

An ASS out of U and ME: The Assumption of Straightness

By Casey Lawrence

"See? I told you there'd be other straight people here!"

A young woman is pointing to me and my partner. She's holding her boyfriend's hand; he looks extremely uncomfortable. I'm pretty sure Steve doesn't notice. He's too busy sticking rainbow stickers on my clothes, and it is very loud, after all.

It's my first Pride Parade as an out bisexual. I've been to one other parade, when I was sixteen. I went with my lesbian-identified best friend, and I was wearing a "Str8 Against H8" t-shirt. I was an ally. I hadn't yet figured out that I, too, should be wearing rainbows. But now I know better. I'm bisexual and proud of it.

Hearing an ally telling her boyfriend that there were "other straight people" at Pride hurt in a way I wasn't expecting it to. Going to Pride as half of a seemingly "heterosexual" couple, I knew we were going to get looks. It isn't the first time it's happened to me. At the Pride group at my school, I am frequently called an ally – despite all my efforts to correct people. It shouldn't bother me anymore that people see me with Steve and make an assumption of straightness. It's only natural, right?

But it still hurts. We aren't in a heterosexual relationship because neither of us is heterosexual. The assumption of straightness based on the way I dress or who I'm with *hurts*.

Even at Pride I'm not safe from it. Even in the place where I am supposed to be able to express my sexuality without fear, I am afraid. I'm afraid of not being seen as "queer enough." I'm afraid of being told to leave, of being excluded based on my assumed "straightness." I'm afraid to kiss my boyfriend at Pride, or hold his hand – at the one place where queer people are supposed to be safe.

(And then I feel guilty for these thoughts, because being with Steve means that I'm not afraid to kiss him or hold his hand anywhere else. No one will yell slurs at us on the streets. No one will gay-bash us. Our presumed straightness is a privilege everywhere else. Just not *here*.)

Marching my way down Bloor Street later, I can't get it out of my head. I'm holding an orange National Democratic Party sign that reads "Gay Straight Alliances" – do people think I'm straight? Steve is holding one that reads "Ban Conversion Therapy," having traded his GSA sign to an actual straight ally.

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Bi, Married (to a man) and Proud

By A. J. Walkley

As a newly married person (one year as of November 8, 2015), I've never been more proud to proclaim my bisexuality – and part of that reason is because regardless of my past and present advocacy, it is all too easy to fall back into the invisibility of my closeted days.

Well-known to bisexuals, allies and LGBTQ+ community members, that damn closet is ever-present, sometimes most so for bisexuals who are in otherwise-seeming relationships, not to mention marriages. Once the ring is on the finger and the legal documents are signed, for a monogamous bisexual like me, if I am not loud and proud in my bisexuality, I will be seen as straight – as someone I am not and never have been.

Making the decision to marry my partner last year was not difficult – they are the person who is always there for me, come hell or high water; the person who loves me unconditionally; the person who knows how to calm me down



A. J., continues on page 15

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From the Editors

Dear Reader,

This month's theme is "Partnering With Men." We hope you enjoy the writing of Casey Lawrence, A. J. Walkley, Griffin Sierra, Gloria Jackson-Nefertiti, Zakkiyah Woods, Rev. Francesca Bongiorno Fortunato, Ellyn Ruthstrom, Robyn Walters, Jenna, S. H. G., Ellen McCammon, Jane Barnes, Theresa Tyree and Annora Borden. Our Around the World column features Aoife O'Riordan in Cork, Ireland. Tracy reports on the Out & Equal Workplace Summit, and Gwendolyn Fougy Henry and Debbie Block Schwenk tell us about a Boston-area support group for bi women who are partnered with men. There's also the News Briefs and a Calendar of events. And last – but certainly not least – we introduce a comic strip by Why Not Both.

And please consider supporting our work. We spend about \$8000 per year to create this resource **FOR YOU**.

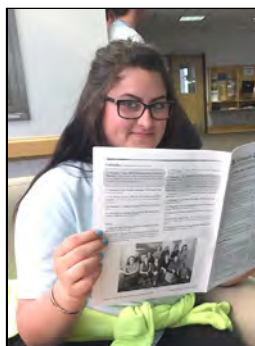
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-Robyn & Catherine

STUDENTS: Are you looking for a **PAID summer internship?** We are looking for a communications intern with amazing design and web skills to work for 200 hours at \$10/hr. Boston-based a plus, but you could live anywhere. Details at <http://biwomenboston.org/2015/11/20/paid-summer-internship>.

Another fan reads the *Bi Women Quarterly*. Send us a picture of yourself reading *BWQ* to biwomeneditor@gmail.com.

Be creative!



Next in

Bi Women Quarterly

The theme for the next issue:

Out at Work (or Not)

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

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

biwomenboston.org/newsletter/submission-guidelines/.

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

The theme for Summer 2016:

Labels

Those of us who identify between (or outside of) gay and straight use a lot of different labels. Which one(s) do you use, and why? Do you use different labels in different contexts? Are you comfortable in your label(s)? What are the challenges/benefits of labeling?

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

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

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

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

Around the World: An Interview with Aoife O’Riordan, Cork, Ireland

Aoife is a queer bi woman in her thirties, currently living in Cork. She works as a freelance writer and plays roller derby in her spare time. She has a blog, Consider the Tea Cosy, at freethoughtblogs. A year and a half ago, Aoife founded the Bi+ Ireland Network.

R: How did you come to identify as bi? How old were you? Who did you tell? What happened?

A: I was 16 when I first realized I was bi – and also when I came out. In a way, I’ve never been in the closet to anyone but myself!

In some ways I am incredibly lucky. My parents have always had gay friends. I always knew that heterosexuality wasn’t the only option, and I had plenty of lesbian role models. However, as I’m sure you know, that doesn’t necessarily translate to bisexuality!

I have only one clear memory of how I felt before I realized that I was bi. I remember lying awake at night, scared that if I let myself feel something for women, I’d stop liking boys. I knew that I liked liking boys, and I knew that being gay was difficult. Bi simply didn’t occur to me.

Then I hit 16, and a few things happened at once. I became aware that bisexuality was an option (thank you, Brian Molko!). And I developed a giant crush on a girl that, for the first time in my life, I couldn’t explain away as just a close friendship. It took a little while to admit that to myself. But once I had? I told my friends almost straightaway.

Again, I was lucky. I was away at summer camp (CTYI – a summer camp for academically-gifted kids). It was a wonderfully open space full of extraordinarily diverse and interesting kids. It was the first place I ever met a lesbian couple my age. I came out to them and within minutes they were giving me my Queer 101 – from Ani DiFranco mix tapes (yes, we still had tapes!) to a tour of the campus queers. It was a wonderful experience.

Of course, it didn’t all go perfectly! My boyfriend at the time didn’t react well. When I came back home, a few of my friends weren’t great about it. But the important people – my close friends and family – were supportive, and our CTYI group stayed in touch all year ’round, so I always had people to talk to.

And of course, within a few months several more of my friends came out too. Living my teenage years in a group of friends where being gay, bi or straight – as well as mono- or polysexual – was absolutely normal is something I’ll always appreciate.

R: What is your religious background, and what impact did this have on your coming out?



A: Like most Irish people of my age, I was raised a Catholic. Again, though, I was lucky. My experiences with Catholicism were almost all very loving. I sang in church choir and prayed with a beloved grandmother. I attended some very diverse schools – a multid denominational primary school, an international school outside Ireland for a couple of years, and a Church of Ireland secondary school that was far more secular than many of its Catholic equivalents.

With one exception (from 12-13 I went through a somewhat more guilt-ridden stage – entirely self-inflicted!), religion wasn’t a scary force in my life. Although I’ve been an atheist for most of my adult life, when I came out I still believed in a god. It made no sense to me that a god would think being drawn to people of different genders was wrong!

