

On Nobody's Side

By S. H. G.

The frustrating thing about growing up bisexual is that both the heteropatriarchy and LGBTQ+ communities play by the same rule: namely, that you must "pick a side." So, while I grew up in a fairly liberal household, with early exposure to non-straightness, I internalized that rule.

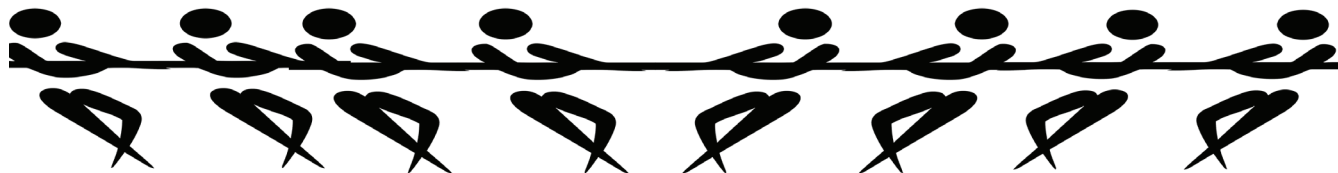
For a long time, I thought it was one way or the other. You liked boys, or you liked girls. When "bisexual" entered my vocabulary, it was usually as a punch line. People identified as "bi" when they were gay and not ready to come all the way out yet or, if you were a girl, you just wanted attention.

That's why I ignored my attraction to girls for as long as I did. That's why I still identified as straight even after I started writing love poems to women, and fiction stories about girls kissing girls. Because I *liked* men. I kissed guys and enjoyed it. I had crushes on guys, I fantasized about them, I wrote about them. They were the dominant discourse in my life for a long time. Regardless of any strange feelings I harbored towards certain women, I was *not* a lesbian. I just wasn't. I knew, instinctively, that "lesbian" was not a label I could ever identify with. And yet... I liked girls.

I can't pinpoint the "aha" moment when the clouds parted and I could finally see that I am bisexual. What I do know is that my self-identity and my acceptance of the community at large happened separately. On one level, I came to know and accept that I held desires for more than one gender. On another, I educated myself on the queer community and came to understand that the B in LGBTQ+ wasn't there for show. At some point, these two ideas intersected, and I came to identify myself and my own feelings with this community.

I'm still fairly fluid on my own identity label, other than knowing I'm definitely not monosexual. I usually roll with "queer" *but* bisexual is a slightly more digestible term for the less educated/less liberally inclined. I do wonder sometimes if my hesitation to use "bisexual" comes from internalized biphobia, but I'm still young and I am okay with a fluid self-understanding.

S. H. G. is a recent college graduate who spends most of her free time on the Internet or chasing drag queens around the Providence area. She hopes to make a career in the performing arts.



Bi Chat

By Mary Rawson

She opens the door to the pub and the warmth immediately hits her. There is a gas fire set in to the brick wall. Set back from the fire are people sitting at tables, looking serious, frustrated and earnest. It looks like a mixed-age crowd.

"Who won the grand final in 1982?" she hears a male voice shout from the corner table, at the far end of the room.

She looks over to the voice and sees a young man, mid-twenties, wearing a bright pink shirt and waving a piece of paper.

"Anyone, anyone?" he prompts, looking expectantly from table to table.

"C'mon Pete, you're supposed to know this stuff," she hears a woman whisper as she moves towards the bar.

She scans the bar, looking for clues. There are two young women to the right of her, one with a flower tattoo on her shoulder and green lace-up Doc Marten boots.

Maybe they're part of the group? She hopes she's not the oldest one there.

There is a woman on the far side of the circular bar, who looks about her age, drinking a glass of red wine. She is looking at the enormous wooden clock that is fastened to

Mary, continues on page 8

HONOR ROLL

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Boston-area women: Sign up for our new email list! Send an email to: biwomen-boston-subscribe@yahoo.com

From the Editors

We present in this issue an abundance of thoughtful prose and poetry on the theme "Pick a Side," with new and returning authors S. H. G., Mary Rawson, K. R. Egger, Chiquita Violette, Gwendolyn Fougy Henry, Toby Adams, Alice Shannon, the Rev. Francesca Bongiorno Fortunato, Sharon Gonzalves, Theresa Tyree, Allison Marie Turner, Jane Barnes, Lila Hertelius and Chelsea McNall.

Twenty-year-old Canadian writer Casey Lawrence appears in this issue twice: you will find her writing on page 6 and a review of her first novel (reviewed by Amy M. Liebowitz) on page 18!

Yossra, from Egypt, shares her powerful and heart-wrenching story. You will also find art by J. D. Walker, a comic from Kate Estrop and our News Briefs and Calendar.

It's a packed issue!

And finally, we present two job opportunities: We are grateful to Kate Estrop for serving as Calendar Editor for quite some time, but now she is stepping down. We are looking for someone to step up and take over this job, beginning with the next issue. Kate will train you and provide support as you transition into this role. Email thewriterkate@gmail.com for more info. And the Bisexual Resource Center is hiring a part-time Support Group Coordinator. Email brc@biresource.net for a more detailed description.

You can support our work with by making a donation (biwomenboston.org/donate). It cost us approximately \$1500 to produce this issue. We could sure use your help!

— Robyn & Catherine

Julie reads the *Bi Women Quarterly*.

Send us a picture of yourself reading *BWQ* to biwomeneditor@gmail.com.

Be creative!



Next in

Bi Women Quarterly

The theme for the next issue:

Partnering with Men

What has been your experience partnering with men? Tell us about challenges/joys/advantages/disadvantages you have faced.

Submissions for this issue must be received by November 1. Submission guidelines are at:

biwomenboston.org/newsletter/submission-guidelines/.

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

The theme for Spring 2016:
Out at Work (or Not)

According to a recent study, nearly half of bisexual people report that they are not out to any of their coworkers (49%), compared to just 24% of lesbian and gay people. What's your story?

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

***Bi Women Quarterly* is online at biwomenboston.org.**

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

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

Around the World: Yossra, Egypt

It is hard to believe I have come this far in less than a year. The worst chains I ever endured were inside me, not outside. My real achievement is the change that has occurred inside me.

I abhorred myself. I viewed myself as two-faced and as a liar. I thought that every relationship in my life was a lie. I believed everyone would despise and abandon me once they knew my secret.

It is hard to explain what it is like to be bisexual, transgender, gay or lesbian in Egypt. It means every single social and political construction views you as a criminal by choice, deserving worse than death. You grow up believing that you do not deserve to live.

We might claim that we are free and able to challenge society and religion, but in fact these things affect us deeply. No matter how rebellious we appear to others and/or to ourselves, we remain imprisoned by the concepts instilled in us by society and religion. And that was the reason why I suffered the most.

I appeared counter-cultural in most of my actions, especially in the way I dressed (which is relatively revealing and also different). Yet inside me I was chained by the ideas of society and religion. I hated myself. I rejected my sexuality even though I did not deny it. I have known that I was not heterosexual since I was 13 years old, yet I did not accept it. I did not know what sexuality is. In Egypt, we do not talk about issues related to sex, as they are taboo. I knew that I was physically attracted to women. When I slept I dreamed more often of having sex with women than with men. Yet I was unable to label myself because I knew nothing about bisexuality and not much more about homosexuality (except that it was against my religion).

There are many popular negative conceptions about LGBT people in Egypt. One of the most dominant is the idea that homosexuals harass and rape people. This makes society think of us as dangerous. I believed – inside me – that I was dangerous (and – of course – dirty) and this was the origin of most of my self-harm.

I tried my best to stay away from people and to avoid physical contact, even friendly hugs. This is extremely difficult in Egypt because the culture forces much contact between women. This made it harder for me to take “precautions” to protect other women from me. Whenever I went to a bathroom and saw women taking off their veils, I looked away. Whenever I felt sexually attracted to a woman or watched a provocative clip on the Internet, on television, in advertisements or in movies displaying a woman’s body (which happened many times in a single day), I started beating myself. I tried to defeat desire with pain. I trained myself



for about three years to completely stop desire by inflicting pain on myself. At one point, beating myself harshly became a reflexive response to any physical contact with anyone even if I did not feel desire and even if that contact was a mere hug from a female friend or my mother. I was even afraid I would hurt my younger half-sister. Whenever I found myself with her in a closed room, I ran out of the room. I felt that my desire was dangerous and I should protect others from me no matter the cost.

