

Finally Discovering My Bi Blanket

By Bri Kerschner

“I don’t mind her as long as she doesn’t come over and try to be a gross lesbian with me.” My aunts and uncles nodded and grunted their agreement with my grandmother’s assessment of her new neighbor, a single older woman whose hair was styled in a short crew-cut. I never really knew Linda’s sexual identity and, frankly, it was none of my business. I remember her as a kind, practical woman whom I rarely saw. My family made her sexual identity their business, and they had endless disgusting commentary about it. I was only ten and was still pretty clueless about my sexuality – at this point I didn’t like *anyone*. Other kids were annoying, I loved school, and I was desperate to please my emotionally distant parents. But at ten years old, because of my family’s overwhelmingly negative response to same-sex relationships, I trained myself to ignore any feelings I had for women. The suppression of my identity, then, while not natural or comfortable, became second nature even though I didn’t recognize it for what it actually was: bisexuality. To be a part of my family, I knew I had to hide an essential part of my existence. My childish mind declared: “I won’t fall in love with anyone, especially not girls.” Naturally, this became more difficult to maintain as I grew, and I crushed on boys and girls in silence, never mentioning my secret to anyone. It was an isolating and cold experience. While I should have expected support and kindness, I knew that I would receive derision and cruelty from my community if I confessed my true feelings.



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#BiWeek2016: Building a Bisexual Community

By Angela Dallara

When I first came out as bisexual at age 16, I was on my own personal journey toward understanding the fluidity of sexuality and gender. I realized early on that I felt passionately and wanted to work toward LGBT equality as my career, and I am one of the lucky people able to make a living doing exactly what I’d hoped. I do external communications for an organization that works to pass nondiscrimination laws and policies that improve the lived experiences of people of all sexual orientations and gender identities. For five years prior to that, I worked for an organization dedicated to winning marriage for same-sex couples. Every day, I am surrounded by beautiful, brilliant queer people who inspire me personally and professionally. What more could I ask for?

But it was only this fall that I found myself in a community that was new and different from anything I’d previously been

a part of. I had the opportunity to join approximately 150 bisexual advocates for #BiWeek in Washington, DC, thanks to an invitation by BiNet USA’s president Faith Cheltenham. My organization, Freedom for All Americans, began working with BiNet this year on a storytelling partnership to showcase the impact and intersections of nondiscrimination protections on bisexual people and bisexual issues. As part of promoting the project, known as #BiStories, Faith graciously and generously invited us to be a part of the 2016 #BiWeek activities. I participated on a panel about bisexual women on Friday, networked with community activists on Saturday, facilitated an “un-conference” on Sunday (similar to a conference, with the exception of the sessions structured by the participants rather than the organizers), and moderated a short panel at a first-of-its-kind, on-the-record bisexual community briefing at the White House on Monday.

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Editor's Note

Dear Reader,

The theme of this issue is Bi+ Spaces. Readers were asked: "How do you find or build community? Where do you get support for and affirmation of your bi+ identity? How important is it to build distinct bi+ support and social spaces? Why does it matter? Should we aim, instead, for an open, accepting queer society – or is the advancement of bi+ identity a necessary precursor or parallel track to that?"

This issue comes on the heels of major bi community events, and we were deluged with submissions on this theme! Angela Dallara, Ann Tweedy and Angelique Gravely report on their experiences at the recent Bisexual Community Meeting at the White House on September 22; Barbara Oud and Lila Hertelius write about the European Bisexual Conference (EuroBiCon) and the European Bisexual Research Conference (EuroBiReCon) which were held in Amsterdam July 28-31; Bri Kerschner, Iyanna James-Stephenson, Emma Walsh, Rae Watanabe, E.E. Giles, Mary Jo Klinker & JamieAnn Meyers, Denarii Monroe and Liz share a wide range of perspectives on the theme and remind us that there are many ways to create bi+ space.

In our Around the World Column, Aredvi S. interviews two Iranian bi activists. Jan Steckel reflects on the recent U.S. presidential election, A Rose Bi gives some good advice, Sarah E. Rowley recommends books, Why Not Both Co share a new comic with us and at the back you will find our calendar of events.

Lastly, if you've never contributed to *BWQ* before, please consider sharing your words, your artwork, your volunteer time, and/or your \$\$\$\$. Remember: it takes a village.

-Robyn

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



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Upcoming in the *Bi Women Quarterly*

Call for writing Spring 2017 issue **Bi+ Creativity**

Does your bisexuality affect your creativity? How do you express your identity and/or sexuality in your writing, art, photography, dance or music? Share your inspirations, your process, your creative spirit, in whatever form you want to express it (that is possible to print in this publication). *DUE BY Feb. 1.*

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

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

Submission guidelines are online at biwomenboston.org.

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

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

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

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

Around the World: Iran and Bisexual Activism

Interview and translation by Aredvi S.

Soudeh Rad, 36, and Zeynab Peyghambarzadeh, 31, are Iranian feminist researchers and activists living in France and Sweden, respectively. They founded Dojensgara.org in March 2015. Dojensgara is the Farsi term for bisexual, and the website is the first and, so far, only resource about bisexuality in Farsi. Dojensgara.org not only fills the existing information gap on bisexuality, but also gives voice to bisexuals of all genders to challenge the biphobic culture which is, unfortunately, prevalent among Iranian LGBTQ activists.

Both immigrants, Soudeh and Zeynab are familiar with the problems of the Middle Eastern LGBTQ community, especially the violation of asylum seekers' rights through bi-erasure by the international and local advocacy organizations, and biphobia at the UNHCR (the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) offices. The subject became more vital and urgent after several individuals from different countries contacted Dojensgara.org seeking help for their asylum process.

AS: Zeynab & Soudeh, you are two openly bisexual activists from Iran. Tell us more about what you do that directly and indirectly impacts the lives of Iranian bisexuals.

ZP: Two years ago, Soudeh and I started *Dojensgara.org*, the first educational website on bisexuality in Farsi. We also maintain an active presence on social media and run a radio program on *Radio Ranginkaman*, which was founded five years ago and is the first radio channel about LGBTQ issues in Iran and other Farsi-speaking countries broadcasted and accessible on short waves. Before we started our work with Radio Ranginkaman, every program revolved around homosexuality and some transsexuality, but mainly issues of gay men, which is typical of most LGBTQ outlets. Now, because of our involvement, *Radio Ranginkaman* has become much more inclusive of bisexual issues, especially since the bisexual audience is actively engaging in conversations.

We also work with bisexual activists from other countries by participating in European and international events and conferences. At the moment, we are particularly focused on the issues of bisexual asylum seekers. Many people in the Iranian LGBTQ community only come out after they arrive in a safe country. In this community are those who are thinking about applying for asylum, those who are asylum seekers and those who have already obtained asylum. During the asylum process, bisexuals are pressured to present themselves as homosexuals and remain silent about their bisexuality. This means their voices and presence will dwindle in our

community. We think working on the asylum issue is a top priority in building a vibrant Iranian bisexual community.

SR: I would add that one of the most important parts of this work is the declaration that bisexuality, as a valid and established identity, exists. We are announcing that there is no shame in being a bisexual person and that we are proud of who we are. In Farsi-speaking spaces, there used to be very little conversation on fluidity of sexuality and gender identity, but now our website is leading the discussion and making it significant for individuals, LGBTQ media and activists.

Since we use Robyn Ochs' definition of bisexuality, we are concerned with all complex sexual identities under the bi+ umbrella. For example, no other Farsi-speaking group had previously worked on asexuality and its intersections with bisexuality. We also talk about sexual fluidity, monogamy vs. non-monogamy (especially polyamory), and offer an inclusive sexual health and pleasure education program. In typical sex-ed programs, bisexuals must often deal with stigma, biphobia and bi-erasure, so we decided to launch our own sex ed podcasts in Farsi that are fully inclusive of all gender and sexual identities.

Lastly, our work has gained a lot of popularity among the trans community of Iran. Many people in the trans community have already shown their support, even though bisexuality can be a silent issue. We work hard to make our content and work relevant to everyone, especially already marginalized groups such as women and trans people. We are first, and foremost, feminists who believe in equality, especially our own equality as bisexuals within the LGBTQ community and the population at large.

AS: We recently celebrated National Coming Out Day in the United States. Would you feel comfortable and inclined to share your coming out story?

SR: The process of coming out to myself was painful. The first time I fell in love was with a woman my own age. I believed, due to misinformation, that I was in love with a girl because boys didn't like me. Years later, after having had relationships with men, I found myself interested in women again. I was very afraid and concerned and even would cry and say that I didn't want to be a homosexual and live a difficult and secretive life. One day, I realized that bisexuals are also part of the LGBTQ community and that "bi" is not an insult, so I allowed myself to identify as a bisexual. There was a lot of stigma, but I knew that nothing would change until I, myself, would identify as bisexual.

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ZP: I always knew that I liked people regardless of their gender. When I was 18, I learned what this orientation was called, and I accepted it. I spoke with some friends and family and they seemed supportive, perhaps because they didn't take a young bisexual woman who hung out with many men too seriously. A few weeks before I left Iran, I met a German bisexual activist, Sonja Schneider, who was a tourist and a family friend. We met up again in Germany, and she introduced me to bisexual groups and gave me lots of texts to read. Sonja was instrumental in my coming out here in Sweden, since I was experiencing a lot of biphobia from both Iranian and European lesbians. Reading queer and feminist theory solidified my bisexual identity as a political identity around which I could organize. That's when I first thought of starting *Dojensgara.org*.

AS: How has your work and activism have been received by Iranian and non-Iranian activists?

ZP: Starting *Dojensgara.org* has had many positive and negative consequences. When the website first launched, as expected, many people came forward and spoke with us about their bisexual and queer experiences. Obviously, a heavy weight had been lifted from their shoulders, and I was very happy to see this happen. I've always known other Iranian activists who either identify as bisexual or engage in bisexual behavior, but speaking about it is still taboo.

At the same time, suddenly I was no longer welcome in certain spaces, especially Iranian feminist groups in which we used to be active. We were accused of having given up our feminist work and having selected a new luxurious and Western cause that would get us attention and grants.

