

## Jen Yockney

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**PARTICIPANT:** I'm Jen Yockney. I've lived in Manchester since the start of the 1990s. Pretty much since the moment I arrived I've been involved in bisexual community activism. I came out as bisexual when I was living in the South Wales Valleys as a teenager and had that whole thing of I shall go to Manchester and there shall be queers! It shall be wonderful and more acceptable than my school, where I foolishly came out to my entire sixth form one afternoon. When I look back, and this was at the height of Section 28 and the fact that I walked away alive is still a bit of a gosh, that was a bold decision! So I came to Manchester with the belief that I shall go there and there shall be a queer scene. Actually spent my first year at university because of historic reasons which I won't go into now sharing my bedroom with a fundamentalist Muslim in halls of residence, so I was quite a lot deeper in the closet for the first sort of nine months in Manchester than I was the couple of years before hand which was bizarre. But there was lots of things to do, which if you've lived in small towns in the Valleys, there's lots of, let's go out and do all these things, there are concerts that you can actually get to, it's amazing. I did all of that for a bit and then in my second year it was, okay, I'm going to do something about the queer thing and went out and found my university LGB society and went out onto the gay scene and found fairly rapidly that it was harder being out as bisexual in the Manchester gay scene than it was in a small town in the Welsh valleys at the end of the eighties which is ridiculous but tragically true. You'd go to places, you'd get involved in conversation with people, oh yes, I was bisexual until I came out properly. There's not really such a thing as a bisexual, you're just greedy, and a whole slew of resources, and I remember I got a copy of the book Young, Gay and Proud as one of those, I shall help myself to be more confident, and I found it on my bookshelf again a couple of months ago and there's a post-it note on the page that mentions bisexuality, out of a hundred and fifty odd pages about how to be a confidently out young queer. The page about bisexuality says, I forget the exact wording, but it's along the lines of some people know that they are gay or lesbian, some people know that they are heterosexual, some people are confused about their orientation and call themselves bisexual while they work out who they're really interested in. I got a post-it note because that was the most positive bisexual representation that I could find in 1991 and this is the kind of thing that makes you go, okay I'm going to have to get up off my backside and make something happen, because clearly the idea that you can just walk into a space and there will be someone that is supportive wasn't what I was finding.

[00:02:49]

**INTERVIEWER:** Jen, one second, can I just move your mic? [Adjusts mic]

[00:03:44]

**INTERVIEWER:** So yeah, keep going sorry, I haven't stopped.

**PARTICIPANT:** That's okay, I'm aware most of this is just ramble as I just get comfortably into the stuff, stuff and things.

**INTERVIEWER:** It's really good.

**PARTICIPANT:** Okay, fair enough. In that sense I don't really know quite what you want. So where was I? I was at about 1992 there. Let's have a bit of coffee.

**INTERVIEWER:** You were talking about that being the only positive bisexual representation.

**PARTICIPANT:** Yeah, actually the complete whack. I joined the university LGB society about the time that I started coming out as trans and did not talk about my sexual orientation because there was the bisexual and I saw what it was like for the bisexual and it wasn't worth having that conversation, you know. I had, you know, there needs to be something for bisexual people and went away, volunteered for a youth project in Cardiff for a bit, built up some skills, came back, walked into the Alt Lesbian and Gay Centre on Sidney Street in December 1994. I'd done a few bits of volunteering elsewhere but, with a right, there needs to be a bisexual thing, I'm going to find out if there is any space and we can make a bisexual space happen and fortunately there was a little poster by reception saying new group for bisexual people, just formed, Biphoria. I was like, yes, thank god it exists, there are other bisexuals, and they've thought of a name! These days for Google optimisation you just call anything Manchester Bisexual Group, but in those days it was about having creative, memorable, catchy names for things, so there was a name, there are some others. That gave me some more allies, some people to bitch about these things with and through that we wound up a few years later doing a very small run of bisexual safer sex packs which were, I wish I could find them actually, I was rummaging in my crates of old stuff because I try not to throw anything away, which is a terrible hoarding trait that I got from my mum, but they were Safer Bisexy, they had fruit on the front and they were little things that were really just a folded sheet of A4 with some really sketchy information about safer sex, because we weren't trained or anything. It was more pointing people at other bisexual resources that were out there and in them you got a regular condom, a flavoured condom, a sachet of lube, and sticker chewing gum, because quite often if you are hoping to have sex with someone then the, oh god, what have I eaten and drunk this evening, I need to take this off because they might kiss me, or oh gosh, I've just done interesting things with someone and I could really do with getting the taste out of my mouth before I go and talk to my mum or whatever, so that seemed like a good extra thing to put in there. We knew of the existence of dental dams but we also knew places that we could scab some condoms but getting hold of dental dams is still now kind of gold dust in comparison and certainly back then it was so right if we found several hundred pounds, how much are we doing this for? We've got about a fiver. Yeah, let's not have dental dams, that's a compromise we'll just have to make. They also I remember that we'd got, off the back of the fact that I was really into zine culture, when you buy comics they come in little plastic bags that are ten inches by seven inches or so and we'd found where you could buy those in bulk really cheap and they came in one of those so all of the bits didn't fall out all over the place. But that was the only actually bisexual-inclusive, bisexual representing resource that I saw in the nineties. We would, perhaps a little bit dry humour, cynically joke about it as very simple, if you're bisexual you're meant to get the straight leaflet and the gay leaflet and read them both and assemble all of that information into one in your mind, which

seems to me such a stupid way of doing sex education and to impart those kinds of messages, because for a start, lots of people will kind of discover that there's this person and I'm kind of drunk and let's go with this and have not received any safer sex messages because it's not the gender that they were expecting to do things with and also so many people's, if you like, self-identity labels and behaviour don't match up.