I put up with my pain alone and did not dare to tell anyone. I came out to my mother after six years, to my closest friend a few months later, and to four other friends. But I still despised myself, keeping distance and beating myself. One year after telling my mother, I registered for a sociology course about social class and inequality. I searched for information about my professor and found out that he specialized in Sexuality Studies. After a lot of hesitation, I came out to him. He pressured me to talk about it and when I did, it was the first time I really thought about my suffering. Two days after we talked, I decided to come out to everyone once and for all. I decided to lose whoever does not accept me and to gain true relationships without lies.

I wrote a status on Facebook saying that I am bisexual and that I wished to free myself from the struggle I lived and to lose whoever does not accept me. I was expecting to lose most people around me, especially as I have conservatives, Islamists and Brotherhood members among my friends. My closest friend told me that I would lose very few people because in this hypocritical closed society people have secrets they fear to reveal and they respect those who can face society. She also told me that people would reject the image they have of the other, not the human being. She told me they would accept me because they know Yossra as a human being, not as an image.

And she was right!

Yossra, continues on next page

Most people accepted me, even the most conservative of them. Some people reacted badly. One of my female friends asked me: "How do you feel towards me?" and I thought: "How sexy you think you are!" One of my Islamist friends jumped over the distance between us and asked me: "Are you willing to have sex with a woman?" And one friend told me: "Return to God and talk to him. He doesn't accept what you do." My older sister told me that I am harming myself and that I am bisexual because I want to have sex with a man but I find women in front of me!

Yet, overall people were surprisingly supportive even though some were ignorant and did not know what being bisexual even meant. A lot of people respected my courage and others told me they do not agree with what I do but they love me for who I am. My nightmare was that my father would come to my mother (they are divorced) and accuse her of failing to bring me up well. I am her only child and her only family. She struggled in a male-dominant society with the stigma of being a divorced woman and I did not want anyone to accuse her of being dishonorable or of failing in my upbringing. I loved my mother, but I was unable to suffer any longer with despising myself and feeling myself to be a liar.

At the time I came out (which was last June), the political situation in Egypt was worsening. The military dictatorship was established and there was a crackdown on political opposition (starting with the Brotherhood, then the Left and the Liberals) and on different minorities like LGBT people and atheists. There are over 150 cases of gay and trans people being arrested. The sentences range between one and eight years but what is much worse is the severe violation of their human rights. In one of the famous cases (Ramses Bathhouse), a reporter told the police that there was a bathhouse for gays downtown. The police arrested the men at the bathhouse naked and encouraged other prisoners to rape them. They were also tortured by the soldiers. We now know that any LGBT person caught by the police will at least be beaten, tortured and raped.

I came out and afterwards began openly defending LGBT rights and writing about the real life of the closed community living in the darkness in Egypt. I got a lot of backlash

(even from my friends) for what I wrote. Some people warned me of what would happen to me if I were imprisoned for defending LGBT rights. I know what will happen but I cannot bear to see the suffering and the injustice or to remain silent.

My whole life changed drastically after I came out. I fought to stop beating myself and eventually I did. I opened up to people because I found they did not fear me, and this made me trust myself more. I felt that I am free. I felt I live in the sunlight, not in darkness. I argued against religion and started to talk with God.

A few weeks ago, I confessed (for the first time in my life) to the girl I love: my love. She accepted me and told me she had felt my love for her before I said it. She told me she cannot be close romantically to anyone, yet she has cared for me like no one ever has. Her acceptance made me accept myself more. It was close to the experience of my coming out. Her love made me love myself. I felt her kind emotions towards me trying to return my love, even though she does not love me as I love her. I felt my emotions and hers, and in the kindness of both – for the first time ever – I felt God.

I believed for the first time that God is not a mere concept and certainly not religion. God is not far away. God is with us, within us. God can be inside our emotions, our relationships and our pure souls. And this was a profound change in my relationship with God.

I know I am in danger. I am afraid – more than anything – of causing my mother pain with my imprisonment or the resulting scandal. Yet, I know as well that I love myself. I am true to everyone. I am trying to help others be as free as I am. I see the suffering of LGBT people in Egypt and I wish to help make them at least be able to live in the light rather than in darkness. I wish to make them love themselves. I wish to make people see them as human beings, not as concepts. This is why I fight now, and I believe there are others with me. Far more important, I believe I love God and God loves me.

I am free.



Editor's note: Thank you, Yossra, for having the courage to BE, for having the courage to find and use your voice. I hear you, and I hope our readers understand the courage it took for you to write this essay. You are a beautiful and strong woman. Readers: please consider supporting the work of organizations such as ILGA (www.ilga.org) and IGLHRC (www.iglhrc.org) which advocate for LGBT human rights around the world.

Responses to Your Inappropriate Assumptions about my Sexual Identity

By K. R. Egger

“Lesbian.
You must be a lesbian.
Are you a lesbian?
You have lesbian hair.
You have to be a lesbian.
No?
Oh. Then you must be straight?
Even if you have that hair?
You should grow your hair out if you ever want men to be into you.
Straight. I see it. You wear dresses.
The makeup.
Not a lesbian.
The opposite.
Straight.
You’re straight.
Feminine.
So you’re straight.
No?
But you’re not a lesbian.
What else could you even be?
Don’t you have to be one or the other?
Straight or gay?
Bi?
Oh my god, are you one of those greedy bisexuals?
That’s so hot.

Are you into threesomes?
Not with me? What does that mean?
Wait.
Pansexual?
What does that mean?
Are you into pans?
Skilllets?
How about woks?
No.
Wait.
Why are you walking away?
I’m just joking!
Don’t take everything so seriously!
Queer!
You gotta pick a side!
What do you mean you don’t?”

I mean that as a person who uses queer, pansexual, and bisexual to describe their sexual fluidity, my sexual identity is my own and I will not be defined by your binaric and out-dated concepts.

K. R. Egger is an undergraduate student at the University of Minnesota Morris. They work as the LGBTQIA Advocate on campus and in gender-inclusive housing where they help bridge the gap between students and university staff and faculty.

That Other Side of the Coin

By Chiquita Violette

Eras long ago, I’d chosen but it be blasphemy
How selfish am I, if that one side is me?
If selecting to thrive in the ecstatic life,
Unplugged, hermetic from sempiternal strife,
Divine, someone at these same crosses could?
Is that not also for community or am I just up to *know* good?

Some may say, my paths meander that left side of history
Yet so-called “right side” is a mutable, subjective “mystery.”
Façade perceptions, persuasions, perspectives lack merit,
I groove in tune with whatever, moves, soothes and cools my spirit.
Call me apostatic with insouciant, #unfiltered flair,
To speak my inner peace, a sybaritic whim to dare.

Artist. Iconoclast. LipglossFemme. OldSouled. InnerChild. ElectricLady. Queen.



The Fence

By Casey Lawrence

The grass always seems greener on the other side, when you can't see over the fence that you accuse me of sitting on. You say I can choose a side, and when I do, I'll see.

You say that I can choose to be straight, to drop to the safe side of the fence, where the grass is green. You say your side is withering, covered in trash that the people on the green side throw your way. When you choose your side, you'll see.

I am bisexual.

I am not on the fence.

There is no fence to sit on, no hard divide.

There's this unfortunate belief that we, as bisexuals, can choose to be straight when we no longer want to deal with the oppression of our queerness. We can't.

There's this unfortunate belief that when we, as bisexuals, commit ourselves to a partner we are choosing a side. We aren't. If my partner is a man, I am bisexual. If my partner is a woman, I am still bisexual. If my partner is neither—

I am bisexual.

I am not on the fence.

If there is a fence, I stand in its shadow.

My capacity for attraction to more than one gender threatens the belief that queer people and straight people are fundamentally different. They aren't.

Fluid with a side of fashion

By Gwendolyn Fougy Henry

Clothes shopping stress me out! Segregated clothing sections trigger panic, downpours of sweat, dizziness, terror and tears. Androgynous stores: where are the options for humans with curves?

