

## Worth It

By Hannah Johnson

I had always been an anxious person, and by the time I started high school I was also depressed. When I was fourteen, my mother was diagnosed with late-stage cancer. I was told by a few of my peers that my mom was sick because I was bisexual, that God had made her sick to punish me. I'd like to think that I never believed that, but regardless, it was scarring to hear other people tell me that something so traumatic was my fault. Later that year I was diagnosed with clinical depression, generalized anxiety disorder and panic disorder.

I don't think my depression was directly related to my sexual orientation. Even on my worst days, I was secure in my identity as a bisexual girl, and I knew that my feelings for my then-girlfriend weren't wrong. However, I lived with the lingering fear of being rejected by friends and peers. This created distance between me and the people around me and made it increasingly hard to ask for help.

My anxiety and depression became more than I could handle, and when I went through a difficult breakup a year later, I became suicidal. I lost over twenty pounds in less than a month, couldn't sleep and was having up to five panic attacks each day. My waking hours were spent crying and shaking uncontrollably, dreading the next attack.

I sincerely believed that life was not worth living, not like that. Halfway through my junior year of high school, I decided I was going to kill myself.

A girl in one of my classes noticed that I was behaving differently, that I was extremely withdrawn and unresponsive. One day she asked me if I was feeling suicidal, and I told her the truth. She sat with me for an hour and told me that what I was feeling was valid and real, but that I shouldn't end my life. When I asked her why, she said, "Because you're important. We're all more important than we know." She told me that even if I didn't believe it right then, it was possible for me to feel better, and that my life was valuable to her. She made me promise that I wouldn't kill myself that night, and with her encouragement I was able to get help. She made me believe that I was worth getting help.

I am deeply concerned about the results of studies showing that bisexuals are at a higher risk for depression, anxiety and suicide. These disparities are a tragic consequence of living in a judgmental, heteronormative society, and at times circumstances seem so dire that as a community, we don't know where to start. In a perfect world, there would be no biphobia, and I hope that if I don't live to see that day, future generations will. But for the time being, I think we have a powerful tool for fighting our way through depression, anxiety and suicidal thoughts: each other.

Hannah, continues on page 14

## Split Down the Middle

By Mariah Cruz

Sometimes I feel like my head might explode or my body might split open, no longer able to contain the two separate people that live within its confines, like a scene from the movie *Alien*. One person is a straightish woman who finds balance in relationships with men. The other is a mostly gay woman who craves sexual relationships with other women. Both live inside of me and both are at odds with each other, fighting to get the upper hand. It's an ongoing battle and I don't know who will win.

I don't want to live in a war zone anymore.

How do I deal with something like this? My own mind and heart are so sporadic and unpredictable. I don't trust myself half the time because I don't understand how I can love my partner so much one second and then turn to liquid when I catch the eye of an attractive woman. I thought being bisexual meant that I had a choice. With 0 signifying exclusive heterosexuality and 6 signifying exclusive homosexuality, I'm a 3 on the Kinsey scale. I could go either way. I've been in love with a woman before. I'm in a committed relationship with a man. I should have this down by now.

Mariah, continues on page 14



Awesome sign at Los Angeles Pride

## HONOR ROLL

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## STAFF

### Editor

Robyn Ochs

### Assistant Editor

Catherine Rock

### News Editor

Robyn Ochs

### Calendar Editor

Kate Estrop

### Proofreaders

Ellyn Ruthstrom  
Erin Pederson  
Katelynn Bishop  
Vanessa Febbre

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**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)**

## From Your Editor

The theme of this issue of *Bi Women* is “Mental Health.” Recent research shows that women who identify as bi engage in risk behaviors at a higher rate and have poorer health outcomes than do heterosexuals or even – on some indices – lesbians. What’s going on here?

In these pages, Hannah Johnson, Mariah Cruz, Julie Morgenlender, Jane Barnes and Marcia Diehl share their personal stories around mental health. Harrie Farrow approaches things from a different angle, strategizing *solutions* for the mental health challenges faced by bi women.

Austin Bay of the GLBTQ Domestic Violence Project discusses domestic violence within bi communities. And there are two interviews: I speak with Los Angeles-based psychologist and bi activist Mimi Hoang about her research about bisexuality, strategies for finding a bi-affirming therapist, and more. And Petra Magno tells her personal story of growing up bi in the Philippines.

Laura Berol reviews *My Education* by Susan Choi. There’s also Ask Tiggy, News Briefs, Reader Feedback and a rich calendar of events.

And finally, the Bisexual Resource Center (BRC) is hosting its first ever Bisexual Health Awareness Month in March, so this issue is – coincidentally – well-timed. You can find more about this at [www.biresource.net](http://www.biresource.net).

I hope you enjoy this issue.

*Robyn*

**Ari reads  
*Bi Women*.  
Send us a  
picture of  
YOU reading  
*Bi Women*.  
Be creative!**



## Next in

### *Bi Women Quarterly*

The theme for the next issue:

### Intersection: Age

We don’t exist in a vacuum. Age is one of the intersections of identity that shapes how we experience our sexual orientations. Let’s have an intergenerational dialogue. Write a letter to women who are significantly older or younger than you. What do you want them know about what it’s like to be you? What impact does your age have on how you experience your sexual orientation?

We want to hear from you. Essays, poems, artwork and short stories are welcome.

**Submissions for the next issue must be received by May 1st. Submission guidelines are at:**

<http://biwomenboston.org/newsletter/submission-guidelines/>

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

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

***Bi Women* is online at [biwomenboston.org](http://biwomenboston.org).**

BBWN is an all-volunteer organization. Want to host one of our monthly brunches, be the woman who coordinates the brunches, 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. It is meant to be a safe environment in which women of all sexual self-identities, class backgrounds, racial, ethnic and religious groups, ages, abilities and disabilities are welcome. Through the vehicles of discussion, support, education, outreach, political action and social groups related to bisexuality, we are committed to the goals of full acceptance as bisexuals within the gay and lesbian community, and to full acceptance of bisexuality and the liberation of all gay and transgender people within the larger society.

# Around the World: PETRA MAGNO, *Philippines*

Interview by Robyn Ochs

## ***Petra, please tell us about yourself.***

I'm Petra Magno, in my early twenties, fully Filipino in lineage but American on paper because I was born in Guam. I was raised in Metro Manila, and graduated a couple of years ago from the Ateneo de Manila with a major in Literature and a minor in Philosophy. I was originally primed to become a doctor, but I have always wanted to write, and a life spent scribbling poems on prescription pads didn't appeal to me at all. After graduation, I worked at Ace Saatchi & Saatchi as a copy-based creative for two years, and then went freelance to accommodate writing gigs for glossies. I love people: I love meeting new characters, picking their minds, re-telling their stories, and chasing their thoughts into unexpected places. Since I've had more time on my hands, I've been working on collaborations with creative folk in my city, as well as little digital projects like Missed Connections Manila, Usapang Bastos (Dirty Talk), The Quick And The Dirty, and my own poem-a-day project, Soft Floors.

## ***How did you come to identify as bi? How old were you? How did you know? Who did you tell? What happened?***

I figured it out while in high school, that tempestuous arena of feelings and fears. I was a new freshman in a Catholic all-girls high school, attracted to a very pretty senior that I was never brave enough to approach, yet I was also crushing on boys from the high school next door, awkward handsomeness I'd only glimpse during mixers. I chalked it up to misplaced hormones until I fell head over heels for a girl in another class. This time I was sure about the feeling, but unsure about how to approach it. We'd write each other cautiously affectionate letters, which probably helped hone my current confessional tone.

It's curious, but I don't think I ever told anyone back then that I was bi, at least not anyone I knew personally. I kept a Livejournal which had a privacy setting that only contained people from other countries, people I figured I'd never run into – Australia, America, Canada – and I would write to them every day after coming home from school: bad poetry and enormous declarations about the girl I loved, all the wistful wanting that had nowhere to go. In this way, I got to keep a secret without ever being silent.

Of course the secret is out now, and those far away Livejournal friends are now Facebook friends, some of whom I've met in person, but that was the fraught and golden time when I figured myself out as I figured out what it was that I



was meant to be doing: writing about my desire was the first and best practice I had.

## ***You went to a Catholic all-girls school. Were you raised Catholic? If so, what impact did this have on your coming out? Did it make it harder or easier? In what way(s)?***

Like most Filipinos, I was raised Catholic: First Communion, Sunday Mass, the nine First Fridays, novenas, highly religious mother, the works. I spent a year in a strict Opus Dei school that confiscated a binder of mine in which I kept some writing with latent gay themes. They never returned it, but they never mentioned it either. I remember living in fear for the rest of that year.

My mother has an MA in Theology and Family Counseling, which I thought would make it easier for her to understand me if I ever officially announced my bisexuality, but I don't think she has come to terms with it yet. I've mentioned my attraction to girls, and have brought home

a girlfriend or two the way I've brought home a boyfriend or two, but she's dismissive of the former even as she acknowledges the latter. I do think this has more to do with her religious upbringing than mine, as I've never experienced a conflict between my faith and my love. I'm lucky in that way, as I have had friends who have had a much harder time coming out to both themselves and their families on account of their religions, whether they're Catholic or of a more conservative order.

