

On (Not Yet) Coming to Terms

By K.

At this point in my life, I have yet to “come out,” mostly because I am not sure whether I need to come out, or what exactly it is I might need to come out about. After thinking carefully about my sexuality, I realized that many of the reasons I have not come out are related to my age, both because my age means I have not yet had a lot of experience with relationships or a lot of time to discover and reflect upon my own feelings and attractions, and because many of the social circumstances defining the time in which I am coming of age make my true feelings difficult to sort out. I have put together a list of ten reasons why I haven't come out:

1. At the age of twenty, I have only dated men, and with the exception of some adolescent experimentation, only had sexual experiences with men. I acknowledge that I have sexual attractions toward women, but I am uncertain of whether I can see myself in a relationship with a woman. I think I need more time and life experience to become more certain of my feelings.

2. Because I am still uncertain of my feelings, “coming out” seems awkward. Especially because I am in a relationship with a man, “coming out” seems like it would be a discussion of who I might date in the future—or perhaps of my sexual fantasies—which seems like a potentially uncomfortable discussion, especially to have with my parents! Also, I am afraid of having a label assigned to me by others when I am still uncertain of how I feel.

3. As a woman with a generally “straight” romantic/sexual history, I am not sure whether my attractions to women are “real,” or whether they are a reaction against what

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Meeting in the Borderlands: Transcending Boundaries 2009

By Amanda Morgan

I had the pleasure of attending the Transcending Boundaries Conference (TBC) for the first time this past November. To quote TBC's official website, the conference is for “bisexual/pansexual, trans/genderqueer, intersex and polyamorous people and our allies. TBC is for and about those who do not fit into simple categories.” For me, TBC was about the rare experience of feeling at home. As a bisexual person who works in the LGBT movement, I often feel like a minority within a minority. Even though recent studies suggest there are more bi people than gay, for any so-called “proof homos bis,” it rarely feels that way. Entering TBC was the first time in a long time I didn't have to continually come out as bisexual after folks assumed I was gay.

Appropriately, the first workshop I attended was on “The Stress of Hidden Bias.” The facilitator, Robin Benton, outlined what she called the three types of microaggressions: microinsult, microinvalidation, microassault. As a bisexual person and a woman of color I experience all three of these on a regular basis and I wonder if many of you do as well. A microinsult can be rude behavior, insensitivity or equating bisexuality with perversion, instability or confusion. A microinvalidation can consist of excluding you, delivering a backward compliment (*You're pretty sane/monogamous for a bisexual. You're not like those other bis, etc.*) A microassault is a deliberate attempt to hurt you physically or psychologically, such as

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My Queer & Fluid Bisexuality

By Lividia I. Violette

The realization that I liked both sexes/genders started around kindergarten. I had no idea what it was, I just knew I had a crush on most of the kids in my class, (save for the glue-eating kids). I was very fond of pretty boys and the very pretty girls. I was a shy person and never really acted on these attractions for females until much later in life. I was still confused about whether or not it was right to even feel that way. Moreover, at first I wasn't quite as attracted to the gals as I was to the guys. Girls took longer to grow on me. I certainly enjoyed a pretty face, but kissing a girl wasn't something that interested me much until my teen years.

In junior high, a friend came out to me as bisexual; that was the very first time I heard the term. In high school, I



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HONOR ROLL

Amanda Morgan
Celian
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Gail Zacharias
Jen Bonardi
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K.
Katelynn Bishop
Katrina Chaves
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Kitty Constantine
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Lauren Spencer
Lavidia Violette
Lina Judith Drake
Linda McMahan
Liza A.
Robyn Ochs
Sara de Souza
Sarah Rowley
Stephany Mahaffey

And others. You
know who you are!
Thank you.

***Bi Women* is published
quarterly.**

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Introducing Bi Women's new Assistant Editor:



FROM KATRINA:

The theme of this issue is "Bi Youth." As a twenty-something bisexual woman, this seems to be a fitting moment to join the *Bi Women* team.

When coming out left me feeling isolated in both gay and straight communities of Rhode Island and Massachusetts, I wanted to find spaces that were both feminist and accepting of all queer identities. For a while, I worried this would be impossible, as many straight friends suddenly became suspicious of my identity, and in the eyes of many lesbians, I was just another girl on her way to becoming gay. Luckily, *Bi Women* was one of several lifesavers I was introduced to; it served as a reassuring reminder that bisexuality was not a label to be equated with words like "crazy" or "confused." Years later, as an out-and-proud Political Science and Women's Studies major nearing graduation, I am excited to be the new Assistant Editor for a newsletter which represents and discusses bi/queer individuals in our own words. Putting the B back in LGBT is no small or simple task, which further motivates me to do my part in supporting *Bi Women*.

Related to this youth theme, we hear many vibrant voices in essays by Sara de Souza, Stephany Mahaffey, Liza A., K., Kitty Constantine, Lividia Violette, Celian, as well as a poem by Lena Judith Drake. We learn

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Next in *Bi Women*

The theme for the next issue:

Bodies

Let's talk about our bodies: Body image. Gendered bodies. Bodies and health. Changing bodies. Bodies converging and merging. Bodies as objects and/or subjects of attraction. Sexuality and the body. We welcome your essays, poetry, artwork, letters, and other forms of musings.

**Submissions for the next issue
are due by May 5th.**

Send your submissions
and suggestions
to biwomeneditor@gmail.com

Upcoming themes will include:
Bi, But...; Fantasy; Choice;
Out at Work; Faith & Religion;
Intersectionality;

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

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.**

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: Yemisi Ilesanmi, (Abuja), Nigeria

By Robyn Ochs

In July 2009 I attended a three-day LGBT human rights conference in Copenhagen associated with the World Out Games. There were over a thousand human rights activists present, from many countries. In an attempt by the organizers to insert some “B” into the program, I was invited to moderate a plenary panel on the second day of the conference.

At an earlier plenary session, several people had risen to challenge the organizers during the question period: it was unacceptable, they said, that only three of the 24 plenary speakers at the conference were transgender. The next day, during the plenary session I moderated, a woman stood up and pointed out that none of the plenary speakers was bisexual. “I am a proud bisexual woman from Nigeria,” she said in a proud and powerful voice, and I was in awe of her.

She is an obvious choice for this column.

Robyn Ochs: Yemisi, please tell us about yourself.

Yemisi Ilesanmi: I am a 34-year-old single parent. I grew up in Lagos, Nigeria. I am a law school graduate and work in Abuja as a full time trade unionist. I am currently in the UK studying for my postgraduate law degree in gender, sexuality and human rights. I am proudly bisexual, feminist and an atheist.

RO: What is your definition of bisexuality?

YI: I would define bisexuality as the ability to be attracted to both sexes, but then that would be putting us in a box and assuming that there are just two sexes, male and female. Naming comes with its own politics and I try as much as possible not to succumb to politics of naming and pegging people



down based on stereotyped definitions. That said, I would say bisexuality to me is what I call genderless attraction – the ability to be attracted to a person regardless of his/her gender.

RO: How did you come to identify as bi? How old were you?

YI: I did not put a name on my sexual preference or my lack of one (laughs) until much later. I have always been attracted to the same sex and the opposite sex but I had always tried to deny that part of me and nurture the heterosexual part, since that was what society promoted and accepted as normal. I was quite young when I had my first same-sex attraction – it hit me like a tsunami wave and I was quite shocked by it. I could not put a name on it, or discuss it with anyone. At that age in my society, I was not expected to be discussing any sort of sexual attraction! With time and enlightenment, I realized I do not have to deny who I am and there really is nothing to be ashamed of. To the contrary, I see it as a step above the accepted heterosexuality because my feelings or attractions for someone are not based on gender but on the person. It does not matter whether you are man or woman or transgender, it's the person inside that I am attracted to and for me attraction comes in different shapes and sizes. After all, variety really is the spice of life!

RO: You mentioned that you identify as atheist. Were you raised in a religious family, and if so, what impact did this have on your coming out?

YI: I was raised in a very religious Christian family, and I started studying religious books at an early age. As a voracious reader with inquisitive mind, I realized quite young that the portrayal of God in the holy books as a war-hungry, bloodthirsty fiend, keen on revenge for a particular race, certainly did not go down well with my picture of a omnipotent, omniscient omni-benevolent, all-loving god. It didn't take me long to discover the word atheism and I heaved a sigh of relief that there are some out there who prefer logic to superstitions and fantasies. Being an atheist has made me a better person. I appreciate people for what they are, accept responsibility for my actions or inactions, give myself a pat on the back for achievements and chastise myself for disappointments. Pleasures and pains are life's twin fountains. Atheism is about embracing reality no matter how difficult it is to accept and that has helped me to accept my sexual orientation because I would rather be true to myself in all aspects of my life. My bisexuality is part of me. I have learned to embrace it to get the best possible me. Admitting to being an atheist *and* a bisexual is more likely to attract an horrified glare, but I know that I do not need to be religious to be moral, loving and caring, and neither do I need to be heterosexual before I can experience real love and sexual satisfaction. I am comfortable in my skin.

