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Spring 2022

*Cover Image:
Chromo #10
by Sudeep Bhargava*

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Q-INE

Spring 2022



Letter from the Editor

Dear reader,

Welcome to the third issue of *Q-INE*, Penn's LGBTQ+ magazine, the first issue that we've published in person. Working on *Q-INE* together in the LGBT Center for the first time in three years, I've wondered: How do we build queer community? How do we relate to each other under the broad umbrella of LGBTQ+ when we all have unique experiences of gender and sexuality that are further mediated by other aspects of our identities and lives — race, socioeconomic status, ability, interests, location? What I've found, after meeting with the *Q-INE* team for a year, talking over submissions, editing pieces, and discovering together what kind of magazine we want *Q-INE* to become, is that queer community doesn't involve coming to a consensus about what queerness is or what it looks like. Instead, queer community asks us to hold space for each other's voices. It asks us to be radically open to difference. *Q-INE*, for all of us on staff, is a place where we can exist without the pressure to conform to society's expectations of how we should look, act, speak, or love. I hope that *Q-INE* offers you that same sense of openness and welcome and that you feel encouraged to add your voice to our growing community.

Yours,
Quinn Gruber
Editor-in-Chief

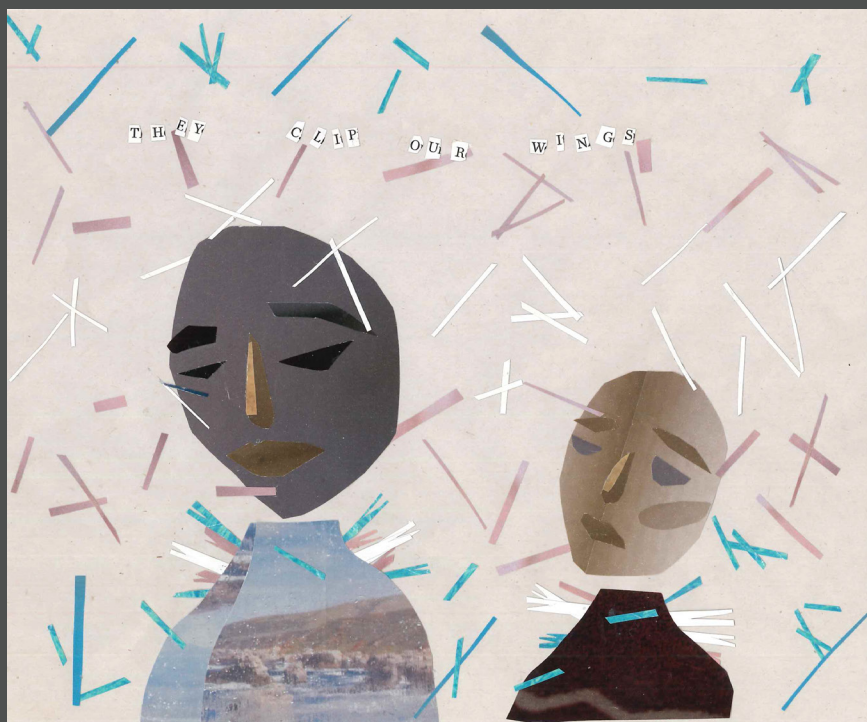
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Fathers

by Sebleh

understanding is present tense
that implies you feel it as you are
but as i am, i need to contort to gain yours
i live in your funhouse
your views as ever changing as they are fleeting
no image has ever pleased you.
your gaze melts the scaffolding of my world
solely for your gain
i am to be present but someday become your past
but not this day, this day you need me to turn your house of mirrors to steel
to become the foundation you build upon until you feel it is high enough
to look down on me
the “person” that i became when your words forged my being to a shape
that was smooth
so the shattered reflections you laid in my path would pierce me
but when scabs now replace my skin, you claw endlessly away until i am
smooth again
slick with blood but smooth nonetheless
you relish in the trail it leaves
my misshapen footprints making it easy for you to find me
the current me, who is beyond recognizable
looking down would reveal what you see, what you crave to torment
but my neck remains upturned
every sense called to you
your image, lucid
your scent, distinct
your movements, decided
your tone, vile
your taste, bitter.
my nerves no longer catered to me but to try to understand you
i wonder ... if they sit exposed much longer, will i feel deeper or feel
nothing at all



they clip our wings by Gabriela Portillo Alvarado

In Revision

by Laila Barakat Norford

My guilty pleasure: romance novels. Whenever my life gets too stressful, I find the familiar story arc to be comforting. A predictable happy ending is impossible to resist when my own future is still uncertain. I read for the dialogue and romantic gestures, seeing how two people can come to know exactly what the other needs. I'm not particularly picky, but queer romance by queer authors is always the best, especially if it features twenty-somethings like me. As long as there is an "I love you," I am content.

Unfortunately, every time I've read a romance novel recently, I feel guiltier than ever. A few months ago, I told myself I was going to give up romance novels. Not because they are a waste of time. Not because I should use my time to read something more "literary." Not because reading a lot of books gets expensive. But because of the romance itself.

I am aromantic. It has been a little over a year since I have been able to say that, and every time I do, I still feel a drop in my stomach like a roller coaster taking a plunge. I haven't stopped going downhill yet.

About five years ago, I finally put a finger on what seemed missing from my life that everyone else had in theirs, and I came out as asexual. Ironically enough, I came out at the same time I entered my first relationship. I was sixteen, I loved them, and we stayed together until high school graduation, and I never had to think about my romantic orientation at all because I was in a romantic relationship.

Then I arrived at Penn, where I had my first opportunity to join an asexual affinity group. Being in a room of only asexual people has made me realize how broad the spectrum of sexual attraction is — no one asexual can describe their experience the same way. I have had moments of affirmation, confusion, and discovery throughout many Sunday-afternoon meetings. But for a whole year, I still did not doubt my romantic orientation.

I first started questioning whether I had been all wrong about myself when I spent multiple days of family vacation listening to my brother and cousin exchange stories of their experiences on dating apps and attempts at Zoom dating. With nothing to add to the conversation, I realized that I could not picture myself ever making a dating profile, let alone attempting to go on a date with someone I knew next to nothing about, with the expectation that I might develop romantic feelings — that I could develop romantic feelings.

A few months later, once again in a (virtual) meeting of Penn Aces, the topic of crushes and romantic feelings came up. As often happens, we were debunking the myth that asexual people do not experience romantic attraction. At this meeting, lots of people were sharing their histories of many crushes. For the first time, this made me pause. I had only had a crush on two, maybe three people in my twenty years of life. It hit me. I unmuted my mic and said, "I think I'm aromantic."

Now I am terrified because admitting I am aromantic means erasing major parts of my vision for my future. It's like erasing a whiteboard that you drew on years ago. You have to draw over all the lines again, then erase them, and though the marker comes off, you can still see the lines underneath. But you know you will never be able to redraw exactly what was there ever again.

I think of my wedding. I plan to go dress shopping with just my mom. Though my taste has shifted over the years, I have settled on a lace A-line dress. I want to get married outside, in the fall. My guest list will be small — just my closest family and friends. I want both my parents to walk me down the aisle (but there will be no giving away). There will be live music for the ceremony, but for the reception, there will be a DJ and lots of dancing. I will eat the cake and not get cake on my face. But I have never figured out who is going to do all of that with me. Who is my other half? I recognize now that there might not ever be that other person. So now I have to tell myself: I planned, I wanted, I would have.

