

Meredith Dunn is a political organizer in the Nashville area in the U.S. She works with local democratic and nonpartisan activist groups in hopes of making Tennessee a safer space for everyone in the LGBTQIA2S+ community. Quote is from the song "I Will Survive," written by Freddie Perren and Dino Fekaris and made popular by Gloria Gaynor.

Imbalances

By Sara Collie

I am 10 or 11, navigating some pre-teen cusp
of selfhood when the question rises up,
engulfs me,
troubling
that long sunstroked lunch outside the Cornish pub
under the looming cliffs
where I watch the waitress tuck her hair neatly
behind her ears, revealing a pair of yin yang earrings.

Small and perfectly formed,
they draw my focus
away from the Specials she is listing
with disinterest. I don't
remember
what I ate, just those earrings and the curve
of her neck

knocking me off balance
as the question coalesces,
somewhere in my middle,
a harbinger,
not yet fully formed as *is it her earrings that I like or her?*

No, it is something vaguer that day,
something fluid—dazzling—
that simply asks when?

When?

Sara Collie (she/her) is a U.K.-based poet and writer with a Ph.D. in French Literature and a lifelong fascination with the way that words and stories shape and define us. Her writing explores the wild, uncertain spaces of nature, the complexities of mental health, queer identity, and the mysteries of the creative process.

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Join our Google group,
BiWomenBoston:
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Editors' Note

The theme of this issue is “Pieces of the Puzzle.” Readers were asked to reflect on formative elements from their youth or early bi+ journey. “Consider toys, books, movies, media, or other influences/creative works that helped you realize you were bi+. Was there a specific influence that made you feel less alone while you were figuring things out? Reflect upon the beginning of your queer journey and write about the things that stand out to you.” We are pleased to share with you the best of what came in.

Meanwhile, here in the U.S. we had a national election, the results of which have led to direct and sustained assaults on women, immigrants, federal workers, and LGBTQIA+ people, especially transgender folks whose health care, their right to be the subject of government-funded research, and even to be mentioned on federal government websites is threatened. More broadly, diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility efforts are currently prohibited by the U.S. government, and efforts are underway to punish schools, universities, and private companies which receive federal funding or contracts (that’s most of them) that continue DEIA work.

Under these circumstances, we can’t imagine publishing an issue as though things were normal. Therefore, you will find in this issue additional writing related to current events.

As always, we welcome your support. Please consider submitting content, volunteering, and/or making a donation at the link below.

-Robyn, Avery, & Melissa

If you value

Bi Women Quarterly,

Please support our work with a tax-deductible donation. Visit:

www.BiWomenQuarterly.com/donate.

Upcoming in *Bi Women Quarterly*

Call for submissions

Summer 2025: Finding Community

How do bi+ people find community? Write about your experience navigating the world as a bi+ person and trying to find your own community, whether that be a friend group, chosen family, knitting circle, or so on. Did you join a club or organization that led to you making some of your closest queer friends? Did you meet your best friend on a dating app? Did you start a group or meetup? Explain how you successfully overcame the struggles society forces upon us as LGBTQ+ individuals and how, through it all, you found your own community. **Submit by May 1, 2025.**

Fall 2025: Allies & Accomplices

What does it mean to you to be an ally or an accomplice? What are meaningful ways that people have shown allyship and accompliceship to you or to the bi+ community on a large scale or individual level? How do you wish people could show up? How have you practiced allyship and accompliceship for others, and does your experience as a bi+ person impact the way you do so? In a time where solidarity feels more essential than ever, we’re looking to hear about ways to show up in support for others, whether they be loved ones, strangers, organizations, or in any other form. **Submit by August 1, 2025.**

We welcome essays, reviews, poetry, short fiction, news articles, and visual art. Our submission guidelines are on our website. You may use a pseudonym, if you prefer. Send your submissions and suggestions for future themes to biwomeneditor@gmail.com.

Shelita reads BWQ.

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

Be creative!



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

AROUND THE WORLD: RUSSIA

Cat Karim

By Ayman Eckford

“He is so cute; can I pet him? Please?” Katrin, one of the coordinators of Saint Petersburg’s Alliance for LGBT and Heterosexual Equality, asked me.

She was pointing at my cat who had the Arabic name, Karim, who was sitting on my partner’s lap, looking around with curiosity.

Katrin was a loud and proud bisexual woman and an outspoken queer rights activist. She was tough and sarcastic, but when she saw our cat, her face softened.

Our cat often has this effect on people. It was 2015, and Karim was just a kitten.

Very soon, he would become a part of Saint Petersburg’s community.

This is the story of my bisexual cat, which is inseparable from the story of my own queer activism in post-Soviet countries.

In 2014, when I was 19 years old and my hometown of Donetsk was under occupation, I became a Ukrainian refugee in Russia. Because of my status, I couldn’t have a proper job. Instead, I dedicated my time to disability and queer rights activism, and Karim was always around, inspiring me and the people around us.

1. *The beginning of Karim’s story*

This story began in Gavrilov Posad, a small Russian town in the Ivanovo region. You’ve probably never heard of this place. Dusty roads, wooden houses without central heating (very similar to ones that existed in the time of the Russian Empire), and a farmers market. My friend Lina and I were passing through this market when we first met Karim.

An old, tired woman was standing there with a tiny gray kitten. The kitten was extremely skinny; he meowed pitifully, looking for his mother.



The old woman begged someone to adopt him.

“I don’t want to drown him, but I’ll have to! I don’t need kittens! He is the last one left.”

It was a tricky situation: we were living in Saint Petersburg at the time, and we had a long train



ride home ahead of us after visiting grandparents in the neighboring village.

But of course, I couldn’t just walk away, dooming the poor animal to death.

I gave him an Arabic name after a character in a dystopian novel I’d been writing.

From the first day, this fragile kitten showed enormous self-confidence and boldness.

When we brought him back to Saint Petersburg, we had concerns that our older cats, brothers Vasya and Rushick, could behave abusively towards our new toddler cat. I shouldn’t have worried. Very quickly, Vasya became Karim’s mentor and, when Karim became older, his mate.

We soon realized that Karim liked both male and female cats. He was definitely bisexual, like nearly ten percent of cats.

Coincidentally, it happened at the same time as when I accepted that I’m attracted to women, and my now-wife and then-just-a-best-friend, Lina, realized that she is not heterosexual but bisexual. Lina and I became partners, and I instantly became an openly queer person and an LGBT+ activist, because I couldn’t live in hiding, ignoring injustice.

I started to use cat Karim as an example for my queerphobic relatives and everyone else who was saying that being queer

is unnatural and a result of media propaganda. You couldn't indoctrinate a cat to be bi, could you?

2. Karim the activist



Karim with pins from a Russian LGBT Center

One of the things that our Karim loved the most was human attention. He liked when everyone was fussing over him, and was annoyed if people didn't pat him or talk baby talk to him.

Also, this cat used to "travel" a lot in his childhood, so he was fine leaving home with us sometimes.

This is why we started to bring him to different LGBT+ meetings and events. And folks from the Russian LGBT+ community adored

it, especially the young people! He quickly became a source of comfort during a period of time when the situation with youth rights in Russia was devastating. Since 2013, Russia has had a law that prohibits any discussions about queerness with people who are younger than 18, the so-called "law for the purpose of protecting children from information that contradicts traditional family values."

Still, LGBT+ teenagers in big cities like Saint Petersburg were going to queer events, and those were the ones who were especially interested in Karim. It's a wonder how much Karim influenced teenagers, but especially autistic and neurodivergent queers, and folks from the local trans community. He was most loved by the most marginalized people within the queer community of Saint Petersburg.

Soon, our queer acquaintances with intersectional identities began to ask me about my cat, even when he was at home.

3. Karim the blogger

In a country where there is zero representation of queer people on TV and in popular media, the internet is essential for building community. And soon, our cat Karim went global.

At first, we just posted his photos to some LGBT+ flash mobs and projects—for example, for the local bi group on Bisexual Visibility Day—and those posts were extremely popular on the Russian-language queer internet.

Then he got his own page on the most prominent Russian-language internet platform at the time, the social media network VKontakte. Karim liked to "post" by typing text with

his paw—kind of a "blogging" with funny stories that the cat (and T9 on the iPhone) created. Most of his readers those days were people who knew me from my activism.

4. What happened next?

Meanwhile, Russia drowned even deeper in dictatorship and homophobia.

Since 2023, transgender people in Russia have not had the right to transition or to access hormonal therapy, and in 2024, the international LGBT community was named an "extremist organization" by the Russian Supreme Court (whatever this means). Now, to be queer in Russia is the same as being an ISIS supporter. And most ordinary Russians believe that you can become gay only through propaganda, and that all queer people are not just perverts, but agents of Western interests and enemies.

When Russia attacked my home country, Ukraine, in 2022, one of the official justifications was the idea that Ukrainian people had become too LGBT-friendly.

"We have this war because people in Donetsk do not want Gay Pride!" the leader of the Russian Orthodox Church said about the region I was born in, using homophobic propaganda to justify bombing campaigns.

I wanted to end this story positively, but it doesn't have a happy ending for Eastern Europe.

But it has a happy ending for Cat Karim.

My wife Lina and I are now living in Sheffield, U.K. as refugees, together with Karim!

Unfortunately, we couldn't take him with us to the U.K. at first, and even after my friend brought him to me, Karim has lived in Sheffield for two years apart from us because we live in a government-provided accommodation that does not allow pets. It is heartbreaking. For us, Karim is not just a pet, but a family member. I hate how our society treats pets, like they are just some kind of commodity that could be easily abandoned or replaced, not living beings at all. And Karim misses us terribly.

Only when we have the opportunity to rent privately will we be



Karim with a sign: "Karim is bisexual"

able to take him to live with us. But for now, he is fine with his current family.

Now it is 2024, and he has already been to Sheffield Radical Pride, where people loved him. But because of the weather and noise, he didn't want to stay for long, and we had to take him home.

In such cases, it's extremely important to listen to the animal. But in Sheffield, he is not alone! I noticed other people taking cats to different pride events, while in Saint Petersburg we were the only ones who were doing so.

Of course, Karim was unable to change Russian politics and save Russian queers, but I'm sure that he helped some LGBT+ youth accept themselves, realize that their sexual orientation is something normal and natural, and feel safer at LGBT+ events, which is important. Because if we don't care about individual people, how are we better than the bigots?



Ayman Eckford is a freelance journalist, an openly trans and nonbinary person, on the autism spectrum, and an LGBT activist. They were born in Donetsk, Ukraine, and now live in Sheffield, U.K., with their wife and two cats.

What Is This Feeling? An Ode to *Wicked*

By Mage Hadley

It has been hard to ignore the musical *Wicked* this year with the release of Part One of its movie adaptation starring Cynthia Erivo and Ariana Grande—and I have not been singularly immune to its charms.

Wicked is a messy, heartfelt, and very queer prequel to (the already incredibly queer) *The Wizard of Oz*, following the friendship and deeply complicated relationship between The Wicked Witch of The West and Glinda The Good. The tale imagines what could have led them to the events in *The Wizard of Oz* if their story began when they met in school. The recent film adaptation has been more successful than I think anyone could have imagined, bringing in audiences old and new to the story. And this renaissance of a musical that has been on Broadway for over twenty years has me reflecting on my youth.

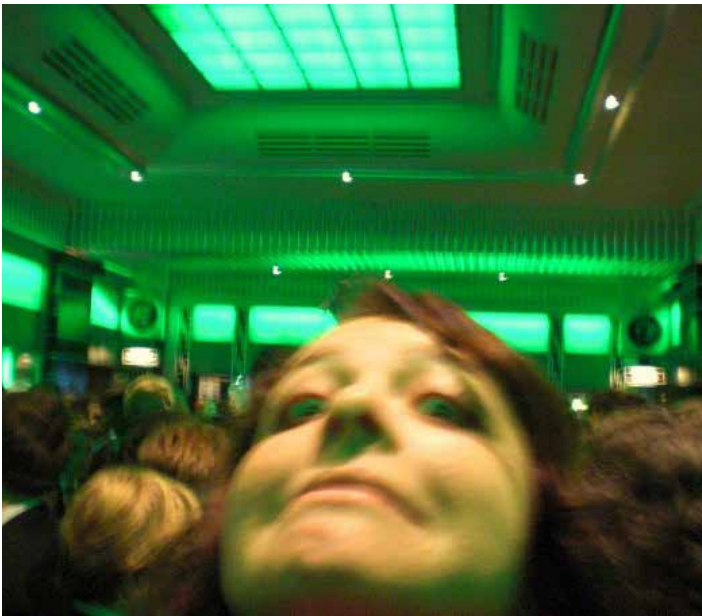
The first time I saw *Wicked* was two days after my fifteenth birthday and although I am now 30, I remember it as clearly as if it were this morning.

Being 15 is hard, and at the time I was struggling with school, with my family, with a lot—most hauntingly, perhaps, with my first sapphic relationship. I was young and in love with my closest friend at the time. Our relationship had become one of a twisted youthful romance, a badly kept secret, and a bisexual mess of kissing each other and kissing boys too and not having the words or bravery to describe what was happening to and with us.

There were many moments in my childhood where I realised that I might be bisexual, even if I did not have the words for it, and there were many comforting pieces of media or books that helped me with that grand internal reckoning. However, *Wicked* came to me at the time that I seemed to most need it. Perhaps that is the wonder of witchcraft.