SR: On March 8, 2015, when we first announced the launch of *Dojensgara.org*, a similar thing happened to me. I used to think our feminist community was a safe space where everyone, regardless of differences in approach – whether we were Islamic feminists or atheist feminists, etc. –, would be concerned with the common goal of dismantling gender-based oppression. We saw our work as closely related to and an offspring of the feminist movement. But after we publicly “came out,” suddenly the number of interviews and invitations I was getting drastically dropped. When we were included, we were targeted for our work around bisexuality. One of the most hurtful comments I once got was, “Well, I guess you're done working on more important issues; your feminist career is now over and you've turned your focus to your fancy new cause of bisexuality, pansexuality and whatever-sexuality.” It felt like we were being kicked out of feminism and had to instead join the LGBTQ camp and stay there. Ironically, some of these same activists privately came out to Zeynab and me and thanked us for our work.

AS: How about other non-feminist media outlets and groups? Have you identified any significant positive reactions?

SR: After our launch, much of the media we interacted with would specifically ask us to focus on feminist issues and refrain from talking about bisexuality. The main issue with this – more than biphobia, bi-erasure, or bi-negativity – is the compartmentalization of activism. As activists, we are expected to be single-issue-focused and never speak about anything else. Many activists are averse to intersectionality, and this is hurting us. We are the first and only Farsi group talking about bisexuality, and we've already lost our connection with much of the feminist movement as well as other LGBTQ groups.

As for positive reception, it has been refreshing to see bisexuality talked about in a much more serious and formal fashion. Our radio programs, especially our sex-ed podcasts, have established us as a known and active group. We now have the authority to call out biphobia and bi-erasure in different spaces. For example, we have been constantly correcting the media's language around same-sex marriage. You can see when we have these discussions a lightbulb goes on. We still have a long way to go, of course. We have put together a Bisexual Resource Library that includes major resources on bisexuality studies from around the world and legitimizes our work as an effort that is based on years of literature and activism. We must constantly remind people what the “B” in LGBTQ stands for and how bisexual people have been instrumental in LGBTQ activism from the beginning. It is good to see this kind of awareness rapidly growing.

ZP: As Soudeh mentioned, we have a lot of single-issue activists who show little interest in learning about other issues. Bisexuality is now looked at as irrelevant to feminism. The line of thinking goes, “Sexual orientation is irrelevant to the well-being of the uneducated poor rural woman.” But then when it comes to issues facing LGBTQ asylum seekers, there is more interest because it is viewed as a human rights issue. There is also the reality that the Iranian government has drawn a thick red line around LGBTQ activism and because of this, many Iranian activists, especially those who live in Iran, try to distance themselves from it. So the discussion remains limited to Iranians outside of Iran, but then we have to deal with the pressure put on bisexual asylum seekers to identify as homosexuals.

We also run an online community for Farsi-speaking bisexuals. It is heartwarming to see how our members have come to accept themselves and receive support from each other and how our work has paved the path for them to do

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so. This kind of empowerment has been positive for all of us. Our work has also impacted the way English literature about LGBTQ issues is now being translated into Farsi. Now, translators are acknowledging and including the word bisexual, *dojensgara*, together with homosexual and trans. As we know, bi-erasure is one of the strongest forms of biphobia. I also want to give a shout out to European and other bisexual activists who have affirmed us and provided us with positive feedback.

AS: You were recently at EuroBiCon and presented a workshop about bisexuals seeking asylum. Can you tell us more about the conference and your workshop?

SR: We were pleasantly surprised to see how well our workshop was received at EuroBiCon. A lot of prominent activists such as Robyn Ochs, Maria Pallotta-Chiarolli and Sabine Jansen attended our workshop. The audience was shocked to hear about the difficulties bisexual asylum seekers face; in fact, many people are completely unaware of these issues. Our goal is to create a network for bisexual asylees so that they can connect with and get support from each other. There are simple things people can do such as helping an asylum seeker get a subway card or go grocery shopping. But more importantly, there are bi-specific issues such as providing a safe space free of biphobia for bisexual asylum seekers and asylees. Currently, the situation is so bad that even a small step makes a huge difference.

On another level, Western activists can make a difference by urging their policy makers to make conditions more friendly for asylum seekers, especially by expanding benefits to bisexual asylum seekers. Zeynab just returned from ILGA (International Gay and Lesbian Association) Europe, and we will be presenting at the upcoming ILGA World Conference as well.

ZP: Both Soudeh and I – Soudeh in France and I in Sweden – have been working on LGBTQ asylum issues for a couple of years now. I first recognized how big of a problem this was when I met a group of bisexual asylum seekers who had declared their identities as homosexual so that they could be granted asylum. Since then, we have collaborated with other activists to focus on bisexual asylum issues for all asylum seekers. This work is still very new, and we need to continue working to effectively influence national as well as United Nations policies.

AS: Going back to life inside Iran, what do you think are some of the unique challenges that bisexual women in Iran face?

SR: Unfortunately, bisexuality is so invisible that it has made any analysis of its impacts and intersections nearly impos-



Photo: Robyn Ochs

Zaynab (left) and Soudeh presenting their workshop at EuroBiCon

sible. We can only observe and draw vague conclusions as it is hard to provide empirical data. For example, we know that in the U.S., bisexual women suffer from a higher rate of partner domestic violence. According to the 2016 Global Gender Gap Index, published by the World Economic Forum, Iran has one of the largest gender gaps. We can only assume that in Iran the issue of domestic violence is compounded by gender discrimination and biphobia. Sadly, there are currently no reliable measures on domestic violence or bisexuality in Iran. Legal repercussions of homosexuality are much harsher for men than women, so in that sense bisexual women get a little break. We must remember that in Iran talking about sexuality of any kind, even heterosexuality, let alone bisexuality, is still largely taboo.

ZP: Thankfully, in recent years we haven't seen the Iranian government enforcing the death penalty laws very much, but there is still much social and cultural pressure from friends, family, employers, etc. I agree with Soudeh that because of censorship and misinformation any conversation around sexuality is stifled. Also, from a cultural perspective, people are less likely to think in terms of "sexual orientation," so

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when there is a conversation, it is heavily influenced by what's happening in the West. I have personally experienced much biphobia from Iranian lesbians who mimic the same biphobic rhetoric seen among Western lesbians: that bisexual women are promiscuous and cheaters, etc.

AS: What do you think non-Iranians and especially Western activists could do to help further your work and bisexual activism for Farsi-speaking people?

SR: One thing that I noticed a lot at EuroBiCon this year was a Eurocentric approach among social sciences and humanities disciplinarians. For instance, at one workshop we were told to abandon the term transsexual. The presenter was completely ignoring the realities in places like Iran, where being transgender is illegal but being a transsexual is legal and even supported by the government. This reality, unfortunately, reinforces the traditional notion that one must change one's body to be accepted and even stay alive. In Iran, the term transsexual is the preferred term among the trans community, but it does not neatly fit into the Eurocentric perspective. I think everyone can work harder to issue statements that are either truly inclusive of all cultures or acknowledge their positionality. It is important that as activists we recognize the limitations of our work with regard to countries, cultures, religions, etc. The current literature on bisexuality can be so alien for non-Westerners that after reading them, sometimes they even doubt if they get to identify themselves as bisexual. At times, the fluid

and expansive definitions that are prevalent in the West are produced in a context that lacks any common grounds with experiences and framework of non-Western people.

ZP: I think the way sexuality is discussed among Western activists and academics directly influences our work. Take the example of Iranian lesbians parroting biphobic behavior of Western lesbians. Even here in Sweden, bisexual activism has only recently become serious, and biphobia is culturally and legally well and alive. This perspective and reality directly impacts the way the Swedish government is treating bisexual asylum seekers, so biphobia gets reinforced and reproduced once again. If Iranian bisexuals continue to be unable to speak about their experiences inside and outside of Iran, their voices will never be heard, and LGBTQ issues will remain limited to those of gay, lesbian and trans people. This is why it is so important to be vigilant about how we speak about gender and sexuality and to eliminate binary language. When you are speaking and producing your work in a Western language, you are reaching a much larger audience and have a much larger impact that will eventually influence the lives of non-Western LGBTQ people.



Aredvi S. is a bisexual, queer and genderqueer immigrant to the U.S. from Iran. Aredvi S. is curious about cross-cultural experiences of gender and sexuality, especially as they relate to trauma, oppression and healing of people of Middle Eastern origin.

Waking in Trump's America

By Jan Steckel

The Statue of Liberty's arm is tired.
She may have torn her rotator cuff.
She still has dual citizenship,
wonders if her passport is in order.

She imagines lowering her arm,
dousing the torch in the harbor,
boiling the sea and seething Ellis Island.

Friends, look at the person next to you.
Put your arm around their shoulder.
Help them keep that torch in the air.
Tell them you would never turn them in.
We're the resistance now.



*This poem appeared first at www.poetsreadingthenews.com. Jan Steckel's poetry book *The Horizontal Poet* (Zeitgeist Press, 2011) won a 2012 Lambda Literary Award for Bisexual Nonfiction. Find out more at jansteckel.com.*

Community?

By Rae N. Watanabe

In the shape of a question mark, she leaned forward in her chair and stared at her computer. Mouse in hand, she seemed frozen.

“Hi, Amber,” I greeted methodically as I walked by her office.

I had taken about five steps past her office door when I heard her call me.

I turned and she motioned me inside. “I was just sitting here deciding whether or not to go to Melissa Etheridge,” she whispered, as if sharing a juicy secret. “But I know Alex won’t go with me, and then you walk by! Do you want to go?”

“Of course I want to go. My husband won’t go either, and I miss gay culture.”

“Me, too.”

In so many ways, Amber is my community of one, and I suspect there are a lot of people like us across the country. Friends for over 30 years, we now happen to work at the same place. When we met, we were both in lesbian relationships. Today, we are both married to men.

Surely, this is no surprise to those familiar with the work of Professor Lisa Diamond. Diamond’s long-term study of women’s sexuality, published in 2008, showed fluidity that surprised people outside the bisexual community. Within the community, however, there seemed more a sense of validation.

Validation is, I suspect, one of the most important functions of community. However, creating a bisexual community in Hawaii is difficult. First, at any given moment, tourists make up a huge part of Hawaii’s population. In 2014, over eight million people visited Hawaii. In addition, military personnel constitute a significant part of the population of Oahu with over 49,000 people in 2016. A person who moves to Hawaii from elsewhere usually doesn’t stay long, a problem so well-known that *Huffington Post* dubbed them “turnover friends.” Transient populations rarely build solid, supportive communities, much less ones of sexual minorities.

