and Don and Wei Lee travel to Adelaide for the annual Christmas with family. The tension explodes and more old wounds are opened, but with the opening perhaps a healing of their family can at last begin.

It could be argued the author took on too much—trying to tell too broad a story with Pina encountering so many different kinds of loving relationships. However, each encounter is told with great care and love. Readers will be moved by Pina’s interactions with John and his partner in Melbourne. Each encounter adds to the nuanced lesson Pina finally weaves into her own life decisions as the story winds to its close.

Choosing to set Pina within a heavily traditional Catholic-Italian family keeps the contrasts sharp between the choices, and the theme obvious. The story avoids stereotypes, mostly owing to the realness of the dialogue, and Pina’s inner monologues.

*Love You Two* is a winner with its accurate teen ‘voice’ and the realism of the struggle with sexuality in all its permutations viewed from the perspective of a person just stepping out to discover her own sexual being. The themes of expectation versus reality, societal “norms” versus living unfulfilled, are repeated throughout.

*Lara Zielinsky lives in central Florida. She writes and edits fiction for a variety of publishers, and hosts a radio show sharing authors and works of fiction for lesbian and bisexual women. [www.lzfiction.net](http://www.lzfiction.net).*

# Hidden in Plain Slight

by Tracy

## SCENE 1: INTRODUCTION

*The curtain is drawn. Maggie enters stage right, looking distressed.*

**Maggie:** (*sighs*) I don't know what to do. I've told my friends many times that I'm bisexual, but they just don't get it. It's not that they're unsupportive or anything, it's just... Why don't I tell you what happened last week, and you'll see what I mean...

## SCENE 2: COFFEE SHOP

*The curtain is raised. Leslie and Sarah are seated at a round table, drinking coffee. Maggie enters.*

**Maggie:** Hi, Sarah! Hi, Leslie! How are you!

**Leslie:** Hi, Maggie! How are you doing?

**Sarah:** It's so good to see you!

(*Hugs*)

**Maggie:** So, what's new?

**Sarah:** Nothing much. My parents are coming for a visit this weekend. My mom said, "Don't worry. You don't have to clean the house just for us." So naturally, I spent the morning vacuuming and dusting.

**Leslie:** So, Maggie, what's new with you?

**Maggie:** I have a hot date this weekend! I met this guy, Adam, at the gym. He is *gorgeous*! He's tall, with dark brown eyes...

**Leslie:** Whoa...wait a second. A date with a guy? I thought you were a lesbian!

**Maggie:** I'm bisexual. That means I date either men or women. So anyway, about Adam – he has the cutest nose, and...

**Sarah:** Oh, so you're really straight!

**Maggie:** No... I'm bisexual! Remember Annie – the girl I was with for 3 years?

**Leslie:** Oh, I remember that all right. What a nightmare!

**Sarah:** Oh, God!

**Maggie:** She was the biggest control freak.

**Leslie:** Yeah. I remember one time when we all went out to dinner and she said, "You don't really want the chocolate cake, do you? Doesn't the fruit cup look much better?" As if you needed to lose weight!

**Maggie:** I know. (*Pause*) I wonder what I ever saw in her.

**Leslie:** Attractive, leggy blonde?

**Maggie:** Yeah, that's probably it.

**Sarah:** Well, it's understandable that you would turn straight after a relationship like that!

**Maggie:** I didn't "turn straight." I'm bisexual! I would date a girl if the right one came along. So anyway, about Adam...

**Leslie:** She's saying that she's really a lesbian, but is experimenting with guys for now.

**Sarah:** No, I think that she's really straight, and has been experimenting with girls.

**Leslie:** A three-year relationship is an experiment? No way! Deep down, she's a lesbian, but was temporarily scarred by Annie. But you'll see. She'll come back to girls.

**Sarah:** Oh, come on. Did you see the way she swooned over that guy, Adam? She's definitely straight!

**Leslie:** How about the way she swoons over Halle Berry?

**Sarah:** What about the pictures of Ben Affleck on her wall?

**Leslie:** Did I mention that she owns every Halle Berry film?

**Sarah:** I'm telling you, she's straight.

**Leslie:** She's gay.

**Maggie:** I'm BISEXUAL!!!

*Leslie and Sarah give Maggie an odd look.*

**Leslie:** I don't get it.

**Maggie** (*mutters*): That's for sure!

**Leslie:** What?

**Maggie:** Oh, nothing

**Sarah:** Maybe it would help if you could explain what "bisexual" means to you.

**Maggie:** OK, let's see... (*thinking*) I like bi-activist Robyn Ochs's definition: Bisexual means the capacity to be attracted to people of more than one gender: but not necessarily at the same time, not necessarily to the same degree, and not necessarily in the same way.

