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Introduction: Join us for the BiCast, a podcast by and for the Bisexual Community. We give [back] and give voice to all of us under the big umbrella, bringing you information, news, entertainment and support for all.

Michael: You can find us at thebicast.org, @thebicast on Twitter. Thebicast on (inaudible) and Bicast in iTunes. Visit the BiCast page on Facebook and see how you can join the Facebook group.

Lynnette: And remember, you’re not wrong and you’re not broke and you are not alone.

Michael: So pull up your favorite comfy chair and relax.

Lynnette: And remember, everybody gets a cookie.

[intro music]

Lynnette: At the BiCast we strive to be about and for the bisexual community. Today we have a very special little episode for our episode 3. We are going to be discussing that happy little demon, labels. With us to do that today, we have a few very special guests. Cameron Coo (sp?) from my local bi group and Shiri Eisner. Welcome to both of you.

Cameron: Thank you for having us, Lynnette.

Lynnette: Oh, you’re so welcome. So before we get started on this little task, we’ll go with introduction.

Will: I’m Will.

Cameron: My name is Cameron.

Lynnette: I’m Lynnette.

Shiri: I'm Shiri

Lynnette: So, labels. Interesting little subject. A love-hate relationship us bisexuals have with that. I myself carry a great many labels around with me, as everyone does. I kind of feel like Marley’s ghost sometimes. Labels I carry around with me, I’m poor, white, female, cisgender, bisexual, privileged, not privileged, many things to carry around. To get into discussing labels and to talk about Shiri a little bit, let’s welcome Shiri. Hi Shiri, how are you?

Shiri: I’m good, thank you, how are you?

Lynnette: I am wonderful. For those of you who may not know, Shiri is the author of Bi: Notes for a Bisexual Revolution. She also has a Tumblr blog. That is [bidyke] and she’s on wordpress with biradical. So Shiri, you’re calling us today from Tel Aviv.

Shiri: I’ve never actually lived anywhere other than here.

Lynnette: Oh, wow, have you ever been to the states before?

Shiri: No, never, so I am trying to. So for anyone who hasn’t heard yet, my book has been nominated for a Lambda award and a Bisexual Book Award. I’m fundraising now to try to get to New York for the ceremonies. So if anyone is interested in donating or in passing the word on, they are very much invited to search for me on Facebook or my book Bi: Notes for a Bisexual Revolution and get all the details.

Lynnette: For those of you who couldn’t hear what Shiri was saying, I apologize. I’ve discovered that recording a Skype call from Tel Aviv is problematic. She’s talking about her upcoming nominations for Lambda Literary Awards that will be happening in June and there’s been a Go Fund Me crowdfunding started and you can find that on her Facebook page, Bi Notes for a Bisexual Revolution. There will be a link there. There’s also a link on our page and the BiCast page and the BiCast group. There will be links all over the place. Everyone is sharing it so please share that link everywhere, on Facebook, on Tumblr, and on Twitter, and if you possibly can please donate –

We will be writing all those things for her, Go Fund Me project and to all her sites and work in our episode, three links that will be available on the website in the BiCast group and also in the BiCast page. So Shiri, could you just tell me, what inspired you to write the book?

Shiri: A few years ago I knew that I was going to write a book about bisexuality someday and I didn’t know what that book was gonna be about. I thought it was gonna be a history of the bisexual movement in the US or something similar and then over time I began gathering a lot more knowledge about bisexuality. I began am reading a lot about it. I started my second year at the university for my MDA. Reading a lot of material about bisexuality academics, sabbatical, anything I could get my hands on, and I started having a very unique understanding of bisexuality and the bisexual cause, when my activism became more known and when I became more known as a blogger I started realizing that no matter how much I wrote about it and how many activities I was organizing, people weren’t fully understanding why everything and how I understood it, and every time I talked about it, people were also very impressed with what I knew and the way I thought about it. So then there was a period of a few months where I just knew I had a bisexual book in my head. I actually (inaudible 5:38) everything that I wanted to say and I kept talking about it and there came one weekend where people in my life have told me that I should really start writing it and so I did, and it took me a year to write and then I think another year to publish. I’m really proud of it and it’s kind of surreal. I’m looking at it right now. It’s sitting on the shelf.

Lynnette: Well, we are all very happy you did. It’s very enlightening. It’s helped me with a lot of my old views. It’s helped me a lot. Up until a year ago I identified as heterosexual. I fought very hard to identify as heterosexual because my conception of what bisexuality was was of course the erroneous one that everyone else has and I knew that I wasn’t morally bankrupt and I didn’t want to be perceived as wishy-washy, flighty, and any of those wonderful little phobic things that there are. It took a lot of soul searching to get to where I embraced what I was or who I was and then to read your book and get your views on why I was in that position was wonderful. I love the book. It’s great. I haven’t finished it. I’ve skimmed through it. I’ve gone through the first few chapters pretty extensively but yes, that’s why I was so happy to have you on today. You were a big help to a lot of people.

Shiri: That’s really why I wrote it. I really wanted to (to reach out help them figure it out alone or easily or clearly or just offer a version of, a sexuality with people I might connect to.