Reading romance novels, like imaginary wedding planning, is no longer fun. The increment in happiness I get from turning the pages has been overtaken by a sense of loss. I decided to give up romance novels so I would stop unnecessarily feeling that pain. It's just one more thing to erase from my life. As I grieve, I can't stop wondering if the few times I experienced romantic attraction — and passed up my chance for a relationship — was me passing up the key to unlock the life I thought I was going to have.

I don't want to spend any more time lamenting over the romantic relationship that might never be when I could instead spend time on the relationships I have and cherish. I can achieve everything I want in life without imposing a romantic objective onto it. As I meet the challenges in my life, I still need an escape into a predictable happy ending, but I need a happy ending that I can see myself in.

I need someone to write a new kind of trope. Friends to better friends. Enemies to inseparable companions. Forced proximity ... to lifelong platonic bonds. Fake relationship ... to real friendship. I need someone else to show me that romance is not crucial to every conclusion because I cannot yet see it for myself.

My story is beginning. Not with a meet-cute, but still with a meeting — of who I thought I would be and who I will become. I'm hoping for a happy ending. ✨

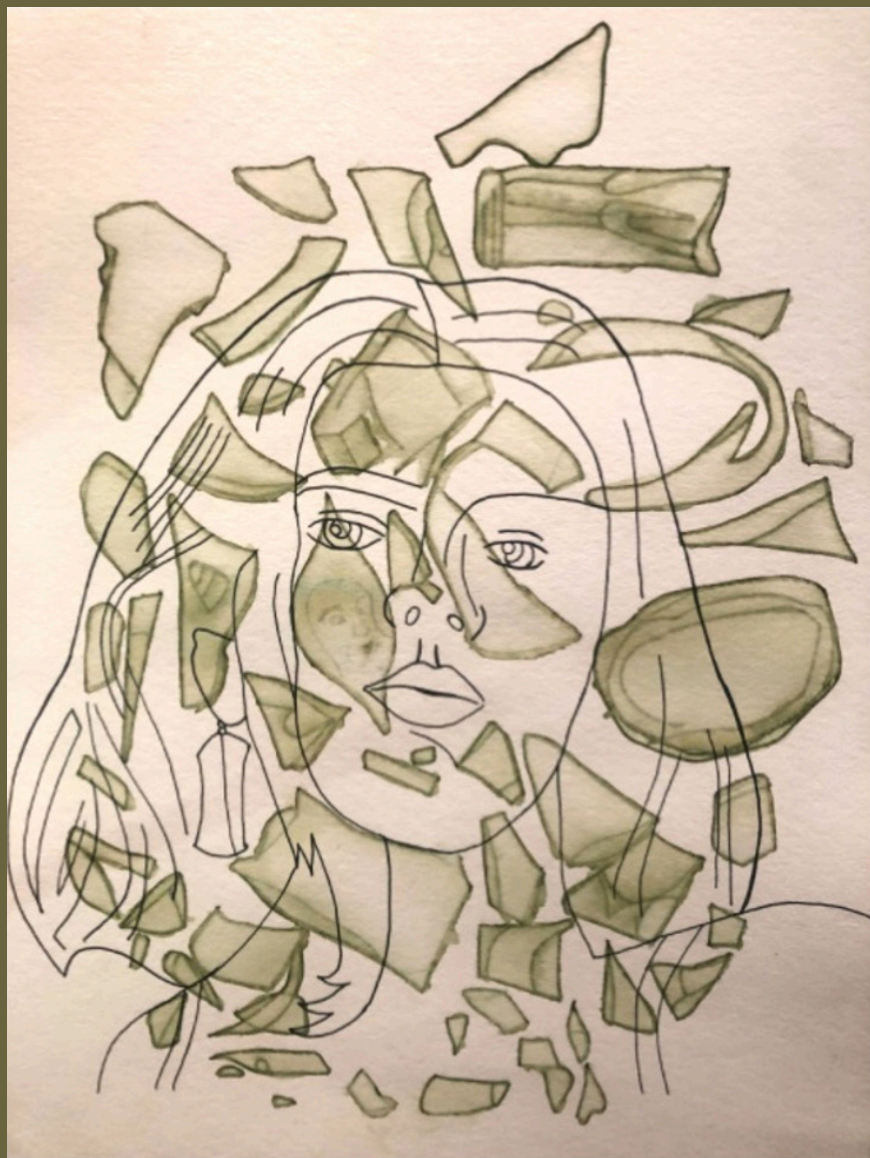


Coming to Terms

by Nadia McGrath



This artwork is part of a portfolio that explores the theme of alcoholism. Through my work, I want viewers to reflect on the notion that alcoholism is a family disease — affecting not only the alcoholic, but everyone around them as well. This series of mixed-media artwork is composed of three self-portraits depicting the ways that alcoholism has affected me — not as an alcoholic, but as a daughter and a loved one. ❁



POST-MORTEM DEFENSE

by R Picasso

God placing blades of grass between our toes & walking among us two
Tightening until our skin raws into dry red
beneath those thin
braided strings attaching us to twigs nurturing the direction in which we
grow
we grow up we grow up up up higher toward You
but our limbs are rigid & immobile & bound over our heads never quite
reaching you
stunting us so we never reach the thin limes on the highest branches
until some limes move on their own, glide over the oak in ways leaves
quite don't & before long the serpent has allowed the fruit to stumble
& fall
it's how you stunted us, the way famine makers run themselves over land
with wet feet
what was he to you & what are we?
what were we, if we weren't meant to know what was
good or wrong or to live eternally, what were your
intentions with us pliant forms of mud
the cherub & his sword along the path out of eden but to ask
him if he knows
what he is here for
God who didn't want us to become like him or like his stars, god who
didn't allow his stars to become like him, god who is alone
i wake up in a dream on talavera
made of men with the maker of Men who still carries the
timbrels & pipes
prepared for him on the day of his creation
He was as beautiful as when he fell
so i ask, when God made man, what did he make us for
What use does he have for flesh entanglements with nothing in
their heads
who live only a pinch of sand's worth of years
The Creator of man turns me over as time does & lets blood cascade
from his lips onto my head to crisp my hair
The baptism of a Man, King Tyre speaks in carnelian, chrysolite, &
emerald
the God who did not make me a man but the cherub who did, the one
who is here with us,
Wearing lapis lazuli, turquoise, & beryl

an Amaryllis petal over me like a mockery of the fountain of life but
thoughts blossom underneath my eyes still

I am a man

I'm a man the way the angels are

I'm a man the way the angels who are golden rings of eyes &
squirming flames are

I'm a man the way the angels were in Sodom, watching the crowd
from the window of Lot's home

Man in the way the angel John fell to his knees to worship was
in the way Lucifer is, here on the talavera of whatever became of
Eden, still singing as he used to, still so beautiful it begins to ache my
heart that god made fragile as a lamb

