

## Coming Out, Creatively

By Martine Mussies

Strictly speaking, I did not come out at work—I keep coming out through my work. While researching sexuality in mermaid stories as well as in King Alfred fanfic. When writing about my autism, which is intertwined with my sexuality. And as a musician, when co-organizing and performing at the Gay Sing Inn of our church. As a Dutch girl in Academia, coming out is relatively easy, as the path was paved by Robyn Ochs and many other bisexual activists. Currently, I am enrolled in a graphic design program. One of my “challenges” was to draw myself as a cartoon character. I didn’t hesitate for a second but showed all my zest in my true colors.

*Martine Mussies is a Ph.D. candidate at Utrecht University, the Netherlands, and a professional musician. Her interests include autism, (neuro)psychology, Japanese martial arts, video games, King Alfred, and science fiction. More: martinemussies.nl.*



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## Non-binary in the Workforce: Out or No?

By Em the Gem

The use of pronouns in a letter of recommendation may feel like a non-issue to some. For others, such as myself, it is a source of major anxiety and near-constant internal debate. As I attempt to enter the workforce (in the midst of a global pandemic, no less), I am faced with a decision: do I come out explicitly in a work setting, or do I stay in the closet? This is a dilemma that many queer folks face, but it can be especially tricky for those of us who are trans, non-binary, and/or gender nonconforming.

Prior to applying for summer internships as a junior in college, I had not considered how pronouns would work in a letter of recommendation. The last time I had needed one was when I was applying to college, years before I started going by they/them pronouns. The idea didn’t even occur to me until one of the people writing a letter for me brought it up. “*What pronouns do you want me to use?*” he asked, and I had no idea how to respond.

What pronouns *did* I want him to use? I was applying to several

internships, some with LGBTQ+ organizations and others with museums and art galleries in the Boston area. While I would like to believe that it doesn’t matter (especially in a blue state like Massachusetts), I know that there is still a large stigma against non-binary folks. People are still uncomfortable engaging in discussions about non-binary identities, and people tend to avoid the things that make them uncomfortable. I had to ask myself: do I want to hurt my chance of getting an offer in the name of authenticity? Conversely, do I even *want* to intern for a company if my being non-binary would affect whether or not I got the job? In the end, I got an internship offer before I needed to send an official letter of recommendation, and so the question of pronouns in said letter became a non-issue. Now here I sit, a little over one year later, and I’m in the same position once again. I feel like I’m not getting any closer to finding the right answer. I’m not even sure there *is* a right answer.

Personally, I have always found the process of coming out to be

*Em the Gem, continues on page 19*

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## Editors' Note

Dear Community,

I mentioned on a Zoom call that the theme of this issue would be Out at Work (or Not). My friend, who subscribes to this publication, thought I had said the theme was “out of work (or not)” — a sign of the times we are living in.

This is another “Out at Work (or Not)” issue. The last was in Spring 2016. It’s an important topic. Whether to come out, and—if yes—how best to do so, is a question we must ask throughout our careers every time we switch jobs, teams, or projects. As bi+ people, it doesn’t suffice to simply mention a same-gender partner or a different-gender one. This will simply lead people to think we are lesbian or straight. To be understood as bi, we have to come out.

We hope the various perspectives shared by our writers on this subject are helpful to you.

Contributors to this issue hail from South Korea, the Netherlands, France, Spain, and various parts of the United States. We’re also delighted to feature some local Boston-area talent: in these pages you will find an interview with Julie Morgenlender about her new book, *The Things We Don't Say: An Anthology of Chronic Illness Truths*; Carol Moses shares her writing and visual art; Emma writes about volunteering with queer elders; and Aurora shares her experience serving in the U.S. military.

Enjoy!

-Robyn

### HONOR ROLL

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**Kat reads BWQ. Send a picture of yourself reading BWQ to [biwomeneditor@gmail.com](mailto:biwomeneditor@gmail.com). Be creative!**



## Upcoming in *Bi Women Quarterly* Call for submissions

### Winter 2021: Finding Sex/Finding Love

How do you seek and find romantic and/or sexual connection? Do you use technology such as dating apps? Why or why not? Have you intentionally sought these connections, or stumbled upon them? We want to hear about your experiences, whether they be delightful, discouraging, amusing, or absurd! Submissions are due by November 1.

### Spring 2020: Role Models

Who has had a positive impact on your bi+ journey? To whom do you turn when you need strength, inspiration, or support? Tell us about your bi+ role models or heroes, heroes or theyroes, whether they be friends, admired celebrities, or trusted community members. Submissions are due by February 1.

Submission guidelines are online at [biwomenboston.org](http://biwomenboston.org).  
Send your submissions and suggestions for future topics to [biwomeneditor@gmail.com](mailto:biwomeneditor@gmail.com).

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

We are an all-volunteer organization. Want to proofread, edit submissions, host one of our monthly brunches, help out with our Etsy store, or with our WordPress website? Or, if you’re a student, consider an internship. If you are interested in helping out, please contact Robyn ([biwomeneditor@gmail.com](mailto:biwomeneditor@gmail.com)).

The Boston Bisexual Women’s Network (BBWN) 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; and 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, full acceptance of bisexuality, and the liberation of all gay and transgender people within the larger society.

# AROUND THE WORLD: Candy Yun, South Korea

By Candy Yun

The first time I recognized myself as bisexual, I was in high school. I fell into a terrible unrequited love for someone of my own sex. It was a stormy time and my unrequited love was unsuccessful, but this experience helped me realize that I could have same-sex attraction. A few years later, a friend introduced me to a lesbian community website. In the “Introduction to Terminology” section of the site, I first learned the word “bisexual,” and I could see that it described my experience.

During the next few years, I had no community, and I didn’t worry much about identity. Even though we’ve had pride parades since 2000, most of the South Korean LGBTAIQ+ community is based in Seoul, the capital city, so people who don’t live in Seoul have difficulty finding actual community spaces (like bars, clubs, and organizations), except online. Perhaps for this reason, though I had adopted a bisexual identity, I did not think of myself as a member of the LGBTAIQ+ community. During the seven years I spent with my now ex-boyfriend, my heterosexual community was very stable and solid, so my identity as bisexual was not much more than a word to describe me.

The situation changed after I moved to Seoul. I moved there in search of a new job, but I quit after just over a year. At that time, I didn’t tell anybody in my workplace about my sexual orientation. I was not sure about my colleagues’ sensitivity toward LGBTAIQ+ issues and I didn’t want to take any risks. But it made me kinda lonely at that time, so I decided that I would find work at a place where I could express myself. That’s



why I started working on the “Sexual Minority Committee” within the “progressive party” that I had previously never paid much attention to. Since then, most of my life has been focused on LGBTAIQ+ issues. When I started working for the Sexual Minority Committee, I formed a transgender organization in connection with transgender issues and it led me to the Korean Sexual-minority Culture & Rights Center, for which I now work. KSCRC covers various activities, including cultural events (such as Pride House PyeongChang), education (lecture and research), advocacy, etc.

I don’t know how much everyone knows about South Korea. In short, it is a country in which being LGBTAIQ+ is not a crime. We have had Pride Parades for more than 20 years, and Korea is a country where one can legally change one’s gender marker, and various LGBTAIQ+ organizations are openly active. However, social invisibility, discrimination, and hatred are still high, and even though being LGBTAIQ+ is not a crime, consensual sex with a same-sex partner in the army is illegal, and same-sex marriage is not recognized. During presidential elections, the question *Do you agree or disagree with homosexuality?* is a regular question for TV debates, and only a small number of celebrities have come out publicly. Can you imagine what South Korea is like?

I always explain that South Korea is on the verge of crossing a hill for change. We all know that change will accelerate once we cross this hill, so those who oppose us resist getting over the hill, and we who want change struggle to figure out how to move forward quickly.

*Candy, continued on next page*



Living in South Korea as a bisexual and as an activist, I face various concerns. Rather than organizing separately under each identity, our LGBTAIQ+ movement is united together under “sexual minorities,” working together to reduce hatred and discrimination and achieve our rights. Bisexual people are generally subsumed under this broader category and are often erased in the public conversation. Same-sex marriage, for example, is often referred to as “gay/lesbian marriage” because for the public, it is easier to message “gay/lesbian marriage” than lesbian/gay/bisexual marriage. More diverse sexual identity movements are being discussed and recognized, but it seems to take a little more time for them to spread to the public.

However, there have been changes, and a bisexual movement has emerged over the years. A bisexual group was established in 2013. One of its activities was the publication of bisexual webzines (which have been temporarily suspended since 2017). The organization I work for began celebrating Bisexual Visibility Day online in 2015, and in 2017 we marched with a giant ten-meter bisexual flag at the Busan Queer Culture Festival. In 2018, an organization called Non-mono Planet was formed, and they are actively doing podcasts and hosting regular events. Still, bisexual people hear a lot of “once in a lifetime [just a phase]” or “confusion.” So, being able to find something visible plays a big role in clarifying that my identity is not fake or a mistake.