## ***What can you tell us about the experience of being bisexual – or more generally LGBT – in the Philippines, and specifically in the part of the country in which you live?***

LGBT activity in the Philippines is a curious thing. On one hand, there is widespread acceptance and applause for the gay community insofar as they provide entertainment in popular media. *My Husband's Lover* is a recent television show portraying a married man having an affair with another man; it's getting excellent ratings and buzz. Local comedy clubs are often run by phalanxes of gay men, and the humor is of the brilliant and biting variety, zingers directed at popular culture, politicians, or audience members. Celebrity coming-outs are treated as spectacles. I think of Charice Pempengco, a young pop singer once featured on *Ellen*, who recently came out and changed her

Petra, continues on next page



Petra, continued from previous page

image accordingly – chopped and dyed her hair – and was then billed in a duo concert with Aiza Seguerra, another openly lesbian pop singer and a former Little Miss Philippines. The concert, if I remember correctly, was called “The Power of Two.”

I say Charice changed her image “accordingly” because Filipinos seem to have a set idea of what a lesbian looks like. Gay men are given more leeway in terms of their images, probably because of metrosexual culture, but gay women are often stereotyped as characters with cropped hair, bare faces, and oversized polo shirts. The more feminine a lesbian looks, the more resistance she might meet. I have heard doting aunts and mothers describe their femme daughters as “*sayang*” or “a waste [of beauty].”

This, like many other things in the Philippines, can be traced back to class issues and media portrayals. The class divide in the Philippines is something that is very deeply felt: the rich and the poor live in entirely different areas within the cities, and consume very different media. The middle class, or maybe just the social circles I am in, seems to be the most open-minded about how LGBT people – or people in general, for that matter – arrive in a multitude of forms, and I daresay the upper classes are more conservative, probably connected to religion and a maintenance of upper-class propriety.

I rarely spend much time outside the capital, where this divide can be observed, so I can’t speak for LGBT acceptance in the provinces, but what I know is this: the stereotypes that gay men and women bear – gay men run beauty parlors, gay women are all butch – are pervasive in media, and are sometimes yet another hurdle to leap in the process of coming out and living a life.

Bisexuals, however, are not as acknowledged as gays. They have little to no presence in media, and – I speak now from personal experience – are often understood to be people who simply can’t make up their mind.

**What words are used to describe lesbian, gay, bi or non-heterosexual people in the Philippines? Are these words equivalent to their English counterparts, or do they have a different meaning?**

There is an entire list of words for gay men, ranging from casual to derogatory – *bakla* and *bading* are the most common – and the male gay culture itself has its own highly dynamic and fantastic vocabulary known as *swardspeak*. *Swardspeak* coins terms and verbal play that find their way into general Filipino slang, which, I think, nods to the gay man’s presence in Philippine popular culture. Lesbians, no matter how feminine, are accorded the terms *tibo* or *t-bird*, which are traced back to *tomboy*, which I personally find problematic because the root word is still, after all, male. Furthering my



point on the lack of acknowledgement of bisexuals in Philippine culture: there is no Filipino word for bisexual.

**You have written about your bisexuality in the Philippine media. What made you decide to speak out? What sort of response have you received?**

My essay “Bi The Way” was written upon the request of a youth-targeted weekly publication: *Young Star Philippines*. They were working on an LGBT-themed issue, and reached out to me – along with a few other writers – to take on personal topics. It wasn’t a conscious decision to come out or speak out on behalf of anybody other

than myself, but the gravity of being published as a bisexual hit me thrice: when my then-boyfriend tossed me my article and said, “You’ve come out in a national broadsheet,” when my mother casually mentioned that she didn’t read the essay despite it being shared by her enterprising friends on her Facebook Wall, and when the editor forwarded to me an email containing a ridiculously long and quote-heavy diatribe-cum-gospel from a rabidly Catholic reader.

Out of all of these, my mother’s silence stung the hardest. She has always been very proud of my writing and makes it a point to buy magazines in which I write about other people; why then did she refuse to read about me?

**Do you have contact with bi activists in other countries? Do you see a value in transnational activism?**

Funnily enough, I don’t see myself as an activist, nor am I very participatory in LGBT activism in the Philippines. I don’t join rallies nor do I spearhead events. What I do is write and speak and meet people, and if it moves people to action or changes minds for the better, I’d have done what I can in the best way I can.

Transnational activism is a tricky thing in the Philippines, a country with a long history of colonialism and, consequently, heaps of post-colonial issues. Filipino pride doesn’t take too well to foreign voices commenting on local culture, and when healthy transnational collaborations kick up noise or step on toes, these often get mistaken as interventions and are rebuffed. There is definitely value in transnational activism; welcoming it is a whole ‘nother issue.

**What are your hopes for the future?**

Oh, so much. To begin: the implementation of reproductive rights. Coming up with a Filipino word for bisexuality. The legalization of same-sex marriage. More accurate and multi-faceted portrayals of the LGBT in popular media. Also on my wish list would be open-mindedness about sexuality in general: the possibility of polyamory, open relationships, and all-around healthier discourse on gender.

[Photo credit, previous page: Joey Alvero]

# The Things They Don't See

By Julie Morgenlender

The thing about invisibility is, you can choose, if you want, to “pass.” If you “pass,” then you face less discrimination in specific areas, like at job interviews or just in the world in general. But then, if you “pass,” you get mistaken for the majority. You don't get the protections you otherwise would. You have to choose when or if to disclose, and you don't know what kind of prejudice you'll face if you do disclose. And visible or invisible, you still have to deal with society's misconceptions and misperceptions. Some of the laws that should apply to you, don't. Or the laws do apply, but people argue that you don't really need those protections. The majority just doesn't understand. And even the majority within your minority doesn't understand what your sub-minority is dealing with.

I listened to this conversation and smiled to myself. I was sitting in my monthly chronic pain support group, listening to the exact same conversation that I often hear amongst my bi friends. I explained the similarities to the group and they were shocked. It had never occurred to them that the bi community faces so many of the same issues.

A few months later, I was at a BBWN brunch when I heard this same conversation. The vocabulary was different, but the feelings and difficulties were the same. Again, I tried to explain the overlap. Again, they were surprised. It had never occurred to some of the women there that people with chronic pain and autoimmune conditions face similar issues.

I've had people tell me they wouldn't date someone bi. I've also heard people say they wouldn't date someone with a chronic illness. I've been told my pain isn't real, that it's all in my head. I've been told bisexuality isn't real. I've been told I don't look sick. I've been told I don't look bi. I've gotten nasty looks for parking in a handicapped parking space while appearing “healthy.” Need I tell you about the looks I've gotten for kissing a woman in public or holding her hand as we walk down the street?

I hear the same stories from friends, those who are bi and those who have physical or mental health issues that aren't immediately visible. Because something is invisible, many assume that it doesn't exist, or that it's a choice. We all know that neither is true. We definitely exist, and sexual orientation and health problems are definitely not choices!

The difficulties are so similar, and so are my responses.

I am who I am. I will not apologize for who I am. I will not try to justify who I am. When people have questions, I answer them honestly and directly, even though my response often makes them cringe. If you don't want to know my health symptoms, then you'd better not ask, because I will tell you. If you ask about my coming out, I'll tell you about that, too. Generally, the more direct I am, the less people doubt me. And if they do doubt me, or if they don't support me, then I don't include them in my life.

I have so many awesome family members (Hi, Mom!) and friends in my life, why would I waste time with someone who doubts or discriminates? Obviously, sometimes it's harder to cut someone out. Walking away from a job with a biphobic boss, for example, isn't so easy. But it's important to surround ourselves with as many allies as possible.

And as we consider who our allies are, let's remember that there are people in other minority groups who can relate to what we're going through. A friend of mine was turned away by her doctor because she was in a same-sex relationship and wanted to get pregnant. Another friend was turned away by another doctor because she was in pain and the doctor assumed she was just looking for drugs. The situations are different, but the emotional pain, frustration, embarrassment, and indignation are eerily similar.

We have great support within our own communities, but I find there's strength in connecting with other communities, too. When we support each other, not only do we get stronger, but we also help to educate each other's communities about one another. So let's be strong together.

*Julie is a health activist and blogger, writing about understanding and acceptance, as well as difficulties, within the chronic illness and bisexual communities.*

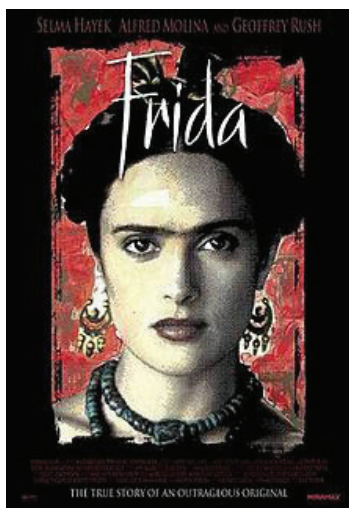


**Conference**  
Celebrating the Spectrum of Sexuality, Gender & Sex

The 2014 Transcending Boundaries Conference will take place April 4-6, 2014 near Hartford, CT, at the Hartford Sheraton at Bradley Airport! This annual conference brings together sexuality, relationship and gender minorities for three days of education, activism and community building. This year's theme is "Inclusion In Action." Join us!

