

Nurturing My Nature

By Mandi Maxwell

I'm unsure about a lot of things in life, but two things I am absolutely sure about: my bisexuality and not having kids.

When I was a kid, I played with Barbies and Sailor Moon dolls, but I never played with traditional baby dolls. I had no interest in them, and I never felt the desire to take care of any doll as though it were a baby. I was more interested in having them fall in love, kiss, scissor, right wrongs, and triumph over evil.

As I grew older, the systematic words started ringing in my malleable mind, regurgitated by expectations of society...

"When I have kids..."

My mouth mindlessly executed the given line, but deep down in the fiber of my heart, I knew I didn't actually want to.

But I was someone who followed the rules, and the rules were that women got married (to a man) and had kids (with a man). If they had a successful career too!? Well, *then* they HAD IT ALL! Growing up in a westernized, middle-ish-class neighborhood at the time when MSN Messenger was *the* way to communicate with "ur peeps," there wasn't mind-expanding social media like there is now. At that time, for me, straight was the only sexual identity. Men and women were the only two genders. Monogamy was the only option for relationships, and marriage and having kids were "the goals."

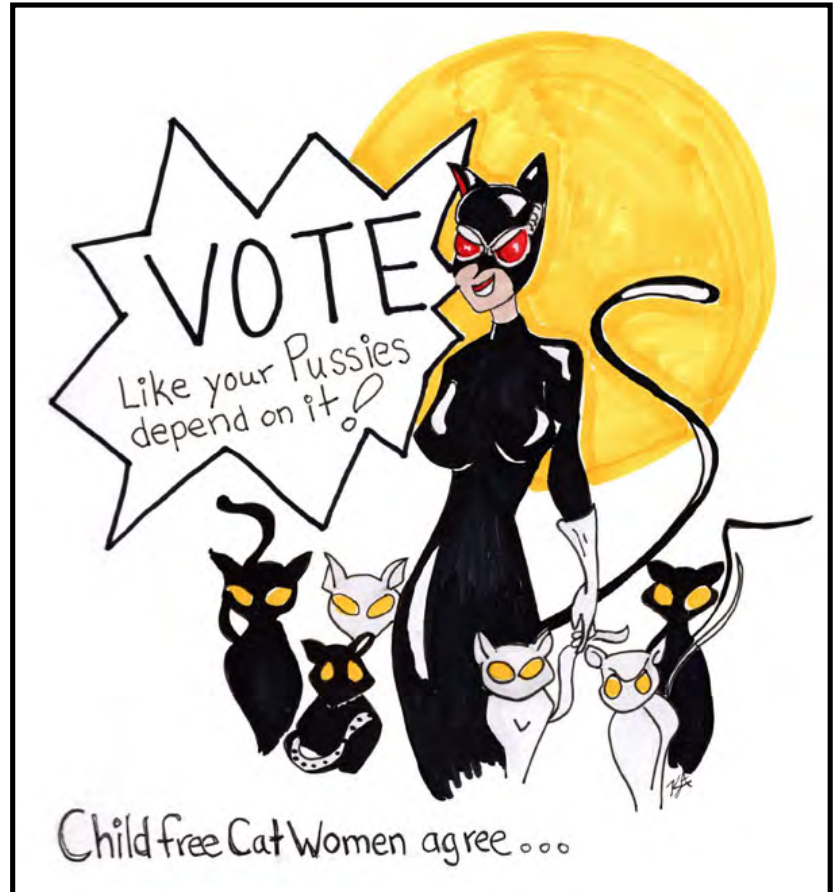
Those were the rules, and I was someone who followed the rules. That is, until I turned 23 and had the most life-changing realization. I don't remember where I was or what I was doing, but I do remember the realization surging through the synapses of my dutiful mind, my world stopping, eyes wide like *That's So Raven's* Raven Baxter when she had a vision: I didn't actually *have* to have kids.

Suddenly, the fibers of my heart eased and the perpetual pit in my stomach evaporated. I finally heard the message my mind, body, and heart had been trying to communicate to me for many years: *you don't actually want kids.*

You never have.

And you never will.

Mandi, continued on page 9



Artwork by Kara Ammon

Childfree Bisexual

By Anna Kochetkova

I had no idea I was bisexual even as I was making out with beautiful same-sex humans—I just wasn't aware that there was a word for it. On the other hand, I have always known that my life was going to be free of marriage and children. It has been a non-issue, no-brainer for me since I was a child. My choice has been a shock to many. So, at some point, I felt the urge to do the "coming out." And I have been coming out ever since.

Both my bisexuality and my choice to remain unmarried and childfree come up frequently in my conversations—I "come out" almost daily. Before I knew what bisexuality meant, when I was about 15 years old, I told my mother that a husband and children weren't in the cards for me. At first, my mother ignored my proclamations, reassuring me that I would certainly change my mind when I "grew up." Nothing has changed 20 some years later (so far). My mother and I have had multiple children-related conversations, especially before I turned 36, at which point it was "too late" for me to become a mother,

Anna, continued on page 19

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Editor's Note

This issue's theme, "Child Free," is very meaningful to me and I hoped it would be a great opportunity to share the voices of women who don't often get a chance to talk about not having children. There remains a lot of stigma attached to women who choose to live childfree, as you will hear from our many writers. You will find an emotional array of responses to the theme throughout the issue. Insightful essays, moving poetry, two great cartoons, and some beautiful artwork as well.

It also so happened that the whole issue of "childless cat ladies" developed after Republican Vice Presidential candidate JD Vance said, "We are effectively run in this country ... by a bunch of childless cat ladies who are miserable at their own lives and the choices that they've made, and so they want to make the rest of the country miserable, too." He also asserted, "If you don't have as much of an investment in the future of this country, maybe you shouldn't get nearly the same voice." These are dangerous ideas meant to separate us from each other and to put the issue of voting rights up for discussion. It's not just about cat ladies. If you can question who should vote, then you can question the entire system.

When people ask me if I have children, I always reply, "No, I'm happily childfree." Some people have never heard the term and stumble to react to my positivity in embracing it. As noted on page 10, nearly 20% of American women will not bear a child in her lifetime, so there are many more of us childfree folks out in the world than you might be led to believe.

Thank you to all of the writers and artists who shared their own journeys and perspectives with us. We've got writers from at least six different countries and a dozen US. states weighing in on this issue. Please enjoy, and send us your reaction to the issue at biwomeneditor@gmail.com; we love to hear from our readers!

-Ellyn Ruthstrom

*Jordyn, Grace, & Maggie
read BWQ. Send a picture of
yourself reading BWQ to
biwomeneditor@gmail.com.*

Be creative!



Upcoming in *Bi Women Quarterly*

Call for submissions

**Winter 2025:
Teachers and Mentors**

We all have teachers in our lives that have helped to form us into the people we are today. Some of them may be traditional educators; others may be mentors, colleagues, authors/artists, friends, relatives, or even students themselves. What roles have teachers played in your life? How have they helped shape your understanding of/perspectives on bisexuality or of yourself more generally? What are the important lessons that you want to pass on to others? Tell us who has impacted you the most. **Submit by November 1, 2024.**

**Spring 2025:
Pieces of the Puzzle**

This issue focuses on formative elements from your youth or early bi+ journey. Consider toys, books, movies, media, or other influences/creative works that helped you realize you were bi+. Was there a specific influence that made you feel less alone while you were figuring things out? Reflect upon the beginning of your queer journey and write about the things that stand out to you. **Submit by February 1, 2025.**

We welcome essays, reviews, poetry, short fiction, news articles, and visual art. Our submission guidelines are on our website. Submit your work at our new portal: <https://bi-women-quarterly.vercel.app/>. You may use a pseudonym, if you prefer.

If you value this resource...

Please support our work with a tax-deductible donation. Visit:
www.BiWomenQuarterly.com/donate.

Bi Women Quarterly (ISSN 2834-5096) has been in continuous publication since 1983. It began as a project of the Boston Bisexual Women's Network (BBWN), a feminist, not-for-profit collective organization whose purpose is to bring women and nonbinary folks together for support and validation. Through the production of *Bi Women Quarterly* and related activities, we seek full acceptance for bisexuals and those with other nonbinary sexualities. More broadly, we work through an intersectional lens and seek the liberation of people of all genders, sexual orientations, abilities, nationalities, and racial and ethnic identities.

AROUND THE WORLD: Dajana Bakić, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Interviewed by Robyn Ochs

Dajana Bakić was born in Tuzla in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BIH) in 1986. She earned her degree in pedagogy and psychology at the University of Tuzla. Dajana has been a long-time activist, playing a significant role and making notable contributions to the work of the Alliance of Anti-Fascists and Fighters of the National Liberation War, the Youth Movement “Revolt,” and the Folklore Ensemble “Panonija.” Additionally, she has volunteered for many years as the executive director of the Tuzla Open Center. Dajana was elected as a city councilor in 2012. In her term, she has been actively involved in programs for the development of entrepreneurship, agricultural production, and environmental protection. She is also a strong advocate for human rights and supports youth, civil society organizations, culture, and media.

Currently, Dajana works at Sarajevo Open Center (SOC), a human rights organization that initiates and creates systemic social changes, emphasizing gender equality and the position of LGBTI persons. She joined the team at the beginning of 2021 and took on the role of program coordinator for the Initiative for Monitoring the EU Integration of BIH, as well as coordinating the “BIH Civil Society for UPR” informal initiative, which monitors the implementation of the Universal Periodic Review recommendations on the state of human rights in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In December 2021, she became the Operations Manager of the whole SOC team.

She is also the newly elected President of Rainbow Rose, following one year as Vice President and two years as a board member. She was one of the founding committee members for Bosnia and Herzegovina Pride, holding their first pride march in the capital, Sarajevo, in 2019. She is an active member of the Social Democratic Party of BIH.

Robyn: Dajana, please tell us a bit about yourself.

Dajana: I like to say I’m a true millennial, born in Tuzla, Bosnia and Herzegovina, in 1986. I was very lucky to grow up in a community with a rich history of antifascist and worker movements, which greatly influenced my upbringing and education. My family is from Tuzla, and I am very proud of my heritage.

I love people and thrive on supporting them and standing in solidarity with them. I enjoy being around individuals who challenge me in many ways and who are rather active in their

own lives. Although COVID has definitely had an impact, I remain a very active person at heart.

I studied psychology and pedagogy in Tuzla, and I have a keen interest in the psychology of work. I’m grateful to be working in a field I love. I gained a lot of knowledge through non-formal learning—seminars, research, understanding legalities, history, networking, and all things “different.” It has been very influential

in my evolution and growth, maybe even more so than my formal studies. I actually started my activism journey because I was revolted by the education system in my hometown.

Structure and work are central to my identity. I’m an activist and politician, and much of my life has been shaped by my experiences in these roles. For the past three and a half years, I’ve lived in Sarajevo and worked at Sarajevo Open Center, a human rights organization in the heart of BIH advocating for LGBTI human rights and gender equality. Currently, I work in a management position focused on organizational operations and development as well as human potential.

Robyn: How did you come to your bisexual identity?

Dajana: I realized my bisexual identity when I fell in love with a woman at 18. I had previous experiences with women but hadn’t thought much about it until that point. Those experiences helped me resolve my internal issues through a hidden process, so when I fell in love, it became fairly clear to me who I was. It’s important to me politically to identify as a bi woman because we face discrimination even within the queer community.

Robyn: Do you sometimes feel lonely as a bi person in your place of work?

Dajana: There are other bi persons in my work environments, but there’s no formal connection in relation to our shared identities. Sometimes I do feel alone in my efforts to put our bi issues and perspectives on the agenda. Maybe it’s because there isn’t an organized structure or initiative that connects us based specifically on our bi identity. I have the space and resources to create a bi group, but I need to find the time. That’s where I feel alone—so far no one showed interest in the same. I think it would be beneficial to share experiences based on our identity. Leaders are often lonely, as they say.

Robyn: Please tell us more about your political involvement.



Dajana: I'm a member of the Social Democratic Party of BiH. Next year I'll be celebrating 20 years of membership. I wanted to directly influence decisions because I saw many problems on a local level that needed to be dealt with and felt the need to do more. I wanted to work at the grassroots level and create policies that would benefit my local community, which is why I joined politics and the party. My hands-on approach in Tuzla gained me the trust of other party members and the locals, leading to my election as a local councilor of Tuzla from 2012 to 2016.

With only a few women in the council, I felt I had a responsibility to view everything through a gender lens. This led me to focus more on human rights in my political life. Although making anything related to the LGBTI community mainstream in Bosnia and the party is difficult, I jumped that hurdle and found a way to push for changes by joining Rainbow Rose, the pan-European LGBTI network of the Party of the Socialists, where I'm currently president.

My only elected position was as a local councilor, but I continued working within the party and advising in different positions. However, the system's corruption became very challenging and frustrating for me. My principles and values are non-negotiable, and I wouldn't compromise them for personal gain, leading me to step away from BiH politics. I still consider myself a politician, though.

Robyn: What's the legal status of LGBTI persons in your country?

Dajana: In the last five to ten years, we've made improvements in the legal framework, with advanced laws that protect against discrimination based on gender identity, sexual orientation, and sex characteristics. Bosnia is the only country in the region to specify sex characteristics within the law, which inherently protects transgender and intersex people. We have fought for the establishment of a gender equality law and change of criminal laws, though there's still work to be done.

We've been advocating for same-sex partnership laws, but no changes have been made on that front. Our annual Pride March has been happening since 2019, and while we voice our demands towards the government every year, the freedom of assembly remains a challenge. Police and government have many demands for Pride organizers, requiring us to pay for additional security measures, unlike the full police protection provided to hooligans before frequent football matches.

Last year, Pride organizers were attacked in Banja Luka, a city in northwestern Bosnia, incited by hate speech from the mayor

of that city and the president of the Republic of Srpska—the political establishment closely aligned with Hungary's Viktor Orbán and Russia's Vladimir Putin. This has worsened the situation for the community in Banja Luka; the space to act for civil society organizations (CSO) is shrinking, and there's a lot of fear in the community. Quality of life is poor, especially outside urban centers like Tuzla and Sarajevo, where queer and activist events can be attended fairly safely.

While the legal framework has improved, implementation is lacking. Reporting crimes often leads to further discrimination by the police or institutions responsible for enforcing these laws.

The overall situation is particularly challenging for the trans community, as we advocate for trans-inclusive medical care and legal recognition of gender. We are also witnessing the anti-gender movement slowly infiltrating Bosnia. We're organizing to protect our achievements and ensure we don't regress.

Discrimination and violence, especially domestic violence when people come out to their families, are rampant. We recently established a safe house for LGBTI people in Sarajevo, the first in BiH, started by our partner organization—Kriša Nade—which provides psychological support to the queer community.