Do you know now why he made you perfect in beauty, do you
know why he wove you knowing you were too wise to worship
blindly, why he made you so pretty it made you sin? Can you
tell me now why he makes some of us destined for hell, from
the moment we are sown

it's only pleasures in life that god is denying me, sweet heat in my
belly & fevers when i see you

narcissist, I'm a narcissist, for seeing you & feeling myself melt
like gold into its cast

but if everyone could have salvation then it would not be salvation, would
it

at least i have you, at least i'm not tied, i may not reach the stars, but i
can burrow myself & continue digging & i know you'll never stop me
but here in this dream you're not staring at me, the stones in
your gaze & the wisps of their flames smoke upwards

Michael is looking down on us from the peak of the dome in the chapel,
Creator, we can both see him

can i ask, did he love you

He stares at you longingly, deprived of water & seeing it in the topaz,
onyx, & jasper of your waist

But he will never be tempted, he has seen you abandoned & sees the
torture of your future, & he sees mine as well

Whom do we worship now

Whom do we belong to? god has only left me still

Searching for meaning

The Othering

by Masha Morozov

All my life I wished for inclusivity. But now that I have a smidgen of what I wished for, I realize it's not what I wanted. I have been queer for as long as I remember, and in the last few years I have come to recognize that the gender dysphoria I have felt all my life was because I am non-binary. It hasn't been an easy road; I got outed as gay to my class in the fifth grade, which took a huge toll on my comfort with my identity, and forced me further into the closet than out of it. Now, thirteen years later, I am comfortable with my identity. I have no problem disclosing my gender identity or sexual orientation to others — until it isn't really my choice anymore.

In an attempt to increase inclusivity in the classroom and workspace, people are often heavily encouraged to share their pronouns. This, however, leads to a few issues: most of the people I find myself interacting with in my graduate program and my workspace are cis and heterosexual. Amidst the sea of she/her/hers, I am the only person assigned female at birth who does not identify the same way in all of my classes and in my workplace. While I know my professors and employers only mean well, this casts an “othering” effect like no other — it is hard being the only one outwardly different in my professional outlets. Of course, no one is forced to share their pronouns. But when every cisgender person shares their pronouns, and you are the only one who doesn't, it still feels as if you are outing yourself. I am, luckily, comfortable enough to share my pronouns on these occasions, but it really hurts being the only non-cisgender person in my classes and constantly being misgendered.

I don't know what the solution is. I think pronouns should be shared — but they should never be forced, and I believe they should be asked only if everyone will put in the work to respect the few who do not identify with the pronouns with which they were assigned at birth. My name is Masha, and I use they/them pronouns, and the fact that I am femme-presenting should not take away from my non-binary identity. Androgyny is not owed to those who don't understand gender identity; androgyny is not owed to anyone. What I do know is that your non-binary classmates and coworkers should not feel as if they have to present a certain way to have their identities respected or feel forced to share their pronouns if they're not comfortable. ❀

I want to make myself into a creature.

by Leah Baxter

I want to augment my reality with a metaphysical sense of touch, of space. I want my reality to be more expressive of truth than it currently is. A man received a heart transplant from a pig today: things you can imagine converge with things you can see. I want to grasp the handles of an existence I cannot completely see ... yet. My body is not human. I am a creature in my mind. I want to fall asleep and wake up, flipping into a new universe upside down. Reoriented.

I want to be a thoughtful creature. I want to hang about and ponder things and read books that look tiny next to my calloused hands and long thick arms. I want to get around by swinging from things. I want to smell like cardamom. I want to quiver vestigial dragonfly wings in pairs down my back, stirring the hairs on my damaged spine. It does not need to bear my weight, and it does not hurt.

I want my body's extradimensional ripples to match the shape of my possible selves. No, that's not quite it. I want to make my body into something that matches the shape of my body inside my brain. But mental geography exists only in dreams, not in real space. I want to map ideas onto my real skin, my real body.

If my spine hurts me, I do not need it. I cut my hair short and my follicles hum with pleasure because it feels right, it fits in a way that long hair was wrong. I want to tattoo my arm with seven circles that represent sharp, short claws hooking out and down from my wrist but also pain, relief, and the external manifestation of the parasite that is death in my future, curled in my bone marrow and eating me away very very slowly from the inside. But also that that's okay. If I were a creature, I would have no scars, but I would have sharp, short claws. I am a gentle creature, but they would say a lot about me.

When I drink too much caffeine, I can feel parallel universes. What if the paths that connect my destinations are not real? I emerge from the subway into the night. I imagine that my origin point and my current location are pockets of universe connected to each other only by the thin tendril of the transreality MTR train. Other worlds brush by my skin, hirsute. I pull myself along, wingbeat by wingbeat.

I want my body and my brain to interface with the world in a way that folds my many selves into me. In noisy moments, my vision flattens and I am sharply aware that my brain lives in only one place. I dream



Chromo #7

by Sudeep Bhargava

about colors being mashed together like teeth and wake up to clean lines of sensible nonsense. Reoriented. I take refuge in the language of creaturehood; it is of my mind, but also feels real.

It's already hard enough trying to translate my brain into meaningful language, without also trying to translate it into language that's meaningful to someone else's brain, too. In my mind, I want to find other creatures. I know they're there. One day I will.

One day, we will meet. ❁



Wife

by Zula Palmer

frigid

by Azzaya Galsandum

the cold wind traveled through my clothing to pierce into my skin like a
thousand needles
having long forgotten my scarf, my neck began to turn blue as the ice
formed a new scarf
a newer, thicker layer of clothing of ice had formed underneath my
original clothing
my warm clothing stood no chance against the outer and inner coldness
of the world and, my own body
conforming to the outside, my inner soul quickly became as fragile as a
snowflake





I THINK OF COLOR

by s.s.

I think often of the way pride is colorful,
both in its symbols and in its celebration.
I think often of the way my different worlds see that color,
of the Pantones I can share and the ones I can't.

I think often of the way Hindu wedding ceremonies are colorful
both in their decor and in their elation.
Of the lavish adornments,
and how all the worlds describe these festivities to be richly filled with color.
I think of mine one day, mine with her,
mine, where to protect us both,
perhaps not physically,
but certainly from the voyeurism,
from the murmurs, and
mostly from what our anxious minds will do to us,
we will remove the better part of all of that color.

And I think, after all that, about why I have to think so much.



Chromo #5

by Sudeep Bhargava



Queer Domesticity

by Luca Fontes













In this photo series, all I really wanted was to portray queer domesticity and mundaneness through the queer gaze, since I feel like that is not done too often. I wanted to contribute to a corpus that sees queerness in the everyday and not just in the extraordinary.

Hound of God

by RS Dennis

"Those that men call Werewolves or Lycanthropes call themselves the Hounds of God, as they claim their transformation is a gift from their creator..." —Neil Gaiman, The Graveyard Book

In some sense my body is like the bulb of a jackfruit
Pressure to pod and the seed slips out, slick
To be sure.
Literally and metaphorically.
There is something inside,
Beyond fingernails digging into sweet and edible skin.

To break every bone in the body
And have it heal back in a different way
Would be like being well-endowed
With transformation
Transform utterly, snapped fingers to claws.
The horror of the body, body horror.
The emergence to the face of the boy soul.

In Shakespearian times
The boy was not a man.
Yearn for
Either, or.

