

Little queer labels

"No one seriously thinks that people's personalities can be summed up with Type A, Type B.... So why should we seriously believe that people's sexuality can be summed up by gay, straight and bi?" says Williams. "Human personality and sexuality are too complex for labels. Leave the labels for the psychiatrists, who use them to make generalizations but who know better than to believe they are real, closed systems."

Daly agrees it's dangerous to categorize people. "The queer community runs the risk of cleaving too strongly to the categories that have been imposed on us—we don't need to divide ourselves against ourselves."

She adds: "I feel very muddled about the whole 'tag' thing. Honestly, I think what it feels like is like what I felt back in 1997 [when Daly fell in love with her partner, Scott]—that I'm a lesbian who is in love with a man. I'm not trying to make a political statement by saying that; I'm trying to just be very honest about some very delicate feelings."

Not only did she feel then that she was driving a wedge between she and her lesbian friends, but she also hated the sigh of relief from particular relatives when she retracted her lesbian identity and came out as bi. And she says she suffered from internalized biphobia, a very real condition for many gays and lesbians. "For me," Daly says, "evolving into being bisexual has coincided with a general sense of wanting to move beyond external definitions of myself."

The problem with categories, says Williams, is "one can feel threatened by those outside the categories. Straight people feel threatened by the idea of queerness. Queers feel threatened by the idea of mutable sexuality. American culture is obsessed with...either you're straight or you're queer. Either you're male or you're female. Either you're for us or you're against us.... It's absurd."

Parker believes that instead of doing away with categories, it may be time to find new ones within the sexual minorities community to alleviate some of the burden that bisexuals carry. When many young people experiment with same-sex attraction and in turn flee when they get in over their heads, they hurt a lot of gays and lesbians in their path of self-exploration.

"Perhaps these experiences leave a mark that—as we get older—doesn't really mature. It happened to me on more than one occasion," says Parker. "Perhaps a new label should be developed for these individuals—how about...youngbian...or considersexual."

Parker jests, but her quip suggests some people may use the term too loosely, giving bisexuals a bad name.



Laury Weiss is organizer of Portland's Bisexual Community Forum—an all-age, gender-inclusive bi interest group for people of all orientations

Her bi partner, Gina James, remarks: "I can't tell you how many dykes I've met that believe bisexuality is just straight girls screwing around and breaking the hearts of their sisters.... Many gays and lesbians resent someone laying claim to their subculture when that someone is in [the queer community] only because they happen not to be in a heterosexual relationship at the time."

attempt to dip my toe in the water to gauge [my friends'] reaction to the idea that I may be attracted to men. I continued to pursue women, but I was also able to begin being more comfortable and open about my same-sex attraction."

Daly concurs that, for some, coming to terms with one's sexuality is no Point A to Point B journey. "Some of the anger and misperceptions come from the fact that coming

The myths

Myth: Bisexuality is only a rest stop on the way to Gayville.

"I think that we're sometimes perceived by [gays and lesbians] as being fence-sitters, being indecisive and unable to come out fully in our gay identity," says Laury Weiss, organizer of Portland's Bisexual Community Forum, who has had significant relationships with both men and women. He says the truth is "we have our own identity—which includes loving people of the same gender."

The myth that bisexuality is not a destination in and of itself is reinforced by some gays and lesbians who use bisexuality as a steppingstone on the path to coming out as a homosexual. Weiss says: "Many gay and lesbian people, myself included, have identified as bisexual at one time or another...in an

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—Gina James

out is a process. It's not like we all spring forth from the proverbial closet as fully formed lesbians and gay men. Many people go through a time of confusion or exploration where the lines are all blurry," she says.

Many gays and lesbians have a hard time understanding how bisexuals "can't just make up their mind," says Dillinger. "People struggle to understand and therefore find it easier to just pass judgment and form an opinion that 'those darn bisexuals...they just need to work through it and figure it out!' It is diffi-

cult for some to imagine that perhaps they have figured it out...and 'it' is bisexuality as a sexual orientation."

Myth: A relationship with a bisexual is doomed to failure.

When Parker first began dating James, she was guarded. This was somewhat due to the pain she felt in the deterioration of her prior relationship, but also in part to how gays and lesbians view bisexuals.

"I certainly didn't want to risk so much again," admits Parker. "I wanted someone who knew who they were, sexually and otherwise. I didn't want to be an experiment for a young girl's sexual boundaries. So, I was up front about all of that when I met Gina, and although she was bisexual, she was done experimenting. I think that makes all of the difference."

Dillinger explains: "People who date bisexuals run the risk, just as anyone else does, of having their relationship fail. Unfortunately, when relationships fail, one of the first things we tend to do is look for a place to lay blame. When dating a bisexual, a failed relationship sets up the perfect opportunity to be hurt and/or upset about an ex's bisexuality! But the reality is that the relationship will almost never fail because Partner A is bisexual. If anything, the relationship will fail because Partner B does not understand Partner A's bisexuality."

Myth: Bisexuals lack sexual control and are uninterested in monogamy.

"Polyamory is definitely more common in the bisexual community," Weiss acknowledges. But, he adds, it doesn't reflect the entire bisexual community. Many straight couples enjoy polyamorous relationships, and open relationships in the gay male community seem more prevalent than exclusively monogamous ones. Bisexuals are just as interested and capable of monogamy as everyone else.

Myth: Bisexuals can't be trusted because they sleep with the enemy.

Dillinger believes sexual identity is immaterial when it comes to trusting someone in a relationship. He says: "It is important to distinguish trust issues from our own feelings and opinions about human sexuality. Some gay men may look

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