

## Re-learning Trust, Love, & Care

By Apphia K.

There are times when I catch myself thinking of my mother's house. I think of the sound of the rain on the stone wall right outside my window, and of the wet scent of the earth. I remember the familiarity of the streets that I once belonged to, where I knew the children who played outside and the people who worked in the shops. I let myself remember what it felt like to live with my parents, my sister, my cousins, and my aunts and uncles. And then I remember that, once upon a time, I used to belong to my birth family.

I've been an LGBTQ activist for more than 11 years; I started out in my hometown in India and for six of those years I was stalked, threatened, and harassed for the work I did. That pushed me to get out of India and seek asylum in the United States. That was five years ago. Over time,



life has moved at an inescapable pace and I have slowly lost touch with almost all of my birth family. We text occasionally, when something exciting happens in our extended family—but otherwise we're not really what I'd call a family anymore. With some, the distance got in the way; others intentionally moved away from me.

My most important consideration when applying for asylum was that I would be giving up the possibility of going back to India. The idea of not being able to see my mother or my relatives scared me. How could I live without my family? I remember asking my mother what to do, and whether she would consider moving to the U.S. to live with me since I could add her to my application. She simply

*Apphia, continues on page 16*

## Life is Better with Her

By Theresa Tyree

When I was still at Portland State University completing my M.A. in Book Publishing, the student press I worked for took on an interesting project. It was an anthology called *Untangling the Knot* that focused on how marriage equality (although wonderful) didn't mark the end of the fight for queer rights. The anthology focused on themes of cultural acceptance, language and gender, and legal protections for queer family groups.

The anthology began with a story about a person who had two partners. This person talked about how there was no way for their family to be as safe as a family that only had two partners in it. Their two partners and their child were in a state of flux. They spoke of how they decided who should be legally "married" on paper, and why. Ultimately, it came down to who was covered on health insurance through their work, and who needed to be on one of the other spouses' plans.

The anthology was eye opening. It was inspiring.

In 2009, I met a girl. Her name was Ainsley, and she was going to be my college roommate. She was nice enough. Quiet, and a little sheltered, but nice enough. I moved in thinking that we would probably get along alright but that I might have to spend a lot of time outside of the dorm room to really do anything interesting.

I was so wrong.

Ainsley became my closest friend. It got to the point where we stayed in on Friday nights and watched old *Doctor Who* episodes together rather than going out to party.

She was quiet, and I was loud. She was compliant, and I was rebellious. Someone on the outside looking in might have expected us to destroy each other or hate each other, but Ainsley was my balance. I was her courage. She taught me to relax and I taught her to speak up. We were eye-opening for each other.

When it came time to choose roommates for the next year, we stayed together. We did so at the end of the next year as well. When the school housing system changed and we couldn't be guaranteed that we would be able to room together if we stayed in the dorms, we moved off campus to stay together. When I graduated and she didn't, we made a point of visiting each other. When I went back to school, and then abroad, we made Skype dates.

Today, we still live together. Today, she is inarguably family.

But there's no way for us to make our society, the government, or the world acknowledge the strength of our bond culturally

*Theresa, continues on page 17*

### Editor

Robyn Ochs

### Assistant Editor

LB Klein

### Calendar Editor

Charlotte Alger

### Proofreaders

Bri Kerschner

Jo-Anne Carlson

Andrea Miotto

Katelynn Bishop

## Editor's Note

The term "chosen family" refers to those with whom we choose to have a significant and ongoing relationship and mutual support. This concept is particularly relevant to the LGBTQ+ community, as many of us are estranged from, or at least have an ambivalent relationship with our family of origin due to their rejection of or discomfort with our sexual orientation and/or gender identity and/or politics. A 2013 Pew Research Center survey on the LGBT population found that 39% of LGBT American adults have been rejected by family or friends because of their sexual orientation.<sup>1</sup> For this reason, we have chosen to dedicate an issue of *BWQ* to this subject.

You will find in this issue essays by Apphia K., Theresa Tyree, Aicila Lewis, A.J. Lowe, Jane Bailey, Elaine Schleiffer, JMC, and Ellyn Ruthstrom; and poems by Hailey Forrester and Dove. Amanda Lowe shares her experience at the Creating Change Conference in Washington, DC., and in our Around the World column, Soudeh Rad reports on the first-ever bi pre-conference institute at ILGA Asia, in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. You will also find Katelynn Bishop's review of the new memoir of one of the co-founders of Black Lives Matters our Research Corner, Advice from A. Rose Bi, a WhyNotBothCo comic, News Briefs, and our calendar of events.

Enjoy!

<sup>1</sup>[www.pewsocialtrends.org/2013/06/13/a-survey-of-lgbt-americans](http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2013/06/13/a-survey-of-lgbt-americans)

## Upcoming in *Bi Women Quarterly*

### Call for submissions

#### Summer 2018 issue:

### Bodies

Let's talk about our bodies: Body image. Gendered bodies. Bodies and health. Changing bodies. Bodies converging and merging. Bodies and attraction. Sexual bodies. We welcome your personal stories, poetry, artwork, or opinion pieces. *DUE BY May 1.*

### Call for submissions

#### Fall 2018 issue:

### Pop Culture

Did you find your first bi+ role model in a music video, concert, TV show, or novel? Do you have critiques of current media or ideas for how you'd like to see bi+ women represented? We welcome your perspectives on pop culture through personal stories, fiction, poetry, artwork, or opinion pieces. *DUE BY August 1.*

Submission guidelines are online at [biwomenboston.org](http://biwomenboston.org).

Send your submissions and suggestions for future topics to **[biwomeneditor@gmail.com](mailto:biwomeneditor@gmail.com)**.

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

### HONOR ROLL

Thanks for  
volunteering!

Belle Haggett

Char Alger

Claudia ClarkeFriend

Ellyn Ruthstrom

Gail Zacharias

Jordan Peaerson

Julia K.

Julie Morgenlender

Kristin Laird

Mitsy Chanel-Blot

Molly Walter

Stephanie Rodriguez

All articles and art appearing in the *Bi Women Quarterly* are copyrighted by the authors and artists.

**Boston-area women: Sign up for our new email list! Send an email to: [biwomen-boston-subscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:biwomen-boston-subscribe@yahoogroups.com)**

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



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

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

# Around the World: The First Ever Bi Pre-Conference at ILGA Asia

By Soudeh Rad

The seventh ILGA Asia conference was held in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, from December 4th through 8th, 2017. [ILGA](#), the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association is the largest worldwide LGBTQIA+ rights association and has members from all over the globe. ILGA activities are organized through six different geographic regions: North America, South America, Europe, Pan Africa, Asia, and Oceania.

More than 350 individuals from more than 48 countries joined the 2017 ILGA Asia Conference to debate and discuss various subjects. Pre-conferences on the topics of bisexual, intersex, interfaith, trans, United Nations advocacy, and LBT Women were held during the two days prior to the conference. Some of these spaces were closed events. For example, intersex pre-conference participants had to self-identify as intersex, while the bi pre-conference was open to everyone.

The bi pre-conference was the first in ILGA Asia history and welcomed more than 50 individuals. [Candy Yun](#) from the [Korea Sexual Minority Culture and Rights Center](#) and [Soudeh Rad](#) from the Iranian [Dojensgara](#) co-hosted the event. During the first half day, participants introduced themselves, talked about the situation for bi+ individuals in their respective countries, and shared their definition of *bisexuality*. Hearing the variety of definitions given by people from Nepal, Bhutan, Vietnam, Cambodia, Iran, North Korea, Pakistan, Philippines, Malaysia, Taiwan, Lebanon, China, Hong Kong, etc. was interesting and revealing. There was no clear consensus on the definition of bisexuality. Most participants were wondering if they would be considered bisexual and many were there to find their own answers to questions such as: “Is this my label?”; “Do I have

the right to identify as bi?”; “I am a lesbian woman, but I have a child—am I bi?”

