

Pap Smears & Paint Parties: A Journey Toward Embracing My Bisexuality

By Sara Krahel

This year I finally came out to my best friend as bisexual. But first, I have to tell you about my first pap smear. You see, I have cerebral palsy and my legs often spasm when I get uncomfortable or nervous. I was certainly nervous going into the appointment because I knew there would be issues with those infamous stirrups.

It was the day that changed my life. Let me set the scene: it is the day of the fated pap smear. I had hooked my arms around one leg in a death grip, a nurse was holding the other, as the gynecologist was performing the procedure as fast as she could. In this circumstance it was not just my legs that seized up, it was my entire lower body, including my vagina. I was visibly sweating and red in the face, trying to hold onto my twitching right leg. The doctor noticed me struggling and told me to “relax and breathe.” I rolled my eyes, knowing that it wouldn't magically make my entire body stop spazzing, but I took a deep breath to be a good sport. It did not help with the spasms. Although the doctor and nurse were medical professionals, they didn't get that I couldn't relax in this compromising position. Can anyone truly relax with strangers holding on to their legs and looking at their genitals? No. After years of invasive medical procedures, I have a fairly high pain tolerance, but metal in my vagina while having a spasm was one of the most painful things I've ever experienced.



Sara, continues on page 15

Bisexuality & Autism

By Martine Mussies (Cyborg Mermaid)

One of my best friends is a true activist and his bathroom is full of posters about socialism, environmental issues, and animal rights. On a printed sheet just above his sink, you'll find a cartoon featuring Bob, the stripey blue triangle who should be proud—“Yay me!” With this brilliant little infographic, PhD researcher Miriam Dobson explains intersectionality in a heartwarming way. As intersections between forms or systems of oppression, domination, or discrimination are happening all around us, this affects “our group”—bisexual women—as well. Therefore, for this issue of *BWQ*, I would like to put myself in the shoes of Bob (if he had any...) and tell you about the connections between bisexuality and autism.

This is the first time I am writing about two of the “invisible” aspects of my identity. Why did I not open up earlier? While I agree with Bob that oppressions are interlinked and cannot be solved alone, I also have to admit that speaking up for more than one can be difficult and can cause even more problems. If you request attention for one type of oppression, it can already

seem like a lot to ask, and when you also start talking about a second one, it becomes very complicated very quickly and you have to unravel everything to ensure that the prejudices can be nuanced. A beautiful example of such an interpersonal process can be found in “Bisexual women and their relationship(s),” a master's thesis by Roos Reijbroek (Utrecht University, 2012). In it, Roos describes how one of her respondents reacted to the fact that Roos has both a man and a woman as partners. “[S] he was disappointed and frustrated. [She talked about how I embody the prejudice she often has to counter; that a bisexual would have the need to be with both a man and a woman and not being able to be monogamous.” Thus, for the respondent, the intersectionality between bisexuality and non-monogamy was a problematic feeling that for her own emancipation she even needed to defend herself against the stigmas of the other identity. Stripey triangle Roos made things difficult for her, and I do not wish to make things difficult for autistic women who do not identify as bisexual and vice versa. At the same time, I

Martine, continues on page 16

Editor's Note

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The theme of this issue is bisexuality and disability. But what, exactly, is disability? As the contributors to this issue beautifully articulate, definitions of disability depend, in many cases, upon others' reactions, and social definitions of what constitutes "ability."

The contributors to this issue share their experiences with disabilities that are visible and invisible, chronic and intermittent, mental and physical. They reflect on the intersections of bisexuality and disability, along with other embodied experiences related to size, illness, and intersexuality. The weight of other people's assumptions, and the importance of being able to label our identities and experiences on our own terms, are powerful themes that resonate throughout this issue.

We feature essays by Andrea Miotto, Elizabeth Mechem, Jeanette Gandionco Lazam, Julie Morgenlender, Martine Mussies, Robyn Ochs, Sara Krahel, and Theresa Tyree, visual art by Why Not Both Co & Jo-Anne Carlson, and poetry by Jane Barnes, Mari, Karen Schnurstein, Nina Dixon, and Stephanie Enyeart. Bri Kerschner reviews the book *Claiming the B in LGBT: Illuminating the Bisexual Narrative*, and Bobbi Ruggiero offers a review of the film *Blindsided*. Alexandra Wang interviews bi and intersexuality activist Gigi Raven Wilbur, and our World column features the urgent words of Yossra Hamouda, a brave bi activist in Egypt.

We hope this issue will leave you with a better understanding of the diversity of experiences of bi+ women with disabilities, and also the ability we have as a community to make the world more just.

-Katelynn, Assistant Editor

HONOR ROLL

Thanks for
volunteering!

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Boston-area women: Join our our Google group: <https://groups.google.com/forum/#!forum/bi-womenboston>

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



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).

Upcoming in *Bi Women Quarterly*

**Call for submissions
Spring 2019 issue:
Firsts**

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

**Call for submissions
Summer 2019 issue:**

Non-binary x2 (or more)

Calling all readers with multiple non-binary identities—including bi+ folks with non-binary gender identities, multiracial identities, etc. How do your identities inform each other? How do you navigate others' reactions? What labels do you use? Do you see yourself represented in bi+ communities?

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.

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

Around the World: Egypt And a Few Years Later, I'm Still Meaningfully Alive

By Yossra Hamouda

A few years ago when I first wrote to you, I was young. I was experiencing, for the first time, the meaning of freedom and self-love. I wrote to you just three months after my own coming out. If you remember, I am someone who was brought up in a religious, conservative society. I was once someone who used to hate herself, consider herself a sinner and a potential threat to every woman just for having sexual attraction towards women. I am someone who once sentenced herself to daily severe beatings to chain what she considered her inner monster.

And I am also someone who decided after eight years of living in the closet and severe self-harm to come out on social media in one of the fiercest societies. I am someone who faced tremendous pain for years to enjoy being true to myself and others, self acceptance, and self-love. I learned, them all in a long, tormenting human path. I am someone who found God in self-love and in the love of others.

I want you to read another chapter of my story. Please read it until the end; it may be long but believe me, you will find deep meaning in my words.

I came out at a time in which Egypt was becoming a nightmare for all minorities except Christians. Egypt was shifting towards dictatorship and military conservative capitalist rule. I was once a political revolutionary and risked my life to defend freedom and democratic rule. I participated in the January 25 Revolution and fought afterwards for years as a leftist dreaming of political freedom and justice. I lived in Egypt through three years in which Egyptian society hosted ideals of political freedom and I lived through five years in which the society shifted towards a belief in extreme dictatorship. At the beginning, most people thought that the military would only attack the Islamists and most people (I am not included) supported the crackdown during which hundreds of Islamists were imprisoned and even killed. The Islamists (the Muslim Brotherhood) were never fair or democratic; they were a conservative, oppressive Islamic party, but that does not justify violating their rights as human beings.

Once the Brotherhood was defeated, the system shifted towards silencing all opposition and imprisoning most liberals and leftists. A crackdown on the LGBT community, atheists, and authors followed! Our society was shifting towards a fascist hatred of everything and everyone different from the majority. The majority of Egyptians are neither Islamic nor liberal. The majority hate both extreme religious attitudes and progressive lifestyles. The majority wanted everyone to live within a “moderate” lifestyle, and the state enforced that “moderate” lifestyle favored by the majority by prosecuting both religious extremists and those who were openly atheist. And whoever wrote about topics like sexuality—even heterosexuality—was

prosecuted as well. Egypt imprisoned around 40,000 political prisoners and 300 homosexuals in just a few years and in a famous case imprisoned a group of youths for holding a rainbow flag in a concert. They criminalized rainbow flags!

I was lucky enough not to go to prison although I was once close to it. All my friends from the LGBT community tried to leave Egypt; some succeeded, and some didn't. But one important incident happened that affected me deeply. An article was published in my university's student magazine about a diary of a homosexual in Egypt under the following crackdown. The writer was not from the magazine; it was a contribution by a reader. The article angered the Egyptian parliament, and everyone in the magazine (including myself) was under pressure although it was not us who wrote it. The shock for me was not the threat or the pressure. The shock for me was that the university (which is supposed to be a foreign university supportive of freedom of expression) did not support us. We were simply sold out. In the morning, we found out that the foreign professor who had supported the LGBT community on campus, and who had supported me after my own coming out, had fled Egypt. Though I understand his reasons now, it took me three years to forgive him for leaving us behind.

I continued to fight for LGBT people although everyone had backed off after the crackdown and was pressuring me to back off as well, telling me about the rapes that happen to detainees from the LGBT community. I insisted on writing about and supporting LGBT individuals, even those who contacted me for psychological support from fake accounts (people I do not know). I continued as a terrified fighter. I was deeply afraid and alone but I continued.

Yet I found myself rejected by the people I fought for. I found lesbians and gays who rejected me for being bisexual or because I was a religious Muslim. I am no longer Muslim; I am an



This is an image of an anonymous Egyptian gay man who takes photos with the rainbow flag every year.

Yossra, continued on next page

Yossra, continued from previous page

Omnist, but when I was in LGBT groups I was a religious Muslim. They did not accept me or my veiled lesbian friends. There was an idea within the community that you should fit a certain stereotype if you are “one of us.” I was “too progressive” for the larger society, but my identity was too complex to fit into LGBT society. I viewed myself as a religious Egyptian Muslim bisexual woman. Every sect wanted to accept a part of me and oppress the other. I felt deeply betrayed by the LGBT community because I had risked my life for our cause. I felt betrayed because I thought that the LGBT community in Egypt was different from the bigger society and I found out that it is equally oppressive.

