February Zine QYA

Inside:
"Queer Love in Many Forms"
"Growing Up as a Queer Teen in Rural America"
and more!

Cover art by Savanah (they/them) pg. 8
Dear reader,
Welcome to the fifth edition of the Queer Youth Assemble monthly zine. Inside, you will find beautiful pieces of art, writing, and poetry created by Queer Youth Assemble members. The content within this zine varies greatly from one piece to the next, highlighting various elements, themes, perspectives, and our creators’ lived experiences. We acknowledge the intersecting elements found within the content of this zine, and encourage you to read with both compassion and understanding.

Due to our strong belief in uncensored creativity, we decided to not put content limits on our creators for this publication. However, we understand that some of the content within this zine may be triggering to some readers. In this and future QYA zines, a list of specific triggers can be found at the top of each page, and any potentially triggering themes can be found at the beginning of each zine. Potentially triggering themes in this issue include homophobia, religious homophobia, and imagery of top surgery scars (page 5). If you find yourself struggling after reading, we encourage you to reach out for support.

We hope you enjoy this publication, and are inspired to create whatever your heart desires.

With love and care,

Esmée Silverman (she/her)
Queer Youth Assemble Co-Founder

Alice Mead (they/them)
Queer Youth Assemble Writing Team Lead
What is QYA?

Queer Youth Assemble is a non-profit youth-led organization dedicated to serving queer youth across the United States and its territories. We are committed to nurturing the joy, interests, and talents of queer youth, and giving queer youth the resources and support to create positive change within their communities. We envision a day where all queer youth are happy, supported, and able to reach their fullest potential.
Hannah was amazing.
Sweet, pretty, smart, athletic, talented.
She always made honor rolls.
She always got the leads in plays.
She always got solos in the chorus.
She always got on the sports team.
Hannah was amazing.
But Hannah hid things.

Hannah was also queer.
Hannah was also my girlfriend.
We were a lesbian couple.
Hannah didn’t want anyone to know.
Hannah didn’t want to tarnish her perfect reputation.
Hannah hid our relationship.

We were just friends to everyone.
Best friends forever.
Just friends.
We had to hide.

Valentines day.
Everyone was with their person.
Gifts and treats for lovers everywhere.
Except for me and Hannah.
We hid.

No one could know little miss perfect had a girlfriend.
No one could know Hannah was different.
Sometimes I didn’t know Hannah was mine.
She was perfect.
But she was hidden.
growing up as a queer teen in rural America
by Jaiden (she/her)
CW: homophobia, religious homophobia

As a pansexual teenage girl living in rural America, a lot of things didn’t make sense while I was growing up. Whether that be the confusion regarding liking others regardless of gender, not relating to my heterosexual counterparts, or lack of acceptance in my area, I strongly believe that my experiences have helped shape who I am today.

In middle school, I had my first crush on someone of the same gender. I never really understood why I was feeling that way towards a girl, but I knew exactly what the butterflies in my stomach meant. Her smile lit up the room and her brown eyes made my heart skip a beat. I tried to explain my feelings to my friends at the time, but they all thought that I was crazy. While all of them were wanting to date boys, I was wanting to date a girl. I wanted to hold her hand and go stargazing, but instead, I was faced with horrible remarks from my “friends.” I was told that I was disgusting and “needed to get fixed.”

I later came out during my freshman year of high school and that did not go very well. I was taunted by my peers and told by adults that I was just going through a phase. The horrific time that I went through could have been avoided if I had the acceptance that I longed for. The slurs thrown at me because of my identity made me feel weak. The invasive questions about my identity made me feel uncomfortable. My heterosexual counterparts separated me from themselves and that was the most alone I felt in my entire life. I never felt adequate in my daily life, so I decided to change my perspective on who I was. I practiced daily affirmations, I followed LGBTQ+ creators online, and I dove into the supportive influencers’ content. I felt as if I was finally welcomed somewhere with open arms. I was finally free.