RO: You are quite an outspoken woman. When you stood up at the plenary that I was moderating and challenged the organizers about the total absence of bisexual plenary

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speakers, I was very impressed by your eloquence and your passion. How did you first get involved in activism?

YI: It was the mid-90s and the military regime was in power. Like every other sector in Nigeria, the educational system was badly hit and the student unions became a driving force for the call for a democratic government. I was a student union leader and many of us got suspended from school, arrested and detained so many times for protesting against the military regimes and their puppets in power in the educational sector. I was involved in human rights activism as well as gender issues. I founded the National Association of Nigerian Female Students to challenge our marginalization and to encourage female students to actively participate in student unionism and issues of governance. It was from student activism that I started working with other progressive organizations in the country like human rights organizations and the labor movement. I started working full time for the Nigeria Labor Congress in 2002.

RO: Please tell us about the LGBT movement in Nigeria.

YI: The LGBT movement in Nigeria is still in its infancy. In fact, it was more of an underground thing before the attempt to introduce the hopefully doomed anti-same-sex bill that sought to further criminalize same-sex relationships. Nigeria is one of the commonwealth countries still stuck with the colonial legacy of sodomy laws. Rather than repeal this outrageous and degrading law, Nigeria is seeking to further criminalize same-sex relationships. This has actually brought the LGBT movements and other human rights organizations in Nigeria together. LGBT organizations are still in early stages of development. Hopefully they will get stronger and be able to exist without fear of criminalization. The main problem is that an LGBT organization cannot be officially recognized as such because of the sodomy laws, since same-sex relationships are considered criminal offenses. We must continue to fight for the decriminalization of same-sex relationships everywhere.

RO: What is it like to be a bi-identified woman in Nigeria? Do you know many others? Are there other bi people involved in the LGBT rights movement in your country? Do you feel fully accepted by your fellow activists?

YI: If you choose to be open and honest about your sexual orientation in Nigeria, life can be difficult, but if you choose to be hypocritical about it or live in denial, life might be tolerable – it depends on what makes life worth living for you. Hypocrisy seems to thrive in a society like Nigeria and many are just happy for you to lie and deny something so central to your being just to be accepted. I do know many bisexuals, lesbians and gay men in Nigeria; some acknowledge this only to a select few while many are in constant denial. Remember that same-sex relationships

are considered criminal offenses in Nigeria. People cannot truly be who they are without fear of repercussions. Even though I work in a progressive organization with trade unionists and human rights activists, I cannot deceive myself and say I am totally accepted by my fellow activists. I am used to snide remarks. Many follow the “don’t ask, don’t tell” attitude. Colleagues would rather refer to my same-sex partner as my friend rather than a lover or partner and I find that annoying. I am a very out person in my workplace and in my social life generally, and I treat any snide remark as an opportunity to address the ignorance of the person making it.

RO: In your lifetime, what changes have you seen in Nigeria for LGBT people?

YI: I am happy that many are coming out to identify with the cause; I do hope that discrimination based on sexual orientation will be a thing of the past and the pending bill in the National Assembly will be voted down by right-thinking people who value democracy and human rights for all.

RO: As a “proud bisexual woman,” how do people respond to you? Do you have any interesting stories to share?

YI: I do not allow people to get under my skin or affect me with their ignorance. When you are in a same-sex relationship people do not want to accept that you are in a real relationship, they would rather refer to your partner as your friend rather than lover. Coming from a particularly bad same-sex break up, I was told that I can’t be heartbroken because a girl can’t break a girl’s heart! Finding support can be difficult in a homophobic society. Many same-sex breakups can be blamed on the unhealthy, ridiculous demands of the society wanting you to compromise, dictate to you how to live your life in order to be accepted and considered as normal. It is indeed a sick society that needs to be healed.

RO: You have travelled quite extensively. What contacts do you have with LGBT activists in other countries? Does your knowledge of or contacts with bi or LGBT activism in other countries influence your activism here? Do you see a value in transnational activism?

YI: Yes, I do see a value in transnational activism. As a trade unionist, workers of the world have always seen the sense in uniting globally to fight for better working conditions. And LGBT issues are workers’ issues – there is a need to make sure that workplace discrimination on the ground of sexual orientation is not tolerated anywhere in the world. Trade unions, especially from Third World countries in Africa and Asia, must see this as a key workers’ issue. An

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about the new biyouth.org website, and Lara Zielinsky reviews *Map*, a coming of age (and out) memoir by Audrey Beth Stein and interviews the author. Jennifer DiOrio discusses her new coming-of-age play, "OFFSIDES."

Also in this issue, Amanda Morgan offers her perspectives on 2009's Transcending Boundaries Conference. Lauren Spencer discusses *Creating Change 2010* and Amanda Morgan adds commentary about the first-ever day-long Bi Institute held at this conference. Our "Bis Around the World" feature takes us to Nigeria, our "Bi of the Month" is Bisexual Resource Center President and former *Bi Women* editor Ellyn Ruthstrom, Kim shares a poem and, as always, we offer our calendar of fun-filled events in and around Boston.

And, bi the way, please consider writing something for the next issue! The theme is "Bodies." And we want to hear from you!

Warmly,
Katrina Chaves



BBWN's Valentine's Day Brunch at Jen's

HELP WANTED

BBWN is an all-volunteer organization. Rather than 2 or 3 women doing 100 hours of work, our goal is to have 100 women doing 2 or 3 hours each. Below is a list of volunteer opportunities. If there is a project that interests you, please contact Robyn (biwomeneditor@gmail.com) for more information.

Host a brunch

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. Let us know if you are interested in hosting a brunch.

Be Our Brunch Diva

Take responsibility for scheduling and serving as point person for our monthly potluck brunches. We schedule brunches 3 months in advance, and we already have brunches lined up through June. This is a very easy -- but important! -- job.

Be Our Mailing Diva

Take responsibility for scheduling and coordinating our quarterly newsletter stuffings.

Pre-Pride Brunch

Most years, BBWN hosts a brunch on the morning of Boston's LGBT Pride Day (June 12th, this year). We're looking for a woman or three to coordinate this event.

Do You Know Web Design?

We're looking for someone to maintain biwomenboston.org, our new website, which uses WordPress. It's the perfect volunteer job, as you can do it from home, in your pajamas, or even in your birthday suit.

Are You Looking for an Internship?

Are you a student 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.

And finally (this will be fun!):

Next year is the BRC's 25th anniversary and we're gearing up to build a killer float for 2010's Boston Pride Parade in honor of this auspicious milestone. If you're interested in being a part of the float committee, or if you have an idea for a float concept, please contact Carla at carla@imperial-jewett.com. We will be holding several planning sessions starting in December or January.

The Road Less Travelled

By Sara de Souza

During the Fall of Grade 10 at my “all-girls’ school,” I recall developing a crush on someone who at first glance I thought was a boy. I believed my feelings were irrational and tried to push them out of my mind. But they wouldn’t go away. A year went by and I asked a very close friend if I could try kissing her. To my surprise she accepted and a mutual friend photographed our simulated kiss. Unfortunately, thanks to photo index on the disposable camera I had, the girls at school also found out about the infamous “kiss.” I found myself suddenly enmeshed in gossip and glares from girls I rarely spoke to, and soon-to-be ex-friends. I came out almost a year later, before the summer I left for university. I recall one experience with a friend during our commute to Toronto. I blurted out to her on the subway, “Oh, by the way, I’m not straight...I’m bisexual.” She told me I couldn’t just throw something like that out there, and kept quiet. Our outing seemed to progress normally until we parted, but we never spoke again. I tried to chalk up her rejection to how close-minded institutional religion had made her. But really, we went to the same high school and I had friends who identified as Catholic and still accepted me. The experience just taught me that not everyone will accept you for who you are, and you just have to live with that, despite how hurtful it may be. During my first year at McMaster University I was able to “make up” for the missed prom and attended our LGBTQ Centre’s annual formal, where I was met with one of the biggest surprises of my life! At McMaster, I had garnered somewhat of a reputation for being an activist engaged in feminist movement and LGBTQ organizing on campus. Several of my residence hall friends naturally assumed that my participation in the formal was evidence of my activist identity and not my newfound bisexuality. While at the formal, themed “Fairy Masquerade,” four of my friends randomly decided it would be a good idea to get dressed up and come surprise me. I had no clue they would do

