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For All the Mias of This World

By Meredith Doench

2015 Lesbian Fiction Appreciation Event

#LFAE2015 / see <http://kbgabbles.com/2015/01/meredith-doench-thurs-115-lfae.html>

As a relatively new writer on the f/f fiction scene, I have received all sorts of questions regarding why I chose to “make” my main characters lesbians.

A typical exchange goes something like this:

Fellow Reader: “A female protagonist can be limiting enough, right? Lesbian, too?”

Me: “Limiting?”

Fellow Reader: “I have nothing against lesbians. You love who you love, but gay protagonists can limit who decides to read your book.”

Me: “Isn’t it infuriating that the sexuality of my characters has the power to, as you say, ‘limit’ readers?”

Fellow Reader: “Absolutely, but it’s a reality.”

It’s not that this fellow reader doesn’t have a point. It’s that she *does* that disturbs me most.

Over the past few years there has been a lot of attention given to the amount of women, or lack thereof, in the publishing world. Statistics provided by the 2013 Vida Count show that not only should those numbers be much stronger, but so should the representations of women and their variations of sexuality in published works. Roxane Gay writes in the introduction to her 2014 book, *Bad Feminist: Essays*, “Movies, more often than not, tell the stories of men as if men’s stories are the only stories that matter. When women are involved, they are the sidekicks, the romantic interests, the afterthoughts. Rarely do women get to be the center of attention. Rarely do our stories get to matter.” When we add lesbian to a female’s story, we find ourselves once again at the main point of my fellow reader: women are marginalized in this world. Lesbians are doubly marginalized.

It surprises some to hear that the sexuality of my protagonist of my novel *Crossed* was never a serious consideration. The fact that Luce Hansen is a lesbian is as clear to me as the fact that she has dark hair and is stout in stature—it just is. Luce is a version of every-woman, and I hope to present the truth of all my characters in a way that women readers can recognize and wholeheartedly cheer for. Although Luce may have more emotional damage than most, she is a woman who also struggles with all of the modern day dilemmas: how to balance her professional career and personal life, how to keep the relationship with her partner alive, and how to find a place in her world where she is recognized and respected. Although there are many writers who honor women’s stories and depict lesbian protagonists, so few of these characters are widely recognized in our mainstream culture.

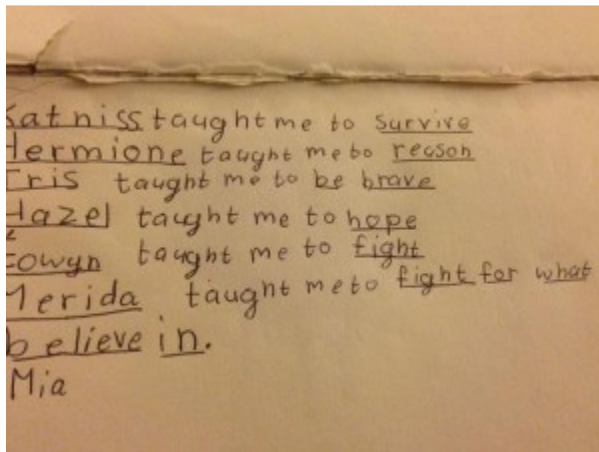
I want my writing to contribute to the growing collection of voices that say *all stories matter* regardless of the character’s sexuality, gender, religion, race, or class. Every life counts;

we need to be able to recognize ourselves in literature and film. For some of us, stories can be powerfully transformative and the method in which we learn how to survive and navigate throughout our world. Many say this is most important for children and teens, but I argue that we all need to see representations of ourselves in literature regardless if we are 5, 12, 17, 28, 54, or 77 years of age. It provides a strong and important verification that our lives are visible, and that we do indeed *count*.

But the questions remain: is it possible for us to escape the political act of writing lesbian? And how does visibility of lesbian characters play a role in the LGBT community?

I don't pretend to know the answers.

I do know that when I came across this post from [Myke Cole's young niece](#), I did a little happy dance. Mia wrote in her scrapbook about the female protagonists from popular culture that she has read/watched:



So. Very. Beautiful.

Now, imagine a list that includes lesbian characters who taught Mia how to trust herself in order to live authentically and truthfully. Imagine a list that includes lesbian characters from popular culture who taught Mia love between two people, regardless of their gender, should be celebrated. After all, gay marriage has been legalized in 35 states, and I suspect that number will continue to grow. Our mainstream literature and film should reflect that societal reality as well as the changes in perception we hope to accomplish in the future.

Women of all ages are reading, watching, and listening. Transformation is everywhere. Yes, we still have a long way to go. Change can be slow, but Mia's scrapbook list proves that change *does* happen.

I want my writing to be a part of that change for all the Mia's of this world.

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Bio:

Meredith Doench's short fiction and creative nonfiction have appeared in literary journals such as *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *Women's Studies Quarterly*, and *Gertrude*. She earned a Ph.D. in creative writing from Texas Tech University and served as a fiction editor at *Camera Obscura: Journal of Literature and Photography*. She teaches writing and literature at a university in southern Ohio. *Crossed* is her first novel.