Growing up in rural America as a queer teen has been my greatest challenge. The demeaning anti-LGBTQ+ posts on Facebook, the churches closing their doors to the LGBTQ+ community wanting to practice religion. It’s the fear of going out into the streets holding your significant other’s hand. It’s the fear of going out on a date in public with them. It’s the fear of using the restroom that matches your gender or not even being able to find a gender-neutral restroom. There were no resources for us. To combat this, I started my school’s Gay-Straight Alliance and became the Vice President of the LGBTQ+ support group in my area. I used my pain to spark growth within my community. If there is anything I have learned as a queer kid, it has been that I can change the world one step at a time. I’ve stood up for what I believe in and I’ve put my all into it too. I am not only more confident, outspoken, and happy, but I am also stronger than I’ve ever been before. I strongly believe that my experiences have helped shape who I am today.
QUEER LOVE IN MANY FORMS
Digitally drawn depictions of queer love beyond monogamy by Jesse/Finch (he/they)

“Polyamourous Love”
(above) Three people are shown sitting against each other in a darkly-lit field. Left: shaved dark hair with painted-on stars. Earth-toned clothing with patched jeans. Middle: orange-brown, medium-length short hair, with light-colored clothing. Right: short green hair, red turtleneck shirt, dark pants, holding a black mug.

(right) CW: top surgery scars. Two people hold one another, imposed over a darkly lit outdoor scene. Left: visible top surgery scars, red hair, and dark green pants. Right: light green hair, glasses, blue sweater, red pants with yellow stars.

“Monogamous Love”
“Queerplatonic Love”
Two people sit in a field in daytime, one, on the left, with a dark-haired mullet and patterned clothing offers mushrooms to the other, who has light blue hair and brightly-colored clothes.

“Love Between Friends”
Two people are shown, one, (with short light hair) offering the other (with dyed red hair) a colorful snail they found. No drawn romantic love imagery.
I was never one of those people who had a big epiphany where they realized their sexuality. There was no 'aha' moment and no lightbulb that went off, not even when I saw the word for the first time. I spent years waiting for my first crush to happen, like what happened to my friends and my favorite characters in the books I buried myself in, and then it just... never did. Even in elementary school, some of my classmates were already "boy crazy." I went through a phase of acting revolted by any display of affection in front of me in order to avoid participating. Later on, I switched strategies: picking out boys to like based on arbitrary things like their hair color or whether they shared my Hogwarts house (but then getting upset whenever anyone implied that I wanted to actually date them). Eventually I stopped that too. My friend group, while slightly clueless, was fairly laid back, and by middle school they knew and did not care that I was not interested in relationships.

It was in middle school that I first discovered that there was a term for what I was experiencing. My friend, while doing research about her own identity, came across the word "asexual." She explained it to me, then asked me directly, "Is this you?"

I told her I had no idea.

I didn't know how to tell if I was ace or not; I had no clue what to look for. Sure, I had never "like-liked" someone, but everyone told me that some people were just "late bloomers." I knew what it meant to be gay or bi, but didn't feel like either applied to me, so in my mind I had to be straight. It hadn't occurred to me that I could be something else entirely. But how could I know for sure? How do you qualify the absence of something as abstract as attraction?

I think this fear of being "wrong" was what made me most reluctant to identify as ace at first. I was terrified to come out to adults who felt dubious about asexuality existing, because I worried if I changed my label later down the road I would just enforce all the harmful stereotypes I had been trying so hard to disprove. Later on, once I began taking on positions of leadership in queer spaces, I felt a great deal of impostor syndrome. What if I "ended up straight?" I didn't want to feel like I had been untruthful in identifying as queer, or even worse: lose the sense of community and belonging I had found among my LGBTQ+ peers.