I broke down once when my belief in political freedom and justice was defeated by the dictatorship-supportive society and when the so-called liberals and leftists supported the oppression of Islamists. I broke down and thought about suicide but I stood and continued fighting, focusing on the LGBT community’s rights and once again I found myself breaking down. I broke down again when I found my society fascist against LGBT people in Egypt and LGBT people in Egypt oppressing each other!

I lost belief in meaning. I lost my reason to live. I wanted to live to give to others and to create a more fair, free-loving society. I wanted to help people love themselves and others and I woke up from this dream to find myself in the land of fear and the universe of hatred. I stood up again and decided to dedicate my life to supporting people and teaching them critical thinking and understanding of the other as a philosophy graduate. I was the first in Egypt to work on teaching people to think critically and get out of the small bubbles that their society locked them in and now I have hundreds of followers who attend my lectures and my work is covered by a few media outlets.

A few things happened that helped me to stand up again.

A large segment of youths started to become part of the progressive minority in Egypt during the last couple of years. They cannot announce themselves for the fear of persecution

by society and the state, but they exist and grow in number. They are still a minority, but every day more and more people are leaving behind their deeply conservative past selves.

Second, a few people told me that I changed the way they think and view others and the world. They even changed their careers and points of view in life because of my work in promoting critical thinking and because of knowing me personally as a human being after my coming out. One of my closest bisexual friends who used to think about committing suicide because he is a religious Muslim learned to love himself and now lives his truth without any masks because of my support of him.

And there is an important incident that affected me. I met a stranger in a gathering and he came to talk to me. He told me that he knew me even though I did not know him. He told me that he was one of the people who contacted me over three years ago from a fake account after I came out. I stood beside him then although I did not know who he was and although he hated himself and rejected being gay. In the gathering he told me that I supported him greatly and I was the reason why he’d learnt to love himself. He finally had the chance to come and tell me after these years that *my existence makes a difference*;

I decided to continue;

I learned that I am not helpless;

I learned that I deserve to live;

I learned that I leave behind me an eternal meaning.

Editor’s note: *Yossra’s story first appeared in the Fall 2015 issue of BWQ.* Thank you, Yossra, for continuing to have the courage to BE, for having the courage to lift your voice. We hear you. We respect your courage.

Readers: please consider supporting the work of organizations such as ILGA (www.ilga.org) and IGLHRC (www.iglhrc.org) which advocate for LGBTQ+ human rights around the world.



This image is among the Egyptian LGBT movement’s most famous, taken the first (and also last) time the rainbow flag was raised publicly in Egypt at a September 22, 2017 concert by Mashrou’ Leila, a Lebanese alternative rock band. As a result of this image, a number of Egyptian activists—including one woman—were imprisoned, beaten and raped.

Bisexuality & Disability: Some Connections

By Robyn Ochs

Bisexualities and disabilities are identities that carry negative stigma in the United States (and beyond). They are misunderstood, maligned, and are “labels of primary potency” (Allport, 1986), identities which are seen to be of such significance that they overshadow our other identities and are thus assigned disproportionate importance.

I see parallels between the experience of having an invisible disability—one that is not immediately apparent—and holding a bisexual identity:

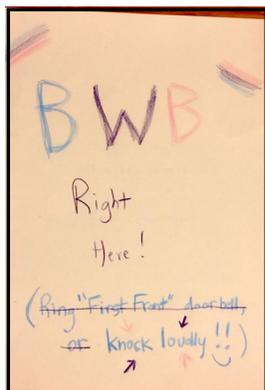
- Because the default assumptions of U.S. culture are that everyone is both heterosexual and able-bodied, every time you meet a new person you can be fairly certain that they will make false assumptions about you.
- You can't tell by looking who else shares your identity, so it is likely that you feel isolated and more uncommon than you actually are.
- It is probable that other members of your immediate family do not share your identity, so it is likely that you have not had in-family role models or received ongoing guidance and support from someone who shares your identity in how to navigate your identity through the world.
- In order to be seen, you have to come out through some sort of declaration.
- You may spend considerable interior time deliberating on the potential costs of coming out. (If I disclose my identity, will people devalue me or see me only as that identity [see labels of

primary potency, above]? Will it cost me personally, academically, or professionally?)

- And you may spend considerable time deliberating on how to come out. (“Oh, by the way, speaking of bisexuality, which we weren't, that's how I identify!” “Oh, did I mention I have a learning disability?”)
- If we are silent, we know that we are not seen, and we may feel we guilty for dissembling or covering, even though it is, in fact, those around us who are making false assumptions about us. When silent, we may feel that we are doing a disservice to all those in our identity group.
- If we do speak up, we are aware that there is so much ignorance and misinformation about our identities that to be fully understood, we must do more than simply share a label or diagnosis. We must also explain and educate.

More broadly, bisexuality and disability are both identities whose meanings and boundaries are disputed. What degree and what types of disabilities entitle one to claim the label “disabled”? What degree and what experience of bisexuality entitle one to claim bisexual (or pansexual or queer) identity? Who is “really disabled”? Who is a “true bisexual”? We may find our claims to our own identities disputed, and we may also doubt our own right to claim identity.

Robyn is an international speaker, educator, and editor of two bi+ anthologies and of this publication.



Thanks to Julia (left) who hosted a special BBWN gathering in Providence, RI on September 8 which included a trip to WaterFire, an outdoor Providence tradition.



Society giveth, society taketh away, and maybe society giveth again

By Julie Morgenlender

What do you think about as you head down the street? Maybe what to eat for dinner, something that happened at work today, the latest news headlines? Or maybe you think about how safe you are, if someone might attack you for who you are, or how to navigate a flight of stairs that prevent you from going any farther?

There's a theory that disability exists only as a social construct, that once society removes barriers and provides accessibility, then people won't be disabled. For some people that may be true. For me, that's not the case. My type of disability won't stop being a hindrance once someone puts in more ramps, though having more accessibility would definitely make my life *much* easier.

You know what would help? A change in attitudes. It would help immensely if I wasn't assumed to be healthy just because I can walk one day or climb a flight of stairs another. It would help if we had more ramps, accessible public transportation, access to healthcare of all types, and social events held in accessible places.

On the other hand, to me, biphobia *does* exist as a social construct. I think about how safe I am as a woman holding the hand of another woman or sitting close to a queer-presenting person while on a date. I think about how uncomfortable I feel in some lesbian spaces as a bi person, while in others I have been told outright that I'm not welcome. The difference is, all of these concerns I feel *will* go away once society stops being hateful.

If I could snap my fingers and magically end ableism and get all of the health-related accommodations I need, my health would improve a lot and life would simply get much easier. Barriers would be removed and in their place would be helpful tools. I would still struggle, but much less so.

On the other hand, if I could snap my fingers and magically get rid of all of the biphobia, homophobia, and transphobia in the world... WOW! Can't you just picture that? We could all be open about our orientations without fear or worry. "Coming out" would no longer be a stressful event. We could celebrate our community freely and safely, and be invited warmly into the larger LGBTQ+ community.

This gives me hope for our future as bi+ folks. It reminds me that it is possible that one day, biphobia will be gone. It may take a long time, but it's possible. So I'm holding out hope for that. And in the meantime, a few more ramps and wider access to healthcare would be appreciated, too. Not to mention, a lot less ableism in the world.

Julie lives in Massachusetts where she serves on the board of the Bisexual Resource Center, volunteers with a chronic pain group, and is working on an anthology about living with chronic illness. Info about the anthology can be found at chronicillnesstruths.com



My disability is

By GL Meisner

My disability is...

My disability is my sexuality

At least according to the critics

I can't focus on one person

I can't stay in a relationship for long

My disability is my sexuality

I swivel my head at every shiny

Any voice overrides my attention

My disability is my sexuality

will grow out of it

I am ignored in discussions about it in the wider community

My disability is not my sexuality

My disability is ADHD

My sexuality is bi

These are not the same thing

GL is a trans woman living with her wife and kids in Minnesota.

Claiming My Labels

By Elizabeth M. Mechem

When dealing with my ADHD, I find myself encountering many of the same issues I do when dealing with my sexuality. I have experienced outright dismissal and ridicule when opening up about being bisexual. In the same manner, I have experienced dismissal and ridicule when talking about having ADHD. This has led to much self-doubt and a feeling of loneliness over the years.

It wasn't until adulthood that I even heard the term "ADHD." As I looked more into ADHD, I realized that I may have been struggling needlessly for a very long time. Even though it would be years later until I gained a proper diagnosis, at least I had a sense of what was going on in my head. There was a reason I struggled in school. I wasn't just lazy or stupid after all!

Just as with "ADHD," I didn't hear the term "bisexual" for the first time until I was an adult. As with my ADHD, though, a door opened for me that allowed me to understand all these feelings I had been experiencing most of my life. I didn't walk through that door all at once, but I did start to gain a sense of understanding and ownership of my own sexuality for the first time. I began to feel a great sense of relief that I wasn't a freak of nature that needed a ton of therapy. My sexuality existed and I was not alone.

Strangely, there are many who refuse to acknowledge the term ADHD or believe that it exists. It is the same way with "bisexual." Many times the same people who "don't believe in labels" are the same people who deny the existence of bisexuality altogether. When these things are said to me, I question who is saying them. Are they just ignorant about these things, or are they purposefully trying to deny me access to sorely needed resources and a community? I try not to always go the conspiracy route, assuming genuine ignorance instead. So I often find myself educating people.