Daily life for queer people is challenging, and public displays of affection are risky. There are some queer-friendly

spaces in urban areas, but the overall environment is very conservative. Many people from rural areas move to bigger cities, and some even leave the country for better freedom and anonymity. Media is slowly changing, with some independent channels reporting queer-related news properly. This change is driven by CSOs working to educate lawyers, police, judiciary, and other CSOs, improving how the wider community perceives the queer community. Progress is slow, but it's happening. Visibility and engagement are crucial for change.

Robyn: That seems to be the global sentiment. People move to bigger cities for safety and anonymity. Knowing someone personally who is queer, visibility, and representation fundamentally change understanding and increase acceptance. What impact has working transnationally had on your perspective and work?

Dajana: Transnational connections, especially with individuals and parties from European Union countries, are invaluable. They allow us to use the authority of EU countries and parties to create pressure and initiate changes with more power than working alone. For instance, when same-sex partnership laws were being voted on in Montenegro and marriage equality in



Greece, we leveraged our connection with the Party of European Socialists network to pressure members of Parliament to vote in favor for our joint cause.

International support and community are crucial. This connection also provides a sense of belonging and community. We attend many Prides across Europe, especially smaller, non-commercial ones in challenging environments like Poland, Bulgaria, and Bosnia, to amplify those voices. Working with other parties on common actions sets an example for local communities.

Robyn: What is it like to be a bi woman in advocacy work?

Dajana: In Bosnia, we're still advocating for basic human rights for the entire community, so there's no special focus on any one letter in the acronym. There is slightly more focus on nonbinary and trans people due to specific issues related to the outrageous violence, discrimination, and health issues that the community deals with.

When I worked as a field researcher, I was surprised by just how many people in our community identify as bisexual. This reinforces the fact that our bi community is often erased and invisible. I feel like I have to do more for our bi community but the sad reality is—in BIH, we're still fighting for basic human rights of queer people.

Robyn: How do you take care of yourself, and how do you make your work sustainable?

Dajana: I love overworking myself, not just with my actual job but with all activities, projects, and initiatives I can include myself in. Especially back in my hometown, I was all over the place. I see myself as a person of change, and I like to be part of such activities. I learned about boundaries only a couple of years ago. It wasn't in my vocabulary before. I've been through many burnouts, but I couldn't describe it. I say I'm constantly burning—the flame is just smaller or larger at any given time.

I'm still learning how to rest, take care of myself, and tell myself that resting is resistance. It's a process of learning and unlearning. I try to find different activities I like to do just for myself—swimming, going to theater shows, and seeing friends in my hometown. I love art, and I love to travel. With Rainbow Rose, I get to work, travel, and meet people from different cultures who inspire and motivate me.

Robyn: It's the best—you get to spend time with people who share your values, and you get to learn from them. Sometimes you feel alone, and then you see the energy that other people in the world are investing in this community and it makes you realize that this work we do is global. It's exciting and motivating.

Dajana: Every decision I make in life comes from the values and principles that form my core. I am led by them. Sharing a space or creating something with people who share those values is very motivating.

Robyn: Do you feel welcomed, accepted, and taken seriously as a bi woman?

Dajana: Yes, I do. However, in a general sense, we have to con-

stantly remind people we, the bi community, exist. There's not enough attention, and there is some kind of ignorance about the specificities that come with the letter B. The initiative around bi people and their issues are being made visible by bi people. Others don't consider our perspective, unfortunately.

Robyn: How did you come to read *Bi Women Quarterly*?

Dajana: I was introduced to it by Hilde Vossen who is one of the initiators of a European bi+ network, at Oslo Pride in 2018 or 2019 when I was just preparing for the first historical BIH Pride March. She gave me a physical copy of *BWQ* after our conversation about our bi identities, and I loved it.

Robyn: I'm very excited to include your voice in this publication, and I'm excited that you and Lejla—who is interning for *BWQ*—are representing Southeast Europe, which has had lower representation in our publication. My goal is for people from *all* countries to be able to go to *Bi Women Quarterly* and see people from their country represented there.

Dajana: Thank you, Robyn, for your work. I'm very proud of Lejla. I call the younger activists that I've mentored “my kids,” as I see myself as part of their activist journey and education.

Robyn: On that note—the theme of this issue is “Child Free.” Would you like to say anything about this?

Dajana: I don't have children and I never had a sense of wanting children. I did wonder what kind of parent I would be, but you shouldn't have kids as an experiment. I wouldn't call it selfish, but I do not want to give away my freedom and possibilities to explore the world the way I want. Raising a person in this socioeconomic system and general environment of this country is nearly impossible—I just don't have the support for that. But, I don't want kids and want to be free and responsible only for myself, enjoying life and exploring it by focusing on me. I wouldn't say I chose not to have kids to be able to work. I think I could manage my obligations with or without kids, but I just don't want them. I'm happy to have contributed to this *BWQ* issue. In fact, for many people, this interview might be my coming out.

This interview was organized and transcribed by Lejla Delalić, who is an intern at BWQ.

Postscript from Lejla: *I've been mentored by Dajana while volunteering for Tuzla Open Center in BIH, and she has been an incredible role model for me, especially during my formative years as a young woman. Seeing and learning from an intelligent, strong bisexual woman fighting so confidently and bravely for human rights in a hostile environment made me the person I am today. I am incredibly grateful to Dajana for being in my life, her lessons, advice, and introduction to Bi Women Quarterly.*

No Regrets: My Favorite Birth Control

By Ellyn Ruthstrom

I've heard so many women in my life say something like, "The one thing I always knew I wanted to be is a mother." And I could say pretty much the same thing from the opposite perspective: I've always known I didn't want to be a mother. But if I ever said that to someone when I was still of childbearing age, I was often told that I would change my mind. Or, even more invasively, "You are going to regret it."

No. And no.

I remember as a young teen feminist reading many books about the oppression of women and how it was linked to the fact that women bear and raise the children, and not until the responsibility of raising children was more equally shared by men would the status of women change. I could never envision myself as wanting to devote my time to raising children—it just seemed boring to me. I didn't want to spend my time teaching a child to speak and then a few years later teaching them how to be quiet and how to behave. I really didn't want to live with all the plastic that appears to dominate American childhoods and, most of all, I did not want to be forced to watch Disney and Pixar movies over and over again.

One of my earliest commitments to myself as a feminist was that I would never change my last name. The whole idea that a woman's identity was malleable and determined by the male

figures in her life (father and then husband) really pissed me off. Also, that men got to feel the permanence of their name and take pride in their family's heritage, passing it from generation to generation. It didn't seem fair. I also said to myself that *if* any babies ever came out of my body, their last name would also be Ruthstrom, no matter who the father was. That's what I decided for myself by the age of 14.

I also didn't see myself as wanting to get married, but at 20 I fell madly in love with an Englishman. When I was 25, we married so that I could live there, and eventually he could live in the U.S. with me. I kept my name, as planned, which didn't go down well with the in-laws, but I had that whole American thing as a strike against me anyway. There were no plans to have children and I only found out at the end of our 10-year relationship that he kind of wished I had gotten pregnant along the way. That shocked me because when we had spoken about it earlier, we had been on the same page.

The fear of pregnancy was omnipresent during my years of being sexually active with men. Even if I was vigilant with my birth control, there was always the reality that my life could be altered at the drop of a sperm. I experienced the horror of late periods, but I count myself very lucky that I never had to scrounge together the money for an abortion, like other friends

Sapphic Solace



Artist Statement: "Sapphic Solace" by Nicole Miyashiro, (2024, mixed media collage) incorporates journal clippings, snips of personal papers (cards, crafting scraps, my son's nature magazines, etc.), and touches of Sharpie ink. It emerged from an adamant freedom to want, to need, to seek, to savor, to celebrate, and to share affection with a woman—that rides a fluid and blended current of eroticism and nurturance alongside, not against, all the varied currents of my deep and loving relationships.

Nicole Miyashiro writes short forms, and this is her first published and publicly displayed visual art piece.

It was shown in June 2024 in her hometown of State College, Pennsylvania at their Pride Community Art Project, Each Piece Belongs. In photo, Nicole is at left with friends, Liz and Miranda, at State College Pride.



of mine had to. I also know that an abortion was always the choice I would have made.

In my twenties, I was still hanging out in Straightsville and that was when a lot of my straight friends were starting to have children. But after I came out as bi and my community was the queer world, the majority of my new friends were not having children, so there was no social pressure to do so. My mother died when I was young and my dad *never* said anything to me about whether I would have children or not. He was wonderful that way.

Having relationships with women was my favorite birth control method. No prescriptions necessary. And, for a long time, I fell for other women who didn't want to have kids. Worked out great. Until I ended up in a relationship with a younger woman who did want to have children. We were together for a few years, and I knew it wasn't going to last because of her desire to be a mom. When 9/11 happened, it really shook a lot of people up, pushing them to clarify what they truly wanted in life. I tried to imagine myself being a parent in order for us to make a go of it, but in the end, it just didn't feel true to me, and we parted ways after a long goodbye. She now has two beautiful kids and is also parenting her sister's child, so it is wonderful to know that she got what she desired.

One of the things that I have noticed, and bemoaned with other childfree queer women, is the way our birth families sometimes devalued what our nontraditional lives look like. I have two siblings who both have children, and for many years while their kids were young, it was always most important to work around their family calendars when scheduling gatherings, and I was just assumed to fit into whatever plan was made. I couldn't possibly have anything more important that could interfere. Yet I was the one who was politically engaged and devoting my time to different community campaigns and activities. You know, trying to make the world a better place for future generations. That kind of thing.

Another thing that can be different for a queer woman's life pattern if she doesn't choose to have children is being a serial monogamist. Children are still often a common reason for people to stay together, sometimes longer than they would if they did not have children. I've had several long-term relationships in my life (and some splendid short ones as well!) that have been really fulfilling and brought so much into my life. But I've sometimes felt a reaction from some of my straight friends with a lack of understanding of me choosing to move on from a relationship and even sometimes pitying me for being single in between the relationships. No pity is necessary over here. I value those times in between the relationships for many reasons and feel good about being an independent soul who knows when a relationship has run its course for both people.

In my late 50s, I fell in love with a woman who had been in a 20-year straight marriage and has three kids. How does that happen? They weren't little ones—she never would have left the marriage when they were young and I wouldn't have wanted to

help raise children, so the timing worked out. I am not a parental figure to them, but we are family. It has definitely been the most complicated part of our relationship, figuring out the balance of priorities between being partners and her being a mother. She is used to making all sorts of accommodations for other people's needs and I do not always understand the level of sacrifice she believes is necessary. Still, we work on that and it's a learning experience for both of us.

It's been a long journey and I have no regrets about my non-creation path. My teen feminist self is still very much within me, and I continue to fight for other women to make the non-traditional and unpopular choice of being childfree.

Ellyn Ruthstrom is a childfree cat woman who is on the board of directors of Bi Women Quarterly. She hosts the annual BBWN Brunch and Book Swap (see page 32) near Boston, Massachusetts.

Unexpected transmissions from brain to body

By Neda Dallal

You are blood, muscle, viscera
Stretchy ligament and gristled marrow
Behold the miracle of you
Taken wholly for granted

You are bothering everyone
Hurting everyone
Their disgust for you has no quantity
You attempt to measure it anyway

Your grays are sexy one day
Horrifying the next
You never agreed to aging
You are not a girl, not yet a woman

Anyone older than you scoffs at your meditations on the theft of time
Anyone younger doesn't pay attention
Standing between them you recognize that
You are middling in every sense

When your therapist asks you to
Practice being kinder to yourself
You remind her that the human condition
Demands sacrifice

Neda Dallal is a poet living in Brooklyn, New York. Her work has previously been published in Mixed Mag and The Bitchin' Kitsch.



Giving Birth to Myself

By Gloria Jackson-Nefertiti

All eight of us were born at home, yet I have never ever witnessed a birth in my life. You would think (or at least, I would think) that my mother's home births would have offered me the perfect opportunity to see a baby come into the world. But because the women in my family carried so much body shame—shame passed down from generation to generation—I'm sure the last thing my mother wanted was for everyone to see her bloody bits, even though for the longest time, all of us were female and used to seeing female bodies. (My first brother didn't come along until December 15, 1963, on my seventh birthday.) But I never saw my siblings being born, so I can't blame my later lack of interest in having children on the fear associated with watching a home birth.

In fact, I really wish I could get excited about the idea of a home birth. But if you were Black, poor, and living in the Deep South in the 1950s and '60s, you wouldn't go to a hospital to have a baby, and you also wouldn't make a conscious decision to give birth at home. You would just give birth once your body was ready. As they say on the GEICO Auto Insurance commercials, "It's what you do." Having children at home was what my mother seemed to do without imagining it could be otherwise.

That doesn't mean having babies came naturally to my mother, at least not at first. My mother once told me that my older sister—my mother and father's first child—was born after they had been married for six years. Waiting six years to conceive certainly wasn't a conscious decision on their part. My mother just couldn't seem to get pregnant, that's all, and nobody knew why. I was told later that several well-meaning relatives would say to her things like, "Now, the Bible says, 'Be fruitful and multiply!'" This wouldn't be the first or last time that I heard someone in my presence quote a Bible verse out of context. My relatives would also throw out meaningless platitudes, like, "The Bible says that children are a blessing."

I personally think that orgasms are a blessing, but that's just me.

When I was a fundamentalist Christian for the first two decades of my life, I assumed I'd have children just because that's what all women around me did. Then again, I also assumed I'd marry a preacher, or just get married, period. In fact, during my fundamentalist Christian days, and even a few years afterwards,

I wanted to get married because it would prove to the world that somebody wanted me, a feeling I experienced so rarely. But I gradually began to realize that I didn't want children. My dysfunctional, chaotic, and violent family certainly had a hand in that thinking.

My thinking wasn't commonplace. It was rare for me to meet or hear about other women who didn't want children. Women like that would be considered pariahs, and everyone who found out I wanted to remain childless would be like, "What's wrong with you?" I suppose that my choice not to have children, however, became another possible reason for feeling like I didn't belong.

When I was in high school, I would frequently check out a particular book from the library. It was called, *How to Get a Teen-Age Boy and What to do with Him When You Get Him*, by the late Ellen Peck. The book did no good. But I mention the

author because I remember that she was also an advocate for childfree living who founded the National Organization for Non-Parents (NON)*.

As a teenager, I remember being fascinated by the idea of a woman choosing not to have children. It certainly wasn't a popular opinion ("Oh, you'll change your mind!" or "You're so selfish!" people would later say), but it was a stance that I thought took an awful lot of courage. My 14-year-old self couldn't really appreciate this at the time. But looking back, I can see what a revolutionary act it was for a woman to admit that she didn't want children. I admire people who know what they want and aren't afraid to say so, even if sticking out of the crowd can feel lonely sometimes.

In the mid-to-late 1980s, a friend of mine was in her thirties when she told me that she had gotten her tubes tied at age 19. She said she always knew that she didn't want children. Of course, she had a heck of a time finding a doctor who would perform the procedure on someone so young. She's in her sixties now, and she said she has never regretted her decision. I thought about my friend's commitment to herself, and in 1995, I finally made the decision to get my tubes tied. That's when I got a firsthand look at society's attitudes about childbearing. I can't believe the grief the surgeon gave me for making that decision.