Of course, that’s a typically Irish response. While most Irish people do identify as Catholics, most of us ignore the hierarchy completely when it comes to our personal and family lives. Here, religion is more about culture and identity than dogma.

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R: Ireland has undergone a dramatic cultural transformation. In May, Ireland had a voter referendum on marriage equality, with 62% of voters casting their ballots in favor of extending marriage rights to *all* loving couples. What, in your opinion, caused this transformation? Were you part of the #VoteYes movement in your country?

A: I could talk for days about this and still have more to say!

Yes, I was part of the campaign and movement, both as a writer and as a campaigner. I don't want to downplay the part I played – I did everything I could. But the most transformative thing about the marriage referendum campaign was how it was created by tens of thousands of people from all over the country.

Ireland has changed a *lot* over my lifetime. In a way, the referendum was simply one part of a chain that started with revelations about the Catholic clergy abuses in the early '90s, moved on to a profound economic transformation in the '90s and '00s, was lit by our outrage over our anti-choice constitution after Savita Halappanavar's* death in 2012, and reached a turning point this May.

I would mark two essential factors in Ireland's immense cultural transformations over the past twenty years: a generation of young people were not forced by poverty to emigrate and the ubiquity of the internet, which enables us to find each other.

As for the campaign itself? It was the result of years of work, of course. I think that the most important thing that people did was to share their stories. The opposition wanted to create terrifying caricatures of us, but that couldn't fight against people's relatives and friends standing up and sharing our everyday stories.

The other thing that happened was that those friends and families were suddenly made aware of what we'd been putting up with all these years! I can't count the number of straight, cis friends I have who were absolutely shocked at what was being said about LGBTQ people – and at the resigned shrug of our reaction. People from outside our community realized how we were being attacked and they really did come through in defending us. It was a horrible and beautiful time, and the result – two-thirds in favor of change! – confirmed that Ireland sees LGBTQ people as part of our society, not something separate.

Overnight, same-sex couples holding hands became an everyday sight in our cities. It was a profoundly wonderful moment.

R: You founded Bi+ Ireland Network. What inspired you to do this?

**Savita Halappanavar was a 31-year-old woman who died in Ireland after being repeatedly denied an abortion for a miscarrying fetus.*

A: I've been facilitating workshops for and about bi+ people since around 2008. I travel all around the country to do this. Most of the time, the workshops are hosted by LGBTQ groups in universities and the like.

Before long, I began to notice a pattern. Almost every time, someone would share that this was the first time that they'd ever been in a room with other bi+ people, or that they could feel completely safe sharing that they were bi+. This, sometimes from people who'd been active in LGBTQ communities for months or years!

I had been thinking for years that I wanted to do something about it. In November 2013, after a Saturday workshop turned into Sunday morning coffee that people just didn't want to leave, I decided to bite the bullet and start a Facebook group for us to keep talking.

R: How many folks are on your mailing list? What kind of meetings or events do you have, and on average, how many folks show up?

A: Back in November 2013, we started with a group of around eleven people from different parts of the country. Today, our discussion group has almost 300 members! And we also have a public Facebook page with over 1,000 likes. We're called the B+ Ireland Network.

We hold meetups all around the country. We've established meetups in Dublin, Galway and Cork, and are working on starting them up in Belfast and Limerick. We'd love to have regular meetups on every side of the country.

Numbers, of course, vary. Because Dublin is the biggest city in the country, those meetups get the highest numbers – around forty people isn't unusual, and we had over fifty marching with us in Dublin Pride. The other cities have smaller numbers, but it's not unusual to have ten or twenty people attend.

As well as meetups, we have lots of other things happening. Our online discussion group is a lively space and the heart of our group, with several discussions going on every day. We're currently working to train facilitators to work with other community groups and educate them about bi+ people and our needs, as well as arranging more events both on- and offline. In short: watch this space!

R: Are bi folks well integrated into Ireland's sexual minority community?

A: I created Bi+ Ireland because I felt that there was a huge lack of representation and integration for bi+ people in our LGBTQ communities. However, we've also experienced a wonderful welcome! We've had great experiences of working with Pride and local LGBTQ groups. Lots of people are happy to work with us and delighted to get the chance to learn more about us. So, yes and no. I think there's a lot

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of ignorance out there, but also often a wonderful willingness to learn.

And while many organizations are welcoming and helpful, the marriage referendum campaign did bring out a darker side. The main campaigning organizations made a deliberate decision to use the phrase “equal marriage for gay and lesbian people” and to avoid using the word bisexual entirely. Many of us felt a lot of pressure to hide our bisexuality in favor of more acceptable gay narratives. And if we objected, we were seen as selfishly putting forward our agenda at the expense of our community.

It was an incredibly difficult position for the campaign to put bi+ people in, and we’ve never had any acknowledgment of this.

R: Last time I was in Ireland, Bi Irish organized two programs at Outhouse, Dublin’s LGBT Centre: one for bi folks, and another for BeLonG To, the LGBT youth group that meets at the Centre. Is Bi Irish still active?

A: I haven’t heard of Bi Irish doing any organizing for a few years now. I remember going to their meetings, though, back in the early ’00s – as well as attending your workshop in Outhouse! One of the projects I’d love to get to in the future is connecting with the people who ran Bi Irish.

Our community can often suffer from what feels like a lack of continuity. We all feel like we’re reinventing the wheel, because it’s often hard to find out about what came before. I’d love to work on finding those connections and seeing what we can learn from each other.

R: Dublin is Ireland’s largest city, and there is obviously an active bi community there. Do you know of any bi groups in other parts of the country?

A: That would be us! We’re active throughout the country. We’re able to do that because a lot of our focus and community is online. Our organizers live in four different cities (and a town) and stay in touch to coordinate events. The first community that we welcome people into is our online discussion group. This means that we can all work together, having local events as well as a common sense of community. It also provides a space for people who mightn’t be able or ready to attend our events to access community and support.

R: Are you in contact with bi activists in other countries? Do you see a value in transnational activism?

A: Yes and no. I’d love to be more in contact with bi activists overseas! I’m afraid that I’ve largely focused on working here in Ireland, though. Bi+ Ireland is entirely volunteer-run so time’s our most precious resource, and organizing our community locally takes up a lot of it.

I think that transnational activism is incredibly important. It means that we don’t feel like we’re reinventing the wheel. We can learn from what works for others and adapt it to our own situations. Also, we all often feel isolated, and it’s wonderful to know that you’re part of a diverse and vibrant worldwide community.

R: Any last words?

A: I think I’ve had no shortage of words so far, so I’ll leave it here!

Tired

By Griffin Sierra

Although “bicurious and sick of men”
Is not, perhaps, precisely “lesbian,”
I do begin to have a glimmering
Of an idea why so many wives
Who tire of their husbands and their lives
Spent crammed into a role too limiting,
Seek women for a more enlightened mate,
Someone who knows the pressure and the pain
You’ve been through without having to explain
(Or risk anew that men will denigrate
Your own experience, in their own defense).
I’m tired, yes. I’m yearning for a change
Of life and love to something new and strange.
I’m tired of conforming and pretense.

Griffin Sierra is a bicurious poet, artist, mother, and editor in Los Angeles, CA.



“Moonchaser,” glazed stoneware, 30 cm., 1999, by Griffin Sierra

Am I Still Bisexual if I Regularly Partner with Men?

By Gloria Jackson-Nefertiti

I'm a bisexual woman who regularly partners PRIMARILY with men. For many years, this was something that caused me a great deal of anxiety. But before I go any further into this, I want to give a glimpse into my background.

I was born in Mississippi (also known as part of the Bible Belt), where I lived until I was 15, after which my family and I moved to Portland, Oregon. I remained very religious until age 24, when I left the church due to the hypocrisy, misogyny and racism I regularly witnessed and experienced.

