

Label Me with a B

By Rev. Francesca Bongiorno Fortunato

I've been calling myself bisexual since I was eleven years old and have never (as far as my orientation was concerned) even considered using another label as my primary (though I do feel that "queer," as an umbrella term, includes me).

I call myself bisexual because it includes attraction to all genders (same as mine; different from mine). I call myself bisexual because it's a label with a long, honorable history. Bisexual people have been at the forefront of LGBTQ liberation movements from their earliest days. I don't want to negate that history or dishonor my foremothers and forefathers by claiming some new, trendy label for myself.

I also call myself bisexual because it's a distinction with a difference. I am not "fluid." My orientation doesn't fluctuate. I was born bisexual and will die bisexual, regardless of relationship status at any point along with way.

I call myself bisexual because, by doing so, I combat bi-phobia and bi erasure. Only by speaking my truest truth to the powers that be, can I be part of the solution. I won't call myself something less definitive (or claim "no labels") to make bigots more comfortable remaining bigoted. I will continue to challenge the stereotypes and the haters by claiming the label that is most genuine for me.

I call myself bisexual so that those in search of community will know that I am one of them, and one of our community's leaders.

I call myself bisexual so that the next generation will know where to find themselves, and me. I am aware that the "foremother" label will also be mine before too long. I want the bisexual young people, stepping into future leadership, to see me as an inspiration, and be proud that I am part of the history they share.

I call myself bisexual because I am bisexual, and I hope, work and pray for the time when that will be a thoroughly matter-of-fact and unremarkable thing to say.

Rev. Francesca Bongiorno Fortunato lives in New York City with her wife, Lynn, and their cats, Alice and Gracie. She currently works as a youth minister and part time dance teacher, in addition to being the volunteer facilitator for Bi Perspectives, a support group at the Manhattan LGBT Community Center.



Queer: My Non-Label Label

By L.B. Klein

Like many folks who navigate the world as a woman, labels have always been assigned to me.

- When I was 13, a close friend told me that I was a "dyke" and that was a reason to rape me.
- When I was 14 and read books by feminist authors, a classmate wrote "carpetmuncher" on my notebook.
- When I was 15 and confided in a friend at church that I had feelings for a classmate at my all-girls' Catholic high school, the label was "sinner."
- When I was 16 and had been on some dates with a boy and was later caught kissing a girl, the label was "slut."
- When I was 17, and I told a boy "No," it I was because I must be a "homo."

For me, labeling has a history wrapped up in violence and abuse. Before I gave a real label to who I was, I was furtively reading Ursula Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness*, watching *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* and trying to figure out how my friends didn't get that Xena and Gabrielle were totally a couple on *Xena: Warrior Princess*. Figuring out that I was queer was inextricably wrapped up in my political identity and in being a nerd. The label that would have resonated the most with younger me would have been "different."

Even when I started to live openly as an adult queer person, the labels continued.

- At 18, I started to enter LGBTQ spaces and was immediately labeled "bi-curious" because I dressed femme and had a boyfriend.

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From the Editors

Dear Reader,

This month's theme is Labels, a subject I spend considerable time pondering. I am a campus speaker, and one of my workshops is *Choosing to Label: What's in a Name*. I could have filled this entire issue with my thoughts about labels. My intention was to write for this issue, but we received so many other thoughtful pieces that I chose to step aside. Instead, I'll use this letter to insert a few words of advice about labeling:

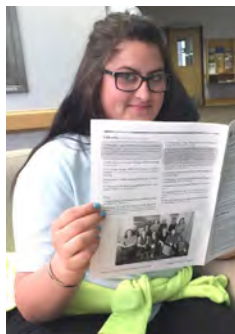
May we use labels as tools for communication, and to find other people with similar experiences, but let us not allow labels to restrain or limit us, or to separate us from one another – people with different labels do not have to be on opposing teams. May we use labels as adjectives, not as nouns. (I identify as bisexual. I am not a bisexual.) And we can use as many labels as we wish. (I identify simultaneously as bisexual, pansexual, queer and fluid.)

Enjoy this issue, which may well be the most graphically-rich issue we've produced to date. Our "Around the World" column features Esperanza Monteiro, an impressive activist from Madrid, Spain. We present various forms of writing by Stella, Katherine Garcia, Courtney Carola, Lila Hertelius, Keira Edwards-Huolahan, S. H. G., Michelle Spring-Moore, Theresa Tyree, Paige Owen, Iyanna James-Stephenson. And we are excited to have Tiggy Upland back for a visit, in an entirely new format. Also featured: paintings by Jo-Anne Carlson and another comic from Why Not Both Co. And finally, as always, we bring you our News Briefs and Calendar.

If you live in the Boston area, please join us at one of our upcoming bi women's brunches on June 18, July 17 and August 13.

-Robyn

Another fan reads *BWQ*. Send a picture of yourself reading *BWQ* to biwomeneditor@gmail.com. Be creative!



Upcoming in the *Bi Women Quarterly*

Call for writing Fall 2016 issue: **Does Gender Matter?**

Is love really just love, no matter the gender of your partner(s)? Are your affections and attractions genderless, or do you crave or seek experiences with particular genders? Are you treated differently with different-gendered partners? Do *you* behave differently? *DUE BY Aug. 1.*

Call for writing Winter 2017 issue: **Bi+ Space**

How do you find or build community? [Where] do you get support and affirmation of your bi+ identity? How important is it to build distinct bi+ support and social spaces? [Why] does it matter? Should we aim instead for an open, accepting queer society – or is the advancement of bi+ identity a necessary precursor or parallel track to that? *DUE BY Nov. 1.*

Submission guidelines are online at biwomenboston.org.

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

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

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

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

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

Around the World: An Interview with Esperanza Monteiro, Madrid, Spain

By Robyn Ochs

Esperanza, 38, has been an activist since 1997, when she was a student at the Universidad Complutense de Madrid. In 2009, she founded the bi group within COGAM, a community-based organization in Madrid advocating for legal and real equality for LGBT people and served as president of this group from 2012 until 2015. She is active in Podemos, a political party led by Pablo Iglesias, and is also active in Ahora Madrid, part of the left-wing coalition that gained 20 seats in city government, including that of Manuela Carmena, their current mayor, in 2015.

First, Espe, tell us about yourself. How did you come to identify as bi? How old were you? What happened?

When I was 17, I fell in love with a woman. There were not so many bi role models in Spain at that moment, so I thought I needed to choose. I feel more emotionally attracted to women, so I identified myself as a lesbian.

It was a complete contradiction, not fitting completely in any label. I fell in love with some guys and I always felt guilty because I was betraying the word “lesbian.”

In 2008 someone introduced me to Arantxa Sanchez, Vice President of COGAM, and she said, “I’m Arantxa, I am bisexual.” And I realized, “I’m Esperanza, and I guess I am bisexual, too.” I felt an amazing sense of relief.

What is your religious background, if any, and what impact did this have on your coming out experience?

Well, I studied in a religious school. But it wasn’t at all a problem for me, personally. I am not religious.

Despite being a Catholic country, with churches everywhere, Spain was the third country in the world to adopt marriage equality back in July 2005. What made that possible? Were you involved in the movement to make it happen?

It happened because of many activists working together, despite demonstrations of the “Foro de la Familia” (Family Forum), an organization advocating for a classic model of family. I was not yet involved in activism at that time. I remember watching the news on television and feeling grateful to all of the activists who were changing my life: Pedro Zerolo, Sylvia Jaén, Beatriz Gimeno, Boti and others.

You founded Madrid’s bi group in 2009. Please tell us about it. How many folks are on your mailing list? How often do you meet? What kind of meetings or events do you have, and on average, how many folks show up?

The bisexual group operates within COGAM, a larger LGBT organization that was founded in 1986. We are about 30-40 bi people who meet every two weeks to speak about



We have around 200 people on our mailing list.

Are bi folks well-integrated into Madrid’s sexual minority community?

Not everyone. It is still complicated sometimes to identify as bisexual because of biphobia. But it is changing a lot with the help of some of our monosexual allies.