Here I was, in my late thirties, and the doctor was asking me things like, "Well, how do you know you're making the right decision? How do you know you won't change your mind later? How do you know...?"



Artwork by Miriam Rice-Rodríguez, *Blue Fire*

Finally, I couldn't take it anymore. "Look!" I said, "Are you going to do the surgery or not?"

"Oh, I'll still do it," he said. "I just wanted to make sure you were aware of everything that was involved. That's all."

Sigh.

It's amazing that a man, even if he is a doctor, would have any idea what it's like to think about having children—and how to know exactly what you want to do with your body, that is, to be clear you don't want to grow any kids inside it. What's more, it's audacious for a male doctor to assume that he has any kind of say over what I do with my body.

For the most part, I don't regret my decision not to have kids. I certainly have more freedom to pursue my interests without children in my life. But, occasionally I wonder if I'm missing out on something. I'll have these brief, fleeting moments where I don't feel like I'm fully female because I've never experienced motherhood. Plus, it feels a little weird knowing that classmates my age are now parents and grandparents. During those times, I'll sometimes wonder what it would feel like to give birth. Of course, I'll never know. I guess I'm still too busy trying to give birth to my newly-diagnosed autistic self in this world, to want an extra life to worry about.

*The National Organization for Non-Parents (NON) was founded in 1972 by Ellen Peck and Shirley Radl. NON designated August 1st as Non-Parents Day and it later became International Childfree Day. NON later changed its name to the National Alliance for Optional Parenthood, but it does not appear to have lasted beyond the 1980s.

Gloria Jackson-Nefertiti (she/her/hers) is a Black, cisgender, femme elder who is late-diagnosed autistic. She's hard at work on her memoir, "A Different Drum," and lives in Seattle, Washington.



Mandi, continued from page 1

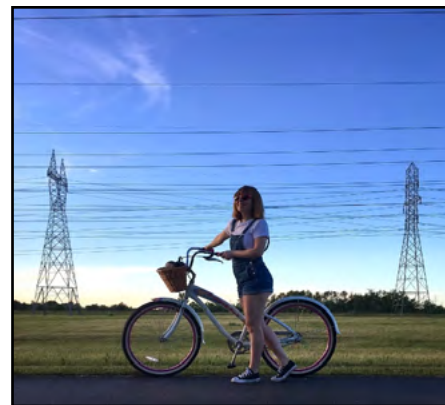
It's been 12 years since I had my life-changing realization, and not having kids was still the best decision I have ever made for myself.

I wasn't made for motherhood. It's just not in my nature. However, that doesn't mean I'm not nurturing. There's this stigma against childfree people (women especially) that if they don't have or want kids, it means they're not nurturing. It also means they have less value in society—less value as human beings. What many people don't realize is, not having children has been the most nurturing thing I could have done for myself, and for my hypothetical children. I would have been a miserable mother. Having had a past struggle with clinical depression and PMDD (premenstrual dysphoric disorder), mixed with the regret and weight of not listening to my heart—not to mention needing a good sleep each night—I wouldn't have been able to show up for my kid(s). I wouldn't have been able to show up for myself. I wouldn't have been able to show up for my life.

The decision to honor my 53 (and counting) reasons why I don't want kids has been the catalyst to finding who I really am underneath all the societal "rules" and expectations: an unmarried, cisgender, consensually non-monogamous bisexual who gives birth to art, projects, and initiatives designed to foster inclusivity and inspire meaningful connections.

So, for me, not having kids is the most nurturing thing I could have done for myself, my loved ones, and the world.

Mandi Maxwell (she/her) is a multidisciplinary artist, writer, creative communications student, and the founder/co-director/co-facilitator of the Winnipeg Bi+ Network who splits her time between Winnipeg, Manitoba and Brooklyn, New York.



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The Right to Choose...Again

By Miriam Rice-Rodríguez

I missed my bus stop and wound up at a gas station beneath a highway overpass. For a moment, I contemplated walking to Planned Parenthood—but there were intimidating people everywhere I looked. Large-bellied, sharp-eyed, stained clothes—and there I was: small, wide-eyed, braless. A person experiencing homelessness laid on the sidewalk by my feet. I felt somewhat safer with them nearby, as a person carrying a weedwhacker approached, their eyes fixed on me intensely as they passed, their chin jutting out like the butt of a knife in a woodblock.

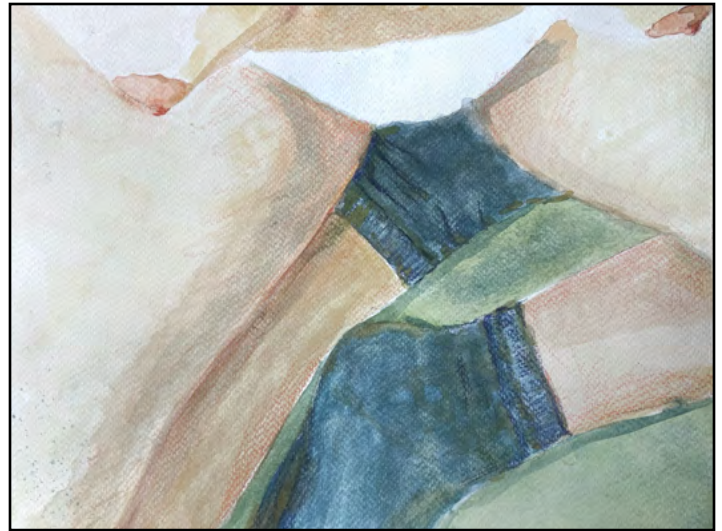
I weighed the risk of walking against the cost of an Uber—then called the Uber. A driver arrived soon after. When I saw the *rosario* hanging on their rearview mirror, I felt thankful I typed the address and not “Planned Parenthood.” What if they thought I was getting an abortion, though I came to remove my IUD? What if they pulled a gun on me, and took my life, before I could take the life of my “baby?” I knew this wasn’t likely, but the thought came, nonetheless. As we drove down the road, passing caravans of trailers, I thought of a Planned Parenthood in Tennessee I had seen on the news with anti-abortionists outside, attempting to prevent people like myself from making autonomous decisions about our bodies.

I felt at ease entering the clinic. I remembered the Planned Parenthood I got my IUD at a year ago, with its fortress of security systems. Two bulletproof, padlocked doors. The relief I felt then, making it safely inside, and how scary it was on the outside. There wasn’t a moat around the Oakland clinic, but the office staff were protected behind double-paned glass—was it bulletproof?

The IUD removal was quick and relatively painless. It hurt no more than the fingerpick they took to test for HIV. The nurse who took my biodata asked if I had experienced bloating. I said yes—bloating and water weight (high progesterone makes you thirstier than usual)—and they said they were relieved it wasn’t just them. How many others would be relieved to discover “it’s not just them?”

They asked me questions like “Is your partner restricting your access to contraceptives?” and “Have you been forced by your partner to come here?” and “Is it okay for ‘Planned Parenthood’ caller ID to show if we call you?” A reminder that for others, it is unsafe. Then, the obstetrician came in. They were golden and thin, like a stalk of wheat. I worried they might question why I wanted to remove my IUD, and I was grateful they did not. The doctor opened me up, and reassured me the strings were right where they should be. They counted to three, and it was gone.

My pelvis felt fleshy—and there was a sense of muscular relief. The internal emergency signals of “get this out of me!” that I had been ignoring until I was physically unable to have penetrative sex, or even orgasm, now said, “thank you.”



Artwork by Miriam Rice-Rodríguez, *Untitled*

I looked at the IUD as I got dressed. This white, t-shaped piece of plastic, lightly bloodied. I felt grateful for the protection it offered me—and even more grateful it was now out of my body. IUDs work for many people, but not for everybody. Which contraceptive one uses should always be a personal choice.

Fear rose, remembering when *Roe v. Wade* was overturned, and I wasn’t able to get an IUD through the federal, military health insurance I had at the time. I’m not certain I’ll be able to get one again in the future. But walking out of the clinic, I felt empowered by my bodily autonomy. I chose to get the IUD, and I chose to remove it—all by my own volition.

Miriam Rice-Rodríguez is a queer, Panamanian-American writer and artist currently based in Oakland, California. She explores themes of the body, women’s issues, whiteness, decolonization, and ritual through a hybridized lens that blends her Latinx and white identities (she/they).



“Nearly one-in-five American women ends her childbearing years without having borne a child, compared with one-in-ten in the 1970s. While childlessness has risen for all racial and ethnic groups, and most education levels, it has fallen over the past decade for women with advanced degrees.”

--PEW Research Center

Loophole

By Jeannie Marschall

Look at that.

As a female, once you've edged past puberty, they'll ask you with the inevitability of day-night-day no matter your other achievements or goals or dreams or hard-won skills or sodding *wishes*

at some point

real nice-like

or curiously

or over and over and over with accusing askances and dire lonely-old-age augurings as if they don't know six folks at least whose kids refuse their names or visit once a year from some continent they winged it to

maybe they'll even give you a flat-out nosy wink when wondering "and when will you" exactly have some sweet small selves yourself and I know it's mostly making merry, the prestigious part of the human habitus, seemingly safe in its predictable pattern but (—and by the way what are you doing asking like that, what if someone wants kids and tries & tries & sobbing *tries* but *can't* what are you *doing* shut up—) I've seen a lot of people squirm and hedge having such private expectations thrown their way. Some rejoice!—and I'm so happy for them. Some [daydream/pictureperfect/long for] lovely littles and glow with soul-fulfilling purpose, pride, and joy—

but some just ...

don't.

And I feel that.

Something has changed since my rainbow flags though, as much as some people sneer at me—and really, relax, I'm not about to woo you when you pull a face like that—the kid questions just ...

stopped.

I never knew that a self-determination proclamation which opens me up for unforeseen attack also carries elimination of justification obligation, somehow suddenly free of all the well-meant well-meaning elbow-nudging female reproductive camaraderie, I don't know if this says anything nice about people's ideas, really I truly don't, and it feels almost like cheating but...

Look at that.



Jeannie Marschall (she/her/lany) is a teacher from the green center of Germany who also writes stories, time permitting. She enjoys long walks, foraging, and inventing tall tales with her partner. Jeannie mostly writes colorful, queer SFFH (science fiction, fantasy, and horror) stories, as well as the occasional poem.



Artwork by Gia Choquette, *Childless Cat Ladies*. Gia Choquette is a graduate student living in central Massachusetts with her boyfriend and their cat, Nyx.

Choosing Freedom

By *KimtheBwordPoet*

I always knew I was going to have children. That's just what girls did when we grew up. That's how the world keeps spinning. Babies need to be born or the human race will die out. Every grown-up person I knew had at least one kid. So, I just always knew that was my fate.

At 21, I started dating someone who I thought could be the father of my future kids. Bi guy and bi gal raising cute babies together—why not, right? But we wanted different things from each other and those differences were dealbreakers for us. I knew having kids would be a challenge with my Crohn's Disease, but I wanted to try. He had decided years before that he didn't want to pass his mental illness to his kids. I was still hurting from years upon years of bullying, abuse, and sexual assaults. I wanted to create a being who truly loved me unconditionally. Who didn't care that I was black and fat and ugly and stupid and good for nothing but casual sex. That baby would need me. And I desperately wanted to be needed by someone. And all that fit into the narrative of being expected to have kids. I was too young then to realize that I wanted kids for the wrong reasons. He didn't want kids for the right reasons.

At 23, I chose the name of the boy I would have. I always knew I would name my future daughter Kesha, copying the alliteration theme my mother did with having our three middle names rhyme. I would have my kids' names all start with K, and my family's last name as their middle name, so they would always carry my last name along with their father's. I started working in childcare centers so I could learn exactly how to care for children. Then I met a cute boy named Kiehran. He looked like the first boy I ever had a crush on. And I loved the unique spelling of his name. Okay, so my future kids' names will be Kiehran and Kesha.

At 30, I hadn't been in any relationships with men or women for quite a few years. Most in my close friendship circle had had at least one kid by then. Why hadn't I had one yet? People not even in relationships were having kids, so what was up with me? I honestly just thought it was supposed to naturally happen to me, too.

I remember complaining about my lack of money, and a coworker said, "Just have a baby! You'll get money, clothes, food, and even a house from the government!" Another time, one of the parents in my classroom asked me if I was married. I told them I'd never been married, I just lived alone with my two cats. They looked at me as if they'd *never* heard of such a living arrangement before. "You mean you don't have *anybody*? No kids, no boyfriend, no one in your life?!" I wish I had the words to describe the level of disbelief this person had on their face when they said that to me. It was then that I realized that I was an anomaly. By 25, no one was going home to just themselves. It wasn't home if other family members weren't living there with you.

So, I started watching birthing videos and looking into artificial insemination and adoption. My doctor even prescribed me folic acid because it was supposed to be a good mineral to have in my body if I wanted kids. I was just really preparing myself to welcome Kiehran and Kesha into my life. But the more years I spent employed in early education, the more information I learned about the physical act of having a child, and the worse my financial state became, I didn't understand why I was doing this to myself. Having kids just because you expect to have them? I deal with kids all day every day—did I really need to go home to them too? I put the active idea out of my mind, but I did start collecting a few items in case the time came. A blanket, a bottle, some pacifiers, a few toys.

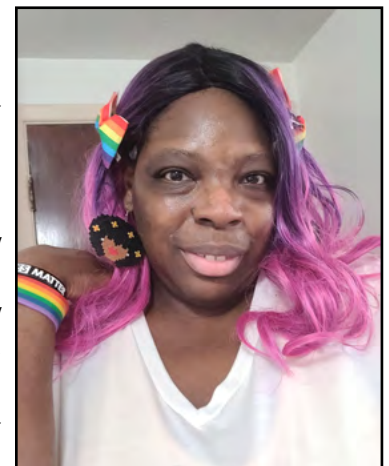
At 36, I found the term that changed my life. In 2017, The Not-Mom Summit* came to my city. This conference was all about support and resources for women without children. Childless women attended, women who'd lost children came, and child-free women came. Until that conference, I truly didn't know a woman could actively choose *not* to have kids. I really thought that having kids was just all our fate. But here I was surrounded by women from all walks of life who chose not to procreate.

That's when I finally put the idea of having children out of my life for good.

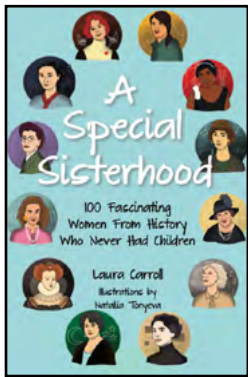
Since then, I've surrounded myself with friends and online communities full of those who also don't want children. Every night, I am so grateful to come home and not have any kids there. I don't ever have to worry about taking my work home. When seriously pursuing someone romantically, I let them know up front that I am not interested in having children. I don't want to be a stepparent either. I want to create a dream life for myself where kids are not in the picture. Because I now know it is a possibility to actively create that future for myself. I'm no longer terrified of the stork coming to leave a baby inside me. I'm no longer childless, I'm childfree.