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**PARTICIPANT [continued]:** There was that research from YouGov in about 2013, that asked under-25-year-olds to put themselves on the Kinsey scale, nought to six, from totally straight to totally gay, very gender-binary, but hey, let's roll with it. About forty-nine per cent of them wouldn't put themselves at zero or at six but somewhere in that continuum in between. But then they asked the interview respondents, how would you describe your sexuality? And two per cent of them said they were bisexual. And although as a bisexual I want clear representation, for that other forty-seven per cent who aren't going to pick something up because it says, hello, are you a bisexual? We have information that's exclusively for you about the disgusting things that bisexuals do, wow! What are you like? You want something that reaches all the rest of the forty-seven per cent. You want them to be equipped so that whatever life brings along to them they have that kind of background information, at Biphoria, because Biphoria is still going now, it's the oldest bisexual project in the country now. About two years ago we had someone come along and go, I've absorbed all these safer sex messages, I know what I'm meant to do with this gender here because that's who I always thought I would be having sex with and now I'm really having fun with these people and I'm really hoping something happens with these people and I have no idea what's good, what's bad, what's a bit risky, what my safe level of choice is and that sort of thing. If we went for an almost, assume everyone is bisexual approach to education, to the resources, the organisations, like Foundation, put out there, you'd equip people in a way that they might need for what life might bring, rather than who you've decided they are. Ask me another question, because I'm all out of words.

[00:10:25]

**INTERVIEWER 2:** I was going to ask, what do you think the specific differences are there between gay people and bisexual people, lesbian people and bisexual people, what are the specific resources that bisexuals need and why is it different to the gay community because I think that's a lot of people wouldn't really know.

**PARTICIPANT:** I'm going to give my brain a moment to warm up on that one if I may, because that's a big chunky sort of a question.

**INTERVIEWER 2:** We can come back to it.

**PARTICIPANT:** If we could come back to it, I don't know, do you want me to talk about some of the stuff I've brought with me, because that could lead then to some of that stuff. We did Safer Bisexy, back in about 1997 or something and that was the only bi-specific health thing that I'd seen as a friendly resource but we'd also hooked up with a national organisation called Bisexual Action on Sexual Health which was a

twelve-month long peer education project that got some funding from some health education authority England or something like that. They went out and did a peer education programme, trained people from local bisexual groups to deliver education that was funded out of tackling HIV budgets but was nonetheless a broader set of things. I remember when it happened in Manchester, the Manchester workshop was on Valentine's Day 1996. I know because I moved house that day and I went to this trading thing and when I went home my partner wasn't there because she'd been taken into hospital and this was the whole, wow, this is a day that I'm really going to remember as a Valentine's Day feeling about it, but that was doing a two, two and a half hour workshop for people who ran, or attended, groups like Biphoria and they'd had an away weekend where trained people to go out and do it at about twenty or thirty different bisexual groups around the country so I think it's kind of interesting to look at that as there was clearly this brief moment where, okay, bisexuals exist and they're real and there should be some money spent on doing something. The only things that I'd really seen from it were, apart from in the bisexual press, were going to the national bisexual conference, BiCon, back in 1996 at the end of the project and going to the most bitter workshop discussion I have ever been to, reflecting on twelve months, what they had and hadn't done with the money and it almost put me off all kinds of funded work for a very long time because of course, because there had been nothing funded to do work with bisexual people and bisexual people's sex and sexual health needs, when you then tell people that there is some money, they all think that that money is going to do whatever their particular pet issue is and of course you cannot, let's say you have ten thousand pounds, you can only spend the ten thousand pounds once, you can't spend it twenty times over on all the different things that people would love to see. I think there's an interesting thing that that ties into what I was saying about biphobia on the gay scene that bisexual people's needs have tended to be hidden and absorbed into what do we need for lesbians and gay men, all the way through the nineties and early noughties, they've changed those sorts of things, actually separating out, and you need this law for bisexuals wasn't really a real thing. When you had a discriminatory age of consent, that age of consent didn't stop and check, so aha, I see that you are a man having sex with other men, are you also interested in women? It just said, okay, you have done this and therefore has this age of consent or this is illegal or whatever. Section 28 didn't... although we enjoyed at the time suggesting that if you can't tell people that homosexuality is a natural thing, can't you just tell that everyone's bisexual and get the information out that way? Of course you couldn't. Actually they have one of those things that I had when I first came out onto the scene after the Section 28 battles that some of the Section 28 campaigns explicitly had we will not have bisexuals allowed to attend our meetings or be allowed to attend our campaign because they have heterosexual privilege. Heterosexual privilege is this brilliant idea that bisexuals, because sometimes they can be read as heterosexual, therefore, life is gilded and lovely and therefore they never experience homophobia.