Lynnette: Well, it really has for me and I know it’s helping a whole lot of other people. That is really good. (audio cuts)

Shiri: This really makes me very glad that I went and wrote it rather than kept it in my head and I think it’s about ourselves and about how we view bisexuality. To talk about it and for the language and the tools to understand it better.

Lynnette: Absolutely. Shiri, you have a lot of very good views and not so good views like we all do about labels. They’re used and abused and why they’re good, why they’re bad. Of course my favorite one of why I like bisexuality is because there isn’t an identity to something I thought I was alone in all my life, pretty much, and shamed myself over and now to find I have a whole community that is there with me, I love the label myself. The part I don’t like of course is what everybody else perceives the label to mean and that’s what we’re all here all trying to change so could you just give us a little recap of how you feel about the whole label situation?

Shiri: I love labels. I know it’s often not a very popular opinion when it comes to queer politics or especially when it comes to discussing bisexuality. Most of the time when I talk about bisexuality to non-bisexual audiences, one of the first things, one of the first topics to be raised, questions to be asked is, why would you need labels anyway? Actually I think labels are incredibly useful. I think they’re incredibly empowering.

Lynnette: I have to agree with you. I think that labels are really useful, especially if you’re trying to put on a shirt and you don’t know what size it is, but as for people I think they can be very – like I said, I think the community label, and the empowerment of being out and talking about who I am and not talking about bisexuality as this only sex-oriented thing but as an identity in a person. I enjoy it very much.

Shiri: Exactly. There was a quote going around Tumblr and – I actually saw it today but it’s been going around for like a month or two that said something to the extent of, anyone who thinks labels are useless has obviously never experienced the huge, immense relief that comes with finding a word that describes something you didn’t even know there was a word for. Finally understand yourself, talk about yourself and find an identity, a community, a way to know that you’re not alone in this world.

Lynnette: Absolutely, I so agree.

Will: I can certainly relate with this, even with something from my very recent past because I for most of my entire life I knew that I felt feminine on the inside a lot of the time but not all the time. I was cognizant of trans people but I didn’t really feel like that fit me. I didn’t feel like I wanted to be a woman all the time but less than a year ago when I met somebody online and they identified themselves as genderfluid, and when they explained that to me, all of a sudden I was just like, oh my goodness. That’s who I am, and I was just so happy to finally have a name to put onto it and as a result of that I just came out as genderfluid to the general public about two months ago and I’ve you know, now that I’ve had a label that I could put on it and tell people, this is who I am and this is why I’m doing it, I’m confident enough to be able to express feminine on the outside as well as on the inside. And it’s really made a huge impact in my life in how I feel about myself and you know, how I’m able to interact with people and express who I feel like I Really am.

Shiri: That is so great. I can really relate to that because my identity is genderqueer. I think I also had a bit of a similar process for that because I think pretty much all my life I haven’t really felt, not like a woman and not like a man. I always had this gender perception of myself – see, I couldn’t even put a word to it, because I didn’t know the word. It was a period in my life where I did identify with the trans community here and I always felt connected to the trans community but within that community I was always (inaudible 12:28) people or people would assume that I was femme and because I was bisexual a lot of people also assumed that maybe I’m a straight ally or something. I was actually familiar with the word genderqueer for a time but I didn’t feel like I deserved to identify as that, which really relates to my identity as bisexual because bisexual is – I spent years and years in the gay and lesbian community getting the message that I wasn’t queer enough. I’m just there on the side. I’m an ally. I’m not really part of the community. I don’t get to call myself queer.

Lynnette: I think we can all relate to that one, Shiri, very much so, even in our own dialogue with ourselves. It took me a long time to realize that – I always thought, well, you’re just not bisexual enough, I mean, so you can’t really be bisexual and it was talking and realizing that yeah, that’s exactly what my am. I mean, if I can call myself that it’s a big step. Finally the genderqueer label must have been a big relief.

Shiri: They don’t know a lot of bisexual people and don’t feel that way.

Lynnette: Yeah, I think we all went through that. Cameron, how do you feel about it?

Cameron: I have a lot of thoughts on labels to touch back on what Shiri was saying when she talks to non-bisexual audiences about labels and how they almost always kind of approach it like, oh, why do you even need labels? Can’t we all just be human? I find that this kind of attitude is specifically directed towards bisexuals. Straight and gay people have their labels and their labels are queer or normal or whatever they have, their relationship with labels isn’t the same because their labels are so ingrained and validated and [return] that they don’t realize how lifesaving finding – going through a path of discovering your own personal labels and how lifesaving that can be and how important that can be for the psyche of a person who falls somewhere in between or outside of the gay/straight male/female binaries.

Shiri: Yeah. Well, I think that mostly relates to straight people because they’re the ones whose sexualities get validated. And actually I’ve met a lot of straight people who also say this kind of, yeah, I don’t really identify as anything because why do you need labels and we’re all human, but it comes from a very very different head space. It comes from being the default you don’t have to think about what you are because what you are is obvious and ‘natural’ and right.