Candy (left) and friend at pride parade

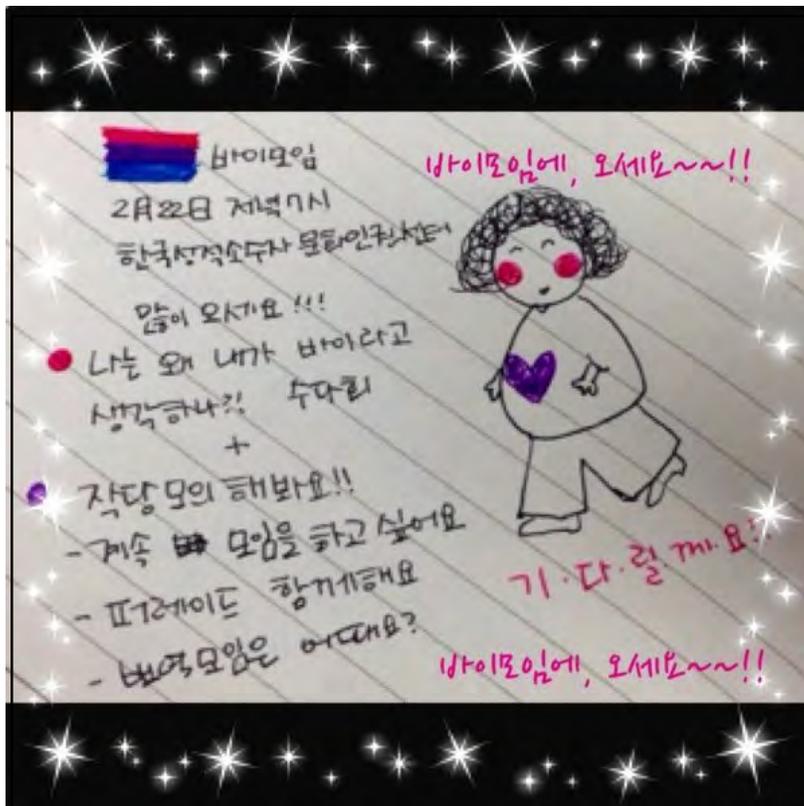
It is my hope to create a place to discuss each movement’s agenda in terms of bisexuality, including what the direction of the movement is from the perspective of bisexuals in the LGBTAIQ+ movement and what same-sex marriage means to bisexuals, and so on.

But what I am most proud of is that when the people in the LGBTAIQ+ movement refer to us as “gays and lesbians,” I remind them that we should say “LGBT” instead because we also have bi and trans people here. And I organized the 10-meter bisexual flag that was unfolded and displayed in a Pride parade.

Next thing you know, I have been working in LGBTAIQ+ spaces for more than 15 years. In that time I met a friend, met a partner, and found a purpose for my life. And still I learn how to respect and love my bi identity every day. Within the movement community, I can meet my partner at the camp for queer women, and meet my friend at various projects like organizing a pride parade or film festival, or promoting the anti-discrimination bill. And because we—my partner and friends— have similar interests and sensibilities, I feel that “finally I’ve gotten my chosen family!”

My girlfriend and I have been together for 11 years. I dream of marrying her someday. And I dream of a day when this “same-sex marriage” of mine is introduced precisely as “a same-sex marriage of a lesbian and a bisexual person,” not as “a lesbian marriage.”

*Candy Yun, 39 years old, lives in Seoul, South Korea with her partner and two old-but-still-cute cats.*



Candy’s first design for a bisexual sticker for pride parade

# What this desk could use is a bit more bisexuality

By Helen Parshall

The first thing I added to the desk at my new job this year, before COVID-19 closed our physical office space, was a bi pride flag.

It was held up with tape and rubber bands, but it was a visible sign to anyone walking down the hall as a sign that a bisexual sits here.

After working at a large LGBTQ non-profit when coming out, it has become incredibly important to me to interrupt preconceived notions of who I am in progressive spaces. Sometimes it looks like a small lapel pin, while other times it involves a bit more of an in-your-face vibe.

I was forced to learn to be aggressive in how I claimed my bisexual identity. By coming into my professional career in such a monosexual space like the Human Rights Campaign, I learned very quickly that bisexual activists often have to fight and claw for our seat at the larger LGBTQ movement table.

And then once we've made it to the table, we're acutely aware that folks will pull that seat out from under us at any time.

Little tools like lapel pins or flags are visual reminders when people make harmful jokes in the workplace—or worse, they just forget to mention my community at all. It's something I can point to when calling folks in to remind them that I am here and still very much part of the conversation of what it means to be queer.

That first day of my new job, in January, one of the first things that a co-worker said when they walked over to introduce themselves to me was they liked my bi flag, and that they had thought about bringing their pan flag to the office but it was too big to fit on the wall.

I breathed a sigh of relief I didn't know I was holding.

Now, as I settle into working from home, my pride backdrop looks a little bit different without the tape, but it's incredibly important for me to be out to my co-workers. They might not know it yet, but we're absolutely going to be celebrating Bi Visibility Day for the first time in our organization's Twitter-history, come September.



*A self-described “professional bisexual,” Helen Parshall is an avid writer and passionate social justice advocate, who uses digital media to bring visibility to marginalized communities. When not joining her housemates at a rally in D.C., Helen can be found reading a book or watching Doctor Who curled up with one of the dogs in her life.*



Central Square, Cambridge, Massachusetts was spruced up in celebration of Pride Month 2020. There is a trans crosswalk, a rainbow crosswalk, and a bi one.

# Rainbow Intersectionalities and Work

By Kim theBwordPoet

As I think about being Out at Work, I typically imagine that all co-workers and customers would have no doubt that I'm part of the LGBT family. I consider myself to be Out at Work because I wear a rainbow bracelet all the time; during Pride Month I wear even more rainbow bracelets, and during the Bisexual Awareness Week I wear bi pride bracelets. However, I am certain that if asked, no one I work with could definitely say, "Yes, we know she's lesbian/bi/gay." Sometimes I wish people would just ask me what my rainbow bracelet(s) mean so I can make the knowledge official.

What exactly would I say to people though? In addition to identifying as bi, I also identify as asexual. Though I am a bi person who desires to have more than one romantic relationship at a time, I don't want to have sex with future partners. There's no easy way to explain that to people. Why be in a relationship without sex? Why be with someone of my own gender if I don't want sex from them? Why even come out if I'm not even actively participating?

The intersections between bi and asexual are what hold me back from feeling like I'm truly LGBT. In a lot of people's minds, identifying politically as LGBT is not enough; they expect you to be sexually LGBT. I'm not sexually LGBT. I'm not sexually *anything*. I would love to date, have fun with, march in the trenches with, live with, cuddle with, enjoy kisses with, eventually marry and be intimate with a male-bodied person and a person of my own gender. As long as I'm not having sex with them, I'm happy. These facts don't make it easier for me to feel like I'm really LGBT. It's one thing to say you are, but actions speak louder than words.



I feel like it's harder for me to be asexual *and* bi. Being both feels even more dividing. I feel like I have four identities. Being bi, I find myself constantly drawn to my own gender and male-bodied individuals. Being asexual, I'm constantly wanting romantic connections, but not wanting sexual connections. I fight my own emotions, wishes, hopes, dreams on a regular basis.

Every explanation I imagine comes out as complicated. And the last thing I want is for the professional world to look at me as attention-seeking or weird. I wish I could simply say I'm lesbian or even that I'm bisexual. But neither of those identities fit me. Because of the rainbow bracelets I wear, my co-workers could easily say I'm lesbian. But I want a romantic relationship with a male-bodied individual, so I don't consider myself lesbian. So, then my co-workers could say I'm bisexual. But I'm not sexual. So, I don't consider myself bisexual, but rather biromantic. Then I can see the conversation diving into the complexities of how I am asexual yet bi and—oh dear! All the emotional labor I'd be expending! At that point, am I trying to convince them of who I am, or myself? I hate being in a constant state of wanting to be completely Out at Work and simultaneously being terrified of always having to explain my orientation so people don't mislabel me.

I wish I had a tidy way to end this essay, but alas, I don't. I am constantly on the quest to find a balance between my identities so I can stop looking at them as a burden. I have no doubt that I will grow into accepting and embracing my asexuality as I did with being bi. Then finding out how they can comfortably coexist. In the meantime, thanks for reading my thoughts while I try to sort it out.

*Kimberly is a 39-year-old biromantic, demisexual, cisfemale from Cleveland, Ohio. She runs Bi+ Initiative Ohio, and is a Soror of Alpha Zeta Gamma Sorority, Incorporated, the first sorority with a specific focus on bisexual women.*



# Taking the Leap: Deciding to Come Out and Be Out At Work

By Kelly Thompson

Being out at work was a choice I made about three years ago, after talking to my daughter and getting the sense that I was living in a shifting world—one where I could live my full self out loud and not be made to feel that my existence was not “real.” I had heard many people over the years claim that bisexuality wasn’t “real,” and since I was married to a man, I hid in plain sight, only making vague arguments to people when the topic came up. When my daughter came out to me as bi (she was in her early 20s at the time), it opened my eyes to realize this is a huge part of her existence, and she’s feeling comfortable in sharing this with the world. I should, too.

I work for a business consulting company, historically a rather conservative industry. And I was in the legal department, another notch on the conservative belt. However, my company was celebrating Pride Month by publishing employee profiles about why LGBTQ+ rights were important, and why each of us felt the need to be involved in our newly created Employee Resource Groups (ERG). I had signed up to be a local leader of our Pride ERG, but my sense was that my colleagues thought I was “just being a good ally.” When I was asked to participate in one of these profiles, I thought this would be my chance to come out “officially.” I struggled with the language to use and it took me weeks to write my profile. This was being published to over 1,500 employees around the world as well as publicly on our company’s website—was I really ready to do this? I had come out to a few colleagues at work, especially those working closely with me in the ERGs, but I knew the rest of the company at which I’d been an employee for eight-plus years would not know this about me.

However, I realized I might help others by doing this. Perhaps my being out would signal to others that it was OK to be “out” at work, and also that it was OK to be bi in general—that our existence was legitimate and authentic. I had not met anyone in my eight-plus years who identified as bi+ at my work, only a few people who identified as gay. I felt rather privileged, as a white, able-bodied, cisgender woman and knew that my community as a whole would likely not shun me if I came out. We were living in the beginnings of the #MeToo movement, and women’s empowerment had really started to inspire me. It felt like a calling at the time.

It was quite liberating to see that profile published on our company website. It seems you come out over and over again in your lifetime, but that was one of the big moments for me, and I’ve embraced it thoroughly ever since. Several colleagues congratulated me on the profile, and one colleague, who had made passing dismissive remarks about bisexuality in the past, texted me to tell me how proud she was of me for doing it.

I’ve attended various conferences, participated in panels and other specific diversity efforts at work, and even led a workshop at the Out & Equal Workplace Summit about how to make the bi+ community feel welcome in the workplace. Last year I started a bi+ support group (using many of the resources found through this publication and website!) at a local LGBTQ+ community center. It has been fantastic to really connect with others in our community and share in both the wins and struggles of bi+ people throughout metro Detroit.