Thus, facilitators Candy and Soudeh decided to change their plans in favor of more discussion about the layers of identity, behavior, fantasy, orientation, and fluidity to help find a definition that could satisfy all participants. Not surprisingly, everyone seemed to be happy with Robyn Ochs’ definition: “I call myself bisexual because I acknowledge in myself the potential to be attracted romantically and/or sexually to people of more than one sex and/or gender, not necessarily at the same time, not necessarily in the same way, and not necessarily to the same degree.”

After lunch, more people joined the bi pre-conference. Almost every participant invited someone else to join.

During the afternoon session, Robyn Ochs’ [“Beyond Binaries”](#) program, facilitated by Candy and Soudeh, moved the the people in the conference room, melted hearts, and put smiles on faces. It also brought tears to some eyes, as some attendees felt lots of pain answering the survey questions. This discomfort did not last, though, and the explanations, conversations, and support of hosts and participants created a safe and judgment-free space. Some participants realized how they have been denying their desires or identities because of discrimination.

In this happy, friendly ambience, hosts facilitated a brainstorming session outlining the first bi-pre-conference statement, which was then approved by participants to be read during the closing ceremony. The organizers consider the pre-conference a success because of compliments from participants and questions about bi+ issues that came up during the rest of the conference.



Some of the participants in the Bi Pre-Conference

A statement issued from this group follows on the next page.

*Soudeh Rad is a queer, feminist, bisexual, Iranian immigrant, who arrived in Europe 27 years ago and has been living France for 18 years. Among other things, Soudeh Rad serves on the board of ILGA Europe, and co-curates BWQ’s “Research Corner.”*

## Statement of the first Bi Pre-Conference at ILGA Asia

On December 4th 2017, the very first bi pre-conference took place at the biannual ILGA Asia conference. We, bisexual and/or ally attendees are proud and pleased to be participating in this one-day event and thank ILGA ASIA for this first step!

We recognize that all over Asia, we face the same issues, in different forms and degrees. There is a general lack of awareness about bisexuality, bi+ and bi visibility, not only in society broadly but also among our own movements. We are seeking greater awareness and inclusion of non-monosexuality at the local, regional and international levels.

We ask ILGA ASIA to act more inclusively and encourage all members to help foster this inclusivity. We demand ILGA ASIA to provide members with adequate educational material and empower them to face the challenges presented by monosexist communities. We want ILGA ASIA to consult with local and regional NGOs and activists about specific bi issues at local and regional levels.

We want non-monosexuality-related sessions to be integrated into the next biannual conference and not only in a pre-conference event.

We also wish ILGA ASIA to become an incubator for the Asian bi movement by facilitating collaboration between individuals, activists, and organizations. Dedication of funds for research and activism is vital.

We ask all participants in ILGA Asia conference, and all members in general, to recognize bisexuality for what it is: an independent valid sexual orientation. We seek acknowledgement that biereasure is real and biphobia is a form of homophobia. Inclusion is a duty and not thinking/acting/talking inclusively is a failure.

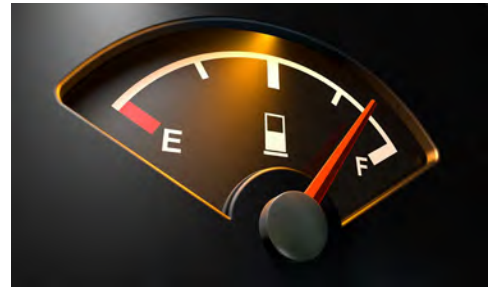
Taking into account intersectionality is key for all of us who want to bring change, and forced or conventional marriages, bi-parenthood, self-identification, and fostering community belonging are the important topics in need to be addressed promptly.

Signed,

Participants of the bisexual pre-conference

(<https://ilgaasia2017.com/2017/12/15/first-bisexual-pre-conference-statement/>)

## Gauging our condition



A quick report on our financial status: As some of you are aware, *Bi Women Quarterly* is fueled entirely on donations, and the revenue from pin sales, volunteer energy, and the belief that our work makes a difference in some women's lives.

We try to keep enough in our bank account to cover our production costs for the next year: approximately \$2000 per issue, or \$8000 annually. I'm pleased to say that—as a result of a more successful than usual end-of-year fundraising drive—at this writing we have \$8688 in the bank. This does not mean it's time to stop giving. By the time you read this, \$2000 of this will have been spent on the current issue.

Furthermore, if we can bring our balance up some more, we will be able to attend to some of the projects on our wish list: hire a graphic designer to update and refresh our look; change the way *BWQ* is available online to a more reader-friendly format; increase the number of organizations to whom we send free print subscriptions; start printing in color instead of black & white; pay our writers; send copies of *BWQ* to conferences around the world; and increase our outreach to let more people know that *BWQ* is out there for them.

Our thanks go to Joy H., Kathryn M., Candace O., Margaret W., Lara Z., Sheri H. and Stephanie M., Hilary T., Beccah W., Melanie L., Sheri H., Miriam S., Judy A., Lynne L., Sue C., Alkje F., Jamie W., Theresa E., Daniel B., Aria S., Catherine R., Catherine O., Estela D., Beth I., E. N., Jennifer B., Meghan P., Sharon G., Laura B., Deb M. & Gina S., Jo-Anne C., Loretta D., Rifka R., Jordan P., Katherine J., PFLAG Northern Colorado, Anne M., Christie C., Hannah B., Rachel M., Robyn O., Katayun R., Michelle K., Mary R., and Crystal S. ***Thank you so much for your support in the past year.***

To help us work through our wish list, please go to [biwomen-boston.org/donate-2](http://biwomen-boston.org/donate-2) to add your two cents (or more).

Also, if you know a graphic designer who might be interested in donating their services, please ask, and let us know if they say "yes." And if you're on a campus and want to send an intern our way, reach out to me at [biwomeneditor@gmail.com](mailto:biwomeneditor@gmail.com), and let's start a conversation.

-Robyn Ochs

# Family Values

By Aicila Lewis

Family are the people who, when you need to go home, have to let you in. My uncle used to say this. He lived it as well. When my mom lost everything she owned in a bad business deal, he and my aunt took us in. They had already raised their children and were moving into their retirement years. I can imagine having a depressed middle-aged woman and her loud, obnoxious teenager come to live with them had its challenges. They teased me about my eating habits and made me wash dishes and never made me feel unwelcome.

Fast forward to 20ish years ago. I was a young lesbian in Provo, Utah. When I left my husband for a woman, and thereby left my religion and everything else, I carried this value of family with me. The women I was close to in that experience are definitely family to me. I haven't talked to some of them in years. We haven't gathered as a group in ages, life has taken us in new directions. And, still, if they had to come "home," I would take them in. Being queer, for me, means I am aware of the people who have weathered the difficult moments of life with me. I have discovered myself in relationships as lesbian, then bi, and embraced terms like queer, poly, and kinky. The people who need me to be a fixed object to orient their own experience have fallen away. The people here today are the ones who can live in a world of possibility. They are the family that has to take me in when I come home. They have chosen that.



I can't really say I chose them in the traditional sense of the word. It didn't feel like a choice as much as a truth. We shared something terrifying and magical. The bonds of discovery and oppression tied us together as strongly as years of turkey dinners and pine trees in the living room. Life made them family. I choose to acknowledge their place in my life and my heart.

*Aicila's self-description: Organizational strategist for dreamers and underdogs. Community builder. Geek. Minion Fan. Bibliophile. Ginger. Apocaloptimist. Shelterhers.*



Some of the attendees at February's bi+ women's brunch, hosted by Sarah

# Can Families Be Chosen?

By A.J. Lowe

“Hello, you’ve reached 617-776-1008. Please leave a message for the goddess of your choice,” a woman’s voice sweetly purred.

Natalie had recorded that as the outgoing message on our voicemail when the phone service was set up in the new apartment we’d gotten together.

“Wow, I’d love to speak to one of the goddesses!” a young man’s voice said in the first message we received. “This is Brian from Verizon calling to make sure your service is working properly. Have a fantastic day.” Brian sounded very excited to be leaving us a message.