<http://transcendingboundaries.org/2014/>

# BRC Resource Library Gets Boost From Donor



One day last year the Bisexual Resource Center received an email out of the blue asking if we would be interested in a donation of books and videos for our resource library. Really? Well, yes please! We started receiving packages soon after, mostly new and used books that the donor bought from Amazon and had shipped directly to us. We've now dubbed this donor our "resource angel" and we want the community to enjoy the fabulous gifts that she has been sending us this year.

In the book section, we've got classics like *Bi Any Other Name* and *Bisexual Women in the Twenty-First Century*, newer titles such as *Bi: Notes for a Bisexual Revolution*, and several years of *The Journal of Bisexuality*. Within the fiction titles we've got Ann Herendeen's *Phyllida and the Brotherhood of Philander* and Alan Cumming's bawdy bi boy escapade, *Tommy's Tale*. We've also got *Soundtrack of My Life*, the recent memoir of Clive Davis, the record producer who publicly came out as a bi man at the age of 80.

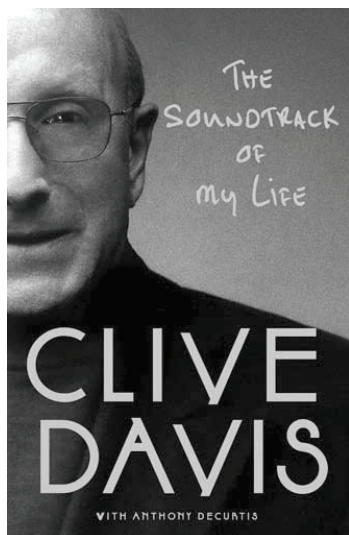
In the documentary section, we've got fresh DVDs of the American bi roadtrip flick, *Bi the Way*; the European *Bisexual Revolution*; as well as Ani DiFranco's concert video, *Trust*. The feature film

collection has been juiced up quite a bit with new copies of *Blue Velvet*, *Henry and June*, *Kinsey*, *Frida*, *Brokeback Mountain*, *Rocky Horror Picture Show*, and *Three*. There are also new Blue-Ray collections of the popular television shows, *Lost Girl* and *Torchwood*.

Our VHS section is impressive for those who still have a VCR. There are bi vampires in *The Hunger*; the award-winning *The Crying Game*; Gus Van Sant's *My Own Private Idaho*; and the Australian drag classic, *Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*.

The BRC will share the material by having open office hours for visitors to come and choose a book or film to sign out. The BLiSS (bisexual social and support) group meets on the first Wednesday of each month at 7pm, so the office will open early from 5:30-7pm for people to come and select something to take home with them. The BRC is looking into having additional hours at other times of the month as well.

Would you like to be a resource angel, too? If you are interested in donating bi-themed books or films to the collection, please contact [brc@biresource.net](mailto:brc@biresource.net) or 617-424-9595. One of our goals is to update as many of our VHS collection into DVDs to make them more accessible and new books are always welcome.



Would **YOU** like to host one of our monthly bi women's potluck brunches?

If so, please send an email to Kate:

[thewriterkate@gmail.com](mailto:thewriterkate@gmail.com).



Here are some of the folks who attended our January Brunch at Kelley's. There was delicious food and excellent conversation.



# Profile: Dr. Mimi on Community, Confidence and Self-Care

*Interview by Robyn Ochs*

Mimi Hoang, Ph.D., is a clinician, educator, author and advocate with over 15 years of experience in cultural diversity issues, specifically with the bisexual and Asian Pacific Islander communities. Since 1999 she has co-founded three bisexual organizations in Los Angeles: the Los Angeles Bi Task Force (LABTF), amBi (the LA Bi Social Community), and Fluid UCLA. With two publications under her belt – a research article on bisexual identity and internalized biphobia in the *Journal of Bisexuality* and a book chapter on bi women in *The Essential Handbook of Women's Sexuality* – Dr. Hoang currently works as a Staff Psychologist at Loyola Marymount University and teaches at Antioch University Los Angeles. She has earned international recognition for her leadership, including a seat at the inaugural White House Bisexual Roundtable in 2013.

## ***How did you come to be an advocate for bisexual people?***

Coming out was not easy for me, as I was an immigrant, raised in a traditional and low socio-economic status Asian household, and grew up never even hearing the word “bisexual.” Luckily, when I went to UCLA, I heard about their LGBT Mentoring Program and found an amazing bi mentor. When there was talk about starting up a new bi group, I volunteered to co-lead. I had already graduated, but I was one of the few students who were out and passionate about leading this group, so Dr. Ronni Sanlo, the head of the LGBT Center at the time, said it was okay, so along with Maria Guerrero, a UCLA student, I launched Fluid in fall 1999. I wanted to create a safe space for students so that they wouldn't have to go through the struggles that I went through. I ran Fluid for two years, and that's how I met Faith Cheltenham (current President of Bi-

Net USA), who led Fluid after I left. I've been doing bi activism ever since!

## ***You are one of the co-founders of amBi. Can you tell us more about this organization and how it came into being?***

BiNet LA was active in the '80s and '90s but it disbanded in 2004-5, except for a listserv. I had lost touch after starting grad school in San Diego and doing a brief stint with the San Diego Bisexual Forum, led by the late Dr. Fritz Klein. I later returned to LA and finished my dissertation on bi identity and really wanted to rally the community, so I asked people on the listserv if anyone wanted to meet monthly for coffee. That first meeting, in the summer of 2006, about ten people showed up, and we named the group AMBI (which stood for “A Meeting of Bi Individuals,” but now it's spelled “amBi” and pronounced “am bi”). It evolved into a coffee meeting plus a social event every month, and now it's on Meetup.com, has over 900 members, and five to ten events monthly. I created amBi to be an “out-and-about” social network, because I'd been to sit-in-a-circle discussion groups, but I didn't need to figure out my own identity anymore – I wanted to make friends and hang out in “normal” public places. So most amBi events are at venues like restaurants, movie theaters, etc. I'm more behind-the-scenes now and Ian Lawrence is the head, but I'm so proud of how amBi has grown and hope it can be a model for other bi groups.

## ***What other organizations are you (or have you been) active with?***

After amBi, I helped co-found the Los Angeles Bi Task Force in 2008 (originally called the LA Bi Center Planning Committee), a non-profit organization promoting bi education, advocacy, and cultural enrichment. It was started when Jerry Mussari, a



Dr. Mimi Hoang

longtime bi activist, called for a meeting to form a bi resource center. That's our long-range goal, but for the short-term, LABTF provides resources like organizing panels and workshops, as well as bi visibility at West Hollywood Pride, the annual arts festivals for Celebrate Bisexuality Day, and bi leaders events. LABTF has featured the renowned researcher Dr. Lisa Diamond, collaborated with prominent folks like Mike Szymanski and Kyle Schickner, and recently co-sponsored an editorial review of GLAAD's Media Reference Guide. We also advise and support local bisexual discussion groups in LA (four in total). LABTF is currently a “virtual tenant” at the LA Gay & Lesbian Center, but we hope to obtain a permanent physical space one day, similar to the Bisexual Resource Center in Boston.

## ***You authored a study on bisexual identity in 2011. What did you find? Any surprises?***

My research article in the *Journal of Bisexuality* (co-authored with Drs. Judy Holloway and Richard Mendoza) was based on my dissertation, a correlational study on bisexual identity congruence, internalized biphobia, and infidelity (in monogamous relationships) among bisexual women. I was

Dr. Mimi, continues on next page

inspired after reading *Tipping the Velvet* and thinking about why there's this perpetual stereotype of the "cheating bisexual." My guess was that maybe some women ashamed of their bisexual feelings may "act badly" and cheat, similar to how Nan's first love, Kitty, defects for a man after feeling uncomfortable about their same-sex liaison. My results supported this: faithful bi women have less internalized biphobia than unfaithful bi women. My other finding was that women with lower internalized biphobia had higher bi identity congruence ("congruence" meaning attractions, behaviors, and self-labels all match) This is a technical way of saying that a woman who is inwardly *and* outwardly bi tends to feel less shame. Or, *the more congruent, the more confident*, and vice versa. I was excited to have data supporting my intuition and my experience knowing many, many bisexual women who were out, who didn't feel ashamed, and didn't cheat on their partners. What surprised me was that more women in my study were unfaithful with male partners than female partners, which may reassure many lesbians out there! Unfortunately, since this was a small dissertation study, I didn't have the time/resources to include bi men, but I hope that one day someone can replicate my results with men.