Lynnette: Absolutely. So I think labels are very useful, particularly in our community. I also can see why they can be a point of abuse and actually damaging this trend to – I don’t want to get into it, the bi/pan debate because I think everybody needs to label themselves as they need to label themselves but I can see there’s a lot of problems developing with that that don’t need to happen. They really just don’t need to happen at all because we are all in this together no matter how we label ourselves and I think that the common good needs to be the main function. I can see where labeling can be an issue.

Cameron: I think that the bi/pan debate is kind of an inevitable topic when we’re touching on labels on a show about bisexuality because it’s a very prevalent topic and it’s a huge source of confusion, not just for non-monosexuals but for gay and straight people who genuinely want to understand and the misinformation is rampant. This is something that I talk about a lot and write about extensively. It’s very frustrating. I’m sure I’m not the only one here who’s frustrated by this topic but I think that it is important to touch on it.

Shiri: I have to say that I do appreciate pansexual identities. I do appreciate that this word exists but I also feel that a lot of the time pansexuality is being used in order to invalidate bisexuality and that’s definitely something that needs to be discussed because that’s a really, really huge issue. And Lynnette, you said that we were all in this together but a lot of times I see pansexual or polysexual or omnisexual people actually dissociating themselves from bisexual people and from bisexual community because of (inaudible 17:44) misperceptions. The perception that bisexuality is inherently oppressive and exclusionary towards trans and non-binary people.

Lynnette: I agree and I think that’s the real problem. The trend I see happening is that in order to identify themselves different than bisexual, they are using an archaic description of bisexual which has not been claimed by the bisexual community for a very long time if ever. It’s a medical term that is very binary which I know I don’t and anybody else I know who claims bisexual do not feel that way. We do not – I am not only attracted to just men or women. It’s not the way I think at all. And I think that what is happening is, we need to have good discussions where everybody’s not getting angry and able to voice their opinions. I think one of the things that needs to be done is, in order to identify ourselves we should not be using someone else’s identity to do that. I think because that is a big problem.

Will: Yeah, I absolutely agree with that. I make that point and I’m always – no matter what they say, I stopped them and tried to make them realize that they are relying on defining someone else’s identity to explain their own, and I have to emphasize, you don’t have to do that. There is a valid difference between bi and pan. Bi people are attracted to same and different genders. Pan people are attracted to all genders or regardless of gender and there is a difference but more important than there being a difference it’s a huge overlap and bi and pan people have so much more in common than they have different. The definitions are so overlapping that they can be used interchangeably. People can identify as bi and pan. People can feel more bisexual sometimes, more pansexual sometimes. The divisiveness of this is a huge issue in my opinion.

Lynnette: I agree with that because if I was going to be technical I would probably say I was pan but because of my own political or personal reason hold on to the bi like crazy. That’s the way I identify. How we are talking about this and discussing this is what is really the issue and not what the difference is between us. There are very good definitions of pansexual but don’t include bisexual at all and that’s what should be repeated and written.

Will: I personally identify as a pansexual but I also still consider myself to be a bisexual as well. Obviously I’m on this show. But for me personally what brought me to choose to identify as pansexual initially was the fact that I’ve always had an internal personal attraction to trans individuals and while I personally understand that bisexuality certainly does encompass those sorts of relationships as well, I wanted to have a label that, if nothing else, what it would do when I identify that way is people who don’t understand asked questions whereas with bisexual, when you tell people that you’re that, a lot of times people will, especially that aren’t involved in the LGBT community, automatically assume that means you like men or you like women, and while that’s certainly not the way that it’s defined for most of us internally it at least, by identifying myself as pansexual, it not only opens up a conversation with people about that and I can – and gives me an opportunity to explicitly state the sort of attractions that I have, but it also, having a label like that sort of gave me the confidence to express those attractions because I hid my status as a trans-attracted person for a very long time because of the fear of the social stigma and things like that. It’s definitely something that I identify with and I agree that the reasoning behind it shouldn’t be there but it’s helped me personally in order to express who I am and have the confidence to do so.

Shiri: And that’s important. I think that we need to really work on changing what everyone else, not us, everyone else views what bisexuality means. I just recently became aware that there is a rumor out there that if you are a bisexual this makes you by default transphobic which upsets me a lot. I’m sure it upsets all of us, right?

Chorus: Yeah.

Shiri: Everything you just said. So Cameron, you said that people should learn to explain pansexuality using bisexuality. I don’t know that that’s the problem in and of itself. I think it’s specifically the contrasting of bisexuality, using bisexuality in order to legitimize pansexuality while delegitimizing bisexuality.

Cameron: Yeah, that’s what I mean.