Natalie and I shrieked with laughter, and I felt my heart lurch with a thrill as I looked around the inside of our halfway-furnished apartment flooded with daylight. It was the fall of 1992. I’d managed to save a thousand dollars or two, and was able to take a week off from work while we shopped at every furniture store on Massachusetts Avenue in Cambridge to set up house together. We joked about the predictable-sounding names of all the stores, like Bowl and Board, The Door Store, Crate and Barrel, and The Furniture Cellar, and started creating our own hybrid names for them, like “Bowls and Doors,” and so forth.

Whenever we ran into the hordes of acquaintances from Wesleyan University who’d also migrated to the area, and they heard we were moving in together, their most common remark was: “Oh! Are you two a couple?”

“Nope,” I answered multiple times. No one had asked us that before we became roommates, and we hadn’t said or done anything else to imply that we were in a romantic relationship. I was 22 and Natalie was 25, and this was the first real home either of us would have with all of our own belongings. Why not buy real furniture, treat ourselves like adults, and create the house of our youthful dreams? We split the cost of a beautiful Shaker dining table and chairs, throw rugs and bookcases, and a Southwestern-patterned futon cover, and covered the walls with a sun-and-stars tapestry and posters with actual frames from New Words, the local feminist bookstore.

To be honest, it *was* like a honeymoon. Natalie lived on savings and set about figuring out what to do with her life while volunteering at the food co-op, cooking macrobiotic meals three times a day, and meditating or going to Healthworks women’s gym in between. I benefitted from her health obsessions and got to eat the great food that she cooked while launching my career at an advertising photography studio, getting cozier in my relationship with my boyfriend Eric, and baking lasagnas and elaborate desserts. We kept the house pristine to start with, so it took a while for me to notice that her three homemade meals a day weren’t followed up with dishes being washed or the rest of the house being kept in order.

“Why aren’t you washing the dishes after you cook?” I said one day, annoyed. “It seems like things are a mess all day long lately. I feel like you’re not taking care of the house, and I can’t do all of it for both of us.” I felt myself getting surprisingly and horribly upset for some reason.

“Sorry,” Natalie replied. “I figured that if I’m going to be cooking again in a few hours anyway, it doesn’t make sense to clean up and put everything away each time. I can work on changing that if you want.”

We had so much in common that after a while I started to feel smothered by our togetherness and found that I couldn’t stand it. When she first moved to town, I’d invited Natalie to most of the activities I was involved in,

or it felt that way. Then she took up an extremely cool-sounding dance form that I was dying to try out—but since she got involved with it first, I didn’t want to tag along. I told her I didn’t want to do everything together and she gave me more space, but now I was feeling jealous that she spent so much time with her new friends in the hip dance scene, which I felt weirdly competitive about.

Each of us had been raised as an only child, although this technically wasn’t the case since we both had siblings who were tragically missing from the home, for different reasons. Maybe this was what it was like to have a sister (and to behave like a five-year-old, in my case anyway).

Natalie and I had first forged our friendship in our late teens and early twenties. At the time, our three-year age difference was enough for me to perceive her as having a certain authority in our relationship, plus there was the fact that she was intensely worldly and sophisticated, even by the standards of the elite college where we met. You couldn’t tell that by looking at her, as she was a beautiful but sloppy hippie who didn’t always brush her hair or bother to fix rips in her clothes. But she’d grown up in one of the world’s fanciest enclaves, with President Reagan as her neighbor, and had visited every habitable continent by the time she was a teenager (which wasn’t a common pastime for other people before airline deregulation in the 1970s). Her wall hangings and statues of Hindu gods came from actual travels to hidden ashrams in India, and she kept a serious altar that didn’t fail to make an impression on visitors to our house. Natalie wasn’t flashy, but she was intense and could often be self-righteous about her political and spiritual beliefs. I felt a special closeness between us, admired her and was intimidated all at the same time, and that set the course of our friendship.

It only took a few months before I decided I wanted to move out from the apartment, and from what I perceived as being under Natalie’s shadow. There wasn’t time for much of a conversation about it, because I brought it up right before she was about to leave on a pilgrimage to India again for six weeks. I saw how overwhelmed she was by the stress of making international travel plans, figuring out scheduling, lodging, transportation as well as how much money to spend and which other people this was all going to affect. When



*A.J., continues on next page*

*A.J., continued from previous page*

she paused for a brief moment in the midst of her packing, I made my announcement.

“I probably won’t be living here when you get back,” I said.

“If that’s how you feel, I’ll understand,” Natalie said. “There are other ways to work out differences, though, than moving out.”

Miraculously, something reset itself in me during our six weeks apart. The pressure of spending every minute together lifted. Calling the ashram in India wasn’t really feasible, so we didn’t even talk on the phone. It felt like starting over when she got home. I hadn’t made a conscious effort to figure out how to behave better, but some part of me must have been willing to accept what she’d said before she left for the trip—that there was another way to work things out.

My relationships with Natalie and Eric had something in common: I loved each of them deeply, and at that time, they both had better communication skills than I did. Basking in the glow of their healthier emotional functioning allowed mine to take root and blossom, too. I was less tense by the time Natalie got back, and I let my guard down again with her. Creating some space in our friendship so that I didn’t feel smothered had been as simple as asking her for it. She got better at washing the dishes on a regular basis, even if they sometimes had bits of food still stuck on them and weren’t exactly sparkling.

And maybe the fact that I’d adopted her habit of crying freely at home, when it was needed, allowed me to get more comfortable with being vulnerable and allowed her to offer me compassion that I badly needed. Natalie had good enough emotional skills, but she was also kind of self-absorbed and hadn’t known what I needed at first. I didn’t have skills *or* know what I needed myself, but I started to develop some of them around her.

We sort of formed an alternative family unit, Natalie, Eric and I, although I wouldn’t have called it that. I started hearing about the idea of a chosen family, both from the New Age/self-help community which contrasted it with one’s “family of origin,” and from the queer community which seemed to view it as a good idea. The more I heard the phrase “chosen family” over the next several years, though, the more I hated it.

True: when I was in my simultaneous, close relationships with Natalie and Eric, there were moments that I felt ecstatic about our configuration. Instead of me eating frozen pizza from Store 24 alone on Christmas, the three of us would cook and laugh together, or I’d get taken to a beautiful restaurant by Eric’s closest relatives.

Natalie flew me as her guest to her father’s seventieth birthday party at a four-star hotel in San Juan. When I was between jobs and panicking one summer, she wrote me a check for three thousand dollars.

She remembered meeting my father only once a few years earlier, when he yelled at her for casually saying the word *shit* in front of him. Even decades later, her memory of that day was one of being “terrified” of him.

Well, I’d lived with him like that my entire life. When I talked

about my parents to her, I couldn’t express myself coherently. It was too painful to go into detail about how they’d called me ugly and a pervert, and to recall the screaming matches in which Daddy easily reduced me to tears, or the fact that Mom hadn’t been willing to look me in the eye for two and a half years after I cut my hair short. I told Natalie bits and pieces of the story in a way that I’m sure was barely intelligible.

Mostly she watched me cry.

“I’m sorry I didn’t sympathize before,” she finally said to me one evening. I was in the bathtub with the lights off, and she was curled up in a blanket on the floor while we talked. “I just couldn’t understand why someone wouldn’t want to talk to her parents while they were alive and it was still possible, considering that my own mother died without warning when I was seven.

“But I can understand now,” she continued.

“Thanks,” I mumbled and smiled weakly. It all just hurt so much.

\*\*\*

It hadn’t been my choice to be rejected by my family at seventeen, and to have to rely on non-blood relatives for many years. I didn’t see it as a positive thing. For me it was haphazard at first—even when I did have friends I could turn to for the purposes that one turns to family, it didn’t feel like I deliberately made these choices.

It took me a couple more decades to take the perspective that choosing one’s family could actually be a form of agency, and therefore a positive thing. What I’ve come to realize much later in life is that having a chosen family means you learn to distinguish who you can trust in life to meet your needs in a healthy way. This goes beyond being *willing* to turn to friends—it means developing the skills to be able to *identify* who’s trustworthy, especially if you didn’t learn those skills growing up.