It is easy to admire a man's beautiful body
Too easy to look and watch and look
With envious, covetous eyes
At broad shoulders or strong sides
Rippling with muscles
Lean, flat lines
Disappearing into tailored pants with
Straight legs all the way down.

At the waist,
Straight hips beyond rearer's reach
The belt that tightens but cannot cinch.
Think Neil McCormack hanging,
Young in mysterious and unknowable
Manhood undeniable skin
Curved like a fucking violin.

The body is missing the cock that
Dangles between the legs
That hits the knees
Or carries no weight at all.

Look instead favorably
On the curve of tight buttcheeks
Between the legs.

How sweet it would be
To carve open my stomach
And have a wolf crawl out.



Metamorphosis

by Aled Dillabough

This piece is about coming into your own as a queer (specifically trans) person. I lived most of my life as a passive observer. My presentation, identity, and experiences were not my own; they were defined and shaped by others' expectations. Even when I began to find words to express myself, I did not have the freedom or space to live my identity until I came to college. Suddenly left without the constraints and expectations that I had lived with my entire life, I was startled by—and euphoric about—the opportunity for self-creation. I began to see my life and self as a continuous art project, as a set of truths that I get to mold, shape, and change however fits me. This piece expresses self-creation, contrasting my new understanding of myself with the “perfect” child that I was raised to be.

the weight of it all for you

by Azzaya Galsandum

as the clock ticks on, the coin stacks on the coffee table grow larger
as the sun shines brighter, the moon lying on my back grows heavier
i grasp for the stars that blind us and hope for you to glow as bright as
them

i would jump from star to star to collect their dust just for you to
continue to shine

as the sun mocks me, the birds chirp and sing with lust
as the dog howls, the vines cover lost secrets

as the fog curls around the grass, the coat rack fills up
as the wind rings, my heart swells and chokes
i would gather the four winds and four elements for you to become my
everything

the foggy mirror in our room of dust, you sit there and wait for me
the mirror in your eyes deflects the fruits of my labor
the juice that i pour for you spills over

Farmhouse Colony

by Masha Morozov

If you grew up on Staten Island, or at least spent your teenage years there, there is a chance that either you or someone you know took part in urban exploration. Urban exploring is the exploring of abandoned man-made structures, and photography is heavily associated with this hobby. Staten Island is often considered the “forgotten borough” of New York City — but people who live there, and other avid urban explorers, know it to house a surplus of urban exploration sites. The Farm Colony, pictured here, is one of them.

People urban explore for different reasons; some do it for the thrill, others do it for the escape, some do it for the photographic potential, and others do it because of the urban history associated with the structures. I can say I’ve urban explored for all those reasons, but the urban history was what always intrigued me the most — I’ve never explored a place the history of which I didn’t learn beforehand.

There is a misconception that the Farm Colony was once a psychiatric institution, and it’s often misnamed as “Seaview” because of its proximity to Seaview Hospital, right across the street. The campus that Seaview Hospital sits on has a fascinating history — it was home to one of the first cures for tuberculosis!

The Farm Colony was originally constructed to house aging poor and disabled people to rehabilitate them during the colonial farm era, as it sat on fifty-two acres of fertile farmland. This never panned out the way it was meant to, due to the depressing pattern of neglectful staff in the area (Willowbrook State School was just down the street, now home of the College of Staten Island campus).

One memorable resident of the Farm Colony was Alice Austen, a street photographer and queer icon, who, in my opinion, is incredibly underrated. Austen was born with a natural eye for photography, and the way she displayed Staten Island in her photographs makes one wonder how it could ever have become the forgotten borough.

The Farm Colony was once a place I used to go to when I needed a quiet place to think. It was where I started to experiment with my photography, from which I began to label myself as an amateur photographer. It was also where I felt like I could connect with someone from the past; Alice Austen has served as photographic inspiration for me since I was in middle school. ✨



top: In The Shadows; bottom: The Path Not Taken, by Masha Morozov

CROWN OF THORNS

by Shalese Jordan

The house I grew up in fostered growth in all things that it came into contact with. As soon as spring rolled around each year, the front yard sprouted both strawberries and blueberries. In the fall, these fruits were replaced by blackberries and raspberries.

The blackberries were always my favorite, but it's taken me a long time to figure out why. Maybe it was the way innumerable new vines forced their way out of the soil and into our gardens uninvited. Or the way that, once they were there, they took up as much space as necessary, disregarded the comfort of the plants that were there first, and reached for a sun they knew they would never reach. It might even be the way brown vines sprout thorns to protect black bodies, as proof that we are more valuable safe and alive than dead and martyred.

All I want to be when I grow up is a blackberry. Brave enough to enter spaces that were not built to support me. Expansive enough to put myself first and make sure my needs are met. Powerful enough to use my thorns to shatter any glass ceiling that thought it was enough to hold me back. ❁

Blackberry



Illustrations by Mason Dao

What Shall I Write

by Lex Gilbert

People always ask me what I want to write. “Vibe, what book ideas do you have?” I have big concepts and little thoughts, different ways I want the words to meld together to create a work of art. I want the book to feel like creativity is flowing out of me, pouring from my unhinged jaw to let the words flow faster and faster. I want big, bold dommes and slim, mellow femmes in my work. They are loving to those who deserve it and to those who don’t. I make sure they exude sweetness even though they are victimized for their queerness every day. I want transmascs with deep, rumbling voices and an artesian well’s worth of newfound horniness. They grow into their confidence. As the story goes on, they become self-assured in their manhood. I want trans women realizing they can stand straight up. The queers love tall women, I assure you. Let me see you smile with the joy of finding a feminine hobby you enjoy flowing over the rigid expectations your toxic family holds for you.

What I want is not everything I need. I need fat tits cradling the head of an upset teenager. I need a fashionable Black man telling his partner they look sexy. I need a lesbian with their five rescued pets. When I say pets, I only partially mean cats. What I need is all bodies. Ones that look a little different from the White, sugar-coated, cookie-cutter mold that makes everyone else feel like they must choose between conforming or suffering on the outskirts as we walk down the streets of Philadelphia. I need the queers. ❀



IN CONVERSATION WITH LAURA GAO

Mason Dao, Quinn Gruber, and Collin Wang of Q-INE spoke to Laura Gao, a Penn alum and comic artist, about her new graphic memoir, Messy Roots, LGBTQ+ identity, Asian experiences, and the journey of publishing her first book.

MASON DAO (HE/HIS): Nice to meet you, Laura! After reading your story, I learned so much about being queer and Asian, so thank you so much for being in this space today and for fostering space for queer Asians like me. I relate so much to your story, from immigrating to America with your parents, to the urgent drive to fit in with white Americans and to live up to the model minority myth, and finally to the fact that you embrace your identity and no longer hide. You talk a lot about anti-Wuhan sentiment. I don't know when you started thinking about writing *Messy Roots*, but you said on your Twitter that you started the book partly because of your "The Wuhan I Know" comic that went viral. Would you want to elaborate on why you wrote your graphic memoir?