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**PARTICIPANT [continued]:** Or indeed biphobia. There are so many ways in which that's nonsense. One of the ways in which I enjoy reflecting on how it's nonsense is the idea that we have quite clearly in all of the business case for tackling homophobia, you know, in the workplace, has taken as accepted the idea that if you are living with one hand tied behind your back you are not as efficient a worker. If

you are always having to watch what you say because people think that you are straight and you might slip up and reveal that you are a lesbian or reveal that you're gay then you are not as effective a worker and if you remove that stress from people's lives it will stop having those effects on their mental healths and they will be better workers, so it's good. Here is your business case. What's weird about the idea that bisexuals have heterosexual privilege is that almost, from that way of looking at the world, instead of a gay closet that you open and step out of into the world, what you have is two closets. A gay closet and a straight closet with doors that lead you from one into the other so you can either be spending your life being read as heterosexual with this hand tied behind your back or being read as gay or lesbian with this hand being tied behind your back and yet somehow that means that everything's a walk in the park and shiny rather than different experiences of having to self-censor, deny who you are. If you are always in same-sex relationships or always looking for same-sex relationships, through the eighties, nineties, noughties, there were specific bits, Canal Street was where you went, that was where all your friends would be happy socialising. Actually if your relationships jump about between different genders and suddenly this group of friends doesn't want to go out with me anymore because of weird feels comfortable, this group of friends don't want to know me because I've betrayed the cause because I'm not gay any more or vice versa. The bisexual experience I would say, almost, makes you more aware of that kind of social homophobia, because you don't spend all of your life self-edited in exactly the same way so you become more aware of the way that you self-edit in different situations in your life and that takes us to the thing of so are how things different from bisexuals and I'm going to get you to remind me a little bit of the question so as to help focus my thoughts even though that's cruel because you've clearly forgotten it almost as hard as I have now.

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**INTERVIEWER 2:** I think it was what are the specific things bisexuals need that gay and lesbian people won't need, or same-sex attracted people won't need?

**PARTICIPANT:** Thank you. In that sense we need the same things, we need whoever you're in a relationship with or whoever you're going oh wouldn't it be nice if I was in a relationship with, to be as okay regardless. But being bisexual brings with it certain added little things, I always describe biphobia as coming in four different flavours, because there's the biphobia that's very similar to homophobia that is straight society going ooh, don't like that sort of thing, there's the biphobia that comes from the gay community that says, ew, that says I was bisexual until I came out properly, that says we don't want that sort of thing going on in our bar because I find that sort of thing disgusting and I came here to get away from it and that sort of thing, so there's a biphobia that's kind of like heterophobia. There's a biphobia that's institutional, that's in how our organisations work. I look at for example, someone came to us who had got in touch with an LGBT domestic violence project. I'm not going to say which one, there are only a few but hey, it doesn't tell you exactly which one. But they'd been in touch because they were experiencing biphobia from their partner but their partner was straight and so they were told we're not here to support you, you need to go to a mainstream service because this isn't about an LGBT relationship. Now if it's about your experience of biphobia, that's surely part of what your organisation that's saying it's there to help people experiencing biphobia,

homophobia and transphobia, that's part of your mission, to me, clearly, other people's mileage might vary, I have a very strong, but you know. In the way that a lot of LGBT people's projects have worked for historically understandable reasons and this isn't a total condemnation, but a lot of projects have done we're going to work specifically with men on this and specifically with women on this, that has a marginalising effect on bisexual people, because okay, I can go along to this bisexual women's thing but if I mention I have a husband, are they all going to assume I must be very sad about that and want to get out of the marriage as quickly as possible or is it going to make me the person who can't bring their partner along to the socials because we go to a women-only bar after our stuff. It's almost, on the ticket it says you're welcome, but when you look at the small print it says, not so much. The idea can you just bring your gay side - I don't have a gay side, I can't be cut open down the middle and this side of you, it's right up there with are you bisexual enough you must be fifty-fifty? No I see bisexuality, there's a lovely definition that bisexual index have as bisexuality like the English Channel, you can be anywhere between Calais and Dover and you're still very wet. Technically you might, yes, you might be in a little area, you're standing on the beach and depending on the time of day you're wet or dry, but fundamentally there's this great wide space where you're bisexual enough, bisexual enough for me. Yet you'll face that, you clearly have a preference and therefore that's the only thing you like. I have a definite preference when it comes to would I like mashed potato or would I like ice cream? I would definitely pick ice cream as being a course of a meal more out of the two. That doesn't mean I hate mash, that doesn't mean that I sometimes don't go mmm mash! But somehow society wants us to believe that you having a preference is the same as having an absolute hatred of the other and perpetual desire for the one, and there are occasions on which I haven't wanted to eat ice cream... probably.

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**INTERVIEWER 2:** I like that, I like it being fluid and being its own thing, it's not red, it's not blue, it's purple, purple's a colour.