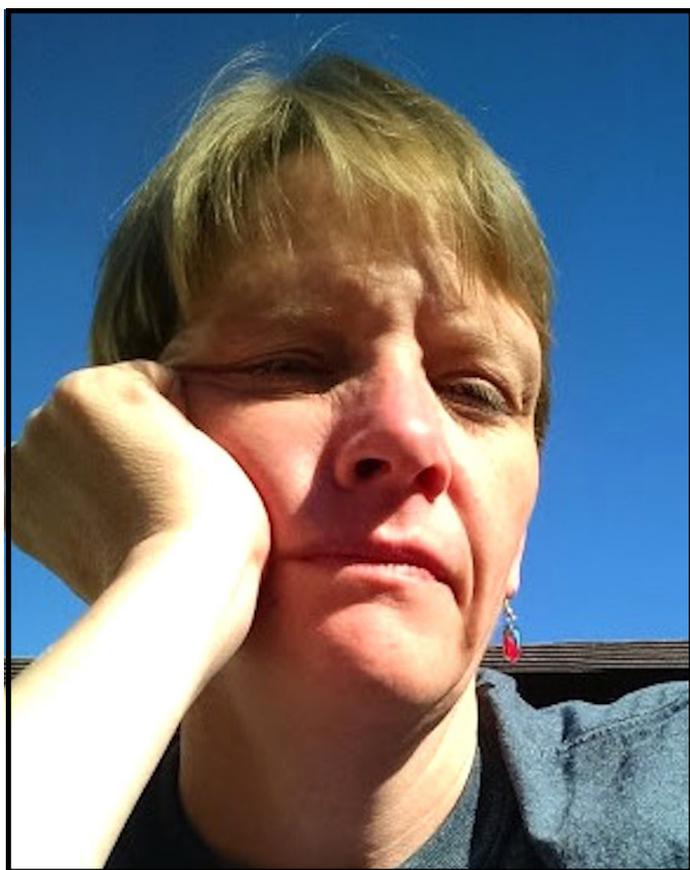
Sometimes, though, people simply fear being boxed in by a label. Or maybe they don't realize that there is an upside. Like "ADHD," "bisexual" is a word that is recognized and has resources and community behind it. People who hear these words know what it means. When I use it, I let others know that being bisexual or having ADHD is not abnormal and that yes, these things do exist. I let others know that communities exist for them and they do not have to be alone.

Admittedly, sometimes it may be dangerous to use any label. Whatever the label is, it is up to the individual when and how to come out and wear it publicly. I don't always immediately tell my employers about my disability or my sexuality, even if the government has laws in place to protect me. It can be extremely hard to prove discrimination. Then there are times when it has been physically dangerous to tell people I am bisexual.

However, we don't have to publicly wear a label to use it. Even completely owning a particular label isn't necessary. Sometimes, even just hearing a term that fits is enough, if it leads to knowing who we are and that we are not alone.

In my case, by owning the terms "bisexual" and "ADHD" I have found resources, and among the many resources, two wonderful communities. A supportive community of people who know what we are experiencing is extremely empowering. Even the existence of a community, no matter how engaged we become with it, helps us to realize that our experiences are not just in our heads.

Elizabeth lives in Lawrence, Kansas, with her family. She spends her time volunteering within the bi community and is a co-host and assistant producer of The Bicast.



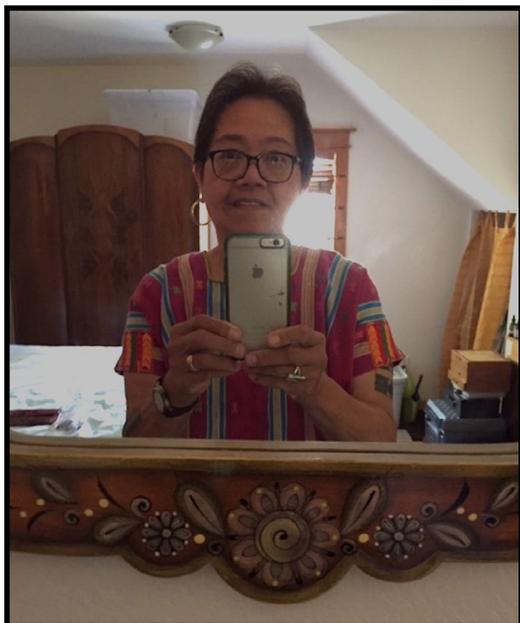
Identity & Illness

By *jeanette gandionco lazam/Waimanalo*

Sometimes, even all the love and kindness from family and friends just doesn't make all things better, especially when you're suffering from long-term illnesses that bring on extreme pain and other opportunistic sicknesses and disease, making your life more unbearable. Sometimes being alone, sobbing loudly or quietly, helps to release the tension and anger that has built up, and letting loose almost seems like a *Waiting to Exhale* moment. Just one big inhale and then let it all out. The frustration, the anger, the sadness, the depression, the good times, and the bad times...just to start all over again repeating the mental cycle of someone who has a long-term illness.

The illness (or illnesses) are now your identity. And as your symptoms become worse over the months and possibly years your identity exists because your illness(es) exist and vice versa. Once there is no longer an illness, your identity with that illness dies. It may die due to death, or it may die because the illness dies, but you continue to live and struggle to gain a new identity. I have gone over and over these ideas in my head. I have reviewed how I relate to people and how people relate to me. Try as I might in attempting to change my relationship with friends it is tantamount to waging an uphill battle.

I have congestive heart failure (cardiomyopathy) Stage 4. Stage 4 is the end of the "numerical" ladder; there ain't no more stages or "rungs" from which I may climb up or slide down. One way or another, this disease will take me out; if not this then most likely cancer (again). Just recently, I was diagnosed with spondyloropathy arthritis, a very different type of arthritis that is excruciatingly painful and to some measure, debilitating. I now walk hunched over with my head facing down so as not to squeeze the nerve endings with the vertebrae in my neck that send lightning bolts of sheer nerve pain down my left arm. For



a while, I had to sleep with my head in a certain position so as not to (again) have the vertebrae in my neck crunch down on the nerves in that area. Prior to this I was known for my heart disease, and now that my heart symptoms have stabilized somewhat, I now am beginning to be known as "the woman with spondyloarthropathy arthritis" *in addition to* cardiomyopathy. Does it bother me that folks address me with my sicknesses? Sometimes "Yes," and sometimes "No." I'm not trying to hide the fact that I have heart disease or sponda... whatchamacallit arthritis. In fact, a good majority of the time I wished I never was this sick... and I sometimes hate myself for being this way!

My identity is so wrapped up with heart disease, (previously) cancer, and now, spondy... whatchamacallit arthritis, diseases so debilitating that they play with my mind a good portion of my day. The mood swings, the self-pity, depression, thoughts of running away, but where to? Somewhere close to a hospital just in case something happens to me (good gawd almighty!). Being angry at the medical community for hurting me with their needles, radiation, manipulating my body, and filling me up with drug after drug... Where will it end?

Wanting and sometimes needing to be alone with my thoughts; not wanting to explain anymore of what I have. Missing my mother and father—"Why did they have to die and leave me alone and so terribly sick?" Sometimes I wanna scream!

Other times I wanna laugh, sing, and dance. I wanna feel the earth, touch the sky, smell the green grass, and possibly lie in it and roll down a hill. I wanna feel alive again! I want a new "Living" identity that greets people with love, patience, and kindness, THAT IS WHAT I WISH!

And, in the meantime, I'll be one with reality. I'll be one with my own situation. And on some nights, I'll pretend that I am MALEFICENT, climbing higher and higher until the headwinds catch my flight and I am finally WHOLE AGAIN, with one half still acknowledging my sickness, and the other half like a caterpillar struggling to emerge from my cocoon with a new identity that can carry the weight.

I hope my rebirth will not be too long!
All Pau, October 21, 2018

mi tierra mi las mujeres somos territorio de conquista!
(neither earth nor women are territories to be conquered!)

Born and raised in New York City's Lower East Side, Jeanette moved with her family in the mid '60's to SF Bay Area where she continued her political activism for social justice and equality with an emphasis on building and contributing to the struggles against racism, sexism, and all the phobias directed at LGBT communities. She is active in American-Filipino issues, is part of the Anti-Fascist Front in the U.S. and internationally, and resides in Ashland, Oregon, with her two Black cats.

Bipolar Hypo (Kind of) Manic

By Jane Barnes

I.

I have Medicare D disability free meds a subsidized place a giant one-bedroom on a leafy street where I write too many poems and when I'm a little "up" I'm amusing but there are too many calls texts emails mailed clipped articles

helpful suggestions way TOO MUCH even in meditation I do too much but in an orderly way and try to remember that all I have is right now but my synapses make me move house coasts schools furniture jobs have a yen to kiss you because

I'm high so I slow and If I interrupt it's because I'm on the next corner waiting for you but these days my meds calm this whirlwind of a woman whose blood's caffeine whose spirit keeps churning into a photographic still a body caught in motion without motion

II.

Every ten years I fall into a black hole hard as any suicidal shadow I cannot write my name can't write at all good books stay unread after all I'm leaving can't walk only wait for death and then after weeks or months somehow the butterflies come

back the new sky clouds fresh air I put on new clothes new hope my poems return I feel glee though not everything's pretty even whimsy makes missteps and puts my foot in my mouth but I write here expecting just a little sense Do you see it? Have I made it?

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

My Life, My Labels

By Julie Morgenlender

Our world is filled with assumptions about labels. We like to assume that we know what labels others apply to themselves. We all do it to some extent, and it becomes a problem when we insist on it, when we don't accept the labels that people have chosen for themselves.