*The NotMom Conference: By Choice or By Chance was held in 2015 and 2017, but no longer convenes. There is still an online blog with some articles that you might find interesting at thenotmom.com/blog.

KimtheBwordPoet is a bi poet and writer from Cleveland, Ohio. She runs Bisexual Initiative of Ohio; an up-and-coming organization for Bisexual and Pansexual Ohioans. When not out and about in her local LGBTQ+ community, she is constantly writing, reading, and putting together her debut collection of poetry.



A Special Sisterhood: 100 Fascinating Women from History Who Never Had Children, by Laura Carroll, LiveTrue Books, 2023. *By Ellyn Ruthstrom*



If you need any proof that women without children have accomplished amazing things, then you might want to take a look at Laura Carroll's *A Special Sisterhood: 100 Fascinating Women from History Who Never Had Children*. The book doesn't analyze why the women remained childfree, but the compilation instead focuses on the accomplishments of these talented and brilliant women.

To give you a taste of what is included, you'll find noted political leaders such as Queen Elizabeth I, known for her 45-year reign in England. Jeannette Rankin was the first white woman elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1916, before federal suffrage for women passed. In 1968, Shirley Chisholm became the first black woman elected to the House, and in 1972, she ran for the Democratic nomination for president. Manuela Saenz was a South American revolutionary war hero, who fought alongside her lover Simón Bolívar.

Jane Addams was a social work reformer who established the settlement house movement in the U.S. Dorothy Height was known as the mother of the Civil Rights movement. Nellie Bly was a famous newspaper reporter who covered many different social problems, and Gwen Ifill was a news reporter and anchor

with public TV for decades. Bessie Coleman was an early aviator and established many firsts as a black woman in the field. Decades later, Sally Ride became an astronaut and only after her death in 2012 was it revealed that she had a long-time female partner after she divorced her husband.

Carroll's book includes many creative women who have not been mothers. Edith Wharton led a privileged life and was the first woman to win a Pulitzer Prize for her writing. Octavia Butler's science fiction is known worldwide for her visionary representation of a future world. Greta Garbo and Madeline Kahn will be remembered for their great movie roles. And Celia Cruz and Jessye Norman's voices were one-of-a-kind in their own musical genres.

Carroll even mentions some of the Greek and Roman goddesses who chose to remain virgins. Minerva is the goddess of wisdom, the arts, medicine, and sometimes of war to the Romans (known as Athena to the Greeks). She was called "the goddess of a thousand works" and was considered the wisest of the Roman goddesses/gods. Artemis is the goddess of the hunt and wilderness and is often depicted with her bow and arrow. She protects women before they marry and during childbirth. Hestia is the goddess of the hearth and home, so we can see it is possible to honor the sanctity of one's home and not become a parent!

Women Without Kids: The Revolutionary Rise of an Unsung Sisterhood, by Ruby Warrington, Sounds True Press, 2023.

By Ellyn Ruthstrom

I heard Ruby Warrington on the podcast *We Can Do Hard Things* back in February 2024, just about the same time as we set the topic of Child Free for *BWQ*, so I picked it up at the library. Warrington discusses many different aspects of what she calls, "The Motherhood Spectrum," which involves the varied experiences, conditions, family circumstances, etc. that shape a woman's desire or aptitude for motherhood. She names the pressures and societal voices that are directed at women—in particular the pressure to adhere to a patriarchal image of motherhood. Early in the book, she poses some profound questions for the reader to consider their own feelings about motherhood, as well as what the reader would want to accomplish in their life. She encourages women to take the time to process these questions as part of their own exploration.

Throughout the book, Warrington explores her personal journey of choosing to be childfree and reveals a great deal of vulner-

Ellyn, continues on page 16

"Along the way, I would like you to imagine with me a world where our legacy is up for grabs, our place in history waiting to be written. A world where no woman is required to birth a child in order for her to validate her existence. I want to remind you that being a mother is neither the be-all-and-end-all nor the icing on the cake, and that any and all expressions of a person's procreative potential are equally, vitally valid. That whatever your reason for being nobody's mom, or even a *selfish cunt*, there is nothing wrong with you, and you are not the only one. Above all, I want us to be united, in sisterhood, as women without kids."

**Ruby Warrington,
Women Without Kids:
The Revolutionary
Rise of an Unsung
Sisterhood**



Why Don't You Have Children?

By Amber Ballweg

Why do people feel like they are owed this information? What are they hoping to hear? That I hate children? A heartbreaking story of how I tried to have children and am now living a life sadly devoid of them? That I had them and had to give them up at some point?

I have to imagine that most people who do not have children have reasons they do not feel compelled to share with the masses. The possible reasons are incredibly varied, and my own are multiple and make up a journey of discoveries through my adult life, including late-in-life discovery of my bisexuality and polyamorous identities.

As a college student and a newlywed, I was very careful about using protection. We could barely afford our own bills, let alone bringing a baby into the mix. At that stage, I was still checking boxes—college, marriage, work. As our lives and relationship moved into a more mature status, my reproductive health declined. I was having very heavy and long periods. After seeing a few different physicians for over a decade, I was diagnosed and treated for Polycystic Ovary Syndrome by a gynecologist. He gave me instructions to come back in six months if I was having problems getting pregnant.



I never went back. I'm still on the same treatment, fifteen years later, in perimenopause. However, as my cycle went back to normal after years of irregularity, I had been procrastinating getting pregnant. I realized I did not want to have children with my husband. I also had doubts about my own ability to parent. My not having children was also leading to

weird, sometimes emotional, discussions about fostering and adoption with well-meaning people. People who were not going to be the ones living my life.

Life moves on. My friends, sister, and sister-in-law had children. I liked the idea of being an aunt, but I definitely was not missing out on having my own child. My marriage ended, and two of the things I'd gained from it was a need for control and minimalistic belongings after years of living in a near-hoarding situation. Visiting homes with children frequently created anxiety for me, and I was happy to go back to my less chaotic, childfree space when visits were over.

I went through a series of life changes in a short time, many involuntarily, that led me to moving to another state near my best friend and her family. Her family included five children

and a foster child. Within two months of moving, they added a second foster child. A year later, they took in two more. Within the next year, all four foster children were permanently added to their family. My childfree self was now spending loads of time with so many children, ages baby to adult.

I consider my best friend to be a platonic poly partner. She and her family are incredibly important to me and who I am. I fill in taking kids to soccer practice or singing lessons when needed as well as providing general child care. Even before I had the language of adding that label to our relationship, the poly-amorous/consensual non-monogamy community was always better at recognizing my need to treat her like a partner than the monogamous community did.

As things opened up after the pandemic in the U.S., I joined a Meetup group for Childfree Women. We go on walks, to brunch, visit breweries, etc. It offers me a chance to engage with other women in a social setting where children are not the major topic of conversation or even discussed at all. We talk about travel, work, hobbies, and pets. Almost all of us have pets. But we understand we all have made decisions to be where we are in our lives without children. Whether the routes involved all of the turns mine had or they were simpler or more complicated, I have never been asked the question of why am I childfree by any of the dozens of women I've met through this group. I have to imagine they are all just as exhausted by responding to the question as I am.

Why am I childfree? I'm not giving this story to near strangers. Am I happy being childfree? Simply, yes. I do not tend to dwell on the past and have few regrets. I cannot go back and change things, so I need to learn and move forward. I cannot say that if I had made a decision to have children that I would have also done the therapy and work that would be necessary for me to be a better mother than mine was to me. I may not have made decisions that would have brought me to where I am now, including recognizing my sexuality as bi+ and relationship orientation as solo polyamorous.

I am a very different person than I was before coming into my identities. I focus more of my time and energy on building and supporting my communities. I am more confident, which has been noted at work, when I advocate for LGBTQIA+ people. I speak out, making sure representation of the bi+ and polyamorous communities is given. As I tie my growth in these areas to creating space for myself, I believe having had children could have hampered this growth. Can I say that for certain? No. However, the life I live now would certainly not have as much space to do the things which make me feel fulfilled.

Amber Ballweg lives in the Minneapolis, Minnesota area and has two cats.

Why Being Childless Can Be Childfree

By VeronicaOfOsea

When I was 18, I was told that I was too young to know that I didn't really want children, that I would have just to wait for the right person to come along. The argument didn't change during my twenties just as my opinion didn't. As soon as I turned 30, the argument stayed the same, but added the twist of my age and that "my time was running out." The angry feminist in me gloated when people gasped in shock when I said that having children wasn't for me, that the idea sounded confining to me. I never really got along well with other children when I was a child myself and, having grown up under the influence of a very toxic and neglecting mother, I couldn't imagine myself having any maternal instincts.

But in some way the people who told me that my opinion would change were right because when I met the right person, I could imagine having children. But as Murphy's Law goes, at this point I had suffered a horrible miscarriage due to a domestic violence incident years prior, and I had gotten diagnosed with endometriosis. None the wiser, we tried, and I got pregnant last year. It was crushing when I lost the first child I ever genuinely wanted through an accident when I was 18 weeks pregnant. To be honest, I'm still grieving, and for the first time being childfree felt like being childless.

A few weeks ago, I was diagnosed with stage 1 cervical cancer, and one of my first questions was how the treatment would affect my reproductive abilities. It's not impossible, but as of right now

we're getting accustomed to the idea of a life without children. Of course, it's not easy to say goodbye to an idea which had started to sound good, but isn't it what I had always wanted? And yet there are some moments where the sadness rears its head and asks, "What if?"

Even though my health issues make the term "childless" seem more appropriate, I love to think of myself as being childfree. I'd rather endure the

arguments of the parenting bubble that being childfree is egoistic, that I might end up alone and what not than to tell them all the reasons why I can't and don't want, to be met with pity or advice I don't want to hear.

I have to admit that some of the reasons why I'm childfree have changed: some wore off in terms of significance, others have increased or have been recently added, especially when it comes to economic and political developments. And with the increasing number of friends and acquaintances who decided to have children, I saw more what disparities parenting—especially motherhood—comes with. With the rise of antifeminist rhetoric, policies, and laws, I find it truly hypocritical when men like American football player Harrison Butker speak of being a "wife, homemaker and mother" as the highest vocation for a woman when in reality the life of a stay-at-home wife and mother is one of the biggest poverty risks for women. I resent the idea that having children is some kind of "natural duty" for me as a woman and that something is wrong with me for not having heard that calling all my life. And weirdly enough, it's only us women who are being asked why we don't have children yet or why we don't want them at all. Believe me, it crashes quite every social gathering if you start asking every man in his thirties why he isn't a father yet. I know, it's petty, but sometimes I get so fed up with having to defend and explain my decision that I crave to make them feel the same pressure.

At the end of the day, I live a pleasant life without children of my own. I'm extremely fortunate to have an incredibly supportive partner, two amazing cats, nieces and nephews to occasionally take care of, and that we can travel as long as our work schedules allow it. As I'm concluding this piece, I asked myself how I feel and the answer is: I feel free. Being childfree is freedom for me, and it's the right choice for me.

VeronicaOfOsea (she/they) is a bisexual woman living in Northern Germany in a monogamous bi relationship and battling the clichés against mlf presenting bi couples.



Artwork by Martine Mussies, Cat Lady. Martine Mussies is an artistic researcher and autistic academic in the Netherlands. Through text, music, and visual work, Martine uses her art to explore new worlds and ideas.

Pack Dynamics

By Tea Campbell

In lion prides, lionesses take care of each other's cubs as if they were their own. In orca pods, grandmothers play a crucial role in caring for the calves, so that their mothers can hunt.

A friend's mum sees us playing with her grandkids and tells us we'd make great parents. My partner and I exchange glances before I laugh awkwardly and tell her we're not having kids. I expect the conversation to end there. She keeps pushing and prodding, asking, "Why not?"

My grandma used to hint to me—unsubtly—that she wanted great-grandkids. As soon as I came out, she stopped. A part of me wanted to reassure her that I could still have kids, just so I wouldn't feel like I was letting her down. But I knew I never would.

I never fantasized about being a mother. I never played with baby dolls. I didn't spend much time with babies or little kids. My mum told me that it changes when you have your own, but that always felt like a ridiculous risk to take. The idea of having kids as a social obligation was being phased out when I was growing up. I wasn't going to have a baby just for the sake of having one.

The pressure to become a mother *did* ease once I came out publicly. Your sexuality shouldn't change your desire or ability to have children, but being confidently bi made me more comfortable defying heteronormative gender roles. Even if I ended up with a man, that didn't mean I *needed* kids to feel fulfilled. There was, however, the fear that my future partner would want them. How do you compromise on something like that? I know that children are such a valuable and wonderful part of many people's lives and I wouldn't want to take that away from someone who desperately wanted it. But I had plenty of my own reasons to stay away from motherhood.

Pregnancy scares me. It's the epitome of body horror for me—a parasite draining your life from you, then emerging painfully over the course of many hours. Not to mention all of the complications for both mother and child. I always feel guilty for saying this because childbirth *is* beautiful—for some people. It's a miracle of nature, it's the start of a new life, all of that mushy feel-good stuff. But when I think about giving birth, I can't see past the pain and blood. And I know it doesn't end after you bring the baby home. Years of sleepless nights, and your body might never return to what it once was.

I'm disabled. I have chronic pain, not to mention a reproductive issue known as polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS)—that means I might not even be able to have kids if I *did* want them. I already spend a significant amount of time bedbound, unable to do *anything* due to intense joint pain and debilitating migraines. That's just not something you can do with a baby around. I need a lot of space and time to myself, otherwise I get extremely overwhelmed. I don't want to traumatize a child by yelling at them for just being a kid and needing their mother. It wouldn't

be fair on a hypothetical child, and it wouldn't be fair to me or my partner who would have to pick up my slack.

I had been openly bi for a while before my amazing partner and I got together, and I was the first person to whom he came out. Being a bi-for-bi couple let us avoid so much of the jealousy and spite that I see so much with straight couples. It wasn't just our sexualities, though—we are on the same page and connect so deeply that it makes me believe that soulmates are real after all.

It took us a while to bring up whether we even wanted kids. Initially, I said no, but I could change my mind down the line. He said about the same, and we left it there. Then our friends had a kid and the answer turned into a hard 'no.'

I *love* my friends' kids (there's a second one now!) but as I've told them, it's just not for me. I'm happy to spend time with them and be the cool family friend, as long as I can hand the child back at the end of the day. It's still a trial—I have to step away when the kids are screaming for too long. I reach a limit, and I feel ashamed, but I'm prioritizing my health. I shouldn't feel selfish about that.

We spend a lot of time with those friends. They're our chosen family, and I love all of them to pieces. Being around their kids has made it clearer than ever for me that motherhood isn't in my future. I'm extremely grateful—if I didn't have these beautiful toddlers in my life, I might doubt my decision to remain childfree. I might always question whether I'm making the right choice and let societal pressure trap me into a decision I will only regret.