My spouse is really good at clothes shopping; he goes to both the men's and women's sections and selects some dope options for me. Men's shoe size 8.5, women's shoe size 10. Buttoned down shirts, vests, blazers, sports bras, jeans, construction boots. Eh, can I borrow your Joop? I'll pass on the bow tie. Sure, I'll wear a dress, bra, red nail polish for a super Haitian femme look, with a mist of rosewater on my face. Shall I wear heels or oxford shoes? I may even put on some vegan cruelty-free makeup. Nah man, no blush for me. Hair shaved on the sides, long locs with colorful yarn for pop. Genderfluid. Je ne veux pas choisir un côté.

Gwendolyn Fougy Henry, Ed.M., MSLIS is an Archivist, Librarian, Information Manager, Researcher, Writer, and Community Organizer. More of her writings can be found at: gwendolynhenry.tumblr.com.

My ability to love threatens the status quo for straight and gay people alike. So they ask, they beg, they laugh, they yell: CHOOSE A SIDE ALREADY. But I can't. There aren't two sides to choose from. It is a spectrum, and I have my place on it.

I am bisexual.

I am not on the fence.

It's not a matter of choosing.

I didn't choose to be bisexual. I didn't choose for people to think that my sexuality is a phase, a lie, an exaggeration. I didn't choose to be invisible. But I am.

When my partner is a man, you call me straight. That is erasure. When my partner is a woman, you call me gay. That is erasure. I am always bisexual. I always have the ability to love people of genders similar to or different from my own. I don't get to choose.

I am bisexual.

I am not on the fence.

The fence is a lie. I am not.

Casey is a 20-year-old Canadian university student completing an undergraduate degree in English Language and Literature. She is a published author of LGBT Young Adult fiction (see page 18!) and has been actively involved in LGBT activism in her community since she co-founded the Gay-Straight Alliance at her high school.



Pick a Side

By Toby Adams

Which team do you play for?
Boy or Girl, wear your hair long
in jeans and t-shirt
Fixing cars and sewing dresses
Date Men or Women,
their soft skin, rough hands
curves, innies and outies
Gay or Straight
In the parade, on the sidelines
In society, and marginalized
Christian or Pagan
Loving God and Earth
Higher Power of my understanding
Daddy or Mommy
Live with which parent when they split
Be which when I become the parent
Pick a side
I am Bisexual
I am Child, Human
I am a Child of both parents
Father, Mother, God, Goddess
I am a Parent of my child
In love with Human Beings
In all their amazing ways of being
I am Bi

Toby is a bisexual lawyer and activist, founding member of "BiLaw" bisexual lawyers group and one of the principal authors of the BiLaw amicus brief filed in the Obergefell marriage case (2015). Toby also founded "Intersex and Genderqueer Recognition Project" (2012), Placer County chapter of Marriage Equality USA (2004), and chaired South Bay Bisexual Organizers and Activists (2000). tobyshome.wordpress.com www.TobyAdamsLaw.com

Pick a Side

By Alice Shannon

"Pick a side!"
"You're not real!"
"You're not valid!"
"You don't make sense!"
"You don't fit in!"

"Pick a side!"
"You're not like me,
But you should be."
"You're too different!"
"You're confused!"

"Pick a side!"
"Erase yourself!"
"Become a ghost!"
"Cease to exist!"
"Don't live, just lie!"

"Pick a side!"
It's not a joke.
It isn't cute.
It isn't funny.
It is violence.

When will you get it?
We will not laugh
When being attacked.
We don't exist for you
We will not die for you.

When you say
"Pick a side!"
I say
"It's not a war."

Alice is from Pennsylvania and a senior in college looking to get more involved in the queer community.

Aside from This

By Rev. Francesca Bongiorno Fortunato



When urged to pick a side
(not sit astride the fence)
my fluid muse provides this fine defense:
that these two eyes may see a world as
one.
The work of these two hands remains
undone,
and there is yet more love under the sun
than I may recognize with just one
sense.
So, here abides the truth to set us free:
Your freedom to be you; mine to be me
resides in our Divine humanity.
Yes, as we are...so we were made to be.

Rev. Francesca Bongiorno Fortunato lives in Brooklyn, NY, with her wife Lynn and cats, Alice and Gracie. Bi activism includes writing for Bi/LGBT publications and leading the Bi Perspectives support group at the NYC LGBT Community Center.

Mary, continued from page 1

the wall just above the liqueur bottles. She takes a sip, looks at the clock, takes a sip, looks at the clock. By the time Mary gets the barwoman's attention, her wine is gone.

Maybe she's part of the group?

"Pot of lager, thanks," she whispers.

"Sorry?"

She clears her throat.

"Pot of lager, thanks," she almost shouts this time. The woman with the flower tattoo turns around briefly. She meets her eyes and registers an emerald green eyebrow stud. That would have to have hurt. The woman turns back to her friend. Mary hopes she hasn't stared. She can't trust her self-censure at the moment.

"Coming right up." The barwoman smiles at her.

As Mary takes her beer and hands over her coins, she leans forward and asks the barwoman in a carefully modulated voice: "How do I get to the upstairs meeting room?"

The barwoman turns and points at a wooden door Mary hadn't noticed before, which is directly behind the red wine drinker.

The red wine drinker frowns and looks confused.

"I'm not pointing at you," the barwoman shouts over to her. "I'm just showing this woman the door behind you." Mary nods her thanks and takes a larger than normal gulp of her beer... and then another.

She forces herself to stop and puts her glass back on the counter.

She looks at the clock.

It's time to go.

Mary picks up her beer, with the serious intent of taking it upstairs with her, but finds herself downing its contents in two big gulps. She hasn't drunk like this since she was a student.

She looks around to check if anyone has seen her. The red wine drinker is picking up a now full glass of wine and is heading for the door.

She must be part of the group.

Mary decides to order another beer.

Just one.

No more.

As she heads towards the door with beer in one hand and bag in the other, a check-shirted man with a bald head

and red goatee beard jumps off his bar stool and opens the door for her.

"Going upstairs?" he asks, smiling encouragingly at her.

"Yeah." She smiles back, relieved she's not shouting or whispering this time.

"I'll be right up. Just ordering another one," he says and closes the door behind her.

The stairs are directly in front of her, and she can see a landing halfway up. A pair of red boots stops briefly on the landing, and then disappears out of Mary's view.

The red wine drinker. She needs to follow her.

Mary pauses briefly at the bottom of the stairs.

No, you are NOT bailing out this time Mary girl, she tells herself.

As she ascends, the air grows warmer and warmer. She feels her cheeks burning hot.

She reaches the landing and puts her drink and bag on the wooden table next to the banister. She shrugs off her orange woolen coat, wondering now how she is going to manage coat, drink, bag and stairs.

The door opens downstairs and there is a surge of bar noise and then quiet again as it bangs closed. Brisk, heavy feet take the stairs two at a time.

In no time, the bald-headed goatee man is next to her on the landing. His cheeks look flushed.

"Let me take your coat," he says.

Before she can reply he is ahead of her, orange coat over his arm.

"No need for coats up here," he pants, opening another door for her.

No going back now. She has to enter.

There is a large wooden table taking up most of the space in the room, around which are sitting eight or maybe ten people. The wine-drinking woman from downstairs nods her acknowledgement and gestures to the chair next to her.

Mary sits and talks to the wine-drinking woman and the goatee bearded man about the traffic on the way here and how cold the night is. They all agree there may be a frost tomorrow.

For the remainder of the night, Mary listens to their stories but doesn't say much.

There is the woman who thought she was a lesbian, but found she was bi.

Mary, continues next page

Mary, continued from previous page

There is the happily married wife who also likes women, the young trans man who has a boyfriend and a girlfriend, the gay man who was alarmed to find himself fantasizing about a woman at work.

There is a man who knew when he was thirteen and a woman who didn't know until her mid-thirties.

Shame, bewilderment and anger are shared at being shut down, ignored and vilified.

Humorous stories are shared.

Gender and orientation become blurred, lines and borders fade and become more like wiggles that continually change form.

On the way home in the car, Mary cries tears of relief.