**Leslie and Sarah:** Huh??

**Maggie:** Maybe an analogy would help. Let me think... (*thinking*)

**Maggie:** OK, I got it! It's like handedness. You could be right-handed, left-handed, or you could write well with both hands!

**Leslie and Sarah:** Huh??

**Maggie:** (*sighs*) Ok, how's this: It's like the treble and bass settings on your stereo system. Just because the treble setting is turned on doesn't mean that the bass setting can't be turned on as well.

**Leslie and Sarah:** Huh??

**Sarah:** Oh, I get it!

**Maggie** (*mutters*): Thank goodness!

**Sarah:** You started out straight. Then, you turned gay for Annie, and now you turned straight for Adam!

**Maggie:** HUH??

**Sarah:** Well, that makes a lot more sense to me than saying you are bisexual.

**Maggie:** THAT makes more sense to you then saying I'm bisexual?

**Sarah:** Well, sure. I don't really believe that bisexuals exist.

**Maggie:** What do you mean I don't exist? I'M SITTING RIGHT HERE TALKING TO YOU!!

**Sarah:** Sorry – no offense. It's just that...well.... I don't really know any bisexuals...

**Leslie:** And it seems like the ones I know are really gay.

**Sarah:** Or they're straight, and just experimenting.

**Leslie:** No, I think that –

**Maggie:** Has it ever occurred to either of you that you don't see bisexuals because we're invisible to you?

**Sarah:** They have invisibility cloaks, like in Harry Potter?

**Maggie:** No, no, no! What I mean is this: Every time I like a girl, I must be a lesbian. But every time I like a guy, suddenly I'm "straight!" What do I have to do to be seen as bisexual?

**Leslie:** Hmm... I guess I never thought of it that way.

**Maggie:** No matter what I say or do, I'm hidden in plain sight!

**Leslie:** Wait! I think I understand.

*Hidden in Plain Sight, continues on page 9*

## Bi of the Month: Elissa Ortiz

by Dina Perrone

*Dina:* Elissa, I have known you for about six years now. But, we really became close when you lived in NYC a few years ago. What I find most amazing about you is your willingness to follow your heart. Can you please discuss how following your heart led you to NYC and then back to Arizona?

*Elissa:* I moved to New York for a clean break. I needed time to myself and I had a friend there, so it was a perfect opportunity at the perfect time. New York was a place I had never been to but always wanted to experience, so I moved to the East Coast. I had lived in Arizona my whole life, and I knew that New York would be a great place to go to experience something different. Living back East was both an exciting and different experience for me. When I was there I was rebuilding my self-esteem along with new experiences and new friends. Unfortunately, I was not yet done with my schooling and I knew staying there would only delay the process. I knew it was better to just get it done with instead of delaying it. Along with school there were of course family, friends and loved ones that I missed dearly. It only seemed natural to me to return to Arizona. It felt like everyone had their lives in place and I didn't, not there anyways. In Arizona, I felt more at home.

*Dina:* I know that being bisexual is not always easy. I am often conflicted, confused, and even scared about coming out. Are you "out" at work or school? How has that affected you?

*Elissa:* I do not go around and flaunt it, but yes, I am honest with my friends and family. Family is harder to deal with because they just kind of brush it off and don't want to know about it or even deal with it. I think the East Coast is much more out and about than the West Coast. When I lived back East it was so much easier to walk around with a girlfriend or even have a PDA. Being "out" here is much harder and people watch every move you make—I think they really have nothing better to do. People out here are very conservative compared to all the liberals on the East Coast (whom I love and miss). Although I have been completely honest with my family and have been open with them about my relationship with a woman for the past four years, they still seem to just "ignore" it. When I am around my friends it isn't even an issue. We don't think about it or bring it up. It is what it is and it is fine, perfectly normal. Around family is harder because I think it is harder for them to accept than it is for my friends. Honestly, the friends I have are like my family so that part is easier since I am so close to them.