**PARTICIPANT:** I like that but I'm always frustrated with fluid with bisexual, because to me there's this thing where we always talk about fluidity, almost to avoid saying the B-word. My sexuality is fluid, oh okay, that's fine, but labels! The reason that we are different from snails is that we have this really rich language that's enabled us to put together concepts to explain to each other how we could build a rocket to get to the moon. Labels are marvellous things, the negativity that people choose to put onto those labels, oh you're bisexual, therefore you're greedy, therefore you're only saying this for attention, therefore none of this is real - those aren't the label, those are a whole load of values that society around us has put onto that label, but the label itself, when I came out to my sister and my sister, as bisexual, and my sister said me too, if I had to sit there and had to hear there's this thing, I sort of, when I experience tingly sensations that I cannot give a label to about other people, sometimes the people are a bit sort of shaped a bit, and kind of, no! Men, women, other people, young, bisexual. Labels are blooming marvellous things that allow us to explain what the hell we're on about to each other. I am a passionate defender, I'm not a passionate advocate that we should force labels onto other people. If you're not ready, if you have, when I'm asked to put myself on that old Kinsey line from nought to six, I'm a five point ninety-nine, technically every now and then happens,

and people will say to me, well in that case clearly that's the wrong label for you, bisexual is in the middle. No, that's the label that I feel comfortable with, that's the label that encapsulates the range of experiences of attraction that I have. Even if sometimes it might be that this week the only time that I experience that particular attraction was when I was watching an episode of Buffy. Nonetheless, that's where you are but in terms of are labels useful, yeah, both for communicating to other people and sometimes for explaining to yourself, because when you are in that state of I don't understand what this is, this isn't the attraction or whatever else this is when you're working out your gender, or your mental health issues, sometimes having a label, or having a word that you can stick onto something is so powerful. It's where I have a bit of jealousy of people twenty years younger than me who have grown up with the internet, grown up with Tumblr. When I was working out my head about being genderqueer, and the only thing that I had in terms of trans materials was a copy of the *Transsexual Empire*, a book written in the 1970s that explains that male to female transsexuals are the agents of the heteropatriarchy sent to destroy feminism from within and female to male transsexuals are lesbians who have been deliberately manipulated by doctors into believing that they must be men so that the scourge of homosexuality can be removed from society, that, it was really hard. I've got long tracts of paper as a dole-y in the early nineties where I tried to explain what the hell this thing was that I could now just collapse down into one or two words because we have labels. Labels are brilliant. That was a good ramble.

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**INTERVIEWER 2:** I would actually like to go off of that about genderqueerness, this, just from my experience as a bisexual woman, today because you have increasing numbers of people who don't adhere to the gender binary, who now have the words to describe themselves as non-binary and genderqueer but a lot of people don't, or have a bad idea about bisexuality now with that bi part where they think you're only attracted to men and women and there's no space. Have you found that has shaped your more modern experiences?

**PARTICIPANT:** It does. There's almost a generational divide in bisexual activism. If I go back between five and ten years ago maybe I felt that we lost an awful lot of energy as a movement because we got into this flame war amongst people who were basically saying the same thing but fighting really hard over what the right word for it was. That's calmed down, we've learnt to rub up against each other a bit better but there was a long time, what I think of as the Tumblr wars of bisexual, bi means two! Obviously part of my response to this is because of the generation that I'm from and that codes how you feel about language and so on, I accept that I am a product of growing up in the South Wales Valleys in the 1980s, not growing up on the internet in the noughties. There are so many things that I find wrong with it, the idea that the bi is binary and is therefore transphobic comes from academics who were not bi, who were not trans, who were creating their own straw men kind of figures that if you were to instead turn around and look at what was there in the bisexual community at that time. The reason, a big part of the reason I wound up as a bisexual activist, I went to bi spaces and gender, yeah, whatevs. I went to trans spaces and they were actually much more strict, much more prescriptive about gender, because for a lot of people if you are small c conservative trans in your experience, if you are doing the hundred yard dash from oh I was raised to be

female, I want everyone to know that I am male, I will try and get whatever surgery to pass as quickly as I can, rewrite my childhood so as not to throw up the obvious thing that codes me as trans to people. Then complicated, all the stuff that came along, about genderqueer and non-binary and so on, is just so alien to what you're about and that back in the early nineties, the trans spaces were much more small c conservative and binary than the bi spaces, perversely, when you might now assume trans spaces were going to be. So if you went to bi spaces, most probably, out of the last twenty years, somewhere between most and let's call it fifty per cent then, of bi organising and events and so on in the UK could not have happened without trans and genderqueer people being part of making it happen, so the idea that these were transphobic spaces to anything like the degree that lesbian and gay spaces were, just no, because they wouldn't have existed. There's that level of, but the actual who do people mix with, almost who's your dating pool, if your gender is kind of complicated then people who have a really simple or strict binary sexuality really aren't your dating pool and the bisexual community is and the natural confluence between those two, well. But also linguistically I find it so frustrating because it reduces itself into an argument of, okay so, historically, this is how the word evolved and that's not how we see the world any more so we cannot possibly use that word. Now we're sitting here in December and if I asked you what the date was and to write it down as a set of numbers, you would probably write something like 15.12.2017. Dec 10, what do you mean it isn't the tenth month of the year, how are you still calling it December when you think that it's the twelfth month of the year? Are strawberries made of straw because they say straw on the front?