this, even though they all helped me get ready pre-event. I was so happy and felt so loved. I thanked them for coming and couldn’t stop telling everyone how happy I was! This was definitely one of the highlights of my coming out experience. Today, four years later, I still identify as bisexual. Yet, my understanding of who I’m attracted to is continually evolving. After attending my first bisexual support group, The B-Side at the Sherbourne Health Centre in Toronto, I came to understand that my sexuality is more fluid and that I am more pansexual in terms of whom I find myself attracted to. For the first time, I found I was part of creating a bi community, something I had never experienced prior. After meeting one transwoman, I picked up a copy of Julia Serano’s, *The Whipping Girl*, and it honestly changed my life to recognize that the relationship between being bisexual and wanting to explore my own understanding of gender is something other people could relate to. Throughout the years that I have identified as bisexual, I have been met with varied degrees of acceptance from friends, family and strangers. Yet, I remain true to my beliefs. There are times that I want to believe that I am a lesbian, but then I realize that I have to separate stereotypes from reality, including those that made me believe that my lack of having a partner of an expected gender somehow made me unworthy of love. I know that I will one day find a partner who I can love, and their gender won’t be of consequence to me. I know that my sexuality has been shaped by both positive and negative experiences and it has made me into a more empathetic being who welcomes fluidity and gender diversity. If nothing else, I try to help create space for people to just be themselves in all their beauty. I just wish that I were a better friend to myself sometimes! Lastly, as a bisexual feminist who also is learning to manage her anxiety, finding helpful mental health services

has improved my confidence in navigating my relationships. I have seen three therapists in my life and never has my sexuality come up until the last therapist. I didn’t speak about it because I felt I would be rejected and that it just wasn’t “relevant.” This attitude is something I believe a lot of bisexual youth also have in common with me. They believe that somehow their sexuality doesn’t “fit” into therapy, or they don’t know how it does. This is why having a supportive therapist is essential. I managed to find one through a local clinic which specializes in anxiety disorders. I encourage anyone reading this to also check out their local clinics and “interview” therapists on their opinions around sexuality. This is what I did and it really made all the difference. Although you can never tell whether someone is harboring implicit biases you can try to get a sense of where they stand on the issue of bisexuality. One quality that makes me proud to be bisexual would have to be my acceptance of gender diversity amongst people. For me being bi and queer enables me to appreciate unique gender qualities and trans/queer gender identities. I have recognized that the people that I am the most connected to also appreciate my queer gender identity and love me for it.

I believe that through my intersecting identities, mainly as a racialized woman of South Asian heritage as well as a bisexual woman, my siblings can learn through my history of coming out. I want to teach my younger siblings (who are 11 and 10 years old) how important it is to be true to oneself while simultaneously being the “safe space” which enables others to do the same!

Sara is a 24-year-old queer feminist from Toronto, Ontario who actively participates in her local anti-violence movement.

Coming Out in My Twenties

By *Stephany Mahaffey*

I am from Miami, Florida, a place known for its openness to sexual diversity. I was in ninth grade when a friend who was sleeping over asked me if I wanted to “fool around.” I froze up. I told her I was straight. She shrugged her shoulders, rolled over, and went to sleep. I couldn’t sleep. I laid there hoping she wasn’t asleep. Hoping she would ask again. Or, hoping that each unintentional contact we made was intentional. It was a long night. There were no Gay/Straight Alliances in my high school and I wasn’t comfortable talking about my feelings with anyone. It was not until college that I would have another opportunity to explore this part of my identity.

At 21 years old, I thought I had it all figured out. And then I moved to Texas. I unintentionally went running back to the closet and only frequented the “gayborhood” in Dallas with my gay male friends. They would constantly tell me that I was a lesbian and I should just come out. But that wasn’t it at all. Within four years, I had completely lost my connection with “the other side” of my sexuality. I enrolled in a graduate program at Texas Woman’s University and my world was reopened by the department’s commitment to diversity of all types. It was here that I truly had an identity crisis. I was 25 years old and didn’t know “what” I was. On one hand, I had a close bisexual female friend who encouraged me to wear a visible bisexual identity. She felt this was important politically. On the other hand, I had another close bisexual female friend who was in a relationship with a man. She didn’t wear her identity visibly and told me to do what I wanted. The problem was, I didn’t know what I wanted.

On a trip to San Francisco for a convention, my two worlds collided and so did my identities. One of my best gay male friends was living in San Francisco and he offered to take a few of us out with his friends on our first night. The first thing he said to me

when we got out of the taxi was, “So, are you still bisexual?” I screamed in delight and made him repeat himself to my Texas friends. It was validated, I was bisexual. It wasn’t just a dream or delusion. The following day, I was processing my identity crisis with a female friend at the convention who, I thought, identified as a lesbian. She looked at me and clearly spoke, “Well, I think the reason you are confused is because people see you with a boyfriend and they assume you are straight. They call you straight. You don’t correct them and a part of you gets lost.” She wasn’t trying to be condescending, as she is a few years older than I am. She revealed that she identified as a bisexual too. I hit the floor. I knew this woman and her partner for years and I had no idea. She said that she never actually identifies herself as a lesbian. People see her with her partner and they just assume she is a lesbian. Just like I did. It was this conversation that opened me up to being more open with my sexual identity to others.

I tested the waters with friends and acquaintances. I told my story with a group of friends at dinner one night and a friend came to me after to say how powerful it had been for her to hear my story. She said she was glad to hear that she wasn’t the “only one.” After I realized I could help other people figure out their own sexualities, I started opening up to everyone. My parents, my colleagues at school and at work, and anyone else who is eager to listen. Being open to my family and friends has been the most liberating part of my elongated coming out experience. I don’t think I was ready at 21 years old to open up to the whole world. I needed to know that there were other people out there like me, and different than me, who were also bisexual. It was also healing to know that they also struggled with their own identity.

I still have moments of panic when I feel my identity is challenged.

For example, filling out a survey for bisexual research there was part where it asked to identify your longest same-sex relationship. I started to freak out. I hadn’t ever had an extensive relationship with a woman. Does that mean that I am not bisexual? It took processing with friends and allies to remember that my identity is just that... it is mine. Mine, mine, mine!

My advice for young bisexual women would be to accept yourself as you are, wherever and whoever that is. Talk to people in the community who are open to helping you figure things out. In my experience, everyone was open to helping because they had all experienced some level of confusion in their identity or loved someone who has. It has also been helpful for me to read books about bisexuals’ life experiences. I have many “Aha” moments while reading about other bisexual persons’ experiences. “Aha! That is exactly how I felt laying in bed that night.” “Aha! This woman has had the same struggles that I have had!” I am relieved to know that a lot of people’s sexuality is fluid and that doesn’t make me crazy. That just makes me cool.

Stephany, 28, is a graduate student at Texas Woman’s University. She hopes that her story will be helpful to others.

Leaving the Bubble: Coming Out All Over Again in College

By Liza A.

Sometime between my freshman and junior years of high school, almost all of my close friends came out as bi, trans, gay, or lesbian. Our few straight friends watched in disbelief as we came out one by one, wondering how we had all ended up in the same social group. We laughed and joked that “all our friends are gay,” but I know many of us appreciated having a safe environment where we could talk openly about both girls and boys, as well as issues like coming out and discrimination. My friends understood me, and we became each other’s support group.

When we graduated last June, our bubble popped. Luckily, I ended up at a small liberal arts college in Pennsylvania where the phrase “don’t be so heteronormative” is tossed around so often that it almost sounds cliché. I promised myself that I wouldn’t hide my sexuality in college, yet it was kind of a shock for me all of a sudden to be surrounded by so many straight people, away from my safety net of understanding friends. I realized that entering a completely new community automatically put me back in the closet, so I found myself pretending to be straight, just because it was so much easier than having to come out to different people over and over again. I awkwardly avoided the topic of dating, and when asked what TV shows I watched, I deliberately omitted two of my favorites: *The L Word* and *South of Nowhere*.

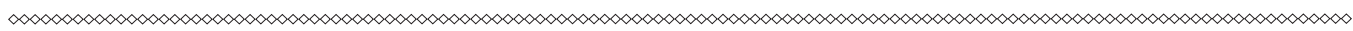
It didn’t help that a few weeks into classes, we had an event called “Screw Your Roommate,” where freshmen set their roommates or suitemates up on a blind date. No one ever asked me if I might want to be set up with a girl. The assumption was just made that everyone wanted to be set up with someone of the opposite gender, leaving LGBT students to bring up the issue themselves, or if they weren’t comfortable coming out

yet, to remain silent and accept their match. I didn’t say anything, and since I like both boys and girls, it was fine with me when I got set up with a guy on the rugby team.