LAURA GAO (SHE/HER): Yeah, yeah! First of all, thank you so much for the super kind words, I'm really glad you related and liked the book. So, it was inspired by the comic, but it had obviously evolved so much more since then. When the comic went viral, one of the most memorable responses I got was from this young Asian American mother. She had messaged me saying that it was one of the only things she could really share with her Asian American daughters about all the anti-Asian racism going on in the world and how to be proud of your heritage despite that. And that really hit home for me because I never had that as a kid. She asked me if I was writing, or had already written, anything else that she could share. I'd done plenty of autobiographical short comics, but nothing on a larger scale like this that really touched on my whole journey so far. I told her I didn't have anything else, but it got my gears turning, and I thought, "This could be something that, even though I didn't have it when I was a kid, I could create for other kids right now."

QUINN GRUBER (THEY/THEM): Yeah! I was wondering, too, after you developed the idea for this book, after you worked on it and developed a pitch, how agents and publishers received it since literature and art until recently have focused so much on only white stories. Do you feel like the publishing industry is shifting a little bit and is starting to think outside of those narrow limits? And what was your experience like getting the book published?



GAO: Yeah, publishing historically has been definitely super straight-, white-, cis-focused. I actually was very fortunate that my experience has been really overwhelmingly positive. Because my tweet went viral and it got featured on NPR, I skipped the traditional process—it caught the eyes of a couple of publishers and agents, one of whom is my agent now. I made sure my book proposal was very authentic to both my cultural identity and my queer identity, so that any editor that saw it had to be as gung-ho as I was about it. The editor I signed with has worked on a lot of amazing diverse books before like *The Hate U Give* and *Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda*. And so, when I saw her repertoire of books, I was like, “Okay, I think I can trust how she’s handled topics like this before.” And throughout the whole process, she never assumed anything, she always asked good questions, and she made sure that I was at the forefront of my creative experience. But I definitely felt a lot of doubt; I would write something and think, “Okay, my publishing team is mostly white, cis, straight, how will they think about this thing I just wrote? Will they get offended, will they not relate?” But thankfully my editor was a mentor and best friend throughout the whole process.

COLLIN WANG (HE/HIM): I had a question that jumps off that. Hi, I’m Collin. I also related to your story a lot, even though I don’t have the exact same background as you. I could see myself in bits here and there and it hurt, but it felt validating too. On your worries about relatability: as you were writing, whom did you write the book for, and what did you want those people, as well as a broader audience, to learn and gather from it?

GAO: I was definitely thinking of people like the younger me, and that stems back to the Asian American mother who asked me about her daughters. And I knew the book was going to be geared towards young adults, the people of today. As for the general audience, I was also thinking of people who could still resonate with the story even without the exact same background—anyone that really felt marginalized in some way, or felt that their home wasn’t the standard, traditional home, or felt that they were caught between multiple different intersecting groups. I wanted people who felt any of that to be able to resonate regardless of whether they were Asian or queer.

WANG: Right. I really saw myself in the Penn Experience chapter, when you talked about discovering that Asian Americanness is such a wide spectrum. There’s so many different ways of being Asian American. Everyone has a different background, everyone is tethered to the East or the West in



Aí = love



different amounts. One thing that really resonated with me was your discussion of people saying “Oh, this person is whitewashed,” or “Oh, this person is too Asian.” Would you want to speak more about that?


GAO: That part was one of the hardest for me to write but also one of my favorite scenes, just because

of how much it hit me in real life. Growing up in a predominantly white neighborhood made me feel like being Asian boxed me in. You can see that in the “Choose Your Fighter” scene when I go to college. I was a video game nerd back then, so it was like when you restart the game and you think, “Alright, I want to recraft myself.” But ironically, I only gave myself five boxed-in choices that I thought all Asian Americans needed to fit. And so, the first time I went to that CSA [Chinese Student Association] event and met all those different kinds of people, it definitely shocked me. I felt so insecure being around them, like, “Oh, I’m this imposter, I’m not Asian enough to really be with them and talk with them.” And I did say hurtful things that showed how flawed I was. At the same time, people who are super comfortable with themselves may not understand someone like me, who hasn’t been able to be comfortable, who hasn’t been afforded that yet. And you have these whitewashing comments. That scene was pivotal because there was not a single person that was fully right or fully wrong there. Everyone had these biases about who was and wasn’t a good Asian, and those jump-started all the unpacking I did that came after.

WANG: Right. My experience is a lot like your origin story. Like, my mom’s side is first-generation, my dad’s is second-gen, and because of that I got some of the cultural facets of being Chinese American, whereas language-wise I didn’t, speaking Chinese. And you talk about that a lot in the novel, about not being super familiar with the language. People back home would constantly remind me about how bad I was at Chinese and how it was like, you know, sacrilege to my heritage, that kind of stuff. And I’d be like, “Ha ha ha,” but it was hurtful after a while.

GAO: Yeah. My relatives, they still call me a “banana,” and I’m like “What? First of all, where’d you learn this term in China?” [laughs].

DAO: I feel like part of the conversation about Asian Americanness is that the term is so broad. I mean like, Asian, American. We combine East Asian, South Asian, Southeast Asian, but we have these different experiences and we live in different ways, especially in terms of our experiences in America. We yearn to speak our mother tongues, but




But the roots grew back
even more tangled.

an excerpt of "Messy Roots"
in courtesy of Laura Gao
and Q-line magazine

My mom proudly said
her genes were to
thank for my hair.

Frankly, the only jeans I
wanted were the ripped ones on
Abercrombie models, but she
said, "That's what poor people
wear."



I knew we were due for a whupping. But as we ran beneath the infinite stretch of stars, for the first time this place felt like mine, too.

different circumstances, like settling into America, impact that. So, thinking about those experiences, how do you want your book to represent Asian Americans in literature?

GAO: I definitely want this book to resonate with as many Asian Americans as possible without being a monolith for all Asian American experiences. That comes with, ideally, publishers publishing as many Asian American experiences and as many queer Asian American experiences as possible. But at least for this book, I wanted to authentically tell my story. Whichever parts do touch people, those are ultimately what I want them to be proud of for themselves. As for Asian Americans, obviously, this book won't hit as hard for a non-Chinese American as it would for Chinese Americans. At the same time, so much of the Asian American experience is shared among people who are diasporic and have immigrated. Some people, even though they identify with a certain part of the Asian American spectrum, they're still othered as "just" Asian American by the majority, right? That term is a double-edged sword: we want to take pride in it, but it lumps so many things together that it generalizes them. So I hope that the book is able to provide solidarity at least in the ways that all the different groups can relate to each other and support each other.

DAO: Right. Solidarity is so important. But the thing that I love most about your book is the way that you use the word "roots." What connotations does "roots" hold for you, and how would you describe "roots" beyond origin and the dichotomy between the Eastern world and the Western world?