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**PARTICIPANT [continued]:** And also when it comes to this idea of bi must mean two, which yes, similar gendered and other gendered is one of the ways that that gets answered back to, but there's an enormously transphobic thing, bisexuals are transphobic because bi is binary and means two, then always being described as that way as a follow through of so you must mean cis men and cis women. Because what priority of who is acceptable and attractive does that say about your understanding of society? Because you're saying if you're attracted to two gendered groupings in society obviously they'd be the cis ones. Once that penny dropped I was like, this whole bi is binary thing has more transphobia in it than that transphobia it's accusing the bisexuals of. These days we use a lot of different labels about things and people will sometimes describe themselves as bi plus or whatever but going back, the first time I went to a BiCon in the mid-nineties was the first time that I met someone who used the word pansexual and it was all just, yeah, this is part of the big bisexual umbrella and we put bisexual on the leaflets because that's the word that most people know. I came to Manchester when I was eighteen and I was sweet eighteen and never been kissed. I'd come out aged sixteen to all of my sixth form and there was that tacit level of acceptance where none of us being ostentatiously biphobic or homophobic to you which looking back was amazing. I grew up in a school that had two schools and I'd switched schools at sixteen, part of coming out was just that sense of I've got nothing to lose, I've got no friends here I'm going to lose, this thing had bubbled up to the surface in my head the summer I turned sixteen. Prior to which I'd done that thing of being beautifully in the closet whilst so obviously not in the closet to anyone outside. As Section 28 went through into law I would cut out things from the newspapers about Section 28 and stick them on my

bedroom wall because as a passionate liberal I was interested in this as a social justice issue. I look back and I was barely kidding myself, was I? But there we go. I think a mixture of things. At that point I hadn't started to deal with all the gender stuff, that was still firmly in the box and I knew if I got into a relationship some stuff was going to start exploding that I wouldn't know how to stop and that makes you go, okay, yeah, that stuff would all be nice, but can't cope. Also, being the token bisexual somewhere where everyone was very straight, yeah, there was nodding acceptance but in the way one of friends back then, Nicola, who was the most, shall we say gay-positive, or one of the two or three gay-positive people in my sixth form, nonetheless at that time there was the Eastenders same sex kiss and the next day we all came into school and she sat there and she explained how I think it's perfectly acceptable that people do that sort of thing but they shouldn't show it on television because children might see. It's like, you are in my great spectrum of people I think this is a little bit risky to people who I think this is safe, you are right up there as my most queer positive person that I have in my life right now and this sort of thing shouldn't be on television because it'll give children ideas. Okay. I came to Manchester and as I say, spent a year not doing anything about my sexuality, because life had rolled the dice a little bit differently. Then came out onto the queer scene, was fairly quickly open about being bisexual, as I remember it. It's a little bit strange trying to think back. Almost at that level you don't often have that conversation, if you're in a space that's notionally gay space then we are all gay until someone sticks out like a sore thumb. I was just about to try twenty-one when I got my first kiss which fantastic piece of [missed] as someone who had partly come to Manchester because of the whole Madchester, Factory Records, New Order, all of that kind of cultural thing, it was just after Factory Records had closed down and their old record company headquarters had turned into a club, Paradise Factory, which in those days was gay all week and slowly slid into being less gay on week nights as they tried to make a profit. My first kiss was on a Tuesday night in what would have been the board room at the top of Factory Records headquarters with a guy, it went on for about twenty minutes and our friends were throwing things at us to get us to stop by the end of it.

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**PARTICIPANT [continued]:** Not hard, not chairs. Cushions. Nonetheless I had a lot of snogging catching up to do, someone has said yes, you're not getting away. [happy noises] Somebody kissed me, it can happen! You bounce your way home. That was still very much a one off and sexuality was still very much a scary complicated thing and also at that point I was, I'd just started coming out as trans and all the stuff around that just then, for people who have a binary sexuality that's quite a complicated and if they might have been interested puts them off kind of thing, I guess. Especially so back then. Gosh. Brutal information. I lost my virginity when I was twenty-one. A friend came, slept over, we shared a bed and about halfway through the night I noticed they were humping my leg. Ooh! Maybe there's more to this than I realised, how do I feel about that? Let's go with it. That turned into a two-and-a-half-year relationship. It was with someone who mildly identified as bisexual in a sort of bi stroke lesbian kind of mish mash place. From there I had a series of small short-lived relationships where everything was monogamous and six weeks or six months. Mostly I would say over the years that most of my relationships have been with cis women then with people of assorted trans identities and then there have been a couple of cis guys who made the grade, or whatever, along the