In Hawaii, even the larger LGBTQ+ community is hard-pressed to organize something as seemingly simple as Gay Pride. After years of poor showings in the traditional Pride month of June, 2016’s Pride Parade and Festival was in October and yielded gratifyingly positive results. The Parade seemed to go on and on. There were even bisexual flags flying from at least one group. The Festival was an undeniable



Rae (left) with her friend Melissa, who is part of Rae’s “lesbian family”

success with hundreds of people, two music stages and dozens of booths. I attended with my oldest lesbian friends and ran into a few more old friends from my lesbian life. Watching the crowd, I couldn’t help but wonder how many were tourists and military, thus creating a fine, but fleeting, LGBTQ+ community.

It is almost impossible to build an enduring community of an invisible sexual minority like bisexuals because it is much easier to live in two worlds—the LGBTQ+ one and the straight one. No one notices us. We are assumed to be members of whichever group we are with at the time. In a sense, we are members of two communities. Do we really need another one exclusive to ourselves?

I don’t. Amber is enough; my LGBTQ+ friends are enough; and my so-called straight friends are enough. Mine is not a fractured community; it is more a multi-faceted one, one with which I have become content. A wise person once said, “Happiness is not having what you want, but wanting what you have.” I want what I have.

Rae N. Watanabe has been teaching English at Leeward Community College, one of 10 campuses of the University of Hawaii System, for 22 years. She is the co-founder (along with the late Joan Souza) of the Safe Zone Program, a proactive program to make campuses safer for LGBTQ+ students, faculty, and staff in the entire UH System.

Bringing it Back to Basics: Love, Acceptance and Community

By *Iyanna James-Stephenson*

I never actively go out and search for a community that aligns with my sexuality, but I always end up finding one. If I think that I have found a close friend, I find it important to elicit the fact that I identify as a queer woman, and more specifically, as bisexual. Admitting this to people around me helps others more fully know who I am. I find that I am able to have conversations surrounding these facts, which shows me a lot about how others see my sexuality and view themselves in relation to it. These conversations lead me to gauge whether or not these people are here to support me or degrade me – those clues help me build a community for myself in the spaces where I live, work and spend the majority of my time.

I often feel like I get the most support and affirmation from individuals who identify like I do. When I say that I like genders that are the same and different from my own, I feel like I am understood by people who immediately say, “Me too!” It makes me feel comfortable to then have a more in-depth conversation about my sexuality. But I also find similar connections and community amongst allies. I have many friends who consider themselves closer to “straight” on the sexuality spectrum and I can still have confident, comfortable conversations with them about my sexuality. I have found that if people are accepting of my sexuality, it does not matter if their sexuality is different from my own.

The more that I travel and live in different places, the more I find that having a community and a friend group that supports my queerness is essential. Having straight male partners who understand and support the LGBTQ+ community has also become a requirement of mine to engage

in any meaningful relationship. Without the expression of my sexuality I feel like less of myself. I feel like I am living in the closet, where I am not out, open or free; I feel stifled, and I hate that feeling! I must have a group of people and friends who support me because only then do I feel safe to express myself and live life as an autonomous human being.

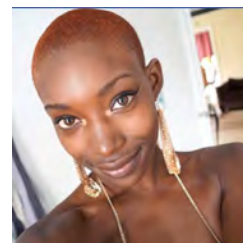
I am all for a general open queer community, but every identity should have a space for recognition and expression. One reason there is still a need for bi+ allies and advocates is because bisexual individuals already get lost in “our own community.” There are stereotypes, ignorance and disbelief about bisexual individuals, and, unfortunately, these attitudes still largely come from other queer individuals. Like any community that engages in intersectionality or sheer identity differences, we need to have specific safe spaces for bi+ identity to be magnified and celebrated.

The bisexual identity does not need to be made the center of every space, but it is pertinent that we have our own space in addition to being accepted into everyone else’s.

The advancement of bi+ identity is indeed a necessary precursor to living in a safer, more accepting society – both in and out of the queer community.



Iyanna James-Stephenson is a 23-year-old graduate from Mt. Holyoke College. She is a writer, actress, blogger, model and traveler who has visited eight different countries and currently lives between the United States and South Korea.



Standing on the Shoulders of Giants

By *Barbara Oud*

I walked through the building as a fresh round of workshops was beginning. Each room was crowded with people and enthusiastic workshop hosts; the information market was well-visited; and a vegan lunch was being prepared in the courtyard. Our hard work had paid off at the European Bisexuality Conference (EuroBiCon). I experienced an intense sense of happiness.



Last summer, the third EuroBiCon and the first European Bisexuality Research Conference (EuroBiReCon) were held in Amsterdam. Despite the fact that I had never attended a

EuroBiCon or any conference on bisexuality, I was given the opportunity to be the conference’s program manager. In the process of organizing the EuroBiCon, we were approached by a mainstream, well-read Dutch online magazine. As coverage in this magazine was an important opportunity to promote the upcoming conference, I considered being interviewed. I knew this would mean my coming out online as bisexual, and I didn’t know whether I was ready to do so.

One night, I discussed this struggle with my partner. I told him about the possibility of having my story featured in the magazine and how much this scared me. I also told him I doubted whether I could even call myself bisexual,

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considering I had never been in a “real” relationship with a woman. I told him about feeling that organizing the EuroBiCon had perhaps encouraged me to consider myself bisexual, even though I wasn’t “actually” bisexual. He told me I was wrong; although organizing the conference further affirmed my bisexuality, I had been bisexual all along. He helped me remember that since the start of our relationship I had discussed my interests in people of multiple genders, and the fact of my bisexuality was not determined by the conference nor by the relationships I had (not) had. Not only did he give me a powerful sense of being supported, he also encouraged me to do the interview and to face the consequences. I could do it.

And so I did. The headline was “I like both men and women, so what?” I got many positive responses, yet there were also people who made strange comments. One man responded that my coming out as bisexual was “very hot,” because now my partner and I could invite a woman and have a threesome. A coworker told me after we had discussed the article that she didn’t care about anyone’s sexual orientation because “It’s not like you are going to jump onto me now, right?” A different coworker told me he had seen something on Facebook about me. He said he read an article saying I am bisexual. He said, “But this isn’t true, so why are you saying this?” I asked him why it wouldn’t be true. He told me I couldn’t be bisexual because I had not told him before.

I don’t believe that most people are against bisexuality; they just lack knowledge. Well-intentioned people can still make comments which enforce negative stereotypes or can be classified as bi-erasure. Consider the following example: at one point I was preparing for the EuroBiCon and I was sitting next to someone I know. When she asked me what I was up to, I explained that I was organizing a conference on bisexuality. She looked at me puzzled and said, “It’s so interesting that you are organizing the EuroBiCon, considering you are not bisexual...or are you?” I told her I am, and she looked even more puzzled. “But how can you be bisexual if you have a boyfriend? That means you’ve made your choice, right?”

In my view these are all examples of why bisexuality needs to become more visible. We need conferences and events and parties and magazines specifically for bisexuals. We need our own communities, to confirm we are not alone and that our feelings are valid. I found my community when organizing the EuroBiCon. By organizing the conference and becoming part of this community, I started to be more comfortable in understanding myself as bisexual. The path that I walked allowed me to openly claim my bisexuality, instead of keeping it to myself and those closest to me. Apart from these personal experiences, I was amazed by how warm and welcoming this community is. While old friends were reconnecting at the EuroBiCon, new connections were cre-

ated, and everyone was welcome. Being welcomed into this community powerfully affirmed my sexual identity. I was truly happy to a part of this important event.

Although becoming part of this community has meant a lot to me, it is not the only way I feel supported. I am lucky enough to have a support system bigger than that. As I stated above, my partner affirms my bisexual identity, as do my children, two teenage girls who can happily explain what bisexuality means, who sport their own EuroBiCon t-shirts and fight me over who gets to wear my EuroBiCon sweater.

Bisexuals face very specific challenges. Our experiences differ from the experiences of heterosexuals, but also of gays and lesbians, as bisexual identity involves being attracted to multiple genders. Bi-erasure is real. Our experiences and feelings are minimized and silenced, and persistent stereotypes affect our daily reality. More visibility is needed, but this should not be the goal in itself. Instead, visibility should be the means towards other goals, such as improving bisexual health and life circumstances.

I am well aware that I am standing on the shoulders of giants. Although I am new to the community, the community itself is not new at all. Many of you have been fighting for bisexual rights for decades, and it is your fight that created the framework within which I am currently thinking, working and fighting. We need to keep spreading knowledge and continuing the conversation. I have chosen to start small. By being open about my own sexual identity, I hope to encourage coworkers, friends and family members to think about bisexuality. After starting with my personal environment, I can expand this mission and improve awareness about bisexuality among a growing group of people. My hope is to play my part in creating a society that is open to diverse sexualities, in which multiple stories are told and heard. Bisexual communities are important sources of support and affirmation for bisexual people, but feeling supported within our own communities is not enough. Society should welcome and equally value all sexual identities. This struggle is not over yet, and I believe that our collective fight still needs to be won.



Barbara is a 26-year-old woman living in the Netherlands with her male partner and two stepdaughters. She has a degree in Gender Studies and is passionate about starting discussions about sex and sexuality.



Is It Just Me?

By Lila Hartelius, BA

The region of France in which I live was recently invaded by millions of little white butterflies... or were they moths? Few people I asked knew for sure, but more than one had an opinion. They appeared to be either a strange breed of butterfly that stays out at night or an unusual species of moth that braves the daylight, because we would see them under both sun and stars.

One day, a friend concluded that the white-winged creatures that emerged at night could not be the same as those we saw during the day, because while butterflies' wings flutter horizontally, those of moths oscillate at a diagonal, downward and away from their heads. That night, as my partner and I watched a cloud of these fairy-like beasts batting their wings against our window screen, he assured me that if I looked closely I would see that these were different than their daytime cousins. I studied their bodies carefully and, for a moment, I was almost convinced.

Bisexuality is often thought of as an impossible hybrid of homosexuality and heterosexuality that cannot truly be real. As Robyn Ochs proposed during her workshop “Challenging Biphobia and Bi Erasure” at the European Bisexuality Conference (EuroBiCon) this past summer in Amsterdam, a possible reason for distorted ideas about bisexuality may be people’s tendency to think in binaries. Reactions to the recent butterfly/moth invasion certainly betrayed this inclination: nobody I initially spoke with suggested that these insects might be a species possessing some butterfly characteristics and some moth attributes.

In a recent conversation, a lesbian friend of mine said she imagined it must be difficult to be bisexual because one has two sexualities, homosexual and heterosexual. While agreeing that there are indeed certain challenges associated with being bisexual, I responded that these difficulties come not from a dual sexuality but from an internalization of society’s

perception of bisexuality as a dual sexuality. Access to accurate and relevant information about bisexuality, as well as opportunities for contact with other bisexual-identified individuals, can help to mitigate the potentially negative effects of internalizing this and other inaccurate societal conceptions of bisexuality. By contrast, a dearth of these things can prove harmful or even lethal, especially at key moments in one’s psychological and sexual development, such as adolescence..