GAO: I tried to do so many plays on words with roots throughout the whole book; that was a ton of fun and introspection for me. As you said, you know, the most straightforward answer is that roots are the connection to my heritage. But at the same time, roots are something that you can lay yourself. And that's one of the main messages throughout the book. As in the Chang'e story, I'm running away from place to place, trying to find a place that will accept me. Later, I realize that sometimes you need to lay your roots somewhere where you can make your own found family and make a place your own. So that's the second main meaning of roots: it's not just where you were born, but also where you're able to lay them. The third part is related to the play on words with my hair, and that symbolism. Roots also represent the attributes that I was born with and how those connect me to my mom, my parents. Even though growing up I felt completely distant from how they viewed me—this ties to my queerness and coming out later on—it still gives me, as I learned later on, a pride in these things that my parents have given me: resilience, adaptability, and all these other qualities that I took for granted when I was younger. I wanted the roots and my hair to represent that. There's that scene where I was trying to shave off my eyebrows

when I was younger because I hated how thick they were, but they were so strong that they just kept growing back no matter what I did. That represents me trying to scrape away every part of myself. But those parts would just come back stronger, so I couldn't keep pushing them away. In the end, when I get that haircut from the Wuhanese person, I accept what she gives me because I take pride in my hair and what I have, rather than push back against it.

WANG: Oh, talking about the roots metaphor reminded me: I also really enjoyed the White Rabbit, you know, the candy and the moon. I was wondering if you could expand on that.

GAO: Yeah! Well, one, I absolutely love White Rabbit candy, I grew up eating it, and I knew I wanted that to be part of the book because it symbolizes diaspora. And I brought in the White Rabbit and the Chang'e story because I wanted something to visually represent my internal battle. A lot of times it's hard to represent internal things just through dialogue or events. I didn't want to put on this giant monologue of me crying in my room and being like, "Agh, am I Asian or not?" I could've done that, but I preferred the White Rabbit. The White Rabbit represents the identity that I'm pushing away, so my internal battles become interactions with the White Rabbit. In the first interaction, in the dream I had right after the CSA event and apologizing to my friend Yejin for what I said about fobby Asians, the White Rabbit eats me. That was my first wake-up call, essentially. I purposefully put that after we're eating White Rabbit candy at the CSA event because so many diaspora kids are familiar with the candy. That's supposed to be unifying, but I turned that on its head in the dream, where it's actually eating me and telling me to wake up. In the end, during the cultural show, that's the main time that I face off with the Rabbit. I remember that when I was drawing and writing it, I saw the Avatar: The Last Airbender scene where he goes to the spirit world—

WANG: Oh my god—

GAO: Okay, I'm glad everyone's familiar. In that scene, the art style changes to be a bit more of a dream-like, Asian art, and Aang talks to the lion turtle and has this great internal battle about who he is. That's exactly what I envisioned when I drew it. I wanted the rabbit to be large and almost god-like, but then it immediately takes up most of these two pages, and it's just me, right there. And then, on the next page, we're eye to eye. The power dynamic changes: my identity doesn't consume me, I decide to face it head-on and refuse to be controlled or to feel guilty about who I am or who I'm not.

GRUBER: You mentioned in the White Rabbit dream scene, which is really incredibly illustrated, that you shifted the art to a more dreamy






Got some of everything so Yang Yang can try them!

White Rabbit Candy!
I'd always sneak them into our cart at the Asian marts.

They're our favorite! So chewy and milky. And you can—

—eat the inside wrapper!



and Asian style. I was wondering what inspired your style. What forms and histories did you draw from?

GAO: I went in knowing specifically that I wanted to blend a lot of Eastern and Western art styles, and you can see that throughout the book. I mean, I grew up reading both Eastern and Western comics and manga, so a lot of the techniques were inspired by that. In a lot of the book, you'll see different manga inspirations. Whenever there's a funny scene and there's a really exaggerated face—

WANG: Really expressive—

GAO: Those are the most fun to draw for me, all those crazy expressions. And for the Chang'e scene I pulled from old Chinese ink watercolor. In terms of the colors, which were done by Weiwei Xu, another amazing queer Asian artist, I also wanted to pay homage to the Western-Eastern side. For East Asian cultures, red especially shows importance (people put red on their main characters a lot), so I wear red throughout the book. And then I actually used a different color scheme for each of the locations. The color scheme for Wuhan is more greens, yellows, and blues to show that nostalgic feel, and the colors for Texas, the yellows, grays, those represent the suffocating feel of Texas. And then all the scenes from Penn and then SF are beautiful, magnificent blues and whites, things that are more open, free. I wanted each of the different color schemes to represent something different. That was drawn more from Western comics, just because a lot of manga is black and white. I grew up reading a lot of graphic novels. For example, Tillie Walden was a huge inspiration; she's also a queer comic artist who writes a lot about her own experience.

WANG: I'll just say that I did take note of the Eastern-Western aspects of your art, and I thought it was really cool how you, even through just visuals, evoke your own identity.

DAO: I wanted to ask, since you brought up the CSA and the Penn experience, I wanted to ask: How do you position your Penn experience in your journey?

GAO: Penn was the start of the realization that I needed to untangle them, for sure. Growing up in Texas, I grew up with this very flawed idea of who I was supposed to be, both from my friends and the fairly racist and homophobic environment I was in, but also my family environment. They're both pretty traditional Chinese immigrants and they have a very set idea of what it means

to be a daughter, what it means to be a woman, an immigrant child. There's scenes that allude to that, like my dad telling me to help my mom cook, or my dad seeing me eat fish head and being like, "Oh, don't do that in front of your friends." Those are more "harmless" examples, but there were plenty of other experiences that I went through as a kid that told me that "This was the box you're supposed to be in." I actually purposefully applied to Penn because it was one of the farthest schools from Texas and I was like "Okay, this is great, my parents can't visit me." [Laughing] I wanted my own freedom to actually explore who I am. And so, in the first few pages of Penn, I am in this in-between of wanting to explore but still being closed off: I throw away the flier from CSA but I go to Tinder and turn on the setting for matching with women. And because Penn was really the first environment for me in which there was not only a significant number of Asians but also a significant number of LGBTQ+ folks, Ivan, my very first best friend, being one of them. That was instrumental for me, to have a great environment to learn about all these other experiences and figure out I could actually craft my own identity. So yeah, that's why the Penn chapters are so heavy and emotional, because there's that Asian aspect and that aspect of finding my LGBTQ+ identity. It didn't fully untangle my roots, because identity's such a constantly evolving thing, but it was the first thing to make me deliberately take control of that experience.

DAO: I'm really glad that we're here to foster that kind of ethnic representation for Asians and queer Asians at Penn (or outside of Penn), which is still a very predominantly white institution.

GAO: Thank you, yeah. I honestly don't think I really appreciated my experience until after graduating. I also had a really great community in San Francisco, but talking about our campuses, there was a stark difference between how queer-friendly I thought Penn versus other people's campuses. And of course there are some toxic issues within the queer community at Penn too, but, for example, I mentioned how Penn Q&A was super instrumental for me and so many people were like, "Wow, you had a club just for being queer and Asian? We barely even had an umbrella LGBTQ+ club." That really made me appreciate the experience that I had.

WANG: The story you told, discovering yourself as a queer Asian at that age, the age I am, was something I never really saw in any kind of media, so that was super, super cool. And one thing that was really instrumental to that whole Penn narrative but also came slightly before was your slow discovery of your queerness. It wasn't always put into words, but it was sprinkled in here and there.