Associations are making special efforts to address this problem. Next year will be the bisexual year for the more than 50 associations of our national organization, FELGTB (La Federación Estatal de Lesbianas, Gais, Transexuales y Bisexuales) in Spain.

As an activist, what is an accomplishment of which you are particularly proud?

Well, activist accomplishments are always because of a group of people, not a particular activist. I am proud to belong to a movement that made it possible for any person to get married to the person they love. I am proud of the Bisexual Year that will happen next year in Spain. I am proud that IDAHOT (International Day Against

Esperanza, continues on next page

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Homophobia and Transphobia, celebrated May 17) finally includes biphobia. I am proud that because of the work of feminists we stopped the Partido Popular abortion legislation, which would have outlawed almost all abortions in Spain.

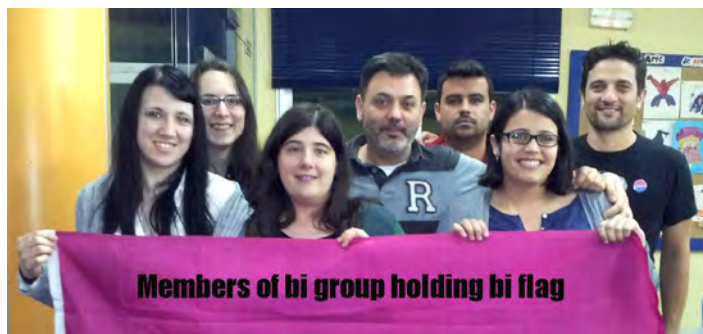
But we still have a lot of problems. The public health system discriminates against bisexual and single women in assisted reproduction. One in ten students in high schools in Madrid who are out of the closet are subjected to physical violence in their school. The HIV policies are not a priority in this moment for some, and yet we definitely need this to be a focus. Bi people are still invisible and very discriminated against.

Madrid is Spain's largest city, and there is obviously an active bi community there. Do you know of bi groups in other parts of the country?

Of course! Some of them are part of LGTB associations (COGAM, Gamá, Arcópoli, Lambda, Xega) and some of them are specific bi groups (Moebius in Valencia). I've grown up as an activist with Xurxo, Elena, Miguel Obradors, Josito, Valeri, Antonio, María – activists from different associations here in Spain. We work together when it's needed.

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

I work also in Eurobinet (an email-based coalition of European bi activists). I think it is needed because bisexual issues aren't always a priority agenda of the LGTB movement. We need to work together.



And finally, Espe, the theme of the last issue of BWQ was "Out at Work – Or Not." What do you have to say on this subject? What experiences have you had of being out – or not – as bi in the workplace?

It is not an easy decision, because it means amazing consequences but sometimes terrible consequences. I've met many people facing discrimination in the workplace. I am usually out as bi in the workplace because I'd never want to work for a company that discriminates against anyone by gender identity or sexual orientation. I remember one particular story when I was president of COGAM: I started work as a sales director for a company and in the first weeks I didn't come out as bisexual. One day everyone was acting weird, looking at me and speaking in roundabout way. The CEO arranged a meeting with me and he began: "Well, someone has Googled your name..." I responded, "Oh, well, you have learned I am President of COGAM. I thought you already knew when you interviewed me for the first time." From that moment on, I was out at work.

L.B., continued from page 1

- At 19, I had a girlfriend for a while who was more masculine than I am, so I was "femme."
- At 20, I had a boyfriend for a while and so I was a "hasbian."
- At 21, lesbians would say they wouldn't date me because I was not "gold star," as I'd had relationships with men.
- At 23, when I had dated a woman for a while, I was told to round up because I'm "basically a lesbian."
- Now that I'm pushing 30 and married to a (heterosexual) man, some labels include "emasculating," "promiscuous," "traitor," and "confused."

I identify as queer because that word simultaneously says nothing and everything about who I am. I enjoy that queer serves as a conversation starter. The word queer explicitly carries with it assumptions, cultural baggage, and the ideal of reclamation which to me is inherent in all chosen labels. Queer serves as my shorthand for the fact that sexuality and

gender are too much to contain in one word. It is a political term. Sadly, the rejection of the idea that when a doctor says, "It's a boy" or "It's a girl," that simple label should define that new human's future is still considered radical. I use queer because I don't want language to constrain my ability to envision new possibilities. Queer is a non-label label I claim for myself.

L.B. Klein dedicates her research and practice to ending gender-based violence and advancing social justice. While she is often on the move, she is currently based in Atlanta, Georgia with her partner, a canoe and a lot of books.



Color Wheel (or How I Figured Out I Was Genderfluid)

By Stella

I am in second grade
I have the biggest crush on my teacher
He is kind and nice
In my seven-year-old eyes he is the smartest person
When he asks us to color in a picture with our favorite color
My page is covered in greens and blue and reds and
I use every crayon in the box
My teacher comes over
He frowns and asks me to pick one color
I tell him I like all the colors
He tells me every color can't be my favorite
He is the smartest person I know
He must be right
My little teddy bear heart breaks

I am in sixth grade
We have to interview each other
One of the questions asked
What is your favorite color
I happily answer all of them
My partner frowns at me
You have to pick one
I tell him I like all the colors the same
On the paper he writes down blue
Says I can borrow his favorite color
It is kind
But still feels like I am lying
Good intentions
It still feels like something is being stolen from me

I am in eighth grade
We have to write an essay about who we are
They ask us to include our favorite things
Including our favorite color
My paper is perfect
At least to me
It is twice as long as asked to be
I'm sure my teacher will love it
When she reads it she frowns
Hands it back
Tells me I did it incorrectly
I have to pick one favorite
I grow tired of people frowning at me
I sigh and write down blue
I guess I'll share that color after all

I start telling people my favorite color is blue
Less explaining that way
Less fighting to validate myself that way
Less people frowning at me that way

Fast forward to college
It is pride week
Rainbows litter my vision
I already know who I am sexuality wise
Here I am allowed to like all the colors
We fill out a form
To introduce ourselves
Under favorite color I write color wheel
They smile
Ask me if I meant rainbow
Without meaning to they are still asking me to pick

The rainbow doesn't have all the colors
Seafoam green
Golden brown
It doesn't hold the color of sunlight reflecting on grass
Doesn't have the color of clouds against the moon
I try to find the words to explain this
I can't find them
So I cross out my answer and write rainbow

I was taught to pick
From an early age
I was taught only certain shades mattered
I was taught that people who could pick were better
Pick a color
You can't like them all
Pick a label
You have too many
Pick a gender
Stop being selfish

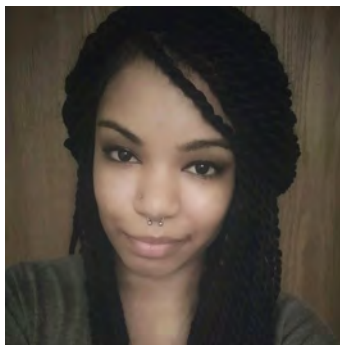
I've been trained to pick
I've picked until I lost myself
Not anymore
My favorite color is the color wheel
My sexuality is my own
As is my gender
I will not pick
I will not give away parts of myself
Because not only do I like all the colors
I am all the colors

Stella, 23, enjoys tea, coffee and pretending to be an author. There was a small notebook full of quotes and book recommendations that they carried everywhere which got damaged in a flood, summing up their life so far pretty well. Stella can be found at queerandhilarious.tumblr.com.



At the Intersection of Bisexual & Latina

By Katherine Garcia



I grew up in Puerto Rico and moved to the States with my family when I was eight years old. Latina was the first label that helped me understand who I was in relation to my world. It was also what set me apart in places where I was the minority, something that was a common occurrence.

Identifying as Latina comes with its own set of stereotypes, expectations, and restrictions. Family is considered to be the most important of responsibilities, oftentimes more important than individual goals and desires.

Women are expected to marry, have children, and build a home. Home building and feminine qualities are a source of pride. Men are expected to be the head of the household and to work hard to provide for their families. Their masculinity is a source of pride.

As a Latina woman, my identity is very much connected to my sexuality. To society, I am perceived as hypersexual, being always willing to satisfy fantasies. Rarely am I portrayed as anything other than heterosexual. Both my culture and public perceptions work to restrict my identity.