With relatively little research on bisexuality in existence, identifying opportunities to connect with, learn about, and experience support and validation from other bisexual people is very important for bisexual individuals. This may, however, be easier said than done. Making reference to the work of Clare Hemmings (Professor of Feminist Theory at London School of Economics’s Gender Institute), feminist bisexual and genderqueer activist, writer and researcher Shiri Eisner¹ addresses the fact that, “Since in most locations in the world, no (explicitly) bisexual community exists – and even if it does, it does not connect with a broader bisexual culture – bisexuals find themselves coming to terms with our identities in, and through, communities where we are strangers.”

Without a connection to others in one’s sexual identity group, it is difficult to recognize the link between personal challenges and common struggles. Isolation could lead one to pathologize one’s difficulties as merely personal or to ask oneself, “Is it just me?” – in other words, “Is there simply something wrong with me?” It might also make it trickier to notice and respond to even unintentional prejudice in interactions with those of other sexual identities. Isolation and discrimination can leave bisexual people more vulnerable to self-doubt and self-blame. These negative thoughts, when unmitigated can lead to anxiety, depression, and even suicide. For these reasons, I feel that bi+ spaces such as that of EuroBiCon, as well as that of the European Bisexuality Research Conference (EuroBiReCon, the first European conference on bisexuality, which also took place in Amsterdam this summer), are indispensable. As an attendee of these two conferences this July, I can say that one of the most healing things about them was that in my social interactions there – unlike those in much of my daily life – I felt safe to simply connect with people. I did not fear even unwitting homophobia or biphobia as I do in both heterosexual and lesbian/gay spaces. Layers of anxiety melted away as I moved in a world where I didn’t have to refrain from certain topics of conversation in order to avoid less-than-savory responses



EuroBiCon Conference logo

¹ Eisner, S. (2013) *Bi: Notes for a Bisexual Revolution*. Berkeley, CA: Seal Press, p. 125.

Lila, continues on next page

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such as an awkward sting of silence, a few clumsy comments or questions, or the imminent premature change of conversation that always makes my heart sink.

These conferences go beyond providing a space for validating mutual support of peers by also bringing together cutting insight with empowering information. The EuroBiCon workshops (many of which were led by attendees, some of whom were activists or experts in their field) covered a diverse range of themes, some oriented more towards feel-good activities (which addressed the human aspect) and others geared more toward practical tools and knowledge. The latter category included such themes as health and well-being, education, activism, politics, identity, the workplace, and film and media. Academic research papers presented at EuroBiReCon dealt with topics that considered bisexuality through a number of different lenses: culture, communities, identities, relationships, well-being, experience (including in relation to work) and intersections between academia and activism.

EuroBiReCon's emphasis on credible research was a refreshing change from the ignorant comments or even one-dimensional affirmations bisexuals often receive. The presenters illuminated challenges that are more than personal struggles but collective challenges to holding a sexual identity that is still not widely understood. As it turns out, "It's *not* just me."

The potency of this combination of educational content and peer support that I found at the two conferences has become even more apparent to me in the months since attending them. To my surprise, I have found myself feeling quite comfortable talking openly about bisexuality *outside of a bi+ space and with non-bisexual individuals*, something which before was always riddled with anxiety for me. Having been exposed to enlightening research about bisexuality, while being immersed in a collective affirmation of my experiences as valid, has given me the confidence and courage to speak about bisexuality from a more informed and balanced standpoint.

The capacity to talk about bisexuality in this way can be important not only for cultivating personal well-being, but also for encouraging constructive dialogue between marginalized sexual identity groups. In the context of a heteropatriarchal, monosexist society that structurally encourages division between sexual minorities, this is arguably as important as communication between individuals in an intimate relationship. Had I had the same conversation with my lesbian friend before this summer's conferences, I probably would have become anxious, defensive and unsure of myself. As it

was, I felt calm and collected, confident in sharing my view and open to whatever response I might get.

For people of any minority sexual identity, better understanding individuals of other minority sexual identities can offer opportunities to form social bonds across lines of self-identification – kinships born of recognition of the beautiful, concordant complexity entwined in the lattice of our similarities and differences. However, to this end, members of such groups would need not only to strive to understand those in others but also to have insight into the unique needs and experiences of those in their own sexual identity group so as to help those in others better understand them. Bi+ spaces such as those of EuroBiCon and EuroBiReCon can help bisexual people acquire precisely that.

After careful observation of the white bugs fluttering on the dark face of our window screen, I had to admit that, in fact, these creatures looked exactly the same as their diurnal counterparts. Some weeks later, looking in a French dictionary, my partner and I confirmed what had at last been proclaimed with certainty by an animal-enthusiast friend of mine: these paradoxical beings were nocturnal butterflies.



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



Lila with Robyn Ochs in Amsterdam during EuroBiCon

The Bi Bookshelf

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

By Sarah E. Rowley

Big Book News

We're now at the height of book awards season, and a novel focused on a bi woman has been short-listed for the National Book Award for Fiction, one of the U.S.'s most prestigious literary prizes. August, the narrator of **Jacqueline Woodson's** *Another Brooklyn*, featured in the last version of this column, has both male and female lovers as an adult, though most of the book is focused on her experiences growing up as an African-American girl in a Brooklyn neighborhood in the 1970s and 80s, and her relationships with her family and female friends.

New Fiction Featuring Bisexual Women

-In **Farzana Doctor's** *All Inclusive*, bi and polyamorous heroine Ameera finds her job at a Mexican resort at risk from rumors about her sex life and struggles with the mystery of her father's disappearance. This is the third novel from the Indian-Canadian author who won the Dayne Ogilvie Prize for LGBT Emerging Writers and it appears to have a touch of magical realism.

-**Robin Talley's** *Our Own Private Universe*, due out in the U.S. in January 2017, centers on a fifteen-year-old girl who knows she's bisexual, but has only dated guys. That changes when she falls for another girl on a youth-group mission trip. Out author Talley has published three previous young adult books about lesbian and genderqueer youth: the award-winning *Lies We Tell Ourselves*, *What We Left Behind* and *As I Descended*.

-**Alexis M. Smith's** second novel, *Marrow Island*, centers on two bi women, childhood first loves now partnered with men, who reunite on their home island in Washington State. One has joined a cult trying to repair the damage from the environmental cataclysm that forced them to flee. Some readers love Smith's natural description of post-disaster Washington State and thoughtful musings; others have been frustrated with its slow pace.

-African-American science fiction author **Nisi Shawl's** first novel, *Everfair*, is an alternative history in which African-Americans, Europeans and Africans band together to prevent one of history's great atrocities: the mass murder of 10 million people in the Congo by Belgium between 1885 and 1908. Two of the main characters in her steampunk novel are Daisy and Lisette, poly bisexual women whose complex love affair encounters as many challenges as their utopian African nation.

-British rapper **Kate Tempest** expanded the main plot lines



from her critically acclaimed hip-hop album *Everybody Down* for her widely-anticipated first novel, *The Bricks That Built the Houses*. The book centers on the relationship between a bi sex worker and a lesbian drug dealer in contemporary London.

-One of contemporary South Korea's most acclaimed authors, **Bae Suah**, has a new novel, *A Greater Music*, out in English translation by Deborah Smith (the first translator to ever share the Man Booker Prize for her rendition of Han Kang's *The Vegetarian*). When the narrator falls into an icy river, her memories shift between her present with her metalworking boyfriend Joachim and her past with a female lover called M.

-Well-established U.S. novelist **Cathleen Schine** has gotten widespread acclaim for her darkly humorous new novel, *They May Not Mean To, But They Do*, about the relationship between an elderly mother and her middle-aged children. The adult daughter in the book, like Schine herself, left a long-standing marriage to a man to marry another woman.

-*The Dream Lover* by **Elizabeth Berg**, an extensively-researched novel based on the life of pioneering 19th-century French feminist and author George Sand, is out in paperback; Berg covers Sand's relationships with many famous men, including Frédéric Chopin, but suggests that the actress Marie Dorval most deeply captured her heart.

Bisexual Memoirs

-Out bisexual actor **Alan Cumming**, fresh off the success of his first memoir, *Not My Father's Son*, presents a series of stories from his life involving famous names like Elizabeth Taylor and Oprah, illustrated by his own photographs. The book is called *You Gotta Get Bigger Dreams: My Life in Stories and Pictures*.

-Originally published in 2015, **Meags Fitzgerald's** *Long Red Hair* is now getting more attention. It's a graphic memoir focused on the author's coming out as a bisexual woman in the 1980s and 90s, and includes meditations on

Bi Bookshelf, continues on next page

~Out bisexual Haitian-American feminist and culture critic **Roxane Gay** has delayed her memoir, *Hunger*, which focuses on her struggles with weight and body image, until next year, but will publish a short story collection, *Difficult Women*, in January 2017.

New Work from Out Authors

~The biggest news on the literary front is **Ali Smith's** *Autumn*, the first in a quartet of novels about the seasons from the writer largely acknowledged to be this generation's Virginia Woolf. Smith is a disabled Scottish lesbian whose gender-bending and experimental narratives (most recently the delightful *How to Be Both*) have won many awards. U.K. readers will get the book in October 2016, while U.S. publication will occur in February 2017.

~Out lesbian Irish-Canadian author **Emma Donoghue** has been deliberately inclusive of bi women in both her fiction and nonfiction since the 1990s. Her latest novel, *The Wonder*, is a psychological thriller focused on an 11-year old girl who becomes a sensation in 1850 Ireland by refusing to eat for several months, and the nurse determined to save her life. It's fantastic.

~The New Zealand-raised, U.K.-based lesbian author **Stella Duffy** also has a new novel out: *London Lies Beneath*, historical fiction about three boys from a South London slum on a 1912 sailing trip. In related news, HBO has optioned both of Duffy's novels about the Byzantine ruler Theodora, the sixth-century child-sex-slave-turned-empress, for a television mini-series.

~U.S. author **Nicole Dennis-Benn** has won high acclaim for her first novel, *Here Comes the Sun*, set in her native Jamaica. Protagonist Margot, forced into prostitution to support her younger sister, longs to admit her love for another woman, who is shunned as a lesbian. You may better know Dennis-Benn and her partner Emma Benn for holding the first lesbian wedding in Jamaica in 2012, though their union was not legally recognized. Her forthcoming novel, *Run Free*, tells the story of a transgender son of Jamaican immigrants.