Though it was nearly half a lifetime ago, the experience remains clear. I remember where I sat and the smell of the theatre. I remember my amazement at the grand dragon that hangs above the stage and being blown away by just how damn green the actress on stage was, unable to figure out whether it was make-up or a magical theatre trick of the light. I remember that when the song “What Is This Feeling?” began—a song where the two main characters sing about their hatred for each other in a very homoerotic way—the friend I was sitting next to leaned over to me and whispered: “Are they gay?”. And, well, good question.

When I returned home from the theatre that evening I knew I needed to explore and consume everything *Wicked* that I could. Luckily for me, my father worked in a book factory at the time, and he had purchased for me a copy of the book that the musical was based on. He had actually purchased it a year earlier thinking I might be interested in it and I had never picked it up, but it waited for me on that fateful night. And the obsession continued. However, reading the book (which I did in one sitting and going to school the next day on very little sleep) was an experience entirely different from watching the musical. Whilst the musical is queer in the way all musicals are, and has some very strong undertones if you are the type of person who looks for them, it still plays the relationship between Elphaba, The Wicked Witch, and Glinda, The Good Witch, as a platonic one. An incredibly intense and soulmate type platonic relationship, but platonic nonetheless. The musical even has them falling in love with the same man, Fiyero, and their only admitted attraction is to him, never to each other. *Wicked* the book, however, is incredibly queer in an explicit way with Elphaba and Glinda both being portrayed as having romantic relationships with, and/or attractions to, men and women. Gregory Maguire, the gay writer who wrote the original *Wicked* book, has discussed many times that the relationship between Elphaba and Glinda in the book is a romantic one. They even share a kiss and many of the other characters in the story comment on the relationship between the two women. The relationship is then discussed more



Madge, age 15, playing in green light, waiting to see *Wicked* at the Apollo Victoria Theatre in London's West End.

throughout the next three books in the series.

However, the relationship between Elphaba and Glinda is also a messy one, about navigating romantic feelings for your best friend in a world that treats any “other” as degenerate. One where the conservative atmosphere in which you grow up stifles the romantic feelings you might have for someone that society deems you are not supposed to have. And this feeling was one that I felt so deeply at the time that having a book, and a musical, that talked about the hardships of being queer and in love with your friend and totally alone in what feels like a struggle against authoritarianism, meant more than I could have put into words back then. Words I struggle to find even now. *Wicked* gave me a silent-yet-familiar comfort when I was in some dark places as a teenager. I could carry the soundtrack with me wherever I went, on my old second-hand iPod. I could take the book with me and reread passages whenever I needed to know that what I was feeling was not unique. I loved my copy of *Wicked* so hard that the beautiful painted green foil edged pages faded and the hardback binding unravelled.

Seeing a new generation of people fall in love with *Wicked* has brought me a lot of joy. I recently went to the cinema to see it in the company of two of my relatives, both queer teens. Not only was I left with a sense of warmth because I saw something that meant so much to me be lovingly brought to life, I was also drawn to reflect on the world I had experienced as a queer kid and the one teenagers experience now. Nothing has changed and yet, everything has changed. *Wicked* is now around to inspire and comfort a new generation, in a new medium, like it was for me. But when I was 15 and found *Wicked*, there was a sense of shadow to my enjoyment, an unspoken feeling to the emotions I had—a sense of secrecy that is reflected in the text and the relationship that Elphaba and Glinda have with

each other. Now, as the story of these two women reaches a far larger audience on the big screen, being nominated for Oscars this month, the veil has been lifted for queer children who may enjoy it like I did. Hopefully, for them, the comfort of the show, the book, the movie, is not one that is enjoyed in the dark but instead, one that is bright and shared openly with an audience of millions.

And my own journey with my queerness, with my bisexuality, echoes this change, too. When I first found *Wicked* I was scared, desperately clinging to the solace it gave me as I awkwardly meandered through my first relationship with another girl. Now I write this in the house I live in with my wife, both out and living in our bisexual reality, with the cat and baby that complete us. We are a family. Looking back, a fifteen-year-old me would probably struggle to believe that people would love and see *Wicked* the way I had back then, and that the movie version would be fronted by a queer actress playing Elphaba who finds herself nominated for Best Actress at the Academy Awards. I would be shocked that I could sit with queer teenagers who did not feel shame for their queerness as I had. Most poignantly however, I believe fifteen-year-old me would not believe that she would one day be able to sit on the sofa with her kid and her wife and share a love for the musical together—that as *Wicked* had a bright and unknowable future, so did she.

Mage Hadley is a writer and video editor living in England with her wife, kid, and cat. Her work focuses predominantly on bisexual issues and history.



Friday Nights

By Gabriela Gioia

When I was a child I lived in Florencio Varela, a small city in Argentina two hours away from Buenos Aires. It wasn't known for its tourist attractions or quality of life. On the contrary, its reputation was shaped by news stereotypes: conservative, Catholic—and, according to reports—one of the most violent cities in the province.

However, Friday nights held a special meaning for me. It was the only time I could watch television alone, without fighting with my siblings over the TV.

From the top bunk, I would stretch out my hand to change channels on our old remote-less TV. Those moments were mine, and I spent hours watching *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *The X-Files*, and *Space Ghost Coast to Coast*.

That year, I was 11 years old. That year, I started at a new school. That year, I had my first kiss. It was my first kiss with a boy, though there were so many other thoughts running through my head.

My body didn't change like my classmates'—it still looked like a child's body.

While my friends obsessed over the Backstreet Boys, I cared about different things. I was deeply into *The X-Files* and its entire universe. I even attempted to create a fan website for *The X-Files*, though I never published it.

Mulder, that mysterious, nerdy man! I could spend hours listening to him talk about conspiracy theories and aliens, with his glasses (at least in the earlier episodes) and his jokes referencing a North American culture which I knew little about. It didn't matter; I loved him just as he was. Spooky Mulder.

And Scully, intelligent, powerful, free. With her little cross necklace, clinging to a belief in something, her long neck, and her shirts.

It's funny how the things I loved most about Scully would later be what I loved most about my first girlfriend. The cross necklace, the long neck, and the shirts repeated themselves.

That woman wasn't afraid of anything, not even opening up corpses. She became my first model of empowerment, perhaps even feminism, and of career aspirations (though years later, my love for cinema and filmmaking would win out).

But it wasn't just admiration; there was something more. It was expected that, as a teenager experiencing first loves, I would fall for Mulder. But being drawn to Scully felt wrong to me. I denied it. How could I like women? I realized I had to keep that secret to myself.

Local TV aired *Xena: Warrior Princess* and *Hercules: The Legendary Journeys*. I liked Xena more because she showed that

women could be strong and fight, plus her companion had the same name as me, Gabrielle.

Sometimes, there were crossover episodes where Xena appeared with Hercules, and Gabrielle with Iolaus. But even as a kid, I noticed that Xena cared for Gabrielle in a different way. Gabrielle was her damsel in distress. She loved her or at least, that was the subtext. The reality was that they were a couple, but some producers didn't like the idea, so they were just "very good friends." But in my understanding, they were bisexual. Xena loved someone named like me. I would have loved to be Gabrielle.

At that time, there were very few openly LGBT characters on TV, and even fewer bisexual ones. Years later, I would research, out of personal curiosity, the concept of bisexual erasure back then, and how it perpetuates in the present. In TV and film, there weren't role models to help me understand what I felt, and the few that existed were full of stereotypes: bisexuals were indecisive, liars, or just there to fulfill someone else's fantasies.

I think a lot about how different my life would have been with good bisexual representation on TV. Maybe I could have avoided years of self-hatred and confusion.

But I also know that my story, like so many others, demonstrates why it's essential to keep fighting for visibility. Telling our stories doesn't just change our lives—it opens doors for those who come after. So they never feel alone in front of the screen and can find a friendly voice that tells them that what they feel is not wrong.

Gabriela Gioia is a filmmaker, photographer, and writer from Argentina, currently based in Berlin, Germany. With a background in documentary filmmaking, art direction, and audiovisual criticism, her work seamlessly merges activism and art. Her projects delve into themes of queer identity, migration, and feminism, reflecting her commitment to amplifying underrepresented voices and stories.



Fabric Art - Abstract No. 19

By Jo-Anne Carlson



Artist statement: This is a fiber piece, made with various types of yarn and ribbon on a circular metal hoop.

Jo-Anne Carlson is a writer, artist, and musician from Yakima, WA who believes that who you love, how you love, and how many you love, shouldn't matter. a from friends is a joyous occasion, so please drop her a line at josexpressions@yahoo.com.



Voyeurism

By K. Olivia Overton

Channel 62 at 2:00 a.m.
features naked ladies
and a man's voice that guarantees
the second DVD free
sent in discreet packaging
if you call now.

Their shiny skin and soft cries
made her tummy tickle
like when she would rub her scraped palms
against that secret place
Mommy said not to show anyone.

"Why do I feel bad now?"
She asked. Mommy promised,
"Because the Holy Spirit knows."

Guilt was a sticky sadness
like leftover cotton candy
staining her tiny fingertips,
rotting her tiny teeth.
Shame penetrated the shallow cavity
of her flat chest where the Holy Spirit was
supposed to be.

Shedding wet remnants makes it difficult
to ignore that secret place now
shrouded in damp curls.
But at 2:00 a.m.
she would remember
their shiny skin and soft cries.
She would embrace
that sticky sadness
in a boneless
keening prayer
that brought her closer
to God than any man ever would.

She would stare at the crucifix
in elated devastation,
touch her own shining skin,
crying softly:

let Him see, let Him see.

K. Olivia Overton, an Indiana-born Floridian in the U.S., struggled not with being gay but with being "gay enough" when she was a little girl. Her poem "Voyeurism" challenges the internalized anti-queer ideology of her religious upbringing. When she isn't filling out grad school applications, Olivia crochets, belly dances, and bakes bread.

Badass and Full of Sass

By Janie Kang

There she was. Her glowing, smooth skin reflected the early morning sun. Her dark brown hair stuck out in cute, spunky spikes of a pixie cut, the side of her head shaved. The sass and laughter shone through the beautiful clash of colors in her hazel eyes, her dimpled smile bright and daring. The silver on her nose ring winked back at me, an invitation to explore a world that was forbidden. From the CD player raging in my bedroom, Alanis Morissette's "Head Over Feet" seemed apt for the situation.

I had fallen in love with an image. And not just any image. As I stared down at the January 1993 issue of *Sassy* magazine broadcasting the newest Sassiest Girl in America, something stirred within me. And not in just an "Oh, you are a cool badass" kind of way, but also in an "I'd sell my left kidney to go on a date with you" kind of way. That's when I first became aware of my non-straightness. My Catholic self admonished, "Uh oh, this won't go over well with Mom and Dad." Still, some part of me was curious to explore the universe within and without that eventually became my bi/pansexual identity.

Sassy piqued my interest as it stood out from the typical teen magazine featuring a size two model and admonishments of "What is wrong with you and how do we change it so that you can get THE guy so you're not a loser?". Instead, the writers for *Sassy* also talked about things like women's rights, the state of the world, "how to be a politically incorrect teenage journalist," and the "latest ska craze—a revolution or just a phase?"—while still feeding the hetero-normative, boy-crazy vibe. Okay, so maybe it wasn't a *total* mind shift, but it was still one that sparked my mind and heart that maybe I didn't *have* to conform to be whole. Maybe there was a community out there filled with lovely individuals like the Sassiest Girl in America who was respected for all the different layers that make up a woman.

We had just moved to Washington state when I hit puberty, and the culture shock was real. My East Coast accent and open demeanor was met with suspicious glares and sneers. The West Coast girls I hung around exuded elite isolation as much as Tribe perfume scent. My half-Asian, half-White, bespectacled short self did not belong. But that was okay because where *Sassy* fell short, this long-haired, angry siren named Alanis Morissette echoed the inner rage hiding within my soul. That voice wanted to yell against messages in my life that said women should be seen, not heard. Be polite, don't be too smart so as to put off the opposite sex (because that's the only kind you should be attracted to), and be grateful that the biggest achievement in life is having the highest teased hair and reeling in the jock/skater/brooding-artist guy. Prior to *Sassy* and Alanis, I thought something was fundamentally wrong with me. To fix it, I consumed everything from *Teen*, *Seventeen*, to the

oh-so-grown-up *Cosmopolitan* magazines. I went through an unhealthy number of pop quizzes that, once deciphered, I was convinced would give me the Holy Grail answers of how to do myself up, get the guy, and have perfect teeth all in the name of "normal." Alanis and *Sassy* taught me to say "screw that" and re-define "pretty." It was okay to read Brontë, surpass guys in chemistry, be loud, have a voice. And if those things were okay, then maybe accepting the fluid nature of my sexuality was okay too.

Of course, social norms and Catholic/Asian guilt is real, so by senior year of high school, I tamped those inclinations down and forged ahead trying to fit into the closet. I pursued what I thought were heteronormative relationships which were damaging in many ways. I became a single mom and still pushed for that straight-laced happy ending that I was supposed to pursue. Still, that fire that was ignited by a revolutionary zine and a pop-star-turned-alternative goddess stayed with me. Slowly, that inspiration broke through the concrete cracks of poverty, sexism, and homophobia. I finished my bachelor's and master's degrees as a single parent. I got a good, stable, paying job that freed me and my family from welfare. I bought my own house. And then I came face-to-face again with my sexuality. This time, over a decade and a half wiser, I stared at the now vintage January 1993 *Sassy* magazine digital cover. The same flutter and flush of heat told me this was not a passing phase. It was time to explore and accept this part of me. With Alanis' albums still my soundtrack, I now approached relationships with new awareness, empowerment, and understanding.