After leaving the church, the first thing I wanted to do was to experience the very things that the church always told me were wrong. So I started drinking and having sex (in that order – the guy I lost my virginity to was somebody I met at a party where alcohol flowed freely). This was also the time that I realized how attracted I was to women; yet, I was also very much attracted to men. So I came out as bisexual, and began experimenting with women and men.

I didn't realize until many years later that I had been bisexual ALL MY LIFE. It's just that I was unable to admit it to myself because my church taught that sex was between a man and a woman – that is, a man and a woman who are married to EACH OTHER. So I squashed any feelings or attractions I may have had for women. I realize now that I was in such denial.

Eventually, it got to the point where the majority of my intimate relationships were with men. In fact, as of this writing, my last relationship with a woman took place more than 20 years ago.

Keeping these factors in mind, I began to question whether or not I could still truthfully consider myself bisexual. I mean, I'm sure that people make assumptions* about me when they see me walking down the street holding hands with one of my male partners (I'm polyamorous). I must come across to most people as straight, being that heterosexuality is considered the norm. I guess that's one benefit of partnering with men: getting to fit in with the rest of society, or "passing."

What finally helped me to see that I still have the right to call myself bisexual is this *NY Times* article that came out in March 2014, "[The Scientific Quest to Prove Bisexuality Exists](#)." Through the article, I learned that even though I'm almost primarily attracted to women, I partner mostly with men. **And I'm still bisexual.** In fact, I've begun to realize that there are no "shoulds" when it comes to bisexuality.

There's something else I realized recently, that I've found to be so freeing. **I'm bisexual because I say I am.** This is not something that anybody else can decide for me. Only I can decide whether or not I'm bisexual. Only I can decide how I identify.

Of course, there's still that voice in my head that keeps saying "YABBUT!" "Yeah, but why have you not been in a relationship with a woman for more than 20 years?" (*No particular reason.*) "Why are most of your relationships with men? What does that say about you?" (*It doesn't say anything about me, nor does it mean anything.*)

So am I still bisexual if I regularly partner with men? **Yes, because I say I am.**

**Of course, being a Black, polyamorous, kinky, sex-positive woman of size brings an additional set of assumptions, which is another post in itself.*

Gloria Jackson-Nefertiti is a bisexual activist and polyamory educator living in Seattle, WA, who is available for trainings, podcasts, panel discussions and public speaking.



The One Day Comic

By Why Not Both



Why Not Both Co is a duo that creates online comics regarding various subjects while remaining an all-inclusive space. The duo consists of the bisexual creators Amanda Wells and AV.

Q: HOW MANY PUBLICATIONS ARE THERE THAT FOCUS ON BI+ WOMEN?

A: JUST THIS ONE.

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Dating Hetero-Identified Men Helped Me Fall In Love With My Bisexuality

By Zakiyyah Woods

Back in 2005, I took some time off from dating in order to understand and connect with my sexuality. Once I felt comfortable and confident enough to proudly claim my bisexual identity, I assumed that everyone I shared it with would be accepting of this part of my life in the same manner I've witnessed amongst my lesbian and gay counterparts who choose to come out to supportive loved ones. During my reemergence into the dating world, I held firm to the belief that being open and honest about my preferences with my person of interest – man or woman – would make for a successful start to our potential relationship. I wanted to allow those who identify as heterosexual the choice of whether or not they wanted to be with someone of the LGBT community. After all, fair is fair, right? Well, I was completely wrong in these assumptions, especially on the occasions when I found interest in a man.

In my ten years post bi acceptance, I've dated men of various religious and ethnic backgrounds. Things between us usually started out pleasant and, in keeping with my word, once I felt comfortable enough to disclose my bisexuality with them, as if unknowingly following a script, their initial response was a mixture of disbelief and excitement. A few have joked and said things like "Oh, so we can check out girls together, huh?" or "Good! So that means you won't get mad if I comment on another woman's figure," and my all-time (not so) favorite threesome inquiry. These responses became common and have always left me wondering if my bisexuality was some sort of pass that allows disrespectful conversation and behavior to magically transform into socially acceptable speech and actions. Instinctively, I would attempt to inform my guy that such suggestions are not okay, and after providing a thorough explanation with examples as to why they aren't, the insecurity of these men would start to creep in and change their entire outlook of the future we had started to see ourselves sharing together.

In my ignorance of biphobia and bi erasure, I managed to convince myself that being bisexual was the problem, while completely ignoring the shared trauma and fears of failed dating experiences these men had had with women who have cheated on them with other men and not other women.

For me, dating men became mentally and emotionally draining. Trying to convince someone that their fears of my (nonexistent) infidelity with someone of my own gender were, in fact, being led by their damaged ego began to stir up old feelings of self-doubt and insecurity directed towards my bi identity. So, in order to grasp a firmer hold of my bi



acceptance, I let go of the dating scene again. During this hiatus, I discovered a few online support groups created for bisexual women and found solidarity in friends who identify as either bisexual or queer. Groups like Bisexual Women of Color (BIWOC) have helped to expand my knowledge of biphobia and bi erasure and the dangers associated with them and have provided me with much-needed "you are not alone" moments in a nonjudgmental space.

Currently, I am in a loving relationship with a man who is fully accepting and understanding of my bisexuality. The language spoken between us is never harmful and I am never made to feel guilty or ashamed for having the ability to love without gender restrictions. I extend a heartfelt thank you to the men of my past. Had I never dealt with their insecurities and stereotypes of the bi community, I'm confident that I might not have learned how to define, embrace and advocate for bisexuality on my own terms or I might have taken a longer time to reach this level of self-actualization.

Zakiyyah Woods is a freelance writer and mother of one. As a native New Yorker, she gathers most of her writing inspiration from people-watching and reading various literary styles.

On Being a Bisexual Woman Who Was Married to a Man for Fourteen Years

By Rev. Francesca Bongiorno Fortunato

When I tell people that I used to be married to a man, the most common response is, “So, you finally found the courage to come out as lesbian.” Ummm...no.

I really loved and was truly attracted to my ex-husband. He knew I was bisexual. He knew that I had been with women as well as with other men before we were a couple. We were monogamous, for the most part. I cheated once (with another man) during our 14 years together. He claimed that he never cheated but I found some evidence that he did (also with a woman) during that time. We both wanted monogamy but, as our relationship got harder and harder to sustain (due to growing apart in various ways), so did our ability to stay faithful to each other. Still, for the better part of 17 years (we were together for three years before we married) I was absolutely faithful to one man. And I was still bisexual.

When I was married to him, though, despite the fact that he was an ultra-liberal, LGBT-supporting guy who had known that I was Bi from Day One, it was harder to be fully out than it is now that I'm in a same-sex marriage, and it was pretty much impossible to have Queer community. That always felt wrong and false to me. Every year, I would watch the Pride parades on TV and think, “That’s my community. I’m the B in LGBT. I should be there.” But I didn’t know how to tell my husband that I wanted to, I didn’t think he would understand, and the fact that I was in a “straight” marriage had alienated me from any queer community I’d once had. My close friends knew I was bisexual because I made a point of telling them (I felt that it was impossible to truly know me without knowing that) but they were mostly straight folk. I was living in “Straight World.” Not by conscious intention but pretty much by default. I missed being out and feeling honest about my identity. The “default closet” was not a happy or comfortable place for me. But I couldn’t think of a safe way out. Until my marriage ended...and I got into a relationship with the woman who is now my wife...and, suddenly, my closet door seemed to open all by itself.