~Speaking of U.S.-Caribbean stories, out author **Naomi Jackson's** debut novel *The Star Side of Bird Hill* is now out in paperback. This coming-of-age story focuses on two

sisters sent from Brooklyn to Barbados when their mother is unable to care for them, where they explore their sexuality and learn about their own family history.

~Out trans author **Jia Qing Wilson-Yang's** debut novel *Small Beauty* tells the story of mixed-race Chinese trans girl Mei's journey in small-town Canada; early reviews call it "luminous."

~**Randa Jarrar**, the queer Muslim Palestinian-American author who won awards for her autobiographical novel *A Map of Home*, has a second book of fiction out: a short story collection called *Him, Me, Muhammad Ali*.

~Out author **Kirsten Valdez Quade** continues to win praise for her short story collection *Night at the Fiestas*, now out in paperback. Set mainly in tight-knit Catholic, Mexican-American communities in New Mexico, the book has won awards from the National Book Critics Circle, the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and the National Book Foundation.

~Out transman **iO Tillett Wright** has published *Darling Days: A Memoir*, about growing up in New York's bohemian East Village neighborhood during the 1980s and 1990s with a loving but unstable addict mother. Reviews praise Wright's depiction of gender-variant childhood and gentrification.

~Also out in paperback is *Jam on the Vine* by **Lashonda Katrice Barnett**, which explores African-American history in the Progressive Era (1897-1925). Heroine Ivoe Williams grows from a reading-loving girl in rural Texas to a crusading journalist who finds sex and love with women. Alas, the ex-girlfriend who marries a man is a villain straight out of central casting, but out lesbian Barnett shows the rise of police abuse and the convict labor system in eye-opening ways relevant to the U.S. justice struggle today.

Other Books of Interest

~History professor **Rachel Hope Cleves** has been getting rave reviews for her nonfiction book *Charity and Sylvia: A Same-Sex Marriage in Early America*, about two women who used a loophole in Vermont's common-law marriage statute to live as a married couple from 1807 to 1851. It's rare to see such love among ordinary readers for a book by an academic, but readers have found it incredibly moving.

~U.S.-born, U.K.-based **Sara Taylor's** novel *The Lauras* has a genderqueer narrator, Alex, whose mother takes them both on a road trip across America to confront their family history. It joins other recent novels about non-binary characters like **Jeff Garvin's** *Symptoms of Being Human* and **Robin Talley's** *What We Left Behind*.



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

Seeing Clearly

By Emma Walsh



Let's be honest for a second: having no community sucks. I was going to try to make that sound more eloquent and literary, but I think the bluntness of it gets across what I mean more than any metaphor could. It sucks.

Having no community, no representation, no support, no *clue* about bisexuality (my own or otherwise) is what caused me so much angst and anxiety when I was closeted. I was closeted for years without even knowing because I didn't know that a person could be bisexual. And being closeted, but not *knowing* you're closeted, is a very strange feeling.

In those days, it was like looking in the mirror with no glasses on; everything was always blurry and out of focus. There was something there that was making me uncomfortable, but it was unidentifiable and therefore I couldn't deal with it. I was always anxious and confused about the indistinguishable part of me I couldn't see. That eventually became the normal way to see myself; I didn't have anyone there to tell me that life didn't have to be that way. No community and no support meant no way for me to even identify what was making me so anxious all the time, which resulted in a lot of headaches, stumbling and confusion, for years.

I did, however, see people on television and in the media, but I only saw them in black and white. I saw straight people, straight characters, gay people, gay characters and gay culture. There's straight or gay. That's it. I knew that I wasn't gay. I wasn't sure if I was straight. But if I wasn't either of those, then what was I? *Is there something wrong with me?* became an everyday thought.

I was searching through everything possible to find something else I could be, but the 'B' of LGBT wasn't really there. It's like having a TV antenna and no matter how much it's moved around or adjusted, that damn channel just ain't going to work. I just didn't know about bisexuality because I had never seen it or heard it. While simultaneously fantasizing about dating either Emma Watson or Patrick Dempsey (it was the golden era of *Grey's Anatomy* and *Harry Potter*), I thought to myself "I'm straight because I'm not a lesbian."

Where was a community, my community, to slap some sense into me? To inform me that the world is a rainbow of colors and not just the black and white we see on our television screens or in our newspapers?

Apparently, for me it was on the Internet. For years I saved up for my first computer, mostly because I really wanted to be able to play Sims 3. Once I discovered that computers can do more than just play super sick games like Sims and Club Penguin, I was absolutely hooked. I proudly embodied the millennial stereotype: I constantly wrotethings on my blog and posted politically charged articles on my Facebook, all while

sitting in a coffee shop wearing a beanie and Birkenstocks.

But it was when I discovered YouTube that things really changed for me. Suddenly, I found media that was made by every kind of person imaginable. There were videos about *everything*: how to do laundry, what being vegan means, someone making weird sounds for 15 minutes, people playing video games, political discussions, news reports, how to pierce your own bellybutton and millions more. The people on YouTube weren't just the people that advertising companies want to be shown in movies and shows. They weren't the people on TV or in the paper. They were real people, diverse people.

And, boy, were there queer people. I found this genre of video called "coming out" videos, where people literally make a video of themselves coming out. At first, I wasn't sure why I liked "coming out" videos so much. *Thank god I'll never have to do that*, I would think, laughing nervously as I watched the YouTuber *nouthisisliving* come out as gay.

It was when I watched a bisexual coming out video that my world literally changed.

'You can like more than one gender?' I thought. *That's something that other people feel?*

Then I watched another bisexual coming out video. And another. And another. And soon it was 4 a.m. and I had watched every single coming out video that had ever been posted to YouTube (or so it seemed).

I began commenting on the videos. I would ask a lot of questions: "Who can be bisexual?" "What does it mean to be bisexual?" "Is it normal to be bisexual?" And people actually replied. They were nicer, more informative and more supportive than anyone or anything I had experienced before. In the span of 12 hours, I had been shown bisexual representation, I learned what bisexuality was, that it was normal, and that there were people out there waiting to welcome other bisexuals with open arms. I might not have entirely accepted my own sexuality that night, but I was seeing myself more clearly than I ever had before. I was seeing myself in others and seeing that there was a community of people out there for me.

It took another couple of months for me to come out to myself and then to others, but without seeing myself clearly, seeing others like me, or having support from a community, I have no idea where I would be today. The LGBTQ+ community is an amazing one, but what I so desperately needed when I was unknowingly closeted was to see bi+ representation clearly and separately in order to identify and understand myself. In order to see and be proud of the rainbow that we all make, we each need our own color to be proud of.

Emma Walsh is studying Cell Biology and English Literature. She is passionate about feminism, veganism, reading, writing and playing board games.

Safe

By E. E. Giles

I can't remember now if I had one specific moment when the lightbulb suddenly came on, or if it was more gradual, like a dim light slowly getting brighter. I've spent the majority of my life doubting myself. Looking back, it seems like a lot of time wasted. But it took all of that time to accept myself, or more specifically, to accept my sexuality. Like a lot of folks, I grew up seeing and hearing things that led me to believe bisexuality was non-existent, not valid. *Bisexual people are just selfish, aren't they? They just wanna fuck everybody. They're promiscuous. They can't be in long-term relationships. They're not faithful. They just can't make up their minds. They're just straight girls looking for attention, or gay guys stuck in the closet. When are they gonna pick a side?* These messages can be insidious. They have a way of creeping into your ear and whispering that something is wrong with you, reminding you that you're the problem, wrong, broken. I believed those voices for a very long time.

A few years ago, I started finding spaces online where bi people came to vent, to console and to celebrate each other. Finally hearing what bisexuality meant to bi people felt like being in a coffeehouse with friends while it snowed outside: warm, familiar, safe. I had never met any of these people face to face; maybe I never would. But we knew each other; we undeniably saw each other. The more I learned, the more I realized that I had never truly known what it meant to be bi, and in how many different ways folks could express it. Attraction to more than one gender, attraction to your own gender and other genders, attraction regardless of gender. These were real people feeling the things that for years I thought were malfunctions in my brain. I felt comfortable in a way I never had before. I felt real. I have these online bi spaces to thank for helping me not only to understand my bisexuality, but to love it, to be proud of it. These are the spaces where I still feel unquestionably understood, acknowledged and validated.

Sometimes, I forget that not every space is safe for bi folks. But every time I forget, someone quickly reminds me. A few weeks ago, as I lazily scrolled through my Facebook newsfeed, I came across an article shared by a page I follow, a group that seemed to be inclusive of all women-loving women. The title of the article was something like "These Queer and Bisexual Women Share Their Stories of Discrimination within the LGBTQ+ Community." I wanted to read it, sure that I would find some stories from women to whom I could relate. As I went to click on the link, my gaze slid down to the comments section; it's often hard to avoid glancing through the comments, as much as we may try. The top comment below the article read something like this:

"I have a hard time with this because I can see both sides. Throughout my life as a lesbian, I've had concerns about dating bisexual women. I've dated a few bisexual women

in the past, and even had a long-term relationship with a bisexual woman, but she eventually ended up going back to a past boyfriend because of the pressures of family and society. From my perspective, when a woman says she refuses to date or share spaces with bisexual women, it isn't really discrimination. It's fear. Fear of losing a woman you love to a man, fear of competing with the entire population instead of just women. I understand that the experience of queer and bisexual women is real, I just don't think it's helping anyone to call it discrimination."

As I read this, I felt heat rising up in my chest. My breath became short. Before I could click away, I noticed how many people had agreed with this comment, liked it, even responded by thanking the woman for sharing such an "important" opinion. I had to close Facebook and close my eyes for a second. My cheeks were getting hot, and I felt water threatening to push past my eyelids, like someone had just thrown me out into a sandstorm, naked. I wanted to scream, or throw something, but all I could manage to do was sort of tremble, waiting for my breath to return to its rhythm. There it was, my reminder that I had gotten too comfortable. The world sees us as something to be feared.

Despicable as it is, I've grown used to being feared by others because of my race, because of my precarious place in this world as a black woman. I've only very recently come to understand that this fear is still discrimination, just in another form (note for those who may be new to this: discrimination is an ever-adaptive beast and it takes *many* forms, changing with the times). Black folks have spent years, decades, centuries fighting to be recognized as human, and we're still fighting today. Right now, this very minute. When a police officer murders a young black *child* and can claim fear as a valid reason, this is discrimination in one of its ugliest forms. Claiming that you're scared does not give anyone the right to invalidate someone's life. It just doesn't. It's really that simple.