Nowadays, I think about how I really want to pass along the knowledge to my young daughter of the important role friends-as-chosen-family can play. Especially since my family was fractured by estrangement for multiple generations, I won’t have much blood family to give her. I want her to know it’s okay to rely on friends, to allow people to provide emotional and other types of support. I want her to know that she has enough intelligence to identify who those trustworthy people are.

It’s one of the most important lessons I hope to teach her.

*A.J. Lowe is a writer at work on her second book, which this essay is excerpted from, and which addresses bisexual identity. She lives in Massachusetts, where she joined Boston Bisexual Women’s Network and first published articles in this publication over 20 years ago. She is a women’s healthcare worker and activist, a caretaker for her now-elderly mother, and an avid Latin dancer. She and her daughter still get together at Christmas with her friend Natalie, who lives with her own family in the southwestern U.S.*

# Choosing Love

By Jane Bailey

“They’re not your friends, you know.”

The sentence would have sounded right at home in the mouths of my middle-school tormenters: the thin, popular girls who told me I couldn’t sing with them in the talent show because I was neither. To hear them from a therapist, a professional whom I was told would help me, to whom I had just poured out my sixteen-year-old heart, was stunning.

One glimpse of the victorious look on my mother’s face snapped me out of it. “Are so,” I said. I knew talking back was dangerous. I didn’t care. They were my *friends*. They were the only good thing in my life some days: the people who sat up with me all night, telling me I wasn’t worthless, and that I deserved to live. The people who told me I didn’t deserve to get screamed at, thrown out of the house, abandoned. The people who first uttered the word “abuse” to describe the way I was treated.

“No, they’re strangers on the internet. A best friend is someone whose phone number you’ve memorized.”

I didn’t have a comeback for that, not yet. But that night, I asked each and every one of them for their numbers. By graduation, I had long since memorized them. *Take that*, I crowed in the privacy of my own mind. *Now we’re best friends*.

People who survived times of great scarcity, such as the Great Depression, change in ways we readily recognize. They become insecure about food; they become frugal, hating to waste anything, hoarding what they have against the time of hunger they know must be coming again. The same can be said for people who are deprived of love and acceptance: we become frightened of being alone, terrified that anyone who claims to love us will withdraw that love the way my mother always withheld hers.

That conversation, that therapist, had shown me a glimpse of my heart that I couldn’t forget. It showed me the depths of my feelings for these people I’d never met in person; it showed me



Jane and her chosen family

where my real loyalties lay. But it also opened a weakness, a direct line to my heart. They were, after all, from the internet. They were, in some sense, strangers. What if this were an elaborate con job? What if they didn’t love me at all?

I began to push at the boundaries, test the waters. I started joking about being the ‘little sister,’ playfully calling them “big brother” and “big sister” until it wasn’t a joke anymore. I made my intentions clear: I needed a family, one that wouldn’t abandon me or scream at me. One that loved me back.

As soon as I graduated, I bought myself a bus ticket across the country and moved in with my “big brother.” The relationship quickly turned sexual; I needed a safe harbor, and he promised to protect me while I healed. I began to piece together a life worth living, a life of my choosing.

The shadowy places in my heart remained. I became jealous, sure that as soon as he realized he could find someone prettier than me he’d leave me. I became anxious that as soon as he saw me as a real person and not some idealized version of myself he’d leave me.

But he didn’t. After several years, he made me a promise that he never would; we married, and I was sure I had now achieved the pinnacle of love.

As I entered the workforce, I began to hear the phrase “emotional affair.” As I examined my relationships, hunting for any sign that I was unfaithful, what I found was a hopeless mess: I loved people, opened myself to them and was loved by them in return, and I yet again didn’t have a good vocabulary to explain my actions. When I confessed my fears to my husband, he was unsurprised. Having loved me for so long, he already knew what my heart was like. Instead of leaving, he offered a suggestion: what if we opened our relationship? If we had agreements in place, if we spoke openly and honestly about our feelings for other people, surely that would be better than fighting to impose exclusivity and restricting the ways in which we could love?

Today, my family looks nothing like what I expected when I first left home. I have an immediate family: a stable triad, the three of us living and loving together as we move into this new world of polyamory. I have an extended family: my girlfriend, my husband’s girlfriend, our lover’s brother. I have in-laws: my husband’s parents, our lover’s parents. I am far from done with this journey I am on; every day I learn new things about love and relationships, about family and friendships. The path isn’t laid out for me, but maybe it never was.

That therapist hurt me that day, but his words were true nonetheless. Those people weren’t my friends. They were my chosen family, and I love them all.

*Jane is a self-published author of speculative fiction residing in Akron, Ohio. You can find her online at [www.janebaileybooks.com](http://www.janebaileybooks.com).*



# Breaking Up While Bi

By Elaine Schleiffer

When a relationship ends, many times the friends and family closest to the couple will reevaluate their relationship with each of the former partners. There are friends we may see less often after a breakup, or family members of our former partner who will never speak to us again. Even members of our chosen family may reevaluate what their relationship with us should look like. There is nothing unusual about this period of reevaluation, and it happens to people of all identities. As a person who identifies as bisexual, I have found that there are normal outcomes for breakups that can be more dangerous for bi folks, and that can make our social standing even more uncertain and unstable. A breakup can call into question our place in the community, our strongest social ties, and even our very identity.

Like many queer folks I know, my closest circle of confidants and supporters is my chosen family. Because the members of my chosen family were gained later in life, and by choice rather than by genetics, a social shakeup like a partnership ending might have a greater impact on them. And twice in my life, I've lost members of my chosen family in the aftermath of a breakup. These losses affect the very foundations of our lives. In losing those familial relationships, I have questioned my choices, my identity, and my very worth as a human. I am left to wonder: if I was a 0 or a 6 on the Kinsey scale, would I have suffered those losses in the first place?

After a breakup, it feels like the queer community is waiting to see what my next partnership will be. If I enter into a heteronormative partnership, then any previous queer relationships can be read as a "phase" and not as a real indicator of my own queer sexuality. If I enter into a new queer partnership, then it affirms my status as a member of the queer community—but why does my belonging to the queer community depend on my partnership status? Saying that I am queer should be enough.

Several years ago, when my first serious queer relationship ended, I felt the weight of that partnership ending particularly heavily. I didn't understand why, and it took me long months of processing, feeling, writing, and talking to dig myself out of that hole. A few months ago, I went through a similar breakup and found myself flailing for a sense of place in the queer community, and as a result, reached out to several folks I knew identified as queer but who I wasn't very close with. I was hoping to build new friendships to replace the old.

Luckily, one of those people understood exactly what I meant as I spoke about my sense of loss and loneliness. She is a community organizer and activist, and she let our conversation become the impetus for a new mission: building social spaces for the bi community. Together we envisioned a new social group, and we created an initial event to gather in person along with an online space. Her passion and leadership helped shape the new

Cleveland Bisexual Network, and our community-building events, Hi and Bi!

I feel fortunate that she was willing and able to take steps with me that would help us locate and build a new home for the bi community in Cleveland. I am also grateful to myself for stepping outside of my comfort zone to talk to people I otherwise might not have told what I was going through. We build our own communities, bi folks! And what we build is beautiful, diverse, powerful, and strong.

I encourage any bi person who feels alone, who feels ostracized, who feels like they've been kicked out of the queer community or their chosen family, to build their own network in any way that feels safe: because if I've learned anything, it's that other bi people immediately understand what you're going through. (And if you're in Cleveland, connect with me—our bi community is eager for your participation!)

*Elaine Schleiffer is a community-minded activist, reproductive rights advocate, and intersectional feminist. Her poetry can be found in publications like Cahoodaloodaling, Stylus, and Pudding Magazine, and her activism can be found in Cleveland, Ohio.*



# An Exploration Confession

By Hailey Forrester

I have a secret, maybe.

I have a confession, probably.

I have a love letter,  
Definitely.

Dear you,

You beautiful wonderful amazing person you,

I think I love you.