She is not alone.

Mary has always liked writing and quite recently had published All of Us, a book whose main characters identify as bisexual. She is a proud member of the Bisexual Alliance Victoria and is currently in the role of Secretary. She lives in Melbourne, Australia, but hails from New Zealand. She likes playing music, cycling and is also partial to a bit of yarn bombing.



Woman 4, by J. D. Walker --The medium is acrylic on canvas board, and the size of the piece is 16" x 20"

Choosing Sides

By Sharon Gonsalves

It shouldn't have to be this way
We live and breathe it every day
This way, that way
How to choose?
It seems like either way we lose.

With men I have a role to play
As sexual partner with visual sway.
With women it's all about emotion
Constantly diving into that ocean.

I'm all of that
It's all in me
It's all in you, so clear to see

That we are truly complex creatures
With all our gifts and all our features.

So choosing sides is quite a gamble
I like the middle where I can scramble
My sexy hips with my emotion
Entice you with a sweet love potion
Be strong and female at work and home
And also spend some time alone.

Partner with a male or female.
Live with, marry or remain single.
Plenty of options to peruse.
Pick a side? I'll let you choose.

Sharon Gonsalves lives and writes in Somerville, MA, USA.

Pretty and Powerful

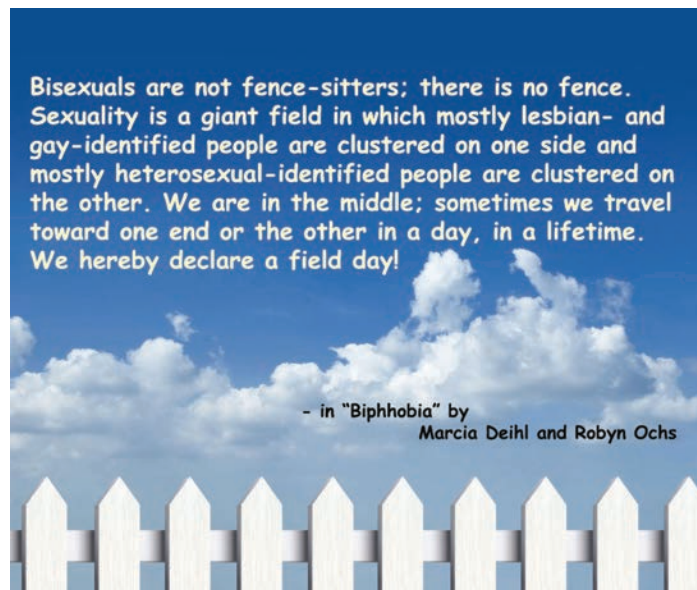
By Theresa Tyree

People called me a “tomboy” when I was a little girl. I wore the title like a badge of honor. I liked it. It meant I was tough. It meant I was just as good as any boy, that I wasn’t picked last, that I didn’t throw, run or fight “like a girl.” It wasn’t until recently that I truly came to understand just how messed up the word that I thought had only meant “tough” and “cool” when I was a kid really was.

This word was my first lesson in labels and how inaccurate and binary they can be. As a tomboy, I wasn’t “pretty.” I wasn’t allowed to be. I had traded “pretty” for “powerful” and I wasn’t allowed to have both. My label wouldn’t allow for it.

As I got older, the labels changed, but the lesson remained the same. I hardly noticed, though. I was too busy *being* the labels: smart, outcast, band geek, nerd. Each one had its own set of attributes and behaviors, as if they were some sort of Dungeons and Dragons custom character profile. The thing was, it was always other people who were giving me these labels because they felt I “fit” them. A boy in college called me a “prude” because I hadn’t had sex in high school. Another boy in my fencing club was surprised when I mentioned an ex-boyfriend because “he had always assumed I was a lesbian because I was so aggressive.” When I began dating my first girlfriend and she told her entire friend group, suddenly half the people majoring in fine arts were giving me knowing smiles and asking me what it was like to be a lesbian. Between society and the labels everyone else bequeathed me, “bisexual” was really the first one I had decided on for myself; and it was also the first one that didn’t ask me to trade one thing for another.

Unfortunately, it was almost completely invisible to the people around me. Unless they were close friends



or knew of my bisexuality tangentially, people talked to me as if I were either straight or gay with no thought to the possible in-between. Every time someone made a comment about how nice it must be to only be into girls, or about how I’d get all the boys because I looked so good in a certain top, it rubbed me the wrong way. It was even worse when I had a partner. Not only would the comments get worse because I had obviously made a “choice” about what I “preferred” sexually, but if I said anything about how people of a different gender than my partner were sexy, my partners would often become self-conscious or worried about how sexually interested I was in them.

I’ve often felt compelled to pick a sexual preference for one gender by other people for their comfort and the comfort of the people around me, and it’s honestly something that makes or breaks relationships for me. The people who stick around usually understand this about me and enjoy one of two things: Reese’s Peanut Butter Cups or Sailor Moon — the relevancy of which is explained by how both objects approach binaries: with an “and.” Like chocolate and peanut butter? Great! Have them both! Enjoy the full spectrum of peanut butter and chocolate. Want a show full of magic and girlish fancy that still kicks ass? Sailor Moon never compromised. She was always pretty *and* powerful.

Theresa Tyree is a graduate student studying book publishing at Portland State University. She is currently pursuing her focus of manga publishing by studying in Japan.



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Clap if You're Bi-Certain

By Allison Marie Turner

“Clap if you're gay!”

“Clap if you're a lesbian!”

“Clap if you're bicurious!”

I sat in the audience, dumbfounded and furious. I was at a large gathering of LGBTQ people for a performance of LGBTQ musicians and allies. The bandleader attempted to hype up the audience by leading a competition among the sexualities, but all I could think about was how sexualities don't need another competition. I'm lucky that I was connected to the organization sponsoring the performances and was able to discuss the comment with the organizers, who will be following up with the bandleader.

As a bisexual woman, the use of “bicurious” has always irked me. I am not curious about my sexuality, I am certain of it. I spent a long part of my life worrying that I wasn't “straight enough” or wasn't “lesbian enough”; curious when I would eventually fall neatly into one category, and curious as to which category it would be. That curiosity, however, has turned to certainty. I am perfectly bisexual enough, and my “category” is more like a river of sexual fluidity. The water feels great.

Sadly, not everyone can handle seeing bisexual people playing Marco Polo and floating in the sun. Many people who are monosexual are more likely to stand on their respective river banks yelling “pick a side” or “greedy” or “just a phase.” This is especially true when the bisexual person in question “looks” to be either gay or straight by the standards of gay and straight people, which, to be clear, is all the time.

My personal style adds to people's confused perceptions of my sexuality. I have yet to achieve the perfect bisexual look, because there is no such thing as “the perfect bisexual look.” In order for a person to look at me and understand my identity, I'd have to get a tattoo saying “I am bisexual” across my forehead. Most often I sport an “alternative lifestyle” haircut. My clothing, much like my sexuality, comes from all sections in the department store (however, that does not include the kitchen section, so don't bother with your anti-pansexual jokes). Therefore, most people, on first glance, assume that I'm a lesbian. Unless I'm wearing a dress. That, combined with my permanent baby-face, makes me resemble a quirky, twee, straight girl.

In the binary world we live in, these are my daily struggles. Straight, gay or lesbian people are free to clap and cheer for their identities, whereas the middle sexualities aren't even included in the game, or worse, are boo'd off the stage. That night, I wanted to cheer for my bisexuality, but was immediately hushed by the assumption that bisexuality doesn't exist.

The other audience members laughed at the bandleader's joke, validating my knowledge that my peers, while full of Pride for their own sexualities, make a joke of mine.

This competition among sexualities, especially sexualities within the category of queer, is a dangerous game. If we are all unity and rainbows as we often depict, we should stop petty arguments about the validity of the middle sexualities, and instead embrace the harmony our varied sexualities make when we play on the same team: the team working toward creating a safer world for all of us. I'm proud that my small community is able to recognize and follow up on bi-erasure within the LGBTQ community, and I am hopeful that through small discussion, we can seek to end it on a larger scale.