Now, some people prefer not to use any labels at all. Personally, I like the labels. I like the community that comes with them and I like having shorthand ways to describe certain aspects of myself. What I don't like is the prejudice that so often accompanies them. No matter how anyone feels about labels, though, I don't think it's up to anyone but the individual to choose them. Or not choose them. Whatever they want. Too bad society doesn't tend to work that way.

Something that surprised me was the realization that the way people label folks with chronic illnesses and disabilities is similar to how people label folks who identify as bi+. When I date a man, people label me as straight. When I date a woman, I am labeled as gay. When I walk down the street, I am labeled as healthy. When I use a wheelchair, I am labeled as "something is wrong." (Interestingly, most people still don't think of me as "disabled" when I am in a wheelchair because they think I look too young and healthy to be disabled, but that's a discussion for another day.) Do you see the pattern?

That's right. The pattern is that other people are labeling me, and ignoring the labels that I've chosen for myself. As a bi person, I hear that I'm really gay and not ready to admit it, or really straight and just looking for attention. As a disabled person, I'm told that I just need to try harder or try new treatments, or that I'm "a faker" who is just looking for attention or to scam government benefits. After all, if *they* are monosexual, then I must be too. If *they* are able to recover from an illness or temporary disability, then mine can't be permanent. They use their own experiences to label me. And it sucks.

I hear about this constantly in both the bisexual+ and chronic illness communities. We state, "I am _____" and someone else says, "No you aren't" as if they know. As if it's their place to label us.

I used to hide from this type of response. No more. As someone with a supportive family, supportive friends, and general safety, I now try to speak up for the community as well as for myself as much as I can. I try to combat ignorance with truth and information. I won't change everyone's attitudes, but if I can change just a few, maybe tolerance and acceptance will become infectious. Maybe just a few more people will accept us for who we say we are, with the labels we give ourselves.

Julie lives in Massachusetts where she serves on the board of the Bisexual Resource Center, volunteers with a chronic pain group, and is working on an anthology about living with chronic illness. Information about the anthology can be found at chronicillnesstruths.com

Functional and Living, with Anxiety

By Theresa Tyree

I'm not sure how to start this. What are we even calling anxiety these days? Is it an invisible illness? A mental health condition? A hormonal imbalance? A differently-abled condition? A disability? There are so many words for this thing I live with, but no matter which ones I use, it never seems to accurately convey what I go through to other people.

The first time I tried to tell someone about my anxiety, it was at work. She was my supervisor, and her response was, "Well, we all deal with that. You'll need to just get over it."

Thanks, DeeAnn. Really helpful advice there.

One of the things that makes it so difficult to convey what anxiety is with just a word is that it can be brought on by a variety of things. For some, it is a hormonal imbalance. For others, it's learned from trauma. Depending on the individual, and the stimulus, it can also present in a variety of ways—some that "look" like anxiety, and some that don't.

"But you're so put together," people have said to me. "You're too functional to really have a mental illness."

That's what I thought too! For a long time! Due to harmful stereotypes about mental illness and what it looks like!

The early examples I had of what mental illness looked like were completely different from how my anxiety displayed. My mother and sisters all suffered from depression. Apparently our family was prone to it. My mother had been dealing with it on and off for most of her adult life, but when her father died in the spring of my junior year of college (2012, in May, just before I was about to get out of school and go down to Southern California to visit him and the rest of my maternal family, like I'd done every summer since before I can remember), my mother's depression was suddenly—and understandably—a lot worse. She wasn't functional. The smallest thing would set her off, and even the most menial of tasks seemed insurmountable for her. My middle sister, Rebecca, was in a very similar state, and my littlest sister, Sarah, was despondent. All of them withdrew into themselves. My mother let the house get dirty and stopped cooking. My sisters began failing their classes. All around me, mental illness was an inability to carry on, a malady on productivity. This pattern only worsened as we lost three other family members within the year: my uncle, one of his sons, and then finally my grandmother.

While my mother and sisters seemingly decayed around me, I went on "normally." Even though my grandfather was gone and I missed him very much, his death had set something in me ticking. I needed to survive—for him, as much as for me. He was dead. It was my responsibility to live like he couldn't anymore. This was how my grief manifested, and the drive to live for those I'd lost only got stronger as I continued to lose family.

My grief manifested actively. Looking back, it's no wonder my mental illness did as well. When a brain is met with the same response despite different actions, there are a lot of different ways it can respond. No matter what I did, my life continued to fall apart. My mother and sisters turned on me for not grieving the way they did. My father had an affair and tried to get me to keep his secret. My parents got a divorce—which was probably good for them, but hugely painful and traumatic for me as I tried to play parent to everyone in my immediate family. All this, while graduating into an economy that wasn't set up to get me an entry-level job doing anything I'd studied.

My brain, trying to make sense of the chaos and find a reason for why everything was falling apart, turned to the lowest common denominator: me. It must be me. There was something wrong with me. If only I'd been better, or stronger, or worked harder, none of this would have happened.

The term "high-functioning" is often applied to people who have conditions that might keep them from having a normal life, yet pass for having no condition at all. I'm one of those people. At first glance, I seem normal enough. An A-type personality, perfectionist, organized, dependable. But these are symptoms—because I'm terrified all the time that if I don't have back-up plans for my back-up plans, everything will go wrong and I won't be good enough to deal with it.

Living in today's administration as a functioning person would be impossible without the coping mechanisms and support system my therapist helped me build. Because I'm a millennial, my anxiety has me worrying about everything from if I can afford a latte on my break and still make rent to if we can keep global warming from putting most of the continent under water by 2030.

I'm scared that I'll never have enough money to retire. I'm terrified that when I fight with someone I may never see them again and that will be the last thing we ever said to each other. I'm scared I'll die in a car crash on my way to work. That even as I write this, it will be too jumbled and unrelatable and the



Theresa, continued on next page

Theresa, continued from previous page

marvelous, talented women at *Bi Women Quarterly* will tell me I'm not good enough to be in their publication and should give up writing immediately.

These are just some of the things I worry about. My anxiety wants me to be scared of everything. It's trying to keep me safe, but in the way a parent tries to keep a child safe by locking them up in a room.

Sometimes those fears overwhelm me. Before I was diagnosed, there would be days I would call in sick to work because I was frozen in bed with fear. If I stayed under the covers, nothing bad could happen to me—and I couldn't convince myself otherwise. Sometimes my heart would beat rapidly—like I was being chased by something, like I was having a heart attack. It would be difficult to breathe, and the freezing feeling of being a deer in the headlights got worse and worse. Bed was the only safe place. Nothing bad ever happened to me at home in my bed.

But nothing good ever happened either, and the sick days weren't helping.

That was when I heard about high-functioning anxiety. The symptoms included perfectionism, constant fear of things going wrong, planning for multiple failures, chest pain, shortness of breath, an inability to rest, heart palpitations, thinking of yourself as "not good enough," and being propelled forward by fear.

The list went on, but those were the ones that made me realize the load I was bearing was not the same as the neurotypicals around me—like the boss who had told me to "just get over it."

To her, anxiety was just a feeling. For me, it was what made me jump, fearing for my survival if I didn't take action.

It took me years to realize I had anxiety. And it took years after that to learn it wasn't something I could fix, but something I had to learn to carry and live with.

My diagnosis has been the difference between barely surviving and beating myself up for it and living a full life where I can manage my condition. Thanks to my doctor, my therapist, and the understanding and support of my family and friends, I live a life where those freezing moments of having a panic attack in bed are few and far between. I wake up every morning, armed with an arsenal of coping mechanisms and people I can call for help. I wake up every morning brave enough to take on the world of horrors my anxiety wants me to fear. And I wake up empowered enough to look my anxiety right between the eyes and tell it we're okay and we can do this.

Without all that, I might have been the fifth family member my mother and sisters lost.

We owe it to our communities, our families, and ourselves to be educated about mental illness—because it can be as lifesaving as CPR.

It was for me.

Theresa holds an MA in book publishing, and is a freelance writer, editor, and overall book guru. Check out her website at theresatyree.wordpress.com



Why Not Both Co is a duo consisting of the bisexual creators AV and Amanda Wells. They incorporate humor and inclusivity through online comics.

She Who Would Not

By Karen Schnurstein

Untitled Poem

"You broke the cage and flew."

--Rumi

We weighed her body
down with sand
bags, heavy
as all of our combined
earthly burdens.

And yet she floated.
She would not
sink to the bottom
of the pond.

We watched with shock
through the cat tails
ripe with clouds
of fuzz.

Then she who would not
sink forgave us
and we walked home
in fresh darkness.

Karen is in remission from severe mental illness and is currently learning how to thrive while dealing with PTSD. She finally faced her bisexuality and came out of the closet shortly after the Orlando shooting. Karen holds a B.A. in English with Creative Writing emphasis and World Literature minor from Western Michigan University. She transcribes and edits live transcription for closed captioning for the deaf.



Unability

By Stephanie Enyeart

Disability meant
the disadvantages
you could see:
the unusable
sense,
the misdeveloped
limbs,
the imperfectly functioning
body

Not
the unusable
dopamine,
the misdeveloped
fight or flight response,
the imperfectly functioning
brain

I wasn't disabled

just unable
to accept disability
as a possibility

Stephanie doesn't write poetry a lot. She works in higher education in Indianapolis and has a recovering relationship with writing. You can follow her on Instagram, @thefluffyskunk, but she hasn't posted in months. Thanks, depression.