Which, I mean, is strange, cause you're a girl.

I mean, that isn't strange, like I promise I'm not judgmental of that sort of thing  
(This sort of thing?)

But I guess I am a little nervous

And THAT'S what's strange

Cause I've never had a problem confessing my love before.

In kindergarten I had it all planned out—I was going to marry Charlie and Clara was going to marry David and Shashonna was going to marry Dylan and we were all going to live right next to each other.

And then in elementary school and middle school I left packets of chocolate in their cubbies and love notes in their lockers, wrote them emails with "Love, me" at the end and bashfully held hands, and finally, in high school I even sneaked my first kiss.

And so in spite of all of my vast hormonal experience,

It was an embarrassing amount of time later before I even realized that some of the girls holding hands in the hallways were more than just "best friends."

So I have to wonder,

When I started noticing the curve of your smile, the curve of your lips

And the light in your eyes, and the way that you walk, and talk, and listen

And the warmth of your hug, a warmth I could sink into, breathe into, whisper into, turning my head just slightly to the right to position my lips right below your right ear...

(But I mean it's always been a really platonic hug, like three-second maximum hug, really nothing to it, only extended if I've had a really bad day),

Why no one told me liking girls was okay.

How come I never noticed how much I think about you?

When did my body and my mind and my heart reach this conclusion?

Was I just not listening to them until now?

Where are the words that I need to tell you how I feel?

And if all else fails,

What can I do to make you believe I had a bad day?



*Hailey Forrester aspires to make art and theater and launch her work out into the world. She has fallen in love with many men, a few women, and the Pacific Northwest.*

# Untitled

By Dove

the college girl asked me  
the shy college girl at the dutch reformed college  
the shy soft-voiced girl at the dutch reformed college with the conduct policy  
the dutch reformed college with the sexual conduct policy about one man and one woman  
the loving and supportive sexual conduct policy about one man and one woman  
the nervous blue-haired girl in the hallway of the loving and supportive dutch reformed college asked me

asked me the college professor  
asked me the visiting professor from the nazarene university  
asked me the visiting english professor from the conservative nazarene university  
the nazarene university with the lifestyle covenant and Title IX exemption  
the nazarene university with the covenant for righteous living as male and female  
the righteous nazarene university with the disciplinary clause in the faculty policy manual  
the untenured professor from the university with the disciplinary clause about sexual purity  
the professor without tenure from the university with the dismissal-for-cause provision about righteous living

the college girl asked me about the book I had written  
she asked me about the young adult novel I had written about the gay kid in church  
she asked me about the gay kid in church story I had written and the scene I had read  
the scene I had read at the dutch reformed college with the loving and supportive conduct policy  
she asked me about the story and told me about the pastor  
she told me about the pastor and her parents and the intervention in her living room  
she told me about the intervention in her living room and the anger of her father  
the anger and fear of her father at having a lesbian for a daughter  
the anger and fear of her dutch reformed father at his daughter the not-yet college girl

she told me about the intervention and the word lesbian she put in the mouth of her father  
the word she couldn't say in the mouth of her father  
she told me her story as the gay kid in church and there were words we couldn't say

the college girl asked me the untenured professor about the unpublished novel no one knew I had written  
she asked me about the novel and her question wasn't about the novel  
her question wasn't even a question but I answered it anyway

I said yes sister I wrote it for us

*Dove is a closeted bi woman currently teaching at a conservative Christian university, holding space and hope for the next generation of evangelicals.*

**If you live in or around Boston, please consider attending and/or hosting one of our brunches, which are held (sort of) monthly in members' homes.**

**We are trying to expand our geographic range a bit: last summer we hosted a brunch in NH (which we may do again), and we are planning an evening event in Providence, RI, around WaterFire for next summer.**

**The next two brunches will be on March 10 and May 12, and are listed in our calendar on p. 24.**

**You are welcome to reach out to Char ([avon.alger@gmail.com](mailto:avon.alger@gmail.com)) for more info about hosting or attending a brunch.**

# Loving Outside the Lines

By JMC

In 2004, I met a newly single father of two and fell instantly in love. By the time we started dating in 2009, his brood had grown to six (through a combination of births, reunifications, and stepparenting). I went from single and child-free to stepmom of six basically overnight, including having two of my stepsons move in with us within the first month of our relationship. My life, which had formerly consisted of drinking, promiscuity, and a few college classes, was suddenly filled with homework, carpool, and home-cooked meals.

I loved being a stepmom. It wasn't easy dealing with kids ranging from diapers to driving, or with three biological moms and varying schedules, but my bond with my stepkids made it all worth it. Unfortunately, my partner's struggle with addiction and my rampant codependency lead to the demise of our relationship after just three and a half years.

My biggest fear was that in losing my partner I would lose my kids as well. The thought devastated me. I viewed these kids as my own children and could not imagine living life without them.

Five years after our breakup, my fears have never come true. I spend every weekend with my youngest three stepkids, and see the older three, as well as my five-year-old granddaughter that my oldest stepdaughter blessed me with, several times a year. Every year around Christmas I make sure to get them all together for presents and a rare group photo. They are the most important people in my life and I would do anything for them. New people that I date have to be willing to accept my complicated chosen family in order to be with me.

I have known that I was bi since I was about 15, but had only come out to a select few friends over the years. My family didn't know, and I didn't plan to tell them unless it was absolutely necessary (like, if I got in a serious relationship with a woman). Then, the Pulse Orlando shooting happened. I felt a ton of different emotions—fear, anger, sadness, grief, and isolation. I felt that being in the closet was keeping me from getting the community and support I needed to cope with how I felt about what had happened (and what else might happen in the future). I decided to come out. Not just to my friends, but to everyone, including my brother, my parents, and all my stepkids.

The youngest two, ages seven and ten, had lots of questions. Had I ever kissed a girl? Dated one? How long had I been bi? Everyone was accepting and supportive. The following spring, they helped me make bi and pan pride flag magnets to give out at our local community Pride celebration. My youngest stepdaughter (now almost 12) started making me lots of presents featuring the bi pride flagpaintings, plastic flowers, and little notes.

This fall, she came out as bi to two of her brothers and me. We were the first family members she told—even before her mom.

I told her that I had kind of suspected as much based on how excited she was about me being bi, and she confided that me coming out to her was a big part of why she felt comfortable coming out to me. I told her how proud I am of her, and how I wish that I had understood my own orientation at such a young age, much less come out. Maybe if I'd had an out bi adult role model in my life at her age, I would have. I'm just glad I could be that person for her.

Our family doesn't follow any of the usual rules about how families are supposed to form or function. We're not all connected by blood, and I don't have any legal ties to my stepkids, either. We just love each other. The way I love them doesn't fit in a little box or conform to "normal", and neither does my sexuality. I love who I love regardless of their gender, and I view these kids as my family regardless of their unofficial relationship to me. I'm thankful that my unofficial role as stepmom gave a young queer kid the courage to come out. I hope I can continue to bring as much love, safety, support, and joy to her life as she and her siblings have brought to mine.

*JMC is a nonprofit development professional, activist, and stepmom emeritus who is biologically childfree by choice.*

## NEWS BRIEF Bi Flag Raising in Santa Clara County, CA

By Moria Merriweather



A U.S. flag, a rainbow flag, and a bi flag share the air in San José, CA

*Continued bottom of next page*

## We Chose Each Other



Here's a snapshot of some of my chosen family. We are gathered at a rental in Truro for a Women's Weekend many years ago, circa 2003. This was before the children were born, the diseases conquered, the emotional and financial upheaval, the loss of friends and family. The bonds of our love and commitment to each other were nurtured in our heyday and created the ballast to help us through the challenging times. We chose each other and built those connections around our shared experiences and values, trust, sense of humor, and the ability to see the goodness in one another. Several of us met through Boston bi community connections and that thread has kept us tightly bound to each other.

—Submitted by Ellyn Ruthstrom

*Continued from previous page*

Here are photos from the bisexual flag raising ceremony, which took place in front of the Santa Clara County Government Building at 70 W. Hedding Street in San Jose on the morning of September 21, 2017.