Allison Marie Turner is an alumnus of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where she studied Journalism and Mass Communication and Women's and Gender Studies. She is a 2015 Communications and Programs Fellow for Campus Pride. Follow her on Twitter: [@amturner1993](https://twitter.com/amturner1993).



Bicrazy Bilinda

By Jane Barnes

Bilinda left her apartment every day with a purple scarf on; in the winters, it was alpaca, and in the summers, a floaty gauze, like a breeze against her neck, against the A/C. Wasn't that something to do with her too? Back in the day, she probably called herself in public "AC/DC" which meant alternating current. Hats off to Edison. There she was – straights said – on the fence, their first question when she announced herself (nothing about her said straight, said lesbian) was, "Which do you prefer?" "I have no preference," Bilinda said, patiently.

Bilinda clung to the sliding scale of everything, swinging out over the canyon of fluidity – a term she was finding had a lot to do with her. Her name was really Bilinda, what kind of name she didn't know. Was it Southern? If it were Southern it would have another name with it, like Bilinda Lee. She wanted to match her perfect 3.0 Kinsey, and her 3.0 life, which had many things bi about it: 1) bipolar, 2) bisexual, 3) bicoastal, 4) bilingual, 5) bi whatever-else.

Because the moment of crossing was itself erotic. The confusion was sexy. And the off again, on again mode of flex was itself familiar. Bilinda had come out a number of times: at four years old, probably bi, attached to the five-year-old blond-drenched fraternal twins across the street. Then bi again at twelve in word and deed (desiring Mary, the Roman Catholic girl, who loved her back); then straight with the football heroes of high school, and later in San Francisco where she lingered on a college friend's bed to "philosophize." Later in New England, erotically obsessed with an asexual friend, was so painful that she promised to find herself a "real lesbian," a bona fide lesbian, who turned out to be Laura. This decade-long relationship broke up; Laura asked Bilinda: could she accept herself and the other woman both? No, absolutely not, Bilinda answered, foreseeing endless drama: complications, competition, haranguing over time spent with Laura. No thanks.

But now she borrowed Cheryl's iPhone 6 to text Henry, who was still Gone Missing at almost two. Henry was gay and smart – the kind of pal every girl needs. They'd agreed to meet at her place on Saturday. What would they do for amusement? The weather report mentioned a shower at mid-day, otherwise overcast. The clouds looked dirty, then gave way to mist. It was July 4, and maybe her favorite and close-by Mexican restaurant would be open; two calls provided no answer.

What could they arrange? Well, since Henry was not strong in the idea department, they might have a picnic on her bed in the residence, with the medium sky blue bedspread, the tablecloth a fresh white towel, and on it bowls with the food she could bring up from the dining room or bought

from Shop Rite: a large egg-salad sandwich, fresh tuna for other sandwiches (with four slices of bread), milk and raisin bran for "dessert," and apples, oranges, her last handful of blueberries. Ice cream in the tiny freezer.

So, having had her most recent relationships with women, Bilinda now found straight and bi men exotic – since if her own range or spectrum or gliding scale – what turned her on the most – was the unfamiliar, that was erotic to her. So she hardly noticed women these days but hadn't had good luck with the men at the residence, though her eight years there might have given her many opportunities. Despite Ivy League degrees, their schizophrenia or stroke complications had taken over, or the bizarre side effects of antidepressants (head straining upward and turning away, for example), but she was "only" hypomanic, and four pills a day scared away her anxiety (that she could be killed at any minute), her depression (this dull life leads nowhere), and stabilized her (which means kept-it-somewhere-in-the-middle).

Bilinda was aware of meditation, practicing Transcendental Meditation for thirty years, but lately after the practice was taking three-hour morning naps. A miracle of calm for this hypomanic. And now Henry was exactly one hour late. What did it matter? Since Bilinda was a writer, she sat down to write. Never mind Henry, who was either struggling on his ride on a few buses on this holiday, had slept in, or just plain forgot. (Note: slept all day.) Meanwhile the sky had turned to powder blue.

In her early twenties Bilinda had her own sexuality, re-discovered in the French writer Colette's Claudine books, four or five in a series, whose heroine loves women and men. Then there came the bipolar, bisexual Virginia Woolf, and, well, anything SHE did was kosher. And reading Sappho gave ancient encouragement, while the New York writer Jan Clausen had written about apples and oranges, and as of 2015 Miley Cyrus and a few other pop goddesses were open with their lady loves, the paparazzi grabbing video of her and her model girlfriend making out furiously in an underground garage while leaning against a cement pillar.

And as to religion, Bilinda had studied, somewhat deleteriously, Buddhist thought, the Tibetan variety, and had sat, side-by-side with Laura, her wife who could sit still for hours. Bilinda was endlessly restless during the teachings, her legs a bit thick and impossible to tuck under her. She writhed in pain; her knees almost went out. But she stuck to it: she was "in" for balance. Or was this extreme? Extremes. The title of her first poetry collection. And putting a brave face on, "The In-Between," her second collection, as yet unpublished.

She'd had five loves, two of them happy – one of these with a bi man, and one with Laura, a lesbian. The bi man had been a friend for over six years before they began an open

Jane, continues next page

Jane, continues from previous page

relationship. Laura had had a previous relationship with a “lesbian,” who left Laura for a man. Would Bilinda do the same? Laura decided to chance it. Several pleasant years went by. Laura was actively hunting for God and Bilinda gamely tagged along – after all, it was a worthy goal – but Bilinda had already found him/her, quietly, simply – not that she wasn’t a sinner; get her on the wrong side (un-lateral bi-lateral) and she was a bitch.

Two-fifteen P.M. and Henry hadn’t yet appeared at her residence. Cynthia promised to announce his arrival on the intercom then send him up. But Bilinda already knew he wouldn’t appear: she was ready to eat at least the egg salad sandwich. Not much drama here, not like her previous crazy life. In her late thirties, she stopped drinking, after her hypomania switched into full mania (doing things, not just talking about them – shopping for three hundred dollars’ worth of cotton shorts, or twenty dozen cans of chick peas, fifteen issues of *Dentistry Today*, filched from her orthodontist’s waiting room). Then, she found out she was bipolar – such a 21st century word. Before that, she was manic depressive, which sounded of the echoes of institutional halls, the clank of steel doors clanging shut. Et cetera.

Bilinda had written many novels, memoirs, stories and poems. Sanity made her impatient, and she was fidgeting now. Would Henry show, or had he fallen asleep; he’d had the flu, and his medications were making him drowsy? She texted Page, a mutual friend, to discover she had the wrong number, corrected it, and now saw that the day was quite sunny and cooler. Simple things stood out: a red ceramic cup, the ivy climbing down over the airy sound of the air conditioner.

It was rather like smoking pot; internal cannabis, and she would think, “I’m a little high today,” which translated into Caution: non sequiturs practiced here, hunger for one project after another (mending this tear with needle and thread). She was still capable of over-industry: Magic-gluing the loose strap on her sandal. Reading the *Sunday Times Magazine*, which had a different look every week.

Out the window the clouds were taking on cumulus, child’s storybook-fluffy shapes in the blue sky. Bilinda has not made a pass at a woman or man in years. Now it was men, especially liberated men, she hankered for. There was Will, whom she felt she could just lie down on, but when he lost weight, he’d thrown out some kind of ballast, and he wasn’t big, ole sturdy Will anymore. And then there was Gene, half African-American, half Jewish – what a lovely combination, runneth over with irony, and those plump lips. After two or four conversations with Gene, she made the mistake of handing him her phone number. “What’s this?” he said, folding the tiny paper and sliding it into an open slot in his billfold. “My number,” she said.

She might as well just have shot him. (Coward.)

But she had little hot dreams of him at night, just one or two, and in her mind had lain with him on an unmade bed after sex, flushed and feeling so femme to his butch. And she’d never slept with anyone trans of any sort (transitioning, not transitioning, having whatever was or was not changed Down Below). Possible.

Bilinda looked to her books: where was Violet le Duc, lesbian, with her thousand-page autobiography, *Bastard*, or the American Berthe Harris, lesbian, with her book called simply *Lover*? And the Village resident on Patchen Place off Sixth Avenue, Djuna Barnes, who had written *Nightwood*, that exotic, strange novel? Virginia Woolf’s portrait looked down at her from the wall, and Colette’s too (herbs, cats, the Left Bank, women of a certain sort, of the equivalent in men).