I understand that we're not talking about murder in this specific case of Facebook articles and social media comments, but the point still stands. Your fear is discrimination. The onus is not on bi folks to placate your irrational fear; it's on you to unlearn it. It's been said many times, but clearly bears repeating: bi women are in no way more likely than gay women to leave their partners, to cheat on their partners, or to engage in any of these behaviors so often ascribed to us. If a woman you love has left you, I'm truly sorry for your loss, but you need to stop blaming bisexuality. Had she left you for another woman, she would still be just as bi. The only difference is that you wouldn't hate her for it. Honestly, aren't you tired? Tired of making excuses, hiding behind fear as a reason to mistreat people? Tired of lying to yourself? I know I'm tired; we all are.

I know that the women who praised that comment on Facebook, and the one woman who wrote it, will probably never see this. And that was a conscious decision. I could have

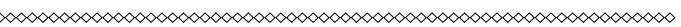
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chosen to write these thoughts as a reply to her comment, on Facebook, in public, but I chose against that. Because as much as I would like those women to understand all of this, I no longer feel safe in that space. It has shown itself to be a space where biphobia is not only tolerated, but celebrated. And I refuse to throw myself into that sandstorm again.



E.E. Giles is a 23-year-old black bisexual womanist, partnered with a man. In typical millennial fashion, she is usually broke and currently lives at home. When not working, E.E. loves to write, read, act, sing, dance and create in as many ways as possible. A textbook introvert, she aspires to one day share her art with an audience willing to listen.



Bi in the Bluffs

By JamieAnn Meyers and Mary Jo Klinker

The two of us met in the fall of 2013 and became fast friends desiring queer community in Winona, Minnesota, a town of 27,000 people nestled between the Mississippi River and forested bluffs, with limited community surrounding non-binary gender and sexual identities.

This conversation began in 2015 at the annual BECAUSE (Bisexual Empowerment Conference, A Uniting Supportive Experience) Conference hosted by the Bisexual Organizing Project.

Mary Jo: What is your experience living as a bi person in rural southeastern Minnesota?

JamieAnn: In Winona, people are very curious about trans identities, but not so much about bi identities. I was playing golf two summers ago on a local nine-hole blue-collar course with two women, one a friend who knew my trans identity and who had previously “outed” me to her friend, who was also playing with us. My new acquaintance began an animated conversation around my trans identity, which carried through most of the round until the eighth hole, when I came out to her as bi. The conversation ended abruptly and there was no more discourse until we finally said goodbye back at the clubhouse. We haven’t been in contact since. It was apparent to me that my new acquaintance, with whom I would love to have a friendship on the golf course, could not understand bi, or perhaps had a vision of negative stereotypes around bi, and I inferred from her silence that she was not open to learning more. This isn’t a phenomenon specific to a more rural area, but I believe that it’s more pervasive in rural areas, where those of us who are bi are less likely to share that identity with others. We are hidden in ways that trans identities are less likely to be hidden.

Mary Jo: What locations have you found beneficial to creating community in a rural Midwestern context?

JamieAnn: One of my first new bi friends was in my hometown that is an island of relative openness surrounded by a very rural and conservative environment. In this town it’s very difficult not to be out as trans because of my long history of living in this space as a cisgender person. Because my town has two universities and a technical college, and education is a major “industry,” it’s a bit easier to find folks who, if not understanding of trans, at least are very accepting of my trans identity. But bi folks are difficult to find in this “straight,” relatively rural world, and straight cisgender people in this environment are far less likely to accept and understand people with bi identities.

The many bi friendships and acquaintanceships that I have developed with other bi people of all genders are mostly in the Twin Cities metro area, and I communicate and meet with some of them on a regular basis via the Bisexual Organizing Project and various Pride events.

Mary Jo: What other spaces have you found to be affirming?

JamieAnn: My gender transition has resulted in sexual isolation from my partner, a heterosexual woman. To fill this empty space in my life, I turned to a social media platform much like Facebook, but for people who identify with kink. Such platforms allow people to identify their sexual orientation, thereby making it easy to connect with other bi persons of all genders. In the space of a few weeks I began to meet a large number of bi- and heteroflexible-identified people who enjoy making friends in the context of BDSM and “swinging” (to use an old term). I hide my trans identity in this environment because I encountered a new friend early in my experience who was homophobic and would no longer communicate with me because he felt that sex with me would be like having sex with a man. Of course, nothing could be further from the truth.

Social media kink platforms have made it possible for me to finally live my life as a bi person who moves freely in a sex-positive environment, while simultaneously fulfilling my identity as one who enjoys kink as a means of sexual fulfillment. Living in this way has also resulted in opening my relationship with my wife of 50 years, resulting in a more honest and transparent loving relationship free of dishonesty and mistrust.

To be perfectly honest, I appreciate being able to live my life in this small corner of my world in “stealth,” meaning that I can be the woman I am while never having to come out as trans. For me, being openly bi in this environment is much safer than being both openly bi and openly trans.

Mary Jo: I appreciate you sharing that, especially because I’ve felt that pain of passing/hiding in response to my bi identity; undoubtedly because of our generational, class and gendered

JamieAnn & Mary Jo, continues on next page

JamieAnn & Mary Jo, *continued from previous page*

differences, we've experienced different forms of hiding for safety and survival.

JamieAnn: As a cisgender woman in her 30s, in what ways have you found affirmation of your bisexual identity?

Mary Jo: In my graduate school years, I spent nearly every Thursday with queer friends theorizing the possibility of a "queer utopia." We felt like nothing could be worse than our isolation in rural Washington. We were racially, economically, gendered and sexually diverse, then we dispersed to teach, no longer safe in the momentary utopia we had built.

When I moved to Winona in 2013, marriage equality had just become law statewide, and many LGBTQ+ youth had learned the critical importance of grassroots organizing that year. The climate of normativity made it more difficult for me to exist as a bisexually-identified female partnered with a male in a non-normative kinship. I learned fast that kinship outside of marriage was irrelevant to the homonormative goals of lesbian and gay folks; for instance, at one of the first events I attended for LGBTQ faculty I was told it was unclear if "allies" were invited. Ouch. I felt closeted and invisible. Or, in my radical openness, I once shared my excitement over meeting an incredible queer musician passing through town, likely for some bluegrass performance (that's about all we have in the bluffs), and a monosexist colleague informed me to "keep trying, you might find a committed-female partner!" I'm happy with my committed partnership to a male *AND* the queer potential of other transformative relationships! While I know these statements aren't necessarily intended to harm, I think they point to the reason we need bi+ spaces to create support in larger LGBTQ communities.

Something unique I've found is that gender and sexual identity politics are not necessarily the glue to an affirmative community here in the bluffs. In fact, creating community aligned with people based on socio-economic blue-collar background has been way more fulfilling. Growing up in a rural, working-class community, I have mostly found myself drawn to non-academic spaces like more blue-collar bars/restaurants/leagues. While a majority of friends and people I encounter in Winona are straight and cisgender, I've found that doing some of the bridge work between friends, refusing to be marginalized in my sexual identity and being rather unapologetically queer have afforded me growth and surprisingly strong friendships in this rural-ish area.

Meeting you and other bi/non-labeled sexually fluid women in Winona has given me the ability to at least be real to myself and my desires, and find community outside of a normative definition.

JamieAnn: I feel the same way about you, Mary Jo. Finding sex-positive people with whom we can share our identities and our deepest thoughts and desires is so important to flourishing in this semi-rural setting. Any final thoughts?

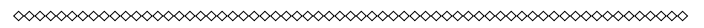
Mary Jo: Just thank you, JamieAnn! Our community is small and not without pain, but each time we speak a truth about our desires, that community grows to include others who don't fit neatly into the imposed binaries of monosexism.



JamieAnn Meyers is a transwoman and Professor Emerita at Winona State University with extensive experience in presenting and facilitating educational programs dealing with gender identity and sexual orientation. She is a lead trainer with the Minnesota GLBTA Campus Alliance and the convener of TransLutherans.

Mary Jo Klinker is an Assistant Professor of Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at Winona State University. Her teaching and research interests include LGBT/Queer politics and history, transnational feminism, contemporary masculinities, and postfeminist media studies.

Queer comrades, the two have worked together on organizing community workshops in Winona on micro-aggressions and for BECAUSE on bisexual organizing in rural contexts.



Where Do You Call Home?

By Liz

Lesbian spaces are not my home.

In my experience lesbian spaces are exclusive.

The only people who have used my bi identity negatively are lesbians.

Straight spaces are not my home.

In my experience straight spaces are exclusive.

The only people who have used my feminist identity negatively are straight.

Open, bi, pan, queer, non-binary spaces are my home.

In my experience bi+ spaces are welcoming.

The only people who don't ask me to pick sides are there.



Liz is a LGBTQ science writer. You can also see her work on www.queereka.com and www.lifesciencewritingsolutions.com.



Artwork: Liz

Bri, continued from page 1

“We don’t need to tell the family about this.” My mother didn’t want anyone to know that I was bi. I had finally decided to come out to my mother and father, believing that because they were my parents they would still love and accept me. Unfortunately, my mother insisted on a two hour “discussion” to convince me I wasn’t gay and that this was all a mistake. We settled on my keeping my sexuality to myself and not speaking of it again; the *family* didn’t need to know that I loved women as well as men. I was dating a woman at the time and was only allowed to refer to her as my “roommate” in their presence. The alienation that began here grew into a chasm that neither side could traverse. Family is supposed to be the keystone to building young identities. For most people, their relatives are their first community. For me the rejection of this vital identity, my bisexuality, by my family only encouraged my eventual departure from them. When I finally left, it wasn’t with sadness or regret but with a cold, seething rage.

“What a quaint little relationship you two have!” My colleague squinted because she had had too much to drink and a little Chardonnay spilled onto the carpet. My “roommate,” Melanie, had brought me to a formal party for work, the invitation highly coveted among the academics we both worked with. Mel introduced me as her “significant other,” making the joke that we’re such great roommates that it’s like we’re married. I cringed, but smiled anyway at the drunken physics instructor who could have made, or destroyed, our early academic careers. Mel had explained quite carefully to me that even though we were “mostly a couple” our conservative coworkers wouldn’t understand and it could hurt our job prospects later in life.