way. When I was twenty-nine I had my first orgasm, of having sex with someone and it did the thing and suddenly how keen everyone else was on sex made a lot more sense than it had up until that point. Ah it's very nice, but it's about being with someone and the energy and if they've come, that's really exciting. Jesus, that's what it feels like! Yeah, that's good, I'm coming back for more of this. At about that time I started having non-monogamous relationships, dating people who were poly. I don't think the two facts were related, I think it was more where my head was in self-acceptance and things than oh gosh I always needed to be in multiple relationships, then it would be okay, or anything like that. From there onwards pretty much all the time I've been dating at least two people. Right now I'm in gosh, a couple of long term relationships that have been going on for the order of ten years and one more recent that's been going on for three years. There's never really been casual sex in my life. The odd time where things like have happened tend to end in, that wasn't good, the person seemed okay with trans stuff and afterwards you go, yeah, then halfway through sex they said this and derailing things. If your gender identity at that point is very female then part way through going down on you someone looks at you and says this is very good and you know what else I want to do, I really want to go down on a girl sometime because I've never managed to do that. It really derails your brain from gosh, this is exciting. I've run out of things that I'm going to say on this I think. I'm waffling too badly for my own good so this is a wave at the camera to reinforce that you definitely want to edit this bit a little. I guess the other thing with that is that, is there anything in safer sex types things that that relates to or anything? Not a lot, I guess. Because of tending to be in relationships with people that you always get to know before hand, you sort of get to know what their sexual politics is, I think that makes it a lot easier in the kind of what are your safer sex choices negotiations is compared to I've had sex with someone I've had sex with once in my life, it was weird. The complete lack of any kind of conversational dimension, it's just so far removed from what's been good and safe and normal. I have no idea, it might well be my phone.

[00:40:17]

**INTERVIEWER:** It's mine.

[Break]

[00:40:28]

**INTERVIEWER 2:** Actually in terms of safe sex stuff, I think that's a really interesting thing to talk about in terms of bisexuality and especially bisexual women because safe sex thinks lesbians are a low risk group and so you don't the same amount of energy being expended on the lesbian community and I think that's [missed] around bisexual women as well.

**PARTICIPANT:** Very. If we were to draw, I often do a diagram when I'm talking about bisexual stuff with people of the pyramid of power and money in the LGBT community because you can draw a nice triangle and make the top more than half of your triangle have a big G in it and then you have a little strand across here with an L and then you have a B, a T and a Q jostling against each other at the bottom of that pyramid and then you can open up that idea a little more at the side of that pyramid

by having race and class and income and things like that which will also affect how much respect, credibility, money is being spent on your sexual health, on support services for you, that sort of thing and in Manchester we had Healthy Gay Manchester and that sort of thing, nationally you had the Chaps Project and stuff like that doing stuff that was interestingly people a little bit older than me who were around for stuff in the eighties where I was a little bit busy going to school and learning. I went to school in Wales so I learnt things like history which consists entirely of people called Llewellyn. Back in the eighties one of the factors in responding to the HIV crisis was how to get politicians to treat this as a serious risk because there were no votes in gays in the 1980s and one of those things was using bisexual men as a stick and saying that there are lots of secretly bisexual men out there. They are going to go out have sex with gay men, who all have HIV and they are going to come home to their nice little twin set [missed], wife in Tunbridge Wells and she is going to get HIV because of her disgusting wayward bisexual husband and therefore this is a threat to respectable heterosexual people and so the government needs to act. I think we are, obviously I am painting that in bold primary colours but I think we are still living to some degree with the consequences of that today. If you turn to a Sun agony aunt page or that kind of thing and had two letters, one of them going I've just discovered that my wife is bisexual and another saying I've just discovered that my husband is bisexual from happy, I've always assumed they were straight, people, the response that you will get to oh your wife is bisexual, oh well that mean that she wants to experiment versus, oh your husband's bisexual? Well you need to be worried because he's going to give you something. It's one of those things where, I like doing lots of combined bisexual activism, but there are some strongly gendered experiences in how sexuality responds to you being bi. For that power pyramid lots of money on gay men's sexual health partly driven along by the threat of the bisexuals and then very little for lesbians because of the relative risks of transmission of different things and then bisexuals just weren't making it onto that kind of agenda. Going back to the theory of you will pick up the gay leaflet, you will pick up the straight leaflet and educate yourself about both. I've lost where the question was going and where I was going to go with it so what I'm going to say is maybe if I talk about these a little bit?

[00:44:31]

**INTERVIEWER 2:** Yeah.

**PARTICIPANT:** These are some leaflets which I'm sure there will be a camera angle to pan onto - stop making the camera look at my belly, I know I'm fat! It's okay, I did bring along a couple of resources that I thought might be interesting because there's been so little that address bisexual needs. This, what is the more recent of the two actually, it's just over ten-years-old. I found this in Glasgow in 2006. BiCon, which is the annual bisexual conference convention thing, it's only been going since 1984, we haven't agreed whether it's a conference or a convention yet, we'll get back to you on that was the first time that I saw something produced by a health education authority specifically aimed at bisexuals as here is information about sex and relationships for you. I'm sure the camera may do some available scan over it for cutting and edited but this is about thirty-two, forty or so pages of stuff about what, you know, what are symptoms of sexual diseases, how you might negotiate safer sex, how you can get access to emergency contraception and stuff like that, that does not make any

assumptions about you must be gay or you must be straight. It's black and white but it is very stylish considering it's produced on the best they could get out of a cheap print budget. I shall hold that closer to the camera instead rather than holding it off away to myself.