As to bisexual male writers, there is the nonfiction *Not My Father’s Son* by Alan Cumming, the international Tony award-winning star of TV’s *The Good Wife* and subject of the documentary *The Polymath*. What about *Recognize: The Voices of Bisexual Men*, edited by Robyn Ochs and H. Sharif Williams, not to mention Catullus, Herman Melville, Horace, Wilde, Gore Vidal, Malcom X., and Michael Chabon.

And what was she? Asexual? Maybe just by default, mind you. Bilinda said to herself, it’s hard work coming out four times, but I am simply naming what’s going on inside of me, and if I should find a person of any gender who makes me swoon, I will be the first to let myself swoon, even get into bed with such a person, and if we just cuddle, well, fine; if we go farther, it’s because a flame has been lit. Nothing then would not be changed, nothing was not in the process of change.

Bilinda thought, “We are what we do – not what we label ourselves; so let the language change too. Fashion new words for new states of being. Words, the most fluid thing of all, did crystallize one’s state of being. For the moment.” She was at peace with the quiet afternoon, and okay with all the names she’d had, for Bilinda, like many, was also passionate for words: like the writer she was, and for the act of being itself, which bowed to the dictates of the body and the heart. She liked all the naming she could write down, for the act of being was, itself, emblematic of this subtle pleasure some others, in their confusion, called “confusion.”

She went down for dinner, and then watched *The Good Wife*, and went to bed. Slept like a rock. Occasional dreams. Another time, depending on her own changing, she might discover him. Her. Him. They would meet at the border, this much she knew.

Jane Barnes has finished a poetry manuscript covering 25 years in 250 short poems called “The Inbetween: Poems 1982-2007.”

A Question of Iron and Calcium

By Lila Hartelius

“Gender doesn’t matter to me.”

Have you heard this phrase before? If you interpret it like I do, you might suppose whoever said it does not feel that gender limits who they could be attracted to, fall in love with or develop intimate relations with. But does this necessarily mean that, while partnered with someone of a given gender, one will never miss sex, romance or intimacy with members of another gender?

One person alone can hardly be expected to fulfill another’s every need and desire. The person might be great in bed but a poor conversationalist, or a fantastic cook but a pitiful housekeeper. But whatever the complaint, how often have you heard gender cited as a reason for discontent within one’s relationship – in mainstream, heteronormative society? I am not talking about heterosexual frustrations with one’s partner that might inspire a wishful longing to be gay.

Even in LGBT circles, is it taboo to crave sex/romance/intimacy with members of a different gender than one’s partner? Sure, someone might miss or desire a particular individual who is coincidentally a different gender than one’s partner. But is it OK if a want one feels in one’s relationship is explicitly about gender? Does such a sentiment inherently mean one is with the “wrong” gender or that one is losing even temporary interest in the person or gender of their partner?

In a society that didn’t worship monogamy as the only proprietary expression of love, respect, and commitment in sexual/romantic/intimate relationships, longing for sex/romance/intimacy with people of a different gender than one’s partner might not be so taboo. It might be easier, in such a context, to act on such feelings without having to breach or painfully negotiate the issue of fidelity in a relationship or leave someone behind entirely. It might be easier to voice such feelings to one’s partner if one were not taught to expect that one’s partner might feel hurt or respond negatively.

Writing in regards to individuals who, as she put it, “come close to equally preferring partners of [their] own sex and partners of another gender,” Relationship Coach Dr. Lori Bisbey, including herself among those who fit this profile, stated: “Some of us find monogamy very difficult ... since we are not able to get our needs met physically when we’re monogamous.” Perhaps it might also or alternately be getting one’s needs met emotionally that some such individuals find difficult in monogamous relationships.

Unfortunately, mainstream society in many countries seems to have a rather dis-favorable regard for anyone who does not pick one sole person – and with them one sole gender

(preferably the “opposite” one) – to spend the rest of their life with. Even if such societies didn’t have a stake in which gender one chose to have and to hold for “as long as you both shall live” (or at least for as long as you can stand one another), monogamy requires selecting a gender, and with it a side: gay or straight. Choosing either side mandates that one renounce – or at least keep in check – all feelings that fall on the opposing side of the proverbial fence, along with all actions that might be inspired by such feelings – unless, of course, they might be titillating to one’s partner ...

This monogamous bias also often precludes the ability to imagine non-monosexuality. The comment, “So you’re gay now,” and its counterpart, “So you’re straight now,” implicitly ask the listener to choose a side simply so the speaker can wrap their head around the person’s sexuality. In other words, “Pick a side so I can understand you,” or, perhaps more aptly, “Pick a side so I can pretend to myself – and to my friends and family – that I understand you.” Other approaches are more explicit: “If you *had* to choose ...”

Can you imagine someone displaying this attitude when it came to, say, nutrition? “It’s impossible to like both calcium-rich and iron-rich foods – at least at the same time.” “People who want both iron and calcium are greedy.” “People who want iron and calcium in the same meal are perverts.”

It seems natural to recognize that we get different nutritional needs met by different nutrients. Does it seem all that far-fetched to entertain the possibility that some (while perhaps not all) bisexual people might get different sexual/romantic/intimacy needs met by different genders?

Imagine for a moment that you have a penchant for cheddar cheese, a food high in calcium and low in iron. Let’s say that, from time to time, you find yourself particularly craving iron-rich foods. Yet all the while, you continue to need calcium and to enjoy eating cheddar cheese. *But what if someone found out about your craving?*

Now imagine, for example, a bisexual woman partnered with a woman. Let’s suppose that, on occasion, she finds herself particularly missing or craving sexual/romantic/intimate relations specifically with men. Yet all the while, she still loves and is attracted to her partner. *But what if someone found out about her craving?*

Why does this question seem so absurd in the first context yet perhaps not in the second? Let’s take the analogy further.

Imagine you are particularly fond of beef, which is high in iron and low in calcium. If you were to go long enough without sufficient calcium intake, you might develop a calcium deficiency. In turn, this deficiency, if not treated

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properly, might contribute to eventual health problems, such as osteoporosis. Increasing your calcium intake might help remedy some such health problems. Doing so through foods you like may make the most sense. If you presently do not like any calcium-rich foods, or if you cannot realistically consume such foods (due to religion, allergies, health considerations, etc.), you might find it helpful to seek out a calcium supplement. Overdoing nutrient supplementation, however, might take a toll on your dietary health. At the very least, acknowledging your deficiency will be more helpful than ignoring or denying it.

Now imagine, for instance, a bisexual woman partnered with a man. Let's suppose that, if she goes long enough without sufficient sexual/romantic/intimate interaction with women, she might develop a gnawing need for such types of interaction with women. In turn, this gnawing need, if not properly attended to, might contribute to eventual health problems, such as anxiety or depression. Increasing such types of interaction with women might help remedy some such health problems. Doing so with women she has sexual/romantic/close feelings for may make the most sense. If she presently does not have such feelings for any specific women, or if she cannot (due to religion, past abuse, relationship agreements, etc.) realistically become involved with women for whom she presently does have such feelings, she might find it helpful to seek out erotic/romantic/intimate images or narratives of women partnered with women. Spending too much time engrossed in such images or narratives, however, might take a toll on her relationship. At the very least, acknowledging her feelings will be more helpful than ignoring or suppressing them.

You may feel it goes without saying that a deficiency in calcium eliminates neither your need for iron nor your desire to continue enjoying beef. Similarly, the bisexual woman in the example just above may feel it goes without saying that a need for sexual/romantic/intimate interaction with women eliminates neither her need for sexual/romantic/intimate interaction with men nor her desire and intention to continue her relationship with her partner.

Does the comparison seem so absurd?

While guidelines exist for calcium and iron intake, sufficient sexual/romantic/intimate contact with members of a given gender is a highly individual matter. And just as iron and calcium are not the only nutrients, the gender(s) with which one feels one needs certain types of interaction may be other than simply "man" or "woman" (as may one's own gender). (This may not, however, stop attempts to place the person, conceptually, on one side of the fence or the other.)