A bi+ colleague told me last year that me being out at work and active with our ERG was what inspired her to get involved, to become a local ERG leader, and to be out herself at work, which she had not done at a workplace before. That was so heartwarming to hear! It inspires me to continue looking for more opportunities to engage and support the bi+ community.

I have even started to come out as poly at work, and I use the terms “pan” and “pansexual” whenever I can, as that is how I truly identify. Those terms are not nearly as common in mainstream circles and educating others has been part of that journey. Telling people you are poly still raises eyebrows. I gauge my decision to use those terms based on the situation and how comfortable I feel around the person I’m speaking to. My workplace has made a significant effort in embracing diversity overall, so I feel supported in moving towards coming out as poly.

If you are thinking about coming out at work, consider reaching out to your leadership team. In the U.S., ask if they know about National Coming Out Day in October. Do they have any ideas about events they could host or articles/resources they could post about this important date? Their response will give you insight into how you might be supported in coming out. If you know of a colleague who is already out, talk to them—ask them what it’s like being out at work. Chances are they are eager to speak to and support you; I know I am!



*Kelly Thompson is a nerdy polyamorous social justice champion who works in the legal arena in metro Detroit.*

# My Whole Self

By Charita Marie



My name is Charita Marie. I am a feminine-presenting, cisgender, bisexual woman and I am out at work. While it feels great to say that I am out at work, let me also state that this has not always been the case. I think a part of me felt that I had enough

strikes against me in corporate America and therefore felt no need to add yet another. I am black and I am a woman, two attributes that already cause me to feel that I have to work harder than my counterparts to prove myself. I didn't want to open myself up to being judged on yet another thing. But somewhere along the way I grew tired of hiding. I had to remember to utilize gender-neutral phrases such as "partner" instead of "girlfriend" or "boyfriend" and "they/hem" instead of "he/she" and "him/her." When peers were telling stories of their weekend or vacations I could never tell my complete story. I was exhausted and decided it was time to stop. I work for a company that not only continually asks their employees to bring their whole selves to work but encourages it and provides resources to assist. I decided it was time to test the waters and haven't looked back since!

Thus far I've found everyone to be supportive (at least to my face) ☺ and for that I am grateful. My company has an LGBTQ+ Employee Resource Group that is very active. I definitely have found my people with them and enjoy making my presence known. Sometimes it's difficult for people to "see" me. When I am with a male partner people assume that I am straight. When I am with a female partner people assume that I am a lesbian. Very seldom does anyone consider bisexuality as an option. I hope to continue to challenge what individuals and society envision when they think of LGBTQ+ members and assist in the elimination of bi erasure.

I love every part of me. Therefore, I will never again do myself the disservice of hiding some of the best parts of me. I will continue to bring my whole self to work and assist with dispelling stereotypes about the bisexual community.

*Charita Marie (she/her) lives in Dallas, Texas, and works at a Fortune 500 company as a treasury manager. Charita is quite social and in her personal time enjoys hosting social events such as brunches, wine walks, and game nights.*

# Outing Oneself Appropriately

By Elisabeth Anderson

As a bisexual woman in a monogamous marriage to a man, in a community with few "out" people (I am a staff member at a small private school with no current members in its queer student organization), I struggle with how to "out" myself at work. I'm comfortable talking about my sexuality, but when is it appropriate to talk about who you used to date with co-workers or your boss? When in college, I flaunted bi pride buttons on my backpack, wore t-shirts that outed me, and joined queer student groups. But as a 40-something adult, I no longer have a place for my buttons and can't wear a t-shirt to work.

I'm out to several co-workers, but I wouldn't be surprised if some people I told 10 years ago have already completely forgotten or assume I'm "not bisexual anymore." How do you come out when it doesn't come up in conversation? From time to time, I can get away with bringing up my ex-girlfriend in a story, but many don't even pick up on that and just hear "girlfriend" and think she was a good friend. Either that or perhaps they think I went through a "phase"—dating girls in college but decided to be straight now.

At times I have found myself reflecting on how outing myself as someone who has had a stillborn child as being similar to outing myself as bi. In both cases, I could easily pass, and in both cases, if I bring the topic up, it often makes the other person feel awkward. But if I'm truly honest, they're not the same at all. While both can be awkward, I only get sympathy when I share my stillborn experience. And while I may not get outright hostility for outing myself as bi, there will be those who judge me negatively.

So, what is the best way to out myself? I have put rainbow stickers up at my desk, but rarely do others notice them and they don't say bisexual. I put a rainbow sticker on my cell phone for a while, but many other co-workers had it as well—so I knew students only saw it as representing "safe."

My best idea so far has been to get a wallet sticker for my phone. It's the one place I could put a make-a-statement image in a socially appropriate way. Unfortunately, my Google searches have come up short. I'm not sure what image I want. A bisexual flag would be too subtle—no one here would know what it means. Perhaps I need to just make my own. If anyone has ideas on where to find something like this, I would love for them to share them with *BWQ*. I'm dying to out myself to more people.

*Elisabeth Anderson lives in the U.S. Virgin Islands with her husband and two sons. She is forever grateful for having met Robyn Ochs when taking two of Robyn's classes at Tufts University.*

# Who Gets to Work?

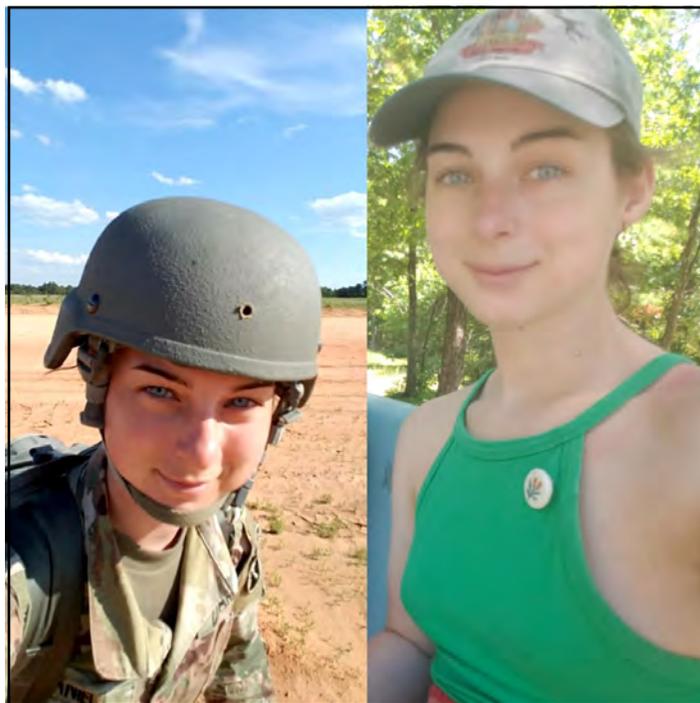
By Aurora

I enlisted in the U.S. Army right out of high school and served from 2016 to 2018. I came from a progressive town in Oregon and my high school had a Queer Straight Alliance club. That isn't to say there wasn't homophobia and transphobia present, but that there was a safe space where I could discuss my identity and seek support on my journey of understanding myself. I came out at 16 and, while I experienced bi erasure because I'm pretty femme and had boyfriends, I was mostly accepted by my peers. Needless to say, I was confident in being out and could manage the biphobia I did experience because I had such a solid support group. Unfortunately, the army pushed me right back into the closet.

Not to get too much into the sexist culture, but I faced a lot of sexual harassment because I was a young, feminine-presenting woman. Most guys assumed I was straight, and I rarely mentioned being bi after a few of my co-workers, on different occasions, asked if I wanted to have a threesome with them and their girlfriends or other women. I was privileged in the sense that I could hide my queerness. Yet, doing so forced me to either avoid dating altogether or only date men to avoid harassment and potential violence, as the army has a toxic rape culture. As a result, I buried my feelings for anyone who wasn't a man.

This isn't even getting into the disturbing transphobia I witnessed and tried to stamp out either. In 2016, trans folks were allowed to be out while serving in the military and receive healthcare to assist their transition. Most of my peers were against this, not to mention many politicians. Speaking up for trans people made my co-workers question me. It brought up fear of being outed because someone might try to figure out if I was queer myself since I was very passionate and outspoken about transphobia. They asked why I cared so much, and I had to withhold that trans people were in my community and that I was bisexual. Instead, I told them that I believe that trans rights are human rights, which I do. Yet, it's not the whole truth. I have trans friends. My sexual orientation isn't limited to any gender identity or presentation, and I'd had crushes on trans binary and non-binary folks as well. So, it was related to belonging to the community, as well as feeling like friends and former and potentially future partners were being targeted. How could I hear all of this transphobic rhetoric being weaponized to target trans people?

Of course, the army has a program to report instances of discrimination. It's called Equal Opportunity (E.O.), and any experience of racism, homophobia, sexism, and transphobia from one soldier to another was to be reported through that. Yet, just like the army's sexual harassment and assault program, it was highly ineffective. There were a few E.O. investigations occurring at my unit during the year I was there, and none of them



resolved any ongoing racism and sexism that I knew of that was happening at my company. I had no faith in the system due to some other personal experiences with it that I'm not sharing here.

The attacks on trans rights were terrifying, not just on a personal level, but also on a societal one. It was only in 2011 that lesbian, gay, and bisexual folks could serve and be out. If trans folks were refused the right to serve their country, when would they remove the LGB right to serve? Both of these policies were instituted during the Obama era, so when was the Trump administration going to revoke my right to serve? Was I going to have a general, or even dishonorable discharge for being bisexual? If this were to happen it wouldn't just cost me a military career, but also other employment opportunities. A discharge status other than honorable carries a strong negative connotation, and all veterans have to include this on job applications. This would force LGB people to either go back in the closet or struggle to recover from severe discriminatory policies, possibly for the rest of their lives. It is naive to think that it would just stop at trans folks' rights. All LGBTQ+ folks are affected by any legislation or policy that targets one group, and I wasn't the only one to express fear.