I love kids. I love my *friends'* kids. But I'm content never to have my own.

There are plenty of social animal groups like lions, wolves, and meerkats that only have one breeding pair. The rest of the community—aunts, uncles, and other relatives—help to raise the young. That's where I fit in. If entertaining toddlers for a few hours helps take some pressure off of my friends, I'll gladly do it.

Tea Campbell lives in rural Australia and is a writer, artist, and crafter. When she's not writing about her experiences with queerness and disability, she's drawing "ugly" animals and playing D&D.



Ellyn, continued from page 13

ability, while examining her relationship with her mother, the various sexual and emotional relationships she has had, her abortion, and much more. Women over time have reframed the procreation choices that we can make for ourselves, and Warrington's book does a nice job of analyzing that transformation and creating a space for women without children to appreciate their experiences.

Even Though

By Bailey Merlin

In another universe, I am a good mother;
in this one, *my* mother doesn't ask me,
"When are you having kids?"

Even though I don't want children,
I have a list of baby names on my phone,
pulling up ancestors to match with Merlin.

A decorated combat veteran
of the Eldest Daughter Club,
the "cool-in-a-crisis kid,"
my body rejects disharmony,
makes me sick, sends me
to bed without supper.
A child could be deadly.

Even though I don't want children,
I look at my partner and know
what a good parent he would be.

My father tells me to get pregnant
the week after my wedding.
I roll my eyes; it's a joke at this point.
The night before he dies,
before I know that he's gone,
I wake up in a cold sweat,
and feel a pulse of baby fever.

Bailey Merlin is a bi+ advocate, the co-host of the podcast Bisexual Killjoy, and the author of A Lot of People Live in This House. She lives in an intentional community with eight to ten people (depending on the day) in Boston, Massachusetts.

Even though I don't want children,
I imagine what it would be like to watch
my child cross life's thresholds.

When we tie the knot, my husband
and I agree on one year of wedded bliss
before broaching the conversation.
Our second anniversary is soon,
and we are no closer to reaching
a conclusion. We like our life,
though we cannot afford a home.

Even though I don't want children,
I imagine painting a nursery, taking
a pack-and-play to Thanksgiving.

My best friend tells me that she wants
to get pregnant, explains why
it is selfless to be a parent. I look
at my phone and only see
reasons why having a child is cruel.
There is so much good to do,
so much good that is needed.

Even though I don't want children,
I want to at least feel
like I had a chance to choose.



Unintentional Mother Figure

By Becca Downs

I've grown strong in a universe
confident in the art of targeted cruelty
to show me a boy tugging on my hem
and asking for mommy
mistaking my dress for hers
in headlights running off scarlet-chested
when I've long dreamed of my own
child, a half-me ultimately destroyed by my
razor blade waking, gut-punched
empty womb, the outline of an angel
clenching fist-full of fabric
dressed as a sharp-jawed man
and pretending to love me, just
to take me naked and whole
which sometimes means wife
in our bedroom, I was a good girl
even as placid became his invitation to leave
future and family, father and
husband, titles of ownership shredded with
fallen leaves buried, now lifeless and
under dormant pillow of ghost-white snow
until a new dress blossoms in spring



Becca Downs (shelthey) is a writer, editor, and educator based in Denver, Colorado. She graduated from the Mile-High MFA program at Regis University and is the author of Acid Rain Epithalamium (Beyond the Veil Press, 2024).

My Childfree Life

By Sharon Gonsalves

It all started in the late 1970s when I was in high school and the women's movement was in full swing. It was clear to me that I had choices—more choices than my mother did—about what to do with my life. There was an assumption in my family that my siblings and I would all go to college. Whatever we did after that was up to us. Well, I decided I wanted financial freedom. I adamantly did not want to be dependent on a man for a home or financial stability. My independence was important, and that meant no children. Having children would require a lot of my time, and I wanted to be my own boss. Marriage and family were not in my immediate future. Although I appreciate my mother very much for all she did to raise me, this was not the direction I wanted to go in for myself.

Not so coincidentally, in my early 20s I came out, first as a lesbian separatist in an effort to keep abusive men away from me, and later as bisexual, once I had healed enough from incidents of abuse to trust myself and men more. As a lesbian, the decision to have children would have to be very deliberate. No “mistakes” there. As a bisexual woman, there were possibilities, but I was still not interested. Alternative models of relationships included living in intentional community, which made more sense to me than pairing up with one person in an exclusive relationship. I was living in Boston and, thanks to the [Boston Bisexual Women's Network](#), I had plenty of like-minded friends for support and socializing.

There was a small amount of pressure from my family to have children. My siblings and I would joke about how my mother posted photographs of all her friends' grandchildren on her refrigerator (hint, hint) since none of us were providing her with the pleasures of being a grandma. We all thank our youngest sister who, finally, at age 30, had her first child. The pressure was off the rest of us, and we could see how happy our parents were to have finally ‘joined the club.’

After college, I studied electronics and got settled into a money-making career fixing computers. Sharing housing with friends allowed me to save some of my income. Being childfree allowed me to go away on vacations effortlessly, and I discovered that I enjoyed being in the tropics—Bermuda, Aruba, and Key West were a few of my winter destinations. Eventually, I moved to Hawaii and opened my own vacation rental business. Now, I really was my own boss.

When I reached my early 40s, the decision about whether or not to have children came up again. My biological clock was ticking. It was now or never. I felt interested in exploring the possibilities, but the idea of giving birth had terrified me. How was something as big as a baby going to come out of my vagina? I became a doula and attended births to demystify the process. Then I looked for someone to share the journey with me, in the hopes that I might become pregnant. My doula role connected

me with new parents, some of whom were seeking nannies for their infants. I dove into training for parenthood and to see what childrearing was really like, up-close and personal. The rewards were many, the biggest one being the shower of unconditional love pouring on me from the infants I cared for. I basked in the glow of receiving, but also was glad at the end of the day when I could go home and have time and space for myself. I walked through infancy and toddlerhood side-by-side with two beautiful beings and discovered that parenting was not for me. I still wanted my freedom. By this time, I had not found a partner to raise a child with, so I let go of this idea, and I have no regrets.

Not much later, being childfree allowed me to move back to the mainland to help care for my father when a terminal cancer diagnosis arose. My mother would not have been able to care for dad on her own, and a nursing home was the only alternative. I dutifully and happily dropped everything and moved in with my parents. None of my siblings were in a position to help full time, and my caregiving experience had prepared me for this opportunity. Dad had a peaceful end of life at home, and I am so grateful to have had this experience. It was the right thing at the right time and led to a beautiful conclusion for us all.

I stayed on with Mom for another year after my father died, then returned to Boston where I still had friends and went back to working full time. I strengthened ties with my family members and got back to earning money, this time focused on my upcoming retirement. Again, being childfree made it easy to move around, make changes, and be concerned only with my own needs. I visited mom regularly and also had my own life, sharing living expenses and socializing with friends. A few years later, another opportunity came my way. My niece moved in with Mom and I headed back to Hawaii, where I am once again enjoying the beauty of nature, the warm breezes, and being surrounded by friends.

Childfree has been a good decision for me. Now that I'm 65, I feel more interested in settling down with a long-time partner. There are no offspring to take care of me in my old age, but I have friends and community who will be there for me. I'm grateful that I had the choice to say ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to motherhood.

Sharon Gonsalves lives in Hawaii and has identified as bisexual for over 40 years.



Childfree Middle-Aged Millennial *By FEMILY*

Artist Statement: I love posting about being “childfree and proud of it,” because each time I post, people thank me secretly in my DMs for giving them a little more inspiration/power to say “no” to everyone asking them to please have babies. My husband has kids (marriage number one), but as I tell people all the time, “I’m definitely *not* a stepmom; my husband has kids who are in our family, but I’m not a parent or a step-parent to them. His kids (now grown) know that I’m in their family as an elder, and that my husband is their parent, not me. They know I was “childfree by choice” long before I met him.” I never liked anything about child-rearing. And I liked even less the super-severe and restrictive women’s gender roles related to momming. Living childfree has been the most liberating (and, for me, feminist!) decisions I’ve made. I’ve never wanted to have kids—and I’ve never regretted it, not even for a moment. It’s a choice echoed by 10% of all women throughout history, from childfree medicine women to the modern “Rich Auntie Supreme” movement. Even though myths say otherwise, research shows life happiness isn’t dictated by motherhood or the lack thereof, but by the power of choice over becoming a parent or not. Hence the importance of autonomy in our pursuit as women and queers to create our families, from straight solo moms by choice to queer chosen families to radical polyam polycules to bi women in open marriages with cishet men (here here!) and so much more.



FEMILY (aka Emily Meghan Morrow Howe), shelthey, stands at the forefront of women’s and gender inclusion as a strategic advisor to the tech moguls of Silicon Valley (and beyond). Also, FEMILY is a success coach dedicated to uplifting feminist and LGBTQIA+ entrepreneurs, change-makers, and thought leaders. She is the visionary founder behind “Future Thought Leader: Self-Promotion Bootcamp for Feminists and Queer/Trans People” and the creator of “From Bi Curious to Bi Confident: a video course for women and femmes.” In all that she does, FEMILY empowers voices on the margins to take center stage in a world that makes it hard for us to secure the money and microphones we need to make a difference. Connect with Femily: <https://www.femilyonthego.com>

Anna, continued from page 1

according to my family. Most conversations end up with my mother bursting into tears, mixing pity with fear, begging me to change my mind. “But you are going to end up alone, my dear,” she often whispers through her tears.

Today, I understand my mother’s concerns, because I know now that her own survival kit included getting married and having children. She loves me, so she’s been trying to instill the same belief system in me. For a short while, I believed that it was through the love of a man, where I would find my safety, success, and happiness—my Self. For my mother, safety comes from marriage and children. However, I have learned that safety is a feeling within and its cultivation doesn’t require a traditional marital relationship. It does, however, require a nurturing relationship with one’s self—an idea foreign to my folks, people who grew up in a different time in history.

A couple of years ago, my mother confessed to me that she believes marriage and children aren’t only the “correct,” traditional pathway in life, but they are a guarantee that you will be taken care of in your wiser years. My father passed away a couple of months ago, and she told me that watching me being single and childless was breaking her heart. After losing her husband, she saw my choices as especially painful.

To my mother (and many others), motherhood and woman-

hood are often two of the same. In many cultures, one implies the other. Therefore, many people in my family seem genuinely worried about me. In their eyes, I am an incomplete woman. When I accepted my bisexuality, many of my personal beliefs and ideas made even more sense, and I realized that I didn’t have to accept or comply with the culture I grew up with; I could carve out my own path. It’s my bisexuality that showed me that this was possible.

Coming out to myself and loving my bisexuality is different from coming out to others who comment on my sexuality a lot, whether it’s “Everyone is a little bisexual,” or “Are you sure? Have you even been with a woman?” or even rejecting my application to join a gay women’s Facebook group. Some find my sexuality irritating, others nonexistent. Somewhere in this bigotry and chaos, I find my own path and walk the journey others may not understand. I keep moving forward despite my family’s pettiness and cultural biphobia, showing myself and others that all choices I make are good because they are mine.

Anna Kochetkova is a Russian-born Australian author and poetess, and a passionate bi+ activist based in Sydney. Anna is the author of Bi & Prejudice and the creator of the @biandprejudice Instagram space, which helps celebrate multisexual attraction and human diversity and @sydbiclub Sydney community-led events and gathering for all multisexual and queer humans.

Why Books Are Better Than Children

By *Finocchietta Selvatica*

I'm 31 now, and since the age of 16, I've understood my desire to remain childfree. Therefore, I'm quite accustomed to the criticisms: "You're selfish, immature, heartless. You don't know how to commit. You'll never know love. You're a disgrace to your family because you won't continue the lineage..."

Let's set aside the notion that "be fruitful and multiply" made sense in less resource-exploitative tribal times. Let's also overlook that carbon footprints drastically reduce without children or that some critics would change their minds about my reproduction if they knew I'm not straight. Let's even overlook respect for AFAB (assigned female at birth) self-determination, as we aren't just baby-making machines. While these are crucial reminders, my viewpoint will be different.

From such criticism, I perceive a persistent theme: even if you haven't accomplished anything relevant, having children fulfills the primary duty of leaving a part of yourself in the world that'll hopefully survive after your physical death. I understand the human need to live beyond death. It's one of the five basic fears we share, regardless of geographical region, age, gender, sexual/romantic/religious/political orientation, social class, etc. The fear of not existing, being forgotten and disappearing into nothingness is something we grapple with daily, seeking ways to alleviate the horror it causes us.

I attempt to fight this fear by writing books. In this article—which I recognize as challenging, and hope will be insightful, deep, and only a little irreverent—I will explain why this path isn't that strange. In fact, it might demonstrate enormous responsibility, respect for life, and a firm grasp of ethical principles.

1. Books as Living Entities

For most writers, books are alive. There can be an emotional bond, though less intense than with another human, and immense satisfaction in bringing them to life. You can pour so much of yourself into those pages, discovering and rediscovering yourself through the story you've created. A book represents me far more than birthing another human who, despite being related to me, rightfully has their own free will, thoughts, and feelings. People who see having children as a canvas to be filled with their favorite colors often forget that's egocentric, even narcissistic. Giving life while trying to direct the child's future without caring about how they will grow *is a thousand times more selfish than not wanting to have children*. It also shows less foresight, responsibility, and empathy. Though we can romanticize books as "alive," they're still objects. I can vent every ambition and desire by writing them, without worrying about stifling their self-determination. I do no harm by replacing the desire/need with a creature made of letters rather than a human who should rightfully emancipate from me.

2. Control and Autonomy

Precisely because books are inanimate objects, I'll never worry about them meeting "toxic acquaintances" and being led astray. A book can't be modified or rewritten if the publishing rights are in my hands for at least seventy years after my death. The final word about my intentions and interpretations is mine. A book is always my creation, reflecting me without causing any pain. I find it more intimately and viscerally mine than children, who must be respected as separate beings. Knowing and respecting a child's individuality, no matter how physically or characteristically similar, is mandatory. Many heartaches and rejections, especially for LGBTQIA+ children, stem from an inability to accept this truth. Therefore, a book will always represent me better.

3. Physical and Emotional Toll

No matter how painful giving birth to a book is, it will never match the physical pain of childbirth. My body won't deform, nor will I endure hospital staff abuse (which is dangerously common in Italy!). I won't need to change my diet, suffer postpartum depression, or be left alone with the expectation that I'll instinctively know what to do. A book doesn't cry, get sick, or drive me crazy with needs I can't understand. I can solve any problems with the book without the emotional drain of parenting.