The day I came out to those closest to me, it was as if a piece of a puzzle finally fell into place. Never in my life had I felt so content with my identity. Yes, there was some regret in living all those years wasted trying to fit a "norm" that was never mine to begin with. Even so, as the older and wiser Alanis later articulated in her *So-Called Chaos* album, sometimes "the only way out is through." From those experiences, I found my sass.

Janie Kang (she/her pronouns) lives in the Pacific Northwest region of the U.S. She loves writing short stories, non-fiction, and poetry as much as she still loves rocking out at concerts and wearing combat boots.



Pretty Girls, Fandom, and My Path from Uncertainty to Self-Acceptance

By Julia Barnes-Brown

When I sat down to write this piece, I started by thinking through my (still-ongoing) journey as a bi+ woman for the millionth time and tripping over what the first step in that journey might have been, because even now that step still feels unclear.

I keep getting stuck on *The Fellowship of the Ring*, with Liv Tyler as Arwen and Cate Blanchett as Galadriel.

Or maybe it was *Bend It Like Beckham*—the movie as a whole, with its intense friendship between two girls united by a shared interest, but also just Keira Knightley.

Or maybe it's both. Both? Both is good. (There's a reason why that meme from *The Road to El Dorado*, a movie which, in my opinion, contains copious bisexual energy, has become something of a bi+ emblem.)

My father read both *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy in their entirety to me (and my twin brother) when I was younger, so by the time the *Fellowship* movie came out I was a tween moderate Tolkien fan. I got attached to female characters at the drop of a hat, often simply by sharing their gender, and all the more so if they were capable of feats too fantastical or physically daunting for me as a disabled person to perform.

In the theater, watching a movie can be magnified in any number of ways. Sometimes I identified with characters or moments on that towering screen only to feel differently upon watching it at home. But one thing held true in the theater and on DVD: the dazed, disbelieving reverence on Frodo's face when Arwen first appears, matched my own emotions. My first thought upon seeing Liv Tyler was that she was the most beautiful woman I had ever seen in my life, a thought that echoed whenever I saw her elsewhere. Even the memory summons the same physical reaction, briefly—the catch in my breath and the ache in my chest. I truly had trouble breathing when she was on screen, afraid of missing a single word she spoke. Her romance with Aragorn was an instant obsession for me, and though I often imagined myself in the woman's place in romances I got invested in, this was different. I almost couldn't decide which of the two I'd rather be. I was soon swept away by the rest of the spectacle and Cate Blanchett's Galadriel, though, so this indecision never registered as unusual.

Galadriel. Oh, Galadriel. Cate Blanchett's voice opens the movie, and its hypnotic tone sealed my fate: when I, a dyed-in-the-wool lover of fairies, elves, and magic in general, was introduced to Ms. Blanchett as an actual elf queen, it now seems inevitable that I'd be in love with her for the rest of my life. Her moment with Frodo and the One Ring—"all shall love me and despair"—is tattooed in my mind to this day.

Of course, I had none of this clarity around my thoughts and emotions at the time. Despite the fact that I had had similar reactions to most of my male celebrity crushes, despite the fact that by that time I knew there were men who loved men and women who loved women, my brain didn't connect the dots.

Bend It Like Beckham came out a year after *Fellowship*, and with it the emergence of my first self-admitted girl crush. It tells the story of Jess, a British Indian teenager whose dream is to get on the local girls' soccer team, where she meets Keira Knightley's Jules.

I went through a period of living vicariously through sports media of all sorts; having cerebral palsy meant balance and coordination issues that made most sports frustratingly difficult or injurious to play. Soccer, next to ice skating, was my favorite to watch, and so my fantasies of playing alongside Jules and Jess were safely contained in the sports fandom box—except my heart skipped whenever Jules smiled. And I absolutely detested the love triangle between them and a young male soccer coach.

Fast forward to me similarly detesting Keira's storyline in *Love Actually*, yet swooning over *Pirates of the Caribbean* and *Pride & Prejudice*, the latter an adaptation I so loved that I received the DVD as a Christmas present and felt oddly embarrassed when I considered why I liked it so much—I was keenly aware it was because of Keira, and that my feelings extended beyond admiration into a nebulous new realm.

Still: the dots? Not connecting.

In parallel to these experiences, meanwhile, I'd discovered fanfiction. This was where I started exploring, through both reading and writing, romantic relationships between women. I'd been shipping* for years at that point, and while most of them were male/female ships due to their media dominance, I found the genders of the characters involved didn't matter much to me; I'd latch onto a pair (and eventually trios, quartets, and so on) because their interactions caught my eye, and sometimes just because they looked really good together. Through my unabashed, seemingly gender-blind "they're meant to be together" passion over many non-canon queer ships in anime, books, and cartoons, I began to sift through my own feelings toward girls unencumbered by the heart-racing admiration I experienced toward characters in the live-action sphere. Indeed, I never wrote for any fandoms featuring actresses or characters I had crushes on, and also rarely read in those fandoms. I still couldn't even call the feelings crushes.

Maybe this was a defense mechanism for my baby bi+ self until

*"Shipping a relationship" means to actively support or wish for a romantic connection between two people, either real or fictional characters.

the bramble of insecurities and internalized biphobia began to wither, or maybe those fandoms didn't hook me in as deeply as others. Maybe both.

Both is good.

As I channeled some of that girl-crush energy into running my fleet of ships, contemplating my sexuality suddenly became an option. Jumping headlong into the trenches of yaoi* taught me that shipping queer ships didn't necessarily mean the shipper was queer; I hung onto this idea, I realize now, like a life raft, while reading and writing stories where girls fell in love with each other, confessed dramatically, and kissed. Because even though my immediate family were queer allies and made sure I was too, I was hardly immune to the wider societal stigma surrounding queerness that permeated everything outside my fandom and family bubbles. With baby steps, I ventured into consuming slightly more inclusive queer culture, encountering the idea of people being attracted to "both" genders (the concept of trans and non-binary people was yet to enter my brain) and the stereotypes surrounding them. My lack of dating experience at the traditional age complicated things; would I be greedy wanting to date boys and girls? Did I actually *like* girls or just admire them? As a shy introverted homeschooler, I didn't have many friends of any gender, so maybe I was only attracted by my crushes' celebrity. Never mind that I hadn't dated boys, but knew unequivocally that I was attracted to them and never questioned those celebrity crushes.

Even though most of my subconscious was invested in veiling my queerness, I think some other part of my subconscious, a part that wasn't hiding in that cozy closet, held iron-clad certainty in my bi+ identity, certainty in the fact that I would realize when I was ready. When I finally began calling myself bisexual in my early thirties, it wasn't because of a huge revelation, but rather a quiet, "Yep, that's me," pieced together through years of fandom passion and thousands of words of fanfic. It was a realization, after much self-reflection, that I was indeed queer enough, that it wasn't just a phase, that I'm capable of being attracted to men, women, and the myriad people that relate to gender in all sorts of ways.

*Yaoi is a term for media created in Japan that focuses on the homoerotic relationships between male characters and has heavy sexual content.

I'm forever grateful for fandom and fanfic allowing me to consider my identity at my own pace, and for the friends I have made and continue to make through them. I continue to closely follow Cate Blanchett and Keira Knightley's careers, and have acquired many more crushes along the way. I've become rather the disaster "everyone is hot" bi+ lady, but that's one stereotype I don't mind being labeled with; the vast human experience of gender is beautiful, and I refuse to be ashamed of my admirations anymore.

Julia Barnes-Brown lives in the U.S., in a suburb of Boston, Massachusetts. She is a disabled, left-handed omnigeek who breathes books, eats words, and has a massive gaming backlog.



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David Lynch Died Today

By Darby Swab

In college, a “Tumblr famous” girl lived in the same dorm as me. I’ll tell the truth as vaguely as possible, but—*iykyk**. She was, and is, ethereally beautiful—a tall, slender redhead with high, dramatic cheekbones. I had to meet her. It started with a DM after she posted a pic of her room—*hey, is this X building? I live here too. Let’s get breakfast.*

We learned we were born one day apart—August Leos. We grew up in roughly the same part of the state. She was an artist and already dating women, something I hadn’t quite gotten to yet. We grew closer and moved out of the dorms. Her apartment was much more fashionable than mine, and she would let me play dress-up in her closet. I drove us an hour away in my Subaru Forester to a fall festival, took film photos of her trying on her dream leather jacket. We went to the beach; her friend left glittery residue from a Lush product covering the backseat of the Forester. I’ve attempted to chase that level of shine ever since.

One summer, I spent the weekend at her family’s house to celebrate our close birthdays. “Have you ever seen *Twin Peaks*?” she asked. “No,” I replied. On separate couches, we watched. Was any of it ever romantic, sapphic? Maybe not overtly, maybe not intentionally. It could have been the magic of female friendship. But for me, something was igniting. Not feelings for her specifically, *per se*, but a part of myself I was just beginning to understand was starting to speak, and I was finally open to listening.



The author, circa 2016

**iykyk*: if you know, you know

We fell apart after a few years, as it goes. She had bigger, louder opinions on things like sexuality and gender and art than I did, and felt inherently correct on them. I tried to say, well I still feel this way, this is who I am. I wasn’t ready to live it yet. At some point recently, I realized she unfollowed me on Instagram. How could someone who was so subtly intrinsic to my story do that? She has a wife, lives across the country. David Lynch died today.

Truth be told, I watched *Mulholland Drive* for the first time on a laptop with busted speakers in 2023 because Chappell Roan sang about it. No one had told me it was gay before! I watched it again that year, on the big screen—a director feature at a local theater on a first date with my now-boyfriend. I’m openly bi, openly queer—even as a woman who dates men, and despite it.

David Lynch died today.

Based in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in the U.S., Darby Swab lives with her senior cat Jack and loves Taylor Swift, the color pink, and all things glittery.

Closing My Eyes

By Natalie Schriefer

I remember not the paperwork mounding on my desk, staff stretched thin with the secretary away, but the background on my computer—the smile of my sapphic fictional crush, a screenshot from a movie, which I saw whenever I closed out a window, a task—the soft stillness of her image as unreal as the promise of new hires but appeasing just the same. I didn’t have a name for it then, how a glimpse of her nose, her cheekbones softened the frenzy, but I know it now as comfort. Truth. Acceptance. Joy.

Natalie Schriefer is a freelance writer and academic editor living in the northeastern U.S.



Twenty-Five Years Later and the Hex Girls Can Still Get It

By Gretchen Uhrinek

*“With this little cobweb potion
You’ll fall into dark devotion
If you ever lose affection
I can change your whole direction”*

— The Hex Girls, *Scooby-Doo! and the Witch’s Ghost* (1999)

Picture this: you’re five years old and sitting on the living room floor. The floor is carpeted, because it’s 1999. Your mom (who is probably hungover, let’s be real) just pushed a new VHS into the machine—well, new to you, at least. It came from the local video rental shop, the one with the dimly lit back room you’re not supposed to enter. But you accidentally stumbled into that room, once, and saw breasts that didn’t belong to your mom. You were too young then to understand that you’re not supposed to see breasts that don’t belong to your mom. Not yet, and if society had its way, probably not ever.

But that doesn’t matter. What matters is the film playing before you: *Scooby-Doo! and the Witch’s Ghost*.

Within the first ten minutes, you’re hooked. There’s a mystery writer man with a black goatee voiced by Tim Curry (again, it’s 1999). A quaint village in New England boasting perfect fall foliage. Candles—you see how candles are made! And how butter is churned! This is paradise, you think. This is how life should be.

(In the background, your mom is spreading *I Can’t Believe It’s Not Butter* on burnt Wonder Bread. She hands it to you on a styrofoam plate. The plate melts under the hot toast.)

But it gets better. You learn of Sarah Ravencroft, a—gasp—*Wiccan*. To this day, her name rolls delicious and dark in your mouth. Then, less than twenty minutes into the direct-to-video cartoon that would spell your bisexual awakening, you meet them.

The Hex Girls.

Dusk, the curvy blonde. Luna, the racially-ambiguous redhead. And Thorn, the frontrunner. Thorn is all black and red and pale evening shimmer, confidence and brain and fang. Later, she would tell the Gang that the Hex Girls are eco goths. You are five and don’t know what that means, but somehow you internalize that statement; in high school, eco goth would become your platonic ideal.

(When you are 18 you will spend Christmas alone in a friend’s basement after your father threatens you for being vegan and liking women as well as men.)

But let’s not get ahead of ourselves.

Let’s focus on the music instead.

The Hex Girls aren’t just eco goths. They fucking shred. In “Earth, Wind, Fire, and Air,” a rock song about loving the planet, the chorus includes a line about how the Hex Girls don’t care if they look bad. Of course, it’s a moot point—they look amazing. Dusk, Luna, and Thorn are veritable hotties, and not just in how they’re animated, although that certainly plays a role. It’s their confidence and dedication to causes greater than themselves that really cemented them as kick-ass icons of female empowerment. (Your parents are alcoholics. You often hear them call you worthless through the thin walls of your home. You are a child, already small, and their words make you smaller.)