My wife isn’t bisexual. She is a lesbian who is, blessedly, not biphobic. But her identity wasn’t even a factor in making it easier to be out, once I was with her. It was easier simply because I was with a woman and, therefore, visibly Queer. I didn’t “look straight” anymore, even though I was still – as always – thoroughly femme presenting. Having another woman on my arm gave me an automatic “Queer Card.” Once in the club, I could (and did) assert my bisexual identity. And then I had to deal with the usual biphobic crap and “Does it bother your partner that you’re bi?” But at least there was no reason to think I was straight anymore...until we got married. Then I was a woman with long hair, makeup, a skirt and wedding

rings, so of course I had a husband. “What does your husband do?” I would say, “My wife is in social services,” and watch the jaws drop. Then...“Oh. I didn’t know you were a lesbian...” Me: “Actually, I’m bisexual. My wife is a lesbian, though...”

I’m 53 years old. I have actually (I’m not proud of this but must be honest) been married four times. I was married to one man for three years in my early twenties. I was married to another man for two years in my late twenties. I was married to the man I mentioned in this essay for 14 years – from my early 30s through my late 40s. And now I’ve been with my wife for six years, and I truly believe that this is my very last relationship and marriage. I don’t expect to be with a man again as anything but friends because I don’t expect to be with anyone else again. I’m in my 50s. My wife is in her 60s. I think we’re both done changing partners in the dance of life. I hope and pray that we are. I’ve had enough of that sort of turmoil. But the fact that I’m monogamous with a woman doesn’t make me any less bisexual than I was when married to a man. Still bisexual. Always bisexual. And never going back into the “default closet” again!

My identity matters, regardless of my relationship status, because it is my truth and my self. It also matters for the sake of young people looking for role models. I want all of the young, bisexual people who are Googling the word “bisexual” to find stuff about me – about a woman old enough to be their mother or even their grandmother – who is an out and proud bisexual, living a real life, in a stable and loving relationship, and being part of the Welcoming Committee for bisexual folk of all ages who need supportive community, a safe place to come out *to*, and a guide on the path as they find their way home.

I’m a Bi activist now. I write for bi publications. I march with the bi contingent at Pride. I facilitate a bi support group at my local LGBT center. If you Google “bisexual,” you will find my name. And that is as it should be. So much as it remains within my power, it will always be so!

Rev. Francesca Bongiorno Fortunato is an ordained minister, dance teacher and bi activist, for whom writing is a serious avocation. She lives in Brooklyn, New York, with her wife, Lynn, and their cats, Alice and Gracie.



Echoes

By Ellyn Ruthstrom

I fell in love for the first time during my freshman year of college. His name was Steve and he was a born-again Christian. He smoked pot and he loved nature – both were his avenues to communing with his god – so we would go walking in beautiful places and get high with our friends. We were both virgins. His best friend and fellow born-again, Dave, tried to convince him that I was the devil so that he wouldn't have sex with me. (Turns out Dave just wanted him for himself; he's now an out and proud gay man.) So I did my best serpent-in-the-tree impersonation and seduced Steve into my bed.

That was young love and it felt amazing to experience such passion and connection with someone else. I loved the feel of his taut wrestler's body and the electrified atmosphere around us when our eyes met. I wrote romantic poetry for him. Once, we were sitting in a booth at the local pizza joint and he suddenly stood up, leaned over and kissed me full on the mouth for a long time. Just out of the blue. It was all that first love stuff. And I think about it so tenderly.

After Steve, there was Ross, then Ken, then Allan, and there were others. I think of all these men and the love and lust and time we shared. I recall their touch, their smiles, their quirks, the hotness between us and the shared intimacies and histories we lived out together.

For most of my early years when I had relationships with men, I had no idea I had any interest in other women. So when that realization finally surfaced, the only thing I knew for sure was that I was not a lesbian. How on earth could a lesbian have enjoyed so much sweetness and steaminess with men? It never crossed my mind to identify that way.

Yet now as someone who has primarily been in relationships with women for the last 25 years, I know that others could very well assume that I am a lesbian. After spending so much time in the bisexual community, I know that my experience is not uncommon. Many bi people have long relationships with one partner or with a series of partners, all of whom are the same sex. For me, and for many of us, that has never shaken my understanding of my own bisexuality.

Many of you may be familiar with the Klein Sexual Orientation Grid that Dr. Fritz Klein designed to better explain the complexity and fluidity of sexuality than the linear Kinsey Scale. Klein's grid assessed past, present, and ideal for a respondent in seven different categories including sexual behavior, sexual attraction, emotional preference, and sexual fantasies (see illustration). The grid's multi-dimensional representation of sexuality is where non-monosexual people can really see themselves revealed in more detail.

I've often contemplated the column for "ideal," wondering what my own ideal would be in all of the various categories.



August Book Swap Brunch at Steph's

And I've also recognized that even one's ideal can fluctuate over time. Sometimes I've wished I had a loving man in my life again, sometimes I've felt that a polyamorous configuration was more of what I wanted, and more often I've sought out monogamous relationships with women.

There is something in that term "ideal" that suggests you are able to work towards that goal. However, as I've initiated relationships in my life, I've never set myself a goal to meet a particular kind of person, whether that be of a particular sex or personality or circumstance.

People came into my life at the right time for both of us to want to share our lives. Maybe they were the "ideal" for that moment, maybe not. (And most of us have been in the situation where one person in a couple believes the other person is "the one" but the other person doesn't agree. Hel-lacious on both sides.)

I'm very open to having another loving relationship with a man, but the reality is I live in a very queer world and don't often meet men who would be interested in dating me. And, as a very public bi woman, I'm also not interested in putting the time into searching for straight men and dealing with all the misconceptions they might have about bi women. (Most of the bi men I meet and am attracted to are already partnered or much younger.)

So, for now, I have my steamy and tender memories of the men in my past. And when I do meet a man that I get a sexual buzz off of (even if it is just for a moment), those feelings echo within me in that space that welcomes and honors my bi capacity for love and lust.

Ellyn Ruthstrom just can't get enough of bi community.

KLEIN SEXUAL ORIENTATION GRID				
On the Klein Sexual Orientation Grid, people rate themselves on a 7-point scale as follows:				
		PAST	PRESENT	IDEAL
1 Other sex only	Sexual Attraction			
2 Other sex mostly	Sexual Behavior			
3 Other sex somewhat more	Sexual Fantasies			
4 Both sexes equally	Emotional Preference			
5 Same sex somewhat more	Social Preference			
6 Same sex (G/L) mostly	Het/Homo Lifestyle			
7 Same sex (G/L) only	Self-Identification			



Bi contingent in Boston Pride 2015



Johnny D's was given the Bisexual Resource Center's Bi Ally Award for hosting the mixed-gender bi brunches for so many years. They proudly displayed the award in their restaurant.



Partner with a Man? Oh, My.

By Robyn Walters

Partnering with a man, having any kind of an intimate relationship with a man, was an impossible situation 16 or 17 years ago. It would not only have meant I was gay; it would have meant gay sex. You know, um, different, uh, body parts. And that wasn't possible. I mean, I was a heterosexual male... a male to female transsexual, true, but come on, I just wasn't built that way.

Eventually, I realized that once I had my sex reassignment surgery, it would all be different. I'd be at the opposite end of the binary, and of course I could be intimate with a straight stick male. (No pun intended.)

Six months into hormone replacement therapy, and I surprised myself with an "Oh my, isn't he nice" moment. That was an awakening. My mind was getting there, but my body wasn't yet ready. I was still 95 percent interested in women, sure that I wouldn't remain alone after divorce. (My soon-to-be ex-wife was unable to accept my gender change with or without sex change.)

A spiritual friend assured me that my life partner was being prepared. Oh, great. I wondered what she'd be like. Would she mind that I was modestly interested in men in a sexual way?

It took about a year, but my new life partner did appear. It took another year, and then we

married. I was still nominally male; so I appeared on the marriage license as the husband-to-be, and she appeared as the wife. Funny thing, though, by then my name was Robyn Marie and hers was Emery Christian. After our church wedding, that one man/one woman union rapidly morphed to two women and then to one woman/one man. First, my male to female surgery and then Emery's female to male surgery. And then the intimacy with a man...check. And then the sex with a man ... Oh, wait; we're old, and not all FTMs are sexually drawn to women.