The box I lived in for much of my life was so cluttered with expectations and formulas on how to best fit my label as a Latina woman that it was nearly impossible to personalize my identity.

Coming out as a bisexual woman further complicated this because it meant I was deviating from my label as a Latina woman. It was almost like bisexuality and being Latina were contradictory, except for the hypersexuality – a stereotype both labels have in common.

Because sexuality was never something comfortably discussed in my family and because the comfort level wasn't much higher in my education, I didn't come into contact with the word 'bisexual' until I was in high school. At that point bisexuality was very much considered a phase and I knew what I felt was more of a permanent thing, so I chose not to identify with it.

Although I was aware of my attractions much earlier than high school, I didn't have a word available for those attractions and so I felt there must be something wrong with me. If there's no word for it then it must not be common – it must not be normal.

I was a junior in college when I began to identify as bisexual. With this new identity label came many challenges, but also some really liberating and empowering benefits.

The most difficult challenges for me were navigating the stereotypes of being bisexual and once again feeling the need to fit into a box. I had already internalized the negative stereotypes of my identity, which meant I felt free but I also felt judged – both by others and myself. There were many times I felt my behavior did not fit with my label and therefore I was not legitimate.

Being me became liberating when I allowed myself to make room and to complicate the meaning behind my labels. I was able to create awareness for those who felt abnormal or alone when I began to understand how perceptions about bisexuality were formed and how they affected me personally.

I think one of the benefits of using labels is that they allow you to have a general understanding that is a necessary and unifying element of community building. However, it is crucial to allow room for personalization and to complicate them because we are not all the same and because not being the same and not matching a label perfectly shouldn't mean you don't have the right to use it.

Once I was comfortable with identifying as bisexual, I started to explore other words to describe myself. I came across pansexual and knew right away that it fit me better than bisexual. I had in the past experienced attraction to multiple genders. I knew I had the potential to experience both romantic and sexual attraction to multiple genders in the future and that distinction was and is very important to me.

Although I believe the word bisexual is encompassing of all my potential attractions, I do use both pansexual and bisexual labels depending on context and to whom I am speaking. My comfort level is very much connected to the comfort level of the people I am around, which I admit is an unfortunate reality and something I am working to overcome.

Because my main goal is to be known and to be counted after being invisible for so long, I tend to use the word bisexual around people who see this as being all-encompassing and inclusive of attractions towards more than just men and women. For those who believe this word promotes a gender binary, I identify as pansexual.

Yes, there are still many challenges to overcome as I work towards feeling comfortable in my skin, but I now know and accept myself as a bisexual Latina. I am a bisexual Latina and that may mean something different to me than it does to others who utilize these same words in so many beautiful and complicated ways. This reality, to me, is truly brilliant.

Katherine Garcia is a current graduate student in the Department of Gender and Women's Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and a contributing writer for Everyday Feminism.

A Word for That

By Courtney Carola

There's a woman, with blonde hair that looks so soft, I long to run my fingers through it
And when she wears shorts, my hands long to make themselves home on her thighs
I don't tell a soul but sometimes I think about kissing her
I'm sure there's a word for that.

There's a man with dimples in his cheeks and at the bottom of his spine
And when he holds my hand, my heart feels like it's going to burst right out of my chest
He tells me I'm beautiful, and I think he is too
I'm sure there's a word for that.

So many people ask me,
"Do you have a boyfriend?"
And even though I don't always know why, without fail, I always reply,
"No, and I don't have a girlfriend either"
I'm sure there's a word for that.

I'm often kept awake in the middle of the night because I cannot think of what to call myself
Because "straight" leaves a sour taste in my mouth, but "gay" doesn't sound right either
And all I know is I long to hold the pretty blonde girl as well as the beautiful boy with dimples
I'm sure there's a word for that.

It hurts not knowing who I am
It leaves me restless and aching for something, but I don't know what I need
All I know is when my friends talk about marrying a boy one day, sometimes I think about marrying a girl instead
I'm sure there's a word for that.

I take to the internet with desperation, hoping to find something – anything – to help soothe the confusion in my mind
And that's where I find it – "bisexual" – and I feel like Cinderella, because right away, I know it is the perfect fit
And all I can do is smile
Because I knew there was a word for that.

Courtney Carola is a 22-year-old bisexual amateur indie author and college student at Fairleigh Dickinson University, studying to be a teacher. Her hobbies include fighting bi-erasure, reminding everyone that bisexuals are valid and taking pictures of the moon.



**Q: HOW MANY PUBLICATIONS ARE THERE THAT FOCUS ON BI+ WOMEN?
A: JUST THIS ONE.**

Do you value the *Bi Women Quarterly*? **Will you support our work?** A small group of volunteers produces and gets this resource out to THOUSANDS of readers. In addition to our electronic subscribers, we mail 600+ print copies to LGBTQ, youth and women's centers across the United States (and to a few beyond). It costs about \$6000 per year for postage and printing and our PO Box to create this resource **FOR YOU. Send a check to BBWN, PO Box 301727, Jamaica Plain MA 02130 or go to biwomenboston.org/donate. You need us. We need you.**

Shoe Society

By Why Not Both Co



Why Not Both Co is a duo incorporating humor and inclusivity through online comics. The duo consists of the bisexual creators AV and Amanda Wells.

Label Drag

By Lila Hertelius

The space between feeling and utterance is the chasm we try to weave together with the needle of language towing along the thread of thought. Stitch it too snugly and sentiment is snuffed out by careful words. Bind it too loosely and all feeling is lost in a nebula of self-conscious ambiguity and falls prey to a labyrinth of myriad interpretations. Each garment sewn of heart and breath calls for a fitting needle and stitch that will communicate clearly upon first sight the garment's intended use and hold together lovingly the fabric of its body through lifetimes of wear and changing of hands.

The needle of language acts as a net, luring in fish that may help clarify the intended thread – or obscure it. The size and shape of the needle chosen may change the way the thread of thought binds together the fabric of identity articulated. Synching or slackening the stitching for specific contexts can sometimes render the fit of the garment more comfortable to wear, sometimes less so. For viewers, such adjustments can also clarify or obscure its contours. Unfortunately, sometimes the needle and stitch one likes best can produce a garment that to a viewer looks nothing like what the seamstress had in mind.

Bisexual or *bisexuelle*?

As a bilingual woman, I find that the cut of my garment can shift between feminine and unisex depending on which language I use. In English, I am bisexual. In French, I am *bisexuelle*, never *bisexual*. To articulate or hem in the particularities of my gendered experience of bisexuality in English, I have to add the word “woman.” In French, on paper I am automatically a woman and in speech my voice betrays my biology. In the francophone fishnet of my discourse, I can out myself and catch reflections of my own female scales in just one word; yet in this fishnet I am also caught – gender bound.

Bisexual & co.

In either language, I am also caught in a different sort of net. Along with a capacity for attraction to more than one gender, the word “bisexual” (and its French equivalent) can lure in some other, less intended fish: “slut,” “non-committal,” “indecisive,” “confused,” “going through a phase,” “greedy,” “at a higher risk for having or contracting AIDS or other STIs,” or the self-proclaimed more “liberal” one, “open-minded.” Apart from the last one, you would think I had just said, “I’m vice-sexual – with a side of disease.” It looks as though when I invited Robin Hood to dinner he thought I meant all his merry men, too.

In social waters where such lexical fish swim in abundance, if I come out at all I sometimes prefer to cherry-pick my fish and describe their fins and scales in specific detail so as

not to let them be confused with other fish. “I’m attracted to both men and women.” “A woman who was my lover at the time...” “Yes, I do have a boyfriend right now; but I don’t have a girlfriend – thanks for asking.” In these dark waters, long-needle phrases become labels where labels get me the wrong contents.

The trouble with bi

For those more versed in the anatomy of queer lingo, a single fin or scale – such as the shorthand “bi” – may suffice to evoke an image of the correct fish. Broad, gestural strokes of the needle, here, will likely be articulate enough for those who are familiar with the shape of the garment. Yet for those potentially less familiar with LGBTQ jargon, a more precise, elaborate stitch – e.g., “bisexual” – may be called for. For such individuals, the statement, “I’m bi,” might arouse befuddled questions – “You’re by what? The sea?” – or invite alternate word endings – “You mean you’re bipolar?”