Then there’s the eponymous song, “Hex Girl.” You are much older than five today and yet you still remember every word. You cannot play guitar, or any instrument for that matter, but that’s beside the point. The song’s heavy riffs are burnt into your soul. From the first lines, Thorn promises to cast a spell on you, one that causes you to obey her every command, one that makes you lose control. It’s a lusty promise for a children’s cartoon, but nevertheless it works. You would do anything for the Hex Girls.

(The thing about drunk people is that they’re unpredictable. You must be hypervigilant to make sure they’re always happy. You are drawn to the idea of someone who clearly tells you what they want.)

The rest of the movie is immaterial. The Gang solves a mystery. The mystery turns out to be a red herring. There are actual supernatural forces at play. Tim Curry is a warlock. The angry ghost of Sarah Ravencroft traps him in a spellbook. Some pumpkins and a turkey transform into evil aberrations. It’s all typical Scooby Doo fare, more or less. But in the end, it’s Thorn who saves the day. She vanquishes the supernatural evil plaguing the small Massachusetts town. And if that’s not enough, she and the rest of her band immediately organize a benefit show to raise money to restore the town following the magical destruction. Once and for all, the Hex Girls prove themselves to be selfless and kind and strong. And you love them for it.

(For the rest of your life, you will want women who are selfless and kind and strong. And you will love them for it.)



Gretchen Uhrinek (*she/her*) is a Pittsburgh-ish (U.S.) writer and editor.

Out and Forgot Your lantern, Looking for Yourself

By Maia Brown-Jackson

I. When do you fake being a person well enough that it becomes the truth?

You fear you're fighting a losing war against yourself.

You have to relearn how people do this, this *living, interacting*, blithe and open. You say yes and yes and yes and you forget the other option but you know you wish for it.

You don't trust yourself. You tiptoe, silent, fearing that everyone is searching for your flaws, ready to lay them out to make you feel like shit so that they can convince you that you don't deserve anything, let alone them, and oh, the things you *owe* them, for (mis)handling the crisis of *you*: you, problem; you, disaster; you, unlovable—

You can't help but wonder if you're still capable of being *in* love. You wonder if you're still capable of being loved. You wonder if there's anyone in the world who can apply pressure to the gunshot wound of your hypervigilance, who can accept the gory, loathsome, frightening (frightened) thing you've become. You wonder if you deserve anyone. You wonder if being alone is your prize, in the end.

(That's what they told you, right? And it ended with your word versus theirs. And they were so confident, especially when it came to you, and something about them had gotten you to doubt yourself for so long—)

And you're so afraid, and you *hate* to admit that, and you hate even more that despite it all you still crave love, that out of everything they took you never lost that, because it makes you vulnerable, and you know it might also make you human but maybe you're not entirely human anymore. But your foolish, foolish heart keeps tearing open, bleeding this *craving* like air. This raw, uncontrollable desire for someone to willingly, gently disable all your defenses (*red wire or green wire!?*), scale all your infinite, frictionless, towering walls, and hell, just take a non-metaphorical chance on someone as mercurial as you. You fantasize about someone who would bandage your scrapes, pressing butterfly kisses into your bruises—because you'll never live a life quiet enough to avoid *that* type of damage—and you're not quite, *quite*, ready to give up on the possibility of that kind of *miracle* just yet.

But you fear the *weight* of love; where others might hurl themselves from cliffs, able to say: "I trust you" and not care about falling because they're holding each other's hands, you can only think of the constant of Earth's gravity (9.8 meters per second squared) and it feels like you might be on Jupiter instead (24.8 meters per second squared) and you don't know if it's better to hit the ground that much faster or clutch those last few extra milliseconds of life.

So if someone (somehow) *did* want more of the crime scene of your existence, and you managed not to run (and you've always been a runner), and maybe you would be trembling or maybe you would be paralyzed, but you know you would feign confidence as you *tried* to let someone in (because you've also always run straight for the things that scared you), and then they grew sick of your new "eccentricities," what would you do when they didn't fall, but failed you instead?

(Because you wonder how much of what they said was true, how anyone could stand this ugly-provocative-loathsome-naive-frightening-frightened-stubborn-impulsive-wounded *thing* you are that apes being a human—)

II. When do you get to go home?

You're getting better: you can acknowledge that you're not okay now. And apparently that's a step in the right direction. Something happened to you, and even though it ended, it hasn't really *ended*, with the neural pathways of your brain now hypervigilant, surprising you with wildly fun and unpredictable new reactions to everyday situations. Like when you're talking on the phone with your mom, and she asks when you're coming home, and you freeze at that damn fragment of a sentence, and you stutter something that you manage to get away with because you've gotten very good at keeping the panic attacks to yourself, but when you hang up you can't get the question out of your mind.

This week was the first time you've swallowed your fear and you renewed your lease. In your life. You'd already been living here an entire *year*, and you could feel your fight-or-flight kicking in, and still. You knew this time running wouldn't do the trick. It used to just feel like this itch to find something new and better because you were never content, and now, after all *that*, you find that standing still makes you understand the phrase "deer in the headlights"—hell, makes you understand that immobilized deer—but you know that this is something you have to face, even when it feels like a car mowing you down, so there's no point in suffering once again from not buying enough boxes for your books because you can never estimate it right because *it* would just smuggle itself along inside no matter where you go. You're being brave, even if it doesn't look like that from the outside.

(Just in case you can't manage it though, if you find yourself stuck in a brand new cycle of bad habits because you have the time to develop them now that you've relearned the basics of living which seems to involve a lot more free time when you're not constantly in fight-or-flight, you just keep repeating your completely normal mantra: "You can always find a way to break the lease. You can always find a way to break your lease.")

Then there are these little things that are actually kind of exciting (you don't tell anyone—that would make you seem even less capable of taking care of yourself): every piece of your art is already on the wall; you know exactly how far to twist the shower knob to make it the perfect temperature; you started a *book club*. It's almost like being a real person.

And now you have a place that you refer to as “home” automatically. But as you talk to your mom, and you hear the way she says that word, you know that's not really right, is it? You can't go *back* home. You're not the person who called it *home* anymore. And you don't know that this new place is (not really new anymore, especially for you) “home,” because when your very skin isn't safe, the skeleton and organs and muscles that make you up don't feel like a home anymore themselves, and this very thing that somehow hasn't given up on you yet might still betray you without notice. How could anything made of brick and mortar possibly do better?

Your epidermis became a war zone disguised by freckles and tattoos, and you use a subtle reluctance to get too close to anyone to hide how the jagged edges of your bones can cut and the jangling of your invisible dog tags keep you awake, but still the ever-present ghosts you never used to believe in don't take the hint. Your body is haunted. It doesn't matter where you go: the spectres come with you.

You remember the girl you once were like she's a fascinating stranger, by now too exhausted to pretend that's still who you are, and you're dripping blood far too freely to keep claiming that you're okay. All your broken pieces have to be reassembled, stitches now crisscrossing skin that, despite its thin fragility, used to somehow stay unmarred. Now you just get to worry that the developing scars reassembling you won't hold—or worse, that they'll be so obvious that one glance at you will scream “I'm not okay!” And with every touch you're reminded: you will not be that girl with the perfect skin and its ease over her limbs that she took for granted ever again. This body, this person, she's someone you're still learning, and she doesn't know where she belongs.

But that's not all you are. That's not all you experience. You still have *your* comfortable bed with *your* rosy silk sheets and you actually bothered to fix the dishwasher because you *signed a lease* and you're going to continue using it for some time so you can't just leave it for the next tenant.

You're still going to be okay, eventually.

It's that some of us—maybe we'll find somewhere new, somewhere we relearn “safe”—we just never get to go home.

III. When will you stop running?

Your instincts are *still* telling you to run, to *finally* lose yourself amongst dust particles, really just little nomads themselves aren't they? Rootless and content in the sunbeams. And you know that dust is just human skin, and your own feels like it

will never be clean— *except* if you could break it back down to elements forged in the hearts of dying stars, hell, hope most that your soul turns to the hydrogen that existed since the Big Bang itself, and *run*—

Then sometimes you remember: you are fucking brilliant and you are burning yourself. *That* happened and here you still stand. It's exhausting having to be brave and *brave* and *brave* so you are not just a survivor—and you hate hearing that word given to you like it should be a badge of honor—but you are truly *living* again. Frankly, you refuse to be a “victim” or “survivor” for the rest of your life because you *will not* let this define your future.

You will not let *them* define your future.

You will not let *them* define you.

(But who the fuck *are* you? Because you know it's not the same person who met them, or even the one who was with them [thank god], and you'll never be either of those people again, and actually, you realize that those women are just one more thing you've been unconsciously grieving, one more thing they stole, they *killed*, and you didn't even notice it happening, and maybe if you'd just noticed that it was happening then none of this—

Will you always wonder if there was a moment you could have stopped this?

What if you're just doomed to become a pillar of salt, because you're eternally trapped glancing over your shoulder?)

IV. What happens when you realize the *old* you is never coming back?

“When's your movie coming out?” the heavyset Dominican man repeats as you pull out your headphones to hear him properly. You hate when people talk to you on the subway. “You've got a look. Like, there was a girlfriend on *Breaking Bad*, I could see you coming from a ways away, just like her. You've got a look, like for the movies.” He pauses, you contemplate your sweatpants, and he nods, suddenly serious. “It's going to be okay.”

You don't really know what to say to that, just mutter an awkward “thanks,” slip your headphones back on, and forget to restart your music.

Fuck. What the fuck was that.

It seems, maybe, that was someone who saw you as a person, whole, not missing the parts that got hidden in the shadows and that you're not really sure you want to find again. You're itching to run, now. Freedom or fear you can't tell. But you haven't fled yet, and you're not going to let them win; you're going to keep fighting to learn to be this new person, this new you. If you have to run, you decide, you have to stop running from, and start running to.

So you struggle not to scowl at the invisible scars along your body that look barely stitched together, but plan for that day you'll be ready—even if you're holding your fists up the whole time because you're still on guard—ready to try because your world is not going to stay this small because there has to be a day that you're ready, and you're going to fill those cracks with gold—

After the extremely practical literature degree from the University of Chicago, award-winning, Pushcart-nominated

Maia Brown-Jackson then braved the myriad esoteric jobs that inevitably follow, ultimately straying from NYC to Iraq to volunteer with survivors of ISIS genocide. Inspired with a new focus, she caffeinated herself through a graduate degree in terrorism and human rights and now investigates fraud, waste, and abuse of humanitarian aid in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan. Also, she writes.



Loved

By Kai Crawford

Grandma had been sitting on the couch. The yellowish-brown family couch, where she'd let you eat popcorn and those chocolate-covered cherries Grandpa loved. On her lap was a blanket Grandpa gave her two years ago. She wore a knitted hat my brother gave her, along with the shawl and socks I'd gotten her for Christmas. I remembered she'd been complaining about how cold her feet were. I remember how surprised and happy she'd been when she'd opened the gift.

But now she was looking down and hadn't really moved since I started talking. I didn't really expect her to. I didn't really expect much of anything, I knew it would be OK, though. It was just who she was. It was just awkward given how time was against us both.

So, in her silence, I took the seat next to her. And even then, it felt so long before she spoke.

"I'm sorry."

"Huh?"

"I'm sorry I made you wear pantyhose."

My head buzzed as her voice wavered. She pulled out a tissue from her sleeve and started wiping her eyes. I have no clue what she's talking about.

"In the eighth grade. You were so upset! I should have known."

It clicked right then. My eighth-grade graduation. I remember being put into a dress and lying in the back of the car in the church parking lot. I remember being frustrated and having a fit I was much too old to be having. Grandma was there, insisting I wear the pantyhose. I hated the dress, I hated pantyhose. I hated being told I was pretty.

And I just told her that again.

I started crying, the happy kind, as I tried to comfort her.

"I didn't even remember that, Grandma!"

It had gotten lost as those little moments piled up and eventually, worse fights took its place. Never with her though.

And when I tried to be "pretty," I wanted to be pretty in the way she was. Like how she is now.

"I did." She pulled a fresh tissue from the box on the end table. "You were so unhappy. You've always been an easygoing kid. But you were flailing about in the back of the Trailblazer like that."

"I hated how easy they got holes." I admitted, taking the tissue from her. "They do make your legs look nice. But they rip so easily, and I think I was just frustrated."

"Still, I'm sorry dear. I shouldn't have done that."

"It's nothing Grandma. You don't need to apologize." I opened my arms to hug her, aware of how fragile she felt. "I love you."

"I love you too. And thank you for telling me." She slowly pulled back, before reaching her thin hand up to run it through my new short hair. "You look very handsome."

Kai Crawford lives in the Long Beach area of California in the U.S., where they constantly work on their writing.



Kai with their grandmother, long ago

Lipstick on Gravestones

By Elaine Server

It's my first semester
and the local community college has all the gallantry and grace
of a cigarette at a gas pump.

I try my best to hide away—
The library basement is dim and dark
and perfect for going unnoticed.
*(I'm down there Tuesdays and Thursdays nursing
the pit in my stomach that forms every time
I see my best friend with her boyfriend
even as I just left mine.)*

The basement—yes—
They keep the unorganized stacks
of the last letters of the alphabet down there.
Hiding turns to one-room-wandering
and eventually I thumb through Wilde
and pick up *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

I spend hours heckling with Henry,
trying to twist Basil towards vice,
seducing Sibyl till sorrow and beyond—
in every page a Victorian scandal
that makes my sheltered ears burn hot.