The guilt of pretending I was straight ate at me constantly. One night I was talking to some friends, and I accidentally referenced *The L Word* in conversation. Realizing what I’d said, I rushed to add that I’d only seen it because I had a friend who’s a lesbian. I mentally beat myself up about making the excuse, telling myself that I was being ridiculous and had no reason to keep hiding, especially after I’d promised myself that I would do just the opposite in college. I couldn’t sleep that night. After tossing and turning, I got out of bed and drafted a private note on Facebook to all of my closest friends at school, explaining that I was bi and that I felt silly for making it seem otherwise. Although it was tempting to put off sending the note, I knew it was now or never. I pressed send.

I got back into bed anxious and shaking, but I also felt relieved. Over the next few days I received quite a few responses. Each one was positive, letting me know that people really respected me for what I did, and that they were glad I felt comfortable sharing with them. I started attending meetings of my college’s Sexuality and Gender Alliance as well as the Queer Discussion Group, and I feel that I’m in a good place now in terms of being out to friends and having resources for support. At the same time though, I know that I’ll have to keep going through similar processes in the future, coming out to new people as I enter new communities and make new friends going forward.

Liza is a college freshman who loves music, photography, traveling, and hanging out with friends.



What we saw

By Kim

I can taste the blonde in her hair
speak orange to the warning of her lips
smell yellow from her environment
she didn’t notice me listening to the red around her heart
But I saw the halo of purple all around us
her feet shifted with the quickness of white
and I felt the brown in her touch
though metaphorically speaking, she may have meant to make me feel pink
The blue crept into her eyes
and I tried to return a matching red but only green emerged
she could tell I was struggling
so we both opted for black

*Kim, a.k.a. The B word Poet is a 29-year-old bisexual writer and activist in Cleveland, Ohio.
(www.shewrites.com/profile/TheBWordPoet)*



The New Bi Youth Website at biyouth.org

By Robyn Ochs

“Are there any resources out there specifically for bisexual youth?” This is the most common question I am asked as a speaker. And until very recently, the answer was “No.” There are a number of resources for LGBT youth on the web, but few resources focus specifically on bi-identified youth. So this past summer, with the help of a number of volunteers, I created a website for bi, fluid and questioning youth. The website is a project of the Bisexual Resource Center, and can be found at biyouth.org. This site is a work in progress, and it is our hope that bi youth themselves will provide its direction and focus. Please take a look, and let us know what you think. Whatever your age – and especially if you are a youth – your feedback is welcome.



Below are a few words of wisdom from bi youth that are already posted on the site:

Ashleigh, age 15: Be who you are! Embrace your true self. Even when/if people put you down, they only do so because they don't understand. (Generally, hate is ignorance.) So stand up tall, and believe in yourself. It can be hard, but in the end it will be worth it because in some way your interactions with others will have changed their perspective.

Kitty, age 22: There's nothing wrong with you. You don't have to choose one side, straight or gay. Bi isn't a phase and you're attracted to whomever you're attracted to, there's no changing that.

Ellie, age 20: Remember that your sexuality is more fluid than society would lead you to think. Just as it can be hard for a person raised in a hetero-normative culture to acknowledge same-sex attractions, it can also be hard for a queer-identified person to acknowledge opposite-sex attractions. Don't let anyone, including yourself, force you into a box or deny the validity of your feelings. Being queer doesn't mean being gay 100% of the time. It's about the identity you choose, the community you have, and how you see the world.

Casey, age 19: There's nothing wrong with you. Your sexuality is fluid. However long or short a time it takes to get there, embrace the path to finding just who you are and the perfect way to identify and express yourself as such. Be safe, be true to yourself, live and love with all your heart.

Skipping the Cookie Cutter

By Kitty Constantine

My name is Kitty Constantine. I'm 21 and have identified as bisexual since I was 19 years old. I learned about bisexuality in my acquisition of general knowledge of sexual orientations in the world. High school was a place where you were expected to be straight. Homosexuality was a joke, so one could not even think about being bi. In time, there were two boys who came out about their sexuality, but no girl at that high school has ever admitted to being anything other than straight. Having a strong religious background in the Christian religion of Pentecostalism, I believed homosexuality was "sinful" but I held the chauvinist view that if it would please my "husband," I would consent to participating in sex with another woman. It was only meeting my boyfriend, who also identified as bisexual, that I gained the courage to explore the homosexual side of my sexuality. It's only been in the alternative lifestyle communities, with the friends I've made there, that I have found true acceptance. I am not open about my sexuality with the community and the people I grew up with. My family is aware of my other alternative inclinations as a BDSM slave, but it would break their religious hearts to learn I was bisexual. If I was ever confronted outright about my sexuality, I would not deny being bisexual, but I will not throw it in their faces and purposely seek to create conflict. I know who I am and what I want from life. Nothing can take that assurance from me. My role models are people who fight for my right to freely express the homosexual side of my sexuality. My role models are the ones who are educators on how we achieved the freedoms we have today. It still amazes me how many people do not know about the Stonewall Riots. My support comes from the BDSM and Leather communities I involve myself in. By getting involved with people like myself, I have been learning and growing in my lifestyle so I can support and educate others. To those who are still considering and exploring their sexuality, don't be so quick to adopt labels. Don't worry if your experience is not a cookie cutter mold of what you expect the idea of "sexuality" to be. Be honest with yourself about what you desire. If you deny yourself pleasure and try to conform to other peoples' expectations, you'll never know anything more than the pain of never knowing what happiness you could have had.

Kitty is a student with a focus in Psychology and Creative Writing, who lives and studies on the East Coast with her wonderful queer roommate and her two cats.

inside, a few inches

By Lena Judith Drake

I

a naked man is a very frightening thing,
my mother says, and as for the videos,
i remember the thick black pubic hair
where a baby's head, barely visible,
pried through;

a boy, voice squeaking, sneaking
out of his bedroom at night with piles of white sheets,
his big brother or father or uncle or the narrator of the
video
a paid actor, and not very good,
stopping him and explaining ejaculation, nocturnally,

but we don't know semen is white. the boy said alien
blood,
and blood is red, isn't it? or, alien,
green? maybe?
and does our blood, girl blood, pour out of us?
how much?

II

when i am 12, cybersex is the new thing, and when i am
12 and a half,
i lose my online virginity,
at my parents' computer in the kitchen.
i say i am 17, in biology in a high school,
and that seems so the thing to say.
he is 16. i am the older woman.

we are writers, so we battle a sorcerer in an igloo in the
winter,
and then i wear white furs, wait for him on a bed.
we have ambiguous romance novel sex, free of "cunt"s,
and full of "inside"s.
we may have even married. pretty good prose
for a first time. he is probably really 16.

in the instant message box, asterisks decorating my fake
name,
he asks me to be his girlfriend, then calls me a bitch.
i uninstall AIM quietly, while my parents make
sandwiches.
i think he will find me; i go to the bathroom and cry.

III

first period: science class with the stoned teacher

we stand waiting in bunches and lines at the door.
i go to look, my panties coated, brown sludge.

i stare down at my underwear in disbelief
in the handicapped stall of the bathroom, like i am in
kindergarten again
playing with toys for too long and accidents and hiding
my tights.
and then i think, oh blood. brown blood.

there is a girl, poised, with beautiful hair, whose parents
vote conservative,
and she has pads in the back pocket of her denim purse.
she gives me one. i go to dance class later,
roll around on the floor, feeling like i have a mattress
between my legs,
like i have blood spotting my stretch pants.

IV

the first first time: every image is soft, the yellowed lace
and lavender
in her bedroom, 15-year-old love notes with inkwell pens,
and her kissing me fiercely,
closed mouths until we try tongue, every image soft until

i pretend not to be wet, grab toilet paper from the
bathroom
to wipe it up before it goes through my jeans and she
knows that i want her.
even though she probably knows already,
even though i run my fingers on her spine and lower,
and leave with lips more chapped
than when i got there.
but always with clothes. i still have to hide it.
i am young.

she is a cutter, but i tell her i will never leave her, forever,
ever, ever.
i go into the bathroom, shake, gag, wipe more from
myself, then come back.
should we take off our shirts? i ask.
yes. it's so soon, she says.
6 months is not very soon, i think, but i don't say it.
areolae pale pink. should we take off our pants, too? i ask.

V

the other first time: i come because i think he's going to
come,
humping through pajama pants,
but with everything else, i'm strangely disconnected. a
witness.

inside, continued on next page

inside, continued from previous page

i am seeing a naked man, curled at the end of the bed.
it is not very frightening.

the moment the tip is inside me (his cock, my cunt,
let's not
make this another romance novel)
i think to myself, i am not a virgin.
and also it only hurts a little.
and also this meijer lube sucks. profoundly, i note
it's not very profound.