Putting the x back in bi

While I can breathe a sigh of relief in moments where I can escape the embarrassment of saying the word “sex” and know I will still be understood, there is also in these moments a sense of disappointment in *not* having to utter that taboo combination of sounds. It feels a bit like putting on a raincoat when I want to dance in the rain. There is something affirmative about saying “bisexual.” Biphobia, and fundamentalist Christian repressive attitudes about sex, have wrapped me in swaths of white, sexuality-less purity and invisibility. Sometimes it feels as though the only way to break out of these suffocating layers is to say exactly what they were designed to hide. In using the word “bisexual,” I am saying, “I have a sexuality! I am a sexual being!” Its dispelling power works like magic.

Bi by elimination

Imagine walking into a traditional business meeting wearing fishnet stockings and a mid-thigh dress. Unless it is a particular type of business meeting (for which such garb might be perfectly appropriate), the first impression might shock a bit. In a milieu where blurting out, “I’m bisexual,” could leave both others and me feeling awkward, it sometimes helps to start by describing the stitching of my identity in terms of what it is *not*. This may spark a dialogue in which I can elicit from the listener an understanding of my sexual orientation without having to speak its name myself.

“I’m not heterosexual.” “Wait – but I thought you had a boyfriend...?” “I do.” “But, you’re not gay, are you?” “No.” “So...oh – you like both?” “Yep.” While crocheting in high school I often enjoyed having someone guess what I was making. “Will it be a skirt?” “No.” “A shirt?” “Nope.” “Oh – is it a dress?” “Roger that.” Why tell others what they can figure out for themselves?

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Queering or disappearing?

On the rare occasion that I have used the word “queer” to refer to myself, I have become a little girl disappearing into one of my dad’s enormous, heavy coats; a mime with a plaster-caked face. In my opinion, too much negativity has come to be associated with the term “bisexual.” I do not want the resulting internalized shame in me to coerce me to shy away from that word because I think it might seem “inappropriate” or “disgusting” to a listener.

When it comes to coming out, I’m a verbal exhibitionist at heart (even if not always in speech). If I want someone to know that my sexual orientation is not heterosexual, I want them to know *exactly* what it is (even if I do so by round-about means), want to let them (and me) deal with the embarrassment, and want to clear up any confusion or misunderstanding about what that word means to me. Sometimes it feels like that is the only way for me to heal and dispel the shame and embarrassment I often feel about using the “b” word.

The times when I have caved in and used the comparatively less piercing needle of the word “queer” have mostly been in LG(b)TQ circles or around lesbian women whom I think are really hot yet whom I fear may have negative connotations with the term “bisexual.”

When, in the privacy of my sewing room, I construct the garment of my sexual orientation, drawing the thread of my self-understanding through the patterns of stitches that best fit my sentiments, my favorite needle – or the word closest to my heart – is “bisexual.” Yet in social interactions, this is sometimes the last term I would use (especially if I am speaking or writing in French). Unless I feel comfortable with my listeners hearing it, am not bothered by the possibility of them misunderstanding it, or just want to break through the assumptions they may be holding about me, the easiest approach is sometimes to simply sail the world in label drag.

Lila Hartelius, BA (lilabartelius.wordpress.com) is a published writer who has written funded grant and business proposals and served as editorial assistant for the International Journal of Transpersonal Psychology. Her work has been published in *Weird Sisters West* and *Tendrel* (Naropa University’s diversity journal), and she has contributed to the efforts of Bennington College’s Queer Student Union, Naropa University’s GLBTQ student group and Boulder Pride.



Credit: Jan Ögren

The Matter of Labels

By Keira Edwards-Huolohan

I started with the label straight. Then, when I found out that you could be something else, I did away with labels. I thought, what’s the point of a label? Why should I have to call myself something to make others more comfortable? A label would only allow them to put me in a little pigeonhole, to ascribe to me certain ways of being based on that label.

It turns out people will do that anyway. We seem to be a lot more comfortable when we have labels for people; it helps us figure out where those people fit and, in turn, where we fit in relation to others.

I originally rejected the label bisexual, believing that I did not fit the (rather biphobic) criteria that I thought a bisexual had to fulfill:

- has a relationship with a man and a woman (before I knew that other, non-binary, genders existed)
- wants to have sex with everyone
- is a rather sexual being.

I also thought that bisexuals were just people who “hadn’t decided” yet, and I wanted to be “decided.”

It was online, through places like Tumblr, that I first discovered the label pansexual. It was defined as a person who could have a romantic and/or sexual attraction to another person regardless of their gender. I thought that fit me pretty well. I’d recently taken on the label of genderqueer, so no longer thought that the label bisexual included people like me (I had been told that bi=two=cis men and cis women). If it didn’t include me, how could I be a part of it? I was still engaging in biphobic thoughts, just of a different nature.

It was not until the last couple of years that I realized that I was being biphobic. This was, again, thanks to online media. After a lot of reading, I did away with the biphobic ways of thinking and took on the label of bisexual for myself. It felt powerful, taking on that label and knowing where I belonged in the community. Just as the label genderqueer had helped me to find a place for myself outside of our binary world, the label bisexual helped me to find a place outside of heteronormativity.

For some reason, the label pansexual never did this for me; it felt much like when I had said that I “had no label.” I can’t put my finger on it, but for me it didn’t feel as definite as bisexual. These labels have been important for me in forming my identity and finding community. They have allowed me to find people with similar experiences, and to figure out where I “fit.”

Keira is a bisexual genderqueer person living in Australia. They spend their spare time making zines, studying for a Master in Human Rights degree and reading comics.

Four Times Labels Mattered, & One Time They Didn't

By S. H. G.

One

I meet you through a mutual friend. She's only in town for a few days so she invites us both out for lunch to maximize her socializing time. I'm a little standoffish towards you but I can't really help it – new people make me nervous. Still, you laugh at my jokes and grin at me over the rim of your coffee mug and by the end of our meal I gather enough courage to ask for your number in case you want to hang out again sometime. You spell my name wrong in your contacts and I'm too embarrassed to correct you so it stays that way until you find me on Facebook several weeks later, after we've gotten together for coffee at least twice. "Why didn't you tell me, silly?" I'm embarrassed again, of course, and I explain that my name is spelled oddly and it's been spelled wrong so often that at this point I never bother correcting people, but after you change the label in your phone, you look at me with suddenly serious eyes and say quietly, "You deserve to have your name spelled correctly."

Two

You have a boyfriend. When my own dating history comes up, I admit to my bisexuality without a trace of the sheepishness I once had. You don't flinch. It's a relief. As our friendship continues to grow, I invite you and your boyfriend to a party. On the day of the party you text me to tell me that, if at all possible, I shouldn't mention my orientation to your boyfriend. "He wouldn't understand. The only male friends I have that he's ever approved of are homosexual. He's just... protective." I dress as feminine as possible that night, and even though he never asks me about my labels, I still feel like I'm lying to him. If he did ask, I know I would lie, and that feels just as deceptive. He's cute, for a jock, not usually the type I'd go for but his face and personality are both charming. For as protective as you've made him out to be, he has no problem leaving you with me to go flirt with my neighbor, a bleach-blonde tennis semi-pro. You pretend not to notice and so do I.

Three

You're over at my apartment and we're baking cookies. You pad around my kitchen barefoot, a glass of wine in one hand and a spoon in the other. The picture you paint is achingly domestic. You've insisted on doing most of the work. Now, you impatiently grab one of the still-cooling cookies and taste it, and a strange look crosses your face. When you won't tell me what's wrong, I manage to push you away from the counter and break off a piece of my own to try. It tastes horrible, way too salty. You've gotten to perusing my kitchen

for what you put into the batter, and finally you hold up the culprit. "Why do you keep your sugar near your salt? I thought this was sugar!" "It's literally labeled, you dope! The sugar is right behind it. This is why reading labels is important!" We giggle until we slide down to the floor, side by side on the black and white tiles, shaking with laughter.