Witty and lush,
I am unbound in its binding.
It's nothing, it's everything.
My breath shudders as the final drops of understanding
trickle in till the dam breaks.
*(Jealousy and love are fickle things;
they both have my best friend's face.)*

The week after I finish the novel I lose my virginity
to a girl who moved like smoke
through most of the very few friends I claim.
(It doesn't make me forget my best friend but it's a close, close thing.)

I am still no Dorian,
the aesthetics of Wilde are a far cry
from my modest thinning closet,
but I keep a copy on my nightstand
for when doubts slip in,
for when lovers slip out.

I tattoo the epitaph
“*Outcasts Always Mourn*” on my thigh in memory
of who I became that year in that ugly little basement,
better than ever before.

Now I smile at my pristine painted portrait on the wall,
at my lovely aged face in the mirror,
and know there's no limit to my pleasure—
however or with whomever I feel it.
Eternally thankful old Oscar died for the purest of my sins.

*(Time and time again
I think of him,
as I take in new lovers
to push out old friends,
because some things never change
and I am nothing if not a creature of habit.
Time and time again.)*

Elaine Server is an ever-changing artist and poet on the West Coast of the U.S. looking to bring long-time private works into the public sphere.



Oh, So That's Why...

By Xénia

Where do I even begin? Although I know now that I'm bi and ace, relating a lot to the split attraction model, my pieces came together a little bit slowly.

In high school, I had a friend who was very open with me about her attraction to guys, so one day she swooningly messaged me a photo of a man who just came out of the shower and was supposed to look attractive. My honest, immediate reaction was “Eww, take that thing away from me,” which didn't surprise me much because I already suspected I was asexual, but I also knew I could definitely imagine myself having a romantic relationship with a guy. The emotional attraction was always there, but then it hit me: *Wait a minute... if there was a girl in that photo, I would have no problem with it; I'd actually find her beautiful.*

After that fateful picture, every related past experience came back: “Oh, so *this* is why I repeatedly watched so many music videos with a focus on girls, especially with dancing or kissing scenes.” Avicii's *Addicted to You* stood out to me the most. As a teen, I had watched it so many times, thinking to myself, “That connection the girls share—it feels so normal, so deep. They must be very close friends. It's beautiful.” Very close friends, for sure. *That's* why I had read every news article I could find about female celebrities who were rumored to have a girlfriend. *That's* why I'd watched female ballet dancers and ice skaters on TV in awe, but shrugged at men, why I'd looked forward to the girl characters' screen time in cartoons as a kid, and stared only at women in fashion magazines, admiring their features. All the while, I'd had crushes on guys in real life—quite confusing.

But after realizing I was bi, after letting myself be open to girls (as well as becoming more confident in myself as a person), I developed girl crushes and found that I felt the emotional connection with them even stronger than with guys. Wanting to make a girl feel happy and loved started to feel extremely right. This is what I was searching for all along! A burden, heavier than a mountain, was lifted off my chest. With guys, love never felt so complete. I fell for them fast, liked watching them from afar or listening to their soothing voices, enjoyed the romantic daydreams... but that was it. I always thought, “If something happens, cool—if not, it's okay, too.” Sometimes I started feeling more friend-like feelings towards them after getting to know them better. As a result, I took about a year to experiment with the label *lesbian*, which still resonates with me a little, yet my recurring crushes on guys kept showing me that I am, in fact, bi.

I decided to collect as much information and as many descriptions online as possible to see what felt true for me. LGBTQ+ social worker Zoe Stoller's (@zoestoller) Instagram posts helped me the most. I learned about the aromantic spectrum and learned to make the distinction between how I experience—if I experience—the different types of attraction towards different genders: I'm ace and frayromantic for men, demiromantic and

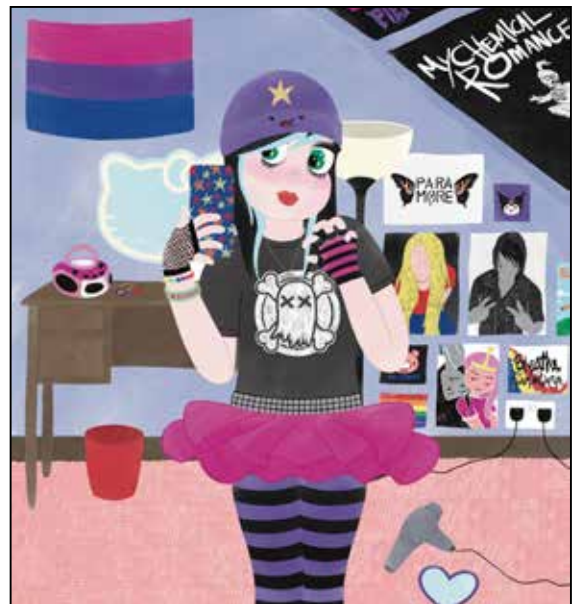
on the ace spectrum for women, and moreover, I can experience aesthetic attraction to all genders. For simplicity, I finally chose the labels bi and ace. (To an extent, I relate to the term non-binary as well). I'm so, so happy and content with it that I even keep using the flag colors in some of my DIY projects.

Looking back, I realize how much more difficult it would have been to understand this without the little signs and pieces of information the media and the internet provided me. But now my puzzle is complete, showing the intricate details of my soul I never thought I had, and I'm forever grateful for it.

Xénia is a translator-interpreter student in Hungary, thinking about switching to a career in visual arts.

Scene Queen

By Sophie Rose



ARTIST STATEMENT: Despite knowing the terms lesbian and gay since early childhood, I was only introduced to the term bisexual at the age of 13, when I was immersed into the scene/emo subculture. This was one reason I had the confidence to come out a short time later. In the scene, being bi wasn't considered dirty, greedy, or immoral—it was cool. People were encouraged to reject gender norms in their relationships, as well as through fashion. Women dressed in baggy band shirts, and had short, choppy hair. Men sported nail polish and eyeliner.

That community gave me a sense of safety and belonging that followed me throughout my queer journey. Without it, I don't know if I'd be the same confident, loud and proud bi woman that I am today.

Sophie Rose is an illustrator living in Southport, U.K.

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Everything That Should Be Mine

By Bethany Gavine

Enchanted by the subtle and effortless feminine around me
The women in my life have caught me
I'm stuck in a perpetual sweet orbit
revolving and circling around and around and around again
Jupiter Mars Venus
My goddess i want to kiss your mulberry mouth
Hold the dainty bones of your hands
Yin sweeping over me
Earthy and dark, hushed as a secret swallowed by blue lips
Strong and dizzying as a nicotine headrush
After months of withdrawal
The moon has pulled her veil over my eyes
But still i can see yours swimming
Unblotted by the indigo clouds or lingering fog
Take your thunder-stained palms and show me all my harsh, sharp edges
Whittle them down until all the impurities have eroded
I don't understand this feeling
Crippled by shame and guilt
Loyalty binds me, shackles or beautiful jewelry?
I know not the difference any longer
How could i wrestle with the thought that to gain back a piece of me
I would be losing you?
How great a sacrifice is too great?
I wish to be compared to a lamb, raring to shed its coat
But i possess neither the innocence, nor purity, nor eagerness to confront my nature for this to be true
Forgive me my love for i know not what i am doing
I need a love like summer
Ripe oranges peeled open by tender fingers on sunny days
Juice spilling over those deft limbs
Nostalgic for my adolescence when sleepovers under lavender sheets turned into
Awkward affections
Hushed and secretive, the most delicious kind of romance
Forbidden fruits taste all the sweeter
Can i be so selfish?
Can i be so daring as to claim everything that should be mine?



AI image generated by Robyn Ochs

Bethany Gavine is currently a student at Central Saint Martins in London, U.K. She is Scottish Trinidadian and has been writing from a young age. Other work can be found @bethg.poems_ on Instagram.

Unabridged

By Kaye Devlynnne



ARTIST STATEMENT: My art is a raw reflection of my personal journey—a journey shaped by struggles that have often been misunderstood, minimized, or ignored. Through my work, I aim to expose the truths of what it means to be a woman facing unjust barriers, to challenge the silence surrounding sexual abuse, to reclaim agency over my body after an eating disorder, and to embrace my bisexuality as a part of my identity.

Kaye Devlynnne lives in the greater Indianapolis area of the U.S. where, professionally, she quarterbackes the fast-paced, high stress world of business acquisitions. Kaye is fiercely protective of time spent where she evolves most as a person: her children, spouse, and art.

Pieces of Me

By Lara Zielinsky

My first attractions weren't towards boys, but I didn't question it. I just thought most kids kept their sexual imaginings private. The first people I fooled around with during my sexual awakening were girls. I'm not really sure why I didn't question it, because I didn't exactly grow up in a time period or environment where same-sex relationships were visible. I was just always more interested in the female characters of TV shows I watched, and often felt disappointed when they took up with guys on screen, like somehow that meant they were "off limits" to my imaginings. The first time this *didn't* happen to me was watching *Remington Steele*.

My nights were filled with dreams of being with *both* characters, and during the day I wrote fanfiction that included intimate scenes and shared them with my friends (pre-internet—this is important). This was when I finally caught on to the idea that some girls weren't interested in seeing (or imagining) naked women like I was. My friends were visibly uncomfortable reading some of these stories. I started writing only M/F stories, and only talked with other girls about being with guys, hiding my other inclinations.

I had my first boyfriend in high school and was sort of pleased when he graduated two years ahead of me and our relationship transitioned to long distance, then became infrequent, then just ended. In college, the final pieces of the puzzle of my attractions showed up. Without parents or my childhood community around me, I first dated a girl, then a guy, and then a girl. No organized group/identity labeling, though. In my final year of college, I met my now-spouse and settled down.

Years into our marriage, he asked something about my last relationship before we met. My use of she/her pronouns to describe the person raised his eyebrows. Yeah, I admitted, I'm bisexual. I had discovered this label in my new online community: Xena fandom. I was conversing regularly with people who identified as lesbian or bisexual. I spent the next few years probably like every other "baby gay," seeking community anywhere and everywhere. Thank goodness for the internet. All the pieces of me had finally come together.

Lara Zielinsky is a published author of sapphic fiction and works as a fiction editor. She lives with her spouse of 32 years in Florida in the U.S.



A Community at Risk: The Immediate and Long-Term Impact of Project 2025 on the LGBTQ+ Community

By Jenise Justice

The Current Assault on LGBTQ+ Rights

In recent months, the United States has witnessed a series of federal actions that significantly impact the LGBTQ+ community. Notably, LGBTQ+ rights in the United States are under direct attack, with the federal government systematically erasing LGBTQ+ related research and resources from government websites, defunding critical health programs, and enforcing a rigid gender binary through executive orders.

These actions align with the broader agenda of Project 2025, a policy blueprint developed by the Heritage Foundation and other conservative groups, which seeks to eliminate DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) initiatives, strip sexual orientation and gender identity from civil rights laws, and prohibit LGBTQ+ content in federally-funded institutions.

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) and other federal agencies have quietly removed LGBTQ+-related research and public health resources, including HIV/AIDS prevention programs and mental health services, from their websites.

Federal research grants focused on LGBTQ+ health and issues have reportedly been defunded or placed under review, endangering critical studies that inform public policy and medical care.

The administration signed an executive order titled “Defending Women From Gender Ideology Extremism and Restoring Biological Truth to the Federal Government” mandating a strict binary definition of gender—male and female—across all federal agencies. This order rescinds previous policies that recognized gender diversity and provided protections based on gender identity.

The enforcement of this binary framework disregards the existence and rights of transgender, non-binary, and intersex individuals, leading to potential discrimination in various sectors, including healthcare, education, and employment.

These policies do not exist in isolation; they are part of a well-orchestrated ideological battle that has been decades in the making. Right now, Project 2025 and its backers depend on division. They hope that LGBTQ+ people will fight alone while other civil rights organizations focus solely on racial or economic justice.

The Danger of Division and the Power of Collaboration

History offers clear warnings about the dangers of allowing divisions among marginalized groups. Attempts to separate

the fight for LGBTQ+ rights from the broader civil rights movement have often led to setbacks. In the late 1960s and '70s, some LGBTQ+ activists distanced themselves from Black civil rights organizations, fearing that aligning too closely with racial justice movements would slow the progress of gay rights. However, this fragmentation allowed conservative forces to successfully stall LGBTQ+ protections, reinforcing the idea that marginalized communities must compete rather than unite.

The AIDS Crisis and Intersectional Advocacy

The 1980s HIV/AIDS epidemic was a turning point in LGBTQ+ history, demonstrating both the power of solidarity and the dangers of neglecting broader alliances. The Reagan administration's refusal to acknowledge AIDS for years led to thousands of preventable deaths. It was only through strategic coalitions—with Black civil rights leaders, feminist organizations, and progressive religious groups—that ACT UP and other advocates were able to pressure the government into action.

Marriage Equality and the Civil Rights Framework

The landmark 2015 Obergefell v. Hodges Supreme Court ruling, which legalized same-sex marriage nationwide, was built on the constitutional arguments established during the Black civil rights movement. Without the legal groundwork of cases like Loving v. Virginia (1967), which struck down interracial marriage bans, the legal justification for LGBTQ+ marriage rights would have been far weaker.

These victories underscore a critical truth: sustainable progress happens when movements work together rather than operate in silos. In a world that constantly defines us by categories, we must recognize how identities intersect and shape our experiences. Forgetting this history risks repeating the mistakes of the past.