So here we are, very much in love with each other and very happy in our very active, nonsexual lives.

Would I have liked to have the new straight or the new (for me) lesbian or bi experience? You betcha. But I/we are the old-fashioned, true-to-our vows type of couple; so at 78, those experiences will be looked forward to in my next life. One of the challenges of partnering with a man.

Cold shower, anyone?

Robyn Walters is a 78-year-old transwoman, PhD, diver, radio amateur, whale sanctuary docent and lecturer and editor of her husband's many novels and short stories. In other words, she is a busy wife, parent, grandparent and great grandparent living the good life on Maui, Hawai'i.



Which Side of the Fence?

By Jenna

I've been attracted to women for as long as I can remember. As a young child, I was drawn to women, but I also noticed men. I remember wanting the attention of men, but desiring women. At the time, I thought that this was normal. I imagined that all women desired other women, but dated men. I didn't have any film or television representations of homosexual relationships to look to for guidance. Though I was never really ashamed of my feelings towards women, I still didn't really understand what they meant. So, I continued with my fantasies, some with men, some with women until junior high when two really important things happened to me. One was my first intense crush on a woman; the other was my first sexual experience with a woman.

The first never had a chance. I was twelve and she was the substitute science teacher at my school. It's important to note that, growing up, I never really had a sense of my age. I have always been very mature, so I got along better with adults than people my own age. My teacher saw my maturity and was friendly with me. She would talk with me about her silly ex-boyfriend who picked her up, but brought the Audi and not the Mercedes. I listened attentively to every word, just grateful for the chance to be near her. Eventually, the year ended, and I knew I would never see her again.

The second experience was very different. There was a girl at my school who I had become friends with. She was nice and funny, and we got along well. I never felt particularly attracted to her; however, one night I was hanging out with her at her house and she came on to me. I was surprised at her boldness and thrilled at the chance to be with a woman. I felt completely at ease; I just went with my instincts. But the next day I didn't quite know what to do. As I've said, I wasn't particularly attracted to her, but it was an opportunity that I couldn't pass up. After some brief awkwardness, we ended up remaining friends, but I was always grateful to her for showing me that I could act on these feelings of desire for other women, and that I was, indeed, not alone in having them.

I moved on to high school, but I still didn't really know what I was or what I wanted. Thanks to a jealous girl in my math class, I finally found my voice. Ironically, I had a crush on her male friend, hence the jealousy, so she was always really rude to me. I decided to tease her and make her feel uncomfortable to get her off my back, so I started to flirt with her. She took this as the worst of possible behaviors. She started to call me "the lesbian," and that was when I realized for the first time, "Hey, there is a community of people like me." From that moment on I felt little fear or apprehension. It never occurred to me that my feelings or sexuality could be wrong, and none of my friends ever seemed to care or make a fuss about it.



I don't remember ever coming out so much as I just never hid who I was after that. I moved to a new area, and I made some new friends. They accepted me. By this point I had had sex with some guys too, and I realized that I just loved sex. Whether with a man or a woman didn't matter; I just wanted to be touched, to be engulfed in the flames of passion. Sex was the essence of life for me, and it drove me for a very long time. Although I was open about my attraction to both men and women, and regardless of the fact that I dated primarily men (it was easier), my family started to think of me as a lesbian, probably because of my insatiable desire and preference for women.

So, why was I dating so many men? As I said, it was easier. We don't wear our sexual identity on our clothes. I had no way of meeting women and I was very shy about coming on to a woman and possibly offending her. I did my best trying to meet women, but I could never tell if their willingness to talk to me was because they were interested or because they saw me as potential friend. As a result, I always waited for the women to make the first move. This was an agonizing, slow, and often unfulfilling strategy. I would get the occasional "curious" girl who would sleep with me if there were no men around to vie for her affections, but never any real emotional connection. I needed more, and to a degree men were able to fill that emotional void for me, but I never saw myself settling down with a man. They were fun, and the sex was okay, but they couldn't fill my deep desire for women. So, imagine my surprise when I met the man who would be my husband.

I had moved to Long Beach to be closer to the LGBT scene, but I didn't want to meet a woman in a bar. I would go to the "lesbian" coffee houses, Ani DiFranco concerts, and all of the lesbian film festivals, but I never met anyone. At this point, I had dated two women; one turned out to be

Jenna, continues next page

Jenna, continued from previous page

unstable, and the other was wonderful, but it was a bad time for both of us. As a result, I decided to go online.

I started looking for women on social media sites. I used books, movies, and music that I liked to find women with similar interests, but nothing ever seemed to go anywhere. Then one day, while searching profiles for women who liked Ani DiFranco, my husband's profile came up. He was pretty adorable. His picture was a little nerdy, which I liked, and his interests were eclectic and intelligent. He identified as a straight male, and he liked Ani. I was intrigued.

We started a correspondence, but he lived about an hour away, so neither of us pursued it very strongly. He dated others, I fooled around with others, and one day I was going to be in his neighborhood, so I decided to see if he wanted to get coffee. He happened to be free at the time and agreed. I immediately felt something with him that I had never felt with a man before. He was confident, good-looking, intelligent and, judging from our conversation, open to some sexual kink. Something inside me clicked and I said to myself that I had to be with this man.

It was quite a shock for me and for my family when I told them that I was marrying a man. As I've said, they had gotten used to the idea of me actually being gay, but my family is pretty great that way. They didn't care about race, religion, or gender. They just wanted me to be happy. It was more shocking for me because I had never cared about marriage, and I certainly never saw myself settling down with a man.

Men had always been a way to fill my sexual desire when I couldn't meet women. There was something different about my husband, though. He was, and is, the best "person" I have ever been attracted to. We have been married now for nine years. It hasn't always been easy. He knew about my sexuality from the very beginning, but we agreed on a monogamous relationship. He has seen me struggle with that, deeply missing a part of me that can never be fulfilled with monogamy, but he has supported me emotionally and never made me feel guilty for my desire for women.

I've always known that men and women represented the two halves of me. With men, I felt more vulnerable and I searched for someone to care for me. With women, I was the caretaker, the nurturer. I felt more in control, stronger, more like myself. It wasn't until a workshop with Robyn Ochs that I realized the difference in my feelings towards men and women when I was young. I saw men romantically like the way I always saw them in film, and women I saw sexually; the desire came from within and was so much deeper. Every day I struggle with those two halves. I miss women, but I love my husband. I often wonder if I were in a monogamous relationship with a woman, would I feel the same sense of lacking for men? I suppose this is the question that many bisexual people ask themselves when they find their soul mates.

Jenna is an actress, singer, and activist who is deeply dedicated to educating people in alternative lifestyles to heteronormativity. Love is love, sex is sex, as long as those involved are consenting adults.

Imagining

By S. H. G.

My friend Brianna is a lesbian.
A lot of my friends are;
it happens when you run in queer circles.
I love my lesbian friends,
but we are not the same.
"I can't imagine being with a man," Brianna says one day.
Her nose wrinkles up like she's smelling something mildly unpleasant.
The two other lesbian friends we are with nod sympathetically.
Brianna glances at me, and I raise my eyebrows and don't say a word.

What I want to say is:
"I know how you feel about women.
That much I understand.
But in a time before I knew it was okay to like both
all I would let myself recognize were my feelings for men.
I seek my absent father in their embraces.
Their large hands in mine comfort me.

Loving a woman
when you are a woman
still seems like a radical act,
And sometimes I am tired of being a radical.
And I need to lay my head on a broad chest that rumbles
when he speaks in his deep, sleepy tone.