[00:46:10]

**INTERVIEWER:** That's great.

**PARTICIPANT:** That seemed to only be given out in Scotland, funded through some of the money that the Scottish Parliament put towards LGBT projects, so that was quite an ooh, if you can persuade the politicians to do things, maybe bisexuals can be part of this agenda as well rather than purely being a threat. The other thing that I saw that was very bisexual-inclusive, without ever being this is a bisexual resource, which is I think is better, because I think if you put bi on something people will go, oh I'm not one of them or oh, I don't want to be seen picking that up, was something we actually got from the South Manchester NHS Trust, people, whatever they were called at that particular time, in 2004, which we gave away to everyone who came to BiCon which was in Manchester that year and it's this shiny little thing called Sexpert. I love this, it's just such a beautiful resource compared to so many things I saw, certainly anything the bisexual community could have done at the time. There was no way we could have done anything like this because we were cheaply photocopying things in black and white and this, if I take-

[00:47:26]

**INTERVIEWER 2:** Can you show us your favourite?

**PARTICIPANT:** Ooh gosh, my favourite?

**INTERVIEWER 2:** Arrangement?

**PARTICIPANT:** Yeah, I think probably my favourite arrangements for this, there are a couple of them, and I'm now flicking through. They did a poster version of it and I've still got the poster on my office wall. I love the poster, it's bold and inclusive, it's got male, male-male, female-female, pairings represented through, kind of like Barbie dolls so although it's very clear what's meant to be going on it couldn't be accused of breaching sort of obscenity, this is showing genitals, whatever, because they're dolls, they have perfectly smooth plastic genitals that are entirely not there but when I look at things like this, let's get it on some more, of being more creative and not just having missionary position sex. To me this is beautiful because this was a young people's resource, but we gave it to people who were sixty or seventy just as readily, because it's still the same arrangement of parts and arms and legs and I can't do that because I've got an arm that's in the way, regardless of how old you are. It didn't say this is what to do if you're straight, it didn't say this is what to do if you're gay, it didn't have any of those things, it just represented all the different things that you might find yourself doing in a gently educative and fun, the fact that these sort of things are bright colours are exciting and engaging when I compare it to and I say this to love of the Glasgow leaflet, when I compare it to something that's got images like that. It's just not quite making you go, oh this is fun, I want to read it

in the same sort of way and like I said, totally not meaning as a criticism of the people who made something happen that had never happened before but when you put that up against it you kind of think aah! Ah this is. Despite the fact that to me this is such a beautiful engaging inclusive resource it got an awful lot of stick thrown at the NHS Trust at the time and they were clearly quite grateful that we deliberately sent feedback to people higher up the chain than them saying how popular it had been with people because without it being a bisexual resource, bisexual people saw all the aspects of themselves reflected in one thing rather than feeling like you kind of a disjointed person split into separate segments of who you are. Those are things that have made me really happy and I haven't seen very much else like them, which when you consider both of those are over ten years old, is kind of terrifying. When I look for equivalent things with due apologies, we're on an LGBT Foundation thing and I'm going to critique it, the LGBT Foundation has a lovely booklet about sex with women, or sex for women who are attracted to women or possibly other genders called Beating About The Bush. When you go to the page in it that talks about what you might do with other people. I'm going to restart that because they've gone to have a sneeze, I thought possibly they were running over to grab a copy and put it in my hand. That's [missed]. It's called Beating About the Bush. It's got nine pages of ways you might have sex with another women. Fantastic. But begins by explaining that if you're thinking of, some people who are reading this may be having sex with people of other genders and if you're thinking of having sex with a man then see the section entitled or you're thinking about having sex with a person who has a penis then see under the section heading Love Hurts. I thought, that's so not written by a bisexual. Yummy yummy ways to have sex, ooh, nasty painful ways to have sex. That's going back to wanting all of my experiences in there, I want all of my experiences in a way that makes them sound like they could all be good.

**INTERVIEWER 1:** Sorry.

[00:51:44]

**PARTICIPANT:** That's okay, these things happen. I'm just impressed that it's you doing it and not me.

**INTERVIEWER 2:** I think... so it's kind of jumping way back but could I ask you about coming to terms with your sexuality because I think the narratives that we see in media are very much, I'm a girl, but I don't look at boys, I only look at girls, or vice versa, and when you're bisexual it's much more confusing, because you're like, but that girl! And that boy! So could you talk about that a little bit?

[00:52:21]

**PARTICIPANT:** Yeah, working out you're bisexual, I'm going to relate my story but also a little bit of some other stories because I've run Biphoria for twenty years so every month for the last twenty months I have met at least one, often three or four new bisexuals, often sharing some of these stories, so I've absorbed thousands, by now, tales, of how you've worked out who you were and what it all meant. For me of course, it's complicated because all the gender stuff smooshes around as well and that kind of makes it a more complicated narrative and sometimes people will come up to me and say, we want a bisexual speaker to talk about this. My story there may