I am sixteen years old now and feeling much more secure in myself and my identity. I still haven't experienced anything I can tell for sure is attraction. I still have a tiny bit of uncertainty about labels, but I've learned to be okay with that. I don't owe it to anyone to define myself definitively. Society still often acts like I'm broken for not wanting romantic or sexual relationships like I "should." I've learned to drown those voices out. I am who I am, and I am proud of it.
In the top center down to the middle of the piece it says “February Zine QYA” Near the bottom right there is an envelope which has burst open spewing out wavy streams of purple, pink and red. There are two heads with long pink hair waving into the streams. There is also a golden key and lock along with a heart tipped arrow coming out of the envelope. On either side There are glowing hearts and near the bottom three sweetheart candies.
SUBMIT A QUEERY
by an anonymous white transmasc lesbian

Our February zine is all about love: romantic, platonic, familial, and all things queer love. Our question for today is: how to go about handling a relationship with a monogamous person as a polyamorous person?

Excellent question! Though it may be cliché, it’s true—communication is everything. In this situation, that means figuring out exactly what your needs are: do you require multiple partners for your own personal fulfillment? Are there other forms of relationships you can form that meet your needs without infringing on your partner’s boundaries? What is your partner’s comfort level with you potentially being with others?

Of course these are all broad, complex questions, but can be very helpful to reflect on yourself and then discuss with your partner. Perhaps even consider sending them a list of questions/needs/boundaries you’re thinking of before you meet so you both have time to consider!

At the end of the day, you are weighing the benefit of having this person in your life with your needs as a polyamorous person. Luckily, there is a lot of gray space to work with here. Your partner may not be strictly monogamous, or you may be able to create a strong foundation of trust so they feel comfortable with you having multiple partners. Or maybe you find you are able to have your needs met in a monogamous relationship for the time being. Or maybe, things don’t work out, and while that is certainly hard, it’s okay.

Regardless of what your unique scenario may be, I recommend not letting it fester. Have a discussion, give both you and your partner time to think and prepare before and after, and see where that leads you. Hopefully, you can configure a relationship that works for both of you. Best of luck!

My dear queers, that is all I have for now. I’ll see you in our next edition with Submit a Queery, where queer fears fall on queer ears. DM our Instagram @queeryouthassemble if you have a Queery for our next volume of the zine! And all of us at QYA wish you a very gay day.
family names, centuries old
our eyes, our faces, our traditions, our guilt
they pass down the weight of expectation
while the trees outside hear me whisper
I found myself
outside of you.

most families share their identities
their struggles match with their mothers
stories
trickle
down
through generations.
‘this is where we came from.
this is who you are.’

I discovered my queerness within me;
no twist of DNA from my mother or father
wove together to make me trans.
I found myself.

I keep my head held high
yes, this is me.
and yes, maybe some don’t understand
why we throw glitter and sing loud
we are visible
to shake the foundations of this painful culture-
the world we’re forced to exist in
alone
for so long
until- I see your neon bright passion
or the way you hold your ground,
search for solidarity,
and we see each other.
not blood but yes we relate.

we’ve found ourselves
we’ve found family.
Two foxes lay curled up together on a bed of pink and blue flowers amidst a field of white grass. The bigger fox is in back, staring straight ahead, while the smaller fox is in front, looking up at the bigger fox. To the right of the bigger fox's head reads, "protect trans kids." in capital letters. Made with white, blue, and pink charcoal pencils on black paper (9 in x 12 in).
I’ll never forget
That night in early July
Unassuming
But one of my most important
7 days removed from the event
But the fireworks in my heart were just erupting

It wasn’t real
It couldn’t be
Could it?
This person
My best friend
Their butterflies flew as mine did too
And they’d just collided

So much time later
And the words still can’t reach me
The feeling still seems improbable
And yet it isn’t
It’s true
And has been
And will be

We’ve gone through so much already
And I promise you
We’ll go through more together
What’s happened
What’s happening
And what will happen
How will we do it?
Together
THANK YOU!

Stay tuned for next month's edition & QYA Zine announcements!

Visit us at:

Website: queeryouthhassemble.org
Instagram: @queeryouthhassemble
Tiktok: @queeryouthhassemble
Twitter: @qyouthhassemble

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