I have loved women fiercely
but we burn each other out.
I have loved men completely
and had them let me down completely, too.

The men I have loved are a part of me.
They have shaped my heart and my soul
and are just as important as the women I have loved.

And anyway, Brianna, *I* can't imagine
being with that hippie with white-girl dreads
that you took home from the club last week
but hey, different strokes."

S. H. G. is a theatrical stage manager from Southeastern Massachusetts who spends most of her free time on the Internet or chasing drag queens around the Providence area.

Casey, continued from page 1



I'm angry, but I keep smiling. What else can I do? I holler, I sing, I stamp. It's raining, but everyone is laughing. Pride is supposed to feel this way. I high-five a guy I knew in high school who I see in the crowd. I wasn't out in high school. *Does he think I'm straight?*

There's this weird thing that happens when bisexual women partner with men. Suddenly, no matter how often you tell people you're bisexual, the assumption of straightness follows you. You start worrying that people aren't going to think your identity is valid anymore. People have been telling you to pick a side, and now they think that you have done just that. I suppose when you're partnered with a woman, there's an assumption of gayness: but somehow, that hurts less, because at least I'd still be recognized as queer.

I'm not "straight now." I'm still bisexual. Steve is still asexual. We haven't been "cured" (*shudder*). We haven't been converted. My relationship does not determine my sexuality. My relationship does not invalidate my attraction to other genders.

When I see a couple on the street, I have to stop myself from making assumptions. Just because they appear "straight" doesn't mean that they are. One or both could be bisexual, pansexual, or asexual. One or both could be trans, genderqueer,

agender or Two Spirit. You can't look at someone and know for certain whether they're a part of the LGBT community. If more people checked their assumptions at the door, the world would be a much safer place. I still make assumptions. But knowing how much it hurts to be assumed-straight-until-proven-otherwise... I'm trying to stop making an ass out of you and me.

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

Loves Him

By Ellen McCammon

She loves him with an ease that frightens her,
As he lays curled, his head on her pillow
He tells her she imagines the distance between them
But she knows that the closer she draws to him
With her body, her mind becomes something separate
Longing for the water of his thoughts
In the thirstiness of drought
Oh that you would pour out your love like water
Understand
Oh that he would open the attics and cellars of his
well-kept
Chaos and let in the open air for
my love is the sky above
it is wheeling birds against a winter wind
that glitters with the untold spirits
of my emptiness

Ellen McCammon is a grad student by day and a writer by night. Her poetry has been published in Illumen magazine under the name Anne Ellen Clarke.

Women's Liberation

By Jane Barnes

There was us female and male and them female and male
it was 1968 all pot and bellbottoms we traded off she finally
someone interested in pleasing me well she was happy
with my boring partner I guess she didn't require what I like
which the new man was happy to give me then one day my
guy had to work late so I came by myself and that left three
of us with "Yellow Submarine" blaring and it was us to him
and then him to her and then he bowed out and it was me
to her nobody the "guy" I shook like a leaf I was able to
ask for what I really wanted I don't know which shocked me
more being hardly able to stand up later in the shower from
a treasure of sex or when we ran an ad in The East Village
Other the hip rag for another couple a little more cool the
new ones had matching doctorates he and I fell in love Oh
the love letters he sent to me at to my Cape Cod viola da
gamba camp

my second guy so patient the most sensitive of all my
boyfriends witty quoted Thoreau and so tender the very best
hands

Jane Barnes is a long-time New Yorker, recently moved across the water to Staten Island.

Calendar, continued from p. 20

Poly Women's discussion group. (See Dec. 9th)

11 (Thursday) 6:30-8pm, Younger Bi/Fluid BLiSS Group. (See Dec. 10th)

15 (Monday), Noon-3pm, BBWN President's Day Potluck Brunch at Jen's in Somerville. Bring a brunch dish to share for this special tradition: a great way to meet bi and bi-friendly women in the area! Cats will be present. Info/RSVP: jbonardi@hotmail.com.

20 (Saturday) 11:30am, Bi Brunch (See Dec. 19th)

25 (Thursday) 7-9pm, Young BLiSS Bi-Weekly, Discussion Edition. (See Jan. 28th)



Preparing the Fall mailing at the August "Stuff & Stuff brunch" at Robyn's

A. J., continued from page 1

from a panic attack or lift me up from a wave of depression; the person who can make me laugh harder than just about anyone else. No, saying yes to their proposal was not difficult; the difficult part is the enduring need to come out on a daily basis, sometimes multiple times a day, to those who don't know yet.

No matter if I'm draped in the bisexual pride flag (most people outside of the community wouldn't recognize it anyway), unless I'm shaking your hand when we meet and identify as bisexual (which can be awkward), or I come out by describing my activism (which rarely comes up in conversation fluidly), or tell you what my book *Queer Greer* is about, you will assume I'm heterosexual.

There are some family members of mine who assumed that, since I am a married woman, my activism days were over – they truly didn't understand why I needed to be vocal about being bisexual. "It's not about *me*," I have tried to explain, multiple times. "It's about the kid I used to be and the kids out there now who don't know who they are. The kids who are still being told they're wrong, that there's something wrong with them. It's about *them*."

It's about all of the policies that need to reflect bisexuals; it's about the staggering statistics of domestic violence and sexual assault against bisexuals; it's about the poor health outcomes bisexuals experience; it's about the harassment bisexuals receive in school and the workplace; it's about the income inequality bisexuals face. There are so many reasons to advocate for my bisexual peers, I will cry bisexuality and the naturalness, the beauty of it, until I'm blue in the face

and cold in the ground – for them and, truthfully, for myself, too. Because I am one of them, living in a society and a world that still discriminates, that continues to condemn.

And as my partner and I think about having children, they will be born into that society and world as well. I have the responsibility to teach them who I am, what the bisexual community means, what being LGBTQ+ is; I have the perspective to give them perspective and, hopefully, shape them into more empathetic, loving people as a result.

I believe that the haters hate what they don't understand or what they see in themselves and cannot fathom. The more the activist community educates, the more people we can reach who see themselves in us, as well as those who have simply not had the chance to learn what being bisexual means – and what it doesn't mean (let's get past those negative stereotypes already, okay?). The wider the vast spectrum of bisexuality and all it entails is portrayed and advocated for (single bisexuals, polyamorous bisexuals, monogamous bisexuals, bisexuals of color, trans+ and genderqueer bisexuals...), the more acceptance can be had.

Even as a woman married to a man, I am #stillbisexual. And I am proud.

A.J. Walkley is the author of Queer Greer and Vuto. She is a BiNet USA board member. An earlier version of this essay appeared on the BiNet USA blog. #StillBisexual is a social and video campaign aimed at dispelling the misconception that bisexuals don't stay bisexual once they are in a committed relationship.

Let Me Be Better Than You

By Theresa Tyree

It's my junior year of college, and I'm seeing an old friend. It's not going well.

"How can *Kingdom Hearts* be your favorite video game? The main character is completely two-dimensional." Will stares at me in disbelief, and I stare back, losing interest in the conversation by the second.

Will and I dated in high school. He was a sweet boy – clever, and just as into literature as I was. But our high school pulled a cruel joke on us during our senior year: they scheduled AP Biology and AP Literature at the same time.

Will had always been torn between science and literature as his two loves, but when the school made us choose, he took biology.

I took literature.

The biggest fight of our relationship was when the biology class and literature class had a joint discussion about *Frankenstein*. I kicked his ass with an argument about how the point of the story had more to do with morality of parenthood than any scientific morality, and he couldn't let it go. He took it off the battlefield of the classroom and into our personal time that evening.

What stood out to me about this argument was that it seemed like he couldn't let it go until I admitted he was right. And I wouldn't.