be more the level 201 rather than the 101 for the people that you're going to be talking to. For me I look back and I remember that when I was about twelve I was aware that I was attracted to both boys and girls. It was the 1980s and we were in the South Wales coalfield, we could only afford two genders in those days. I apologise to the younger viewers who live in more exciting and rich world and we could afford two genders and they were both quite interesting. Being aware that I definitely shouldn't say anything about and it's interesting that I have to conclude that that's from the amount of social homophobia and homophobia in the home that I was exposed to and I had a family where I would later work out that most of us were bisexual but my father was the kind of person who compromises on the political principles to merely vote BNP despite that they're a bunch of liberal wash outs who were far too kind to the blacks and the queers. There was a strong pressure at home that this is something I'm not going to say anything about so a mixture of that and the fact that that's just how the world was in the 1980s. I look back at things that were hysterical comedy back then and go, god, was that funny then? In fact people, we would now look back on as person who were right [missed] writers, how we talked about the world was just so different. I mean, take say, Blackadder. Incredibly popular, very funny comedy programme, you'd now look at it and go, yeah, some of those bits of homophobia in there you really wouldn't get even the same writers writings those things today but it was the 1980s and it was a different kind of a world. For me there was, all of that was mixed up in the burgeoning stuff about my gender identity going on underneath as well and it was very, stuff all of this back down into a box. Then I came out. Came onto the Manchester gay scene. I think I identified for a while when I was first around the Manchester scene was less strongly identifying as bisexual and was kind of switching label every few months in response to peer pressure. I remember someone who was, bless him, he was a lovely boy, and he was well-intentioned, but he tried to explain being bi and trans to me as, what you're saying is you're a gay man whose ambition is to become a lesbian. I think as I remember I rolled with it as a description for a little while on the grounds that it's clearly meant well even though it erases every bit. Okay, that's the most you can understand, you're the president of the LGB society at the university at the time. At the top end of people who you could have a conversation with in a bar about gender and sexuality in my social sphere and it wasn't really until I'd got spaces like Biphoria and had found things like BiCross which was the magazine before Bi Community News and things like that that I was back to solidly and securely having this label of choice and persistently articulating it back at people who would try and put me into one or another of the handier boxes that they felt fit people more. It's interesting talking to people who come along to Biphoria so often that there's a story of, well I knew that I felt like this about boys and I knew that I felt like this about girls but I just thought that everyone must feel like that and that this thing isn't real and almost at the point where you talk to someone in depth enough in the late night drunken enough conversation that you realise that no no, they've really never ever felt about men that way or never felt that way about women that this is different. That then has a whole, and do I tell the person who has just said to me that they've never felt like that about women? Do I go and carry on with this conversation? Do I just shut up? How do I in a society that was so gay and straight, back in the nineties you had bars on Canal Street would do a question as you tried to go in of an evening if you were going to Poptastic or Manto or whatever, of this is a gay bar. Are you gay?

[00:57:43]

**PARTICIPANT [continued]:** They would allow in some number of straight people but then hereon we're just gay. Several of them, Manto, Hollywood Show Bar, Poptastic, Essential, places like that, had no bisexuals door policies. If you said you were bisexual would say, this is a gay bar, go away. In slightly more Friday night terms than that. In my peer group, social circle, there was an understanding of okay, you're going to wherever you're going to on a Friday night. You pair up in couples to go in that look as those they're similarly gendered so the bouncers will raise less eyebrows and then once you're inside... I always thought the door policy at Poptastic particularly was entertaining because of how much more bisexual it was inside than the bouncers seemed to believe was the case and that sort of thing, technically that came to an end in 2005 or so with the Goods and Services Act, of course what it really did was to mutate into it's members tonight and things like that rather than the more explicit biphobia you could get on doors. In turn that then gave you a reinforcing message of I shouldn't talk about being bisexual whilst I'm here, this is a part of myself that I need to almost have a straight life over here and a gay life over here in terms of how I live which is so frustrating. All around us you had organisations that were lesbian and gay in their names. All their propaganda, all those types of things. I remember one of the first conversations we had at Bisexual Action which was a campaigning group for bisexuals in Manchester in the 1990s was about Stonewall because they'd just sent some stuff that we'd picked up at the Lesbian and Gay Centre that was really good about lesbians and gays all the way through and remembered bisexuals on the form on the back that asked you to make a donation. It was the nineties. Things were different then. Things are a bit different now.

[00:59:56]

**INTERVIEWER:** We actually have to-

**PARTICIPANT:** I was going to say, I've rambled on for quite a bit now-

**INTERVIEWER:** Only because we've got to now decamp to Oldham Street for two o'clock to interview the next person so we should probably wrap up there but is there anything you wanted to say that you haven't covered?

**PARTICIPANT:** Yeah, three things that I came in with as oh I shouldn't definitely mention those, definitely all been done. I have rambled on lots, I can't think of anything off the top of my head.

[01:00:23]

**INTERVIEWER 2:** Quick plug for Biphoria, just to tell people what it is and when it is?

**PARTICIPANT:** That would make a lot of sense. So if you've watched this and you've gone, I am not the only bisexual out there, or even, there is something wonderful after more than twenty years of having a regular space where you walk into a room and it's full of bisexuals because we spend so much of our lives going no, we are bisexual enough or I'll put up with that bit of erasing because it's not worth

having that argument right now and first Tuesday of every month Biphoria meets here in the LGBT Foundation. Be prompt, we do a little induction session that tells you all about bisexuality, and other exciting things like where the fire exits are and where the loos are. At half seven we come along and join us or find us on social media or that sort of thing. If you're watching this and you're further afield, have a look at Bi Community News's website. They have listings of bisexual groups nationwide that maybe are a little bit closer to you.

[01:01:20]

**INTERVIEWER 2:** Thank you.

**[01:01:21] End of transcript.**