***I hear that you call yourself a "professional bisexual" – so do I! It's great to meet someone else in the same profession. (laughs) What do you mean by this?***

Yes, I indeed call myself a "professional bisexual" because I've been doing so much bi community work – 15 years now – that it does feel like a second career, and the fact that I'm a licensed clinical psychologist now and do talks and educate people also makes it seem like I'm a "professor of bisexuality," which I guess I actually am because one of my other hats is teaching the first-ever eight-hour course on bisexual-affirmative psychotherapy!

***What keeps you going?***

Knowing that there are still so many people out there who are alone and afraid and don't know where to turn to about their bi feelings. Meeting people who have driven two or three hours just to attend an amBi or LABTF event. Hearing people say that I'm the "first bisexual person" they've met – which is frustrating because I'm sure there are people all around them who are bi but just haven't come out yet. And more recently, presenting on bisexual mental health at the inaugural White House Bisexual Roundtable

and discovering staggering statistics that bisexual people face many mental health disparities compared to straight *and even gay/lesbian* people.

***What have been a few high points of your bi activism, moments when you felt that we just might be making a difference?***

I feel renewed whenever I meet a person who says that joining amBi has changed their lives and they finally found "a home," or when I do a "Bi 101" talk and afterwards a bisexual individual thanks me for saying some things they've been afraid to say or I backed them up on with research on something they've already tried to say. Recently I did a workshop and a middle-aged Asian American woman came up to me and thanked me for educating her because she has a bisexual daughter and she doesn't know what advice to give her daughter on dating men and women. I just thought, "My, how times have changed!" I was also very gratified to hear that a few gay-identified staff at the LA Gay & Lesbian Center came out as bisexual after they saw us marching in the West Hollywood Pride Parade!

***The theme of this issue is "Mental Health." What do you want readers to know?***

I've written a lot on bi women in my book chapter in *The Essential Handbook of Women's Sexuality*, and my recent White House trip also really got me thinking about the status of bi mental health. I think we, as bisexual women, are a complex group and have complex needs and really have to take care of our well-being. Bisexual people in general already face higher rates of depression, anxiety, and substance abuse than gay/lesbian people and heterosexual people, and are six times more likely (with gay/lesbian people four times more likely) to report suicidality than heterosexual peers. As for bi women, 45 percent – *nearly half* – have seriously considered or attempted taking their own lives. That's startling! *The Bisexual Invisibil-*



Los Angeles Bi Task Force in LA Pridee

Dr. Mimi, continues on next page



Dr. Mimi, continued from previous page

*ity Report* also reported that bi women face higher rates of intimate partner violence when with monosexual partners and have higher rates of poor general health. Studies are finally parceling out bi participants from gay/lesbian participants, and it's not looking good. So that means we need to reach out to our bi women, get them proper health care, and empower them to feel proud of their bi identities and make healthy decisions. If you are a bisexual woman, listen to your heart but also honor your wisdom. Be more out but also set healthy boundaries with your partners, your friends and your family. Find a bi community (or start one!), and seek professional help when things get bad. Because you matter. And things do get better!

### ***What advice would you give to a bi woman searching for a therapist?***

Be selective. Don't be afraid to "therapist shop" and ask therapists for a free preview/consultation. That's what I advise everyone, but for bi folks, it's especially important to screen your therapist because not all therapists are bi-friendly and even fewer are bi-knowledgeable. Don't be afraid to ask if they have worked with bi clients before or been trained on bi issues. Even if they have very little experience, see if they're at least willing to learn or consult. That will tell you a lot. And very importantly, come out to your therapists and your health care providers. They can't fully help you if they don't know about all the sides of your psychological and physical health.



## Bisexual Health Awareness Month

The Bisexual Resource Center (BRC) is hosting its first ever Bisexual Health Awareness Month in March, and we invite you to get involved with the event! Energized by last September's historic White House Roundtable on Bisexual Issues, the BRC is continuing this important discussion on our Facebook and Twitter pages throughout March. The Bisexual Health Awareness Month project—"Bi the Way, Our Health Matters Too!"—will engage followers and work in partnership with local and national LGBTQ organizations on the following four health topics:

March 3-7 *Mental Health & Biphobia*: We'll highlight important statistics about mental health disparities in the bi community, including the high rates of suicide, anxiety disorders, and substance abuse.

March 10-14 *Safer Sex & Sexual Health*: Our focus this week will be on rates of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and risky sexual behaviors as well as bi-specific safer sex practices and resources.

March 17-21 *Nutrition & Physical Activity*: We'll discuss cardiovascular-related disparities in the bi community, including higher blood pressure and cholesterol levels, and encourage ways to improve health through nutrition and exercise.

March 24-28 *Intimate Partner Violence & Sexual Violence*: Our final topic for the month will draw attention to the high rates of rape, physical violence and stalking experienced by bisexuals via an intimate partner.

Bisexual Health Awareness Month kicks off on Monday, March 3<sup>rd</sup> with a day-long Tweet-a-thon on bisexual health issues and related topics. Follow the BRC on Facebook ("Bisexual Resource Center") and Twitter (@BRC\_Central) all month long for additional facts, activities, resources, and tips for healthy living. Our goal is to keep bisexual issues, particularly our community's health disparities, in the public spotlight for continued dialogue and progress. If you want to learn more about Bisexual Health Awareness Month, or have any questions, please reach out to us at [brc@biresource.net](mailto:brc@biresource.net).

*Julia Canfield is an MPH candidate at Boston University's School of Public Health and is interning at the Bisexual Resource Center.*

## The Network/La Red

The Network/La Red is a survivor-led social justice organization that works to end partner abuse in lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, BDSM, polyamorous, and queer communities. Rooted in anti-oppression principles, our work aims to create a world where all people are free from oppression. We strengthen our communities through organizing, education, and the provision of support services. Check out our list of resources for survivors: <http://tnlr.org/resources/for-survivors/>.

**Hotline 617.742.4911 (voice) • 617.227.4911 (tty)**

“White Tie Occasion, 1988” needs a note of introduction. As Robyn [or “the editor”] pointed out, it is “intense,” especially for anyone who knows me. Obviously I’m still here, and things turned out OK, but the years 1987-88 were the greatest “FGO” (fucking growth opportunity) of my life. I was 38, had a lover who fully supported my bisexuality, and enjoyed the caring support of the BiVocals, the founding group of BBWN. So I can’t blame biphobia for bringing on this situation. After moving in with my boyfriend, I became sleep-deprived, exhausted, and “stuck in the moment,” as if I’d lost my identity. I could not read, plan, or create. I thought it was chronic fatigue at first, but I was eventually diagnosed with clinical depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Perhaps years of feeling different in terms of my bisexuality contributed unconsciously to this breakdown, but so did everything I had ever denied and kept locked inside – early family trauma and a bipolar dad. At the time, PTSD was just beginning to be applied to non-war-related emotional trauma.

In the spirit of Kate Bornstein’s book, *Hello, Cruel World: 101 Alternatives to Suicide for Teens, Freaks, and Other Outlaws* (1986), and the “It Gets Better” campaign, I wanted to assure people, especially younger ones, that the feelings captured here are shared by lots of folks and are nothing to be ashamed about. I didn’t actually try to kill myself, but I thought about it constantly. Today I want to “come out,” so to speak, as someone who has suffered mental illness and has survived (and some days, thrived), with the help of many forms of help – long-term talk therapy, medication, meditation, recovery groups, and loving friends and family. There should be no difference between physical and mental illness in terms of stigma or blame. I wrote this poem to show what it felt like. And as any good therapist will tell you, once you can turn your particular hell into a story, you begin to heal. So if you feel like life is not worth living, tell someone, write it, shape it, and may you begin to heal as well.

-Marcia



Marcia and Robyn in 2011

*Marcia Deihl is a writer, singer and out and proud co-founder of BBWN.*

## White Tie Occasion, 1988

By Marcia Deihl

Like the boy in the fabled Dutch town,  
My new husband stuck his finger in the dyke (me)  
To stop the flood.  
But the tears still came,  
A Niagara roar of sobbing  
Into my pillow every day after work  
While he sat across the hall,  
Listening to the demons of his clients.  
They got better; I didn’t.

And unlike that little Dutch boy,  
He could not hold back my sea of years,  
Tsunamis of rage piled wave on wave.  
When the water burst, it flushed his flailing self  
On top of the wave and out the door,  
While I, the sea itself, was the wave  
That dipped down under the deep,  
Down, down, to that cold and lightless place  
Even before the womb (which at least was warm),  
Down to that NO-land of no time, no memory, no energy,  
No feeling,  
No voice inside, giving orders, picking out earrings,  
Telling me what colors I liked best.  
My smile took a terrible Mona Lisa curve  
That echoed the smiley face on my green foam hospital  
slippers.  
What were they thinking,  
Giving us those fucking things????