For an individual who feels that sexual/romantic/intimate relations with different genders fulfill distinct personal needs, the mandate of monogamy may be asking of them something akin to demanding one choose between iron and calcium. It may be analogous to requiring that they dedicate the rest of their meals (or at least the rest of their time in a given relationship) to only one nutrient while renouncing the other from their plate ever after (or at least for a relationship's duration). Wouldn't that make *you* depressed?

No one deserves to be stigmatized for having or meeting a personal need – nutritional, sexual or otherwise – as long as one meets one's own needs in a way that respects relationship agreements with one's partner. And even if one's longing for sexual/romantic/intimate contact with members of a specific gender is simply a matter of desire rather than of basic need, what's wrong with a strawberry fanatic craving citrus fruit? Does a citrus fruit craving inherently mean the person is losing interest even temporarily in strawberries or should stop eating berries?

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

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Do I Look Straight or Lesbian?

By Chelsea G. McNall

In ninth grade I spent a lot of time in our school library. One of my best friends at the time, we'll call him Jacob, also spent a lot of time in the library. He was quite the class clown, and I was quite introverted. I have no idea now how we became friends, except we were both only children being raised by single parents, loved reading, and wanted to be writers. Books cemented our friendship, and we consistently ended up in the library together.

"Are you a lesbian?" Jacob asked me one day. We'd been friends for about two years by this point.

Startled, I looked at him. I had never considered my sexuality, but I knew damn well being a lesbian in a rural Midwestern town was not the best way to survive the next four years of high school. I didn't get along with many of my cohort, and I sure as hell didn't want to add a whole new reason for people to gossip.

"No!" I cried. "Why would you ask?"

Four years later, when I returned from college on a break, Jacob asked the same question. Four years after that when I returned from graduate school on another break, Jacob asked the same question. Of course, my answers got sassier every time. Why did my sexuality matter so much? He had a girlfriend, after all. Why did he just assume? Why did he feel the need to consistently dig? So many *whys*.

By the third time he asked if I was a lesbian, I'd run into the same question multiple times. Apparently being an independent feminist with short hair, tattoos, supporting equality through actions and language, enjoying LGBT films, having friends who embraced diverse sexualities and talking about sexuality in any way is proof of lesbianism.

I had no desire to live within strict binaries and hated that others looked at my decisions as an indication that I must be one way or the other. It's problematic to make assumptions about someone else's sexuality based on what you perceive as straight or queer behaviors and interests.

I didn't like how their assumptions made me feel, so I chose to let people believe whatever they wanted without addressing any of their assumptions. Why should I pick a side to represent when all I wanted to do was write, read and love?

Moving forward, I started to play with assumptions concerning sexuality, mostly to fuck with the people around me. I turned the social mystery of my sexuality into a game and observed the reactions of those around me. Some people assume I'm straight and I'm automatically given the privilege of a straight white woman, but more often than not people assume I'm a lesbian. But my favorites are

the people who just aren't sure – like Jacob. Generally, they're confused and think pretty hard about it. When I taught as a graduate teaching assistant, I found out I had a class of students who spent the semester debating my sexuality. Am I straight? Am I a lesbian? They dig around, hoping I won't figure out what they're trying to ask. As you can imagine, this group is the easiest to screw with.

Those whom I respect are those who just don't give a damn if I'm sexually attracted to the Spaghetti Monster, Minnie Mouse or the Man in the Moon. These people are rare. They can be straight, LGBT, cats or dogs. They just accept.

No one – and I mean no one – has ever just assumed I'm bisexual. Why? It doesn't fit their binary, and there are no stereotypical "bisexual" characteristics that happen to be physical. When we're with men, we're straight. When we're with women, we're lesbians. Without *bisexual* tattooed across our collective foreheads we aren't easily identifiable.

Once I told a good friend of mine how Jacob would consistently ask about my sexuality, and he asked why I had never told Jacob I'm bisexual. I responded with a shrug.

"No one ever asks the right question," I explained. "They always ask specifically if I'm a lesbian or if I'm straight. Jacob just didn't ask the right question."

Binaries bore me, and bisexuality throws a wrench into our societal binaries. We need to live our lives out LOUD and fuck with the sexual identities others force onto us.

I refuse to hold an identity that isn't mine simply to appease someone else's preconceived notions, and I refuse to announce my sexuality to someone just so they feel more comfortable around me. I will continue to (infrequently) date whomever I want or chill at home with a book and my laptop in a pair of my grandpa's old sweat pants.

If the only options are straight or lesbian, I pick my cat. Thanks anyway!

Chelsea G. McNall spends her time writing, reading and drinking a ridiculous amount of coffee and tea. Haku and Momo, ninja cats extraordinaire, accompany her on literary and writing adventures.



News Briefs

By Robyn Ochs



The Third Annual Bisexual Book Awards were held on Saturday, May 30 in New York City, with *Recognize: The Voices of Bisexual Men* winning in four categories. The collection won for Best Anthology and Best Nonfiction; Robyn Ochs and H. Sharif Williams accepted the Writer of the Year Award; and the Bisexual Resource Center (BRC), based in Boston, MA, shared the award for Publisher of the Year with Cleis Press, another Boston-based publisher.

Other winners:

Bisexual Fiction: *In Case of Emergency* by Courtney Moreno; **Bisexual Romance:** *One Kiss with a Rock Star* by Shari Slade and Amber Lin; **Bisexual Erotic Fiction/Erotica:** *Capricious: A Texan Tale of Love and Magic* by Julie Cox; **Bisexual Speculative Fiction:** *Otherbound* by Corinne Duyvis; **Bisexual Memoir/Biography:** *A Cup of Water Under My Bed: A Memoir* by Daisy Hernández; **Bisexual Teen/Young Adult Fiction:** *Frenemy of the People* by Nora Olsen; **Bisexual Mystery:** *Murder on the Mountain* by Jamie Fessenden.

Over at the Lambda Literary Awards, Charles M. Blow's *Fire Shut Up in My Bones* took Bisexual Nonfiction; and Ana Castillo's *Give it to Me* took Bisexual Fiction.



Photo: Rosalee Toubes

Here's a great picture of Ellyn Ruthstrom and Woody Glenn, who were pride marshalls in this year's Boston Pride Parade.

Robyn Ochs & Marcia Diehl Recognized by City of Cambridge

On June 13, Cambridge's LGBT Commission gave awards to BBWN co-founders Marcia Diehl (posthumously) and Robyn Ochs at Cambridge's annual LGBT Pride Brunch for "outstanding commitment to the LGBT community." Robyn stated, "It meant a lot to me that Marcia and I were recognized. My award was presented by Rev. Leslie Phillips, who I first met through BBWN around 30 years ago. She said that as a trans-identified lesbian she had been searching for community, and I had made her feel welcome in the bi women's community. Her words moved me." Robyn then spoke briefly about Marcia and about the founding meetings of the Cambridge Lavender Alliance and the debates about whether it should be a "gay and lesbian" or a "gay, lesbian and bisexual" group. (This was before T had made its way into the acronym.) At the end, the vote was strongly in favor of using inclusive language. Here is a picture of Rev. Phillips and Robyn hugging on the stage in Council Chambers.



Photo: Priscilla Lee

Oh, and marriage equality throughout the United States. And Ireland. Also, effectively, Mexico.



Book Review: *Out of Order*, by Casey Lawrence

Reviewed by Amy M. Leibowitz

Synopsis: Corinna “Corey” Nguyen’s life seems perfectly average for a closeted bisexual whiz kid with her eyes on college and a budding romance with her friend Kate. Sixteen and navigating senior year with her tight-knit group of best friends through crushes, breakups, and pregnancy scares, Corey mistakenly believes that running for valedictorian and choosing the right college are the worst of her worries. That is, until prom night, when she’s left alone and in shock, hiding inside a diner restroom, the only witness to a multiple homicide.