VI

two fingers all of a sudden, not one at a time,
even boys sometimes know one at a time,
she tells me i have cysts,
and also that i should stop having sex until it's with
someone special.

my mother asks later if the speculum was too big,
since i'm a virgin, for jesus, for marriage.

the gynecologist is right, at least, about the cysts.
the day before thanksgiving, two hour cramps stab-
shuttling to my brain,
i puke up something orange in the wicker wastebasket,
and it makes my tooth enamel squeaky.
the clot-rope sludging out of my cunt,
the trickles of blood sliding down like firemen
all dressed in bright red, palms to the pole, uterus
clenching.

VII

it's comforting,
coming from missionary, or with his thumb while i'm
on top,
socks still on, a bag of jalapeno chips by the bed where
we plant our tissues
after we blow our noses.
we talk statistical illiteracy,
while he re-names both of my breasts, with permission.
i am saying things i haven't said in a long time,
things like "in love", except i don't shake as much, or
at all.

my legs are unshaved and scabless
when the planned parenthood nurse practitioner
tells me my vulva is beautiful, but my cervix
is gorgeous.
the pills are small enough to slip through my teeth,
but i haven't forgotten any yet.

i soak in cold, wash in warm, when the blood comes
out of me.
my fingers are telling you this story, because they've
touched,
because they know.

Lena is a 20-year-old bisexual woman.

Be confident in **yourself**,
YOU are the only one who knows
your own **true** sexuality.
- Jarrett, 18

- Are you a young person with questions about bisexuality or queer sexuality?
- Want to know more about coming out?
- What are the resources for queer youth?

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Find the answers to these questions and more at
BiYouth.org!

BiYouth.org

OFFSIDES, a new play

Robyn Ochs has commented on the woeful shortage of media that deal respectfully with bisexual characters. Her comment got me thinking about my own script and its writing process.

I am currently adapting OFFSIDES, my fictional screenplay, for the stage. This teen drama includes a bisexual main character. Originally, the screenplay had two main characters, one bicurious and the other lesbian. However, the structure of the stage adaptation improved with the inclusion of a lone main character. Not surprisingly, writing about one bisexual character was easier, since such an individual reflects my own bisexual experience. I also found myself changing the focus of the story in general. Originally, the lesbian character “comes out” to her mother. Instead of a coming out story, the adaptation of OFFSIDES is a universal coming-of-age story about Marissa, a star soccer player from a financially-strapped family who makes an unfortunate decision and has to pay the consequences, learning and growing all the while. Although Marissa is bisexual, I do not draw attention to her process. Her bisexuality is no big deal.

More than anything, my main goal was to create a story with which almost anyone could identify. I wanted OFFSIDES to offer insights on complicated human experience.

A local stage director in New Jersey is slated to produce OFFSIDES sometime in the Fall of 2010. More information will follow.

-Jennifer DiOrio, emerging playwright/screenwriter

K., *continued from page 1*

has bothered me in relationships with men. I am especially turned off by men who seem to put up a front in order to display a certain type of masculinity. I feel I am more attracted to femininity, but I am uncertain of whether I am attracted to femininity in male-bodied people, female-bodied people, or both.

4. I can't help but notice in my relationships with men how much their ideas of sex have been influenced by a particular type of pornography. I have expressed to partners my frustration that it seems a sexual encounter isn't considered “sex” unless it culminates with a man putting his dick in my vagina, and I often feel that they just humor me with a little more of this or that, but are not open to a different kind of sexual experience. I also find the female body very beautiful, and I am curious about what sex would be like without dick involved, but I am uncertain of whether this is simply curiosity/fantasy, or part of a “true” sexual identity.

5. I am also uncertain of whether my attractions to women result from the over-sexualization of the female body in our culture. If so, I am not sure whether

it is “just a fantasy,” or whether I could be in a relationship with a woman.

6. I sometimes feel like I can't own the word “bi” or “queer” because I look so *straight!* I also feel nervous about approaching a woman I'm attracted to because I know I am very normative in my gender presentation, and I'm just not sure if queer women would be interested in me.

7. Although I sometimes want to believe I am beyond such concerns, I know that part of me fears the reactions I will encounter from others if I am to acknowledge my attractions to women or come out as bisexual or queer, especially from certain family members.

8. I also know that I am not immune to internalizing biphobia or homophobia, and although I am very accepting of others' various sexual identities, I know that a part of me isn't ready to accept a queer identity as my own.

9. If I were to come out, or adopt a label for my sexuality, I am uncertain of what label would fit me. I find myself very attracted to many genderqueer people, and although I know the word “bisexual” need not imply that I limit my attractions to two genders, I think I would be more comfortable using

a label that reflects my attraction to gender expression that goes beyond the binary... But I am not sure what that word is.

10. At this point in my life, I am content not to pick a label, because I want to be open to discovering my potential to be attracted to different people.

In closing, I know that many of the reasons I have not come out relate to the fact that I am just not sure what to come out “as”! However, I realize that by not coming out at all, I am assumed to be straight, and politically I find this problematic. I hope, then, to keep reflecting on and realizing my attractions because I want to come out as *something* at some point. In the meantime, I have to say that I feel so very welcome in the bi community, despite the fact that I do not (yet?) identify as bisexual, so I would like to thank everyone who has made this community a place where what you call yourself is not nearly as important as what it is you believe in!

K. is currently studying Sociology. She spends a lot of time thinking about gender and sexuality in the (overlapping) contexts of her personal life and academic work.

Lividia, *continued from page 1*

learned of a few other bisexuals, mostly girls. When our discussion meandered to sexuality in my senior English class, one girl came out of the closet. I can't recall her real name, but friends called her "Twitch." Our teacher, (one of my favorites) however, thought that bisexuals were just *greedy*. He said there was no such thing as a "true" bisexual. I never stood up to correct my teacher or defend Twitch. I regret that I allowed my timidity to silence me. I didn't know at the time that he was expressing bi erasure and biphobia. There was no GSA in my high school to consult about the matter. I didn't even hear the term "Gay/Straight Alliance" until long after high school.

By graduation, I was still attracted to guys, although not as strongly. To me, the less masculine a guy was the better. I think this was really the beginning of my fondness for men with androgynous and feminine appeal. My interest in women slowly but steadily increased, yet a better understanding of my sexuality did not really sink in until I was about 20. After this major epiphany, the first thing I did was search the local bookstore. I had to find out more about bisexuality. I had to know how many others like me were out there and how they might be found. At this time, I was aware of only a handful of other bisexuals in my city of Arlington, Texas. At the bookstore, I found one copy of *Bi Any Other Name*, edited by Lani Kaahumanu and Loraine Hutchins, and devoured it. I learned so much from everyone's different perspective and I wanted to learn more. Next, I ordered *The Bisexual Option* by Fritz Klein and after that, the humorous *Bisexual's Guide to the Universe* by Nicole Kristal and Mike Szymanski. I read *Look Both Ways* by Jennifer Baumgardner during breaks at work. A few years later, I obtained my newest treasure: *Getting Bi*, edited by Robyn Ochs and Sarah E Rowley. Robyn gave me her copy herself when she came to Dallas.

Two years after reading and re-reading it, I gave my precious copy of *Bi Any Other Name* to my friend, Shelley (also an LGBT activist) who said that she might be bi. She loved it and told me that she is now certain she's bisexual.

At age 22, I came out to my then best friend. She comically jumped back as if to protect herself, before folding her arms and saying, "Okay, so?" It was good to know that it wasn't a big deal to her. She reminded me that she herself had mentioned long before I came out that she wouldn't be completely adverse to dating women, and pointing out that she thought some women were "hot sauce." She, aged 20, was more like a Kinsey 1 1/2. At 22, I lingered at Kinsey 3 for a while. I was still attracted to men, though I was very particular in their qualities: no chest or facial hair, not too tall or too muscular. I was really into the skinny men with long hair. I loved the glamorous women: lipstick, pretty hair, boobs, skirts, high heels and all. So far, every friend that I've come out to has been very accepting, even my very conservative new best friend. Since moving to Dallas, I've made many more out friends within the LGBT community, and have experienced little discrimination within it.

When it comes to my family, I've always been very private; growing up in a full household any amount of privacy was sacred. To this day, I have yet to introduce anyone I am dating to my family, male or female. The few relatives that I did come out to were accepting and non-judgmental. I have a gay cousin who came out before I did, so I think that may have eased whatever tension there might have been. At my current job, I'm out at work. It is very easy to be. Almost everyone is an LGBT person or LGBT-friendly. It's a very diverse company. People come from different backgrounds and cultures, covered in tattoos or piercings, blue hair and funky clothing; no one judges you based on what you look like or whom you love. Having a manager who is openly and proudly gay also helped me feel more comfortable about being out at work. Never before have I been free to be me at work.