My Neighbor

By Mari

I never got help until it was too late. In fact,
The one who got help was my mom.
The doctor said I didn't have to come if I didn't want to
And I gladly grabbed on to that brief liberation
In time of destruction and blood and starvation
And I stayed at home while he talked her into
Letting me go to study abroad, and carry the load
Of the pain of sharing my body with somebody else.

My neighbor is calm only during the night. At daylight,
She's contradictory, self-important and violent,
She talks over noises of streets and of people
It's simple: she talks and she takes over everything
A tight ring of iron constricting around the ash of my spine
And the chopsticks that I use for legs.

I beg her to loosen her hold on me, but the devil so made her
That I cannot be free, cannot bear living without her
controlling
Owning a part or the hundred per cent of me,
And I've forgotten what it's like to be without her
Every words that she says, it is gospel
And the spell that she cast only recedes at night, and the
hunger sets in

And I lean over the table and spill all my tears cause I
know
If she hears the rustle of wrappers and the screech of the
fork,
I'm done for. But I don't want to go back to before,

I was out of control. I didn't know numbers,
I was a bad student and the sum of my food was
Nothing to me and I was a pig and the real girl who
everyone says that is me
Was sick, she was the real hopeless case because
She reached for a taste and took the whole spoon
And she groomed herself for a life of freedom
But who wanted freedom when you could have Her,
Living inside that body of yours
And squelching the yearning for what you thought good
I would live without her, and with her I would
Rise to the heights of existence and perch on the crutches
Of legs that support half my weight,
She's stayed way too long in this body of mine,
Sometimes I feel she is pushing me out,

After all that is what my neighbor's about,
She gorges on hunger and guilt from my fridge
And sings off fat with a flame of desire
To be better, faster, and stronger...

I'm dying.

She stands in a veil like a widow in mourning.
She looks for a new spouse, I'm never returning,
She's killed me but the gun is still in her pocket
And there is no force that's able to stop it
From happening over and over again to another
Because she is poison, one hell of a lover

If you can't have food,
You'll at least have each other.

Mari is a psychologist/therapist from Ukraine living in The Netherlands. She runs @bipositive, a podcast about the queer experience, as well as thebadfoodie, a blog dedicated to her experience of living with an eating disorder.



On November 3, 2018, more than 2/3 of
Massachusetts voters voted to uphold the rights of
transgender people. Thanks to all who supported
this important campaign with time and/or money.

Tourist

By Nina Dixon

After all this time
It's still not mine
Labels harshly defined
Are just creating more lines
More walls, more calls
As I walk towards the stalls
That separates us from them all
That protects us from the fall
From trying to find the others
While still hiding from each other
While shaming our brothers
While still asking our mothers
If it's okay
To be who we say
Not just some character we play
Until the cameras go away
But to show & be seen
By any & all means
To make it a dream
Come true on both screens

When we lift the veil
Where it's both, heads & tails
More freedom, less jail
Self imprisoned, passed or failed
The test that means less
If they're stressed or pressed
About how you've dressed
According to their definition of blessed
Because what's real is how you feel
Beneath the layers that you peel
Away from whatever keeps you sealed
Shut from the joy that they steal
The joy you freely give away
Trading spaces day by day
Where you reclaim it & bravely say
I am me & that's okay



Nina is an integrative therapist that facilitates a LGBTQ+ Youth Group and Parent Support Circle, also identifying as bisexual. She believes self-love is the foundation of all of our relationships, which means loving ourselves for who we are, regardless of our sexuality and extending that compassion outwardly to others.

These photos were taken at two recent bi+ women's brunches. If you live in or around Boston, or are visiting, please consider attending and/or hosting one of our brunches, which are held more-or-less monthly in members' homes.

Our next events are scheduled for December 2, January 13 and February 10, and are listed in our calendar on p. 24.

You are welcome to reach out to Charlotte (avon.alger@gmail.com) for more info about hosting or attending a brunch.



Robyn's in May.



Our very popular annual book swap brunch hosted by Ellyn and Steph in September.

Sara, continued from page 1

After that horrifying ordeal, I made a swift exit and texted my best friend, “I just had my first pap smear. I don’t know how I’m supposed to handle a penis inside of me if I can’t even handle a speculum... This is definitely not the moment I was hoping for, but I’ve been wanting to tell you for a while now...I’m bi!”

I was shaking as I typed it. I had been thinking about this for over a year but hadn’t gathered the courage to actually tell anyone. Of course, she immediately called me to gush about how proud of me she was for telling someone (it didn’t hurt that she’s an out gay woman herself). Thankfully, she said all of the good things that you hope someone will say to you when you come out for the first time.

This opened my life up in new and exciting ways. I told a few of my closest friends and began to feel more comfortable with my new identity, so I decided to change my Tinder settings to include both men and women. In the past I had gone on dates with guys from Tinder, but nothing serious ever came from them, and at first it was the same with women. The first date I had with a woman was at a coffee shop and it went fine, but I could tell there wasn’t any mutual attraction.

The next step for me was going to a gay bar. I go out often on weekends, but I’d come to realize how uncomfortable I felt at the straight bars. I wanted to go to a bar where I felt like I could be myself: no invasive questions, seedy objectification, and slimy pity grinding. I made plans to go out with another gay friend and came out to him just as we were about to enter a local gay bar (he took it just fine). When we got to the bar we saw that it had three flights of stairs and no elevator. Normally, I would ask my friends if we could try a different bar, but we were truly determined this time around because it was a paint-party-themed night. So, I talked two bouncers into carrying me and my chair up the stairs. It was a spectacle, but if you’ve lived your entire life using a wheelchair, you just have to embrace the experiences that come with it. The inside of the club was just as inaccessible, with small staircases leading to each area. Once my friend helped me down the steps to the dance floor I went immediately to the front because I wanted to experience the paint-splattered madness.

We had just started dancing when a stunning girl came up and asked if she could dance with me. At first, I froze. I’ve had girls come up to me in straight clubs and ask to dance with me before... but it was always a joke to them. I had to remind myself that I was at a gay club and she might actually be into me, so I said yes. Anyone reading this who also uses a wheelchair will know how awkward it is when people are dancing with you with their back to you. Personally, I want to actually see the person I’m dancing with. Luckily, I think she felt the same way because after a few minutes she turned around and we started talking. One of the first questions she asked was if I was straight (I’ve been told that’s how I come off). I laughed and said that I was bi and it was my first time at a gay bar—and it turned out that she was in the same position. This was the first time I said “I’m bi” to a stranger, and honestly, it felt so good to be open about it.

After a few songs she left for the bathroom and I awkwardly waited around, then saw her leave the bathroom chasing her visibly upset friend. I’ve had enough friend drama happen at clubs to know I should leave her be. But I couldn’t stop thinking about her and asking myself why I didn’t kiss her when I had the chance.

Even when I found my friend again, I couldn’t get this girl out of my mind. Suddenly I looked up and saw her dancing alone. I held back for a second because I didn’t know if she was actually into me or if it was a pity dance. I told my friend and he said, “No, I saw you two dancing. She was definitely into you!” With that, I gathered up the courage and went over to her. She immediately lit up and started dancing with me again. I was so completely taken in the moment that I forgot all about my friend and let the music move us through the crowd.

A while later I could tell we both wanted to kiss, but my mouth was so dry that I couldn’t. I asked if she could go up the steps to the bar and get a water—normally I hate asking people to bring me things, since I can get them myself, but I decided to trust that she wouldn’t think it was too strange of an ask. She saw my stairs dilemma and happily got water for us to share. Once we started dancing again I could tell she was too nervous just to go in for the kiss herself. I thought, “damn it, I’m just going to do it,” and kissed her in the middle of the club with paint flying everywhere. It was a moment I will never forget.

We moved throughout the night dancing and just genuinely vibing with each other. People even came up to us and asked if we were a couple because our attraction to each other was so visible. We had to laugh and said we just met despite popular belief. The night ended with us exchanging numbers and kissing goodbye with the open promise of seeing each other again.

I would love to say that this meet-cute turned into my first relationship with a girl and that everything worked out. But I never saw her after that night. I texted her twice the next day and got no reply. For a while I was hurt because I don’t usually hook up in clubs. That night though none of that mattered—my wheelchair, my kissing abilities, my self-consciousness of everyone watching us hook up. I had never met anyone who I was so instantly attracted to; where I felt so comfortable with myself and with them. I felt free to just live in the paint-splattered moments in the dark.

Even though I’m disappointed this night didn’t lead to anything, I am grateful for this experience with her because I realized that the right people don’t care that I use a wheelchair to move around in this crazy world we all live in. They find me attractive for being me, which sounds cheesy, but it isn’t always a given when you have a visible disability. Here’s to many more nights of living for myself and not letting my disability get in the way of finding love. Or maybe just a cute person to dance with for the night.