Mel said that “we want to fit in,” but I realized a little too late that she was desperate to belong and so denied her identity. At the time, I echoed this desire; this was the community I wanted. Elegant wing-backed chairs, the discussion of culture and art over a glass of exquisite Scotch, climbing this gilded ladder in the ivory tower until we reached the inner sanctum and declared, “We belong here.” But while we lounged in the overstuffed chairs and drank the overpriced Scotch, the identity I tried to stuff down with flippant dismissal and casual jokes began to waken the rage that had been simmering in my stomach. How could I continue to pretend to be detached while our relationship felt like a filthy skeleton we kept tightly shut away? How could I continue to be complacent while Mel made jokes to hide the fact that we were more than “roommates”? This elite island of academics held all the promises for my future career – to reveal my true identity would be akin to total career destruction. I decided that the price of

my membership was too high; I left both the college and Mel, never revealing to either my whole true self.

“So now that you’re married to a man, you’re technically straight, right?” I mean, you can’t claim to be bisexual if you’re with a man.” Fast forward a handful of years and I’m sitting in a coffee shop on a bright winter morning with a close friend. I patiently ask, “Did your sexuality change when you got married?” She lets out a surprised “Oh!” in recognition. Over the years I got better at explaining my sexuality and had decided that I didn’t want to belong to a community that couldn’t accept the whole me. Unfortunately, that meant I had quite a few years of being alone; I was getting heartsick by myself, yet I learned to love my own company. The more time I spent single and alone, the more I learned to love whom I was as a whole being. Perhaps for me, not being a part of a community gave me an opportunity to discover and fall in love with myself. And just when I had come to terms with being comfortable in my own skin and sexuality, Fate threw me for a loop and tossed a man in my way. On our third date I confessed my bisexuality, stating it as a challenge. *Accept me as I am or get the hell out of my way.* He replied, “That’s great! How has that shaped who you are?” I was floored and speechless. No awkward conversation, no rude threesome jokes, no challenge to my identity. Unwavering acceptance and a gentle curiosity defined him and I found myself realizing that this person was different from anyone I’d ever met. He softened my edges, quietly defused me when I was looking for a fight, and offered constant kindness and support. He even persuaded me to marry him, a nigh impossible feat, as I had sworn I would never marry. He also introduced me to people who were as accepting and kind as he was: his friends and family. Suddenly I found myself in a community with people I loved, but because of my past experiences, I was afraid to share the truth about my identity. I couldn’t bear rejection yet again, not with these people who were so warm and wonderful. I felt like I had found home but couldn’t move in, and I so desperately wanted to.

“It must be really hard being in a seemingly straight relationship when you’re bisexual. You need to connect with other people who are bi. It would be a good thing.” This was my husband a year ago. (See how easy it was to fall in love with him?) I had found an article online dispelling the myths about bisexuality and wanted to post it on social media – in the process “outing” myself to my new community. “Just post it. Tell everyone. I think you might be surprised.” He was all encouragement, and I was terrified. But I did. And I announced to my friends and family-in-law I was bisexual (other than the close few who

Bri, continues on next page

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already knew). But instead of rejection, within the first day I received encouragement, support and even some “Me too’s.” A number of our close community friends came out to me and wanted to chat, connect, relate. I had planted my feet and declared my sexuality and instead of rejection, I discovered my own mini-community of bisexual friends among people I knew. It took me years to get here, to be boldly unapologetic about my bisexuality, and to make peace with my past experiences. By prioritizing my own acceptance of my sexuality and vowing to be my authentic

self in my relationships, the community I had always wanted coalesced around me like a transparent, warm blanket. And I am more than happy to snuggle in its warmth, at long last.



Bri Kerschner is an English instructor at a two-year community college in Minnesota. In addition to spending time with her dog and husband, she loves spinning fleece into beautiful yarns. She is passionate about eliminating bi-erasure and encouraging LTBTQ+ voices.



Angela, continued from page 1

That weekend was a bisexual activist’s dream come true and one of the most fulfilling experiences of my life. It was the first time that I’d ever been in a bisexual-specific space. A space where the overwhelming majority of people were like me – where being bisexual was the automatic, assumed, default identity. Where I did not have to go out of my way to explain myself or wait to be asked. I didn’t quite realize how exhilarating that feeling could be.

Since I’d never known it, I didn’t realize what I’d been missing for so long (and when it occurred to me that gay people feel this way most of the time in queer spaces, I could not believe that either!). Although bisexuals make up the majority of LGBT people, the nature of heteronormativity, the trajectory of the history of being LGBT in America, and a myriad of complicated other factors have presented unique challenges to creating bisexual-specific communities and spaces. I find it difficult to meet other openly bisexual people even in my specific field working on LGBT causes. Events like BiWeek offer the visibility that I believe we don’t often realize we are aching for and which we struggle to articulate. They give us the opportunity to share a stronger sense of the community, pride and knowledge of our history that we see many of our loved ones in the gay and transgender communities carrying with them.

Also important, BiWeek was a space full of bisexual activists from various backgrounds, including people of color, transgender and gender nonconforming people, local community organizers, service providers and people of varying ages and abilities. I met one woman who had come out to herself as bisexual only a few months ago and was not open to anyone else in her life. I met a hero of mine whose writings and lectures on bisexuality have been familiar to me for nearly a decade. In addition, several personal learning moments made me more acutely aware of my white and cisgender privilege that I bring to the table in all of my

interactions, and I hope to humbly carry those lessons with me going forward.

I’m grateful that the organization I work for supports my identity not just on a personal level, but sees a place for bisexual inclusion in our professional work. My time in DC during BiWeek motivated me more than ever to think about bisexual issues in a more creative and unique way and to bring that back to my job so that we can continue to value bisexual identities and issues. The #BiStories initiative provides a great mechanism by which to publicly highlight bisexual-specific voices and perspectives in support of LGBT policy priorities. But it doesn’t end there. National LGBT organizations should actively push bisexual people forward to give testimony in front of legislatures and courts. We should do research and testing on the best messages to effectively increase support and understanding of what bisexuality means. And we should make a proactive effort to hire more bisexual people and ensure bisexual representation – not to even begin reiterating how policy priorities and programmatic work specifically makes lives better for bisexual people.

The rates of mental illness among bisexual people are alarming. This can’t be unrelated to the lack of visibility, community, and spaces that we have been able to create for ourselves. I’m encouraged and inspired to do my part to keep moving the needle forward. I hope and believe that we can only grow, and #BiWeek 2017 will be bigger than ever.



Angela is the Director of External Communications at [Freedom for All Americans](#) (FFAA), the national campaign to secure nondiscrimination protections for LGBT people. She lives in New York City.



Bi Artists, Activists & Scholars at the White House

By Ann Tweedy

I was grateful to be able to attend my second Bisexual Community Briefing at the White House on September 26. This event was a remarkable showcase of bi talent and expertise. It had a more celebratory feel than last year's event, which was a conversation among federal attorneys, agency staff and the bi community. Both events served important purposes but were quite different from each other. This year, there were several panels featuring bi scholars and activists on topics like anti-discrimination protections; bi people of color; and the pansexual, fluid, and bi+ communities. The event's two hours were packed to the brim, so everything seemed very fast-paced and somewhat abbreviated. This resulted in the panels being quite thought-provoking but not digging into the issues as much as would have been possible in a longer event. What struck the deepest chord for me was the art – there were incredible musical performances by Monique “Honeybird” Mizrahi and Robin Renee, among others. As a poet myself, I was perhaps most inspired by the poetry. Trans poet Andrea Jenkins recited a powerful piece about the horrific difficulties that black trans women face and their strength and mutual solidarity in the midst of these, and Khafre ABif read an inspiring poem dedicated to those who are HIV-positive. Kevin Hogan and Yazmin Monet Watkins also presented strong poetry, and Ron Suresha read an interesting personal essay about his identity as a bi man.

By the end of the event, I felt filled with joy, awed by our collective talents and knowledge, and empowered. After



Panel at Bisexual Community Briefing

taking a quick group picture, we all streamed into the dusk, and many of us took selfies with the White House before heading to the after-party.

*Ann is a poet, lawyer, and legal scholar who grew up in Massachusetts and currently lives in Washington State. Her first book of poetry, *The Body's Alphabet*, came out in 2016; you can read more about her at www.anntweedy.com*

Room for My Whole Self

By Angélique Gravely

I have been out as bisexual for five years. During those years, I have participated in a GSA, worked and volunteered for LGBTQ organizations, and attended LGBTQ-focused events and conferences, yet I have rarely felt unequivocally understood and supported as a Black bisexual woman in these spaces. My perspective and those of others who identify as Black and/or bi+ have so infrequently been centered or even acknowledged in generic LGBTQ spaces that I have spent much of these five years wondering if there is truly room for me to be all of me in the greater LGBTQ community.

For the five days I was in D.C. to attend the White House Bisexual Community Briefing, along with other bi+ community events, I didn't have to question whether or not there was room for me to bring my full self into any space. Every event I attended acknowledged, and at times celebrated, the existence of intersectional identities and diverse experi-

ences in those spaces. The limited range of stories I usually encountered in LGBTQ spaces was not uplifted as the most valid queer experience. Instead, all stories, whether shared on a panel or shared across a restaurant table, were affirmed without judgment or attempts to make a hierarchy out of them.

In this setting, I felt I could be proudly bisexual without silently waiting for someone to question the validity of my orientation. I could be proudly Black without feeling like I had to filter my Black experience of my sexuality for white consumption. I could even live out other parts of myself that I sometimes cloaked in generic LGBTQ spaces in order to be accepted - like my identity as a person of faith or as a burgeoning bi+ activist.

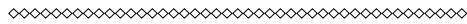
The bi+ spaces I encountered strove to make room for multiple ways of experiencing just as the bi+ umbrella makes room for multiple ways of loving and labeling. In doing so, these spaces taught me that having the freedom to be all of me in a queer-centered space is not an unattainable dream.

Angélique, continues on next page

New(ish) groups in the Boston area:

Bi+/Trans* Support Group is a peer-facilitated, safe space where individuals who identify as both bisexual+ and transgender* can discuss a wide range of topics related to gender and sexuality. Meets the last Thursday of odd-numbered months (January, March, etc.) 7-9pm, at Hope Central, 85 Seaverns Avenue, Jamaica Plain.

Social BLiSS in Jamaica Plain is focused on socializing and discussion with like-minded bi+ folks of all ages and genders. Each month, the group starts off with a different topic and ends up wherever the conversation takes us. This group meets the 4th Thursdays of each month, 6:30-8pm, at Cafe Nero in Jamaica Plain. For more information, email Mia at youngblissboston@gmail.com.