I'm twenty-four now and more comfortable in my own skin than I've ever been. I think as far as my attractions go, they may change and evolve, but I'm certain that I'll always be attracted to more than one sex/

gender. Right now, I would say that I'm more of a Kinsey 3.5 to 4, but when I take into account the Klein Grid, it gets much more complicated. I find it easier to form friendships and emotional relationships with men. I'm less and less attracted to masculinity, physically or otherwise. I'm more attracted to the soft-butth women and femme, but not too lipstick, women. I'm still into men that physically remind me of women and I am really into the androgynous look. I can't really look at the grid and say what my "ideal" orientation is; for me, it's whatever I'm identifying myself as at the time.

As far as role models go, Robyn Ochs is a bisexual icon of mine whom I had the pleasure of meeting during her visit to Dallas. I look up to all those who promote visibility for the bi/pan/fluid community, as well as those who fight for equality for all. I am a member of the Dallas-Fort Worth Bisexual Network, but I have not gone there for support. I really haven't thought about seeking support for myself—I am too busy lending support to others! I also admire some of the bi and queer-identified friends that I work with in my community: Latisha McDaniel, D.J. Anderson and Andi Reis.

The best advice I have for other young people who are questioning or bi/pan/fluid would be this: Come out, come out, wherever you are! Read bi and LGBT literature, be proud to wave the bi flag or wear bi colors during Pride week and parades to promote visibility. Join or organize a GSA if you're in school, or find or create a support group. Go out there and find local activists and organizations that are pro-bi and pro-LGBT causes; just get *involved* in the bi and BLGT community! Learn as much as you can and teach others what you know. Make use of the many resources that are out there. Education is a key factor in breaking down the barriers of ignorance and intolerance we still face today.

Lividia is a 24-year-old activist from Arlington, Texas who rocks the mission of equality.

Map by Audrey Beth Stein

Reviewed by Lara Zielinsky

Regardless of the age at which a person comes out, the search for identity brings out traits often associated with youth—awkwardness, uncertainty, and end-all, be-all feelings.

This “everyone goes through something like this” message permeates each event of Audrey Beth Stein’s very relevant memoir *Map*.

In 1996, through an online romance with another young woman, Catrina, Audrey is flung through all the youthful exuberant stages of overwhelming love. Her days and nights filled with correspondence, she grows increasingly certain that she’s found her one true love.

A creative writing senior at the widely accepting University of Pennsylvania campus, Audrey commits to traveling to Seattle to meet Catrina. She envisions perfection, every word and touch exactly as it should be. Her creative writing courses provide some outlet for her thoughts and feelings, and she feels torn between that and her romance with Catrina. Audrey briefly chooses her writing over the romance and yet, tapping into the feelings, she is able to produce some of her most powerful writing to date. She returns to her romance feeling that her love for writing and her love for Catrina can coexist.

However, just days before the trip, Catrina breaks up with her. She won’t return Audrey’s calls or emails. This is where the youthful love story becomes a tale of growth and maturity in love and heartache; Audrey begins with the help of friends and ex-boyfriends to figure out what happened, what went wrong, and what to do now. She examines all the romances of her past.

She resolves to go ahead and travel to Seattle—to stay at a youth hostel instead of with her would-be-lover, and to visit with a friend who lives a few hours south of Seattle. She also connects with some fellow Indigo Girls fans, and finds a sense of individual purpose. She’ll see the sights, and see what happens.

Map is a journey. Stein uses the map metaphor to show us the lay of the land as she has seen it. Her style of prose is, at times, lyrical. Told in first person, it has a stream of consciousness feel, letting the reader in on Audrey’s disjointed, disquieted thoughts about her parents and former romantic partners. Then, gradually, order comes to the internal monologue—decisiveness, definitive action. The sentence structure becomes more complete, even as questions remain. But no longer are these particularly questions of identity; she is comfortable with the identity of ‘bisexual.’ The questions have to do more with her place in her community, her goals, her family, and her resolve about her writing.

I found *Map* extremely readable. Events in the story blended well one to the next. I found the writing style interesting, and while the italicized dialogue was off-putting

at first, it became clear that it was to show that these were recollected conversations, not necessarily verbatim.

I had a brief conversation with Ms. Stein, discussing her life as well as the purpose and structure of her memoir. Ms. Stein teaches memoir and novel development at the Cambridge Center for Adult Education in Cambridge, Massachusetts.



Lara Zielinsky: You indicate near the end of *Map* that you moved to Boston. You had been at the University of Pennsylvania which is “40% Jewish” and also has a large, open and welcoming GLBT population. What took you to Boston? What differences and similarities have you found?

Audrey Beth Stein: I’ve always liked Boston, and a part of me was disappointed to discover that my first choice college was somewhere else. I grew to love Philadelphia while I was at UPenn; I think it is an underrated city and a wonderful place to spend four years of school. But I was starting to outgrow the city itself and whereas Boston for a single twenty-something is really about a lot of different connected areas with unique characters—Cambridge, Somerville, JP, Brookline, and so on—Philadelphia had a much greater divide between city proper and suburbs. So even though Philly is technically bigger than Boston, Boston feels larger. I moved here for the city itself as well as its proximity to family—it was a place I could see myself staying long-term—and then figured out how to find community and a job and all that stuff. Being queer and being Jewish were definitely helpful in the beginning in terms of meeting people, and in fact I met one of my very good friends through volunteering on the *Bisexual Resource Guide* that first fall.

LZ: Early in *Map* you express your identity as bisexual. And it appears in the execution and your choice of language through much of the memoir that it is/was more of a struggle to be accepted as bisexual rather than your own personal struggle with describing yourself as such. Is this the case? If so, what are the key points of someone else accepting a person’s orientation?

ABS: I actually think the largest challenge was not being sure,

Map, continues on next page

I Am Who I Am

By *Celean*

I found out about bisexuality through my friends. Seeing how most of them are bi it wasn't hard for me to understand it and want to know more about it. Being me is hard since many don't approve. Looking back on my life, I can now see all the signs that were leading me to be bisexual. I am happy being who I am, even if it is hard.

At my high school in Huntington, Indiana, people look down upon those of us who are attracted to same-sex partners. Seeing looks of disgust on many faces is very common. Obviously, we have no LGBT or gay-straight alliance at our school. My friends, of course, approve since

they are all mostly bi. Those who aren't bisexual still seem to be okay with it. My family doesn't approve at all of gays. So I haven't told them yet, for fear of their reactions. However, with all the support from my friends, I will soon tell them. Ellen is my role model; seeing how she lives her life in the open, and isn't afraid of what others say about who she is, or who she is with.

My advice for all those like myself is: Be who you are, instead of living up to others' expectations. You are who you are, and that's all that matters.

Celean is 17, a junior in high school, and on the swim team at her school.

Map, continued from previous page

and then once I was sure, having that almost immediately being tied in with something else challenging to talk about—namely, falling in love via the Internet.

In terms of someone else accepting a person's orientation, I think that's a tricky question to answer in the abstract and I sometimes wonder what my own experience would have been if I'd been in a less-accepting environment. I would agree with what I have witnessed elsewhere: that time and familiarity often temper more extreme reactions. For me, having confidence in myself and assuming the best of other people has worked well.

When I teach writing classes, I habitually wear a rainbow necklace on the first day to send a message that I am both queer and out to anyone who will find that helpful, and I use my language and example to make clear that my classroom is a safe space for all kinds of experiences. I don't leave room for expressions of intolerance, but I do try to allow for someone who is less comfortable around queerness to feel comfortable enough to stay in the classroom, and then to quietly come to a more accepting space without having to admit they might not have been there at the beginning.

LZ: Toward the end of *Map*, you write of writing the memoir itself. This self-referential style is not something I'm familiar with in the memoir form. Could you explain why it was important to describe the struggle of writing the memoir within the memoir?

ABS: Over the nine and a half years of writing *Map*, it became more and more clear that the writing process was part of the story—the struggle to articulate is a piece of the journey to understand and to connect. As I say on the last page, “I noticed that even those people who seemed to think that this relationship didn't quite count still responded to

individual passages of manuscript, yes, I remember that feeling, I've been there.”

I also found it challenging to write a memoir where I came out as bisexual when I have since moved away from using that term. (Bisexual had never felt completely comfortable to me, though it wasn't/isn't inaccurate, and nowadays I mostly use queer.) It was important to me to honor my own experience of the language—which I've found many others share—but also to respect the incredible activism that has taken place under the bisexual label that has paved the way for so many of us. Using a flash-forward in the middle of the book allowed me to address my own identity-labeling in a way that felt clear and natural and—I hope—leaves that aspect of the story relatable to people regardless of the terminology they use to describe their own history and behavior and identity.