4. Societal Pressure

Since society doesn't dictate that my life is meaningless without writing books, I don't feel the same pressure. I can make mistakes, change my mind, and improve with each new book without being labeled a "bad mother." I can keep a book private until publication, avoiding the invasiveness that often accompanies pregnancy. I decide when to write and when to enjoy my private life without worrying about hurting the book's feelings. My dedication won't impose the glorified sacrifice often seen in motherhood rhetoric. It will be tailored to me, leaving me more mental, psychological, physical, and emotional resources.

5. Money Matters

This might seem mean to some, but quite evident: I'll spend much less money on books than on children. The planet and my wallet will thank me since I'm part of a poorer generation compared to the previous ones. And the belief that having children provides a better return, economically or otherwise... is subjective. There are equal, loving, respectful relationships I can cultivate with partners/friends/acquaintances, offering fulfillment without the drain of parenting. Anyway, I have no intention of conducting an experiment with human children to check if my fulfillment is less than that of those who believe otherwise.

6. Control Over Legacy

I can revise new editions if necessary to prevent my books from aging poorly, especially in self or indie publishing. Instead, overriding a child's will to ensure they grow well would be

violent and absurd. With books, the worst that could happen is appearing ridiculous for trying to ride a wave of success for too long or making poor marketing choices—no suffering inflicted, no personal boundaries violated. Just my responsibility to understand when to stop.

7. Disowning Creation

If over time I no longer see myself in my book, I can disown it without causing harm. In the worst cases, I might have to acknowledge writing mediocre or harmful things, apologize, rewrite, or stop distribution. Disowning a human child, however, would be devastating. How many people suppress their true selves out of fear of being outcasts? Parent-child relationships can be complex, especially when values clash. As a survivor of several forms of abuse, I wonder if I could love children who became harmful. This conversation on parenthood is crucial, as societal conventions often overshadow personal ethics. None of this applies to a book, which cannot transform into something so dangerous/painful.

8. Independence and Creativity

While research and industry involvement are crucial, I can produce a book alone. I don't need to freeze gametes, worry about my menstrual cycle, or find an AMAB partner to create it. A book is truly mine alone, conceived independently, and can be brought into the world at any time. To me, this independence is more rewarding/freeing than motherhood.

9. Longevity and Impact

Books outlive people and can reach many more individuals. They can change lives, represent causes, and be kept in circula-

tion for centuries. In the greatest cases, an author's name can be immortalized in literary studies. Children, however, eventually die. Conditioning descendants with guilt and the obligation to continue a lineage is limiting, whereas finding a different meaning to existence, one that frees others' choices, is more ethical and fulfilling.

In conclusion, I understand the need to escape death in another form. The desire to affirm our existence and preserve it shouldn't be judged solely on selfishness/altruism. But some expressions of this desire are more functional than others. Having children just to ensure a part of my DNA survives is terrible. It would be limiting, unsatisfactory, and unethical for the children born to quell my anxieties. Finding fulfillment in writing and admitting that I don't want human offspring is more honest. And I'll leave to other articles the rhetoric of all the love I'm missing without bearing human children. Love, in fact, takes many forms, and the joy of dedication, commitment, pleasure, empathy, and sharing can be experienced in many ways, including relationships that don't involve raising and educating a child. Since reality is subjective, redefining motherhood from a childfree perspective is valid and necessary. And that's my ultimate hope: to redefine the concept of legacy like the childfree, non-monosexual, aware human beings we are!

Finocchietta Selvatica lives in Italy and is equally passionate about devouring books and french fries. She identifies as polysexual and panromantic, sees the writing craft as lifeblood, and intersectional feminism as home.

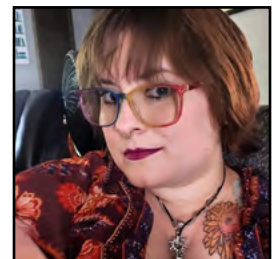


Coming of Age

By Flare Henry Tieszen

You have great childbearing hips
The church women told me at thirteen
You'll make a man very happy one day
I was told at fourteen
Cover up your body, you are going to cause these men to stumble
They demanded of me when I was fifteen
I can still feel their hands tugging at my clothes
Their tongues clicking in disapproval anytime I walked by when I was sixteen
At seventeen I knew I did not want any daughters
Not after the humiliation I had to suffer at the hands of older women, my own mother doing nothing to protect me
At eighteen I decided that I did not want any sons either
The church men were not any better.

Flare Henry Tieszen is a 32-year-old gender-fluid individual who lives in the Pacific Northwest of the U.S. with their two wonderful partners and three dogs. They are a full-time registered nurse and use poetry to explore themes of love, depression, disassociation, and returning to oneself after the COVID-19 pandemic.



Bitch On Board

By Lexine Sage

The sign caught my eye while I wandered around a gift shop in a Vegas hotel six years ago. It was a car decal that read “Bitch on Board.” As someone who doesn’t have a problem with the word “bitch,” I found the message witty and in tune with my sense of humor. I originally bought it for fun and to offset all those “Baby on Board” decals seen on other cars, out of jest.

Months later, I met a guy at a friend’s party. Our meeting was brief, but I still remember our conversation, especially what he said at the end:

Guy: “So, what do you think about kids?”

Me: “In general or...”

Guy: “Like having kids? Or do you have kids already?”

Me: “Oh, I don’t have kids and I don’t think I want them.”

Guy: “What? Why? Why do you not want them?”

Me: “I have my reasons. One of which is—”

Guy: “Yeah, but you’re a woman. You’re supposed to have kids.”

Me: (playing cool) “My body, my choice, my dear.”

Guy: (looking disgusted) “You’re a bitch.”

He left right after, and I would have made one more quip to him, but seeing him upset because I stuck to my guns was enough for me. I had installed that “Bitch on Board” decal on my car months before, and I smiled at it when I left that party.

When a woman does something that goes against what a patriarchal-driven society expects from them, that five-letter word always follows her: “Bitch.” When we simply tell a man “no” because we don’t want to, we’re called a bitch. When we flex strength and turn the tables on men, we’re called a bitch. And when we make decisions that are right for us, even if it upsets men, we’re called a bitch.

I expected *that word* from a guy when it came to my choice in not wanting children. What I didn’t expect was the agitation from some women over my choice. They wouldn’t call me a bitch (at least not to my face), but I could tell they weren’t happy that I chose to opt out of parenthood. These upset women were either mothers themselves or believers of motherhood being the ultimate prize in a woman’s life. Just a little over 50 years ago, women fought for their reproductive rights and helped *Roe v. Wade* become federal law. Since *Roe’s* unfortunate overturn in June 2022, I’ve noticed more women getting upset with other women choosing to be childfree. It’s all “my body, my choice,” until some women decide against motherhood, then it becomes a civil war among women.

The stigma childfree women face from others who expect children from them (“You’re not a real woman,” “You’ll change your mind,” “You’ll be lonely when you get old,” etc.) are eerily parallel



to the stigma bi people like me face from narrow-minded people (“Pick a side,” “You’re in a phase,” “You’re in it for attention,” etc.). And just like childfree women facing backlash against hostile mothers who can’t accept our childfree status, bisexuals face conflict with LGBTQ+ community members because we’re bisexual. I chose to be childfree, but I didn’t choose to be bi, and I certainly didn’t choose to get backlash for being both.

If my life choice makes me an oddity, so be it; I’m used to being the “odd one out.” Being Filipino-American and nearing 40 on top of being bi and childfree, I’m supposed to be married to a man and mothering his children at my age (and not writing this piece.) Instead, I lead a life that goes against tradition and the patriarchy. I’m single with no desire to be partnered right away nor have children in this lifetime. I’m financially independent and have an apartment all to myself. I’m still proudly bi despite the grief bisexuals continue to face.

And, yes, I still have that “Bitch on Board” decal on my car. It compliments my new “bitch” shirt that I got for Pride, with the “b” and “i” letters colored in pink, purple, and blue. At least I never have to worry about watching my language around kids in my own space.

Lexine Sage is the pen name of a published writer/poet who lives in the Bay Area of California in the U.S. She published her first eBook, a Women’s/LGBT Fiction titled The Playgirl in July 2023, and is currently working on a new novel.



Motherhood Is Not My Cup of Tea

By Valerie Tendai Chatindo

I don't hate kids!

Let me start off by getting that one little nitty-gritty detail out of the way. Almost everyone assumes that people who choose not to procreate have issues with children. I've been a Sunday School teacher from the time I was 14 and I've helped rear many family members' kids. I practically raised my sister with whom I share a 17-year age gap. Ironically, our relationship has been more of a mother-daughter one than one between siblings. Seventeen years! What did you expect to happen with that? I was there throughout the pregnancy. I helped her say her first word, which was her nickname (which I gave her). I named her, changed her diapers, potty trained her. I'm her tutor, mentor, and hell, yes (because I'm Black and we go down like that), I'm her disciplinarian. Just call me the world's number one deputy parent.

But, seriously, I don't hate kids.

Kids adore me. Everyone says that but in my case it's true. I love playing and conversing with the small folk. Kids are cool and more profound than people credit them for. And no, my fascination and engagement isn't an attempt to resolve any childhood issues. I didn't have a traumatic childhood (well, we are all traumatized, but you know what I mean) and no, I don't have any reproductive issues, though I am way overdue for a check-up.

I just don't want to have kids!

People who know me question my decision. Not because I'm an African and there are stereotypical ideas about us being baby-making machines. Yikes! No. They question my decision because everyone who knows me knows that I am a huge nurturer. I love taking care of people. I'm a feeder, a cleaner, and a very affectionate person. I mother all my friends. Yet...

I still don't want to have kids.

I've been singing this same tune since I was five. When all my other friends were playing mommies with their teddies and dolls, I made mine my subjects. Don't ask. The idea of having my own kids has just never appealed to me and as I get older, I've acquired logical reasons to justify or articulate this inner instinct I've had for most of my life.

Sure, I could tell you that children require a lot of emotional and financial energy and attention. I

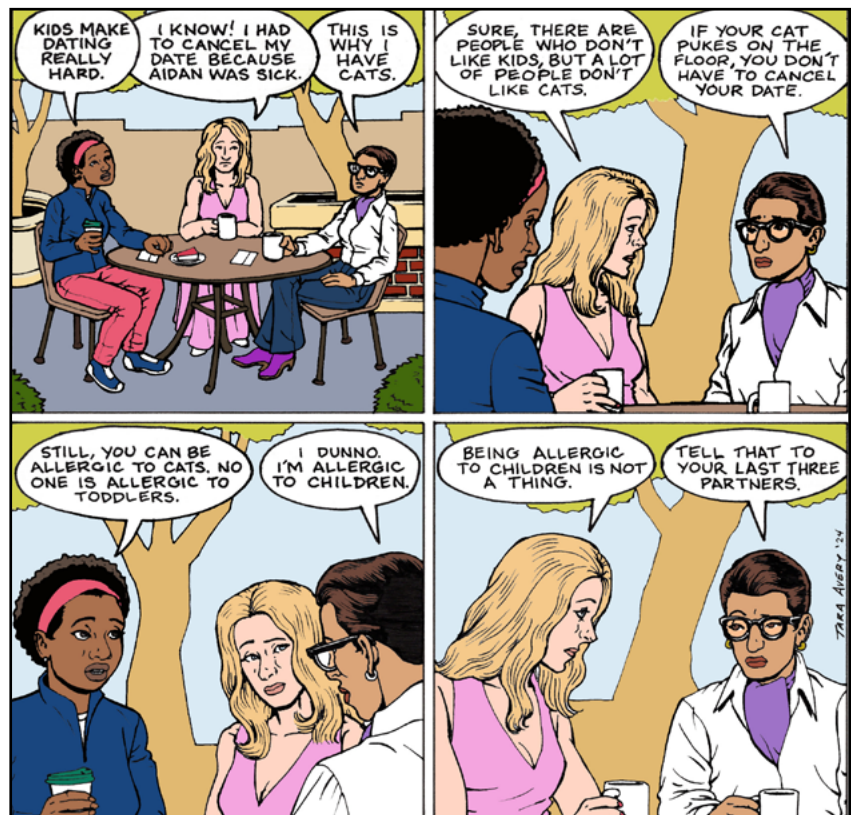
could even mention that I enjoy my life of solitude and peace. That I love waking up with the knowledge that no one is counting on me. It's liberating! I can fuck up my life in whichever way I choose and no one else will get hurt in the process. Of course, I have no intention of doing that. I'm probably the most boring and stable person out there, but just knowing that I could if I wanted to is a freedom all its own.



I love waking up late. I love not having to cook every day. I love the silence when I'm writing with the backdrop of a beautiful African sunset. I love being 29 and not being in a rush about achieving my life goals because I've got little ones counting on me. Parenting is serious business. It's one most people don't take seriously enough, sadly, and because I'm aware of my own limitations I'd rather not even venture into that field. I could go on and on and turn this into a thousand words to justify my aversion. But you know what? It all comes down to...

Me. Loving my childless and selfish existence and, for the last time: I just don't want to have kids!

Valerie Tendai Chatindo is a Biochemistry graduate from the University of Zimbabwe, a writer, and a sexual health and awareness educator. The 29-year-old resides in Harare, Zimbabwe with her cat, Muffins, where she runs her own



Tara Madison Avery is a cartoonist, publisher of Stacked Deck Press, and a board member of Prism Comics. She is known for her comics work such as We're Still Here: An All-Trans Comics Anthology and the bisexual-themed webcomic Gooch.

I Reject Your Idea of Womanhood and Substitute My Own

By Elisabeth Smith

The first time I told my mother I didn't want to be a mom I was four years old. I told her that when I grew up, I didn't want to be the mom; I wanted to be the dad. My mom, wonderful person that she is, told me that that was perfectly alright. That was only the beginning of my rejection of commonly expected gender roles.

When I was 17, I went to Planned Parenthood in secret and received my first IUD. I was dating a boy my age at the time and my top priority was to avoid getting pregnant. It was somewhat terrifying to go and have the procedure alone, but I was determined. When I did tell my parents what I'd done, they were actually proud of me for taking precautions.

Whenever I've had relationships with men in the past, I've always felt an underlying discomfort with the gendered expectations

placed on me by society. I was always terrified to become a housewife. I would dress more androgynously and insist on participating in more "masculine" activities, such as car maintenance and home repairs. Even as I entered adulthood, my fear of pregnancy did not subside. I made it clear to every man I dated that children were not an option. This was non-negotiable.

When I first realized that I was queer, I slowly began to make sense of my rejection of gender roles. With that revelation, everything started to fall into place. I strongly believe that my desire to be childfree is connected to my queer identity, though I acknowledge that others may have a completely different relationship with the idea.