What Needs to Happen Next

To combat these regressive policies and protect LGBTQ+ rights, we must:

Rebuild coalitions. LGBTQ+ organizations must actively collaborate with Black, Indigenous, immigrant, and women's rights groups. Civil rights victories have always come through unified resistance.

Resist division. We must reject any attempts to pit marginalized groups against one another. The same forces attacking LGBTQ+ rights are also defunding reproductive healthcare,

Support legal and grassroots efforts. The ACLU, Lambda Legal, and other advocacy organizations are on the front lines of legal battles. Supporting their efforts financially and through activism is crucial.

Educate and mobilize. This is not just an LGBTQ+ issue—it is a human rights crisis. Spreading awareness and engaging in local, state, and federal activism is essential to stopping these attacks before they escalate further.

Vote strategically. With elections approaching, every vote matters. Policies like Project 2025 thrive when voter suppression and disengagement allow extremist agendas to take hold.

Do not panic. There is a movement surrounding every step of injustice. We must not lose sight of victory.

In closing, I must address another issue that has been overlooked in most conversations. It is my personal call to action. We must not overlook:

The Media's Failure and the Path to Accountability

The media has largely failed us by prioritizing sensationalism, corporate interests, and partisan agendas over truth and accountability. Instead of serving as a watchdog for democracy, too many outlets amplify misinformation, ignore systemic injustices, and neglect the voices of marginalized communities. This failure has allowed dangerous policies to go unchecked and public trust in journalism to erode.

To demand a course correction, we must hold media institutions and ourselves accountable by calling for transparent reporting, ethical journalism, and a commitment to investigative integrity. Those of us who are journalists must rise to this challenge by centering truth and resisting pressure to cater to power. The public can support these efforts by funding independent journalism, challenging disinformation, and demanding fact-based, context-driven reporting.

Jenise Justice resides on the East Coast of the U.S. She is the author of Down Low Sister On Top: Celebrating the African American Bisexual Woman and curator of Bi+ Black Women Podcast, which she will be launching in June 2025.

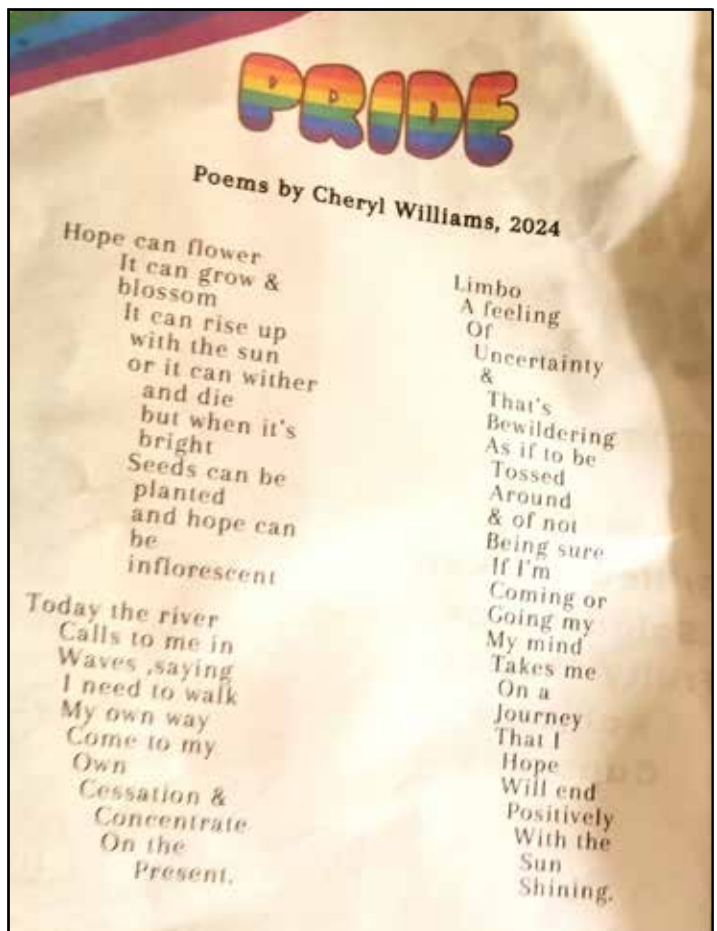


Months of Silence

By Monica Meneghetti

I extend these words like wings to brush all the anxious places. May their motion across page create updraft to help you soar. If altars are where the divine rests, then this paper is holy, these words, reclining deities of ink. The ache inside—I know it dwells in you, too—like a bruise or a bell, crying out at the slightest impact. The tremor in guts and the clench of jaw resound. Oh may our aches be brushed only by feathers and raise a resonant hush, making all the ache airier—as heavy, as afloat as clouds.

Monica Meneghetti is an unsettled settler on the traditional lands of the Klahoose, Tla'amin & Homalco Nations aka Cortes Island, Canada. Her memoir, What the Mouth Wants was a Bi Book Award winner and Lambda Literary Award finalist. Her personal essay, "Scars" was included in the 2024 release Here & Now: An Anthology of Queer Italian-Canadian Writing, Volume 2. Contact: @authormon.bsky.social.



Cheryl (Che) Williams is an artist, poet, singer, and songwriter from Boston, MA in the U.S.

A Gentle Reflection

By Mikey Vibal

Editor's note: In 2025, at the beginning of the Trump administration, the U.S. government and government agencies, including the Center for Disease Control (CDC), scrubbed references to queer and transgender people from their websites and publications, erasing LGBTQ+ individuals from official health information and resources.

As much as I would like to say we survived this in 2016, the truth is many of our queer (especially BIPOC) siblings did not. Here we are once again with gloom and clouds rushing in every morning when we turn on the news, check our phones, or listen to the radio. There is an attack actively going against us that is deeply rooted in racism and systemic violence. LGBTQ+ narratives and government-supported media are becoming archives and no longer living proofs. Even more so, as the BTQ+ BIPOC narratives have been historically left in the extra dark corners of the closet.

I am in a place where I know that if the government can brush over white cisgender gay men and their health needs, people like me are left in limbo. The federal government has removed LGBTQ+ information and resources from their platforms. Obviously, this sounds frightening, but I am writing to remind you that no web page will ever be enough to recognize the beauty of being LGBTQ+. A government web page's existence should not define your existence. The way being queer has made me feel is something that no amount of dictionary word proof, or research could ever define us, even when they are framed in our favor. The government and surveillance state will never love the way a community does. Our community's recognition of who we each are, through our love, mutual aid, and queer joy is evidence and testament to us.

I am aware that this is the system we must try to endure under, but do not let this be the thing that breaks your heart in two. I will always choose your creations, platforms, and testimonies as the true expertise on queer living. A system built on the binary never had the capacity to hold and sustain LGBTQ+ community members. Just as we were added in throughout the years, we are being taken out. This was inevitable when we were never consulted and uplifted from the beginnings of the system's creation. I wanted to be shocked and appalled, but instead I view this as true colors revealed. It has always been like this and until we are part of the foundation and fundamentals, we are just a loose brick they can do without.

Reflect on the beauty of not allowing a government to define your existence and truth. I know many may say those web pages were essential, and though I do agree it helped address some stigma and that it was good general info for a simple Google search, I would not ever call it an actual solution toward the

goal of queer liberation. I see the real work being done through queer mutual aid, coalition building, and even as far as the abandonment of the non-profit industrial complex and migration toward new ways of anti-carceral care. May this event create room for us to choose our own definitions, tell and listen to our own stories, continue to conduct our research, divest, and protest.

My community has held space for me from the very beginning and we can continue to do so for each other without the binds of binary legality and recognition. Queerness—especially for people of color—is still and has been actively criminalized before the removal of this content on the government's platform. We have been in a place where we must nurture care outside of the systems in place for decades and to the present day. We have been doing our best to build skills, safety pods, houses, found families, and communities where we are the foundation, and that has kept us safer than any law that can get ripped away with a signature or any platform with a .gov/.org.

We keep each other safe. Every shared meal, story, resource, tear, and laughter is our proof of existence. We need each other more than we will ever need them and I would not have it any other way.

Mikey Vibal (all pronouns) is a daughter of immigrants, writer, and artist based in Los Angeles, CA, in the U.S. She engages as the co-chair of the LA HIV Women's Task Force, is a lover of mutual aid, and describes herself as an active participant in love as she works toward solidarity in her community.



Here are some of the CDC removed pages:

CDC guidelines for LGBTQ care

HIV risk reduction tool

Facts about LGBTQ youth suicide

Tips for safe schools for LGBTQ youth

Rally

By Amy Cook

Midmorning, brutally cold, but warming. My hands are fucking freezing, even with the Hot Hands® tucked inside my gloves. Hundreds of people stand on the sidewalk in front of the United States Supreme Court. A picturesque pink sunrise has faded into a day that is pulsing with new rhythm. Of course, having set my hotel alarm for 4 a.m., I'm a little worse for the wear myself. Adrenaline and coffee are working overtime.

Inside the courthouse, the world has forever changed. Attorney Chase Strangio has become the first openly transgender person to argue before the Court¹. The case, having to do with Tennessee's ban on gender-affirming care for minors, has drawn the attention of many. It has broad implications for the future of, well, all of us. The rally-goers stand in two camps, separated by steel barriers. One side stands rigid and motionless; our side dances.

I am working today. My job is largely administrative, but affords me the opportunity to stand on the sidelines of queer history, to witness and re-tell. I was at the Stonewall Inn, the night that we won marriage equality in New York and again the night we won marriage equality for the whole United States. Celebration is often joyous. Today's moment is a little different. It points forward with a taut line.

Unlike dueling pianos, which operate in concert, the competing rally speakers offer dissonance, competing visions for who we aspire to be. The signs we hold are filled with affirmation, color, and joy. "Fight Like A Mother for Trans Rights!" and "Let Trans Kids Bloom!" The other side offers mostly fear: "Stop Transing our Kids." Our next speaker climbs the podium stairs, puts her handwritten speech on the dais and instinctively brushes her fingers through her long, dark hair. She wears a stylish white coat. Perfect for winter.

The crowd leans in.

"Hello, and good morning to everyone."

The sound of her voice echoes into the cold air, reaching out towards the Capitol.

She giggles, echoes of her recent childhood sneaking through her otherwise grown-up facade. There's another speaker starting in the distance, but, for now, she pays them no mind.

"My name is Mila. I'm twelve years old, I'm in eighth grade, and of course, I'm a trans girl."

1 Joanie Rae Wimmer, a transgender woman, argued and won a case in the *U.S. Supreme Court, Village of Willowbrook v. Olech*, 528 U.S. 562 (2000), and came out as transgender several years later.

Pitch perfect delivery, the inclusion of, "*of course*." It sounds off the cuff—improvised. But I bet it's not.

Outside the courthouse, the world has changed, too.

*

Twenty-five years ago, I stood on a similar podium—one a few blocks away, on the Washington Mall. I was twenty years old, and I was missing my cousin's Bar Mitzvah to speak at the Millennium March.

The march, in the spring of 2000, was (we were told) part of a storied tradition of progress. It followed the marches for gay rights in 1987 and 1993. At the start of the new era, the AIDS deaths had slowed considerably. The same week as the march, Vermont became the first state to allow civil unions for same-sex couples. My speech, which was poorly written and sparsely attended, was part of the youth movement for LGBT rights. I can't tell you what I spoke about. But I was very newly "out," and what felt brave and courageous at the time feels sloppy and embarrassing now.

I did get to meet Tipper Gore. And I did feel seen. Affirmed.

*

Mila is being counterprogrammed by none other than Congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene. This is not by design, just interesting timing, but the contrast captures my attention. Greene has made no secret of her contempt for our communities, and she brings to the microphone a violent, vindictive tirade, filled with junk science and wayward conspiracies. It is as predictable as it is unremarkable.

Mila seems unbothered. "I have a normal life," she proudly continues. "I have sleepovers. I have after-school activities. I speak four languages."

Well, that's just showing off. I am, at the moment, actively jealous.

Mila speaks *not* of the odds stacked against her, but of gratitude. Of life. Of *her* world that embraces difference and variation and the splendor of discovering and becoming. Of being surrounded by close friends. Mila is, by all accounts, popular.

"I have a loving family," she beams, and that couldn't be more clear. As she speaks to a crowd of supporters, a younger child, maybe a sibling, stays glued to her side, arms wrapped around and not letting go.

*

It is only in Mila's pauses that we hear the other speech. Fragments of it, rather, an unhappy trumpet squealing through cold air. As the tenor of Greene's speech dims, we shift and grow uneasy. Mila is unbroken, but she is comparatively tiny. Greene looms over her microphone, refusing to cede a scintilla of her crowd's attention to the Americans she thinks of as less than.

I suppose I am one of these. The queer daughter of a gay man, who works in LGBTQ+ civil rights and chose to travel here today. I represent something scary. Something *other*. Something with rage.

And then, suddenly and simultaneously, we fight back. A wave of noise, static threatening Greene's every note. A chorus of jeers and megaphone sirens erupt, protecting Mila's speech. When Greene leans even harder on her mic, the noise erupts, a cacophony of resistance.

Mila gives a quick, furtive glance to the naysayers. Pausing. She doesn't stop.

"Now, suddenly, out of nowhere, I'm hearing states are banning gender-affirming healthcare." She describes the pain and empathy for those whose medically necessary care has been taken away. For those who are at risk. That one of the people responsible for this injustice is standing not twenty feet away is not lost on this brave girl.