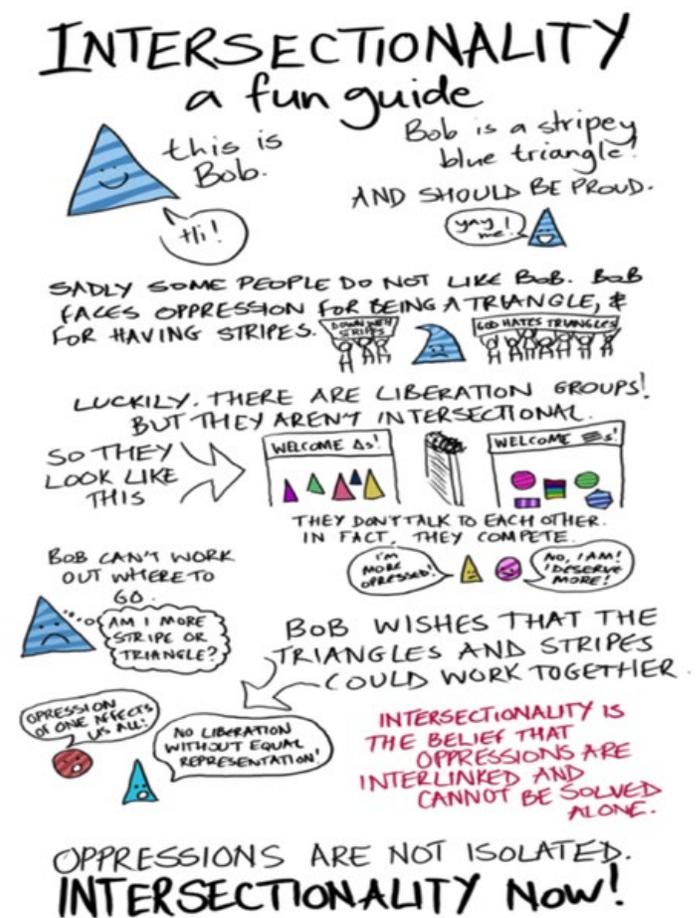
Sara was born and raised in southeast Michigan but will one day move somewhere with warm weather because wheelchairs and snow do not mix. She loves reading, being an extrovert, and dancing through her weekends.

do not really have a choice, because I often do not know where some of my character traits originate (autism, sexual preference, giftedness, synaesthesia), and there could be mutual influences as well.

Research explains that people on the autism spectrum exhibit difficulty coping with or responding to various social and cultural norms, expectations, and constraints. It should be noted that these social and cultural norms govern nearly all aspects of our lives, including sexuality. Think for example about the research by Gloria Wekker on “mati work” in Afro-Surinamese culture, wherein women bond with both men and women, alongside each other, because they “consider sexual activity as healthy, joyful, and necessary.” As a stripey blue triangle, this seems very valid and logical to me. But when I described these ideas to my classmates in primary school, they bullied me. These social and cultural norms can be quite unforgiving. Owing to the problematic interaction with social norms, people on the autism spectrum often experience unique sexual development. According to recent research findings, the experience of sexuality among autistic persons appears as less hetero-normative (George & Stokes, 2017). Despite the high prevalence of autistic persons identifying as non-straight, there is a dearth of information in research concerning the overlapping of autism and bisexuality, just as there is little public awareness concerning the issue of autism’s interaction with gender identity.

One of the most common explanations for the interaction between autism and bisexuality is the male brain theory of autism. This theory suggests that autistic personalities characterized by extreme inclinations towards masculine traits occur as a result of high testosterone levels in the amniotic fluid. Prenatal exposure to testosterone leads to masculinized future personality and traits (Bejerot & Erikson, 2014). Aside from the male brain theory of autism, the paucity of information concerning bisexuality and autism impedes in-depth awareness and understanding of the subject. Recent research studies show that high rates of asexuality and bisexuality have been identified among people with autism (Gilmour, Schalomon & Smith, 2011). Thus, although the hard link between autism and bisexuality is yet to be established, the chances are that biological and developmental factors—particularly difficulty interacting with social norms and exposure to male sex hormones in utero—play a significant role. Because of the overrepresentation of autistic persons in minority sexual orientations, I would encourage people (for example clinicians, teachers, and caregivers) to be open to different ways of discussing sexuality with autistic persons, as minority sexual orientations present an additional challenge to the stigma and discrimination that autistic persons already face. “My body is like a permanent invisibility cloak from Harry Potter, or invisibility cap if you like classic Greek mythology,” wrote Amalena Cardwell. It is time to remove the cloak, to discuss the “invisible” parts of our identities and be as proud as stripey blue triangle Bob. Yay, me!

Martine Mussies is a PhD candidate at Utrecht University, writing about the *Cyborg Mermaid*. Martine is also a professional musician. Her other interests include autism, psychology, karate, kendo, *King Alfred*, and science fiction.



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Stigma Is Killing Us

By Andrea Miotto

NOTE: This article uses the word “fat” in an effort to reclaim a term others have used to shame us. By using it, I am not trying to hurt but rather to empower.

Fat people and people with mental illnesses just might be the last groups it’s socially acceptable to degrade openly for a good laugh. In the media we still find examples of subtle or unexamined racial or other prejudices, and people are, happily, called out regularly on these. *Overtly* racist and homophobic jokes, on the other hand, are waning fast in mainstream media. But fat jokes and jokes punching down at the “crazy” are blatant, gleeful and unashamed.

They hurt.

It’s not just isolated jokes. Sometimes it’s whole movie plots that distort and sensationalize mental illness (see *Split*); whole websites dedicated to fat jokes and the hatred of fat women; endless games and sit-coms in which the “comic relief” character (or the wise friend or the wacky neighbor or the amusingly incompetent villain) is fat and jolly (and always sexless) or quirky and funnily crazy (but in treatment or struggling). Stand-up comics do whole routines on fatness and its funniness or “psycho” exes suffering from hilarious obsessive-compulsive disorder.

Media offerings like this hurt my heart when I hear them, and they are hurting our society. They coarsen the ability and willingness of “normal” people to empathize with those shaped differently from them and those who suffer from invisible health problems in their psyches. They add to the suffering of great numbers of people already in great pain. They contribute to the awful stigma society places on the fat and the mentally ill, which studies show causes people to avoid seeking life-saving treatment.¹ If you’re fat and have heart problems and you’re too ashamed to talk to your doctor about becoming more fit (simple weight loss is not correlated with overall improvements in health), then stigma is killing you—or at least making your death more likely. If you’re fixating on killing yourself and you’re told by ignorant people who have watched too many movie characters heal their mental illness by getting a manic pixie dream girlfriend, to just “get over it,” then stigma is killing you.

What do fat and “crazy” stigma have to do with bisexuality? Everything. Bisexual women are already at significantly higher risk than other groups in this country for mental and physical health problems. The US Department of Health and Human Services states that bisexual and lesbian women have a more difficult

1 bmcmedicine.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12916-018-1116-5; www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/nurturing-self-compassion/201705/the-catastrophic-effects-mental-health-stigma

time than straight women finding health treatment and fitness programs sensitive to their particular health needs.² A Norwegian study released in 2013 found that bisexual women, compared with straight men, straight women, gay men, gay women, and bisexual men face the greatest risk of all these groups for “mental health problems, poorer self-rated health, more sexually transmitted diseases, experiences [of] loneliness and ... suicide attempts.”³ In 2016, the



Daily Beast reported on a Drexel University study that surveyed the primary health providers of 2,500 people aged 14-24.⁴ Among the findings was that “lack of acceptance for bisexuality is behind an increased risk for depression, anxiety, substance use, and suicidal thoughts.” And pride.com reported on a study by the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine that found bisexual women in the UK were at 26 percent higher risk of depression than lesbians and had more eating disorders.⁵

With all these health risks, bisexual women can’t even turn to the one community that should bolster us and greet us with support and love. We still face significant social isolation and stigma even within the LGBT community just by virtue of our sexual identity.⁶ Bisexual people in general tend to be closeted these days much more than our straight or gay counterparts, with all the stress and shame that entails. Bisexual women who are fat and/or have mental illness face the double health hazard of stigma surrounding their sexual identity *and* their shape or health. And women of color face a literal triple threat: stigma around their sexual identity from people of other sexual orientations. Stigma

2 www.womenshealth.gov/blog/one-size ; <https://publichealth.gwu.edu/content/landmark-study-helps-overweight-lesbian-and-bisexual-women-adopt-healthier-habits>

3 uni.no/en/news/2015/01/30/bisexual-women-struggle-more-health/

4 www.thedailybeast.com/bisexual-women-are-at-higher-risk-for-depression-and-suicide

5 www.pride.com/bisexual/2018/9/27/8-reasons-we-need-talk-about-bisexual-women-mental-health

6 www.thedailybeast.com/are-bisexuals-shut-out-of-the-lgbt-club, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3966467/>

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surrounding their shape or health, and the tremendous stress of operating in a racist society.

The good news is that there are groups out there fighting discrimination and stigma surrounding fatness and mental illness. Check out these websites (see Resources below), call out your friends/acquaintances/colleagues if you hear fatness- or mental-illness-related jokes, contact the media to protest stigmatizing stereotypes and join the fight. It's quite literally a fight for our lives.

Resources:

<https://www.thebodypositive.org/what-we-do>
<https://www.sizediversityandhealth.org/about.asp>
<https://www.nami.org/stigmafree>
<https://adaa.org/learn-from-us/from-the-experts/blog-posts/ending-mental-health-stigma-generations-come>
<https://bringchange2mind.org/>

Andrea is a fat, proud, and queer woman who works for a nonprofit organization near Baltimore, Maryland. She is also a writing and reading tutor and freelance writer, editor, and proofreader. She has worked on web sites, newsletters, books, and more. To hire her, contact her at amiotto@yahoo.com.