In my twenties, I became very passionate about reproductive rights and justice. I attended activist training and protests to

Salpingectomy

By H. Roth

I could easily exhaust myself
arguing all the finely mapped out reasons
I do not want to be a mother

Ranging from the hazy
hard to pin down and defend
I do not want to
through the agonies and threatened infertility of endometriosis
tracing the intertwined, encroaching vines
of intergenerational trauma
 which I am still struggling to extricate myself from
 decades later
finishing with my aunt's death
 which is still too raw and exposed a nerve
 to probe too deeply
and topped by a desire to reduce the risk of ovarian cancer
 my anxiety only slightly reduced by negative BRCA testing

I am summarily blessed with a surgeon
who requires no argument or explanation
when I request a bilateral salpingectomy
shocked into a stumbling silence
my list of reasons dies an abandoned, neglected death

The morning of the surgery, misplaced paperwork necessitates
signing consent a third time
I sign and sign and sign

H. Roth is a poet and writer who works in palliative care. Her writing explores themes of grief, loss, and hope. She lives in Alberta, Canada.

protect abortion access whenever possible. As someone whose greatest fear is pregnancy, the issue is very personal to me. I never want to see anyone forced into the role that I have always rejected, myself included.

The day that Ruth Bader Ginsburg died, I saw the writing on the wall for abortion rights. I decided that same day that I needed to get sterilized. I found a list of doctors on the *r/childfree* subreddit, and reached out to a local doctor to set up a consultation appointment. When I told my parents what I'd decided to do, they were not only supportive, but agreed to cover the costs. I am sure they would have loved to have grandchildren, but they have never asked that of me. I'll always be extremely grateful to them for their unquestioning support.

Three months later, when I was 28, I had a bilateral salpingectomy to remove my fallopian tubes. Immediately, I felt a sense of relief, safety, and empowerment from what I'd done. That sense of empowerment has not faded in the three years since I had the procedure. My rejection of motherhood is complete and final. It feels amazing to tell people who insist "you'll change your mind" that it's too late. It's impossible now. I love my little scars from the procedure. To me, they are proof that I took control of my own destiny.

Now I am in a relationship with a bisexual woman, who also does not want children. Being in a relationship with a woman for the first time has been freeing in a way I've never felt before. I don't feel the need to constantly fear falling into stereotypical gender roles, because there are fewer socially expected gender roles for two women in a relationship. Nobody asks us when we're going to have a kid. Even though I'm sterilized now, I don't know if I could go back to relationships with men after feeling this level of freedom from gendered expectations. I have never wanted to be a wife until I was with my current partner, and now the idea of being *her* wife thrills me.

I believe that my rejection of motherhood is just one part of my broader rejection of society's expectations for me as a woman. My queerness is an integral part of that as well. I believe that coming to realize I was queer helped me fully divest from gendered expectations. In fact, it wasn't until after I realized I was queer that I felt fully comfortable even being a woman. Embracing my queer identity helped me realize that womanhood is not as limited as I once thought. Now that I am out and proud, and now that I have made a final decision on motherhood, I feel freer than ever to be the kind of woman that I want to be.

Elisabeth Smith is a 31-year-old queer woman, and lives in central Ohio, U.S. with her bisexual girlfriend. She is passionately proud of her identity, and cares strongly about the acceptance of bisexual people both outside of and within the LGBTQ+ community.

Meet BWQ's New Assistant Editors

After a search which drew more than 40 applicants, we have hired not one, but TWO new Assistant Editors. We are delighted to introduce you to them here:

Melissa Rorech is one of *BWQ*'s new Assistant Editors and has been an LGBTQ+ advocate for several years. As someone who identifies as bi, she makes it a point to write articles that help the queer community and uplift LGBTQ+ voices through her editing as well. Rorech has written for publications like *USA Today*, *Reviewed*, *LGBTQ Nation*, and more. She has experience in not only journalism, but video producing, social media management, and more. She currently lives in Boston and spends her free time reading, embroidering, and drinking lots of coffee. Melissa is super excited to be joining the *BWQ* team in an effort to continue featuring and highlighting a wide variety of different experiences in the queer community, making sure everyone's voice is heard.



Avery Friend is a long-time *BWQ* subscriber and delighted to be joining the team as Assistant Editor. Avery was born and raised in the Greater New Orleans area, where she studied Creative Writing. Since moving to Maine in 2017, she has held professional and volunteer roles across several nonprofits, and her current role at Bowdoin College sits at the intersection of higher education and community engagement. She additionally works part-time for MaineTransNet, a community-based organization dedicated to supporting and uplifting transgender people in Maine. As a bi, queer, sapphic, ace-ish woman whose relationship with each of these identities has and continues to evolve in ways that never fail to excite her, Avery is passionate about queer representation of all forms. You can often find her reading poetry or sapphic romance, watching her favorite sci-fi shows, hanging out with her cats, or traveling with her friends.



Having kids or not can be a potentially fraught issue for some women. There are myriad reasons why someone may be in this situation. Some of them include: miscarriage, couldn't find a partner and didn't want to do it solo, couldn't afford in vitro fertilization or freezing eggs, tried to adopt and it didn't work out, couldn't afford the costs of raising them, and many others, or just plain didn't want to! Another person's choices are none of your business, especially if they are not harming anyone. Let's respect each other's choices and not put others on the spot.

When talking to women without children, it's important to approach the conversation with sensitivity and respect. Avoiding certain topics or comments can help ensure that the discussion is positive and inclusive. See below for the kinds of questions you may want to avoid that can apply pressure and feel invasive, followed by questions that can give the conversation more spaciousness and ease, and can evoke curiosity, empowering the responder.

These are examples of questions or comments a woman without children may feel are insensitive:

- "So, do you have children?" (Not a great way to start out a conversation.)
- "You're missing out on the best part of life!" (This can seem condescending and judgmental.)
- "When are you going to have children?" (Assumptive that you will have children.)
- "You don't know what love is until you have children." (There is more than one kind of love, and assuming this is the only or best way excludes and marginalizes people who make different choices, whatever their reason. Don't assume that their life is incomplete or that they need to justify their choices.)
- "Who is going to take care of you when you get older?" (Even folks who have children are not guaranteed that the kids will live nearby or be good caretakers.)
- "Don't you get bored without children?" (This implies their life has no structure or meaning.)
- "You'll change your mind about not having children." (This undermines their autonomy and decision-making.)
- "What's the real reason you don't want children?" (This question is invasive and assumes there's a hidden or negative reason behind their choice.)

Consider some of these open-ended conversation starters instead:

- How have you been spending your time these days? How is that project/goal you've mentioned going?
- What have you been streaming/reading lately?
- What brings you the most joy these days? What are some things you're excited about right now?

- If you could live anywhere, where would it be and why? What are some pros and cons of living in the area you do?
- Are you an animal lover? Tell me about your animal companions.

By focusing on these more inclusive and respectful questions and conversation openers, you can foster positive and engaging conversations without unintentionally offending or making assumptions about women without children. Finally, respect their choices. You may not know why their life is the way it is. Try to understand that not everyone follows the same life path and that's okay.

Fennel (she/her) makes her home in Boston, Massachusetts. She loves having easy access to all the beautiful nature in New England, a vibrant foodie scene, and especially being only 75 minutes from the beach! Yes to dogs, coffee, and reproductive justice!

"Praise all our choices. Praise any woman who chooses, and make safe her choice."

-Marge Piercy, *The Sabbath of Mutual Respect*

No, I Have Not Changed My Mind

By Karen D.

You don't have children? Did you just never meet anyone?" These questions came from a woman I'd known for less than five minutes. It was the latest in a long list of "ugh" comments I have encountered over the past three decades about my parent status.

In my early 20s, I came out as bisexual. My younger brother told our mother he couldn't wait to be an uncle. Her response was, "I just visited your sister and her girlfriend, so don't hold your breath!" It was the 1980s, and same-sex partners having children were still a rarity.

Soon after, I came to the realization that I didn't want to have children, and not for lack of sperm. A gay friend was open to having a child with me. Then I started a long-term relationship with a male partner (and to this day, I still get grilled on why we are not married, but that's a whole different article).

When I grew up, having children was just a given. Once I decided I was not going to have children, I felt a pressure valve open, relieving something that I did not know I was carrying. My feelings have never wavered.

In my late 20s, I wanted to get my tubes tied. Doctors are incredibly reluctant to perform tubal ligations on people who do not have children already. It's understandable given it is a surgery and the impact, but there's a difference between being cautious

and consultative vs. being dismissive. How different would this be if I were a man asking for a vasectomy?

Whenever I told anyone that I didn't want children the response was always, "You're young; you'll change your mind." (Like it's a phrase, sound familiar?)

At least my mom understood. She had me at 19 and if she had to do it again, she would not have. My mom adored my brother and me, but the non-stop worry was very hard on her. I'm built the same way and I know I would have struggled as a parent.

It took me 10 years to get permission to get my tubes tied. I changed my doctor and when I told her I wanted my tubes tied, she told me it made sense. She had patients my age who did not want children, got pregnant, and were faced with a decision they never thought they'd have to make. My doctor was required to refer me to see another doctor for a consultation. That doctor gave me a quick sign-off and she submitted the paperwork for authorization. So, at 39 I had the procedure. I could finally stop taking birth control pills—which over the years was more costly than the surgery copay.

Some people might say that I'm selfish for not having children (well, not *might*—people have *actually* said that). What I think is selfish is defining someone's value by that definition. It's similar to how people have judged me for being bi or not getting married, or all the other expectations of what others think a woman should be that I am not.

I still don't know what the best approach is when people have made insensitive comments. Sometimes I take the high road and let it go, although I cannot say that I've never used a sharp comeback when someone really got under my skin. There have been times that I started listing all the positive things I contribute to the world and then I'm mad at myself because I feel like I'm justifying who I am.

Being childfree has not only shielded me from the hard things about being a parent. I'm a very independent person and it's given me a lot of freedom. I've been able to take career risks because I was only responsible for myself. I have travelled the world which might not have been possible if I had a child. Even simple things like an impromptu bike ride or eating dinner when I feel like it sounds trivial but are important to me.

Now I'm old enough to be a grandmother, which doesn't even seem possible. At least the "ugh" comments have slowed way down since it's obvious that my eggs have reached their expiration date, one of the few benefits of menopause. While I see the joy that children can bring to others, I'm still happy with the choice I made not to have children.

Karen D., an instructional designer from the Boston, Massachusetts area, is very involved in volunteer projects in her community.

News Briefs

Compiled by Dylan Fee



Those of you who watched any of the 2024 Paris Summer Olympics probably witnessed some amazing queer athletes competing for and *winning* medals! *PinkNews* reports that Team LGBTQ+ (all of the publicly out LGBTQ+ athletes combined from different nations) came in 7th place in medals at the 2024 Paris Summer Olympics. These athletes achieved 15 gold medals, 13 silver medals, and 14 bronze medals! HRC counted at least 29 out athletes on Team USA, and we know there are others who may not feel safe enough to come out yet. A huge congratulations to the American bisexual athletes who won medals in Paris: Sha'Carri Richardson (at right) won a silver in the 100 meter and a gold in the 4x100 meter relay, Haleigh Washington won a silver in team volleyball, and Evy Leibfarth won the bronze in slalom canoeing. Sorry if we missed anyone!



A new law in Utah led to the closing of LGBTQ+ centers at many of their public universities. This law, known as the anti-DEI 261, bans public universities from "discriminating" against people with certain identifiers which includes sexual orientation and gender. While it is not explicitly stated in the bill to close identity centers, many universities—such as Utah State University, Utah Tech University, Utah Valley University and University of Utah—have closed their centers for fear of repercussions. Some of these universities have tried to reconfigure their identity centers into other programs.

According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, bisexual and transgender adults report loneliness twice as often as straight adults. Their 2022 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System found "56.7 percent of bisexual adults and 56.4% to 63.9% of transgender adults reporting lack of social and emotional support." This is in comparison to around 30% of straight adults reporting in the same surveillance system.

Casey McQuiston, a *New York Times* best-selling author, known for her novel *Red, White, and Royal Blue*, has come out with a bisexual rom-com called *The Pairing*. "The book tells the love story of Theo and Kit, best friends who became what seemed like the perfect bi-for-bi couple, until they broke up during a transatlantic flight to a European food and wine tour. Years later, with their nonrefundable tour vouchers about to expire, they accidentally book their 'I'm totally over you' solo trips at the same time and are stuck together with a busload of tourists and a hot Italian guide for three weeks."

This Is Mine

By Heidi Bruins Green

I always knew that I would have children. Everyone knew it. I was the one with tender bedtime rituals for all my dolls. I took in dolls no one wanted anymore. My arms reached to hold any baby within my radius. Once when we were young, someone handed a baby to my older sister while simultaneously saying, “Oh, I think her diaper is dirty.” My sister instinctively let her arms go limp. Baby Anita would have fallen except I was right there underneath my taller sister with my arms extended.



How then did I end up deciding NOT to have children?

It was a series of small choices that each made sense when I made them.

Wait until after grad school.

Wait until I have a partner who wants children.

Wait until I'm settled in a job with good benefits.

Come to understand that my now-wife actually DOESN'T want children.

Choose that relationship over hypothetical children and grieve my empty arms.

After the devastating ending of that relationship when I was 40, realizing that I could choose again.

Recognize that children no longer fit into the life I had built and was right for me.

Grieve again.

Those choices and myriad other choices have given me the life I have today.

I love my life. I'm married to a man I love, respect, and adore spending time with. We're good together in a way my wife and I never were. When we got together, he already had children, who I met when they were 12 and 16. They are 35 and 39 now. I love them fiercely.

I have a brother whose faith path led him to decide I couldn't be around his children because my capacity to love people of all sexes made him uncomfortable. Over time he and his wife have matured beyond their either/or thinking. They now welcome me, but long after the children had grown; I never got to dote on them during the bonding years as babies and small children.

Then I realized that kids of kids could be an answer. The next generation!

I had hoped for grandchildren to spoil, but neither of my step-kids want to bring children into the world we have. (Grandpets are nice, but not the same.)

More grieving.

I hoped for an opportunity to be in the lives of great nephews and nieces, but distance and ideological differences have forced more losses.

On the upside, I've never faced stigma, or even overt disapproval, for not having children. I'm sure I've not been included in lunches or friendship circles that were parenthood-based. I know I made major faux pas when I was younger by giving “parenting advice” to friends with children. I have always been treated kindly when I've made those cringe-worthy comments.

My age group is dealing more often with aging parents—where we are suddenly the children again—so we are back on even footing. I can commiserate and ask good questions based on what I've learned and have experienced firsthand.

When I look back on my life and look at the people around me, I see that I've been lucky. While in my deepest fantasies, I imagine that I had children—I know that I idealize them, gloss over growing-up challenges, and have a rosy picture of what our relationship would be like now—the reality might have been very different. I have a friend who adopted two young girls and the intervening years have been little but heartbreak. Another dear friend has two children—one developed a life-altering mental illness that keeps him from the dreams he once had, and the other has cut her mother off completely. I've learned that having children is not a guarantee of happiness or even of support in your old age.

Being childless has allowed me to explore who I am, get plenty of sleep, stay out all night on a beach in Portugal, live on a Greek island for weeks, make reckless choices, and deal with the consequences on my own terms. On the other hand, I wasn't there for first steps, first words, to kiss a boo-boo, or to be the only arms some small being could be comforted by.