GAO: No, yeah, you hit it right on the head, for sure. I purposefully didn't want to label my queerness, especially in Texas, until I really started to

deliberately explore it in college because that was how I felt growing up. It's like this itch or that's in the back of your heart but you can't really scratch it, and, on top of that, you're actually afraid to scratch it. Yeah, there's so many ramifications of growing up in a religious household and religious town like I did: you constantly acknowledge that [queerness] pops up, but you try to suppress it. And that's why I wanted it to feel very subtle in those early chapters because that was how



I dealt with it, and I'm glad you're able to catch that. That's a feeling a lot of queer folks grow up with. If you're straight or hetero reading it, it may not really occur to you because being straight is the default, and so it's like, "Oh, of course I'll have a crush for this person." But because I wasn't the default, I'm constantly thinking: "Is this bad?" It just kept gnawing at me, like in the basketball scene, seeing the other girls who were changing, and being like, "Oh my God." I'm this poor kid going through puberty just trying to live my best life, yet everything that's supposed to be natural for straight people is something that I feel ashamed for. There's that scene where I'm talking with the pastor at the Asian church party and he asks me about which guy I'm dating, if I'm thinking about a boy, and I give a non-answer. I grew up with a lot of non-answers because I didn't want to pinpoint what I was truly feeling, but I didn't want to affirm what they were thinking of me either.

WANG: My go-to answer in situations like that is like, "I'm too focused on studying, maybe later." [Laughing] "It's academic right now." But yeah, I really enjoyed how in the beginning, you were more explicit about mentioning those romantic crushes on boys because, like you said, being in an environment where that's supposed to be the norm, that's the course that's going to jump out at you first.

GAO: Yeah, thanks for bringing up Rosh, the guy who I dated in high school. I purposefully put that scene in contrast with the scene with me and Val, the first girlfriend I had, and you can see the juxtaposition in how I treated those few dates. With Rosh, I was immediately like, "Oh, he's hot, he's the boy everyone wants," and I immediately go to this big panel of me telling everyone, even the pizza delivery guy, "Yo, here's my boyfriend." It's so obvious that I'm dating him for the wrong reasons, like even I don't know why I'm dating him. Then, with Val, we met at Q&A, we were having this conversation just between the two of us, completely separate from the crowd, and even when we're getting fries together afterwards, it was just the two of us. I was just focusing on this person in front of me and my love for them. That was a representation of me realizing what that true love is supposed to be and not what I thought it was with Rosh back in high school. ❀

Farewell

by Zuma Palmer

Farewell” by Zula Palmer is a song exploring the queer “I” and all the feelings around it, from confusion, through shame, to panic. Navigating those experiences can be difficult, but it’s part of self-discovery and eventual acceptance. You can listen to “Farewell” on all streaming platforms now.

*She grabs my attention
Like I grab a smoke
Swiftly
Fiercely
Alone*

*Not sure what her intention
Is but I’m on board
Listening
Twisting
The plot*

*Now she’s about to go
A chance to farewell
But I can’t choke out a word
Oh, I wish I had control
Now the moment’s gone
So please pick up the phone
Or I’ll cry at the tone
To tears there’ll be no end*

*Unfathomed roles
Uncalled for calls
Unscripted moves tighten like a noose
Around my neck
Last time I checked
A leech was there like I was not*



*No eloquence
Lies in defense
I'm frowned upon when I ask what's wrong
She builds a case
I'm lost in space
I'm coming round, she wants out*

*And she's about to go
A chance to farewell
But I can't choke out a word
I wish I had control
Now the moment's gone
So please pick up the phone
Or I'll hang up at the tone
To tears there'll be no end*

Life in Color

by Andres Ramirez



Une histoire d'amour intemporelle by Andres Ramirez

I have synesthesia, a rare neurological condition that allows me to experience multiple senses simultaneously. In my case, I see shapes and colors when listening to music. Music allows me to experience the world differently, taking me on a visual journey like an audio visualization on a Windows Media Player. My intimate connection with music allows me to momentarily escape my reality and experience life in color. I spent twenty-three years hiding the rainbow of my identity, repressing my queerness to psychologically protect myself from verbal abuse by my homophobic father. When I listened to music as a teen, I was liberated from my self-doubt, and I became fierce. Now that I'm out, I'm free to experience this ferocity beyond the confines of my mind and celebrate my colorful existence with pride.

I often use music to store and invoke memories, the colors piecing back the emotions associated with the tracks' timeframes. I first discovered my ability at the age of twelve, when my father would play his beloved salsa records on the weekends. Hues of yellow and orange would oscillate and dance in my periphery as I listened, masking the daily fear I held for my father when we were together. Listening to salsa together was my father's form of bonding, as we seemingly had nothing else in common. As an adult, I avoid these records because they transport me back into the body of a scared teen regularly scolded for deviating from traditional gender norms. Reminding me of my constant fear of being disowned if I turned out to be un pinche maricon. Whoops.

Fortunately, among all the salsa records in our living room, I discovered and kept for myself Pure Disco Vol. 2, which included "YMCA," "Dancing Queen," "I Will Survive," and countless other (soon-to-be) gay anthems that began molding my music taste. When these tracks play through my headphones, I'm fifteen again, listening and dancing in secret while my dad is at work. I eventually started saving money to buy my own records, with Britney, Ricky, and Madonna leading the dance-pop musical renaissance of my collection. The more music I discovered, the more colorful my world became. Blues mixed with pinks, purples with greens, the entire spectrum of the rainbow became apparent to me, and with it, the realization of why music was essential for my survival. Music allowed me to love and express myself in a way I couldn't in public, to live authentically, without shame.

Music was instrumental in helping me process my internalized homophobia. It was my escape mechanism from the imposter I was at school, at work, and at home. The urgent synths of the melodies spurred me to dance away the pain of my old heterosexual existence and gave me the courage to come out. To transform my grief into liberation as my favorite songs culminated into an explosion of euphoric melodies. When I'm at a concert, on the dancefloor, or just in the shower listening to my favorite artists, I experience anew the moments when I've felt powerful and ready to share my authentic self to the world.



Sights Set on Pride by Andres Ramirez

It took me twenty-three years to come to terms with my trauma and come out. The shame of my father almost broke me, just as it's broken millions of others that have come out before me. I ensured my financial independence before I was open with my identity, anticipating financial and emotional estrangement from my father. Thankfully, I have music as a constant reminder to gravitate towards the sounds of revitalization. My synesthesia gives me the power to celebrate life in color, both on the inside and out. ❁

HOW TO BE A GOOD ACE ALLY

by PennAces

KEY CONCEPTS:

1. Asexuality as a spectrum extends to everyone in society. Everyone can benefit from incorporating nuance into their understandings of themselves and others.
2. There is no one way to experience being ace or aro. There are many forms of intimacy, from sharing feelings to genital sex or cuddling. Each person has their own preferences. Culture also plays a huge role in how people experience these identities.
3. There are multiple forms of attraction, commonly said to include: familial, platonic, aesthetic, sensual, physical, romantic, sexual, emotional, intellectual. Often, the lines can be blurred. Ask yourself what you want to be / do with that person(s), at that moment.
4. There is a distinction between one's sexual activity, sexual attraction, sex drive (libido), and attitudes toward having sex (sex-positive, sex-neutral, sex-repulsed). People can experience any combination of these variables to any extent at any given time.
5. With sex, you can do what you want when you want however often you want (even not at all). Keep in mind that people have different understandings of what is sexual. Our primary relationships don't need to revolve around sex.
6. There is a need for cultural and legal shifts in how we conceptualize caring relationships. We don't need to look for "the one" to be everything for us. Marriage should not be the only way to get legal benefits. As we age, we should be able to find support from a community.
7. There are many ways to experience fulfillment. Joy can come from many sources other than sex. Not having sex or a romantic relationship does not make a person any less human or whole.