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

Mimi and the Too-Much Girl (Me)

By Jane Barnes

For Mimi Brown

she said you're so smart but when we
talk we go for hours and I have to
hang up and take a nap and when we
dance at Somewhere Else we go till

closing you'd rather walk to the T than
take a cab or you make friends with the
cabbie get up the next morning and
write a poem about our date read it

out loud to me on some Back Bay
doorstep it's charming and good but
I want a girl a little less lively someone
normal who even almost bores me

oh I said we don't have to walk from
Brighton to the North End in an hour
discuss fifteen novels by lesbians
analyze their styles or go to a poetry

reading of gay Walta or Charlie or
go for a "few" drinks get three
burgers or go to Romeo's and drink
4 espressos at 3 AM walk again to

the Copley Square T stop or sit on
some rehabbed Berkeley Street
porch discussing consciousness
raising aren't I mellowing out

so what do you mean when you say
it's not about just whether you *like* me?
aren't I witty enough oh you say
you just want some *silence*?

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

Gigi Raven Wilbur: Advice on Bisexuality

Interviewed by Alexandra Wang on August 4, 2018

Gigi Raven Wilbur is an activist in bisexuality, intersex, transgender, BDSM, and paganism; former member of the BiNet USA Board of Directors; co-creator of Celebrate Bisexuality Day; and recipient of the American Institute of Bisexuality Globe Award for contributions to the bisexual community. Gigi has a BA in Philosophy and a MSW degree from The University of Houston Graduate College of Social Work.

Alexandra Wang: Can you share a bit about your early experiences as a bisexual and intersex person?

Gigi Raven Wilbur: I realized I was bisexual when I was with a boyfriend and girlfriend. We kissed at a tavern. My father disowned me when I came out to him. He was a minister. I felt alone after I came out. I was one of the only bisexuals in my area.

I didn't know I was intersex until I was in my twenties. I felt I was lied to by the medical community. I was born during the 50s. It was common practice for doctors to change a baby's sex to either male or female. I had sexual reassignment surgery after I was born. The doctors had me keep my penis. I think I still have my vagina, but the doctors just stuffed it in me. I never felt or identified as male. As a child, boys and girls didn't want to play with me, because I wasn't male or female enough for them. Later, I wanted my vagina back. But doctors told me I could only be male or female. There should be an option for people who are intersex and who had sexual reassignment surgery to have their missing parts restored.

I also have dyslexia and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Many people who are intersex have them. And I am active in the transgender community.



AW: What sources of support have you found?

GRW: I realized I wasn't alone when I first attended a conference on bisexuality. And support groups such as BiNET have been great for me.

I have found support for my intersex identity within the pagan community. There were some festivals and events in the pagan community when you could wear any kind of clothing. I was nude, and some people thought I was male. I had to explain that I was neither male nor female.

They recognized me as an elder. Because of my involvement in the community, I had a ceremony that was for both males and females. My ceremony had both saging (for males) and croning (for females). This was the first time in my life that people acknowledged I was intersex.

Intersex people were respected in pagan cultures. They were often spiritual leaders and shamans.

AW: What advice would you give to bisexuals about coming out?

GRW: Be strong in coming out; people will be more willing to accept you. I wouldn't come out where it is dangerous. Realize that you don't have to do it alone. There are lots of support groups, such as BiNet USA and PFLAG (Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays). My advice would be to join them.

My advice to intersex people would be to join support groups and be comfortable with your gender.

AW: Why does the bisexual community still struggle to be visible? Do intersex people face similar challenges?

GRW: We live in a world where we are often stuck with binaries, which applies to both sexual orientation and gender.

Because of this, historically, many people said that they were either gay or lesbian, when they were really bisexual. This is reflected in the media. Now more people are coming out as bisexual, including the youth.

Bisexuals still face lots of discrimination from the gay and lesbian communities. Many gays and lesbians hold the same beliefs about bisexuals. They believe that we have heterosexual privilege, and will leave them for someone who is straight.

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Many of them believe that bisexuals always have threesomes or multiple relationships at once. I have had to explain that I can be monogamous. Once during Leather Jacket Pride, I was turned away for not being male enough. I explained to them that I wasn't male or female.

There is more information now, because we have the internet. During the 70s, there were only maybe two books on bisexuality, and they were hard to find. There are lots of organizations now including the one Dr. Fritz Klein (1932-2006) founded, called American Institute of Bisexuality. Dr. Klein introduced The Klein Sexual Orientation Grid (KSOG) in his 1978 book, *The Bisexual Option*. The KSOG expands upon the earlier methods of describing a person's sexual orientation by using a more detailed and informative system.

AW: What can be done to raise awareness about bisexual and intersex people and to increase visibility?

GRW: Educate people that there are many types of sexual orientation and gender. There's more than just gay or straight, or male or female. Be comfortable with your sexuality and gender.

AW: What can school counselors and social workers do to support students who identify as bisexual?

GRW: As a person who previously worked as a counselor, I can offer many ideas. Counselors can have a sticker with the bisexual flag or the flag itself to show that they support students who are bisexual. You can buy stickers from the BiNet store. There are flags at the college where my wife works and students have been more comfortable in coming forward. Of course, they should have the LGBT and transgender flag too.

As a social worker, I learned that suicide rates among bisexuals are high because they often feel isolated. This is why having visible markers of support, like flags and stickers, is important. (Note: To date, there has not been research on suicide rates for people who are intersex.)

AW: You, Wendy Curry, and Michael Page created Celebrate Bisexuality Day. You said that it should be in September because that is Freddie Mercury's birthday.

GRW: That's part of it. Celebrate Bisexuality Day has three parts to it. Autumn equinox is on September 21st. The autumn equinox is important in the pagan community, because this is when we gather our crops. The pagan community believes that the autumn equinox is a "calling out day." Having Celebrate Bisexuality Day during the autumn equinox would be like "calling out" to all bisexuals." So, I thought what day wouldn't be better than calling out day?" September 23rd is also my birthday.

[Note: In the northern hemisphere, the autumnal equinox occurs every year on September 21st to September 23rd.]



AW: What was it like when Celebrate Bisexuality Day was celebrated for the first time?

GRW: We had a conference in South Africa. Word of the day spread quickly! Much faster than we thought it would. It was practiced even in Australia.

AW: GLAAD (Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation) created Bi Awareness Week (September 19th to September 26th) to reinforce Bisexual Pride Day. What can GSAs, school counselors, and social workers do to promote participation during this week?

GRW: Have events and have support groups. Have organizations visit the school during this week.

AW: What can be done so intersexism isn't stigmatized in the medical community?

GRW: To make it clear, intersexism isn't a condition that has to be "cured." Surgery isn't necessary for most intersex babies. There are only a few conditions where surgery is necessary because they're life threatening.

Doctors should not play God and force babies to become male or female. People should choose their gender identity. Doctors shouldn't lie to people who were born intersex, but had gender-altering surgery. Let's remember the disgusting case of John Money and David Reimer, resulting in tragedy through these practices.

AW: You have a website called The Raven's Lair. Can you explain the purpose of your website?

GRW: I have podcasts that are adult education training programs for BDSM, sex positivity, human sexuality, sex, gender, individual differences, respect, suicide prevention, and life coaching, lifestyle changes. I try to encourage people to understand their bodies on an emotional and physical level by being sex positive. I have podcasts on my website that teach people to understand sexual feelings and how to engage in sexual acts.

There is the podcast, Adult Bedtime Stories, where you can learn about orgasms and masturbation and how to have them. There's also The Erotic Body Map Training Program, where you and your partner find feelings, and communicate them to each other. I have also had radio shows called, "The AfterHours," "Queer Radio," and "KPFT."

Sex is such an important part of our lives, yet it's stigmatized and never taught.

AW: How can people learn to be sex positive?

GRW: By thinking sex affirmations, correcting incorrect false beliefs about sex and by having erotic meditations every

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morning. This results in positive energy for sex.

AW: Which support groups would you recommend to people who are intersex, bisexual, have ADHD, and/or are dyslexic—and to their parents? What would be your advice for them overall?

GRW: BiNet has been great for me. I would recommend it to people who are intersex or if they identify as bisexual as well. There's the United Kingdom Intersex Association and

the Intersex Society of North America. The Intersex Society of North America encourages letting children choose their gender identity rather than gender-altering surgery at birth.

For parents, I would recommend PFLAG (Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays). They have many resources, including resources for parents of children who are intersex.

Alexandra Wang has BA in English and an MSED in Guidance and School Counseling from Hunter College. She is a member of Phi Beta Kappa Society and Chi Sigma Iota Honor Society for Professional Counseling and Professional Counselors. Now she interviews different groups about their rights and advice.



Abstract 9. 16 x 16 acrylic piece by Jo-Anne Carlson.

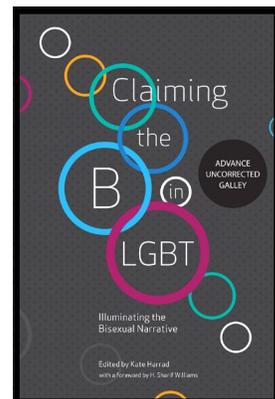


Jo-Anne Carlson is a writer, artist, and musician. Check out her websites: www.expressionsbyjo.com and www.lifebyjo.com.

Claiming the B in LGBT: Illuminating the Bisexual Narrative

Reviewed by Bri Kerschner

Edited by Kate Harrad, this ambitious text sets out not just to define bisexuality, but to champion it with the myriad of diverse voices and experiences compiled in the pages. *Claiming the B in LGBT* is the epitome of bisexual intersectionality, as it includes sections on non-monogamy, bisexuals of color, issues of faith, being out in the workplace, disability, gender, and aging. If there was a standard handbook on being bisexual, *Claiming the B in LGBT* would be on all our bookshelves! Structurally, the experiential narratives of numerous diverse bisexuals are tied together with thoughtful and inclusive threads from the brilliant team of editors. As H. “Herukhuti” Sharif Williams states in the foreword, the book is “a collection of bi+ people living in the UK describing the nature of sexual fluidity on their terms.” While *Claiming the B* focuses solely on bi+ experiences in the UK, bisexual readers from all over the world can relate and see themselves mirrored in the stories of the contributors.