During my time in the service, there weren't any support groups or spaces for LGBTQ+ service members to meet up. As an individual you seek out queer friends, and one of my good friends was a lesbian. She got a lot of my anxieties and frustrations, and she herself had enlisted after the Don't Ask, Don't Tell policy was repealed. She had her own experiences of homophobic discrimination and I admired her staying in so long despite the mistreatment, disrespect, and prejudice she had to take. It was incredibly helpful to have her as a friend.

*Aurora, continues on next page*

*Aurora, continued from previous page*

Things may have changed in the two years since I've been out of the army, but I doubt it. The barriers for trans folks have only gotten worse, and that signals an attack on all LGBTQ+ rights. One may think that this exists in a vacuum, but this administration has attempted to repeal our access to health-care, jobs, emergency services like homeless shelters, and adoptions; and the discrimination that service members and veterans have faced is just an extension of that. There is an overall attack on our rights to be full humans and citizens, and one that leads to severe consequences for our community.

I'm currently in college, and I'm a member of my college's LGBTQ+ club. A few weeks after I joined, I realized how much having a space for our community was vital for my social well being. I'm hopeful that someday, when I enter the workforce, I won't have any experiences like what happened in the army. Additionally, if I do, I'll be able to report it to the human resources department and get it corrected, as well as prevent further discrimination and prejudice from appearing in my workplace. I don't think anything will ever be as bad as what I went through in the army, but to be a young adult (17-19 years old) and have to feel so cut off from who you are is quite isolating. It forced me to avoid my queerness for years. I'm grateful for my current social network and my therapist for the support and space I have to process and heal from these experiences. It makes me worried about how many LGBTQ+ service members are out there, living in such an oppressive environment, and having to deny their true selves in order to survive.

*Aurora is a sophomore at Bunker Hill Community College in Boston and is currently working on transfer applications and figuring out her major. When not busy with school, she enjoys hiking or working on art, which you can find at [www.instagram.com/indistinct.aurora](http://www.instagram.com/indistinct.aurora).*

## Strange Women

*By Catherine Darwin*

They're not perfect,  
They mess up sometimes  
when giving advice and  
then back-pedaling ensues.

They're not perfect,  
They put their foot in it  
And then apologise profusely  
For experiencing curiosity.

They're not perfect,  
And don't always agree  
With some snarky remark  
You've made about someone.

They're not perfect,  
They have their own lives  
And own interests that  
Extend beyond your bubble.

They're not perfect,  
They're human and raw,  
And have faults like yours  
Which makes them real.

They're not perfect,  
No, so far from it.  
But they love you.  
And that means everything.

*Catherine Darwin writes: 'Strange Women' was written about my female support group, as a reminder to myself we're all struggling through things, but love unites us."*



## —being out?

who am I  
to you?  
why do I have to tell you  
anything about myself?  
I am here to work.  
it is none of your business.  
I certainly don't want to hear  
who/why/how of your attractions.  
(spare me!)  
well, yes, there are those  
with whom I have affinity  
here, at work.  
but it's not for public  
consumption.  
my inner self isn't fuel  
for your education.  
what a stupid world.  
I don't tell you  
my secrets.

## —change



## —being bi?

there you are  
my people  
but you don't see me  
so awkward  
some longing  
some sparks  
some isolation  
missing you  
even tho  
you're here

## —sad, but don't lose hope



*Carol E Moses is a visual artist living in Massachusetts. Moses does painting, drawing, and portrait photography/interview series. Her current project is "Image & Interview: Meeting with Bulgaria," in the WorldsofCo residency. Upcoming is a blog of art and artists in the pandemic time: [artinthetimeofcoronavirus.com](http://artinthetimeofcoronavirus.com). Other work is exhibited at Studio 213 in Boston's SoWa neighborhood.*

# Banana Split

By Alison Miller

I want to sit in a comic book diner  
with you and share a banana split or  
maybe a milkshake with two straws.  
We'll get whipped cream on our faces  
and wipe it off without flirtation as we  
talk about politics and deep-down sea  
creatures, as we teach each other languages.  
I'll say (something) Did you know that  
means "ferry" in Japanese?  
And you'll say (something) and I'll say  
what? and you'll say I said 'Start with Spanish.'  
I'll say bitte but I'll mean danke and you'll  
nod and say something in incorrect French

and I'll say I hate French and you'll say,  
No, you dislike French music and I'll

be glad for how well you know me  
and we'll hold hands and sip our  
milkshake or eat our banana split.

# Untitled

By Alison Miller

I watch a sail-shaped shadow  
on your neck and imagine  
it curving towards me.

Your eyes are peacock feathers  
shimmering gold. I want to  
ask you if we'll touch again.

I slid my hands into your hair  
so easily once, my fingers  
dolphins frolicking in your curls.

You are your laugh, melodic  
and bold. You are your  
lips when they open for me.

You are the person in the  
pictures taken when you claim  
we were making mistakes.



*Alison Miller is a writer and sex educator whose poetry has been published in various literary magazines. The owner of sex positive adult boutiques in Richmond, Virginia, she currently resides in San Diego.*

# Finally

By Robyn Ochs

It took me an eternity—three and a half years, to be precise—to come out at work. I moved to Boston at age 23 and a few months later found work at a university (there are lots of universities in Boston!), where I ended up working for 26 years.

In my first position, I didn't mention that I had a girlfriend. I didn't tell anyone I was bi. I was afraid of how my co-workers might respond.



My next job was at a residential research center, I'd heard a rumor that the boss was uncomfortable that an unmarried couple was living together in one of our apartments—a man-woman kind of couple. I concluded it would not be safe to come out as bi at this job.

Upon starting job number three, a promotion, I decided

I could be silent no longer. It was time to come out at work.

I waited an entire year.

Why did I wait? I was afraid people would judge me. I was afraid people would perceive me as less professional. I was afraid my sexuality would distract people from my competence. I wanted my co-workers to get a firm sense of me as a professional before the big reveal. It was a very long year. Then I finally came out.

A few of my co-workers made strange comments: "How does your partner feel about sharing you with other people?" (I never said that.) "Why do you need to tell me this? Sex has no place in the workplace." (Huh? I wasn't talking about sex. I was telling you how I identify.) Straight people talk about their partners and relationships all the time. I just wanted to be able to talk about mine, too.

It was a relief to come out. I felt myself breathing a bit more deeply. I was no longer carrying the heavy weight of a secret.

Fast forward almost to the present: I couldn't possibly be more out. I am, after all, an educator. And bisexuality is my subject.

*Robyn Ochs still lives in Boston. She is Editor of this publication.*

# Being Out vs. Being Bi+

By Tami Gorodetzer

I joined the corporate workforce in 2014, fresh out of college. I held my identities in full view throughout the four years I was active on campus and didn't spend a ton of time thinking about what I needed to adjust prior to starting my first "real" job. Not long after my first day, I put up a photo of my then-girlfriend posing with me at a summertime wedding. I was open with my co-workers and leaders about the fact that I was dating a woman. I had no inhibitions about my relationship and the implications that came with it. But months later, we went through a breakup that left me not only heartbroken, but extremely isolated from my queer world. So, I joined my company's PRIDE ERG.

Joining PRIDE gave me back the queer community I thought I had lost, but I quickly noticed a pattern: we had gays, we had lesbians, and we had allies. I had never identified as a lesbian, but I also was never strongly vocal about being pansexual, bisexual, queer. The thing is, I've never felt as deep of a desire to find a label that fit as the others around me seemed to want to label me. Then, I took advantage of my day job and used my company's social media to comment on a student's post about Lavender Graduation. I congratulated him, told him we knew how special the occasion is, and said we couldn't wait to see what he does in the future. Our Corporate Relations team heard about my outreach and asked me to be part of a video series they did featuring goodness of employees. In this video that was going to be available to all internal employees of my 45k+ company, I outed myself as bisexual. The home page of our intranet opened to my story. It felt like employees stared at me just slightly longer in the hallways. Suddenly, I was very out. So, what else was there to do besides become the PRIDE president?

This should have been a celebration. Instead, it launched a seven-month identity crisis where I spent days and weeks crying to my roommate feeling like a fraud because I was leading an LGBT+ group but I wasn't a lesbian. I had never claimed to be a lesbian, though. And the "B" was always in the acronym so there was no prerequisite to be a lesbian. But wow, did I feel like it was a requirement! The closer I got to a year of feeling like I wasn't allowed to be who I am, the more conversations I began having. First, they were private. I had a 1:1 with one of my board members about her stories of blatant biphobia. I had a conversation with a past leader about wanting to make sure our group reached all audiences in the community, wondering if we were reaching our "A's" or our "T's" or maybe our "B's." Then, heading into the 2019 planning year, I decided these conversations should be more public.

I pitched a storytelling event to my closest board members, some of my closest friends. I asked if they would each be willing to share a hard story if I agreed to do the same thing. "I Get Bi+" was born in the spring of 2019 and launched as our first event

for Pride Month that June. We featured three stories and I sat next to two of my best friends and listened to painful realities. My closest friend shared her stories of being cheated on by women, who happened to be bisexual, and how that made her see bi+ women as liars, cheaters, deceptive, and attention-seeking. Next, my vice president shared his story about the reality that he forgets bisexual people exist. When watching a TV show, he got distracted and a character he recently saw dating a woman entered the screen with a man. He commented that he thought this character was a lesbian, dismissing the option that she's bisexual. This was a harmless and thoughtless comment but when considering that he was helping lead a PRIDE ERG of a Fortune 100 company, should this be taken so lightly? Then it was my turn. I shared what it was like growing up in my bisexual body, being ashamed that I couldn't figure it out, that I couldn't "pick a side." I detailed what it was like to feel afraid to tell my queer friends when I was dating men, worrying they would think I am no longer queer and would exile me from my community, my home. I explored the ways I judged myself for dating men, wondering if it did call my queerness into question. I indulged my audience with what it was like to know you could fall in love with anyone, with everyone, and how that made you awkwardly lonely when you were alone and unable to explain how you felt to anybody. But the end of my story was explaining this gift.