Angélique, continued from previous page

I can have love and support while still being open about all of my intersectional identities, and I shouldn't have to settle for a community that doesn't value all of who I am. Being in truly communal, intentional bi+ spaces for the first time in my life made me believe that I deserve better than that.

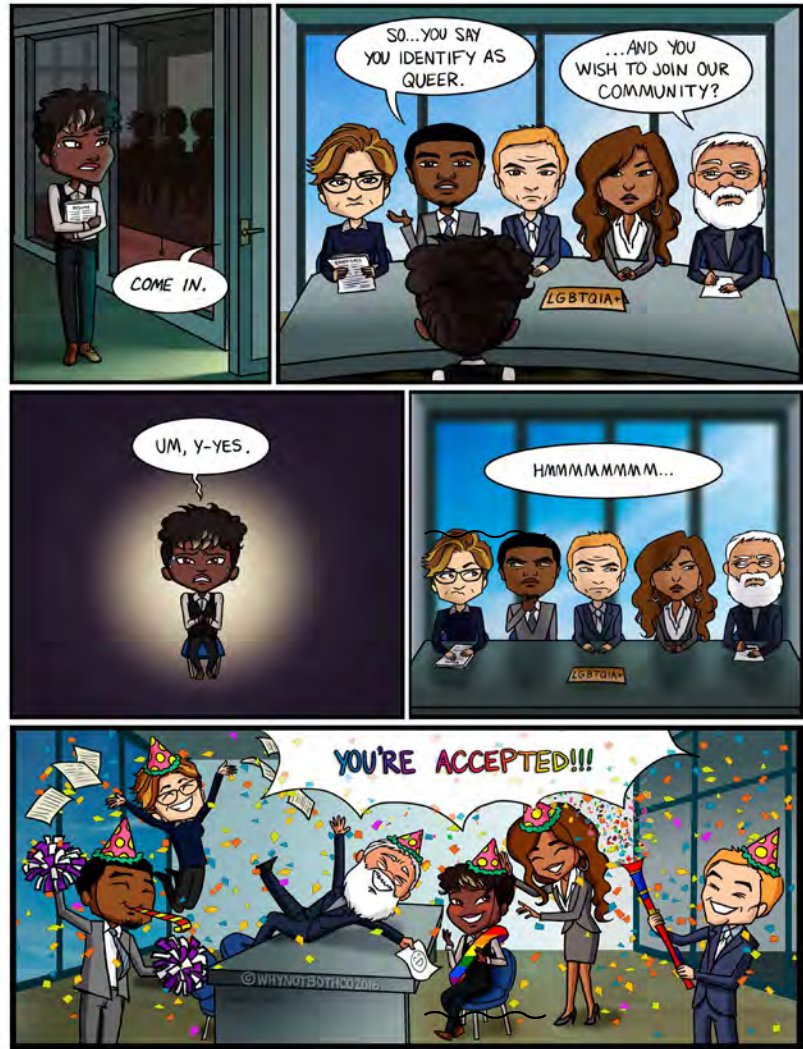
I deserve spaces where I can safely discuss being bi. I deserve spaces where I can safely discuss how my Blackness connects to my experience of my sexuality. I deserve spaces where I can discuss the needs of the bi+ community without being ignored. I deserve to see my community and all its subsets represented in every organization that claims to serve the full LGBTQ community just as I saw it represented at the White House Bisexual Community Briefing. I deserved to not have to wait five years to learn all of those things are possible.



Angélique is a Philly-based bisexual activist and writer trying to come to terms with all the labels she's taken on. You can find her reflections on her intersectional experiences and observations at <https://angeliquesjunction.wordpress.com>.

You're Accepted

By Why Not Both Co



Why Not Both Co is a duo incorporating humor and inclusivity through online comics. The duo consists of the bisexual creators AV and Amanda Wells.



Angélique, 2nd from the right, at the White House Briefing

Advice From A. Rose Bi



A. Rose Bi is thrilled to be writing *Bi Women Quarterly's* new advice column. An avid BWQ reader herself, A. proudly identifies as a bisexual woman. She currently lives in New England with her boyfriend and her two stupidly adorable cats.

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

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

Dear A. Rose Bi,

I've used the label of bisexual for the better part of a decade at this point, but now I'm starting to wonder if I'm actually only attracted to women. I have clothes and jewelry and other things that showcase my bi pride, and the less I find myself attracted to men, the more I'm scared of losing this identity and community that I've loved and embraced for so long. Does losing my attraction to men mean I have to give up the bi+ space and identity I've created for myself?

Thanks,

Sliding Kinsey Scale

Dear Sliding Kinsey Scale,

A beautiful thing about the queer community is that there are so many labels that we can choose for ourselves, or not choose, depending on what feels right. But on the other hand, so many niche options can be overwhelming, especially when you're questioning how you feel or who you might be attracted to. I say this to make sure you know that this is not easy – questioning your identity can be unsettling and a long process – and that you're not the only person to go through this.

That being said, remember that sexuality can be fluid! You could be attracted to only men, then a few years later to multiple genders, then to mostly women – figuring out your sexuality can be both a long journey and a moving target.

Based on my own experience I believe that the bi+ community will welcome you, regardless of your attractions in the current moment. If at any point in your life you have been attracted to people of more than one gender (including people who are genderfluid, agender or otherwise non-binary identified), you are bi if that is how you understand yourself! At the end of the day, the label or labels you identify with are yours to choose, and no one can tell you otherwise. And, if you want to continue to be a part of the bi+ community, or venture out to try other communities on for size, we will support you in your journey every step of the way.

Best of luck and lots of love,

A. Rose Bi

We are looking for a new **CALENDAR EDITOR!** For every issue, the calendar editor compiles a list of events to feature in *BQW*, coordinates BBWN potluck brunches each month, and updates events for the BBWN web calendar. This is a fantastic opportunity to work with a one-of-a-kind publication! Contact Kate at thewriterkate@gmail.com if you're interested.

STUDENTS: Looking for a **PAID SUMMER INTERNSHIP FOR SUMMER 2017?** We are looking for a communications intern with amazing design and web skills to work for 200 hours at \$10/hr. Boston-based a plus, but you could live anywhere. Details at <http://biwomenboston.org/2015/11/20/paid-summer-internship>.

The "Bi Office"

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

Ongoing Events

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

2nd Mondays:

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

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

1st Wednesdays:

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

2nd Thursdays:

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

3rd Saturdays:

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

4th Thursdays:

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

Metro-Boston women:

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



CALENDAR

December

1 (Thursday) 7pm, Bi+Mic Performance and Open Mic. Join the BRC at Lir on Boylston for this free event featuring performances in spoken word, storytelling and comedy! Open mic will follow. Cash bar, 21+. Info/RSVP: brc@biresource.org.

4 (Sunday) Noon-3pm, Monthly BBWN Potluck Brunch at Heather's in East Boston.

Bring a potluck brunch item to share. This is a great way to meet other bi and bi-friendly women in the area! Info/RSVP: heatherabenjamin3@gmail.com.

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

8 (Thursday) 7-9pm, Young Bisexual Social and Support Group (Young BLiSS). If you are in your 20s or mid-30s (or thereabouts) and identify somewhere along the lines of bisexual/omni/pan/fluid (or are questioning in that direction), please join us on the 2nd Thursdays for a few hours of laughter, discussion, activities, and/or the eating and drinking of delicious things! Info/RSVP: youngblissboston@gmail.com.

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

13 (Tuesday) 6:30pm, BLiSS and Young BLiSS Community Holiday Dinner. We will celebrate a year of support and socializing with a community social outing at Bertucci's in Alewife. All bi and bi-friendly people of all

genders, orientations, and ages are welcome to attend. Join us at 6:30 at the bar area for a drink, or at 7pm for dinner. Info/RSVP: bliss@biresource.org.

15 (Thursday) 6:30pm, Social BLiSS, Jamaica Plain (Holiday Schedule). This group is now for all ages who are interested in some tasty snacks and discussion with like-minded bis. Feel free to bring any topics you're interested in discussing! Meeting on 3rd Thursday this month only for holidays. Info/RSVP: Mia at youngblissboston@gmail.com.

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

January

4 (Wednesday) 7-9pm, Bisexual Social & Support Group (BLiSS). (See Dec. 7th)

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

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

9 (Monday) 7pm, Straight Marriage, Still Questioning. (See Dec. 12th)

Calendar, continues on p. 23



You are welcome.

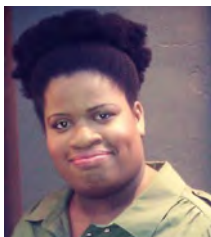
Build community here in Boston. Come spend time with smart, interesting bi folk (and our friends). Check out our calendar of events. Elsewhere in the US? Check out: www.binetusa.org/bi-groups-in-the-us.



Untitled

By Denarii Monroe

I need a break.
A space
with queer people
who know
my Name.



Denarii is a New York-based freelance writer/editor, aspiring screenwriter and activist. She loves social justice liberation, red wine, cooking and eating, and blues and jazz.

Calendar, *continued from p. 23*

18-22 (Wednesday-Sunday), Creating Change Conference. Annual national conference put on by the National LGBT Task Force, this year in Philadelphia. Info: creatingchange.org

21 (Saturday) 11:30am, Saturday Bi Brunch. (See Dec. 17th)

26 (Thursday) 6:30pm, Social BLiSS, Jamaica Plain. Meets 4th Thursdays. (See Dec. 17th)

26 (Thursday) 7pm, Bi+/Trans* Support Group. The BRC's bisexual+/transgender* support group is a peer-facilitated, safe space in Jamaica Plain where individuals can discuss many different topics. Info/RSVP: <https://www.meetup.com/Bi-Community-Activities/events/hnwxslwcbjcl/>.

February

1 (Wednesday) 7-9pm, Bisexual Social and Support Group (BLiSS). (See Dec. 7th)

9 (Thursday) 7-9pm, Young Bisexual Social and Support Group (Young BLiSS). (See Dec. 8th)

13 (Monday) 7pm, Straight Marriage, Still Questioning. (See Dec. 12th)

18 (Saturday) 11:30am, Saturday Bi Brunch. (See Dec. 17th)

19 (Sunday) Noon-3pm, Annual President's Day Potluck Brunch at Jen's in Somerville. Bring a potluck brunch item to share. This is a great way to meet other bi and bi-friendly women in the area! Limit 12 attendees. Info/RSVP: <mailto:jbonardi@hotmail.com>.

23 (Thursday) 6:30pm, Social BLiSS, Jamaica Plain. Meets on 4th Thursdays. (See Dec. 17th)

JOIN US!