This was the first time the bi flag has been raised by Santa Clara County, California. There were three community speakers, including me (Moria), as well as government officials, who voiced words of understanding, support, community and inclusion.

I actually really enjoyed the hoisting of the flag—which I would not have anticipated—it was *super fun* to help hoist it up!

I spoke as a representative of the Bay Area Bi-sexual Network, and the highlight of my own talk, for me, was that people *clapped* during the part of my speech where I talked about the long history of bi leaders advocating for trans people, and bisexuality not excluding attraction to any particular gender or non-gender or any particular expression, etc.



Bi flag raising. Moria is third 3rd person from left

# Chosen Family and Radical Love in Black Lives Matter Co-Founder's Memoir

A book review by Katelynn Bishop

*When They Call You a Terrorist: A Black Lives Matter Memoir*, written by Patrisse Khan-Cullors and asha bandele, tells, with brutal and beautiful detail, the experiences that led Khan-Cullors to courageously assert that Black Lives Matter.

The book tells the truth about...

...growing up poor and Black at the height of the war on drugs, in a neighborhood terrorized by police and abandoned by wider society.

...daring to imagine a future for one's family and community in the face of the cruelty of a system that treats Black lives as disposable.

...being queer and creating bonds that provide sustenance and the strength to push through the daily realities of oppression.

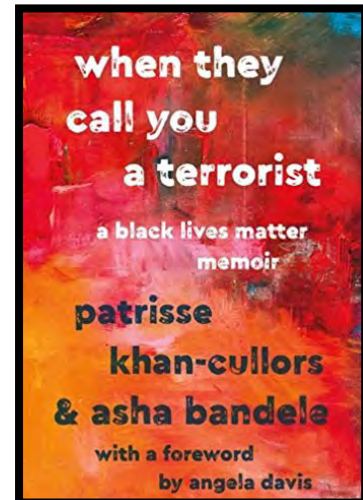
...both the injustices and hope that led the author to become a community organizer and to eventually co-found, with Alicia Garza and Opal Tometi, Black Lives Matter.

It is wrenching and full of radical love.

The theme of chosen family is threaded through the memoir, and it becomes clear that choosing to create and affirm familial bonds is an act of resistance and evidence of resilience.

Khan-Cullors found out as a teenager that Alton, the man she had always known as her father, was not her biological father. Though Alton knew this information all along, he chose not to share it with her, never wanting her to feel like their bond was anything less than authentic. Khan-Cullors' family only expanded when she met her biological father, Gabriel, who, along with his family, embraced her into his life. Throughout her life, she has surrounded herself with other chosen family, who have provided support in enduring and resisting systems of oppression. During her brother Monte's incarceration, her friends Rosa and Carla wrote letters to her brother, and when he was released, Carla drove her to pick him up. A community of chosen family formed a support system to care for Monte—who was diagnosed with schizoaffective disorder while in jail—following his release, to ensure that he did not end up back in the clutch of the criminal justice system.

Khan-Cullors came out as bi as a teenager (though she refers to her present identity throughout the book as queer). She describes finding herself surprised as she fell in love with Mark Anthony, the man who became her first husband, having never before having been drawn to a heterosexual and cisgender man. Their love transcends many types of boundaries. Khan-Cullors writes movingly about her commitment to non-monogamy, and her



efforts to rise above the divisive impacts of jealousy. Though her romantic relationship with Mark Anthony eventually unraveled, he was there to support her as she married a second time.

Alongside the beauty of the chosen family Khan-Cullors describes is the brutality of oppression. She writes about the pain of having multiple family members incarcerated and of family members suffering addiction and dying prematurely due to the stresses wrought by oppression. It was particularly devastating to learn about how incarceration exacerbated her brother's mental illness, and I came away from the book understanding more deeply how the injustices of the inaccessibility of health care combine with the horrors of the criminal justice system.

It was deeply moving to read about how these experiences gave rise to a loving and hopeful movement for change, and to a movement that centers the voices and experiences of Black women, and especially Black women who are queer and/or trans\*. This is a movement that persists, despite the fact that simply expressing love for their families and community, simply expressing that Black Lives Matter, leads some to label these activists as terrorists.

Khan-Cullors writes, "My community of friends, this chosen family of mine, loves in a way that sets an example for love. Their love as a triumph, as a breathing and alive testimony to what we mean when we say another world is possible" (99).

As a white person who has moved through the world with many privileges not afforded to Khan-Cullors and her loved ones, this book deepened my understanding and empathy as well as my resolve to contribute to bringing that world into being. In offering these reflections, I hope to encourage others to do the same.

*Katelynn Bishop recently earned a Ph.D. in Sociology, with an emphasis in Feminist Studies. Her academic writing focuses on how gender, sexuality, and other social categories impact embodied experience.*

# Reflections on the Creating Change Conference, Washington, D.C., January 25-29

By Amanda Lowe

Greetings from Oklahoma!

My name is Amanda, and I am a fat, femme, pansexual, poly-amorous queer womxn. I had the pleasure of joining more than 30 Oklahomans on a bus ride from Tulsa to D.C. to attend Creating Change 2018. We ranged in age from 12 to 75+ and came from all different intersections of our community. It was beautiful, y'all. I learned so much about myself and my community, and I am inspired to bring that back home to continue the resistance.

Being a bi+ person with a trans-masculine partner, we often get read as hetero. This is often a privilege in the state we live in, but within our community it can be limiting. For five days, that feeling of erasure was released, not only from myself, but from my partner, and our relationship. We had community, real community that saw us and embraced us for the magical queer beings we are. We are all so magical.

A few of my highlights from the trip included:

▼ Bi activist Eliot Sutler opening up the conference with a call for accountability and accessibility within the Creating Change conference. She called out erasure of communities of color from the conference and asked us to not just see who was in attendance, but who wasn't. She was so powerful and articulate. And that pant suit was beautiful.

▼ Snacks from the Bi+ Hospitality Suites (a space provided by the conference and staffed with local volunteers for bi+ folks to gather).

▼ That Southerners on New Ground (SONG) dance party was a spiritual experience! It was so full of freedom and hope.

▼ Queer Advocacy at the Capitol—a lobbying day—was empowering for us here in Oklahoma. While our legislators weren't interested in meeting with us, leaving their staff to do so in most cases, we were able to use our voices and stories to maybe rock the foundation of some of those working in their offices. At least, we hope so.

If you haven't been to Creating Change, I encourage you to attend. It will fill your heart with hope, giving you fuel to go back and speak up. You will meet lifelong friends there, cry there, and (if you want to) hook up there. You will be challenged in areas in which you didn't know you needed to be challenged. You will see the most beautiful, vibrant people. Just do it. Got ideas? Apply to lead sessions! We need more Bi+ folks taking the lead. This is our time.

In case you needed more convincing, here is what my friend Haley Myers-Brannon had to say about the conference:

As a bi+ woman living in Oklahoma and facilitating a group for other bi+ identified folks, I came to Creating Change with a hunger to learn everything I could to bring back to those in my group who were unable to attend. I came with a slight nervousness that, like in many LGBTQ+ spaces, I would not see my identity represented as a valued part of the community. Not only was that NOT the case, but I was actually met with an emphasis on inclusion of the intersectionality of bi+ identities with other identities that members within our community hold! I was encouraged, challenged, called in, and supplied with an expanding toolkit that helps me and the group I facilitate to cultivate a space that is inclusive for people to feel safe and brave, and to bring their many intersecting identities to the table without fear that there won't be space for their full selves. This experience was transformative and I can't wait to continue these conversations throughout the year.

If you are in the Tulsa area and need community, find us at Oklahomans for Equality ([okeq.org](http://okeq.org)). For more about the Creating Change Conference, visit [www.creatingchange.org](http://www.creatingchange.org).

*Amanda Lowe is on the Board of Advisors of Oklahomans for Equality and is a historian, activist, and queer doula.*



Saturday evening in the Bi+ Hospitality Suite

said that I should do what I wanted and that she didn't want to get involved in what was happening with me. Applying as a solitary asylum seeker was possibly one of the loneliest moments I've ever felt.