Being bi+ or pan or queer or however I'm being defined today is a gift. How lucky am I to just love, with no parameters or discriminations? It took me a long time to like who I am and after almost six years at my company, I got to share it. Most of co-workers knew me as "out." These co-workers also would have described me as a lesbian. Most likely, that was the only identity they knew besides gay. But after that event, after the ways the company responded, I never shy away from my truth in my identity, I am not afraid of correcting those around me, and I take genuine pride in representing my openly bisexual self. Being out as bi+ at work, not just being out at work, gave me the understanding of how important it was to shine light on our community in queer spaces and in corporate spaces.

*Tami Gorodetzer (shelher) is a corporate professional and social activist. She has presented at multiple conferences on the topics of intersectionality, racism in queer spaces, and bisexuality.*



# Volunteering with Queer Elders

By Emma

Not all work is paid. In May 2020, months into the COVID-19 shutdown in the Northeast of the United States, I volunteered to do check-in telephone calls for LGBTQ+ elders in the Boston area through the LGBT Aging Project at Fenway Health. I had read an interview with the assistant director of the LGBT Aging Project saying the organization was looking for volunteers, and I thought it would be interesting to chat with LGBTQ+ elders about their lives and the history they have lived through.

All older people are high risk for COVID-19, but queer elders are more likely to be disconnected from their birth families and live alone than their straight peers. LGBTQ+ elders are more likely to be physically and emotionally isolated because of the scarcity of explicitly LGBTQ+ affirming elder services available.

On my calls I spoke to a jazz singer, a woman taking recorder lessons on Skype, and a man who had just gotten two kittens. I spoke to a transgender woman who really enjoyed her gender transition support group at a Veterans Administration way out in the suburbs. I spoke to the sister of a man on my list and she told me her brother preferred living in shelters and addiction treatment centers instead of living with her. One woman told me she was really going to miss her adult queer summer camp this year, but her cabin was having virtual happy hours regularly. I stumbled through telling one man who only spoke Spanish that I needed to go call my boss so we could find someone who could understand him.

One particularly memorable elder I spoke to told me he used to bring his cat out to the bar Saturday nights in the 1970s! The cat

would ride on this shoulder and get all excited as they turned onto the street where the bar was. I feel very lucky to have heard these firsthand snippets of queer history.

It is a lot of hard work to listen to a sad and frightened stranger tell you their situation over the phone as you take notes. I quickly discovered I could only call three to five elders a day because the emotional labor exhausted me otherwise. If someone needed immediate assistance or a social worker, I called the program directors' cell phones.

If you are in the Boston area and would like to volunteer, contact either the LGBT Aging Project or FriendshipWorks, a partner organization that finds intergenerational conversation partners (find info below). If you live elsewhere, reach out to your local LGBTQ+ resource center or elder resource center to ask if they need any volunteers to do check in calls.

*Emma is in her twenties and lives in Massachusetts.*

## **LGBT Aging Project:**

[fenwayhealth.org/the-fenway-institute/lgbt-aging-project](https://fenwayhealth.org/the-fenway-institute/lgbt-aging-project)

## **FriendshipWorks:**

[www.fw4elders.org](https://www.fw4elders.org)



Photo courtesy LGBT Aging Project

# Out through Advocacy: Showing Pride by Serving My Community

By Ally Muterspaw

My coming out story doesn't fit the coming out arc that many films, novels, and other media portray to their audiences. I never had that "oh!" moment, nor do I have specific childhood memories where I recognized my queerness. I never made an announcement to friends or loved ones about my identity. This isn't from shame or rejection, although those feelings are valid and important to acknowledge. I've always been a private person and, overall, am private about my personal life at work.

I work in a suburban public library, where the growing area's economics and politics mostly cater to the nuclear family structure. This attitude is present in my workplace, and usually my femme-presenting self is labeled as straight. When co-workers refer to my future family, they envision me as having children with a male partner. This presumption is rooted in bi erasure and assumes a narrow definition of family, omitting the reality that for many queer people, our concepts of family don't necessarily rely on the mom and dad paradigm, but form through a community of people we grow through love and support. Learning how to navigate these conversations is a challenge, because how do I explain to someone that these presumptions about who my partner may be are not necessarily *wrong*, but that what they assume about the life I imagine for myself is toxic.

I know of only two other openly LGBTQ+ people who work in my library. I am very grateful to have a close queer friend at work; honestly, we all need a queer friend to commiserate with about our jobs. I find support through sharing similar experiences with other queer people and trusted allies when I feel distress at work. Having a few select people I talk to is how I usually cope with microaggressions at work, since we currently don't have designated resources for LGBTQ+ health or community. Unless my workplace hired more LGBTQ+ competent members to its leadership team, I wouldn't feel comfortable with my work facilitating an employee resource group. Of course, I hope this dynamic will change, and that queer inclusivity will progress after I am gone from the library.

This isn't to say that I'm not out at work, I like to say that I let some people "in" to my life. I show pride for my community by advocating for an equitable workplace. Particularly focusing on LGBTQ+ people oppressed through racism, transphobia, and other oppressions, pride is showing up to fight for every member of our community. I actively make an effort to push for equity in organizational policy, workplace culture, and patron services. Facilitating difficult but necessary conversations about oppression and privilege with my co-workers is critical in creating a conscientious workplace.

I wouldn't go so far as to say that my workplace is LGBTQ+ incompetent, but it's definitely not an affirming place. Since I have assurances through community care outside of work, I find that advocating for patrons to feel safe in our space is the best way to show my pride at work. The core values of my job are accessibility, and the right to feel represented in the media we consume. I uplift stories about underrepresented community members for patrons who seek visibility from a space where they should feel valued.

*Ally Muterspaw, shelher, is a public librarian living with her roommate and their cats in Indianapolis. She spends her free time running, reading, and curating her cat's Instagram. She is a member of Queery, a radical queer book club run through Irvington Vinyl and Books in Indianapolis.*



# Thoughts from the Closet

By Lila Hartelius

As an English language teacher who also happens to be bisexual, I'm not currently out at work; yet my understandings of biphobic and monosexist<sup>1</sup> oppression have helped me put words to elements that feel oppressive to me in my experience not only of not being out at work but also of being an English teacher. I feel that it's important to connect these two experiences, so in this essay I'll first focus on my outness at work and then connect that experience to my observations about English language teaching (ELT).

## **Biphobic/monosexist oppression and outness at work**

It saddens me that—even in France, a country that prohibits workplace discrimination based on sexual orientation—I allow my interactions with colleagues to exclude potential opportunities to break my isolation as a bi person and connect with other LGBTQ+ people who might feel the same. Staying in the closet at work means immersing myself in persistent, often subconscious, anxiety about how colleagues might react if I came out.

Yet I wonder whether being out at work would improve my personal sense of mental/emotional well-being while there. Biphobic and monosexist microaggressions, internalized biphobia, and bisexual erasure can work together in toxic ways. Past experiences with encountering such microaggressions have helped me understand how difficult it can be to recognize, challenge, and be heard around these insidious, often unconscious manifestations of biphobia/monosexism.

Before I knew what microaggressions were, being subjected to what I now recognize as biphobic/monosexist microaggressions often left me feeling frustrated or hurt yet simultaneously confused and ashamed, fearing I was overreacting.

Internalized biphobia and internalized monosexism make it difficult for me to confront these microaggressions without worrying I'm being oversensitive—even when I realize these forms of internalized oppression feed into these apprehensions. And bi-erasure helps keep nonmonosexuality and the associated oppression invisible, which seems to contribute to the bewildered/belittling reactions bi+ people receive when challenging microaggressions.

Often, such microaggressions I've experienced have been so subtle, and systemic bi-erasure so societally embedded, that my attempts to explain—to those involved or from whom I might seek emotional support afterwards—how what occurred was a microaggression have been futile, stressful, and emotionally taxing. Self-care can unfortunately sometimes mean picking my battles.

Indeed, bi-erasure makes it so that, despite growing literature that validates the challenges we face, as nonmonosexual people we often find ourselves being asked to explain what nonmonosexuality is—sometimes even just to be taken seriously when challenging a microaggression—all while navigating the potential for ensuing microaggressions. Furthermore, directing someone to educational resources does not guarantee that person won't commit microaggressions toward us again. Learning to apply to everyday interactions what one has read/watched/listened to can be a long, complex process. Nonetheless, learning a colleague is bisexual might be the one thing that prompts someone to educate themselves about nonmonosexuality, and being out at work might help me contribute to more people taking this first step.

Understanding biphobia and monosexism, in all their manifestations, as public health and safety issues might clarify why it's important for people to actively contribute to promoting bi-visibility by educating themselves—and not just for the sake of nonmonosexuals. For example, Shiri Eisner argued that “biphobia against women is not only the concern of bisexual women, but of all women regardless of their sexual identity” (182). Eisner asserted that, underlying harassment of both lesbians and bisexual women, is the biphobic notion that they are performing same-gender desire for male pleasure. Eisner also remarked that heterosexual women often are “subject to pressure by straight men to perform bisexuality [...] for their pleasure” (182).

While raising awareness about biphobia should be used to help end violence against *all* women, the tragic realities of higher rates of violence committed against bisexual women as compared to lesbian and heterosexual women respectively should not be ignored. Moreover, recognizing how biphobia also affects monosexual people shouldn't be used as a sole justifier of the importance of promoting awareness about biphobia.

## **Connecting oppression-related discourse to ELT**

Reflecting on my experiences of outness at work got me thinking critically about privilege and oppression regarding not only sexual orientation but also ELT. While my language teaching style tends toward valuing comprehensibility over an accuracy-at-all-costs approach, for example, I am confronted with ethical dilemmas when it comes to standardized English language tests that in some cases are a requirement for English language learners. When working in test-prep capacities with learners, I of course endeavor to increase my teaching's focus on accuracy. Yet I can't help feeling like some of these tests seem to reinforce the idea that there is a single standard for what counts as “correct

<sup>1</sup>In response to common conceptualizations of biphobia that focus on stereotypes about bisexuality and bisexuals, feminist bisexual and genderqueer activist, writer, and researcher Shiri Eisner posits that, “within the frame of discussion on biphobia, the term ‘monosexism’ is a tool that can be used to examine and deconstruct the underlying power structure at the basis of biphobia” (63).