LZ: Your experience with Internet romance has many lessons unto itself and could easily have become the story. Did you find that aspect complicated to “contain” in order to tell the larger story of your experience with realizing you could love anyone regardless of gender?

ABS: Actually, it was the opposite—I began with the story of the relationship and early manuscript readers kept asking for more. The revision process involved a lot of layering as I figured out how to tell something that was simultaneously a love story, a coming out story, and a coming-of-age story.

LZ: Thank you, Ms. Stein, for your time.

ABS: Thank you for your kind words and for the opportunity to talk about *Map* for the *Bi Women* newsletter.

Order Map and learn more about Audrey Beth Stein at <http://map.audreybethstein.com>.

Bi of the Month: An Interview with Ellyn Ruthstrom

By Deb Morley

I met Ellyn eight years ago at a BBWN brunch that I attended when I first moved to the Boston area. I have found her to be a great inspiration in the various ways she connects with and builds queer community. It's both an honor and a pleasure to interview my first Boston friend for this issue of Bi Women.

Deb: What does the word “bisexual” mean to you, and how does it apply to your life?

Ellyn: To me, being bisexual means having a sexuality that isn't limited by the sex or gender of the people you are attracted to. You just recognize that you can be attracted to a person for very individual reasons. I became aware of my capacity to be attracted to both men and women in college. I used to say that I was “sexual” and felt that should explain it (I've heard quite a few other bi folks say this as well over time), but soon found out that sexual politics are much too complicated and you really need to identify in a way that explains a bit more to other people. I know a lot of people (especially younger folks) don't feel the term “bisexual” explains their identity any more. I still like it for myself, but I don't think there is any term that can capture the complexity of how any individual bi person expresses their sexuality. We are all so different that it truly is a short answer kind of thing, not a multiple-choice response.

DM: You mentioned that a lot of people don't feel the term “bisexual” explains their identity. I've heard some say the term is outdated, or too exclusive in meaning. What do you think?

ER: I still call myself bi or bisexual because it feels comfortable for me after being out for over 20 years as such. I understand other people's feelings towards the word and I know different generations like to discover new terminology but I'm happy with it. It's not unique to us. I've dated various women-loving women who each hated to use one or more of the terms lesbian, dyke, or queer—depending on their age, race, nationality, and experience. Everyone doesn't have to use the same identifying words as long as we keep communicating and working together.

DM: You've been a bi activist for quite some time. Can you share a situation in which you felt most gratified by this work? How about a time when you felt most challenged?

ER: One of the things I really enjoy about bi community activism is the larger gatherings where people get to see each other and feel validated by each other. Those are great. Also, while I was a commissioner on the Massachusetts



Commission for GLBT Youth, I had the opportunity to travel around the state and meet with gay/straight alliance members in many different settings. When some bi students talked about their own experiences of biphobia in their families or with their friends I felt good about being able to talk with them about resources and strategies for dealing with those experiences.

I still feel the most challenged when the gay and lesbian community makes yet another *faux pas* by not inviting bi people to a national march, or not using inclusive language in a civil rights campaign that I'm a part of, or when I hear a biphobic comment in a queer community setting that suddenly makes me feel uncomfortable and I have to figure out how to constructively engage the person to rethink what s/he said. I've done a lot of anti-racism work and diversity training work over the years and I've heard many people of color talk about being tired of having to constantly teach white people about racism and their experiences. They want white people to do some of the work themselves, and I heartily agree. And even though I see myself as a person who wants to engage and educate within the LGBT community, I also wish others would do some more of their own anti-biphobia work.

DM: Besides the Boston area, where else have you lived and experienced bi community? In comparison, what is unique about Boston's community?

ER: I've lived in two other communities since I've come out. One was Northampton, Massachusetts and the other was Columbus, Ohio. I was so excited to be out in such a queer-positive space as Northampton but it happened to be in 1989-1991 when the Pride parade went through a huge

Ellyn, continues on next page

Ellyn, *continued from previous page*

controversy about whether to include bisexuals or not. One year we were added and the next year we were removed. The local Queer Nation contingent took a pro-bi stance and organized people to walk at the front of the official parade with a big banner that said “Bisexual.” There were several official Pride speakers who gave hateful anti-bi speeches provoking other protests by the crowd. I knew many people in Northampton who were supportive, but as a community at that time it was not very friendly to bis.

I lived in Columbus, Ohio in the early 90s and was involved with a local LGBT group and a small bi-specific group. I think the thing about Columbus is that there were still a lot of people in the LGBT community who were not completely out and that seemed to exacerbate the situation for bisexuals. One of my favorite memories is when the Ohio State group brought Lani Ka’ahumanu to campus to talk about bisexuality. That was great!

Boston’s bi community does seem to be special. We are

established, we have several organizations serving different needs, and lots of us are very invested within the great LGBT community as well. I love the Boston bi community and feel incredibly comfortable within it.

DM: What message do you have for queer youth?

ER: Get involved in your community. Find a group to connect with and be active within it. It doesn’t have to be political involvement, but find ways to learn about your community and how you can contribute to it. Many communities now have great resources for queer youth and there are often good organizations where you can feel safe and gain your confidence with your identity while also building leadership skills. If you can’t find a community near you, find it virtually. You are not alone! Also, visit the new resources at biyouth.org and tell others about them, too.

Deb is a fun-loving bi woman who lives in Arlington, MA and enjoys hanging out with other bi and bi-friendly folks.

Yemisi, Map, *continued from page 4*

injury to one is an injury to all. I am doing my best as a trade unionist from a developing country to spread the message that we cannot rest on our oars until every worker is liberated from the yoke of oppression. I want to bring LGBT issues to the table of trade unions everywhere. These issues must no longer be swept under the carpet. LGBT workers must start demanding workplace protection from discrimination and that protection must be available to all workers irrespective of gender, color, race or country.

Robyn is the editor of Bi Women and of the international anthology Getting Bi: Voices of Bisexuals Around the World.



Borderlands, *continued from page 1*

teasing under the guise of humor. Benton’s workshop was a powerful validation of the stress that I frequently experience and also a reminder of why spaces such as TBC are so necessary.

Transcending Boundaries was a wonderful mixture of transgressors of gender binaries and strict categories of any kind. Fittingly, Tristan Taormino gave the keynote address: “Everyone’s Invited to the Pool Party: How to Build a Supportive, Inclusive Community.” She told an amusing tale of how she was able to create a comfortable and inclusive environment at her wedding for her trans and genderqueer guests as well as her straight gender normative birth family. She trained the staff and sent family members a gender

primer, alerting them to the diversity of gender expression they would see as well as letting them know: “You’re going to meet three people who will look very much the same to you. One of those people identifies as male, one of those people identifies as female and one eschews gender altogether.”

Of course, the bi presence was also in full force and I wasn’t even able to attend all the bi specific workshops. I made it to “Bisexuality: Are We Still Invisible?” and “Getting Bi: Voices from Bisexuals Around the World.” The former consisted of a panel that brought together bisexual and pansexual people as well as monogamous and non. Each story was interesting and each panelist has struggled with making themselves visible and feeling included

in the larger LGBT movement and community. My only complaint was – with five people who had a lot to say and only one hour to do it in – we were left with a litany of grievances but no plan or suggestions for how to move forward or make ourselves more visible. “Getting Bi...” was a lovely way to end the day. We formed a circle and took turns reading passages from Robyn Ochs and Sarah Rowley’s book of the same title. In between each passage we discussed the variety of experiences and marveled at the strength of our bi brothers and sisters from far and wide.

Amanda is a writer, photographer and bi activist living in Brooklyn, NY. (www.AmandaMorgan.com)

CREATING CHANGE 2010

A Personal Perspective

By Lauren E. Spencer

Held in Dallas, Texas, this year's conference, the Task Force's 22nd and my third, inspired me, but also illuminated the work that lies ahead of us, particularly within our own community and movement.

What I love most about Creating Change is the wide range of identities that I encounter there. As a queer woman of color, I frequently find myself in the minority, either racially or sexually, in LGBTQ communities and communities of color respectively. On the opening day of the conference, I attended a day-long event titled "Building Bridges across Our Communities," which was an organizing institute for activists of color. I also spent a great deal of time in the People of Color Hospitality suite. I cannot fully articulate what I experience in spaces like these; it is best explained as a deep sense of belonging. I connected with people who, mere days ago, were complete strangers, but have since become close friends and even family. Being multiracial, it was of particular significance for me to be in a space that included people of many races and colors. I didn't feel like I was a less valid member of a monoracial community because of my mixed heritage; I am of color and subsequently, a full member of the queer community of color.