Fast forward to three years later, I had to get out of New York. I had two choices—move to Boston or to San Francisco. When I asked Robyn Ochs (my bi mom) to help me decide, she said, "If you move here, you will already have support; if you move there, you won't." That night I decided to move to where I would be supported. Moving to Boston was the right decision, because here I have found people who are safe for me and I have developed intimate friendships with them.

The closest thing I can compare my current family to, the model that I've learned from, is the hijra community in India. Hijra communities have family structures and exist as safe havens, because hijras are often outcasts and are almost always ostracized from their birth families. My little family structure is my safe haven.

What makes our little family distinct is that we have learned to recognize how privilege and power dynamics can show up in our relationships. We understand that consent is vital to our safety and directly impacts our ability to thrive. We listen to each other, and help each other process and identify what our feelings are rooted in.

Our family consists of three of us—Nermeen, Ayana, and me. I choose not to call us "chosen" family because I believe that I was destined to find these humans and build a family together—that we were destined for each other, to be able to heal and grow together, as survivors, and as individuals.

Nermeen, our middle sibling, says that the relationships we have with each other are reflective of what it's like in Egypt—where we can be comfortably affectionate with each other. She also says that it feels good to be able to have access to each other when we need or want to share space with someone safe, and that we can also ask for space from each other without worrying that the other will take offense. One thing she said that resonated with me was that we trust each other to show up for one another because we want to, without fear of being taken advantage of. We understand that the reason we feel safe enough to ask the other to show up for us, or even want to show up for each other is because we trust, love, and care for each other—our take on TLC.

Ayana, our youngest and wisest sibling, recognizes that each of us comes from siloed backgrounds and has managed to create a place

into which we can come with our whole true selves, understanding that none of us are perfect but are trying our best. Our family has become the space within which we can make mistakes, work on learning and creating our boundaries, and figure out what we want and need in relationships. This is a space for us to learn what our growth points are, identify our strengths, and bring those strengths into our relationships so that we can learn from each other and teach each other. At the end of the day our experiences are so different from each other, and each of our lived experiences holds immense value.

Ayana says, and Nermeen and I concur, that our family is a space for us to grow and that should we exhibit harmful behavior, we trust each other to be affirming and receptive to being called in—even if we are not always in agreement. They say that there's also the space within this family to call each other 'out' because our relationships do not exist to silence each other's anger, but to see it and validate it. It is the one place that we enter simultaneously vulnerable and empowered to express our own insecurities with each other, and to see each other's insecurities and areas of growth, even when we don't or can't ourselves.

The one thing on which we all vehemently agree is that with each other we have found the space to be able to talk about the loss of birth family, to relearn what it means to hold relationships where we're not afraid of losing each other, and to trust that this is a mutually consensual relationship that we all equally and actively want.

Safe spaces aren't guaranteed, but the one constant that I have been able to count on with my family is that we want to be safe for each other and intentionally do the work to create that space for ourselves.

Looking back, I see how far I've come from being my loneliest to having people I can call my own, and I am finally able to love freely, ferociously, and unconditionally without the fear of love and belonging not being reciprocated.

Author's note: Asylum is the protection granted by a nation to a person fleeing their native country because it is no longer safe for them to continue living there.

*This piece was written by Apphia K. with their siblings Nermeen & Ayana. A warrior, survivor, and the relentless voice in the room reminding it to be affirming and inclusive, Apphia aims to empower a generation for change.*

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



*Theresa, continued from page 1*

or legally.

We've thought about a civil union. Unfortunately, it really is just a dumbed down version of marriage, because if you're in a civil union with someone, you can't marry someone else.

We've thought about adopting each other—but it doesn't offer us the same protections as something like marriage would.

And we could get married...

...but both of us feel strangely about the connotations of doing that.

Ainsley is as important to me as any romantic lover—but we aren't romantic. Perhaps it's society's romantic connotations for marriage that keep us away from the idea of being married.

Perhaps we should just get over them and get married anyway so we can keep each other safe.

But if we do, we may face even more prejudice for not being romantic or sexual—and we already face plenty of that, me for identifying as bisexual, her for identifying as asexual. For example, if we were married, this is the sort of question I would expect to hear on a fairly consistent basis: "Why don't you want to kiss her? Isn't she your wife?"

Ainsley and I have done a lot of things to stay together, including sharing a very small one-bedroom living space outside of college. When my aunt heard about it, she assumed that Ainsley and I were romantic and sexual, and told my cousins about my new "relationship." You can imagine how awkward that became at Thanksgiving that year. My cousins heard me out and seemed to understand. On the other hand, I'm sure my aunt still doesn't get it. To her it's baffling that Ainsley and I would behave the way we do with each other if we're not romantic and sexual.

She's not the only one, though.

Ainsley and I play this game whenever we're getting to know new people. It's the "how long will it take them to ask if we're a couple?" game.

Ainsley and I behave "like a couple." We use pet names for each other, we're often within touching distance of one another, and we anticipate the other one's needs. Our level of synchronicity is culturally reserved for those in a romantic relationship—and so we sit back and mirthfully wait for the new acquaintance to ask "the question."

Once the question is asked, that's our opening to explain the situation.

Most people come to understand our "platonic life partner" bond fairly easily.

Some have more difficulty than others.



My friend, Valarie (not her real name), is a fairly old-fashioned gal. She means well, but she sometimes has difficulty thinking about things outside her own experiences.

When told of Ainsley's sexuality, she said, "How does she know she doesn't like sex if she hasn't tried it?"—completely missing the point that an asexual person simply doesn't experience sexual attraction. While it's my understanding that there are asexual people out there who do have and can enjoy sex even without experiencing sexual attraction to others, Ainsley is not one of them.

Valarie has also said such gems as, "Well, if you're going to act like lovers, it's just sad you can't be lovers," and, "It'd be so much easier for both of you if you were just sleeping with each other..."

Valarie's ideal future involves a partner with whom she can be both romantic and sexual.

Mine...honestly doesn't.

Ainsley is my person. She's my family. Anyone else that I would want to bring into my life would have to understand that before coming into it. Because Ainsley isn't just some substitute for a romantic and sexual lover. She's something that society never told me about in story books. She's my best friend and my partner—even if she's not my girlfriend.

She and I are in this together, and that makes me feel safe.

Life is better with her in it.

*Theresa Tyree is a freelance writer and book publishing professional. Find out more about her favorite stories on her blog at*

# Research Corner

This column is under the capable supervision of Renate Baumgartner and Soudeh Rad. Renate Baumgartner is currently researching bisexual women and their experiences of discrimination in Vienna, Austria. She holds a Ph.D. in natural sciences, is a bi+ activist, and offers workshops for bisexual empowerment. Soudeh Rad is an Iranian gender-equality activist based in France and cofounder of [Dojensgara.org](http://Dojensgara.org), a website about bisexuality in Persian. Some columns will be written by Renate, some by Soudeh – and some by both. If there is research on bisexuality that you would like them to be aware of, please write to them [c/o biwomeneditor@gmail.com](mailto:biwomeneditor@gmail.com).

## Being Bi: Italy's First Research on Bisexual Health

By Soudeh Rad

In March 2017, the first survey on Italian bisexual people's health awareness was launched by the newly-founded national organization, [Mondo Bisex](http://MondoBisex.com). Initial findings were released last September during Bi Visibility Month celebrations.

Mondo Bisex, themselves bi activists with various LGBT+ identities, sought to find out how people with diverse identities under the bisexual umbrella experience coming out, discrimination, and health conditions, using a hybrid and multidisciplinary approach.

The survey's 48 questions were grouped into five sections: identity and relationships, sexual-affective awareness, interactions with LGBT+ communities, socio-demographic data, and sexual and mental health.

Mondo Bisex's goal for the pilot research was to "inform, sensitize, educate, and collect the first data on bisexual health awareness." They recruited more than 650 respondents by simply sharing an online survey in various social media groups and spaces.