*Dina:* You have made incredible achievements as a single mom—working full-time, going to school and buying a home. How have you included dating in this already busy schedule?

*Elissa:* Dating?? Ha ha! Dating with a new baby is almost impossible, babysitters are too expensive and honestly I am too tired. I had a girlfriend until just recently and we decided to go our separate ways. So, at the moment, no, I am not dating.

*Dina:* As a single mom of a beautiful and sweet daughter, do you think being bisexual has affected the ways you parent or who is in her life? Do you mind explaining how?

*Elissa:* I do not think it has affected the way I parent. Parenting to me is about raising a child with manners, morals and love, and being bisexual wouldn't and shouldn't affect that. As for the people in my life, I don't think you can have enough people in your life who love you. As long as they love me and they love my daughter, I have no limits. I believe that my decisions will only broaden my daughter's views in life and make her realize that it isn't important if a man loves you or a woman loves you—as long as they love you.

*Dina:* Is there anything else you would like to tell the readers of *Bi Women*?

*Elissa:* Just do what makes you happy! That is what I did, and what I am doing. Just remember there is no way you can make everyone happy, so instead just do what makes you happy—it is your life, not theirs!

*Elissa and her daughter Charli live in Gilbert, Arizona.*



# Encouraging the Conversation: Thoughts on the Bi Media Summit

by Amanda Morgan

*The Bi Writers Association, with support from the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Community Center of New York City, organized "Putting the 'B' in LGBT," a national summit whose aim was to "give people the tools to understand and include the bi community more fully," said bi activist Sheela Lambert, who was also the driving force and primary organizer behind the summit. I was lucky to attend this free conference on May 30th, 2009. Here are some of my thoughts and reactions.*

The most common excuse I hear from lesbian and gay folks, activists and non, for the lack of bisexual inclusion is that we are included. Huh? This is typically followed by an explanation that bisexual people are only made targets for acts of violence and discrimination when we are in same-sex relationships. And if we're single or in different sex relationships well, we can just take our heterosexual privilege and shove it. Because we stop being bi if we're monogamously partnered, right? And we're all so gender-conforming that the only thing that makes us vulnerable is our relationship choices, right? Right.

This ignores the glaringly obvious fact that we remain bisexuals no matter what our relationships look like. Our visibility might change. But who we are does not. And being in the closet hurts. No matter what privilege or lack thereof might come along with it. This also ignores the fact that one's perceived gender or sexual orientation (see also: gender nonconformity) often makes them a target, and this includes bisexuals of all relationship statuses. Bisexuals, like everyone else, are represented across the gender spectrum. Most profoundly, however, this viewpoint illustrates a complete lack of interest in any critical self-examination on the part of the lesbian and gay community when it comes to bi inclusion. While community members may be quick to point out victimization or its absence in mainstream culture, lesbian and gay organizations/media/folks/etc. are experts at avoiding the subject when it comes to their own possible perpetration of biphobia and bi erasure.

The participants of the Bi Summit were having none of that. "Putting the 'B' in the LGBT" called the rest of the queer

umbrella to task. Exactly what are the effects, personally and politically, when we leave bisexual people by the wayside? I promise you, it's more than hurt feelings.

Not to knock hurt feelings. When Peter Ruggiero of the Bi Writers Association spoke of contemplating suicide as a result of being inundated with messages that bi men did not exist, I remembered why I became a bi activist in the first place. Our very lives are at stake here. I was hospitalized for depression as a teenager. While a variety of factors contributed to this, it certainly didn't help that I had a therapist who was telling me I was straight. And where did I find her? The Pink Pages, a New England Resource Directory of LGBT friendly professionals.

Recent research suggests our experiences are not unique. As bisexual columnist Mike Szymanski reported: "Some stats show that bisexual youth particularly have more attempts at suicide and feel more alienated than even their gay and lesbian counterparts who have a growing social and support network around them. A suicide prevention study in Australia found that bi women and bi men were the highest percentages of suicide attempts (35 and 29 percents). Bi youth between 14 and 21, in a University of Minnesota study, were more likely to be suicidal than any other group."

This comes as no surprise. We as bisexuals know the high cost of invisibility. But what about our LGBT organizations? Isn't combating invisibility supposed to be one of their main tropes? Keynote speaker Robyn Ochs addressed the ways in which the mainstream LGBT movement has let us down and contributed to our invisibility instead of helping to alleviate it.