My time in these spaces was not without conflict, however. In both the day-long institute and the hospitality suite, the need for queer people of color

to have their own safe space was not recognized and respected; white conference attendees came to both spaces and some were argumentative when asked to leave.

This year's conference was the first Creating Change to feature a Bisexual Hospitality suite. I was delighted to see that the need for bisexual people to have a safe space and be visible was finally recognized. I loved connecting with members of our community in workshop or hospitality suite and recognizing them throughout the rest of the conference.

I experienced biphobia in Dallas; while at a club, I was talking to a woman who was clearly interested in me. When our conversation shifted to our coming out stories, she mentioned that she'd never been with men. Her demeanor briefly, but visibly changed when she learned that some of my sexual partners had been men. What I experienced at the nightclub is just one example of how I and other bisexual people have been perceived as less queer and a less valid part of the queer community because we don't have solely same-sex attractions. Similar to the way that I experienced racial validation in the POC suite, having a bi space at Creating Change challenged the perception that bisexuals are less queer, sending the message that our visibility is important and bisexual people are full members of the queer community. It is merely a step in the right direction, however. Here's to more visibility in our communities in the coming year and at Creating Change 2011!

Lauren is an activist and student who focuses on intersecting identities, the connections among systems of oppression and LGBTQ communities of color.



Robyn, Amanda, Lividia, Lauren & Chrysanthe



The Bi Institute

By Amanda Morgan

This year at Creating Change was a momentous one for bisexuals and people who have a profound and deep commitment to sexual liberation. The year 2010 marks the first time (out of twenty-two years) for the Bi/Fluid/Pan Day-long Organizing Institute as well as the Sexual Freedom track, which also included an institute of its own and a series of workshops, many of which included bi presenters.

The Bi Institute, as it was called, was an exciting achievement. Those of you who attended the Bi Caucus in 2009 or perhaps read my account of it in last year's Bi Women, probably recall that one of the requests we made of the Task Force was that they provide bi leadership development. The folks at the Task Force listened and we had both an institute and a hospitality suite. Those eight hours we spent together during the institute were productive and passionate. Additionally, I feel I must mention, the room was packed. We had to bring in more chairs than the organizers had planned on. It was a great feeling. We broke down what we decided as a group were the four main areas we need to focus our energies on in the coming year: 1. Education (both internal and external) and Outreach; 2. Intersectionality; 3. Developing/ Strengthening the Infrastructure of the Bi Movement; 4. Mentoring New Leaders. Within those headers, concrete plans were made as to how to address each. It was truly a fruitful occasion and I can't wait to see how our efforts continue to progress.

Amanda is a writer, photographer and bi activist living in Brooklyn, NY. (www.AmandaMorgan.com)

Calendar, *continued from page 20*

dancing and Kate Clinton as emcee. Tix are \$175 so it's not a cheap night out, but supports a great resource. Womensdinnerparty.org for more info.

Tuesday, March 16, 6:30-9pm. Boundless Program: How Toxic is Your Bust? A film screening and discussion about breast cancer and the environment at Fenway Health, **9th floor, 1340 Boylston Street, Boston**. Did you know there could be a connection between your sex toys and breast cancer? How about your shampoo or shower curtain? Join us as we explore the connection between breast cancer and environmental toxins through a screening of the thought-provoking documentary, *Toxic Bust*. After the film, learn how to be proactive about your health! **FREE! Refreshments provided.** RSVP to 617-927-6028 or boundless@fenwayhealth.org.

Thursday, March 18, 7pm. Bisexual Social and Support Group (BliSS). 3rd Thursday meetings are 7-8 p.m. check-ins, discussion, and announcements followed by social time at a nearby restaurant. Only want to socialize? Meet the group around 8 p.m. in the lobby of Boston Living Center, 29 Stanhope St., Boston.

Saturday, March 20, 11:30am. Bi Brunch. This mixed gender bi group meets 3rd Saturdays at Johnny D's on Holland St. in Davis Sq. in Somerville. The Davis stop on the Red Line is just across the street.

APRIL

Wednesday, April 7, 7-8:45pm. Bisexual Social and Support Group (BliSS). Bisexual Resource Center, 29 Stanhope Street, Boston. (See March 3rd)

Monday, April 12, 7pm. Straight Marriage, Still Questioning. (See March 8th)

Tuesday, April 13, 7-9pm. BRC Board Meeting. (See March 9th)

Thursday, April 15, 7pm. Bisexual Social and Support Group (BliSS). (See March 18th)

Friday-Sunday, April 16-18, BECAUSE Conference (Bisexual Empowerment Conference: A Uniting, Supportive Experience) in Minneapolis, Minnesota. The premier weekend event in the Midwest for bisexuals, queers, trans, bi-curious, questioning, and others, regardless of identity. This conference is open to *everyone!*

Visit www.becauseconference.org for more info.

Saturday, April 17, 11:30am. Saturday Bi Brunch. (See March 20th)

Saturday, April 24, noon. BBWN Brunch in Arlington at Steph's. Please bring a potluck dish and/or drinks to share. Also, be ready to share something about a favorite famous bi, (living or dead). Email Steph at smiserlis@gmail.com to RSVP/get directions. A great way to meet other bi/bi-friendly women in the Boston area.

MAY

Wednesday, May 5, 7pm. Bisexual Social and Support Group (BliSS). (See March 3rd)

Monday, May 10, 7pm. Straight Marriage, Still Questioning. (See March 8th)

Tuesday, May 11, 7-9pm. BRC Board Meeting. (See March 9th)

Thursday, May 20, 7pm. Bisexual Social and Support Group (BliSS). (See March 18th)

Saturday, May 15, 11:30am. Saturday Bi Brunch. (See March 20th)

Saturday, May 22, 12-3pm. BBWN's Potluck Brunch at Robyn's in JP. Please bring a potluck dish and/or drinks to share. Email Robyn at robyn@robynochs.com or call 617-413-2717. A great way to meet other bi/bi-friendly women in the Boston area.

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 or details.



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 Boston-area email list! Send an email to: biwomenboston-subscribe@yahoogroups.com



Ask not what Bi Women can do for you ...

Dear Reader,

Help us send *Bi Women* to you, to other women, and also to community centers, youth groups and campus LGBT groups, and to make copies of *Bi Women* available at events and conferences. Think of the support that *Bi Women* has provided to you, and give generously because your contribution will indeed make a difference in many, many lives. It will only take a minute and you will make a difference.

So far, we have raised \$1558 toward our annual goal of \$5000. No donation is too small (and no donation is too large).

Make your checks payable to BBWN, PO Box 301727, Jamaica Plain, MA 02130. Or you can donate on line via paypal to biwomenboston@gmail.com. For more information, visit our website: biwomenboston.org.

Remember: YOU can make a difference.



Sarah, Linda & Jennifer, at a newsletter stuffing

CALENDAR

MARCH

Wednesday, March 3, 7-8:45pm. Bisexual Social and Support Group (BLISS). Meets monthly 1st Wed. & 3rd Thurs. at the Boston Living Center, 29 Stanhope Street, Boston. All bi/bi-friendly people of all genders and orientations welcome. 1st Wed. meetings are peer-facilitated discussion groups, sometimes with a pre-selected topic or presenter. Info: brc@biresource.net.

Sunday, March 7, 11:30am-1:30pm. (NOTE THE EARLY START!) BBWN Potluck Brunch at Jennifer's in Jamaica Plain CoHousing. Please bring a potluck dish and/or drinks to share. Easy parking & one block from the T. To RSVP or for info: isis.jenn@gmail.com or 857-205-6778. A great opportunity to meet other bi & bi-friendly women in Boston area.

Monday, March 8, 7pm. Straight Marriage, Still Questioning. A peer-led support group

for women in a straight marriage/relationship struggling with sexual orientation or coming out. Info: kate.e.flynn@gmail.com. Group meets on 2nd Mondays.

Tuesday, March 9, 7-9pm. Bisexual Resource Center Board Meeting. All bi/bi-friendly community members welcome. Info: Ellyn@biresource.net. The meeting is at Boston Living Center, 29 Stanhope St. near Back Bay station on the Orange Line.

Saturday-Sunday, March 12-13. True Colors Conference for LGBTQIA Youth on University of Connecticut's campus in Storrs. Info: Ourtruecolors.org.

Saturday, March 13. The Women's Dinner Party, Boston Marriott Copley Place. Fenway Health's annual women's fundraiser includes a great night out in downtown Boston with several hundred fabulous women. Dinner,

Calendar *continues on page 19*