There are trade-offs as with everything in life. I have the feeling there isn't a “right” choice about parenting, there is just getting comfortable with your choice and living your life. This is mine.

Heidi Bruins Green lives in the U.S. Pacific Northwest, in Vancouver, Washington, just across the Columbia River from Portland, Oregon. A bi+ and anti-racist activist and educator beginning in the '80s and '90s, she designs learning experiences and is flirting with retiring to spend more time with her husband, Jamison Green, and their cat, Squeak.

Bi+BIPOC: Reflections on the First SAMHSA LGBTQIA+ Behavioral Health Summit

By Casira Copes, President, Bisexual Resource Center

For years now, research has reflected a little-known truth: bisexuals make up the largest swath of the queer community. Recent data also reflects the reality of being an often-sidelined majority: bisexuals tend to have worse mental and behavioral health outcomes than our other queer peers. Knowing this, I was intrigued and enthused to be invited to the SAMHSA (the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration) LGBTQIA+ Behavioral Health Summit in D.C. during Pride Month. What better time and place to address the growing health needs of the bi+ community?

The conference brought together 125 individuals across various fields—government workers, direct service providers, academics, researchers, and community activists—to reflect on data collection, program outcomes, and initiatives taking place in queer communities across the country. Yet so many discussions about the work and well-being of BIPOC queer people, trans people, and multiply-marginalized individuals were held without many (sometimes any) of those voices present. *Why aren't they in the room with us*, many asked. *It's a shame they aren't here*. Their work was praised, their resilience admired, but few were there to receive it. At the end of the workshops, attendees were asked, quite simply: *Now what? Where do we go from here? What do we do next?*

While the conference itself did not offer the answers to these questions, I'm glad to have been in the room to meet individuals who I believe care deeply about finding those answers. The people I'm so pleased to have connected with understand that what comes next is making sure our fellow queer people of color are embraced rather than missed from afar. I'm proud to have been accompanied by Bisexual Resource Center board member Brooke Lindley, who brought intersectionality to the forefront



A bi+ contingent of amazing people relaxing after the SAMHSA Summit: Sitting: Lisa Diamond, Heron Greensmith, Casira Copes, Robyn Ochs. Standing: Sabra Katz-Wise, Mimi Hoang, Lauren Beach, Amy Andre, Brooke Lindley, Fiona Dawson.

with her presentation on bisexual and biracial identities. I'm proud to have been a Black bi woman in a space where I could offer some degree of visibility to the fact that GSS data shows almost a quarter (23%) of young Black women identify as bisexual. I'm proud to still be engaging meaningfully with the changemakers I met there and looking forward to a future of collaboration and partnership in the name of improving health outcomes for LGBTQIA+ people—especially my bi+ family and always my Black and brown siblings.

In fact, it was my bi+ peers that demonstrated the power of inclusion with intentionality. As a result of the tireless efforts of Amy Andre, organizer of the summit and fellow bi+ BIPOC leader, I found myself amidst a bi+ contingent of amazing individuals who were able to center bisexual experiences and community in ways rarely seen in such spaces.

As the first of its kind, the SAMHSA summit set the stage to expand and improve on large-scale discussions of LGBTQIA+ behavioral health across sectors. It kicked off an important conversation in a national context that must be continued—next time, with more people at the table.

Casira Copes is a nonprofit communications specialist, writer, and trained facilitator with a passion for navigating the intersections of race, gender, sexuality, and social justice. They serve as the communications director of their state ACLU affiliate. In her capacity as president of the Bisexual Resource Center, as well as a board member of both OPEN (Organization for Polyamory and Ethical Non-monogamy) and OutCare Health, Casira helps marginalized individuals and families find community, share resources, and advocate for a more queer-friendly future.



Bi+ at the White House

On June 26th, the Bidens hosted a Pride reception on the South Lawn of the White House. Bi+ activists Casira Copes (President of the Bisexual Resource Center), Fiona Dawson (filmmaker, author, and speaker), and Robyn Ochs (speaker and editor of *BWQ*), were among the attendees.

Research Corner:

Much is Unknown Still: Parenting and Being Childfree Among Bi+ People

By Jessamyn Moxie

July's release of the updated report on LGBTQ+ Parents from UCLA's Williams Institute points to numerous ways bi+ cisgender women stand apart (Wilson & Bouton, 2024). Our understanding of the bi+ umbrella when it comes to parenting is limited primarily only to bisexual individuals, with much to be understood about pan, fluid, and other identities. We lack intersectional data that explores the nuances of how other identities such as socioeconomic class and gender presentation influence the experiences of bi+ parents or childfree individuals. Although I would argue that we also need more research on all bi+ individuals who are not parents, I use "childfree" in reference to those who identify with the label. "Childfree" can be a positive identity that individuals adopt in contrast to "childless" or deficit-framing (Rivera et al., 2024). Bi+ individuals who are (and plan to remain) childfree may be engaging in unique strategies to exercise their agency in the current political climate. At this point, we know more about bisexual parents than we do about bisexual childfree individuals.

Many LGBTQ+ individuals *do* live childfree—partly due to reduced opportunities to become parents among same-sex couples and experiences of stigma (Dorri & Russell, 2022; Widmer et al., 2024; Wilson & Bouton, 2024). And when the

heteronormative pressures and norms related to sex and family structures are reduced, LGBTQ+ individuals may also choose not to parent (Riskind & Patterson, 2010). Yet bisexual cisgender women aren't following this trend. In fact, bisexual cis women are parenting at similar rates to heterosexual cis women and men (about 30%) (Wilson & Bouton, 2024). In fact, bisexual cis women are the largest group of LGBTQ+ parents, at about 60% of all LGBTQ+ parents (Wilson & Bouton, 2024). There's a lot we don't know about the experiences among bi+ individuals who are childfree and those who parent.

Whether bi+ individuals want to be parents and for what reasons has mixed evidence. One nationally representative study reported similar rates of parenting desires and intentions between bisexual and heterosexual cis women, though bisexual cis women partnered with cis men had increased parenting desires compared to those partnered with cis women (Riskind & Tornello, 2017). The expanded group of bi+ parents have not been studied in isolation from other LGBTQ+ individuals. However, one study from Switzerland reported similar rates of desiring children between pansexual and bisexual individuals (Widmer et al., 2024). It may be notable that some pansexual, fluid, or queer individuals may also not identify as cisgender—which may influence their



By Tessa Stayton

GLAAD, the media advocacy organization, recently released their annual report detailing the representation rates of LGBTQ+ characters in the media (entitled "Where We Are on TV") for the 2023-2024 season. Whereas last season saw 596 LGBTQ+ characters represented in the media, this year has yielded only 468 (GLAAD). This represents a significant drop of nearly 22%. Furthermore, only 24% of these characters are bisexual+, despite bi+ identifying individuals making up 58% of the LGBTQ+ community (Gallup).

One encouraging development has been the considerable increase in media representation of bi+ men. The 2023-2024 season has seen an increase from 26% to 34% of LGBTQ+ characters representing bi+ men, many of whom are lead protagonists in their respective series rather than neglected side characters (including Loki from *Loki* and Nick Nelson from *Heartstopper*) (GLAAD). Since bi+ representation has a history of being strongly skewed towards women, this is a welcome change.

Naturally, there is still considerable room for improvement. The majority of bi+ characters continue to be white (53%), and discontinuations or cancellations of LGBTQ+ shows remain a significant issue: at least 27% of this season's LGBTQ+ characters will not be returning for this reason (GLAAD). And yet, compared to the measly 1.3% of LGBTQ+ characters present in the media when GLAAD first began documenting this information during the 2006-2007 season, it is important to recognize how far LGBTQ+ representation has already come while simultaneously advocating for further advancements.

Tessa Stayton is a rising senior at Connecticut College in the U.S. and a summer intern at Bi Women Quarterly.

parenting desires (e.g. pregnancy may not feel compatible with their sexual and/or gender identity; Carpenter & Niesen, 2021).

On top of numerous stressors of parenting, we know that bi+ parents may face additional hardships. Overall, LGBTQ+ parents are more likely to be living in poverty (33%) than non-parents (21%) and cis heterosexual parents (21%) (Wilson & Bouton, 2024). Bisexual cis women have the highest disparity in living in poverty between those who are parenting (38%) and not (25%) (Wilson & Bouton, 2024). This is partly due to the high proportion of bisexual cis women parenting with single income households. Many bisexual cis women who are parents are single parents (44%)—more than lesbian (40%) and heterosexual women (29%) (Wilson & Bouton, 2024). Complicating this portrait is the fact that one study reported 85% of bi+ parents were in a relationship (Wilson & Bouton, 2024), though we do not know the extent to which partners assist in parenting, financial or childcare assistance, among others. Having a partner, specifically a cis man, can help bisexual cis women to have more positive experiences with healthcare providers (e.g. perinatal providers; Goldberg, 2017).

We don't know about the percentages of childfree bi+ individuals who are in relationships or not, and the stressors of those different groups. However, we may look to Reddit for trends among those interested in being childfree (Rivera et al., 2024). Reddit hosts an online community (i.e. Subreddit) focused on being childfree, with 1.5 million members in the group (putting it in the top 1% of discussion boards on the site) (Reddit, 2024). Bisexual individuals in the group have multiple posts discussing strategies in avoiding partners assigned male at birth to avoid pregnancy. Recent additions to these types of posts include navigating increasing limitations on abortion access.

Sexual identity and parenting status/identity are just a piece of the overall picture—we are largely still missing research that examines how marginalization or privilege of other identities influences these experiences. For bisexual individuals with other marginalized identities, such as race/ethnicity or class, structural stigma can be stark. For example, Black bisexual cis women lose custody of their children at significantly higher rates than heterosexual cis women (Harp & Oser, 2016). Bi+ cis women may resist parenting imperatives related to motherhood faced by women by adopting a childfree identity (Blackstone & Stewart, 2016; McQuillan et al., 2008). Among those who include their identities in the r/childfree Subreddit, women were more represented in the group (Rivera et al., 2024). The identity of “childfree” may be more commonly adopted by individuals with privilege, such as bi+ individuals with higher levels of education.

Identities of both “parent” and “bisexual” are dynamic and we need research across the life course to examine the relationships between them. For those who did not birth a child, they may fight for visibility as a “legitimate” parent (Abelsohn et al., 2013). Upon becoming a parent, bisexual individuals may not find their bisexual identity as important (Manley & Ross, 2020). For

those who are childfree and pushing against heteronormative scripts, we do not know how bi+ identities may be differentially preferred. In other words, do some identity labels (e.g. queer) connote more resistance to normativity and assist in relaying a childfree stance?

There is much left to explore in relation to bi+ parents and bi+ childfree individuals. We are only beginning to research the experiences among bisexual parents. Research on the experiences of pansexual and queer parents is still in its infancy, and bi+ childfree individuals have been nearly absent.

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News Briefs

Compiled by Dylan Fee



The Advocate reported that Thailand will be the first Southeast Asian country to make same-sex marriage legal. In a 130-4 senatorial decision and guaranteed approval from the monarch, the bill should pass within the next 120 days. “The marriage equality bill was supported by all the major parties and marks a significant step in cementing the country’s reputation as one of the friendliest in the region toward gay, lesbian and transgender people.” [Bi folks, too, one hopes!]

Nonbinary representation in the government is at a record high with 52 nonbinary government officials nationwide, *The Advocate* reported. Nonbinary state representatives Sam Montañó of Massachusetts, Alicia Koslowski of Minnesota, Mauree Turner of Oklahoma, and DeShanna Neal of Delaware are a few examples. This is a rise from last year by 69.7%. However, the number of transgender representatives has decreased by 6% in the past year.

A new spirit of hope and joy has seized the Democratic Party since Vice President Kamala Harris has become its candidate for President. At the Chicago Convention, the party united around the ticket and prepared for the campaign. Queer convention highlights included Secretary Pete Buttigieg challenging J.D. Vance’s statement that childless people don’t have skin in the game by speaking of his service to the country when he was single. Michigan’s Attorney General Dana Nessel asserted to Republicans and the Supreme Court, “You can pry this wedding ring off my cold dead gay hand.” Plus, the candidate for Veep, Tim Walz, was a high school coach who was also the staff advisor to the GSA! We’re not going back!

CALENDAR

3rd International Bisexuality Research Conference

October 5th and 6th, 2024

A free online conference for anyone who wants to learn more about bisexual, pansexual, polysexual, plurisexual, queer, fluid, and unlabeled experiences.

Enjoy a weekend of stimulating interdisciplinary discussions and presentations. More details at

bisexualresearch.com/ibrconference2024.

A special invitation to our readers EVERYWHERE:

Please join the Boston Bisexual Women's Network at one (or all) of our digital brunches. We are proud of our community of women (trans and cis) and nonbinary folks, and we would love to make connections across the country and globe. Grab your coffee or tea and some food while we chat about bi+ issues and other fun topics.

Digital brunches will be held on the following dates starting at 1 pm EST:

Sat., Sept. 7

Sun., Oct. 6

Sat., Nov. 2

Sun., Dec 8

Please join us! Info/RSVP: BWQEvents@gmail.com.

(Note: Dates are subject to change. Check BiWomenBoston.org to confirm date.)

Bi+ World Meetup Fri, Nov 22

Join us at the 13th Bi+ World Meetup on Friday, November 22nd at 3 pm EST/ 9 pm UTC. Bi+ people everywhere are invited to join us on Zoom. We'll use breakout rooms to give folks an opportunity to join each other in a friendly and free setting. The meeting is in English and is facilitated by Barbara Oud (the Netherlands) and Robyn Ochs (U.S.). Pre-registration is required.

Register at <https://biplus.nl/biplus-world-meetup>.

BBWN Annual Book Swap Brunch

Sun, Sept 29, Noon

Join the Boston Bisexual Women's Network (BBWN) community at our annual book swap brunch at Ellyn and Kara's in Melrose. Folks are encouraged to bring a dish to share and books to exchange. Books should be in good shape and can be of any genre (except textbooks). You don't have to participate in the swap to attend the brunch, and you don't have to bring books in order to take some home with you, but you should be aware that books will be discussed. Hoping for good weather so we can all enjoy the backyard together, but if we are inside it is a cat-friendly home. Email Ellyn at elruthstrom@gmail.com to RSVP and for address.



The bi+ community promotes visibility and awareness each year September 16-23, culminating on **Celebrate Bisexuality Day**. Check out bi+ organizations on social media and boost the visibility on your channels!

Metro-Boston Bi+ Women and Nonbinary folks: Keep up with local events. Subscribe to our Google group: <https://groups.google.com/g/biwomenboston>

Check out BiWomenBoston.org for info about upcoming **in-person** events for women with bi+ (bi, pan, fluid, and other nonbinary) sexualities sponsored by the Boston Bisexual Women's Network.

BWQ offers FREE digital subscriptions to people of all genders and all orientations everywhere. Subscribe at BiWomenQuarterly.com.