Shiri: I know, so I’m agreeing with you and I’m adding a specific detail because specifically what bothers me about a lot of explanations about pansexuality is when people say, “I’m pansexual because bisexuality is binary.” They shouldn’t be saying that. I can imagine someone using bisexuality in order to describe their sexuality or their identity in a way that doesn’t denigrate bisexuality and that’s fine by me. The problem starts when someone needs to step on bisexuality in order to legitimize themselves. But also I think we need to acknowledge a lot of bi people do use a binary definition and it’s a sexist definition. A lot of bi people say, I am bisexual because I am attracted to cis men and women. I’ve had a lot of big people ask me, tell me things like, I identify as bisexual because I am not attracted to trans and non-binary people which is hugely problematic because it normalizes their own transphobia and cissexism and we need to acknowledge that a lot of bi people do that and it is a problem within our community that we need to address and call out. I think we need to make a distinction between labels and attraction because difference between bisexuality and pansexuality isn’t in the amount of genders that we’re attracted to or even in the way that our attraction works. My attraction personally works pretty much identically to a lot of other people who I know identify as pansexual. The difference is political. It’s not about actual attraction, it’s about how we choose to describe it. What word we choose to associate ourselves with? Mainly I find that people who identify as bisexual are more interested in talking about bisexuality and biphobia and monosexism and all the issues that come up from that and a lot of people who identify as pansexual are more interested in talking about trans issues and non-binary people and genderqueer people and issues that have to do with transphobia and cissexism.

Will: I notice that, too, and that’s very valuable. All those things need to be talked about and I think that it could be a strength of the non-monosexual population to have these different subsets and different agendas. It’s a diversity of identity I think strengthens our community as a whole and inward bickering I think its what’s holding us back, and always trying to find the right word that everybody can agree on and…

Shiri: I don’t know that it’s bickering. You’ve used the word divisive a few minutes ago and I don’t actually like the word divisiveness. I get a lot of accusations myself of being divisive and a lot of the time when people call out oppression this word is being used against them. I don’t think divisiveness is necessarily a bad thing. It means that you’re raising issues that the community needs to discuss and to process. I do think that it has a lot to do with hierarchies and with acknowledging and confronting biphobia because there is a reason why so many people want to dissociate themselves from bisexuality, because bisexuality is considered such an invalid identity. Nobody wants to use it. Nobody wants to be identified with that. I mean, you know, nobody but us, right? Um, but you know, for example, when you meet someone who is only ever – who is a cis woman who is only ever attracted to women, you wouldn’t have to like, you know, guess and try to glean whether or not that person identifies as a lesbian. The obvious. Or if you meet someone who is only attracted to the quote-unquote ‘opposite gender’ you wouldn’t have to play the guessing game around heterosexuality. But once you meet someone who is attracted to people of more than one gender, you have to really work your way around it. You can’t assume anything and that’s a thing about bisexuality that most people who experience attraction to more than one gender don’t want to identify as bisexual.

Cameron: And I think that’s the problem. In an ideal world it would be an automatic to say, oh, you’re attracted to more than one gender, you’re bisexual. You may be –

Shiri: I don’t know about it being ideal. I actually really, really like the diversity, the multiplicity of labels. We have bisexual and we have pansexual and polysexual and omnisexual and a lot of other labels that can kind of be put together in some way. You’ve got fluid people and you’ve got, I don’t know, I need a list of all of them.

Cameron: Yeah, I agree and I like all the labels too but I feel like bisexual –

Shiri: I think more than being a problem I think it’s really a symptom of social biphobia.

Cameron: It’s just, I like to see and use bisexual as the umbrella term that encompasses and works actively to be inclusive of all of the other labels that describe some variation of what it means to be non-monosexual.

Shiri: I think one of the things that confuse even people in the community and outside the community is that our language is always evolving because it needs to. You know, I think it confuses people and they think that we can’t make up our minds. You know, we’re not together on anything because… people think in black and white. They think male and female. They don’t quite get anything that falls in between that or people that are fluid. And I think that’s part of the problem.

(Loss of audio)

Shiri: What’s after biphobia? Or Monosexism. Binaries, and specifically hierarchical binaries because the function of the binaries the gay/straight duality give it a privileged status while oppressing everyone else. So you know, in a way, biphobia and transphobia and a lot of… even I think aphobia, I think that also fits in it. I think it has a lot to do with subverting the binary. Showing that the way the world is constructed as to privilege one group over the other on account of the other is just an elaborate illusion. It’s a social construction. We show by simply existing, by bisexuality being a thing, it shows that the whole binary is actually very, very fragile and that is why. Now it’s so important to eliminate our existence.

Lynnette: I so agree with that because like I said, up until a year ago I clung to that binary heterosexual, either you are gay or straight and that was what it was. Whether I really said that aloud or in my head, that is what I had going on and it’s just a lot to get past that. Quite a lot and of course I’m a much happier person. You tend to think differently when the lights come on and I think that is the problem. We do threaten that basic structure that has been so ingrained about gender and sexuality. The born this way and either you are, everyone is sexually attracted to someone, everybody is either fully male, fully female, everybody is born with a body, with an identity that their body is, these things shake things up and it scares people. And I think we need to try to educate people that it’s really not the way the world is. Shiri, did you have any other points you’d like to come up with right now?