Four

You show up on my doorstep one warm April night with a bottle of Jose Cuervo in your hand and a wicked grin on your face. Your job was really stressful this week and when you tried to tell your boyfriend about it, he tuned you out. He just pisses you off sometimes, you tell me after the first margarita. He flirts with other girls, sure, but he just does it to make you jealous, he would never cheat on you, you say after the second. You are sick and tired of being the only one who gives a shit in this relationship, you slur after the third. As I'm gently dissuading you from starting on a fourth, you try to kiss me. I won't let you, even though I'm aching to, even though I've been into you from the first day I met you. You have a boyfriend, you are in a relationship. You fix that label before you come to me.

Five

We don't speak for three weeks, and sometime during that period I decide it must be over, this friendship that could have been more. I expect radio silence and that is what I get. For three weeks. Then, out of nowhere, you text me and ask me to meet you at your place. You look like you have been crying for weeks. It turns out, you have. All of your ex-boyfriend's belongings are gone from your apartment. You asked him to leave and he did, but you are still scared, nibbling chapped lips in between telling me that you want more than friendship with me and that you aren't quite sure how this changes how you see yourself. "I've never felt this way about another woman before." We can figure out the labels later, I assure you. For now, we finally kiss.



SHG is a Southcoast-area theatrical stage manager who spends most of her free time on the internet or chasing drag queens around the Boston/Providence area.

Identity & Play: My Life in Labels

By Michele Spring-Moore

When I co-founded a social/support group for bisexual women in my Western New York hometown in the late 1980s, the statement I heard most often at meetings was, “I hate labels!”

This surprised me, as I’d never found labels limiting or prescriptive – I didn’t care what people called me, as long as it wasn’t *heterosexual*. I attributed the anti-label attitude to the streak of conservatism in our mid-sized city, which had a reputation for staidness more Midwestern than Manhattan. Our urban politics were fairly progressive, and we had an established “gay” community center board of middle-aged folks who helped elect an out candidate to city council but refused to start a support group for youth for fear they’d be accused of “recruiting” teenagers. As the very young editor of one of the oldest LGBT newspapers in the country, I had my paychecks signed by the organization’s board and had to cater to a diverse readership, so I learned to walk more in the middle of the road than was comfortable for me.

A few years later I U-Hauled off to grad school in the Rocky Mountains, where I met GLBTQ activists and feminist PhD students who immediately welcomed me into their gangs and taught me new terms from their studies in literature, film and theory of all stripes. It was a relief and a revelation to live in a smaller, more liberal city dominated by a university, where the artists and grad students had formed a Queer Nation chapter before I landed.

Performance art and political street theater were hugely popular in my new city, and it felt revolutionary to watch a troupe of radical feminist artists walk onstage through a curtain shaped like a gigantic vulva, years before Eve Ensler had inspired every female college student in the universe to monologue about vaginas on February 14. I loved hanging out with my buddy Jim as he strutted in white go-go boots and other mid-century mod drag at the only queer bar in town, and showing up at a protest to find several of our male friends in character as the Church Ladies, parodying the right-wing Christian fundamentalists who were launching their latest round of anti-GLB legislation in the Western U.S.

We were young – late 20s to early 40s – and labeling ourselves was part of the process, the protest – and the pleasure. People now tend to dismiss “identity politics,” but figuring out one’s identity and how that intersects with other oppressed groups’ concerns, needs and marginalization is vital. We noticed that those quickest to trivialize our words and work as “political correctness” were the privileged. As one of my favorite Chicana professors said at the time, “What about ‘humanly correct’? I’m a human being!”

While writing autobiographical poetry about coming out and hanging out with other young queers, I began to realize that I loved labels. For me they were handy tools, a verbal hankie code, shorthand to say to each other, “Hey, I’m one too!” Finding one another wasn’t as easy in the era when AIDS and silence equaled death, before effective drug cocktails had been created, as Ronald Reagan shuffled his homophobic way off the national stage and the senior George Bush moved into the White House. My response to “I hate labels” was to collect and flaunt them – “I’ll take as many as I can get!”, I wrote in a protest poem.

While preparing to read at one of Jim’s legendary queer performance and poetry evenings, I pulled from my dresser drawer a battle-worn white ACT-UP t-shirt with a Victorian-style photo on the front of two women kissing each other, and with a black fabric marker wrote on the back every label I embraced: *Activist, bisexual, butch, byke, dyke, fag hag, feminist, genderqueer, kiki, lesbian...* I concluded my slam poem and my shirt with *¡Poeta feliz!*, which, if not idiomatic Spanish, was at least heartfelt.

One of the labels I carefully lettered on the back of my shirt was *queer*, apparently the most contentious term BLTGQ folks ever reclaimed, judging from the reaction then and now, nearly 25 years later. Although we never had an in-depth conversation about it, I noticed that those who most vocally objected to the term were young gay and lesbian leaders of color, whom I thought would be most open to reclaiming harmful labels. But I’ve seen over the years that responses to labels are idiosyncratic, and we don’t know one another’s personal histories with various words/names until we do have those conversations, face to face or via social media.

On that T-shirt, I didn’t include one word that’s grown more popular over the decades to reclaim: *slut*. In the early ’90s, I was actively involved in local and national communities of self-identified sex positive folks, female and male, lesbian and bisexual, and took part (in a wallflowerly, introverted way) in a couple of safe sex parties. But I never felt the need to claim the *slut* label when I was having sex with women, whether I was shouting stupidities at the stage when Susie Bright spoke in a rural queer bar or test-driving a strap-on for the first time.

I have a vivid memory of feeling simultaneously empowered and embarrassed about seven years later, when Robyn Ochs asked at one of her college workshops what labels we self-identified bi women were using, and I responded, “I’ve been identifying as a slut more than anything else lately.” I’d been having a brief, friends-with-benefits relationship with an older, long-time male friend – not exactly racy stuff, but his wife had just left him and I’d stepped into the breach,

Michele, continues on next page

Michele, continued from previous page

something my mother would not have approved of had she known he wasn't yet legally divorced. Like many women my age, I was raised by women who preached that sex before, or without, marriage was a no-no; homo or queer sex wasn't even on their radar screens, therefore not "bad" or "slutty."

I've found that although I still like all the labels I adopted when I was young, they've evolved as I've matured, sometimes against my will. I still feel sexually transgressive when I'm being a peeping Tom/Tomasina, catching a glimpse of a hot older bear (OK, so I was staring – I guess that's why he put up those kitchen window shades!), but in my early 50s, it feels more healthy and silly than slutty. I can't take myself as seriously as I used to, which reminds me of another friend in her 40s in Boulder who, when I developed a crush on her, responded, "I just want to play." So I'm adding *playful* to my list of labels, along with my latest: *pansexual*, *multigender*, *girlfag* and *gnome*.

I discovered the girlfag and gurdyke identities several years ago, courtesy Janet Hardy's book *Girlfag: A Life Told in Sex and Musicals*, and Girlfags and Gurdykes on Facebook. This group defines girlfags as "(more or less female identified) persons who feel in one way or another like a gay man in a woman's body. They are usually attracted to gay/ bi/ queer men and gay-male sexuality but are not limited to this and can be attracted to more types of people [...] Girlfags can identify as cisgender, cisgenderfluid, transgender, or genderqueer." While reading Hardy's memoir, I began to re-examine my own life and recalled that the first person I'd been attracted to, at age eight, was a boy two years my senior who was willowy, delicate, sensitive, soft-spoken –

regardless of his sexual and gender orientation, he would've been bullied in our neighborhood had his parents not moved the family to the Netherlands for several years. These days a boy a bit older than that would be labeled a *twink* in the gay male world.

I continued to fall in love with gay male friends, including the guy who was my bestie when we started college and came out of the closet. I'm still attracted to bears of all genders and orientations, and the older I get, the more I feel like a gay bear trapped in a female, 5-foot-4, soft-butched body. For many reasons, transitioning physically is not my cup of tea, and 99% of the time I don't have what's been labeled "gender dysphoria." The solution I've settled upon came to me in a whimsical moment: I'll call myself a *gnome*! The stereotypical garden gnome of European origin embodies the way I feel inside. I worried that I'd finally pushed the label envelope too far, but my closest friends have embraced the term because it makes them laugh, even if they can't picture me in a belted tunic and a pointy white beard.