She noted the first problem—people only "see" bisexuals when we are simultaneously partnered with members of both sexes, which is not the reality lived by most of our community. As a marriage equality activist who is married to a woman, Ochs knows firsthand the ways in which media outlets and others have tried to make her bisexuality invisible. She situated part of the blame with the messaging of LGBT organizations and their own biphobia. There were collective nods, laughs and sighs all around as Ochs conveyed the frustration many of us feel with current messaging standards such as "gay marriage"

"We oversimplify our messaging so people will 'get it' but then people

don't 'get it' because we've given them an over-simplistic message...[T]he ick factor with regard to bisexuality is both about a resistance to sex and a resistance to complexity."

Author and activist Ron Suresha also spoke critically of the movement.

"We have a lack of representation on a national level. They [national LGBT organizations] don't have anyone addressing bisexual issues full time. I think that's a problem."

Educator and activist Renata Moreira is feeling the effects of this. Moreira has been unable to secure a visa for the woman she loves. Now, the request for her partner's visa has put her own citizenship in jeopardy. Moreira, who has a green card and is in the process of applying for her citizenship, was previously married to a man.

"Now they are now reevaluating my paperwork because they think my previous marriage might be fake."

This suspicion has caused much stress and pain for Moreira, as well as her ex-husband and family, with whom she is still close, as they are all being subjected to an investigation of the validity of Moreira's previous marriage. An added insult to an already devastating and unfair situation.

Moreira's story illustrates the results of bisexual visibility on a national level. As LGBT organizations continue to do more work around the effects of current immigration law and same-sex couples, this is something we cannot allow them to forget.

Much of the discussion around messaging addressed the ways in which LGBT organizations and the media have failed bisexuals in the course of the fight for marriage equality. *Washington Blade's* news editor, Joshua Lynsen, who is also bisexual, told of how the *Blade* was failing in its coverage of bi people before he got there. Lynsen and Sheela Lambert went over the Bi Writers Association Media Guide to Bisexuality and Reporting on LGBT Issues, which was chock full of suggestions it would behoove not only the media to apply, but whoever has been writing all those "gay marriage" press release as well. \*ahem\*. He then invited any bi people willing to be interviewed or with story tips to contact Lynsen at: [jlenssen@washblade.com](mailto:jlenssen@washblade.com). So if you've got something to say,

**Bi Media Summit**, continues on next page

**Bi Media Summit**, *continued from page 13*

let Joshua know who you are so we can continue to make our voices heard.

Wrapping up the summit was a roundtable discussion that featured LGBT activists, media professionals and politicians as well as bi community activists, that asked 'How can we do a better job?'. GLAAD's Director of National News, Cindi Creager addressed the issue of how LGBT organizations could work

to keep their messaging consistent with a bi inclusive perspective. It was a rousing discussion with many diverse perspectives and as Ann Northrop, co-host of Gay USA, noted, as someone with 39 years of experience in journalism, "People do not like complexity. The human race runs screaming from the room not to deal with this."

Northrop's suggestions for how to move forward? "I want to encourage you to encourage the conversation. Talk more. Think more. Have conversations with everybody."

Northrop had the last word at the summit, but it's my hope that this is just the beginning of a long, complex *inclusive* conversation.

*Amanda Morgan lives in New York City.*

*Note: a poccast of Robyn's keynote is available at [www.robynochs.com/resources/BiMediaSummit.html](http://www.robynochs.com/resources/BiMediaSummit.html)*

---

## Where's the 'B' in LGBT?

*By Neelima Prabhala*

"Straight and experimenting." "Gay and in denial." "Flat-out confused." These are all responses I've heard to my bisexual identity. I never really know how to go about explaining my sexual orientation to people—How can you reason with someone who claims that bisexuality doesn't even exist? I'm reminded of a Chinese proverb that says, "Those who say it cannot be done should not interrupt those who are doing it."

We live in a world that likes to put people in boxes and say that people are one thing or the other: Black or white; yes or no; gay or straight. But reality is not that

simple. There are shades of grey, for people who identify as bisexual as well as for those who identify as gay or straight or anything else. There are those who are attracted to the person, and regardless of their sex. There are those who are more attracted to men than women, and vice versa. And there are those of us who are simply attracted to all sexes. But a person who identifies as anything other than straight often has the displeasure of dealing with a world that is not accepting. Unfortunately, that is just how it is (even though that doesn't mean we cannot try to change it).