For forty days and forty nights  
seconds crawled like hours.  
When I wanted out, I put on eye liner  
And they said, predictably,  
“Look, she’s taking pride in her appearance.”  
And I walked out with my overnight bag,  
My diary, and my meds.

But when I got out, this false body stayed on,  
A cardboard cutout for old friends to greet:  
“Hi, how are you? What’s new?”  
They hadn’t heard my husk of skin  
Now played host to a changeling parasite.

I replay that scene in my mind,

Knowing I will never repeat it:  
Calmly, I knot the white leather  
tea dance tie,  
wrap it around my high ceiling pipe  
—I’ve done my research; no half measures for me—  
And the truth arrives like spring:  
A blank nothing is better than a bad something.

# Crazy Love

By Jane Barnes

*I don't know when I went crazy. My father was a shadow that crept into my room in the dark, and when my liberation occurred, we'd built a big house out in the country; the important point: my bedroom was now on the second floor. Quickly, I ordered myself to forget all that, which was successful when combined with drinking alcoholically to get drunk – “wasted” – not for the taste or relaxation, but to forget again. When my parts began speaking to me about confusing things, my body went to war; it wanted touch but my memory whispered filthy ashamed naughty feels-good (what?) my fault. At any rate, The Beast was calling the shots.*

Laura and I cautiously became a couple. It was really good for six years then we ran aground. She broke up with me and moved to South America. I moved from Boston to New York. Maybe this city is my true lover!

Back in the late seventies, if you were attracted to a woman or had kissed (or even more) with a woman, you were a lesbian. I had one “bi” friend, and I remember walking with her in the Cambridge Common. Yellow dress and lipstick; dressing for whom? But then she turned to look at a passing woman and said, “Umm, my type.” I'd been warned off bisexual women, who will sleep with anyone, who are too chicken to come out, who want what a man has as well as what a woman has, etc., *ad nauseum*.

And as to being crazy, so far all (all!) my diagnosis was alcoholism. About three years after my life cleared up, abuse memories came back. So I guess I was ready, so I bought *The Courage to Heal*. There they were, 25 symptoms. I had all 25 symptoms: I was sexually abused. I lost it, flew to Arizona and entered a rehab and there I wept and shouted, and a weight fell off my shoulders. Soon after I returned home from rehab, a portrait photographer called me and wanted to take my picture for an art book of portraits of gays and lesbians. When I said I was bi, he was sorry, but he couldn't use my photograph.

When I was in the closet, I had had a painful friendship with a straight woman, after which I vowed to be out to any new relationships. I found a terrific woman; she was lesbian, I bi. Years passed, most of them good. Then she met someone new. I tried some men. The Ivy League was no guarantee. One by one, “Princeton,” “Yale,” “New Yorker” and “NYU” failed to meet my standards. Then health issues announced themselves, one after another. And now? No romance in sight with either sex, but I send in my poems to bisexual journals and they get published. And I get a little more found.

*Jane Barnes has finished a poetry manuscript covering 25 years in 250 poems called “The Inbetween: Poems 1982-2007.” A short story of Jane's (too big to hug) is carved on a granite pillar at Copley Plaza in Back Bay, Boston.*

## Announcements

### Come to BECAUSE 2014 in St. Paul, Minnesota

BECAUSE, which stands for “Bisexual Empowerment Conference, A Uniting Supportive Experience,” is dedicated to building the bisexual, pansexual, fluid, queer, unlabeled, and allied community. Keynote speakers this year will be ABilly Jones-Hennin (a long-time activist in bi, people of color and AIDS education movements), Mary Anne Mohanraj (a writer, editor and academic born in Sri Lanka) and Robyn Ochs and Dr. Herukhuti (a.k.a. H. Sharif Williams), who will be previewing their new bi men's anthology! The conference will be held June 6-8 at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis, MN. This is a great way to connect with other bi folks and our allies, and all are welcome. [www.becauseconference.org](http://www.becauseconference.org).



Mary Anne Mohanraj

### New Bi Group in Rhode Island

The RI Bi Resource Network is a new group (recently founded by activist Katrina Chaves) that provides resources to the often-ignored “B” in “LGBT,” and aims to improve the mental and physical health of the Rhode Island bi community. If you're looking for support in coming out, or just want someone to talk to, or want an opportunity to meet other bisexual folks, this is the group for you! The network is currently seeking volunteers to co-facilitate support groups/organize “Bi Cafe” gatherings, as well as volunteers to work on our first newsletter. If interested, visit <http://www.rifuture.org/the-ri-bi.html> or contact [katrina\\_chaves@hotmail.com](mailto:katrina_chaves@hotmail.com).



# Solutions for Bisexual Mental Health Issues

By Harrie Farrow

Following are 11 ways to improve bisexual mental health:

**Educate mental health workers, groups and organizations that claim to be LGBT.**

Much harm is done to bisexuals who reach out for help to LGBT groups, websites, therapists, and mental health workers who are ignorant or poorly informed about bisexuality – or, not infrequently enough, outright biphobic. Often, there is a complete lack of understanding that bisexual mental health issues are in many ways different from and more complex than those of gays and lesbians, with little or no mention made of separate or distinct challenges that bisexuals face. Since many bisexuals just coming out are likely to reach out to LGBT groups unaware of the potential pitfalls, we need to make sure websites, mental health workers and other organizations that claim to have information about bisexuality are not giving out misinformation or participating in bi-erasure. Any group, organization, or website that uses LGBT in its name needs to be in compliance with actually being LGBT or change its name to LG. Monitoring should take place by a bisexual group formed for this purpose.

**Create readily findable, strong bisexual communities.**



One of the main directives given to LGBT individuals who are not welcome in their family/school/church is to find a new accepting and supportive “family.” Thus bisexuals often reach out to what is ostensibly the LGBT community, and while it is not unusual for bisexuals to find new friends, allies, or support in this world, it is also unfortunately common to find instead new problems in the form of lesbian and gay biphobia and bi-erasure. Bisexuals need *bisexual* communities to safely reach out to for support, advice and family.

Having strong bi communities will also lessen stress bisexuals have when losing straight or gay community support when they go from being in a relationship with one gender to being in a relationship with another gender.

While there are the promising beginnings of bisexual communities forming, they need to be strengthened, expanded, developed, and more tightly bound together.

**Identify more mental health professionals specifically dedicated to bisexuality.**

Bisexuals with issues affecting mental health need to be able to find professionals who are more than just minimally acquainted with the specific life challenges that bisexuals face.

**Educate the general public about bisexuality.**

There needs to be a massive multi-front educational campaign aimed at the general public. Currently, the great bulk of information the average person is likely to happen upon about bisexuality is filled with stereotypes, myths, misinformation and bigotry. Perplexed teens are asking and answering each other's questions about bisexuality. Many people likely first come across the word “bisexual” in pornography, and then connected to slurs, and thirdly in some form of misinformation often from seemingly reputable



Robyn Ochs holding NGLTF logo

sources. It is telling that gay-friendly parents of people coming out as bisexual are reported by their children to spew things about a gay phase, bisexuals not being real, and bisexuals being sex-crazy and immoral.

**Encourage more visible and outspoken bisexuals.**

As with any minority group seeking to rise above prejudices, we need to be visible and vocal.

Harvey Milk's coming out campaign is, I believe, hugely responsible for today's greater acceptance of homosexuality. The only truly effective way to bust the myths is for the world to know who we are and how we live. We need to let the world see something of us besides the barrage of porn labeled “bisexual,” gays who went through a phase, and party girls who flirt with each other in front of men, but actually self-ID as straight.

We have been ripe for being bashed, as our invisibility makes us weak, easy targets, ready victims whom bashers have counted on to not lash back with any intimidating force. We need to let the bashers know they will hear from us, that we will embarrass the press and national organizations publicly for their biphobia. We need to make it clear we expect our allies to defend us, too.

Individuals who come out and speak up will feel better about themselves, all bisexuals will benefit from the lessening of biphobia, and the most vulnerable among us will hear someone is speak-

Harrie, continues on next page

Harrie, continued from next page

ing up for them, see there is hope and pride, and know they are not alone.

We need a bigger bisexual campaign for National Coming Out Day, and a much bigger, broader promotion of Bi Visibility Day.

While it's important to acknowledge that many bisexuals cannot safely come out, those who can without serious recriminations should be encouraged and supported, and those who cannot should be given info, support and resources to help them break free from their oppressive restraints.

**Create better resource lists for bisexuals.**

Though there are several good resource lists for bisexuals available, they need to be updated and fleshed out. Grant monies could be used to fund regular searches for new resources, check out their legitimacy, and update lists. Lists, including those in different countries and regions, should be cross referencing one another.

**Create alliances across sexual labels, identities, and practices.**

Daily-fought mini-wars over definitions, which divide the non-monosexual community, further contribute to mental health issues. In the spirit of embracing and celebrating our diversity, bisexual/pansexual/omnisexual/etc. people need to form alliances to support one another across identities. The notion that "bisexual" necessarily and/or always promotes the binary needs to be eradicated.