The key to my enjoyment of labels has always been to use them the way I like, rather than letting anyone else pin them on me. As I wrote this piece, I toyed with inventing a new one, as I've been unable to determine whether *girlbears* exist. Looks as if it's time to create a new social media group!

Michele Spring-Moore is a (choose a label) in her early 50s who now plays with labels, gnomes, humans, cats and other creatures on the border of Mass Audubon's Arcadia Wildlife Sanctuary in Northampton, Massachusetts. She blogs, bicycles and studies Spanish in her free time.

What's in a Name

By Theresa Tyree

My name doesn't tell you a single thing about me.

Am I young, old?

African American? A brown follower of Islam? A food-loving Greek?

American at all?

Am I kind, smart, intelligent in the ways of the heart but stupid in the ways of the tongue?

Do I like books? Am I good with cars? Do I know myself?

Will I love you?

All these things you would have from a name. I can't give you one to satisfy.

Look at me and you will see something:

a person presenting young, white, and female.

Measure the quickness of my smile, the volume of my laugh, the light in my eyes...

You won't know me, but you will assign me value.

"Desirable," you will think. "Desirable" or "bitch."

These names determine my worth to you.

My worth to you isn't my worth, isn't my identity.

Whatever words you choose; you'll never define me.

Without knowing me, how can you want me? How can you despise me? How can you define me?

Lash me with your labels – woman, romantic, bi- and demisexual–

I am too wide an expanse to be confined.

In the end, there is only "me."

Theresa Tyree is a graduate student studying book publishing at Portland State University. She's currently preparing for graduation and spending all waking moments on her portfolio and thesis.

Definitely & Defiantly Not Straight

By Paige Owen

Like many young bisexual girls, the first label I used to describe my sexual identity was “straight,” followed by a long, silent phase of “Oh no, am I a lesbian!?” Long before I discovered that I had sexual and romantic attraction towards other girls and women, I chased boys on the playground and they chased me. Same-sex recess tag never had the same connotations that the opposite-sex alternative had. Girls never chased other girls on the playground, begging for hand holding and kisses on the lips. I never even considered this as an option. I was confused when I discovered, around the age of ten, that I viewed women differently than it seemed most of my female peers. It didn’t help that I had discovered this in the same way that many millennials discover sex and sexuality: through misogynistic, homophobic and pornographic material on the Internet.

In high school, when I came to terms with the fact that I might not be completely heterosexual, I went through many labels, none of which I shared with my friends or family. I remember one time when my friends and I sat down to watch *Orange is the New Black*, a dialogue was sparked about the support that Laverne Cox’s transgender character receives from her wife throughout her transition. The group of heterosexual women unanimously agreed that they wouldn’t be able to have a romantic or sexual relationship with another woman, regardless of the circumstances. Meanwhile, I sat silently wondering how a change in my perception of someone’s gender could possibly cause me to stop loving them. It was around this time that I started to become comfortable with the term pansexual, because I did not think of gender as a strong deciding factor in whether or not to start a relationship with someone. (Not that I had had any real relationships at the age of sixteen, with men or women.)

The term pansexual seemed to fit me nicely and within online safe spaces, this is how I began to identify myself. I adamantly rejected the term bisexual because I mistakenly thought that it reinforced the gender binary. Upon entering college, I was immediately exposed to my school’s celebration of Queer Awareness Month. I had heard about people reclaiming the former slur queer and using it as a term of self-identification but I had no idea how widespread this trend was. I learned about how words like queer and gay were starting to be used as umbrella terms for LGBTQ+ individuals. Before long, I fell in love with the label queer and it is still the term that I feel best fits my identity. While other terms can often draw certain assumptions from others or feel limiting, queer not only represents a complex part of my own identity but also a huge worldwide community that I am lucky enough to be a part of.

It wasn’t until *Bi Women Quarterly* editor Robyn Ochs visited my school that I really began to appreciate bisexuality as a

label for myself. I began to realize that there was a huge community of bisexual women that I had been cutting myself off from simply because I preferred other labels. I began to understand the struggles and joys that I shared with other bisexual women. On that day, I bought a button that says “Do you like boys or girls? Yes!” and it is still pinned to my backpack as I sit writing this. I wear this pin with the pride of a queer bisexual woman living in a heterosexually dominated society. Every time I choose to wear this pin in public, I am brave. Sometimes I forget that the pin is there and I’ll venture away from my liberal college campus to unknowingly display my bisexual pride elsewhere. Only when I hear footsteps behind me am I reminded that this badge is one that not only includes me in the beautifully diverse bisexual community but also one that can sometimes alienate and “other” me from the rest of the world.

Although I am not out as a bisexual woman in all realms of my life, I have started to become comfortable identifying myself as “not-straight” when meeting new people. How I label myself to these people depends upon the setting we are in. In an environment that I know includes many queer individuals or people who are knowledgeable about queerness, I will often identify myself as queer because that is the term with which I feel most comfortable. However, in situations where I know or assume that the person I am talking to is straight and not very well informed about the queer community, I will usually identify myself as bisexual. Although bisexual women still face a great deal of discrimination within and outside of the queer community, the term bisexuality is one that is at least in the average person’s vocabulary, which is not always the case with pansexuality or queerness. Because I now feel comfortable identifying as bisexual, it is easier for me to explain my sexuality to straight people. Once I become more comfortable with a straight friend, I may decide to discuss with them the many other aspects of my sexual identity that the term bisexual may not immediately reveal.

I am gay. I am a lesbian. I am bisexual. I am pansexual. I am queer. Some of these things may seem contradictory (Can you love and make love with a man and still be a lesbian?) but they are all terms that I identify with on some level. While the labels I use to identify myself have changed quite a lot over the past twenty years and will likely continue to change, there is one thing I know for damn sure: I am not and never will be straight.

Paige Owen is a 20-year-old college student currently pursuing both a bachelor’s degree in Women’s and Gender Studies and a master’s degree in Deaf Education. She splits her time between The College of New Jersey and her home outside of Annapolis, Maryland.

Learning to Love Labels

By *Iyanna James Stephenson*

Like most Americans, if not most of the world, I revolve(d) around labels.

I grew up with the notion of a stark dichotomy. I was socialized to think of many things as having a name, being categorized, and being either/or. I knew there were men and women, gay and straight, black and white, and this extended framing to many other things I thought about. Although I was never a concrete-thinking individual and I never felt stagnant in my thoughts, I had a dichotomist view of the world based on our societal *status quo*.

Until I went to high school, I identified as straight. Once I came out in high school I began to identify as bisexual and express this identity to my peers. Once I got to college I realized that the dichotomist thinking I was used to, and how I identified, was very limiting. Bisexuality, I felt, did not wholly express the extent of my identity. I became best friends with women who felt the same way as I did – identifying as only bisexual, only straight or only gay. My best friends in school, and the college community at large, had taught me that I do not need labels; that labels were created to place people in boxes the way you do objects.

I soon tried to dismantle all things label-oriented when referring to myself. I tried to practice free living, without confined identities in regard to race, sexuality, class, socio-economic status, etc. I found that was a bad idea. I realized, when studying the politics of race and the practice of labels within real space, that the absence of such is difficult. I also came to the personal realization that labels are not *all* bad, and grouping can actually be beneficial.

I adopted the wholly encompassing label of pansexuality when expressing how I identify sexually. This label says that anyone I am attracted to, no matter their age, gender or race, is fair game. But I reserve this label for use with certain individuals. When someone identifies as queer (used here as an umbrella term for those who are not straight-identified), I feel more comfortable expressing the fact that I am pan, because I think they will understand it and it will not need to be further explained. When I am speaking to someone who has a limited idea or knowledge of sexual identification and expression, I always use bisexual. People have heard of this before, it doesn't need to be debated and there are simple follow-up questions to the responses that I get for eliciting that particular sexual identification.