Shiri: I story with pansexuality because we had quite a long relationship. I actually identified as pansexual for several years, I think maybe five, maybe a little bit more, and started when I first heard about the term. Someone who was a friend of mine told me there’s a new word, pansexuality and it’s better than bisexuality because bisexuality is binary. And from that moment actually felt something being closed off to me. I didn’t feel like something was opening up which, you know, it’s a bad sign when you’re talking about labels because labels were to to open you up but I felt also that I should be identifying as pansexual now because I’m attracted to a lot of people. Actually for years I identified as pansexual but I kept my bisexual identity as well because, the things that I told myself was that I was using it for simplicity because more people are familiar with bisexuality and it’s easier to speak about it and to explain it, to educate people using the word bisexuality rather than having to explain pansexuality. And for a lot – for many, many years I actually used a lot of the rhetorics of you know, the biphobic rhetoric of pansexuality, of – I’m not bisexual because I’m better than you. I actually have an essay that I published on an anthology called Getting Bi: Voices of Bisexuals From Around the World which was edited by Robyn Ochs and I contributed an essay where a portion of the essay, I think maybe one or two paragraphs, was about saying, I am not bisexual, I am pansexual because I am not transphobic, because I am against homonormativity, because I’m a radical, I’m not a liberal, and obviously I feel very different about it now. Go back to the process then I think in 2007 – no, in 2008 there was a blog at the time that was active and it was called Bi Furious And that blog was really, really important for me for all sorts of reasons. It was a very radical bi blog before there was my radical bi blog and one day one of the bloggers named Zee an entry about the two in bisexual, she actually called it that, the two in bisexual, saying that the two doesn’t really have to be two sexes binary. It can refer to genders similar to and different from our own and she took that definition from bisexual and that’s an organization from the UK. That moment I really remember the moment that I read it and I was like, oh, so I can go back to identifying as bi. That was a really, really central moment to my identity as bisexual. I think that’s when my long breakup, elongated breakup from pansexuality started. So I continued identifying with both bi and pan but there was that trope. And they started being more critical of the notion that bi is binary. I think it took me maybe 2-3 more years after reading that post to – I had to leave the pansexual identity behind me because a lot of the people who knew I identified as pansexual assumed that my view of bisexuality was biphobic, and my final breakup was with my blog post which is now a part of the book called Words, Binary and Biphobia, or: Why “Bi” is binary but “FTM” is not. FTM being of course a term for trans men, female to male, that’s what the FTM stands for, and I really – in that blog post I really took it to heart why this argument is being used against us and where it originated. I was going to say something about how I feel about bisexuality now. So everything that I (inaudible 37:48) with my pansexuality being a radical, being genderqueer and trans-identified and being a radical and being a feminist and everything else, now I put this way up to bisexuality and that’s part of my reclaiming of that word as an identity.

Lynnette: Every moment we all reclaim our words, don’t we?

Shiri: Invariably. The first time that we encounter the word bisexuality it is in a negative context. I think for all of us it takes a very long time until we get to a text or a piece of media or whatever where bisexuality is actually a positive thing. So it’s reclamation just by starting to identify as bisexual and of course we have to reclaim it constantly because we constantly have biphobia against us.

Lynnette: I have yours words here and you can tell me if you want me to take this out. You did write this. “At the basis bisexuality means to be attracted to people of more than one gender or to people of gender similar or different from mine and that is just the basis. Identifying as bisexual for me also means resisting biphobia and monosexism. (inaudible 39:10) heteronormativity, patriarchy, cissexism. (inaudible) identifications bisexual people with queer and trans people as a whole. It connects me with solidarity with other marginalized groups, ultimately for me my sexual identity is about resisting all hierarchies and seeking liberation for everyone. In a very personal sense in my life, bisexuality has meant accepting myself as different form social norms, celebrating that difference and subverting the norm itself.| And I like that. That’s how I feel about a lot of things. Thank you Shiri. (inaudible 39:45)

Cameron: Yeah, Shiri, I really love your book. I value so highly how empowering it made me feel and I know that everyone who has read it has felt similarly.

Shiri: Thank you.

Cameron: I have a different experience. I came out as bisexual when I was 18 and I’ve been assured in my orientation ever since. I’ve only become more confident in my identity as the years have gone on and I – I grew up in a pretty liberal region of the world. I knew bisexual people before I came out. I didn’t have a very negative personal experience with bisexuality and I perceived the negativity in the mass culture and the media towards bisexuality but for me it was always – there was always so much truth to it and so it’s become a lot easier for me to embrace the concept of bisexual than it is for a lot of people. Also, I’m not college educated. Your book was probably one of the most academic texts I’ve ever gotten through and I think that if I have any criticism of the book it’s that I feel that it might be inaccessible to a lot of younger bi people, or I’ve read statistics that bi people are less likely to be college educated because the language is very academic in your book.

Shiri: I know. I get very academic sometimes because academic theories are part of my passion towards bisexuality. It’s a lot about the theory because I feel the theory gives it a whole extra dimension. It allows me to deepen my understanding of bisexuality and the way that it works in the world, the way that it carries meaning in the world. So yeah, I actually, I felt like I had to use academic theory in the book in order to fully explain all of these meanings that bisexuality carries, and I tried to do it as accessibly as I could, so a lot of people have absolutely told me that it was very, very accessible and I did a good job but on the other hand, we asked people, some people have said that it is too academic for them.