"You're not studying literature anymore," I told him, hoping this would be enough to make him realize that I probably had more authority on this than he did. I never challenged him when it came to biology. I wasn't studying it. I didn't care as much as he did or spend as much time and effort on it as he did. Why would I think that I knew more than he? To me, this seemed like the way to end the argument.

Instead, he said, "Yeah, but I still read!" and continued harping on the book until I told him I didn't want to talk about it anymore.

Now, here we were, years later, just friends, he still pursuing science and I still pursuing stories, having the same argument.

"Sora's not two-dimensional," I tell him.

He chuckles, amused, acting like he's enjoying this. "Yes he is. How can you not see that?"

He starts listing reason upon reason as to why the main character is two-dimensional, when actually he's showing that Sora hasn't had a lot of character development yet. He doesn't even know the difference between a two-dimensional character and character development, and he's talking down to me.

I tell him the words for what he means. He doesn't listen. I tell him I've been studying this for three years now and he should

listen to me. He doesn't listen. I tell him he doesn't know what he's talking about. He doesn't listen. Finally I tell him to stop talking to me about it because he's just making me angry.

He doesn't listen.

I cross my arms and stop listening too.

This is a common occurrence. And not just in the realm of stories or in the realm of Will. This is a problem I see in all of my partnerships with men: I am not allowed to be better than them, or it makes them feel emasculated.

In particular, it's in areas that each man thinks he's skilled in. Will saw himself as a scholar, and didn't understand that I knew more about literature than he did. He didn't have the chance to get mad about it, because he simply didn't ever think it possible. Dan saw himself as a fighter, and became increasingly frustrated in our relationship as I won match after match against him due to my previous eight years of training in Taekwondo and mixed Eastern weaponry. Addison saw himself as a psychiatrist, and learned the hard way that his degree didn't trump years of self-discovery spent in therapy when I left him.

But everyone has their achievements, right? It's not just men who do this, is it?

Maybe so. But I certainly never dated a woman who wouldn't listen to me or consider me her equal in something if she had cause to. And it certainly never messed with her own sense of self-worth if I made better brownies than she.

In each of these situations, it was not a matter of my actual ability. It was how my level of ability was higher than the men I partnered with, and how that upset them. They either pretended it wasn't so, were frustrated by it, or insisted so hard that I was wrong that it drove me away.

Will finally talks himself out, and I politely tell him that it's gotten rather late for me, and that I should be heading home. He seems surprised by this, reminiscing about what a night owl I used to be.

I smile and say, "I guess things change."

Partnering with men has become difficult for me, and will continue to be difficult for me until it's actually a partnership between equals. Until then, I'm inclined to admire them from the sidelines and date people whose sense of self-worth doesn't come from being better than me, and who will allow me to be better than them at some things.

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

A Card-Carrying Bisexual on the Joys of the “B”

By Annora Borden

It's no revelation to say that being under the bi umbrella subjects your LGBTQ+ credentials to closer scrutiny than almost any other box you can check. Seriously – there are printable membership cards about it online, so you can prove that you're gay enough to matter. It's probably also not a huge surprise to say that proving your credentials is extra rough when you date a man. Because what does a membership card mean if you can't also whip out proof of how you got it? Bi people are often asked to tally up their past sexual and romantic experiences (in that order) to prove that they're not just lying liars who lie. ('Cuz, you know, the truth about your life isn't really the truth 'til it's approved by strangers). And sometimes, you wonder if maybe you aren't just lying to yourself, too.

When you're also polyamorous, this habit spreads its insidious tentacles into the present, too. Thanks to internalized biphobia, I've spent a lot of time thinking that I should be dating one lady, one gent and one gender-non-conforming person (bisexual means “two or more” folks!) at the exact same time. This idea of the perfect one-to-one (to one) ratio has a sinister side effect. “The fact that I'm currently seriously dating two men,” says my brain, “must indicate some deeper truth about my sexuality.” I could be dating anyone. (You might have noticed here that my brain puffs me up to make squishing me down more effective.) But I decided to go with two dudes. “That's 2x the straight!” (says my brain). I know that a lot of people look at me and assume that I'm straight – erasing a huge part of my life with no hesitation. I worry that this perception will make it impossible to prove to the other people I fall for that I'm serious about them. And amidst all the worrying, I sometimes accidentally do onlookers' work for them and talk myself out of my own queerness.

I don't want to give the impression, though, that the only challenges to dating men have been things that live inside my own head. I've received plenty of external reproach for calling myself queer while dating dudes. And men can be really unwilling to engage with issues of inequality and oppression, especially when the discussion is about their intimate relationships (though gender isn't the only category of privilege where this happens). They don't always understand why I freak out when we start to fall into easy, traditional relationship roles. They often have no idea how to engage with the big, writhing anger at the world churning around in a body that should be too small to hold it.

But sometimes individual men are great. My two partners, for example, are basically the best. They're smart, funny, charming, attractive people who are committed to eschewing oppressive relationship structures. Better yet,

they're people who aren't freaked out by my intense emotions or lack of interest in sex. To fulfill others' assumptions about my bisexuality, perhaps I should have passed on the newer of the two relationships and held out until I could meet a woman with those same credentials.

And yet, they are who I love! More than that, ignoring a connection solely because that person doesn't make me look good enough violates the number one rule of ethical dating: don't treat people like things. (And the very slightly second rule: don't be a dick). My boyfriends are very different people. They aren't interchangeable simply because they're both men.

When talking about queer politics, we often focus on reclaiming markers of our queerness that have been used to hurt us. Personally, I need to take back the whole of my queerness from the things (internal and external) that use my partners to try to revoke it. In building a radical queer politic, anger often floats to the top. And I get it. I'm angry, too. But I think that we sometimes lose hold of other important things – like joy – because of this laser focus. These people I love make my life and community more joyous. And when anger can't push me forward anymore, I rely on joy to drive me to make meaning in my life. I love women and genderqueer people too, but right now I need to be okay with these particular men being sparks for that joy.

Annora Borden has recently decided to be an aspiring feminist writer. She's going to get a website shortly. She promises.



LGBT in the Workplace: My First Visit to the Out and Equal Workplace Summit

By Tracy

“There’s an LGBT workplace conference in *Texas*? Wow!”

That was how my coworker reacted, when I told him that my company was sending me, along with 11 coworkers, to the Out and Equal Workplace Summit in Dallas, Texas.

They say you never forget your first time. I am, of course, referring to my first visit to the Out and Equal Workplace Summit. For those of you who don’t know, Out and Equal is a conference whose goal is to promote LGBT equality in the workplace. As the leader of the local chapter of the LGBT group at my company, my goal was to find ideas for getting my fledgling group going.

“Which workshops should I attend?” I thought as I perused through the colorful handbook handed to me at registration. (Unfortunately, my ancient phone was not compatible with the fancy conference app, so, I had to make do the old-fashioned way). Let’s see: “Bisexual Roundtable Discussion.” “Making your Workplace a Safe Space.” “The Intersection of Religion, Sexual Orientation, and Gender Identity at Work.” Oh! I wanted to attend them all! In typical bisexual fashion, I hated having to choose. But unless I could find a way to clone myself, I could only attend six workshops out of the 80+ that were offered over the three days of the conference.

I was delighted to discover that the “Bisexual Roundtable” workshop was being co-run by our very own BBWN editor, Robyn Ochs, and by Heidi Bruins Green. I knew right then that I had to sign up. As expected, they did a marvelous job. With their help, several attendees told moving stories of feeling invisible because they are in mixed-sex relationships and therefore assumed to be straight. Others said that they feel invisible even in same-sex relationships, because they are assumed to be gay when they are really bisexual. Robyn and Heidi asked, “How many of you are in bi-specific space for the first time?” Several hands went up. Then they asked how many of us have been mistaken for straight allies. Once again, several hands went up. (Too bad they did not ask me this question one week later. I could have raised my hand as well! When I described this conference to a coworker, she asked me if I was motivated to attend because I know someone who is LGBT. I said, “Yes. Me.” She said, “But you had a boyfriend for a year!” She assumed that I am straight for this reason, at which point I gently explained that I am actually bisexual). I successfully applied the lesson I learned from this roundtable: “If you don’t speak up, then people won’t listen to you!”