*

A few weeks from now, the world will tilt on a new axis. In a slew of obscenely cruel Executive Orders, the new president will try to erase the existence of transgender and nonbinary Americans. He will propose to eliminate funding for schools that support trans youth. He will try to ban medically necessary healthcare for trans youth and young adults. He will deem gender-affirmation as "mutilation" and he will seek to remove transgender Americans from military service. He will demand that federal buildings ban transgender people from using the bathroom that aligns with who they are. He will demand that federal employees remove their pronouns from their Outlook signatures.

He thinks he is a magician, and that it all just goes away. Real magicians know where things go when you vanish them.

*

And then. And then. In the distance, Representative Greene says something about protecting a child. We hear it in echo, the old mantra about controlling what you do not comprehend. *Child, child, child*. Like a big bass drum, but off-rhythm. Unsound. And that is the moment Mila reacts. She glances again, this time, rolling her eyes. The morning is hers now, and we're just a part of it. Grinning, she turns forward.

"It's wild that people... think that trans kids are a danger to society."

She laments that no one ("no, *not no one*," she changes her mind, ably wandering off script) takes her seriously because, as she reminds us, "I'm a kid."

"You know what? In spite of all of that, I'm standing right here, in front of the Supreme Court, because I have the guts to make change."

Mila gets loud. Louder than the sirens. Louder than the Congresswoman. Louder than whatever the hell detritus is written on the opposition's signs. Louder than the voices of the cynics and the so-called experts who see an enemy instead of an equal. Louder still than the bills and the laws and the rhetoric that shrinks a country—that makes us seem petty. and that makes the country inhospitable to life, liberty, and the pursuit of self-love.

Concluding, Mila shouts, "They will never take away our existence and our pride!" She turns to climb down the stairs, and then stops. She raises her speech, triumphantly, into the air, the loopy scrawl of a young girl's handwriting now transparent in the sunlight. Soon, the oral argument will be over, and our fate will hang in the balance, likely until next June.

Things heat up.

*

January comes. Another Executive Order. And then another. Claims of "radical indoctrination" and "anti-American ideologies." Very little of it is immediately enforceable, and it remains to be seen if any of it will go unchallenged. My co-workers and I, stunned but not surprised, gawk at the links in the Teams chat, holding each other up merely by witnessing. My dear colleague calls it, "patently unconstitutional nonsense." And it is. But it's static, in a world that doesn't need more static. We could use a pep-talk, by a young woman in a white winter coat.

Amy Cook was a 2024 finalist for Tablet Magazine's inaugural First Personal Essay Contest. Her essays and poems have been featured in more than two dozen literary journals, magazines, and anthologies, including Anti-Heroine Chic and the Los Angeles Review. Her lyrics were most recently performed by the San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus. She is an Editorial Assistant for the literary magazine, CRAFT. Rainier Writing Workshop (MFA pending, 2025).

EDITOR'S NOTE: You can read an account of Mila's speech outside the Supreme Court here: <https://www.the-independent.com/news/world/americas/us-politics/justice-alito-supreme-court-transgender-case-b2658961.html>

RESEARCH CORNER

Bi+ Communities and Their Experiences and Needs in Europe: Findings from the Bi+ Equal Survey

By the Bi+ Equal Research Team: Jantine van Lisdonk, Zeynab Peyghambarzadeh, Hilde Vossen, and Aida Marukyan

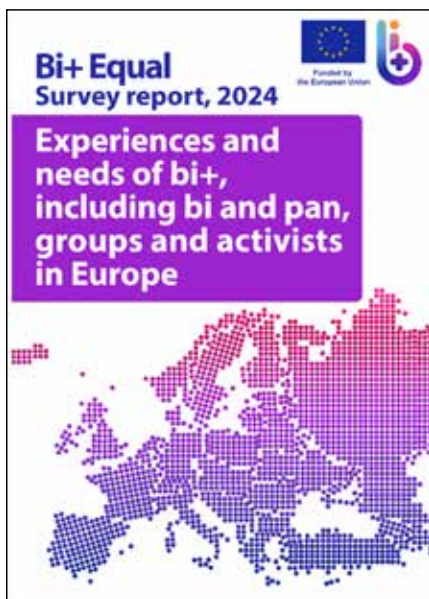
In January 2025, [Bi+ Equal](#) published a [survey report](#) on bi+ groups and activists in Europe. It reveals that the bi+ community in Europe is growing and ready to combine forces into a European bi+ organization or network. We are excited to share key findings from the survey.

Bi+ Equal

In our Bi+ Equal Project, Bi+ Nederland from the Netherlands, and Spectrum, a queer feminist group from France, are working together on three goals. We map existing initiatives, experiences, and needs of bi+ groups in Europe. We organize opportunities to exchange and learn from each other. And ultimately, we aim to create a European bi+ organization or network. This regional organization will give bi+ people in Europe a stronger voice, power, and visibility. This is done by the bi+ community, for the bi+ community!

The Survey

Our survey was the very first step to gather the needs and experiences of bi+ groups and activists across Europe. We mapped a total of 125 bi+ groups and 110 individual activists, and were pleasantly surprised by these high numbers. The online survey was filled in by 39 bi+ groups and 44 individual activists. The comprehensive survey report covers a wide range of topics and can be used for advocacy, research, and initiatives aimed at supporting and uplifting the bi+ community in Europe. We will also use the valuable insights for the process of creating a European bi+ organization or network.



Goals

Bi+ groups and activists mentioned most frequently that their goal was to promote bi+ visibility and inclusion within LGBTQI+ communities. Other goals that were frequently mentioned were challenging bi+ erasure and negativity, and promoting a positive, healthy, and safe community for bi+ people. Other survey findings also showed that bi+ people and activists can face challenges within or working with LGBTQI+ organizations.

Strong focus on community

Almost all the bi+ groups focused on community building. They described a wide range of activities, such as meet-ups, Pride activities, training sessions, services, and fun activities. The report gives beautiful examples, which may inspire other bi+ groups and activists.

Less focus on political advocacy

Only a few bi+ groups and activists were engaged in political advocacy, for example promoting more bi+ inclusive legislation, policies, and research. While most of them did value political advocacy, many reported that they lack the skills and budget.

Working together

Most bi+ groups have teamed up with LGBTQI+ networks and subgroups, and some have also worked with non-LGBTQI+ organizations such as feminist groups, schools, political parties, health organizations, trade unions, anti-racist groups, and businesses. These collaborations were generally positive, though a bit less so with other LGBTQI+ groups.

Financial and Human Resources

In Europe, the financial situation of bi+ groups is much weaker compared to other LGBTI+ organizations and subgroups, such as lesbian or transgender and non-binary groups. The difference was huge: many bi+ groups operate with very limited budgets, or none at all, and have to depend on volunteers, with very few having paid staff. This lack of resources impacts their ability to carry out activities. They also mentioned the emotional toll of activism, including health risks and activist burnout.

Regional differences

Similar to other LGBTQI+ communities, the situation of bi+ activists in Eastern Europe and sometimes Southern Europe was far more vulnerable or negative than that of those in Northern and Western Europe. First of all, we found few bi+ groups and activists in Eastern Europe and pan-European countries outside of the European Union. This could be related to the fact that

LGBTQIA+ activism in these countries is often discouraged, restricted, or illegal. None of the bi+ groups in Eastern Europe had funding. The bi+ groups and activists in Eastern Europe generally agreed that the situation of bi+ inclusion and equality had worsened in their respective countries in the last ten years; whereas in other regions, a small minority answered that it had not.

Concerns and optimism

Generally speaking, bi+ groups and activists raised concerns about the changing political landscape in Europe and the impact on bi+ activism. Yet, there was optimism about the younger generations, who appear more open to and engaged with bi+ advocacy. Despite limited resources, bi+ groups across Europe remain dedicated and resilient, demonstrating a strong commitment to their goals. Many groups had attention for marginalized groups within their bi+ community and strived to be inclusive.

The need for a European bi+ organization

There was a high interest in developing a European bi+ organization. Such an organization could support bi+ groups across Europe, facilitate exchange and learning, and advocate for bi+ rights. Given the lack of attention to bi+ issues in European strategies and programs, this organization could address a significant gap. The survey findings also emphasize the importance of diverse representation of bi+ people in terms of age, gender, geography, and background.

Acknowledgments

We are grateful to all the bi+ groups and activists who shared their needs and experiences in the survey! This survey and the Bi+ Equal project is being financed by the European Commission.

For more information, visit www.biplusequal.org or follow us on our socials.

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Hilde Vossen (she/they) is the Mapping Coordinator of Bi+ Equal. She is a longtime bi activist, living in The Netherlands, focused on local, national, and international networking.

Aida Marukyan (she/her) is the Researcher of Bi+ Equal. She is an Armenian queer-feminist researcher specialized in grassroots community-based advocacy for LBQT women, prioritizing community well-being in all activism efforts.

I think I might be a chameleon

By Alex

I think I might be a chameleon
my identities are shifting like shades in the light.
Maybe I'm a rainbow,
or maybe I'm the storm before it,
a mix of all that nature is,
earth, fire, wind, and water
just like that, undefined.

For many years, I asked myself:
Who am I? Why am I? Am I OK?
I searched inside and outside,
through mirrors and other people's faces,
but answers slipped away like wind,
In the end, I found nothing,
There was no fixed truth.

Yet there, in nothingness,
I found something deeper, valuable,
my soul, my heart, screaming to me:
You're okay. You are enough.
You are simply... human.
I am, simply, human!

With or without labels,
I know who I am,
and I know how to love.
And who I love, or how I dress?
That doesn't concern you, does it?
That belongs to me.

Alex is a 28-year-old nonbinary bisexual person and human rights activist from Tuzla in Bosnia & Herzegovina. They see poetry as a form of activism and a way to express their opinion. Alex is a psychotherapist in training working directly with the community.



Bisexual Killjoy Podcast Gives Us Life

By Jen Bonardi

I'm driving to Vermont, one of the snowiest states in the U.S., while listening to a podcast hosted by two intellectuals, Jace Rios and Bailey Merlin. That might sound dry but, in fact, it's so riveting that I have to keep reminding myself to pay attention to the road. Jace and Bailey are what I consider neo-intellectuals: scholars who make their brilliant perspectives on a complex topic accessible to the masses, complete with giggling and occasional slang.

These cerebral goofballs are the creators of the podcast *Bisexual Killjoy*. Bailey reveals early on that she podcasts from inside a closet, but strictly literally. I can confirm this, as I watched her come out during her 2023 capstone project presentation on bi+ health. A week later, she graduated from Harvard Medical School's inaugural Media, Medicine, and Health program, securing her second Master's degree.

It's evident that this is a season one episode from mid-2024; by season two, they are podcasting from the same room in Boston, Massachusetts. Jace received their Master's degree in Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies from SUNY Albany in May of 2024 and moved to Bailey's city after being accepted to Boston University's Sociology doctoral program. The tell for season three will be Jace exuberantly introducing themselves as "Jace!" instead of "Lynn!" as they have for the first two seasons.

When I interview them, their eagerness to nerd-out on the middle sexualities is palpable. "*Bisexual Killjoy* stands out in a sea of other queer voices because it's about bi+ issues," Bailey tells us. "Among bi+ podcasts, it's scientifically rooted. We talk about poverty, intersectionality, health. For us, it's about how bisexuality affects a person as a whole. Not just, 'We cuff our jeans.'"

Jace harmonizes with this. "As a budding bisexual and sociologist, I took theory classes and my life started to make sense. [With *Bisexual Killjoy*] everyone can know those sociological terms now and have the same a-ha moments as I did."

In listening to the first *Bisexual Killjoy* episode on my long drive north, I learned that their titular label refers to the bi+ person in the room who insists on busting harmful myths about bisexuality, even if it doesn't win them any friends. Armed with this knowledge, I look forward to the top of every episode



where they ask each other, "What was your Bisexual Killjoy moment this week?"

"That question started as a way to hook the listener and not jump right in with theory," explains Jace. "It also reminds us that being a Bisexual Killjoy is not about the abstract. It keeps me and Bailey accountable in making the podcast practical for the audience, and shows them how we handle real situations."

Covering both theory and practical application for a wide range of bisexuals is a tall order. Their process for creating a season starts with brainstorming subject matter based on what folks want to hear. But requests from the audience often yield the same topic: quashing insulting myths about bi+ people. The hosts are tasked with striking a balance between satisfying those listeners and giving them something new to consider.

"The issue is that on social media," says Bailey, "we do a lot of educating and stigma-busting. We often respond to that with suggested reading." She reveals her objective to go from 80% repeating herself to 20% repeating herself.

Another challenge crops up when Jace discovers that people can be defensive about their gender. It's unclear how to maintain a safe space when there is pressure to get stuff "right" that you have no way of knowing. Climbing up icy hills in my car feels unsafe but it's nothing compared to navigating certain conversations about gender and sexuality.

Bailey understands what I mean. "In some leftist spaces, folks police each other's language. Unfortunately, there's not enough grace there in learning." Jace defines the *Bisexual Killjoy* ethos: "We describe this not as a safe space but a *brave* space. We're committed to being curious about where it came from and providing resources to address it. We believe in people, not in isolated incidents."

It sounds like *Bisexual Killjoy* is ready to take on controversial topics. Will they delve into the betrayals that bisexuals have historically faced, sometimes even from within our community? "Absolutely," confirms Jace. "That is one of the biggest goals of this project. This is a space for everyone to articulate the pain and use new words to do what we need to heal."