**Rebut religious dogma regarding "homosexual acts."**

One of the biggest mental health problems bisexuals – as well as gays and lesbians – face is shaming and fear due to religious teachings. Bisexual groups should engage with gay and lesbian groups in researching, validating, and collating the many useful responses/rebuttals to these teachings, which are currently available, and creating a strong cohesive resource which in-

dividuals and groups can easily find.

**Educate the public on the intolerance of male sexual objectification of women.**

We have to bring back the feminist fight against male objectification of women, especially in terms of male fantasies regarding two or more females engaged in sexual activities. It should be emphasized that while it's okay for consenting adults to choose to participate in gratification of f/f male fantasies, it is quite another thing for men to equate "bisexual woman" with an automatic desire to please men in these ways.

**Own up to some facts about bisexuals.**

In response to "Bisexuals are confused" a typical retort by bisexuals is that we are not any more confused than any other orientation. While clearly not all bisexuals are confused – and bisexuals are not, by nature of their orientation, confused – the fact is that many bisexuals *are* confused. While it's true that the confusion bisexuals experience is caused in large part by a monosexual-oriented, hetero-centric, monogamy-based society's norms and expectations, this doesn't erase the reality that we may feel confused. Many bisexuals, when first recognizing that they are attracted to more than one gender, are – yes – confused by these attractions, and sometimes go through a lengthy process of sorting it out. Additionally, *some* bisexuals are confused about how to work their desires towards more than one gender into their desire for committed relationships. Bisexuals are also sometimes confused when reconciling who they thought they were – which could include anything from a gay-hating heterosexual fundamentalist Christian to an out-proud biphobic homosexual – to what they now understand they are: bisexuals. Some bisexuals experience "fluidity" in their sexual attractions, and for some this too is a source of confusion. Further, there tends to sometimes be confusion for people who perceive themselves to be romantically inclined towards one gender but only sexually interested in



Harrie Farrow

another. These potential sources of mental health problems need to be acknowledged so they can be addressed.

**Funnel grant money and other funds designated "LGBT" towards bisexual issues.**

Many of the suggestions above will require funding, so this is perhaps the most fundamental solution for bisexual mental health issues. Bisexual groups, organizations and individuals need to lobby federal, state and local governments, funders for LGBTQ issues and others, to specifically designate "LGBT" monies – long-channeled nearly exclusively towards lesbian and gay issues – for bisexual-specific issues.

*Harrie Farrow's "Navigating the Biways – Life Coaching for Bisexuals" is aimed exclusively at helping bisexuals, and those who love bisexuals, come to terms with the bisexual-related issues in their lives, and facilitating a journey to a happier, more satisfying future. She is also the author of a bisexual-themed novel, "Love, Sex, and Understanding the Universe," writes a blog about bisexuality, and does bi-activism on twitter as @BisexualBatman. For more information: harriefarrow.wordpress.com.*

**Mariah**, *continued from page 1*

I don't.

I love the man I live with, but what am I supposed to do with the other half of me that wants to be with a woman? It's a big part of me, but not all of me. How do I make a commitment to one person when one person can't ever be everything I need? What do I do now that I've already made that commitment?

What now?

I thought working with an "LGBT-affirmative" therapist would help me to find a resolution or at least to feel a sense of relief. It didn't. I thought my therapist, a bisexual woman herself, might know of another option, one not obvious to me. But she didn't. I knew about "opening up" my relationship. I knew about compromising. I knew about polyamory. And divorce. But I was looking for a better answer, one that made sense to me and fit with my values and the way I wanted to live my life.

I haven't found any answers yet.

What I want is to be at peace. With myself. With this "thing." But I don't know how to get there. I have no idea if I could ever be happy with another woman. I think I would always be searching for the balance I find with men. But while I have balance with them, I also have emptiness because I'm always aching for the thing in women that sets me free. It's hard to define; it's more like an energy. There's something that certain women will activate in me, a piece of me that never gets to be expressed anywhere else. And it desperately wants to be expressed.

It's crazy, locomotive, and out of control.

I live in Portland. There is a monthly support group for bisexuals that I attend. We start every meeting by going around the room and saying what number on the Kinsey

scale we are that week. I almost always say I'm a 3, but the first several times I attended the group I said I was a 5.99999. The group is about 50 percent men and 50 percent women. The other women in the group always say they are a 2 or 2.5 on the Kinsey scale. I don't know any other bi women who feel like I do.

I don't really need a support group for being bi. What I need is some good advice. How do you live inside of a pressure cooker without exploding? That's what I want to know. I think part of the reason it's so challenging for bisexuals to find help is that no two shades of bi are the same. While I'm glad I live in Portland where it's easy to find support groups and LGBT-friendly therapists, I still think it's hard to find understanding. I've had gay male friends tell me that they would never date a bisexual man because then there'd be twice as much of a chance of being left for someone else. I've had lesbian friends tell me they would never date bisexual women because bi women are really straight women who won't make commitments to other women.

As for me, I keep trying to fit in to the straight world, feeling out of place in the gay world, hoping "this" will go away, knowing that it won't and trying to deal with it somehow. I wish there were more examples, very visible templates of ways to be bi in the world. I wish I could say "Oh, I'm a Bi Type C" and this is what my life looks like when I am that type of bi. But I don't see any examples of my shade of bi. I know more people who are trans than bi. I think being bi is a lonely state to be in. We would think we'd have twice as much community around us, twice as many people to choose from, two whole worlds to be a part of, but we end up not feeling a part of anything.

At least, that's what it's like for me.

*Mariah Cruz (a pseudonym) lives and bikes in Portland, Oregon.*

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**Hannah**, *continued from page 1*

This is why the connections we make with other people are so important. Not everyone has a reliable support system within their family or group of friends, so we owe it to each other to step in and be that support system when it's needed. We can help each other by sharing the stories of our struggles with mental illness. We can help each other remember that although being bisexual in this day and age comes with its own set of obstacles, sexual orientation itself is not a cause of mental illness. If we are struggling with difficult feelings, it's not necessarily because we're bisexual but because we're human beings.

It's been five years since I planned to take my own life. I've been on antidepressants and anti-anxiety medications since then, and although I continue to have ups and downs,

my quality of life has improved by miles. I am grateful for the life that I decided not to give up. If there's one thing I want everyone to take away from my story, it's that you're important, and there's nothing wrong with asking for help. There's nothing wrong with seeing a counselor or being prescribed medication. There's nothing wrong with taking a day off to take care of yourself. Whatever it takes to get through one more day, it's worth it. You're worth it.

*Hannah is a junior at University of California Riverside. She is studying Creative Writing and LGBT studies, and is a moderator for The Non-Mono Perspective, a blog about non-monosexual identities and issues.*



## REVIEW

### Alive to Every Moment: A Review of *My Education* by Susan Choi (Viking, 2013)

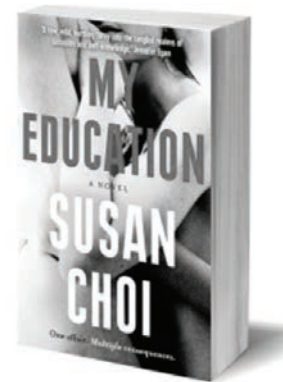
Reviewed by Laura Berol

In Susan Choi's latest novel, the young heroine starts graduate school with an obsession for a Byronic professor and ends up in a torrid romance with his wife. Nights and days in bed, pleasures given and received, pour from the pages like sweet liquor, but this isn't a book to be skimmed for sex. The same verbal magic that Choi lavishes on coitus also flowers in scenes of drinking, child care, home decoration, and being struck by a parking barrier gate. Like a hallucination, the novel feels more real than reality. And it's not only in depicting the immediate that Choi shines. Her protagonist's reflections, both as a young adult and as a mature woman, are utterly convincing and profoundly revelatory. As I read, I felt simultaneously that I'd found the novelistic portrayal of my own past and that I was encountering someone entirely different from me. This book taught me everything I already knew about growing up. Such is the work of literature: to pierce a reader's shell of habituation to what is obviously, startlingly true.

Other reviewers have faulted Choi for writing a book about bisexual experience without using the term "bisexual." "Why doesn't the question of sexual orientation ever arise for this protagonist?" they ask. They conclude that Choi is eschewing the label, sidestepping the controversies of identity politics, avoiding the taint of alliance with a shunned group. Then the reviewers lament that this self-protective behavior has impaired Choi's writing, cutting it off from the issues that could make it meaningful.

Approaching the novel with such reviews in mind, I came to realize that the questions they posed would never have been suggested to me by the story alone. The narration grows organically from the heroine's own experiences, and issues of sexual identity are irrelevant to her. The heroine receives her same-sex passion with the matter-of-fact acceptance she shows all her sexual impulses. No explanation is demanded by any of her social worlds, which consist of absent parents, a circle of alcoholic and stoned-out friends, an academic program that "problematizes" all generally accepted categories, and a marriage to which she becomes one of countless subsidiary partners. When the heroine finally grows beyond her love affair, it's for reasons unrelated to the sex of her lover, reasons having to do with life stages, commitment and parenthood. Her bisexuality is crucial to the story, which wouldn't exist without it, but the label "bisexual" offers nothing that she needs.