*Lila, continues on next page*

English,” a standard that is invisible in a way similar to how assumptions of monosexuality work as an unquestioned norm.

Jim Scrivener (118-119), a teacher and trainer in the ELT field, discussed a model that the late linguist Braj Kachru proposed for grouping the different varieties of English that exist (see fig. 1). In Scrivener’s words, “Kachru suggested that the models of correct language are mainly set by the inner circle but that the outer circle is starting to create its own norms” (119). Standardized English language tests which I’m aware of are based on *inner-circle* models of correct language. While this may be practical for learners who will be using English primarily in countries/regions/discourses where inner-circle varieties of English are dominant, I wonder how helpful such tests may be in evaluating learners’ competency in navigating real-life communication in countries/regions/discourses where outer-/expanding-circle varieties of English may be more common.

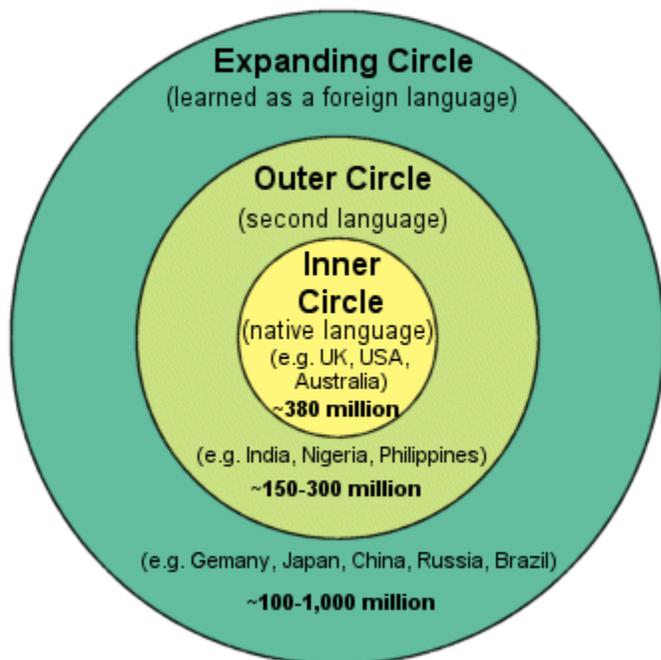


Fig. 1. Kachru’s three-circle model of World Englishes. Source: Luke Mastin, “Who Speaks English?” *The History of English*; Luke Mastin, 2011; [www.thehistoryofenglish.com/history\\_today.html#Who](http://www.thehistoryofenglish.com/history_today.html#Who), Date Accessed: 31/7/20.

This raises a question for me: when English is taught as a foreign language, should the varieties of English taught default to exclusively inner-circle ones? While I would argue no, the ELT textbooks I’ve encountered are based on inner-circle varieties of English. This may not be every English language teacher’s experience, but I cannot imagine I’m the only one who’s had this experience. Why does it seem that so many English language teachers have been exposed primarily to textbooks that promote

this single standard and that seem to erase and delegitimize other forms of English?

I think it’s important to ask questions such as: Who or what is contributing to the notion that there is one “correct” group of varieties of English? Who or what is expected to benefit from this notion? Who or what is actually benefiting from it (and at the expense of whom or what)? To what extent is this notion present in the dominant discourse of the ELT field? Eisner described *dominant discourse* as “a discourse created by those in power and which dominates social understandings about a given topic” (17). This brings up some other questions. Who is creating the dominant discourse in the ELT field? Who is included in this discourse’s creation, and who is excluded from it? Who or what is served by such inclusions/exclusions, and at the expense of whom or what?

Just as monosexism and bi-erasure mean I rarely hear coworkers mention bisexuality, a single-standard notion of correct English means I don’t often happen upon teaching materials that address non-inner-circle varieties of English unless I’m actively looking for such materials. And just as biphobia works to delegitimize bisexuality as a sexual orientation, standardized English language tests that privilege inner-circle forms of English promote the idea that any diversion from those forms is automatically an error rather than possibly being a norm specific to an outer-/expanding-circle variety of English.

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Though it could be challenging, coming out at work might give me opportunities to promote bi-visibility and help me feel less alone. Even just reflecting on the question of outness at work has already helped me name elements underneath aspects of English teaching that have felt oppressive to me. This has helped me reflect on how, in my teaching practice, I might be able to invite or encourage dialogue around questions of normativity and diversity concerning English, how it’s used, and how it’s taught. My hope is that such dialogue might help both my workplace and the ELT field to become more inclusive of diverse identities, experiences, and ways of communicating.

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Lila Hartelius, BA ([lilahartelius.wordpress.com](http://lilahartelius.wordpress.com)) is a bilingual (English/French), published writer who has served as editorial assistant for the International Journal of Transpersonal Psychology. Her work has been published in *Bi Women Quarterly*, *Weird Sisters West*, and *Tendrel (Naropa University’s diversity*

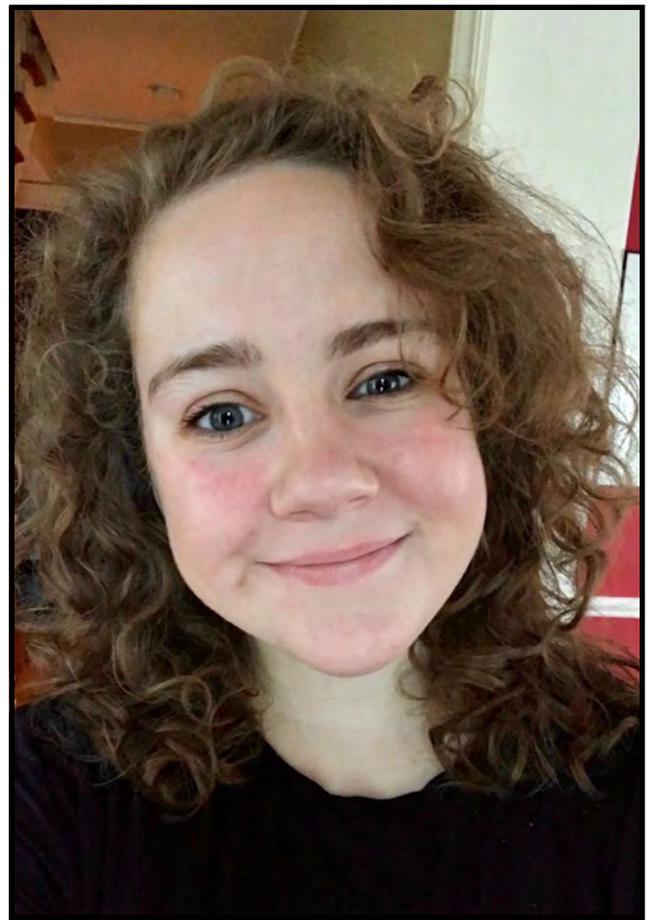
# Not-Not Out

By Maddie McGuire

I live and work in a western suburb of Chicago. I never came out at work and it's hard to say if my co-workers are aware that I'm bisexual. Though I do have a feeling most of them know I'm not straight. I work in a library in the Youth Department where I mostly serve grades 6-12, but the department starts at birth. When I started, I made a conscious effort to be outwardly queer positive. I openly use the word queer without shame, I started a program for queer youth, I wear a rainbow she/her pin on my name tag, and I rallied to have a booklist for the LGBTQIA+ books (I was met with no resistance). I do all of these things because it's important to me that teens are seeing queer representation. Most of the other librarians I work with, in the Youth Department, work hard to have representation in the books we have in our collection and are outwardly supportive of the queer community. Overall, the library I work at is a comfortable place to work for me as a bisexual person. Many people sign their emails with their pronouns and a few people in my department wear pronoun pins along with rainbows. In my department no one else identifies as part of the LGBTQIA community, as far as I know. But the Youth Department I work in has always been supportive when I have implemented more queer-based programming and booklists. They all seem to know the importance of representation for youth and have always been proactive about using and having queer representation.

Although everyone's open and kind I've never felt the need to tell my coworkers that I'm bisexual. I'm sure I've made comments that allude to the fact that I am because I don't censor my language to "act straight." Sometimes I wear large rainbow earrings and talk about the queer representation in books and how it makes my heart warm. It's not important that my co-workers know I'm bisexual, and that's generally how I feel about coming out at this point in my life. My immediate family and my best friends know how I identify because it felt important to me for them to know my preferred label. I would say that, based on my behaviors at work and what I show as my values, my team knows I'm not straight. And if at some point I decide to tell everyone, "I'm bisexual," I'd like to think they'd be okay with it. Maybe it's because I'm only 24, maybe it's because I'm single, maybe it's because I'm still getting comfortable being out and proud. I've only been fully out with my family for a few years now, and maybe as time goes on I'll want to tell more people I'm bisexual. But for now, I feel okay with being myself at work without telling everyone that I'm bisexual.

*Maddie McGuire is a 24-year-old graduate student living and going to school to get her master's in Library Studies in the Chicagoland area.*



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The graphic is a circular purple badge with a white border. It features the text 'JOIN US FOR VIRTUAL Brunch' at the top, with 'Brunch' in a large, stylized script font. Below this, the dates 'SEPT 12, OCT 18, NOV 7' are listed. To the left of the dates is a line drawing of a woman with dark hair, wearing a purple top and white pants, sitting on a stool and looking at a computer monitor. Below the dates, it says 'SEE PAGE 24'. At the bottom right, it says 'RSVP TO: AVON.ALGER @GMAIL.COM'.

Personally, I have always found the process of coming out to be particularly agonizing. I'm someone who hates talking about myself almost as much as I hate confrontation. Unfortunately, though, coming out is sort of unavoidable and so at some point I do have to make my dreaded choice: Do I come out explicitly in job applications and interviews, or do I choose to omit my non-binary identity? Am I just putting off the inevitable, or committing some kind of self-treason by choosing to be constantly misgendered and misunderstood? Is this an act of self-preservation, or self-flagellation (or maybe both)? So many questions with so few answers.

