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The Buzz: Life Beyond the Binary

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Each year as Pride Month rolls around, I am encouraged to reflect on what my queerness means to me. With [so much current legislation affecting the LGBTQ+ community across the U.S.](#), including the [“Don’t Say Gay Bill”](#), it feels imperative to reflect on the humanity and life affirming love within the LGBTQ+ community.

So often LGBTQ+ folks are painted as anything but human – but I

have seen more humanity, love, and affirmation within the LGBTQ+ community than any other I've been part of. So, I share my own experience to highlight how identity exploration can lead to a more beautiful, whole, expansive life.

[I have seen more humanity, love, and affirmation within the LGBTQ+ community than any other I've been part of. Identity exploration can lead to a more beautiful, whole, expansive life.](#)
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I still remember the first couple of times I saw two girls kiss. It was 7th grade. One time was while watching *John Tucker Must Die* with some friends at a sleepover. I felt butterflies and sparks vibrate through my veins the moment their lips touched. The other time was under the Friday night lights of a high school football game. I didn't say or do anything about those feelings at the game or the sleepover, but I did rewatch the kissing scene in *John Tucker Must Die* as many times as I could in secret.

Up to that point, I had had many crushes on boys, and boys had had crushes on me. To be completely honest, I always loved the attention. Especially when I could beat the boys at foot races across the field at recess. I enjoyed feeling connected. And seen. Flirtatious exchanges were energizing no matter who was flirting back. I never held much tension between my ability to feel that energy toward people who were similar and different than me; the wrath of heteropatriarchy never became internalized against myself — although I didn't make it through unscathed. I never questioned my internal world, however, I didn't name it out loud until many years later.

The first time someone came out to me was in college. It was one of the most affirming experiences in my life. Someone else sharing with me the words I had never said out loud myself. It was a turning point, and one aimed at liberation.

During my second year of college, Robyn Ochs came to speak on [*Beyond the Binaries*](#), asking questions about how we identify, what our lived experiences were, and where those overlap or hold contradiction. I walked away feeling more myself than ever before. I watched as the whole room – representing each other’s data anonymously – ebbed and flowed in waves across various identities on a continuum laid out across the floor, fundamentally deconstructing everything I was taught to understand about identity. I walked away with hope for new possibilities, and a deeper connection with the space I held for myself. Contradiction, paradox, and both/ands were all felt and understood in new ways – all dangerous concepts in a world built on binaries, hierarchy, and either/or thinking.

The world became filled with possibilities beyond the binary; queer expansiveness will do that for you.

I explored my own identity and how I could be captured by an imperfect language. For a while, fluidity felt most expansive. Then, bisexuality. My understanding of bisexuality has roots in [Robyn Och](#)’s definition: “I call myself bisexual because I acknowledge in myself the potential to be attracted — romantically and/or sexually — to people of more than one gender, not necessarily at the same time, in the same way, or to the same degree.” Some people may feel more comfortable with the label pansexual, others with no label at all. Over the years, it mattered less about the word I chose and more about the expansiveness my queerness offered.

[Some people may feel more comfortable with the label bisexual or pansexual, others with no label at all. It matters less about the word I chose and more about the expansiveness my queerness offered. #Pride Click To Tweet](#)

It wasn't until more recently that the same revolution happened with my gender identity. [Alok Vaid-Menon](#) offered a new understanding of gender and sex – one that deconstructed the [colonial history](#), and restored humanity and expansive existence. Alok shares in their book [Beyond the Gender Binary](#) that gender is a story and is experienced in as many ways as there are, and have been, human beings. I will always acknowledge the limitations of language that have been shaped by white supremacy, heteropatriarchy, colonialism, capitalism, and other systems of oppression, so it has felt particularly empowering to expand beyond my own understanding of the words I use to understand myself.

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The way I understand my gender and sexuality now is beyond any scope that could be offered through a binary or spectrum. I am a queer bi femme who lives with a combination of privilege – especially as a white, class-privileged citizen of the United States; erasure – in the ways my identities are invisible through my appearance and by extension my relationships; and expansiveness – in my radical dreams for a future of belonging, love, and celebration of humanity in all of our glory.

I never had a formal coming out experience; and to be honest,

there are many people who I haven't discussed these parts of my identity with. But, that is rooted in my belief that no one should *need* a coming out story because being straight and/or cis should not be considered the norm; humanity is so much more expansive than that. We all deserve a life of freedom to express who we are and who we love. And centering love, humanity, and the nuances of life in our struggle toward a world beyond any binary will help lead us in opening a world of possibilities to us all.

[I never had a formal coming out experience. I believe that no one should need a coming out story because being straight and/or cis should not be considered the norm; humanity is so much more expansive than that. #Pride Click To Tweet We all deserve a life of freedom to express who we are and who we love. Centering love, humanity, and the nuances of life will help lead us in opening a world of possibilities to us all. #Pride Click To Tweet](#)

Not everyone has a story like mine – one of internal affirmation, continued comfort in traversing the unknown, and being able to hide or show myself when I choose. I also hold the tension of the ease and lack of challenge I've had within my identities and how my queerness is only visible if I name it. This is a struggle I face often and think about a lot. Identity is a constantly flowing and changing landscape when we allow ourselves to reflect and unpack and write our own story.

Pronouns are part of writing our own story, but they are not the end all be all. I am comfortable with she/her pronouns despite my genderqueerness because I don't mind the pronouns and don't feel harmed when they, or other feminine qualifiers, are used. This doesn't bother me because my understanding of myself and these words are expansive. So, when I am called a "woman," I have my

own definitions of what that means for me. Not everyone has that same privilege or comfort, and my ideal world would rid our need to define and label and categorize ourselves based on set standards that aren't in alignment with lived truth.

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Deconstructing the binaries in everyday life is a commitment I make to affirm my queerness. When I show up in work settings, personal settings, or community settings, I aim to de-gender our language and experiences, share different perspectives, and hold space for the paradoxical nature of being human. And what I offer to you today is to embrace your own paradoxes, contradictions, and nuances.

You are the author of your own story. Your story matters. Your queerness is enough. And when we begin to share our stories loud and proud, we queerify the norm and expand what is possible for everyone.

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