Lynnette: For people to me that are new to the community, or I haven’t finished college either. I think it just takes a little practice in learning the words and once you do that it is a little easier to read. That’s where I got thrown off was, you know, learning what cissexism is. Even what monosexuality meant but after you do that it’s easier. Once you’re in the community a while those words become a lot more part of your language.

Shiri: When it comes to words like cissexism and monosexism and everything-ism, these are not actually academic words. They don’t appear in the academia. I have never heard these words in the university and I’m doing my MA now in gender studies. I do use a lot of academic theories in my book and it does require a certain familiarity with how academic theories work, trying to explain the theory in terms that were as simple as I could.

Lynnette: It’s a great book, Shiri. You did a great job.

Shiri: I feel it’s important for me to be accountable to problems in the book because obviously these problems have the context of privilege and I am privileged that I am what you call college educated. We don’t have any colleges here. University. But it’s true, I did try to accommodate but I didn't completely succeed and I’m completely accountable for that.

Cameron: It’s a great book. I did manage to get through it and I learned a lot. You know, you really did write in a way so that people who weren’t familiar with a lot of the terms you were using could research them independently and learn from them.

Lynnette: In my copy there’s actually those side notes that explain what each thing is and that really helped a lot.

Shiri: Yeah, that was actually my idea. My publisher actually wanted for there to be only a glossary at the end of the book but I insisted on the little squares, windows, whatever you want to call them.

Lynnette: It was a great idea. It really helped a lot. So just to wrap up this whole conversation on labels, I feel that they’re a very useful tool in our community, wonderful tool. I can see the damage that can be done with them very easily and I think one of the problems we have is, how do we navigate this? How do we put ourselves out there in a positive light, confront the biphobia when it is brought to us personally and on a big level, and how do we work together to come to some kind of agreement or to discuss our differences in labels and how we feel about them. I do have a question from our co-host who could not be here today because he is spending the day with his partner of 27 years and whom he claims the woman who saved his life and she is having a birthday today. Happy birthday, Jane!

Shiri: Yeah.

Lynnette: John wanted me to ask, “My favorite parts of The Bi Notes is where you show how we provide a social use as bisexuals. Our very bodies inhabit an in between space. That gives us the ability to spy on both worlds of monosexuality and to understand each. I am a big fan of Zadie Smith because she deals with these between spaces too. You show us how our very existence challenges oppressive social constructs but too often we hide our lives under the bushel. What advice could you give us to help us to recognize our power in breaking down oppressive structures and for us to see our own value in social change?

Shiri: That is a huge question.

Lynnette: Yeah, big question.

Shiri: The book is about describing the ways in which we can change that. The power that society vests in bisexuality in order to fight the hierarchy slow oppression. So I think there’s so many ways. There are so many ways. I want my next book, maybe second next book, to be about bisexual activism and I want it to be a bisexual activist guide. Hopefully we’ll get to now read the full answer to this question.

Lynnette: I’ll be waiting for that one because that’s one of the things I’ve been trying to think about. I need these tools in my toolbox so I can whip them out when somebody says these things to me or when these things are online or articles are put out that are wrong because to me I believe the way you fight anything is on a very personal grassroots level. I know we can put out articles and responses and retorts but I think that just as important is working with the person standing over there. The group standing over there face to face on that level and that’s what I’m looking for is that little handbook I can whip out when somebody says something obnoxious to me. I can give them a good answer without being confrontational and make them defensive. That would be helpful.

Shiri: Yeah, you said that writing wasn’t enough but I think writing is so important. Especially someone who is chronically ill can't go outside and do face-to-face activism. I do give talks and lectures and workshops and I do facilitate a bisexual support group and because it’s inspired us to educate other people . And also in general about oppression towards various groups. They get that from the internet.

Lynnette: I just read across this that someone who had been called a slactivist because they were just writing online and being a disabled person like you with a very low energy level and besides having agoraphobia and some other issues, exchange in small groups or large groups that I’m not familiar with is difficult for me but I can do things online that I can’t do anywhere else and I spend a lot of what I do online. Words are powerful. I learned everything and connected with everything pretty much online from reading blogs and talking with people so it’s very important. I totally agree. I think that one of the things, I’ve actually had several people that I’m close to say some very biphobic things and you love these people and you don’t want to be confrontational with them and say, please don’t – well, how do you respond to that? I think those are things that we need to learn and we’re not always able to do in a kind and loving way that’s still informative. I think that’s what I meant.

Shiri: I think when I'm in confrontation which actually generally doesn’t happen to me on a day-to-day basis because pretty much all the people in my life are bi or pansexual but when it does happen I try not to… personalize my accusations. When I talk about the problems in what they’re saying, I don’t say you’re wrong or you’re being biphobic. I’m saying, OK, but what you just said brings to mind a problem about the way bisexuality is perceived and that problem is so-and-so and it comes from this and that and it’s not true because X, Y, Z. So you know, I just try to diffuse the tension in a way by depersonalizing the argument.