My decision to stay closeted more often than not is a complicated one. There are many factors that play into that choice. There is shame which I learned from the world around me. It hangs like a shadow in the back of my mind, and when it gets bored it likes to poke at me for fun. There is the fear of judgment and violence, which is, unfortunately, not completely unfounded. There is also *love* and an instinct to protect this wonderful, delicate part of myself. These are just a few of many factors and I consider each and every one of them before I decide whether or not to come out in a given setting. It is exhausting, and perhaps some would say it is unnecessary, but it is my process.

I long for a world where my gender is completely irrelevant in the hiring process. More than that, I long for a world where my gender is completely irrelevant *in genera*. Unfortunately, that is not the world we live in—at least, not yet. It *does* feel much easier to avoid talking about my sexuality versus my gender, especially considering 1) I'm not in a relationship, and 2) my sexual orientation is hardly relevant when it comes to doing my job, or workplace dynamics. Unfortunately, though, I find it much more difficult to “get away with” being vague about my gender, because my gender *is* relevant.

My gender is relevant because gender sits at the very core of our language. My gender is relevant because I am almost always assumed to be a cisgender woman and treated as such. It's relevant because, when I immediately become a ‘she’ in someone's eyes and in their words, I'm forced to make a decision: Do I correct them and “cause a scene,” or do I stay quiet and allow myself to feel hurt and othered? It feels like a no-win scenario. I can't begin to describe how uncomfortable I feel when well-meaning cis folks beg for my forgiveness after messing up my pronouns, not to mention how much it truly *sucks* when people expect me to explain myself and my identity to them upon learning that I am non-binary. The mere idea of having to endure that in the



workplace is exhausting—but is it more exhausting than the idea of not coming out at all, of having to be misgendered constantly? I'm not sure.

It has taken me years to come out as non-binary, mostly because of how much I dreaded long, painful conversations about myself and how I identify. I am still not fully out today—not to my family, and not to many of the people who knew me before college. In a therapy session this past spring, I half-jokingly entertained the idea of never coming out to those people in my life at all—“Living like this isn't completely horrible,” I explained. I reasoned that, while being misgendered isn't fun, you can get used to it after a while. You become numb to the pain. Would it really be so bad, staying with the evil I know?

To that my therapist replied: “But don't you deserve more than ‘not completely horrible?’”

And I do. We all do.

I could spend the rest of my life having certain friends and family members call me “she.” I could live a life where my coworkers and acquaintances never get to see the *real* me. I wouldn't be the first or the last gender non-conforming person to make this decision. If I do that, though, who wins? Certainly not *me*. Don't I deserve to be the winner in my own life story?

The reality is that, out or not, I will *never* be able to fully avoid discomfort and/or conflict. There will always be people who misgender me, people who refuse to understand, and people who mean well but *really* miss the mark. There will always be invasive questions, awkward moments, and feelings of isolation. It is an unchanging, ever-frustrating fact of life: sometimes, things *suck*, and there's simply no way to completely rid the world of that suckiness. While I can't control how other people perceive me, I *can* control how I perceive myself. I *can* demand respect and recognition. I *can* prioritize my own mental health and happiness enough to say, “This is how I want to be referred to,” regardless of how others might perceive me for doing so. I can choose to set aside worries of judgment and not fitting in, rather than allowing them to control my life. While I cannot control everything, this I can control: I will love myself, and I will make all of the annoying, inevitable, and difficult decisions with that love at the forefront of my mind.

*Em the Gem (they/them) is a self-identified creative who enjoys spending time with animals and making people smile.*

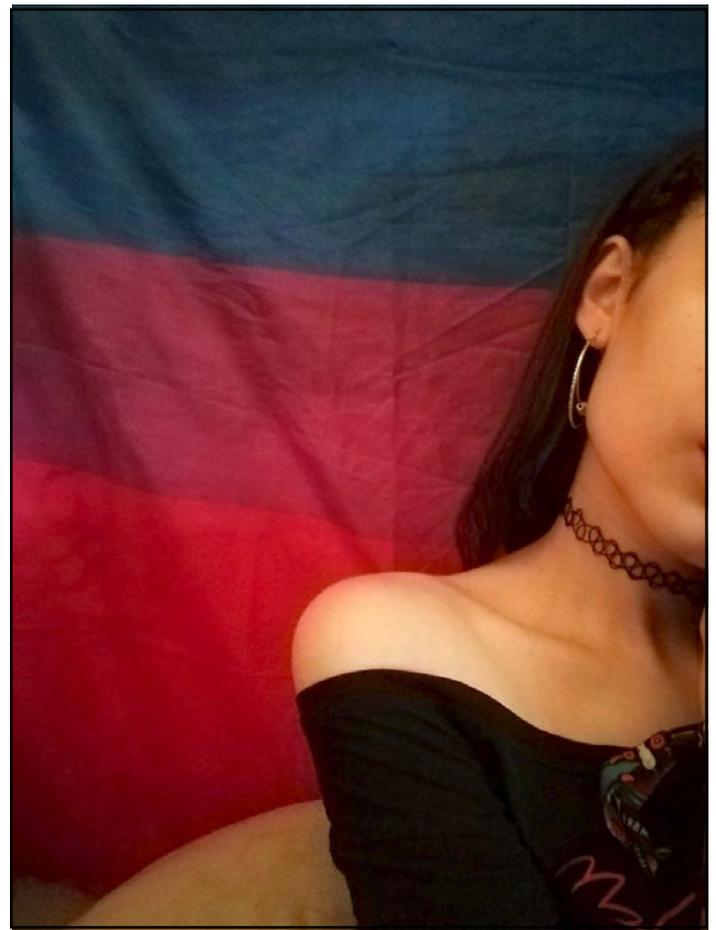
# An Open Door for Biphobia

By *sagavica*

I usually work as an English teacher. It has meant I have had to remain silent about being bi. Why? Because as a primary school teacher in a Catholic school, I am judged harshly by my clothes and my attitude. I have tried my best to teach my students that you may love whoever you want and that there are more options apart from being straight or gay, but I could not risk my job by coming out. I have also taught secondary school students and, being a young woman myself, I already felt hypersexualized by them. So even though I knew my bosses would have no problem with it, I decided not to come out there either.

Some years ago, I worked at a Burger King in order to save money. I was known as “the crazy feminist.” In this workplace, it was common for people to make sexual comments about coworkers and clients. I was hypersexualized by coworkers and supervisors from the day I signed that contract. At the time, my partner was a man and I did not feel comfortable coming out as bisexual, so I just let everyone think I was straight. Eventually this “crazy feminist” got tired of the comments and said, “Did you know you can feel attracted to women without being a dickhead?”

Soon, a new female worker came onboard, and she had a girlfriend. She also identified as bi! As she had the guts from the first day on the job not to hide who she was, she faced negative comments from coworkers and supervisors. What a surprise, right? We formed “a team” as we got closer. I won’t forget the time we were working together and the boss asked: “So what do you prefer, burgers or pizza?” He said it right in front of everyone just to make fun of us. We did not let that comment bring us down, but at heart I felt extremely unhappy and clearly not protected at that workplace. We lacked real resources to fight



discrimination at our workplace, yet we had to see Burger King’s cardboard crowns distributed at Madrid’s pride celebration that July, as if the company actually supported all orientations.

I really wish for a safe work environment in the future where I can be my true self without hiding that I’m bi and proud!

*sagavica is an English major, a poetry enthusiast, and a researcher in Gender Studies who lives in Madrid, Spain. She is still in the process of discovering myself, but doesn’t want to be inBisible!*

NEW CASTLE COUNTY, Delaware—A celebration of pride in New Castle County. On June 28, 2020, County Executive Matt Meyer joined with members of the LGBTQ community to raise rainbow, transgender, and bisexual pride flags. (via CBS)



# Eighth Annual Bisexual Book Award Winners: Books of 2019

**Non-Fiction:** *Psychoanalytic Bisexuality to Bisexual Psychoanalysis: Desiring in the Real* by Esther Rapoport, Routledge

**Memoir/Biography:** *In the Dream House* by Carmen Maria Machado, Graywolf Press

**Fiction:** *Naamah* by Sarah Blake, Riverhead Books/Penguin Random House

**Romance:** Tie: *Out of the Shade* by S.A. McAuley, Independently Published; and *Red, White & Royal Blue* by Casey McQuiston, St. Martin's Griffin / Macmillan

**Erotic Fiction:** *Three For All* by Elia Winters, Cecaelia Press

(Note that *BWQ* author Lara Zielinsky was the other finalist for this category for her book *We Three: One and One and One Makes Three*.)

**Speculative Fiction [Bi-fi/Sci-fi/Fantasy/Paranormal/Horror/Etc.]:** *Shatter the Sky* by Rebecca Kim Wells, Books for Young Readers/Simon & Schuster

**Teen/Young Adult Fiction:** *Deposing Nathan* by Zack Smedley, Page Street Kids

**Mystery:** *Blood & Bitcoin* by L.A. Witt, Independently Published

**Poetry:** *turn around BRXGHT XYXS* by Rosebud Ben-Oni, Get Fresh Books

**Publisher of the Year:** Simon & Schuster

**Bi Writer of the Year:** Rosalind Chase, *Lot's Wife: An Erotic Retelling*, Under Hill Press



Dana Terrace

## Disney Goes Bi

And here's a first: Disney has confirmed it has a bisexual lead character on "The Owl House" series. Fourteen-year-old Dominican-American Luz Nocedo is the first bisexual character to make a Disney debut on a television series. Dana Terrace, the series' creator, also identifies as bisexual. She wanted to write about a bisexual character, so she really pushed Disney to allow the character.



