

Burgundy Johnson

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Safety and Identity

As a queer, autistic, non-binary person, my pronouns are they/them/theirs and vi/vir/virs, and I have mixed feelings about my safety on campus. On one hand: people seem to leave me alone. I've been informed that I give off this "don't mess with this person" vibe, which is definitely for the best because I *am* a black belt, but I also know I'm a pacifist who runs from bees. On the other hand: I don't appreciate the way campus police shrugs off my friend and I's concerns over a dark, unlit, area of campus that said friend has definitely been stalked at before, and the nearest blue lights are far, far away in either direction. I have a friend who's had rocks thrown at them while walking along the sidewalk, another friend was targeted by a now-former student who believed LGBTQ+ people should be killed, and others have been blatantly discriminated against by teachers, students, and employees for being queer, presenting as queer, or just wearing a bunch of queer-positive buttons. I absolutely despise it all, but I also know that the campus is steadily getting better.

In classes I have yet to have to have a teacher who, when I actually bothered to tell them my pronouns, did not at least make an honest effort to use them, but I definitely don't tell every teacher. I rarely tell my pit lecturers, I don't remember the last time I told a lab proctor, or a math teacher for that matter, and I'm fairly certain two of my history professors were never told. I tell my majors' professors in English, Biology, and Environmental Studies, with one exception each, and each of those exceptions are because it never came up so it didn't cross my mind.

Because I know some of those reading may be curious: as for my identity, I have a lot of labels, and none of them I think are easy to explain. I'm asexual, so I don't experience sexual attraction, but that doesn't stop me from feeling love in deep emotional bonds or romantic attraction, and I'm quite

sex-positive and I even enjoy sex—which is *not* necessarily the experience of other asexuals—I just don't experience that strange primal need to have sex with someone because I think they're sexually attractive, and honestly sexual attraction sounds a *little* fake (I jest). I'm non-binary/agender, which for me means that I don't feel like I'm male or female, that I'm something else entirely. I *have* a gender, probably, but I feel incredibly neutral, not strongly toward anything in particular, but I also couldn't tell you for sure if it's there or not—like extra dimensions in physics, they exist *in theory* because the math evidences their existence, but we don't know for *sure* if it's there, and we can't directly perceive it regardless. I've grown quite attached to the word “non-binary” because it's sufficiently vague and accurate at the same time. I'm also on the aromantic spectrum. “But Burgundy, you just said that you still experience romantic attraction!” I hear at least one person say, to which I clarify that I specifically consider myself demiandropolyromantic, which is a mouthful of a conglomeration of prefixes that I'll break down: “demi” refers to how I only experience romantic attraction after developing a strong emotional bond, which isn't me being prudish it's how my orientation works and there ain't nothing to be done about that. “Poly” refers to my attraction to multiple genders but not necessarily all, which I choose to use “poly” instead of “bi” or “pan” because while, yes, I'm attracted to all genders, all physiology types, and all presentations, I'm not attracted to all combinations thereof, and I personally feel that describing myself as “pan” or “bi” would be false advertisement. “Andro” I use as a modifier to “poly,” to specify that I have a strong preference for masculine-spectrum identifying types and fellow non-binary folks. In addition to all of those identities, I'm also polyamorous, which for me stems from experiencing deep emotional bonds for many friends and having a hard time deciphering the difference between a deep emotional love and a romantic love that can only stem from that in the first place. Regardless of my own blurry grey line between platonic and romantic feelings, I tell my loved ones that I simply have too much love to give and no single person can possibly contain it all, and that's okay. But most of the time though, I just tell people I'm queer. It's a lot easier. I don't hide it, in part because I

think I look too openly androgynous and gay to fool anyone into thinking I'm cisgender *and* straight, in part because I'm a terrible liar, and because I don't want to, I want to live openly as myself existing as an obnoxious, loud, non-binary person just living their best life, even if the world around me is tense and filled with way too many people who want to hurt my friends and I. I've found a home on campus, and though it's certainly not perfect, and it could still use a *lot* of improvement, I'm going to continue living my best life being me, and I hope that the campus continues to improve, not for me, but for my friends who are magnets for the hate and harassment on campus and amongst the Oshkosh community that seems to ignore me. For their sake, I'm going to keep being me.