The interview is making me hungry for their third season,



which they are working on now. Season one was Bailey and Jace in conversation; Season two was interviews with bi+ researchers. Jace remarks, “We did interviews because we don’t know everything. It allowed us to go deeper into the issues we discussed in the first season.” Bailey adds that season three will be a mix of the two formats, and the content theme is intersectionality.

Bailey is excited to tell me that they cast the net wide for audience members. “Our role is to educate queer people, queer organizations, your well-meaning mom,” she says. Later, she continues with the invitations: “[This podcast is] for people on any part of their bi+ journey, but also people who are not bi+. Let us educate your racist uncle!”

The two hosts fully expect their scrappy little podcast to result in big changes. “I hope we’re creating ripple effects!” says Jace. “In fairness to people who want to learn, it’s hard to find this information. Not everyone can get by a paywall of a journal or read theory.” They both assert that the podcast reaches listeners in a way that’s fun while allowing for introspective development.

Audience feedback has been ongoing and invigorating, spurring the duo to provide even more resources. In addition to the podcast, the *Bisexual Killjoy* team has led a class and spoken at multiple conferences. They write a bi-weekly Substack (blog) including an advice column, regularly educate people on Threads (social media), and find time to chime in on their Discord group of podcast fans. When I list all of their activities to them, they seem to have no idea how they are doing it all. They are suddenly reminded that they need help.

“We need folks to help for only a couple of hours a week to create content, among other things,” Bailey requests. Jace adds that they are also looking for Discord moderators, but they are open to any talents you bring to the table. While these are currently volunteer positions, they are working hard to eventually pay the folks who make *Bisexual Killjoy* happen, including themselves. Fundraising efforts this year will include offering tiered subscriptions with benefits, and looking for grants and awards.

My exit whizzes by in a blur and I decide to stop listening until I arrive at the ski lodge. In the interview, Jace advises, “Don’t let perfect be the enemy of the good. You can listen without giving it your full attention! Listen to us while cooking, playing games, riding the bus. We’ll say stuff to get your attention.” I can attest to that.



Boston, U.S.-based Jen Bonardi is a frequent BWQ contributor and loves all things bi+.

You can reach Bisexual Killjoy at

Bi Umbrella

By Gia Choquette

I wonder when the ice began to melt
Thawing me into the truth
Was it when her leg brushed against mine?
When a thousand fantasies fluttered through my mind?
When my ex came out to me as a trans woman and I wanted to stay?
Or the way the word “bi” always drew me in;
like the tide, like a whisper,
like it was calling me home?
I remember the way my non-binary ex threw gender to the wind
and how free I felt
to not have to fill any gender role
when we were together;
To just
Be
Me
And how their bisexuality helped to mirror mine back to me
so I could see
The pink, purple, and blue hues of brilliant possibility
Reflected in my eyes
And maybe it was the husky voice and
flannel shirts of the first girl I knew for sure I had a crush on
Or the way I cared so passionately about LGBTQ+ rights,
Always forming friendships with people who were queer
and who felt like familiar soulmates from a distant land
At some point amidst it all, these echoes of the truth
Settled around me like rain puddles
As I stood there beneath my bi umbrella
That had been there, over my head
All along.

Gia Coquette is a graduate student living in central Massachusetts in the U.S. with her boyfriend and their cat, Nyx.



Review of *Polyamory for Dummies* by Jaime M. Grant, PhD

By Jennifer Taub, Ph.D.

Author Jaime M. Grant, PhD is a queer sex activist, researcher, and relationship coach who has been polyamorous for several decades. She brings both personal and professional expertise to this recent addition to the *For Dummies* guidebook series.

For many years, *The Ethical Slut* was the primary print resource for ethical non-monogamy. The more recent additions of *Polysecure* (2020) and *Polywise* (2023) have expanded the literature, and *Polyamory for Dummies* serves as an accessible primer, helping to introduce polyamory to a broader audience as it gains mainstream visibility.

Polyamory for Dummies covers a wide range of topics in the characteristic breezy and accessible style of the *Dummies* series. While this makes the book approachable, it sometimes results in a lack of depth and a somewhat scattered organization. Many readers may find it most useful as a reference book, turning to specific chapters as needed.

Grant's background as a sex educator and her extensive experience within polyamorous communities inform the book well. However, as she is not a mental health professional, the sections on psychology and mental health are less robust than those covering the practical aspects of polyamory, cultural biases around monogamy, and the diverse ways polyamory can be practiced.

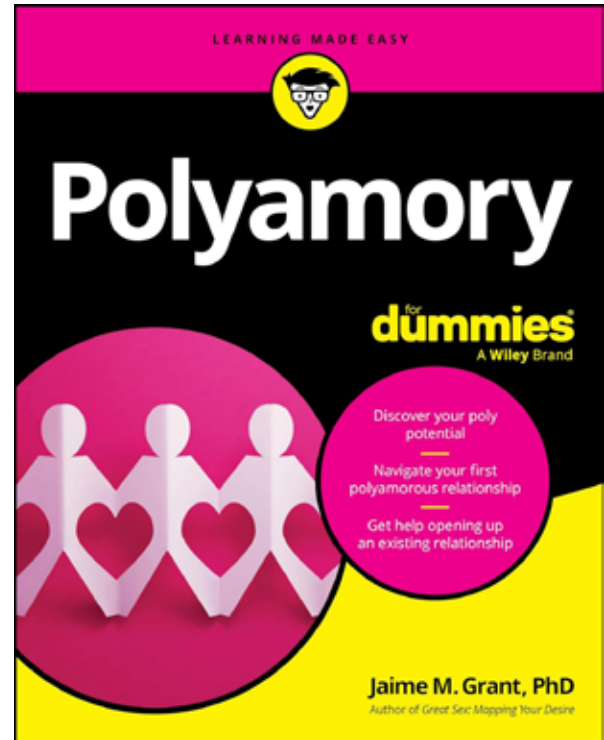
The book is divided into five sections. Section one covers the basics about what polyamory is, terminology, and activities such as "Constructing your polyamorous self." These exercises, drawn from Dr. Grant's workshops, are designed to promote self-reflection and exploration, which many readers may find valuable.

The second section focuses on the communication and skills that Grant calls "relational skills for polyamory," but which are important generally. This section suffers the most from trying to cover too much material without adequate depth, and in some places lacks a basis in research. Information is often presented through the author's lens, to support the anecdotal information she has amassed. There are exercises that claim to help the reader understand their attachment style, but they are not research-informed (and, as a result should be approached with caution).

The chapters in parts three and four try to cover a tremendous breadth of material; here, individual chapters of interest can be accessed as needed.

The last chapters of the book cover topics such as aging, disability and myths about polyamory. There is also another chapter on jealousy.

Throughout the entire book, there is no mention of the core conflict many bisexual people face of how to fully express one's sexuality within monogamy, and the potential for polyamory.



The book does not address the experiences of bisexual women (or men) navigating relationships across multiple genders. Grant gives a lot of space to the benefits of polyamory, but does not include the potential benefits the freedom from having one's orientation defined by the presumed gender of their monogamous partner. Given that polyamory can be an important space for bisexual individuals, this omission is disappointing to me.

In conclusion, *Polyamory for Dummies* offers a broad and accessible introduction to polyamory, making it a useful resource for those newly exploring non-monogamy. However, the book struggles with depth and organization, and some sections—particularly those touching on psychology and attachment—should be read with a critical eye. While it succeeds in normalizing polyamory and providing discussion prompts, it falls short in delivering the research-backed insights that more experienced polyamorous individuals or those seeking a rigorous exploration of the topic may be looking for.

Jennifer Taub, Ph.D. is a licensed clinical psychologist in private practice in Boston, MA, in the U.S. She has a background in research and program evaluation, and has worked in academic and nonprofit settings. She identifies as queer, bisexual, and poly. She is also a mama to one human and two cats.

She See Us, Sis: A Review of *A Vessel Born to Float* by Yazmin Monét Watkins

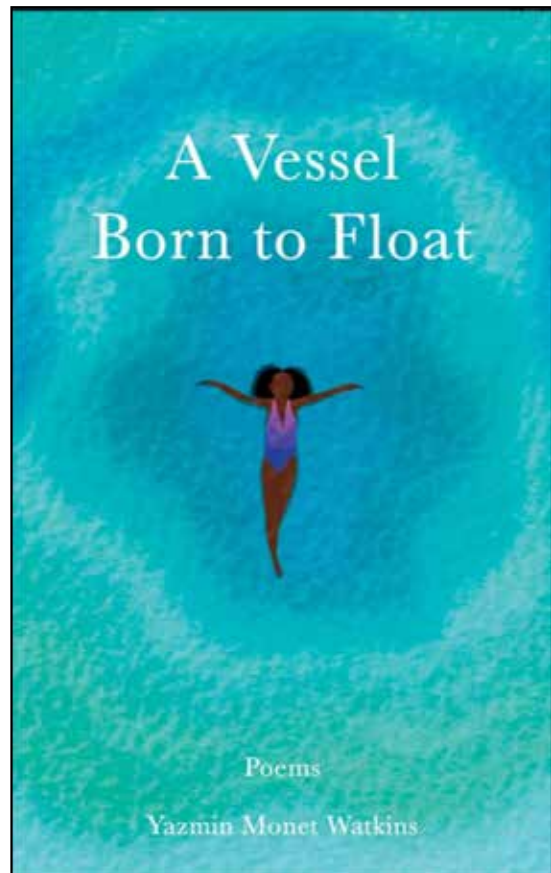
By Angélique “Angel” Gravelly

In the epigraph of Yazmin Monét Watkins’s poetry collection, *A Vessel Born to Float*, she declares, “For us. I see you sis.” Upon reading those words, I immediately felt a litany of desires for this book flowing out of my soul. If she really saw me, I wanted her poems to disrobe me and lay bare parts of my heart I hadn’t yet put into words. If she really wrote this for us, I wanted her poems to assure me that she understood how joy, grief, certainty, and doubt were all making a home in my Black, bisexual woman skin. In a season when I was desperate for ways to return to myself, I yearned for her poems to confirm it wasn’t foolish to believe that every single one of us living in the borderlands, especially Black bi women, have a right to be seen, known, and understood. Fortunately, Watkins met my desires at nearly every turn.

Throughout each of the four sections of the book, Watkins explores from various angles what it means to be multitudinous, inviting readers to claim our own multitudes as she excavates aspects of hers. In the first section, “Expanding,” she establishes herself as part future and part past. Part love and part rage. Part dreamer and part realist. She is someone who makes intentional choices and someone who intentionally refuses to choose. More than anything, she is a heart expanding again and again towards love in every form, lovers of different genders, a more just society, and a freedom that has space for both grief and joy.

Her second section, “Crashing,” builds on the introductory poems by exploring in more depth how expansion leads us into collisions with the world around us. Collisions that often leave us juggling feelings that don’t neatly coexist. Throughout this section, Watkins is frustrated and hopeful. Spiraling and centered. Instructional and experiential. Unsettled and indignant. She establishes with concise authenticity exactly why “Filling,” the third section, is a necessity. Even in its usefulness, crashing can be depleting.

In response to the depletion, Watkins uses the third section to show us how to pour gold into our cracked places through love, connection, sex, and community. She invites us to consider what it would look like to nourish our whole self and to commit to the belief we deserve abundance. An invitation which leads easily into the final section, “Floating,” where she doubles down on this gospel of abundance and multidirectional care. Like the first section, “Floating” reminds us we are expansive. This expansiveness, however, is more than holding multiple identities, more than feelings and experiences dredged from disparate corners of one heart. This expansiveness is a



celebration of a multiplicitous, multilayered life, buoyed by the soul-deep knowing that we deserve to thrive.

The result of these sections considered in their totality is a testament to the power of showing up authentically and to loving ourselves and each other enough to demand to be seen. Watkins hones in on this in her final poem, “Who Am I,” where she declares:

I say I am a Black bisexual poet/screenwriter/actor/
comedian/
improviser/producer/teaching artist/more
creating worlds that look like us
So that anyone who hears my voice will see their truth
reflected back”
I encourage other readers to listen to her voice. Maybe,
like me, it’s your time, finally, to be seen.

Angélique “Angel” Gravelly is a writer, educator, and advocate based in Philadelphia, PA, in the U.S. Find more of her work at angelgravelly.com.



CALENDAR



February 2025 Digital Brunch

A special invitation to our readers

EVERYWHERE:

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

Digital brunches will be held on the following dates starting at 1 p.m. EST:

- Sat., March 1
- Sun., April 6
- Sat., May 3
- Sun., June 8

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

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

Consider this: If you rarely (or never) see people like yourself represented in print, your voice is especially important. When you lift your voice, someone, somewhere will FINALLY see their own experiences reflected, perhaps for the first time. (See our calls for writing on page 2.)

Bi+ World Meetup April 18

Join us at the 17th Bi+ World Meetup on April 18th 4 p.m. EST/ 10 p.m. CEST. Bi+ people everywhere are invited to join us on Zoom. We'll use breakout rooms to give folks an opportunity to join each other in a friendly and free setting. The meeting is in English and is facilitated by Barbara Oud (the Netherlands) and Robyn Ochs (U.S.). Pre-registration is required.

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

Metro-Boston bi+ women and nonbinary folks:

Keep up with local events. Subscribe to our Google group: <https://groups.google.com/g/biwomenboston>

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

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