Luz Nocedo

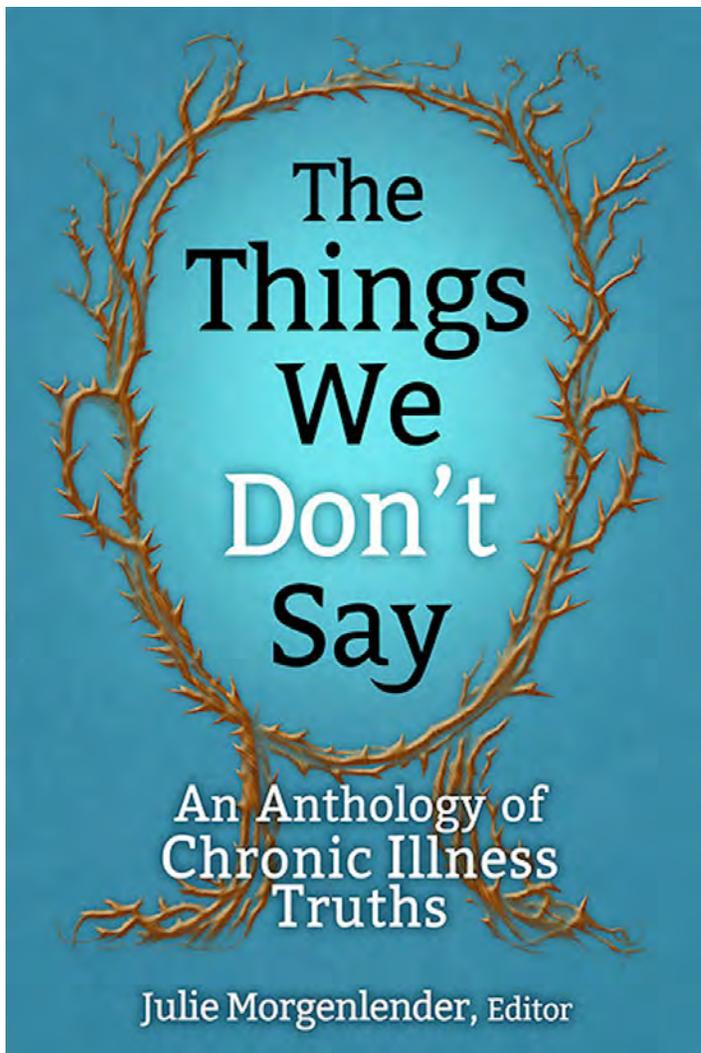
# Saying The Things We Don't Say: An Interview with Julie Morgenlender

By Robyn Ochs

Julie Morgenlender is editor of *The Things We Don't Say: An Anthology of Chronic Illness Truths*, a new collection of 50 true stories by 42 authors from around the world. Spanning different ages, ethnicities, genders, sexual orientations, and diagnoses, these authors open up about their chronic illnesses and their search for answers, poor treatment by doctors, self-doubt, warmth and support from family and friends, the triumph of learning coping mechanisms, and more. These stories are honest, raw, and real. They provide comfort and companionship for those with chronic illness, and guidance and understanding for those whose loved ones have chronic illness." I had the pleasure of interviewing Julie shortly after her book release.

**RO:** Julie, you've been involved in the Boston bi+ community for quite some time. In fact, you are VERY involved.

**JM:** Yes, I am! I attend BBWN brunches, volunteer with BWQ mailings, and serve on the Bisexual Resource Center's board of directors. I'm also an advocate for those with chronic illness. I volunteer with a chronic pain support group, write about chronic illness both under a pseudonym and under my own name, and work to raise awareness.



**RO:** Do you see a connection between these issues?

**JM:** Both groups are often invisible, often marginalized, and in need of community and support. I have found comfort in building connections, and editing this anthology provided an opportunity to share that feeling of connection with others who have chronic illness.

Finding my chronic illness community was a lot like finding my bisexual+ community: I finally felt like I fit in, and I enjoyed being around people who spoke the same language. There was no need to explain chronic fatigue or "painsomnia," just as in the bi+ community I didn't have to watch my pronouns. My first visit to a chronic pain support group felt as revelatory as my first BBWN (Boston Bisexual Women's Network) brunch a decade ago.

**RO:** What motivated you to put together this anthology? Where did you get the idea?

**JM:** There was no specific moment where lightning struck. This was an idea that evolved slowly over many years. The more I was involved in the chronic illness community, the more I saw the loneliness, isolation, and self-doubt there and I knew it was important to bring these stories together so that others would feel the community and support that I had come to appreciate. I also saw how much we benefited when we shared our experiences and advice, and I wanted others to get that benefit. Plus, I wanted those without chronic illness to understand what their loved ones, co-workers, and acquaintances are living with.

As I spoke more openly about my own chronic illness experiences, people I hardly knew began to thank me for showing them what I lived with, saying that they now better understood what people in their lives were experiencing. I wanted to share that on a bigger scale, but my experience is only one of many. I wanted more experiences to be represented so that more people would feel connected, which is why I created this as an anthology.

**RO:** I had the pleasure of joining you at your book release event on Zoom. What were highlights of this event for you?

*Julie, continued on next page*

Julie, continued from previous page

**JM:** The biggest highlight was seeing all of the friendly faces there. After all, this is all about people. Attendees included close friends, relatives, people who I had met virtually through my work on this book, and people I didn't know at all, plus even more of the book's contributing authors than I had expected. Another highlight was hearing from so many people afterwards that they learned a lot about chronic illness. Knowing that even that small event was educational felt really good. And I loved the connections that everyone made. Multiple people told me later that they loved hearing the different accents of attendees, that it made the universality of our conditions that much more apparent. Two of the contributing authors realized that they live near one another and now hope to meet up after the pandemic eases.

A special new project came out of the event, too. One attendee mentioned previous experience hosting support groups, and throughout the rest of the party, people asked how they could join the support group, even though it didn't actually exist! Within two weeks, though, that attendee had decided to host the group, I had shared the news with my email list, folks had signed up, and she had hosted the first meeting. I am so happy that I was able to accidentally bring these folks together so that they can now have this group which, I hope, will be beneficial to them all.

Anyone who's interested can hear the recording and read the transcript from the party at [chronicillnesstruths.com/launchparty](http://chronicillnesstruths.com/launchparty)

**RO:** Where can interested folks find your book?

**JM:** Visit [chronicillnesstruths.com](http://chronicillnesstruths.com) to find links to buy the book or search for *The Things We Don't Say: An Anthology of Chronic Illness Truths* on Amazon. On the book's website you can also check out the glossary to see what illnesses and other topics are covered in the book, learn about all of the contributing authors, and more.

*Robyn Ochs is editor of Bi Women Quarterly and two anthologies: RECOGNIZE: The Voices of Bisexual Men and the 42-country anthology Getting Bi: Voices of Bisexuals Around the World.*

## Visit Our ETSY Shop!



**PINS.** 50 different designs. **FLAGS:** bisexual, pansexual & Philadelphia pride flags (rainbow flag with black & brown stripes). **EARRINGS:** Bi, pan, trans, and rainbow earrings. **BOOKS:** 2 bi anthologies

This is one of the ways we raise funds to cover the production, printing, and mailing costs of this publication. There are 49 amazing bi, pan, lgbtq+, anti-racist, and other social justice pins on our new ETSY page. Please take a look. Favorite. Place an order. Then write a review. Spread the word!

[www.etsy.com/shop/BiProducts](http://www.etsy.com/shop/BiProducts).

# SUBMIT your WORK



#ShareYourVoice

Are you a **Bi+ writer, poet, or visual artist?**  
Consider submitting your work to be included in  
future issues of *Bi Women Quarterly!*  
Info at [biwomenboston.org](http://biwomenboston.org)

## The "Bi Office"

is the Bisexual Resource Center. Address listed at [biresource.org](http://biresource.org).

### Ongoing Events

During COVID-19, check the bi community calendar (right), MeetUp, or with listed contact person to find out if an event is happening online.

#### 2nd Mondays:

Straight Marriage, Still Questioning. 7pm. Info: [kate.e.flynn@gmail.com](mailto:kate.e.flynn@gmail.com)

Tea with Bi Women Partnered with Men. 7pm. Info: [kate.e.flynn@gmail.com](mailto:kate.e.flynn@gmail.com)

#### 1st Wednesdays:

BLiSS (Bisexual Social and Support Group). 7pm Info: [bliss@biresource.org](mailto:bliss@biresource.org)

#### 2nd Thursdays:

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

#### 3rd Saturdays:

Biversity Brunch. 11:30am

More about Boston-area groups [biresource.org/boston-groups/](http://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 digital subscriptions to this publication. Sign up at [biwomenboston.org](http://biwomenboston.org).

# [not your usual] CALENDAR

Did you know? You can find all kinds of bi+ virtual events at the Bisexual Resource Center's calendar at <http://biresource.org/calendar/calendar> and at [meetup.com/Bi-Community-Activities](https://www.meetup.com/Bi-Community-Activities). Please note, some of these events are gender-specific, and some welcome all genders. You can also find great bi+ virtual events on our own calendar at <http://biwomenboston.org/calendar>. Don't hesitate to connect at any of these events—even if you're not in the Boston area.

In fact, I would like to make a special invitation to our readers who are not located in the Boston area: please consider joining us at one (or all) of our online brunches—just be aware times listed are US Eastern Standard Time. We are proud of our community of women (trans and cis) and nonbinary folks, and we would love to make friends across the country (and globe). Grab your coffee or tea and some brunch while we chat about bi issues and other fun topics. You can find more details below!

**September 12 (Saturday) from 12:45-2pm US EST**

**October 18 (Sunday) BOOK SWAP BRUNCH at noon US EST**

**November 7 (Saturday) 12:45- 2pm US EST**

Brunches will be held via Zoom (you can also call in). If you would like to attend, please email Chas at [avon.alger@gmail.com](mailto:avon.alger@gmail.com). A link to the brunch will be sent to you at least one hour before the brunch starts (be sure to check your spam folder). Chas will be available to help with any issues connecting from 12:15-12:45. We will also send a phone number if you are calling in by phone.

Hope to see you there! ~Chas



Our August Digital Brunch, at which we welcomed attendees from California and France.

*Consider this: If you rarely (or never) see people like yourself represented in print, your voice is especially important. When you lift your voice, someone, somewhere will FINALLY see their own experiences reflected, perhaps for the first time. (See our call for writing on page 2.)*