Yet I believe this novel offers much that we in the bisexual community need. Encountering reflections of ourselves in the story, as some of us may do, is an amazing gift, one I searched for throughout my teens and early twenties without success, apart from a few coy scenes in Virginia Woolf. Certainly the library of bisexuality has grown since then, but it is far from reaching its limits. A compelling book like Choi's can also do much to expand the sympathies of readers who (superficially, at least) have little in common with its heroine. At a deep level, we have everything in common, as *My Education* reminds us. Like Choi's protagonist, we all feel the wrench of our desires as they strain against our loyalties, and we all puzzle over the fissures between our past and present selves. The novel teases out these and other conundrums of our shared humanity. Its momentary perceptions and long perspectives give us what we too often miss in the business of living. The most important thing this novel has to communicate is that we do well to treasure life because, if it can be depicted so gorgeously in prose, there must be a lot here for us.



Laura Berol is a writer whose work has also appeared in Believe Out Loud ([believeoutloud.com](http://believeoutloud.com)), an online network for LGBTQ Christians and allies.



Ellyn reads *Bi Women*. Send in a photo of YOU reading *Bi Women* to [biwomeneditor@gmail.com](mailto:biwomeneditor@gmail.com)!

# News Briefs

By Robyn Ochs



**DESIREE AKHAVAN**, a 29-year-old bisexual filmmaker living in Brooklyn, NY, premiered her film *Appropriate Behavior* at the Sundance Film Festival in January. From the Sundance website: “For Shirin, being part of a perfect Persian family isn’t easy. Acceptance eludes her from all sides: her family doesn’t know she’s bisexual, and her ex-girlfriend, Maxine, can’t understand why she doesn’t tell them.” Akhavan is also co-creator and star of the award-winning Web series *The Slope*, a comedy that follows a pair of superficial homophobic lesbians in love.

Openly bisexual goalkeeper **NADINE ANGERER** from Germany is FIFA 2013 Women’s World Player of the Year!

And **LADY GAGA** *Stands Up for Herself*: “You know it is not a lie that I am bisexual, and that I like women, and anyone that wants to twist this into, ‘She says she is bisexual for marketing,’ this is a lie and this is who I am and who I have always been.” Lady Gaga made these statements as she promoted her latest album *ARTPOP* in Berlin, Germany.

Dutch bisexual speedskater **IREEN WÜST** became the first openly LGBT athlete to win a medal at the Sochi Olympic Games, taking gold in the 3,000 meters and later winning three silvers and another gold medal.

Gaga



Angerer



Wüst

## GLBTQ Domestic Violence Project Provides Inclusive Services

By Austin Bay

All people deserve healthy and safe relationships, regardless of gender or sexual orientation. In intimate relationships, it’s important for people to respect one another’s boundaries, reflect the language that each person uses for their gender and sexual orientation, and support the spiritual and emotional development of one another. We know that people who identify as bi often experience partner abuse uniquely related to their bi identity and also confront a number of barriers when attempting to access support and services.

In 2013, the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey reported that bi people experience intimate partner and sexual violence at a rate greater than straight and gay/lesbian people. In an abusive relationship, a partner might blame the abuse on the survivor’s bi identity. A partner may show signs of abusive behavior, such as attempting to force the other person to choose between being straight or gay, keeping that person from going to bi community events, or dismissing that person’s bisexuality as a phase. Bi people may experience biphobia from mainstream service providers, such as assuming that the

person’s partner is of another gender, dismissing the validity of one’s bisexuality or not helping one to safely plan around remaining connected to bi communities.

There are resources in the greater Boston area to provide support and services for bi survivors or to those who may have questions about their relationships. One resource, the GLBTQ Domestic Violence Project, provides support and services for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer survivors of domestic violence through our 24-hour hotline, emergency safe home, community based services, sexual assault support program, and legal advocacy program. The GLBTQ Domestic Violence Project offers workshops for community groups and service providers about GLBTQ domestic violence in order to raise awareness among community members and increase access for support and services. If you have questions about your relationship, please call our 24-hour hotline at 800-832-1901.

*Austin Bay is Outreach & Education Manager at the GLBTQ Domestic Violence Project in Cambridge, MA.*

# Reader Feedback

Dear Robyn,

It was marvelous and thought-provoking to meet you and the other attendees at the last brunch. I really appreciate the encouragement to step out of my comfort zone and I feel so lucky to be able to be in a group of bisexual women. I think this is the first time I have had that experience, and it was supportive and liberating. It was fascinating to participate in the discussion and such a peculiar experience to be back to the place where I first explored my own sexuality 40 years ago. If not for your ongoing efforts over the years to give voice to bisexual women, I would never have been able to have that experience, and I thank you so much for your tireless advocacy and support.

It is amazing to me how the spiral of life turns, and to hear how younger generations are coming up with solutions and solving the problems that silenced so many of us is very empowering and uplifting. Reading *Bi Women* for so long has been a privilege and a treat as well as a force for education and shame reduction, and I am grateful for your hard work and acceptance.

Jeri Riggs

Dear Robyn,

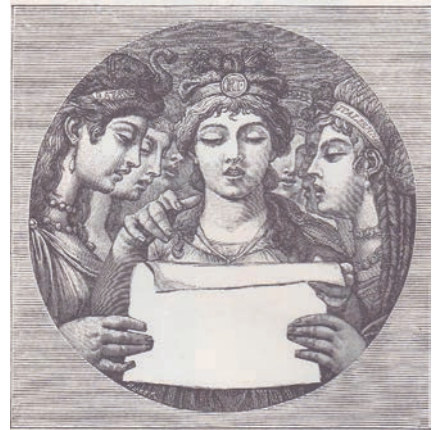
I met you a few years ago at Centenary College when you did a workshop there, but I just read an article (“Being Bisexual”) about you in *Equality*, the Human Rights Campaign magazine. Thank you so much for your activism and advocacy on behalf of bisexuals and pansexuals.

I identified as a lesbian for four years (came out when I was 19) and experienced backlash this year when I started dating a man. I lost lesbian friends and people stopped including me in conversations and gatherings because of my bisexuality. My boyfriend is very supportive of me but I have experienced pain from within the lesbian community in simply being who I am. The community I had identified with and found comfort with has rejected me, saying I am not “really gay,” or that I was “never really one of them.” Ironically, I did not experience this with my friends when I initially came out as a lesbian.

I am sure you have heard stories like this before and you have probably experienced the same thing in your life. I just wanted to say thank you for being a positive voice for bisexuality and awareness of it within the LGBT community. It makes a difference for me in feeling comfortable with myself within this community. I still very much consider myself pansexual/bisexual and I am very frustrated, surprised, and disappointed in some of my lesbian friends for how they have treated me.

Thank you for being you! Keep on doing what you’re doing – and keep on producing *Bi Women*. You – and *Bi Women* – just gained another fan in Louisiana. =)

Emily Willet



## About the Bi\* Trans\* Connec- tion Issue:

“I had considered submitting to this issue but seriously, it came out so beautifully. I want to print every page out onto a fuzzy blanket and wrap myself in it to sleep.” —via email

“What an amazing issue! <3” —from gohomebiphobia on Tumblr

“... amazingly done and inspiring” — Colby, via email

“Too many of the stories available about trans-cis relationships focus on the trauma of discovery and disclosure and on the parties involved coming to terms with this new information, and some of these stories have unhappy endings. For this reason, it is a HUGE pleasure to hear from people in happy and successful trans-cis relationships. I needed this. Thank you.” —in person comment

### WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Write to us at:  
[biwomeneditor@gmail.com](mailto:biwomeneditor@gmail.com)



## New E-Book Version of *Getting Bi* Available Now!

*Getting Bi: Voices of Bisexuals Around the World* is the definitive anthology of international voices about bisexuality. Co-edited by Robyn Ochs and Sarah Rowley, *Getting Bi* includes over 220 different narratives from 42 countries. A compelling look at contemporary bisexual, pansexual and fluid experience, *Getting Bi* shares perspectives of teens, parents, elders and everyone in between.

And now this bi **must-have** is available as an e-book for only \$9.99. Visit Amazon.com today and order yours.



Published by the Bisexual Resource Center, profits from print and e-book sales of *Getting Bi* go towards the BRC's work raising awareness and providing support to the bi community. [www.biresource.net](http://www.biresource.net)

## Ask Tiggy

Dear Tiggy,

I just transferred to a new college and have experienced a huge amount of discrimination by both the straight and the gay communities. As a musical theatre major, I am used to a lot of tolerance. Here, however, I have been told that I must be overly promiscuous, flaky, illegitimate, and a burden to the gay community. I've never felt so hurt and alienated.