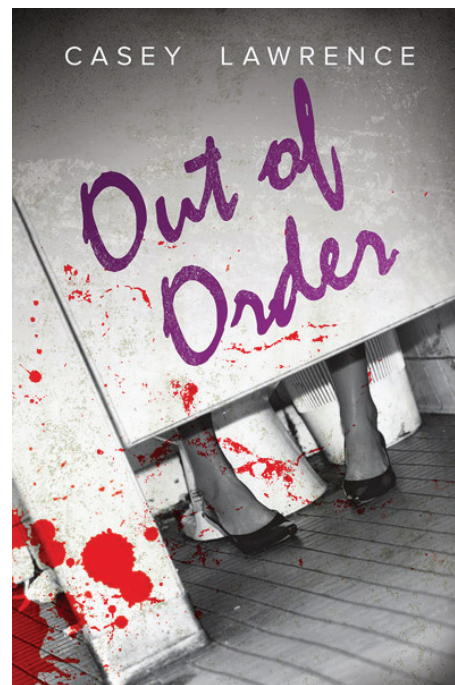
With graduation looming, the pressure is on for Corey to identify the killer and ensure that the crime that has changed her life forever will not go unpunished.

Review: Anyone looking for a terrific combination of coming of age, coming out and young adult thriller should search no further. This smart, engaging story is one of the best young adult novels I’ve read in a long time. I don’t think I’ve ever read a book so fast cover to cover in my life. I couldn’t put this down; it held my interest, page after page.

“Out of order” is a reference both to the tragic prom night incident and to the unusual timeline of the story. It’s entirely told in flashbacks which flow not chronologically but in order of relevance to advancing the plot. At first, the story reads backwards from graduation, but over the course of the narrative, the scenes skip around in time. Each section flows from a memory or reference related to the previous section. Rather than being confusing, it works well with regard to finding small clues hidden in each section and understanding the motives of the characters.

Corey Nguyen, the hero and first-person narrator, is refreshingly different from many adolescent characters. She is complex and interesting, one of the best young narrators I’ve read in a long time. Neither self-absorbed and unsympathetic nor entirely a victim of her circumstances, she is realistic and well-drawn. Her own choices have repercussions, yet it’s easy to see how she becomes caught up in the situation with her friend and crush, Kate. Through her eyes, we see her friends as ordinary teenagers navigating the complicated arenas of friendship, dating and leaving childhood behind.

What I particularly appreciate about Corey is that she never feels the need to “prove” her bisexuality. Although she is coming to terms with her identity and working out how that might look for her, she doesn’t detail for us all her past relationships and crushes so readers will see her as



genuine. She doesn’t date multiple people within the text, nor does she use her budding romance with Kate as proof of her legitimacy. It is exactly what it should be, an adolescent exploration of their feelings for each other. Although the love story plays a factor in the choices Corey and Kate make, it is not the central plot. This is by no means a young adult romance novel.

At its core, this story is less about one individual’s identity and more about how the choices we make have lasting ripple effects. The conclusion of the novel does not provide easy answers to the complex questions raised. The characters are neither condemned nor absolved for their actions. Instead, both they and the reader are left wondering where we go from here, which is ultimately the real decision any adolescent faces on the cusp of adulthood. Although there is no clear resolution, the end of the story is still satisfying, leaving us to hope for better things to come for Corey.

It can be difficult to find LGBTQ+ literature which will appeal to a wider audience, often because characters are reduced to romantic relationships and inventories of who they are sleeping with. In *Out of Order*, Casey Lawrence has crafted a tale with far greater appeal. The book would be a welcome addition to any school library. This is a fantastic novel, and there is no doubt I will be sharing it with my kids when they’re old enough to understand the themes and content. It receives five stars from me and my highest recommendation.

Amy M. Leibowitz is a queer writer falling somewhere on the Geek-Nerd Spectrum. When not spending time with her spouse and kids, she works as a freelance editor, book blogger and author of LGBTQ+ fiction.

The "Bi Office"

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

Ongoing Events

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

2nd Mondays:

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

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

1st Wednesdays:

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

2nd & 4th Thursdays

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

3rd Saturdays:

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

Metro-Boston women:

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



CALENDAR

September

2 (Wednesday) 7-9pm, Bisexual Social and Support Group (BLiSS). All bi & 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/RSVP: bliss@biresource.net.

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

13 (Sunday) 2-4pm, Tea for Bi Women Partnered with Men. Peer-led support meetup co-hosted by BIWOC and the BRC. Meets every other month. Those interested should RSVP via the Bi Community Activities Meetup group or email biwocinfo@gmail.com for more info.

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

19 (Saturday) 11:30am, Bi Brunch. This mixed gender bi group brunches at Johnny D's on Holland St. in Davis Sq., Somerville, across from the Davis stop on the Red Line. Meets 3rd Saturdays.

20 (Sunday) noon, Monthly BBWN Potluck Brunch. Join us for our fabulous annual BBWN Book Swap Brunch at Loren's in Medford! Brings books in good condition, of any genre, to swap with other members (but please attend even if you don't have books to throw

into the pile). Bring food and/or drinks to share. A great opportunity to meet other bi and bi-friendly women in the Boston area. Info/RSVP/directions: lorenomez@comcast.net.

23 (Wednesday), 15th Annual Celebrate Bisexuality Day (CBD). An annual day to honor and acknowledge our community around the world. To find out the details of how the Boston community will be marking it this year, visit www.biresource.net and check the BRC's Facebook/Twitter.

24 (Thursday) 6:30-8pm, Young BLiSS Bi-Weekly, Discussion Edition. This meeting is more discussion-based than the 2nd Thursday Young BLiSS, so come prepared for some excellent relevant conversation! Meets 4th Thursdays. Info/RSVP: Gabby at gmblonder@gmail.com.

October

7 (Wednesday) 7-9pm, Bisexual Social and Support Group (BLiSS). (See Sept. 2nd)

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

12 (Monday) 7pm, Straight Marriage, Still Questioning. (See Sept. 14th)

17 (Saturday) 11:30am, Saturday Bi Brunch. (See Sept. 19th)

18 (Sunday), noon, Monthly BBWN Potluck Brunch at Steph's in Arlington. Bring food and/or drinks to share. A great opportunity to meet other bi and bi-friendly women in the Boston area. Info/RSVP/directions: smiserlis@gmail.com.

22 (Thursday) 6:30-8pm, Young BLiSS Bi-Weekly, Discussion Edition. (See Sept. 24th)

Calendar, *continues on next page*

November

4 (Wednesday) 7-9pm, Bisexual Social and Support Group (BLiSS). (See Sept. 2nd)

8 (Sunday) 2-4pm, Tea for Bi Women Partnered with Men.

8 (Sunday) 11-1:30, Monthly BBWN Potluck Brunch at Jennifer's in Jamaica Plain, just one block from the Green St. T station. RSVP/info/directions: jennifer.taub@gmail.com.

9 (Monday) 7pm, Straight Marriage, Still Questioning. (See Sept. 14th).

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

20-22 (Friday-Sunday), Transcending Boundaries Conference, in Springfield, MA. Keynote speaker will be bisexual activist Faith Cheltenham. For info/to register, see <http://transcendingboundaries.org/index.php/2015-conference>.

21 (Saturday) 11:30am, Saturday Bi Brunch. (See Sept. 19th)

26 (Thursday) 6:30-8pm, Young BLiSS Bi-Weekly, Discussion Edition. (See Sept. 24th)

Stay connected to BBWN by visiting www.biwomenboston.org and by joining the BiWomenBoston Yahoo group.

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITY

Bi Women Quarterly is seeking a new Calendar Editor!

For every issue (every three months), you would: compile a list of events in the Boston area and beyond for the *BQW*, update events on the BiWomenBoston web calendar and recruit hosts for our monthly BBWN potluck brunches. (This latter involves putting out a call for brunch hosts on our biwomenboston email list, helping hosts select dates, write up calendar listing and send out event reminders.) *Time requirement: a few hours every three months.*

This is a fantastic opportunity to work with a one-of-a kind publication that reaches thousands of subscribers four times a year! You do not have to live in Boston to take on this role.

Remember that we are an all-volunteer organization. Please consider stepping up.

Please write to Kate (thewriterkate@gmail.com) to find out more and/or sign up to volunteer.



Kate Estrop is a professor, artist, writer and bi activist who lives with her fluffy cat Max in Somerville, MA.