Two psychologists with expertise in psychometrics donated their time to analyze the results, and found relevant data regarding bi coming out, discrimination against bisexuals in LGBT+ communities, suicidal ideation, and much more.

Mondo Bisex plans to conduct further analyses as they receive funding for the research project.

### Respondents

There were 627 respondents. 71% of the respondents were women, and 84% were under the age of 40.

### Coming Out

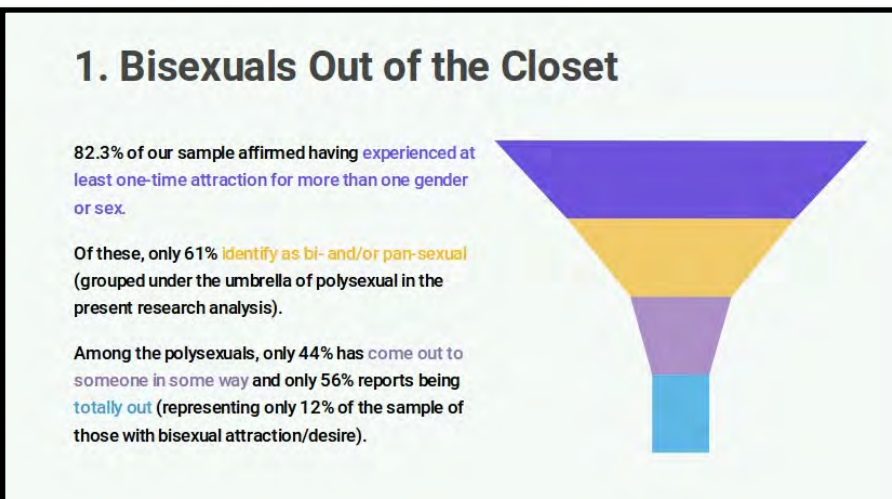
82.3% of the respondents affirm having experienced attraction for more than one gender or sex at least once. Among these, only 61% claimed an identity under the bisexual umbrella, grouped and termed as "polysexual" for this study. Among self-identified polysexuals, only 44% had come out to anyone, and only 56% reported being completely out. Therefore, only 12% of the overall sample who indicated attraction for more than one gender was completely out.

### Discrimination Against Bisexuals in LGBT+ Communities

Among polysexuals who indicated that they had participated in LGBT+ events and activities, almost half declared they had experienced some sort of erasure, discrimination, derision, and/or stigmatization at these events. Approximately 40% of respondents had never heard of an event dedicated to bisexuality.

### Discrimination While Out as Bi

91% of people out as bi or pan indicated they have been judged because of their sexual orientation. Almost 20% indicated that they had experienced threats, property damage, or physical violence because of their orientation.



You can read a full report of the initial findings (in Italian) from Mondo Bisex's study here: <https://infogram.com/f7673d90-b105-4449-8018-76ef23b6202b>. Thanks to Vera Di Santo from Mondo Bisex for working with us on this report, and for sharing her infographic.

## Advice From A. Rose Bi

An avid BWQ reader herself, A. Rose Bi proudly identifies as a bisexual woman. She currently lives in New England with her cat who loves to sleep on her lap while she spends most of her time watching TV and playing videogames. In addition to being an out bi woman, A. has a degree in Cognitive Science, has completed trainings for LGBTQ+ and sexual assault survivor advocacy, and has experience answering calls for an anonymous LGBTQ+ help line. She is passionate about feminism, the bi+ community, LGBTQ+ and female representation in the media, and helping others.



A. Rose Bi's column relies on questions from readers like you! You can send any questions you may have or suspect other readers may have to the author directly at [askbwq@gmail.com](mailto:askbwq@gmail.com) or by posting on the Bi Women's Quarterly's facebook group. All questions are anonymous, nothing is off-limits, and anything related to upcoming issue topics is extra-encouraged!

"Dear A. Rose Bi,

I moved away from my hometown a few years ago and I've always gone home for the holidays. But recently, whenever I go home, it's been more stressful than relaxing. As the only queer person in my family, it's tough to feel like I can completely be myself. Don't get me wrong, I've come out to my family and they're very accepting, but it's not something they seem eager to talk about or maybe don't know how to talk about? My sister said she thinks it's because our other siblings and our parents are worried about saying the wrong thing.

How do I help my family become more comfortable with who I am?

Thanks,

"Home for the Holidays"

Dear Home for the Holidays,

What you're going through is a very relatable experience for a lot of people who grow up and move away from their families, but it's an especially universal experience for those of us who are queer. I'm going to steal a quote from Gaby Dunn's Instagram about going back home: "You're dealing with a bunch of different personalities all thrown together and the only tie is blood and maybe some shared experiences—good and bad."

But I know that hearing that other people experience the same thing doesn't necessarily help. You have a few options. (1) You could try talking to your family about how isolated this makes you feel. Educate them, let them know that you understand they're learning and will sometimes put their foot in their mouth, but that it's important to you that they try. (2) If you have queer friends, leverage them. Hang out with them, text them, or call them when being with your family feels suffocating. Self-care—especially with family and *especially* during the holidays—is so important. Don't feel bad about needing time for yourself to feel sane and happy. (3) Consider limiting the amount of time you spend at home. Instead of going home for a long period of time at the holidays when things are stressful, maybe go home a few weekends throughout the year when you'll have time to talk and spend time together. And this way, you might get more quality time with your family, which it sounds like they would appreciate.

No matter what, remember that it's okay to make decisions for your own mental health, well-being, and happiness. Families and holidays can often make us feel guilty about not doing what our parents want or what we feel we *should* be doing. I want to remind you that *you* are important, and you're allowed to put yourself first.

A. Rose Bi.

P.S. If you're unfamiliar with Gaby Dunn, she is an out bisexual poly comedian—you can find her on Instagram at [@gabyroad](https://www.instagram.com/gabyroad).

---

## NEWS BRIEF

### Georgia State Rep. Renita Shannon Comes Out as Bi!

"I am not only a consistent advocate for LGBTQ issues, I am a member of the LGBTQ community. I am a bisexual black woman." GA state Rep. Renitta Shannon came out in Oct, bringing the number of out bi elected officials to 13 (plus a few others who identify with other non-binary sexualities, such as pansexual). Read more at: <https://thegavoice.com/georgia-state-rep-renitta-shannon-coming-amplifying-bisexual-voices>.



## The "Bi Office"

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

### Ongoing Events

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

#### 2nd Wednesdays:

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

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

#### 1st Wednesdays:

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

#### 2nd Thursdays:

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

#### 3rd Saturdays:

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

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



# CALENDAR

## March

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

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

**10 (Saturday) 12-3pm, Bi Women's Brunch at Beth's in Belmont.** Bring a potluck brunch item to share. This is a great way to meet other bi and bi-friendly women in the area! Pets in home. Info/RSVP: bethinnis@gmail.com.

**11 (Sunday) 2-4pm, Tea with Bisexual Women Partnered with Men (BWPM).** A peer-led support meetup. We will discuss a wide range of issues related to attraction, sexuality, and gender in a supportive safe space for trans and cis women and non-binary folks of all races and ethnic backgrounds. Info/RSVP: <https://www.meetup.com/Bi-Community-Activities/events/243190616/>.

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

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

## April

**4 (Wednesday) 7-9pm, Bisexual Social and Support Group (BLiSS).** (See March 7th)

**9 (Monday) 7-9pm, Straight Marriage, Still Questioning.** (See March 12th)

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

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

## May

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

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

**12 (Saturday) 12-3pm, Bi Women's Brunch at Robyn's in Jamaica Plain.** Bring a potluck brunch item to share. This is a great way to meet other bi and bi-friendly women in the area! Cats in home. Info/RSVP: robyn@robynocho.com.

**13 (Sunday) 2-4pm, Tea with Bisexual Women Partnered with Men (BWPM).** See March 11.

**14 (Monday) 7-9pm, Straight Marriage, Still Questioning.** (See March 12th)

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



Comic by WhyNotBothCo