Lynnette: One of the truths I have noticed lately for making a little positive… lately everyone seems to be presenting us in a more positive note, in the community, the external community and to ourselves by learning our history, presenting positive celebrities and people out there are activists who many people don’t even know are there or don’t even know we have a history. I see this as a good positive social change that we can do through the media, through online, through podcasting like we’re doing now. Do you have any other suggestions. Writing, people just write whatever you want to write, right? Whatever you feel, whatever you need. I’ve been very hesitant in writing a blog because I don’t feel I’m a writer and I’ve been told possibly that that’s not what I should be concerned with, whether I can write or not or whether I should be writing down what I need to be writing down. So I may attempt it. If I do, be patient, but that’s just one of the tools we can use.

Shiri: Maybe if you don’t feel comfortable writing – There’s a lot that we can do whether its, so blogging is one, something that I do a lot, but you know, my first activist action as a bi activist was just to print out a flier about, there was a new bisexual group in Tel Aviv, it was actually the first ever. It opened in 2007 and my first action was to print the flyer to invite people to the group and it was really, really you know, bad in that I created it using PowerPoint and it was all ugly and you know, it’s kind of funny now but it was really low-tech and I printed, you know, in my office where I worked, you know. Cut it with scissors manually.

Lynnette: I was reading your paper on the mood of bisexuals in Israel and some of the history and I just loved it when you were talking about, after you’ve been arrested and you were all singing “I’m a lumberjack and that’s OK”?

Shiri: Yes.

Lynnette: One of my favorite songs in the world, I’m going like, yay.

Shiri: It’s a very bi thing I think to like Monty Python.

Lynnette: All right, so Cameron, what are you up to in this world? You are one of those people that are doing local activities and organizing?

Cameron: Yeah, you know, as important as writing is for the bi community, I think that actually I have found that creating tangible bi community has been one of the most powerful exercises in combating monosexism that I have found, and for over two years I have facilitated a bi and pansexual discussion group at the Q Center which is Portland’s LGBTQ community center and a lot of really wonderful projects have arose from a simple conversation group. It’s been active for over two years. About eight months ago we started an event called Bi Bar and once a month we turn a gay bar into a bi bar and it’s a really simple concept I’ve seen attempted in San Francisco before and something similar happens in San Diego. It’s like a meetup group and they do like a guerilla style takeover but bi bar is kind of the first consistent event that’s dependable where the local bi community will know that at least once a month they can get together and have a drink and be in a room full of other people that are like them, and they don’t have to – it’s like a breath of fresh air, and that event has been gaining a lot of popularity. Our last one was this week. We had a huge turnout and a DJ and it was a lot of fun. Another project that we have been working on actually debuted yesterday and what we did was, we wanted to do something productive with our discussion groups, and we have so many regulars who come to the groups and we talk about so many things and we help so many newcomers feel more comfortable with their identity and sexuality, and we thought of a way to kind of share that with the world, so we started Bi Brigade. You can find Bi Brigade on Facebook and you can go to bibrigade.org and you can submit any kind of questions or advice that you need. Kind of like a sex advice column except instead of a gay or straight person giving bisexual sex advise it’s an entire panel of bi or non-monosexual identified people of all ages and genders and backgrounds and experience levels. And hopefully somebody’s input responding to your submission will resonate with you more effectively than Dan Savage’s response. So check out bibrigade.org and send your submissions to [bibrigade@gmail.com](mailto:bibrigade@gmail.com) and the bibrigade will be filming an introductory YouTube video that we will be circulating on social media. Maybe your submission will be the very first column that we reveal.

Lynnette: I’m looking forward to that. That’s going to be interesting to be on camera. We’ll see how I do with that, OK?

Cameron: Oh yeah, and Lynnette is part of the Bi Brigade.

Shiri: They have these things all over like, they have Bi Coffee in London and they have something in Brighton. I know about this because I have been to the UK so I’m involved more (inaudible 56:55) but this is also something that we had here a couple of years back and back to your question, Lynnette, about activism, this is one of the easiest things that anyone can organize and all you have to do is set a time and place and let people know that they can go there. That is everything. Compared for example with a long-term project or a very big project like organizing a conference or organizing a (inaudible 57:27) which is also a lot of work because this is really, really easy and really, really fun because people can just – the people make it. They get there, they start talking. It really creates a sense of community and get to know each other and be awesome bi together.

Lynnette: Yeah, I’ve kind of really done a lot with that. Like I said, we meet every month on the third Tuesday of the month just to talk as a group and then we have the Bi Brigade meetings and then we have the Bi Bar and we’ve done some other activities. We have them in Portland, Oregon, in our downtown center, one of those posts where it says, I don’t know, Kiev, 100 miles, you know, Boston, you know how they all point different ways? And they put up a Sochi sign for the Olympics. And we had a bunch of people down there to take pictures in their different colors and their rainbow and underneath the Sochi sign during the Olympics. That was kind of fun. I didn’t make it down there but that was pretty interesting. You could see those pictures on the Q Center Facebook site, right Cameron?

Cameron: Right, you can find all of those photos at PDXQcenter.org and there was also a HuffPost write up about it. It actually got picked up by a few different news outlets. That was a fun, simple way to kind of create visibility and kind of a rare opportunity to stage a protest outside of the Internet.

Lynnette: Also you had an article published too recently also Cameron, right?