That's not what bothers me most, though. What bothers me most is the intolerance that still exists within the gay community. You would think that people who know what it's like to be discriminated against, left out, and treated like less than they are on the basis of their sexual

orientation would be more accepting and more aware of the bisexuals in their midst. I was at a BAGLY [Boston Area LGBTQ Youth] meeting a while ago and the leader just assumed that everyone present was gay, and then corrected himself to include any straight allies in the room. I felt so excluded, which is completely counter to the point of a group like BAGLY. Many GLBT events fail to acknowledge the presence of the "B" in GLBT. It's difficult enough to not be accepted by the larger society, but not being accepted in a place designed to be a safe haven for people of all sexual orientations is truly a travesty.

*Neelima lives in Boston and is an entering freshman at the University of Connecticut-Storrs. Her hobbies include photography, martial arts and sports.*



Boston Pride 2009. Photo: Lynn Levine

## Lesson #1

*By Lindsay Pratt*

A white moth  
flew in through my bathroom window,  
the draw of light  
like the moon,  
the window  
merely cracked.

As he beat his wing against the mirror—  
a threat against his beauty—  
I reached out my hand  
to help him home.

Hand out the window,  
he held on  
as if with sticky fingers  
while I waved,  
told him:

"It's safer to let go."

With a violent shake,  
he fell free,  
and I shut fast the window  
before I could find out  
if he had found his wings.

# IMPORTANT: PLEASE READ THIS!

Dear Readers,

For many years, BBWN has tried to balance our need to pay our bills with our commitment to being accessible to ALL women, regardless of their ability to pay. For 25+ years, we've just barely managed to "get bi" (pun intended), and meet our expenses.

But things are changing:

People are turning more and more to the Internet for information. Earlier this year, we began offering an electronic option for receiving *Bi Women*. This is an important change, as it allows many more women access to our newsletter, including those who—because of their living situations—cannot receive physical copies of *Bi Women* at home. And it allows our more casual readers to simply go to the [biwomenboston.org](http://biwomenboston.org) website to read *Bi Women* online. But there's a downside to the "information age": people expect things to be free and are less likely to support our work.

But it costs about \$5000 per year to produce *Bi Women* and maintain our website.

Think about it: We offer our subscribers the option of receiving *Bi*

*Women* by postal mail, electronically, or both ways. Our mailing lists – both physical and electronic – are growing, and we have a long-standing policy of sending physical copies *Bi Women* to more than 200 women's centers, LGBT centers, youth and campus groups around the United States and beyond. We request – but never require – payment.

We're also feeling the negative effects of the economic downturn and the increasing costs of supplies and postage, plus *Bi Women* is 4 pages longer than it was two years ago, further increasing both printing and postage costs.

So this year, we're trying a new strategy: instead of having rolling membership renewal throughout the year, we're changing over to an annual fundraising campaign. Every September (THAT'S NOW!), we will send out a fundraising letter and try to raise enough money to sustain BBWN for one year.

**We ask you to reach into your pocket, checkbook or credit card and support our important work. And we are hoping that those of you who are in a position to do so will support us with**

**generous donations, and those of you who can afford only a few dollars will send what you can. If you need your donation to be tax deductible, you can make your check payable to our parent organization, the Bisexual Resource Center.**

**And if it's all the same to you, please think about changing your print subscription to an electronic one.**

You can do all of this on the form enclosed with this newsletter, on the [BiWomenBoston.org](http://BiWomenBoston.org) website, or directly through PayPal, to [biwomenboston@gmail.com](mailto:biwomenboston@gmail.com). Checks can be mailed to BBWN, PO Box 301727, JP MA 02130.

Thank you for supporting YOUR newsletter, *Bi Women*, and BBWN, the oldest bi women's organization in the world! Your support is invaluable in the continuing struggle for bi visibility and the empowerment of bisexual women around the world.

Love from Robyn, your editor



Join us at one of BBWN's fabulous potluck brunches for bi women and our friends. Our brunches are held in women's homes, and ALL women are welcome. See our calendar (pp. 15 and 16) for details.