Claiming the B begins with an attempt to define bisexuality. While this seems like a Herculean task, the first two chapters illuminate how “defining” bisexuality actually means explicating all the ways bisexuality intersects with various other identities, and that bisexuality has as many definitions as the number of people who identify as bi+. *Claiming the B* is at its best when illustrating how, despite the diversity of our experiences as bisexual individuals and our different converging identities, the shared identity of bisexuality connects us. Our voices resonate together under the umbrella of our shared identity.

Claiming the B in LGBT: Illuminating the Bisexual Narrative shines as an inclusive, landmark text voicing the beauty, the struggle, the diversity of being bisexual. It should definitely be included on every LGBTQ+ bookshelf.

Bri Kerschner is an English instructor at a two-year community college in Minnesota. In addition to spending time with her mini zoo of animals and partner, she loves running her small business. She is passionate about eliminating bi-erasure and encouraging LGBTQ+ voices.

News Briefs



...in politics:

After several days of too-close-to-call vote counting, US Representative **Kyrsten Sinema** flipped a Senate seat from Republican to Democrat, to become the first woman elected to the US Senate from Arizona as well as the first out bi person in the Senate.

Kate Brown, an out and proud bi woman has been re-elected as Governor of Oregon. **Mary Gonzalez**, who identifies as pansexual, was re-elected to her state House race in Texas, which she has held since 2012. In Wisconsin, bi-identified **JoCasta Zamarripa** won re-election to the Wisconsin Assembly. **Katie Hill**, who identifies as bi, beat out GOP incumbent Steve Knight in a California congressional seat. And **Megan Hunt**, who identifies as bi, was elected to Nebraska’s State Senate.

And from one of our contributors, **Harrie Farrow**: “Candidate in red state Arkansas, arrested 9 times in protests against GOP administration policies, who also happens to be a bisexual activist, and also an Indivisible leader, and also happens to be

me, wins county election as Justice of the Peace with 66% of the vote.”

Congratulations to all who prevailed. And thank you for your service, and for being out.

... and on your screen:

Check out Desiree Akhavan’s new series on Hulu, *The Bisexual*. It’s getting excellent reviews.



Photo: Hulu

Blindsided: A Documentary of Disability

Reviewed by Bobbi Ruggiero

I had never heard of Usher's syndrome before my friend, Lisa Olivieri, began filming her documentary, *Blindsided*. A genetic disease that starts in childhood, Usher's causes profound hearing loss, as well as progressive loss of vision. Two important senses fading at the same time. It seemed almost too much to comprehend. How does someone with this disability thrive and cope against such difficult obstacles? To add to this mix, Lisa's subject, a feisty woman named Patricia Livingstone, was also a lesbian. What unfolded before my eyes during the 18 years Lisa filmed Patricia was not just a documentary about a woman dealing with difficult and overwhelming disabilities, but a woman dealing with a marginalized issue in a marginalized society: domestic violence.

When we first meet Patricia, we see her trying to finish a painting she had started years before, when her sight was somewhat better. She's struggling. But she is determined. And she refuses to give in. You can feel her frustration as she scrapes the brush against the canvas, the paint wavering in between the lines she had painted when she could see. As the documentary progresses, this painting becomes a symbol of all she has lost.

We meet her partner, Karen, who starts off kind enough, although a bit odd. But soon, we see Karen changing. Bursts of anger at Patricia that lead to "blows that she could not see coming." And then the addition of another woman into the relationship, a choice that Patricia desperately does not want any part in. But Patricia depends on Karen. Her voice is not heard. There's a brief hint at the cruelty that ensues, both emotionally and sexually. And as a viewer, I felt physically ill watching the demise of their relationship and Patricia's lack of agency.

But Patricia, never one to wallow, moves on with her life, albeit one difficult and slow step at a time. Still dependent on Karen, she continues to live with her, although their relationship is now platonic. Her hearing has deteriorated to the point where she is only able to communicate through signing into her hand. There is no hope for her eyesight. It is devastating to witness.

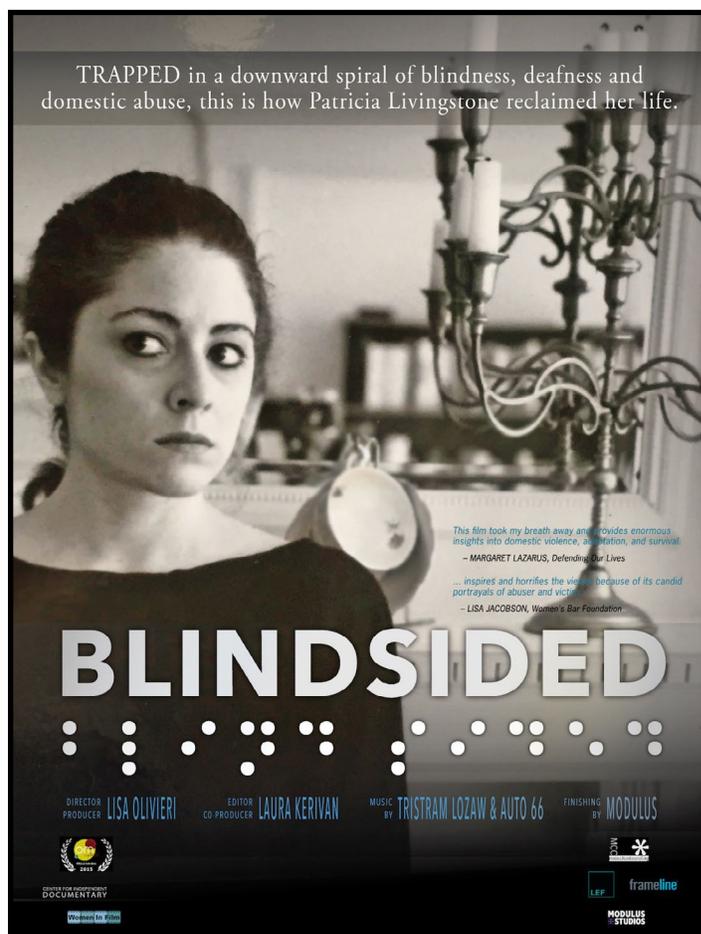
We then see the light at the end of the tunnel. Patricia becomes the recipient of a cochlear implant, which opens up her world in ways she never thought possible. She joins a dating site. She meets a woman named Bella. They marry, Patricia looking stunning in a white dress. A beautiful smile on her face. During this phase, Olivieri lulls the audience into a sense that all is going to end well for our heroine. But her disability seems to attract only bad moths to her bright flame. Their relationship has many cracks on the surface, and we become

painfully and heartbreakingly aware that Patricia's dependence and lack of sight is used against her. Again.

Blindsided touches upon many timely movements and topics: the Me, Too Movement, domestic violence, domestic violence in lesbian relationships, and the abuse perpetrated against people with disabilities, to name a few. But these topics are not thrown in the viewer's face; rather, they are slowly unraveled scene by scene. The beauty and importance of this film is that Olivieri showcases Patricia's elegance, rather than her profound disabilities. She shines throughout, donning her red lipstick and black beret. We witness her vulnerability, yet we also see how tough she can be. Olivieri puts a face to something very few of us will ever have to endure. And the ending, both poignant and touching, leaves the viewer with many feelings, most of all, hope.

For more information on *Blindsided*, please visit: www.lisaolivieri.com.

Bobbi Ruggiero is a writer living south of Boston.



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+ women's brunch! See calendar for dates.

2nd Mondays:

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

2nd Wednesdays:

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

2nd Thursdays:

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

3rd Saturdays:

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

More about Boston-area groups biresource.org/boston-groups/

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

We offer FREE electronic subscriptions to this publication. Sign up at www.biwomen-boston.org.



CALENDAR

December

2 (Sunday) 4-7 pm, Stuff & Stuff at Robyn's in Jamaica Plain. Bring a potluck item to share and help with the mailing of *Bi Women Quarterly*. Cats in home. Info/RSVP: robyn@robynochs.com

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

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

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

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

January

2 (Wednesday) 7-9pm, Bisexual Social and Support Group (BLiSS). (See December 5th)

10 (Thursday) 7-9pm, Young Bisexual Social and Support Group (Young BLiSS). (See December 12th)

13 (Sunday) 12-3pm, Bi Women's Brunch at Maura and Linda's in Arlington. Please bring a potluck dish to share. This is a great way to meet bi+ & bi-friendly women in the area. Cats in home. RSVP: maurahalbert@hotmail.com

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

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

19 (Saturday) 11:30am, Biversity Brunch. (See December 15th)

February

6 (Wednesday) 7-9pm, Bisexual Social and Support Group (BLiSS). (See December 5th)

10 (Sunday) 11:30am-2:30pm, Bi Women's Brunch at Liana's in Ashmont/Mattapan. Please bring a potluck dish to share. This is a great way to meet bi+ and bi-friendly women in the area. There are at least 10 stairs to get in the house. RSVP: ell.posto@gmail.com

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

14 (Thursday) 7-9pm, Young Bisexual Social and Support Group (Young BLiSS). (See December 12th)

16 (Saturday) 11:30am, Biversity Brunch. (See December 15th)