Queer people are not the only ones who receive the luxury of truly knowing the extent of my sexuality. I disclose my sexuality to family members and close friends as well. These are people to whom I don't mind giving a little bit of explanation, who love, care for and accept me fully, and to whom it wouldn't make a difference either way. It may also seem

like “just a label” to them as well, since they have not witnessed me in a short- or long term relationship with anyone outside of the gender binary.

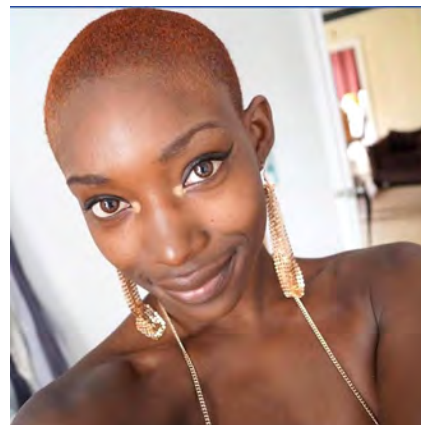
Regardless of whether I use pansexual or bisexual, I am comfortable with either. It is

true that I am bisexual in that I have had relationships with people who have the same gender identity I do, and with people who have a different gender than I do. So far, my preferences have led me to have partners with cisgender men and women, in line with what most people think of when they imagine bisexuality. It is also true that I am pansexual. I may meet someone I am interested in who identifies as my same gender or a different one, and who may lie completely outside of the gender binary. In this case, pansexual might feel the more accurate label. One challenge that I have had with my sexuality is the fact that I must explain it to people. Another challenge is having to change what I say based on who is listening because society is not as accepting, especially when it comes to something they know little to nothing about. Yet another challenge with labeling is that I am still afraid to tell a few of my family members how I identify. In that sense, identifying as bi or pan has meant that I have to remain in the closet – or I feel that I must to savor the relationship I have with certain people. As many of us queer folk know, this is very hard. The fact that we feel we cannot be our true selves *simply* because that true self does not align with someone's way of thinking is disheartening, but it is something we live with in order to live with others.

The benefit of labeling is that it *does* categorize you. This categorization has led me to find a community. When I hear someone say “I'm pansexual,” I am instantly at ease. I feel happy to be in the presence of someone who is like me. I feel comfortable with discussions of sexuality and expression. I feel, emotionally, at home.

And it is that safe space feeling that can make labels worthwhile.

Iyanna James-Stephenson, 23, is a recent graduate from Mt. Holyoke College. She is a writer, blogger, poet and traveler who has visited eight different countries and is currently living and working in South Korea.



Tiggy Upland Returns

By Michael Monroe

The fabulous pink-haired Tiggy, former advice columnist for *BWQ*, is back in a new form. Here is an interview by Michael Monroe of Tiggy's creator and mentor, Jen Bonardi.

MM: Who is Tiggy Upland, and what circumstances surrounded the genesis of this character?

JB: Tiggy Upland is a pseudonym for the highly successful advice column I created for the Bisexual Resource Center. Later that year, Susannah Layton was producing the second *Bilicious Boston* and asked if I would MC the event as Tiggy. I explained this was just a pen name, but she helped me develop a very detailed backstory and from there it just snowballed. The name Tiggy Upland came from the schoolyard game of divining your "porn name" using the name of your first pet plus the name of the street you grew up on. I had a hamster in high school named Antigone, and that's Tiggy's full first name. After MC-ing for *Bilicious* four times, speaking at the 2012 Dyke March, and starting the *You Might Be a Bisexual* Tumblr, plus the advice column – I just found myself wanting to talk more about Tiggy's history, since she's become more and more like a real person.

Now we have this enchanting new webcomic starring Tiggy and friends – but with a twist. What exactly is Upland, and how did you get the idea for this world?

Upland is a webcomic of miniatures based on Tiggy Upland's life in the Back Bay neighborhood of Boston in the hostel where she works. We're using miniatures because I can't draw worth a damn, and I like to think of *Upland*, which is also her last name, as a state of mind. Although we toss the idea out of the characters being bi, it does seem to be an alternate reality where bisexual issues are lived and discussed and facilitated in a way that everyone can experience for themselves. I originally started the advice column, *Ask Tiggy*, because I'm a huge fan of advice columns and have been an avid reader of them for over 25 years. It's always been a great resource for people – especially a minority community – for someone to answer burning questions. So I did *Ask Tiggy* to drive more interest to the BRC website, and started the *You Might Be a Bisexual* Tumblr to celebrate bi culture – customs, rituals, etc. I wanted to give short spoonfuls of our inside jokes, our lamentations, our history – and also because I really like animated gifs. Someone recently asked why I started Upland, and if I was going to monetize it. I'm not sure why I started Upland. I do like tiny things, and I love Tiggy – I think somehow it's just one more avenue to give bisexuals something to relate to while opening a window on our lives for other people.

What need do you think Upland fills in the Bi+ community, and the LGBTQIA community at large?

For the LGBTQIA community, that's easy – there's nothing like it. And that's not me bragging, that's me speaking to the dearth of bi art provided on a regular basis. Just read Eliel Cruz's essays on how few bi characters there are who are really allowed to be bisexual in TV shows, movies and books. We're doing better than we used to, but filling that hole for the queer community is pretty easy.

The two main characters we've established in Upland, Tiggy and her best friend Byron, have identified as bisexual for quite some time. I think often, what Bisexuals are allowed to express in creative media is most often their coming-out narrative, but there's so much more to being bi – so many more stories to tell. With Tiggy and Byron you see two people who represent the richer aspects of our lives, the issues and struggles that come up that most people have no understanding of. With all these projects, the main point is for bi people to say, "I get that! You're telling my story."

Do you think there's crossover appeal to mainstream culture? Will just anyone find it interesting, humorous, germane, etc.?

There's at least one member of team Upland who thinks this is going to blow up and be a major success. That person is not me because I'm too cynical for that, but in the 40-day GoFundMe campaign prior to *Upland's* unveiling, I was so surprised to see so many monosexuals getting excited about it. We were sending out prizes and I realized that the majority of recipients were not bisexual at all. It speaks to their support for Team Upland as people, but it also speaks to the fact that they expect to find this interesting no matter their own sexuality. I kind of think it's interesting, too, for people who like webcomics, who like miniatures, people who are interested in hostels and travel – it's got a lot of different aspects.

Also, people from different walks of life may find they relate to bisexual issues more than they ever knew. Byron, for example, is multiracial, and I think some of his challenges as somebody who's half white and half Asian are very similar to some of his challenges as a bi-identified person.

And finally, it's a sitcom set in a quirky hostel with all kinds of hilarious shenanigans.

Did you have any considerations as you geared up by purchasing these expensive props and dolls, in terms of the cast of characters?

Really the only three characters I had in mind at the beginning were Tiggy, Byron and Estella – who owns the hostel

Tiggy, continues on next page

Tiggy, continued from previous page

– and Beans the beagle. If you only knew what we went through to get a pink bob wig for a 1/12-scale doll...some special considerations that we've stumbled upon include the fact that for dolls this size, it's expected that you use the clothes they already have (or make your own). Buying clothes for them is very difficult because they're not available. In addition, buying a non-white doll is more than a little challenging. And getting a male doll with a reasonable haircut is apparently too much to ask. We also had to factor in the fact that some dolls are moveable and some aren't. Moreover, many are fashioned according to the Victorian era, so that's the kind of mindset you need to have when you go look for a doll that's, for example, genderqueer. Tough to make happen!

Beans is actually two static figures - soon to be three – we've got lying down Beans, standing Beans, and we'll soon have sitting Beans, but that's how we got around the obstacle of getting a really excellent-looking beagle that needs to move.

Where would you like to see Upland in a few months, or years – is there a specific goal?

I just want to make something entertaining and resonant. In terms of advertising and doing quality work, we're hustling, but the fact remains, I don't have a specific goal. Doing it is a goal. The journey is the destination.

Finally, how much of you is in Tiggy? Where does Jennifer Bonardi end and Tiggy Upland begin?