## Calendar, continued from page 16

**Saturday, November 14, 10pm-2am. Back to School Dance Party.**  
(See 9/12)

**Thursday, November 19, 7pm Bisexual Social & Support Group.**  
(See 9/2)

**Saturday, November 21, 11:30am Saturday Bi Brunch.** (See 9/19)

**Friday, November 28, Dyke Night's Fourth Fridays at the Milky Way.** (See 9/25)



---

## The "Bi Office"

is the Bisexual Resource Center, located at 29 Stanhope Street, behind Club Cafe. For info call 617-424-9595.

---

### Ongoing Events

#### Last Fridays:

**Bi Women's Rap.** 7:30-9pm at the Cambridge Women's Center, 46 Pleasant St., Cambridge. For info and discussion topics call 617-354-8807.

---

#### 2nd Mondays:

**Straight Marriage, Still Questioning.** 7pm. Email kate.e.flynn@gmail.com for more info.

---

#### 1st Wednesdays, 3rd Thursdays:

**BLISS: Bisexual Support & Social Group,** 7-8:45pm. Meets at the Bisexual Resource Center at 29 Stanhope St. in Boston. Call 617-424-9595 for info.

---

#### 3rd Saturdays:

**Biversity Bi Brunch,** 11:30am at Johnny D's, Davis Square, Somerville.

*Sign up for our new email list! Send an email to: **biwomenboston-subscribe@yahoogroups.com***



# CALENDAR

## SEPTEMBER

**Wednesday, September 2, 7-8:45pm. Bisexual Social & Support Group (BLISS)** meets 1st Wednesdays and 3rd Thursdays of each month at the BRC. All bi & bi-friendly people of all genders & orientations welcome. 1st Wednesday meetings are peer facilitated discussion groups, sometimes with a pre-selected topic or presenter. 3rd Thursday meetings are 7-8 p.m. check-ins, discussion, & announcements followed by social time at a nearby restaurant. Only want to socialize? Meet the group at or shortly after 8 p.m. in the lobby of the Boston Living Center.

**Tuesday, September 8, 7-9pm Bisexual Resource Center Board Meeting.** All bi & bi-friendly community members welcome to attend. Email Ellyn: president@biresource.net for more info. Location: BRC office.

**Saturday, September 12, 10pm-2am. Back to School Dance Party,** Dyke Night's Second Saturday at Machine, 1254 Boylston Street, Boston.

**Monday, September 14, 7pm. Straight Marriage, Still Questioning.** Peer-led support group for women in a straight marriage/relationship struggling with sexual orientation or coming out. Contact kate.e.flynn@gmail.com for info.

**Thursday, September 17, 7pm. Bisexual Social & Support Group.** (See 9/2)

**Saturday, September 19, 11:30am. Bi Brunch.** (a mixed gender bi group) Johnny D's on Holland St. in Davis Sq. in Somerville, across the street from the Davis stop on the Red Line.

**Thursday, September 24, Celebrate Bisexuality Day (CBD) is honoring new bi books this year. Come out to**

**hear selections from the second edition of *Getting Bi: Voices of Around the World*, Kinsey Zero *Through Sixty*, and another special guest writer. For details about the event visit [www.biresource.net](http://www.biresource.net).**

**Friday, September 25, Dyke Night's Fourth Fridays** at the Milky Way, The Brewery, 284 Amory Street, Jamaica Plain.

## OCTOBER

**Wednesday, October 7, 6:30-9pm. Bisexual Social & Support Group.** (See 9/2)

**Saturday, October 10, 10pm-2am. Back to School Dance Party.** (See 9/12)

**Monday, October 12, 7pm. Straight Marriage, Still Questioning.** (See 9/14)

**Tuesday, October 13, 7-9pm. BRC Board Meeting.** (See 9/8)

**Thursday, October 15, 7pm. Bisexual Social & Support Group.** (See 9/2)

**Saturday, October 17, 11:30am Saturday Bi Brunch.** (See 9/19)

**Friday, October 24, Dyke Night's Fourth Fridays at the Milky Way.** (See 9/25)

## NOVEMBER

**Wednesday, November 4, 7pm. Bisexual Social and Support Group.** (See 9/2)

**Monday, November 9, 7pm Straight Marriage, Still Questioning.** (See 9/14)

**Wednesday, November 10, 7-9pm BRC Board Meeting.** (See 9/8)

**Calendar** continues on page 15