Cameron: I did. I wrote about Google’s continued block of the word bisexual and I wrote that for a new social justice emag called EffectMagazine.com and it links to a petition on change.org that is circulating right now. Still over 500 signatures needed to be delivered to Google to have them lift their block of the word bisexual which the bi community has been trying to get them to do since 2009.

Lynnette: So what have you been up to? Anything special besides getting to know yourself?

Will: I haven’t really been getting involved in a whole lot lately. I’ve been struggling with some health problems that have sort of been holding me back from doing too much, so I’ve – yeah, I’ve just been kind of spending a lot of time at home, have been really embracing my gender fluidity since it’s something I’m finally able to express openly. I’ve been working on building up my closet of feminine clothes and makeup and learning how to do all that stuff but I haven’t really gotten out and gotten involved in any projects or anything recently just because like I’ve said I’ve got some health issues I’m trying to get taken care of so I can feel better and actually do stuff.

Shiri: You know, sometimes health care is activism. What you just said about building up a femme wardrobe, that’s great, and while dealing with medical challenges, sometimes just going through the day and you know, being able to care for yourself and live your life sustainably, not putting out more energy than you’re able to give, that can be activism in and of itself.

Lynnette: Absolutely, I agree with that very much.

Will: Yeah, and I have tried to at least remain very active on my social networks and be very public about my experiences and if anything that I’m doing can help anybody else or inspire them to express who they feel like they are, I like to be able to do that, so I’m trying to be very open about my thoughts and what I’m doing to address my gender identity and my dysphoria and things like that.

Lynnette: I wanted to say that to you that I’m pretty proud of you for doing that because you are helping other people by taking them on your journey and showing that bravery and showing them that it’s okay, that it’s very helpful for others who are going through the same struggle that you are. So you know, kudos to you for sharing that with us on Facebook. Wonderful.

Will: Thank you.

Lynnette: We’re going to wrap up the whole show. I know everybody’s probably getting a little tired. I just wanted to have everybody talk about their favorite local event or project that they would like to discuss and links again will be provided. Online, on Facebook, and on the website. So Shiri, let me know what you’ve been up to.

Shiri: Yeah, I’ll tell you a little secret (inaudible; cuts out) award so I just really want to be there to receive this and to be able to meet people and give talks and book signings and connect with everyone. That would be really, really exciting so (inaudible).

Lynnette: It’s really taken off. It’s really doing well. We really want you to come to New York, too. I wish we could all just meet you there but we won’t be able to, but we want you there and we think you’re going to win too. I know I voted for you. So Cameron, we just talked about all the good things you were doing. We’ll provide all the links online, like I said, in the file. Anything else you want to add?

Cameron: I really appreciate you having me on the show. It’s really wonderful to get to speak with you Shiri and Will and I really hope that the BiCast and the Bi Brigade and other little independent projects like this that are kind of unique and different start to take off and get noticed more in the bi community because I think it’s little independent efforts like this that are really going to give a face to bisexuality as a whole.

Lynnette: Thank you, I appreciate that. Will, anything you’d like to plug or anything you’d like to add?

Will: I guess what I’d like to plug here, I already mentioned the center once I think in the first episode, the Raleigh LGBT Center but a little more specific than that is their transgender initiative that may not be as relative to as many of our audience as it is to me personally but going to their [T-time 65:28] supper club event was something really positive for me. It was one of the first times that I went out in public expressing female and it was really helpful for me to know that there was somewhere I could go and be accepted so I’d like to give them another shout out here.

Lynnette: Absolutely. Very empowering. Just make sure you give me that link so I can put it in the little file, OK?

Will: Yeah, absolutely.

Lynnette: And I’m going to, because John’s not here and they have a lot coming up because of Pride, I’m going to go ahead and plug [Center Bi] again because Cameron already took care of Q Center for me. Center Bi in DC is pretty active. They have a happy hour coming up, fundraising for the Pride week and that will be on May 13th at 5:30. They also have Center Bi Brunch. They also have Genderqueer DC. That meets on fourth Tuesdays. They have DC Bi Women monthly meetings. The next one will be on May 13th. And like I said, they are going to be at DC Pride. On June 7th it will be a presence there and I am looking forward to that because I’m hoping to maybe possibly make it but I don’t think it’s going to happen. And John is very active in building the local DC bisexual community groups and centers so I will provide groups for them online also. Shiri, I cannot tell you how happy and excited I am that you agreed to come on. I so much appreciate this.

Shiri: Thank you. I really, really enjoyed this. I don’t get to ramble on about bisexuality so much in my day-to-day life so…

Lynnette: Yeah, we love the rambling on about it ourselves. It’s been really a joy doing this.

Shiri: Yeah, I really love it. It’s my favorite thing ever.

Lynnette: It’s a lot of fun. Anybody else want to add anything? OK, so I’m going to wrap it up guys. I just want to remind everybody. Remember: you are not wrong, you are not broken, you are a human being and you are bisexual. Bisexual bisexual. Yay.

Shiri: Yah.

Will: Yay.

L: Bye everybody!

Will: Bye!

Cameron: B-I.

[Monty Python skit audio]

(end of audio file)