I am very comfortable with my sexuality and I just want to be able to focus on my career without worrying about labels. I am proud and I want other bisexuals at my university to feel like it is okay to be who they are. Do you have any suggestions for spreading awareness throughout my campus without offending the gay community and becoming a social pariah to the people I support fully? I thought we were all in this together.

-Nell

Nell, ask yourself: "Why would dispelling hurtful myths about my community offend gays?"

Here's another thing to ponder: why would you fully support those whom you think are offended by your very existence?

I'm making two points here. The first is that we need to be ever-vigilant about battling internalized biphobia. By the way you've worded your letter, I sense some of that sour thinking is starting to seep into your brain. Stay aware of it and be sure to raze that mess before it hits your heart. We need your spirit to be strong for the challenges ahead!

My second point is something I learned at a (non-physical) self-defense seminar that I took at the Harvey Milk School in San Francisco many years ago: perpetrators are cowards. They seek out victims who will be easy to overpower. Therefore, since everything about my presenta-

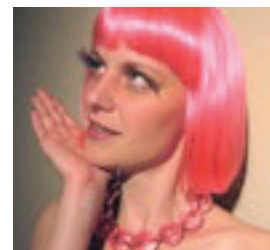
tion as I walked down the street said, "I'm just trying to get to my destination. I don't want any trouble," I was unwittingly making myself the perfect victim to potential aggressors.

I learned that this lesson holds true for any antagonist. Sending the message "I don't mean to provoke your ire with who I am" leaves you quite vulnerable to people who have made it clear that they don't respect you. In a nutshell, you have to know deep down that being bisexual is super cool and let that radiate from your soul. (You can fake it 'til you make it, though.) Only then will you feel no need to apologize for it.

With that attitude mastered, I'd say it's time for you to organize. I see that your school doesn't have an LGBT activity group as one of its intercultural programs. What a fantastic opportunity for you to start one! It can be a conversation group that sometimes does educational projects, too. You'll get the support you need, give other bisexuals support, and meet lots of lesbians, gays, and trans\* folks who are terrific allies to the bi community. You're going to feel so much better when you find some LGTs who really get you. Trust me, there's a whole lot of them out there.

Fighting biphobia is tough work and you don't want to go it alone. We are all in this together – so get together with the other queer peeps at your school and start building that community you envisioned.

-Tiggy



## The "Bi Office"

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

## Ongoing Events

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

### 2nd Mondays:

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

### 2nd Mondays:

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

### 1st Wednesdays

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

### 2nd Thursdays:

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

### 3rd Saturdays:

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

### Metro-Boston women:

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



# CALENDAR

## March

Tuesday, March 4, 6-8 pm, **Straight Marriage, Still Questioning Western Massachusetts.**

A peer-led support group for women in a straight marriage/relationship struggling with sexual orientation or coming out. Meets first Tuesdays. Info: appleday621@yahoo.com.

Wednesday, March 5, 7-9pm, **Bisexual Social and Support Group (BLiSS).**

Meets 1st Wednesdays at the Boston Living Center. All bi and bi-friendly people of all genders and orientations are welcome to attend. Meetings are peer-facilitated discussion groups, sometimes with pre-selected topic or presenter. Info/RSVP: bliss@biresource.net.

Friday, March 7, 6-8 pm, **Bi Women of Color Coffee & Chat**

is a safe and supportive space for women that meets on the first Friday of the month at Flour Bakery, 131 Clarendon St, Boston. Nearest T is Back Bay on Orange Line. Email bostonBIWOC@groups.facebook.com.

Monday, March 10, 7pm, **Straight Marriage, Still Questioning Boston.** A peer-led

support group for women in a straight marriage/relationship struggling with sexual orientation or coming out. Meets 2nd Mondays. Contact kate.e.flynn@gmail.com for location.

Monday, March 10, 7-9 pm, **Bisexual Resource Center Board Meeting.**

The BRC board holds a meeting on 2nd Mondays. Open to all bi and bi-friendly community members. On the 4th floor of the Boston Living Center, 29 Stanhope St. near Back Bay station (Orange Line). Info: president@biresource.net.

Thursday, March 13, 7-9pm, **Young Bisexual Social and Support Group (BLiSS).**

If you are in your 20s or mid-30s (or thereabouts) and identify somewhere along the lines of bisexual/omni/pan/fluid or questioning, please join us for a few hours of socializing and support. We meet on the 2nd Thursdays at Diesel Cafe, Davis Sq., Somerville (Red Line). All genders welcome! Info/RSVP to Kate at youngblissboston@gmail.com.

Saturday, March 15, 11:30am, **Bi Brunch.**

This mixed gender bi group is now always the 3rd Saturday of the month at Johnny D's on Holland St. in Davis Sq., Somerville. The Davis stop (Red Line).

**Calendar,** *continues on next page*

## Bi Women Quarterly wants you!!!



SUBSCRIPTION RATE  
for Bi Women Quarterly (sliding scale)

\_\_\_\$0-20: Pay what you can

\_\_\_\$20-39: Supporter

\_\_\_\$30-\$99: Sustainer

\_\_\_\$100 on up: Goddess

\_\_\_\_\_ Renewal      \_\_\_\_\_ New Subscriber

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

EMAIL \_\_\_\_\_

Please send my **Bi Women** \_\_\_by email; \_\_\_by postal mail; \_\_\_both ways

BBWN, P.O. BOX 301727, Jamaica Plain,, MA 02130 or online [www.biwomenboston.org](http://www.biwomenboston.org)

## Calendar, *continued from previous page*

Saturday, March 29, 6pm, **The Women's Dinner Party**. An elegant attire fundraiser for Fenway Health and Boston's biggest night on the town for more than 1,000 lesbian and bi women, transgender people, and allies. Info: [womensdinnerparty.org](http://womensdinnerparty.org).

## April

Tuesday, April 1, 6-8 pm, **Straight Marriage, Still Questioning Western Massachusetts**. (See March 4th)

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

Thursday, April 10, 7-9pm, **Young BLiSS**. (See March 13th)

Friday-Sunday, April 4-6, **Transcending Boundaries Conference** (Hartford, CT). Brings together sexuality, relationship and gender minorities for three days of education, activism and community building. This year's theme: "Inclusion In Action." [www.transcendingboundaries.org](http://www.transcendingboundaries.org).

Sunday, April 13, noon, **BBWN Potluck Brunch at Kate's in Somerville**. Bring a potluck dish to share. A great opportunity to meet other bi and bi-friendly women in the Boston area. Info/RSVP/directions: Kate at [thewriterkate@gmail.com](mailto:thewriterkate@gmail.com).

Monday, April 14, 7pm, **Straight Marriage, Still Questioning**. (See March 10th)

Monday, April 14, 7-9pm, **BRC Board Meeting**. (See March 10th)

Saturday, April 19, 11:30am, **Saturday Bi Brunch**. (See March 15th)

## May

Saturday, May 3, 12-5pm, **Northampton Pride March & Festival**. Kick off Pride season in Northampton! March goes from town to the Tri-County Fairgrounds for the festival. Info: [www.nohopride.org](http://www.nohopride.org).

Sunday, May 4, noon, **BBWN Potluck Brunch at Robyn's in Jamaica Plain**. Please bring food and/or drinks to share. There are cats in the home. Children welcome. A great opportunity to meet other bi and bi-friendly women in the Boston area. Info/RSVP/directions: [robyn@robynocho.com](mailto:robyn@robynocho.com).

Monday, May 5, 6-8pm, **Straight Marriage, Still Questioning Western Massachusetts**. (See March 4th)

Wednesday, May 7, 7pm, **Bisexual Social and Support Group (BLiSS)**. (See March 5th)

Thursday, May 8, 7-9pm, **Young BLiSS**. (See March 13th)

Monday, May 12, 7pm, **Straight Marriage, Still Questioning Boston**. (See March 10th)

Monday, May 12, 7-9pm, **BRC Board Meeting**. (See March 10th)

Saturday, May 17, 11:30am, **Saturday Bi Brunch**. (See March 15th)

Saturday, May 31, 7pm, **Annual BRC Fundraising House Party**. Details to come on [www.biresource.net](http://www.biresource.net).

## Coming Up.....

Friday-Sunday June 6-8, **BECAUSE** (Minneapolis, MN). The annual conference of the Bisexual Organizing Project, dedicated to building an empowered bisexual, pansexual, fluid, queer, and unlabeled (bi\*) community in the United States. Info: [www.becauseconference.org](http://www.becauseconference.org).

Saturday, June 14, beginning at noon, **Boston Pride March**. Begins in Copley Square. Pridefest at Government Center. Info: [bostonpride.org/parade](http://bostonpride.org/parade).

Saturday, June 21, beginning at noon, **The Rhode Island PrideFest** on the Providence Waterfront on South Water Street. Pride March after dark. <http://www.prideri.com>.

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thursday 24th april, 2014  
6:00pm - 10:30pm

center for the arts at the armory  
191 highland avenue  
somerville, ma  
[www.artsatthearmory.org](http://www.artsatthearmory.org)

tickets and on-line auction coming soon!

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una celebración de sobrevivencia