After this workshop, I strutted smugly into the transgender ally workshop thinking, “I’m an evolved cisgender ally. I know

this stuff already!” I was quickly humbled by the powerful stories from transgender people. These did NOT come from the presenters, as I expected, but from the comments of actual transgender people in the audience. They bravely took it upon themselves to correct some of the misconceptions given by the leaders themselves! For example, one

of the presenters stated that a transgender employee should give a manager a timetable for exactly when transitions will occur. Several audience members pointed out that, due to medical realities, this is not always practical or possible. Sometimes you learn more from the audience than from the leaders.

In addition to the workshops, the conference featured a whirlwind of speeches from both famous people and ordinary people. You could hear a pin drop while Annise Parker described her experience as the first openly gay mayor of a major U.S. city, in Houston, Texas. The audience gave her speech a standing ovation. A similar response occurred after the given speech by Jason Collins, the first openly gay male NBA player. He told us that he was inspired to come out by Sally Ride’s biography, in which the famous astronaut was posthumously identified as LGBT. He wished that he could have had such role models when he was struggling to come to terms with who he is. I can relate, having craved such role models in my own childhood.

As inspirational and moving as these speeches were, I couldn’t help but notice the lack of openly bisexual speakers in this long series. It would have been affirming to see my experiences represented among these courageous speakers. I believe that other bisexual attendees felt the same way, especially the ones who were struggling with coming out as bisexual.

After a brief detour to visit family members who live in Dallas, I headed home, exhausted but happy. I am proud to work for a company that supports its LGBT employees to this degree. I have learned the hard way that, even in blue-state Massachusetts, this is not something that I take for granted.

Tracy works as an engineer in Massachusetts. Her hobbies include reading, playing the marimba, and hiking.



News Briefs

By Robyn Ochs



Wendy Bostwick, Associate Professor of Nursing and Health Studies at Northern Illinois University, was awarded a grant from the National Institute of Minority Health and Health Disparities, part of the National Institutes of Health, to research the relationship between microaggressions and mental health on bisexual women.

Three out bi women were recognized with 2015 Excellence in Journalism awards from the National Lesbian & Gay Journalist Association.

Sunnivie Brydum was given an award for “40 Under 40: Emerging Voices,” in *The Advocate* (with **Diane Anderson-Minshall** and others); and **Faith Cheltenham**, president of BiNet USA received second place for “Bisexuals at the Gates” on *Bilerico.com*.



Faith Cheltenham

Support Group for Bi Women Partnered With Men (BWPM)

By Gwendolyn Fougy Henry and Debbie Block Schwenk

This past September, the Boston-area group for **Bi Women Partnered with Men (BWPM)** celebrated its first anniversary! We welcome trans and cis women and gender non-binary people who are partnered with trans or cis men, or with gender non-binary people. This support group is a joint effort in collaboration with Bisexual Women of Color (BIWOC) and the Bisexual Resource Center. The focus of the group has shifted a bit since our first meeting. As it evolves it continues to provide community and support.

This support group’s history began in the summer of 2014. Gwendolyn wanted to create a support group for **Bisexual Women Married to Straight Men** seeing a gap of services for Boston area trans and cis women. She contacted Debbie, her friend and colleague in the Boston bi community, to work together on a support group. Since they are both married to men they thought they would have a lot to offer this demographic and broaden their community connections.

It can be very stressful to be out as bisexual and then experience bi erasure, especially while partnered with men (whether trans or cis men) or gender non-binary people. Trans and cis women who are new to the bi community, especially those who are in monogamous partnerships, are in special need of a safe space to discuss bi erasure (and the accompanying myth of heterosexual privilege), biphobia, where to find resources and other issues.

On September 20, 2014, the first meeting was held at a cafe in Somerville, Massachusetts, with six attendees present. After getting a sense of the issues these self-identified women

faced as well as inquiries from others in the community, we decided to expand the group to be explicitly inclusive to different types of partnerships and genders. The group was changed to **Bi Women Partnered with Men (BWPM)**.

Topics discussed range from: coming out process; discussing sexuality with our partners; monogamy and being visibly bisexual; coming out at work; connecting with Boston bi community; polyamory and dating resources; raising children and being an out bisexual; and healthy partnerships. Intersectionality is centered in this space and we offer a zero tolerance policy on racism, classism, ableism and transphobia. What is truly wonderful about this safe space are all the unique people in the group! We have had people from Western Mass, Vermont and Connecticut attend, and people from all races, ethnic groups and ages (early 20’s to mid 60’s). Discussion at the group has inspired other Bi community events such as the “bi takeover” of a lesbian happy hour.

Gwendolyn and Debbie are proud to have worked on this group for the past year and are excited to see it grow and continue to touch our dynamic community. Please join us! We meet bi-monthly, usually on the second Sunday of the month. To RSVP for BWPM’s next meeting, join <http://www.meetup.com/Bi-Community-Activities/> or email biwocinfo@gmail.com.

Gwendolyn Fougy Henry describes herself as a nerd who works with photographs and books and enjoys vegan baking, long walks and cafe hopping.”

Debbie Block Schwenk describes herself as “a geek who works with computers, reads too many books and has too many cats.”

The "Bi Office"

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

Ongoing Events

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

2nd Mondays:

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

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

1st Wednesdays:

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

2nd & 4th Thursdays

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

3rd Saturdays:

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

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



CALENDAR

December

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

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

9 (Wednesday) 7-9pm, Boston Queer Poly Women's Discussion Group.

Diesel Cafe, 257 Elm St. in Somerville. T stop is Davis on the Red Line. The group meets to discuss issues relevant to women in the poly community, especially those of interest to queer women. First-time attendees, please email Donna at dalbino83@yahoo.com to RSVP.

10 (Thursday) 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 are questioning in that direction), please join us on the second Thursdays for a few hours of laughter, discussion, activities, and/or the eating and drinking of delicious things! Activities and locations will vary, so please contact Kate at youngblissboston@gmail.com for info/to RSVP.

13 (Sunday) Noon-3pm, BBWN Potluck Brunch. Linda and Maura will host a holiday brunch at their home. Bring food and/or drinks to share. A great opportunity to meet other bi and bi-friendly women in the Boston area. Info/RSVP/directions: maurahalbert@hotmail.com.

14 (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 2nd Mondays. Info/RSVP: kate.e.flynn@gmail.com.

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

January

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

11 (Monday) 7pm, Straight Marriage, Still Questioning. (See Dec. 14th)

13 (Wednesday) 7-9pm, Boston Queer Poly Women's discussion group. (See Dec. 9th)

16 (Saturday) 11:30am, Bi Brunch (See Dec. 19th)

17 (Sunday), Noon-3pm, BBWN Potluck Brunch at Kate's in Somerville. Bring a brunch dish to share. Info/RSVP to Kate at kateestrop@gmail.com.

22 (Thursday) 6:30-8pm, Young Bisexual Social and Support Group (BLiSS). (See Dec. 10th)

28 (Thursday) 7-9pm, Young BLiSS Bi-Weekly, Discussion Edition. This meeting is more discussion-based than the 2nd Thursday young Bliss, so come prepared for some excellent relevant conversation! Meets 4th Thursdays at the Prudential Mall Food Court, near Copley. Info/RSVP to Gabby: gmlonder@gmail.com.

February

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

8 (Monday) 7pm, Straight Marriage, Still Questioning. (See Dec. 14th)

10 (Wednesday) 7-9pm, Boston Queer

Calendar, *continues on p. 15*