I like to think that Tiggy is the most whimsical version of myself. She was born and left in a hot air balloon, she rides the rails like a hobo, she's a writer and works in a hostel – I mean, this is essentially my dream life. But she's actually so different from me, that when I write the episodes, I write out her part, and then I have to go back to the beginning of each episode and completely re-write her once I get in the mindset of being in her voice. I can't even write her in real time, is what I mean. I'm beginning to think I'm more like Byron – I might have to keep an eye on that. Having a detailed personal history on Tiggy makes it easier to keep my eye on the ball and differentiate her from myself. It enables me to ask, *What Would Tiggy Do?*

Michael Monroe is a bisexual person who likes cheese and thinks playing with dolls is great because he wasn't allowed to as a child and who's laughing now, patriarchy! Now that his mostly-bisexual-owned solar panel installation start-up is stable, he's back on the board of the Bisexual Resource Center after a three-year hiatus. Michael also juggles flaming basketballs (if necessary) and can cobble a few good metaphors together as a spoken word poet.



These four paintings are part of the Cara series, in acrylic by Jo-Anne Carlson, a regular contributor to the *Bi Women Quarterly*.



Cara 1



Cara 4



Cara 2



Cara 3



Jo-Anne Carlson is a writer, artist and musician. Check out her Facebook page for more information about a crowdfunding campaign: www.facebook.com/joanne.carlson.9250

News Briefs

Words Matter

On February 23rd, Gay & Lesbian Advocates and Defenders announced a name change. Its new name is GLBTQ Legal Advocates and Defenders, and it will still go by the acronym GLAD. According to GLAD's Executive Director, Janson Wu, "GLAD has blazed a trail of legal victories for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and queer people across New England and the nation. As we continue our pioneering work, we're proud to bring all of our communities into our name."

And the GSA Network announced on April 20th that it has evolved its name to be more inclusive of all LGBTQ+ youth leaders: "As a youth-driven organization, it is our responsibility to respond to this evolution and accurately reflect the identities of the young people we serve. With the support and guidance of GSA youth leaders, we are thrilled to announce that Gay-Straight Alliance Network has officially changed its name to Genders & Sexualities Alliance Network. According to an email sent out by the GSA Network on April 20th: "The name change has been a long time coming. We have heard from countless youth leaders who understand their genders and sexualities to be uniquely theirs and have moved beyond the labels of gay and straight, and the limits of a binary gender system."

These name changes follow on the heels of name changes by the National Gay & Lesbian Task Force, which last fall became the LGBTQ Task Force, and PFLAG and GLAAD, which are retaining their acronyms but are no longer "Gay & Lesbian."

Represent!

Pansexual-identified Mary Gonzalez, first elected in 2013, won re-election to the Texas House of Representatives representing District 75, east of El Paso. Her opponent was a challenger who had held the seat from 2003-2013.

Calendar, *continued from p. 20*

14 (Thursday) 7-9pm, Young Bisexual Social & Support Group (BLiSS). (See June 9th)

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

17 (Sunday) Noon-3pm, Monthly BBWN Vegan Potluck Brunch at Deborah's in Wattertown. Bring a vegan potluck brunch item to share (meat and dairy are not permitted in the home). There will be a dog present. This is a great way to meet other bi and bi-friendly women in the area! Info/RSVP: debabel@rcn.com

28 (Thursday) 7pm, Social BLiSS, Jamaica Plain. (See June 23rd)

August

3 (Wednesday) 7-9pm, Bisexual Social and Support Group (BLiSS). (See June 1st)

8 (Monday) 7pm, Straight Marriage, Still Questioning. (See June 13th)

11 (Thursday) 7-9pm, Young Bisexual Social & Support Group (BLiSS). (See June 9th)

13 (Saturday), Noon-3pm. Monthly BBWN Potluck Brunch at Linda's in Roslindale. Bring a potluck brunch item to share. A great way to meet other bi and bi-friendly women in the area! Info/RSVP: linda.realty@gmail.com.

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

25 (Thursday) 7pm, Social BLiSS, Jamaica Plain. (See June 23rd)

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

We are looking for a new **CALENDAR EDITOR!** For every issue, the calendar editor compiles a list of events to feature in *BQW*, coordinates BBWN potluck brunches each month, and updates events for the BBWN web calendar. This is a fantastic opportunity to work with a one-of-a-kind publication! Contact Kate at thewriterkate@gmail.com if you're interested.

The "Bi Office"

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

Ongoing Events

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

2nd Mondays:

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

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

1st Wednesdays:

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

2nd Thursdays:

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

3rd Saturdays:

Biversity Bi Brunch. 11:30am at The Burren, 247 Elm Street, Davis Square, Somerville.

4th Thursdays:

Social BLiSS, Jamaica Plain. 7pm at Café Nero. Info: Mia at youngblissboston@gmail.com

Metro-Boston women:

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



CALENDAR

June

1 (Wednesday) 7-9pm, Bisexual Social and Support Group (BLiSS). All bi & bi-friendly people of all genders & orientations welcome. Meetings are peer-facilitated discussion groups, sometimes with a pre-selected topic or presenter. Meets 1st Wednesdays. Info/RSVP: bliss@biresource.net.

5 (Sunday) 10am, AIDS Walk Boston. The 6.2-mile AIDS Walk starts at the Hatch

Shell at in Boston's Back Bay. Raises money & awareness for essential HIV prevention, advocacy & services. Info: www.aidswalkboston.org.

9 (Thursday) 7-9pm, Young Bisexual Social and Support Group (BLiSS). If you are in your 20s or mid-30s (or thereabouts) & identify somewhere along the lines of bisexual/omni/pan/fluid (or are questioning in that direction), please join us 2nd Thursdays for a few hours of laughter, discussion, activities, &/or the eating and drinking of delicious things! Activities & locations will vary, so please contact Kate at youngblissboston@gmail.com for info/to RSVP.

9 (Thursday) 7pm-2am, Pride Queeraoke. Kick off the big Pride weekend with karaoke & dancing at the Midway in JP. \$10 cover is a donation to Boston Pride.

10 (Friday) 6pm, Boston Dyke March. Gather at the Boston Common Gazebo to frolick & march with the queerest women in town. Info: www.bostondykemarch.com.

11 (Saturday) 12pm, Boston Pride Festival & Parade. March with the Bisexual Resource Center & help us carry a giant bi flag for the second year in a row! Visit us at our booth 11am-6pm. Info/RSVP: brc@biresource.net.

12 (Sunday) 2pm, JP Block Party. Keep on dancing at the hottest women's block party the day after Pride. Info: www.bostonpride.org/jp.

13 (Monday) 7pm, Straight Marriage, Still

Questioning. A peer led support group for women in a straight marriage/relationship struggling with sexual orientation or coming out. Meets 2nd Mondays. Info/RSVP: kate.e.flynn@gmail.com.

18 (Saturday), Noon, Potluck Brunch at Charlotte's in Dorchester. Bring a potluck dish to share. A great opportunity to meet other bi & bi-friendly women in the Boston area. Info/RSVP: Charlotte at avon.alger@gmail.com.

18 (Saturday) Rhode Island Pride. Info: www.prideri.com/.

18 (Saturday) 11:30am, Bi Brunch. This mixed gender bi group brunches at The Burren on Elm St. in Davis Sq., Somerville. Meets 3rd Saturdays.

23 (Thursday) 7pm, Social BLiSS, Jamaica Plain. This group is now for all ages who are interested in some tasty snacks and discussion with like-minded bis. Feel free to bring any topics you're interested in discussing! Meets 4th Thursdays at Café Nero in JP. Info/RSVP: Mia at youngblissboston@gmail.com.

July

6 (Wednesday) 7- pm, Bisexual Social & Support Group (BLiSS). (See June 1st)

10 (Sunday) 2-4pm, Tea with Bisexual Women Partnered with Men (BWPM). A peer-led support meetup co-hosted by BIWOC & the BRC. We will discuss a wide range of issues related to attraction, sexuality, & gender in a supportive safe space for only trans & cis women & non-binary folks of all races & ethnic backgrounds. Meets at Blue Shirt Café in Somerville. Info/RSVP: <http://www.meetup.com/Bi-Community-Activities/events/229651329/>.

11 (Monday) 7pm, Straight Marriage, Still Questioning. (See June 13th)

Calendar, continues on p. 19