STARTER TERMS:

- *Asexual (ace)* - adj. describes a person who experiences little or no sexual attraction. Concept: Asexuality.

- *Aromantic (aro)* - adj. describes a person who experiences little or no romantic attraction. Concept: Aromanticism.
- *Allosexual (allo)* - adj. describes a person who experiences sexual attraction. Often placed at the other end of the spectrum from asexual. Concept: Allosexuality.
- In-between terms include:
 - *Ace-spec* - adj. on the asexual spectrum.
 - *Aro-spec* - adj. on the aromantic spectrum.
 - *Gray-ace* - adj. may experience sexual attraction infrequently or conditionally.
 - *Demisexual* - adj. may experience sexual attraction after an emotional bond.

ADVANCED TERMS:

- *Compulsive sexuality* - n. The idea that being sexual and wanting sex is fundamental to being human, and that this prioritization of sex in relationships is cultivated in people's minds through cultural and societal norms. We see this in our media and in our legal systems. Derived from the term "compulsive heterosexuality."
- More: <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/full/10.1086/681774#dq25o66e1>
- *Amatonormativity* - n. The idea that the experience of romantic attraction and desire for romantic relationships is fundamental to being human, and that this prioritization of romance in relationships is cultivated in people's minds through cultural and societal norms. We see this in our media and in our legal systems. From "heteronormativity."
- More: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gsW3VsraJqo>

REEXAMINE YOUR ASSUMPTIONS:

- What in society tells us that sex and romantic relationships are the primary goals? Do you see examples of romantic relationships without sex? Of people happily single or seeking other forms of caring relationships?
 - How many asexual or aromantic characters can you think of? Are they portrayed positively or negatively? Are they presented as human, natural?
- Let's move away from describing teens in terms of sex and raging hormones. Asexuality isn't just an adult thing; young people can be, and know, they are ace. The same goes for aromanticism.

- When someone comes out to you, don't feel bad! If they're sharing something joyful with you, appreciate that. If they're working through their identity, offer support in whatever way is right for you and them.

HISTORY:

- Ace and aro experiences are not novel. People have identified with the label "asexual" for over a century, but the experience is far older. Other cultures today and through history conceptualize(d) sexuality and interpersonal relationships differently.
 - Manuela L. Picq and Josi Tikuna's 2019 piece, "[Indigenous Sexualities: Resisting Conquest and Translation](#)"
 - Victor Karandashev's 2015 paper, "[A Cultural Perspective on Romantic Love](#)"
- Sexualization and desexualization have been used to oppress communities through time. The term "ace" has been used to dehumanize communities. Read into the ties between White supremacy and sexuality. The legacy of these issues remains in the literature and media we consume today.
 - "[The Mammy Caricature.](#)" with the Jim Crow Museum in 2010
 - Eunjung Kim's 2011 essay, "[Asexuality in disability narratives](#)"

KEEP LEARNING!

Check out these links, read a book, or chat with a friend.

- <https://acesandaros.org/learn/the-asexual-umbrella>
- <https://www.asexuality.org/en/>
- <https://aceweek.org/>
- *ACE: What Asexuality Reveals about Desire, Society, and the Meaning of Sex* by Angela Chen
- After you've done some research, you can ask a friend if they're comfortable chatting about their experience with you.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, reach out to pennsaces@gmail.com. Follow our socials, @pennsaces on Facebook and Instagram.

PennAces is a student organization that seeks to promote education about, awareness of, and support for the asexual community. We meet every other week to have chill discussions on asexuality and related topics. We plan an educational event each semester for the general community. We also plan fun group activities like trips downtown, crafts, baking, etc. If you're ace-spec, aro-spec, and/or questioning asexuality, come join us! ✨

writings on home

by angelgabriel gutierrez

i told my mother twice that i forgave her, but neither moment was sincere

i brushed the mattes of a cat's fur. i scratched its back as it ate grass and its head as it licked garbage. we walked for a few steps but left. their eyes reminded me of how moss crawls onto shallow ponds during summers in the south. i hope when i come back, we will find each other and rejoice like subway rats chasing each other, jumping over cigarette butts my mother left in a citronella candle

how old were you when you knew your mother was going to shame you more than she'd be able to love you?

i'd like to think i will crumble like sweet dirt at death
perhaps i will run alongside ridges of land and empty into the river my
mother crossed to give me home in a place, placenta, placebo

what did your mother teach you about plants and herbs and weed?

tall grass waved in the gusts of wind above my head while flocks of crows
landed on a lone pecan tree in a clearing but buzzards fly overhead and i
sit perched on a trunk cleaved open by the sky

plants you sowed would die except for corn
maybe i can become sweet corn

i knew the beginning of fall because spider lilies would be in blood bloom
i've forgotten when they stopped sprouting
i feared the land had grown tired of me
maybe it was the tower of smoke that crushed our bodies
you said if i left, it would be my fault and none of your own
the land showed me how to change and come back again

my mother said when she crossed the river, she floated like seafoam on a
makeshift raft pregnant with me
how long was that moment, the uncertainty and our floating, that
simultaneity?

BLESSING.

by Azzaya Galsandum

the morning sun blesses my eyelids as the warm honey drips into my
heart
lazing around in your warmth, i gradually open my eyes to see the
streams of light that come from you
my eyes tear up as once again i am here with you in this world full of
your warmth
your laugh twinkles like the stars
your sun-like smile fills my mind
the moons in your eyes shine

the smell of lavender and lemon surrounds us as we dance through the
days and nights together
your warm hands melt my own to reveal my own true warmth
you are my lazy summer day that constantly blesses my cold, lackluster
body

DESPAIR.

by Azsaya Galsandun

A bubble of large eyes surrounded the poor thing;
she couldn't bear to shut her own eyes,
for she feared that the others would open and see who she really was.
She stood on the eyelids and dared not to move.
The eyes twitched regardless of her lack of movement.
Worry filled her body —
she could feel her body growing heavier with each breath she took.
The air was filled with her own thoughts and
the ideas that the eyes forced into her.



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Call for Submissions

If you enjoyed reading *Q-INE*, we encourage you to submit your own work to next year's issue! We want to provide a space to share your experiences and perspectives as a member of Penn's LGBTQ+ community.

We accept all kinds of art and writing, including:

- Creative writing (eg. poetry, short stories, flash fiction)
- Nonfiction (eg. personal essays, short interviews, memoir, journalistic writing)
- Painting, photography, and other visual art (artists are welcome to include a short one- to two-paragraph artist's statement providing context for their work)

Submissions are open to undergraduate and graduate students, alumni, faculty, and staff. You can email your submission to qinemag@gmail.com or keep an eye out for our submission form, which we will send out in Fall 2023.

And if you're interested in getting involved in *Q-INE*, whether as an editor, designer, marketer, or any other role, reach out to us at qinemag@gmail.com! We're always excited to welcome more people to the *Q-INE* community.

