

***Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Jen Yockney***

**Name: ITV Pridecast w/ Jen Yockney**

**Jen** **00:00:00:11**

Visibility, for us, being able to find each other is the first step to them being able to talk about all of those experiences as being bisexual, as being bisexual enough, as your way of bi being just as valid as the way that 20 other entirely different ways of being bi are for people.

**Liam** **00:00:17:09**

Hello and welcome to Pridecast. This is a podcast about all things LGBT+, brought to you by ITV. During the show, we chat about being proud to be LGBT+, today. We speak to people from across the community to find out where they are on their journey and where they're headed. We'll also keep you updated on the latest LGBT+ news, events, and the things that matter to you. This is the ITV Pridecast.

**Liam** **00:00:47:17**

Welcome back to the ITV Pridecast. Now if you listen to our last episode, you'll have heard that my co-host Reece Dunn was moving on to pastures new and leaving ITV. Well, for this episode, I'm delighted to say that Simon Callisto, who also works for ITV, is joining me to present the Pridecast.

**Liam** **00:01:10:08**

Simon, hello. How are you doing?

**Simon** **00:01:12:21**

I'm not too bad, thank you very much. I'm feeling very hyper. Very active. Feeling good.

**Liam** **00:01:16:18**

Haha. Well that is what we like to hear of course. And I wondered if you could tell us then what is your role within the company?

***Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Jen Yockney***

**Simon**

**00:01:24:06**

Well, I am a creative diversity team assistant. I work on the DNI team within ITV. Um, and essentially I support them in improving on screen and off screen diversity. So the diversity acceleration plan I helped to work with, I work with a team of three people a day who's on the management board, who is the group director of diversity and inclusion, and the two creative diversity partners, Sam and Lorraine. So yeah, that's just what I've been doing for the last six months.

**Liam**

**00:01:55:04**

So for anyone who's listening and doesn't work for ITV, the company is really making strides with diversity and inclusion and making it a real focal point in how we move forward. And your department, the Diversity and Inclusion team, is really integral to that, isn't it? And reaching a range of people across our society?

**Simon**

**00:02:16:21**

Yeah, essentially it's all sort of, um, marginalised groups. So whether it's, um, LGBTQ+ groups, um, ethnicity, we're also looking to social mobility and obviously disability as well. So it's across all of those spectrums and ensuring that they are becoming integral parts of ITV in all forms, both on screen and off screen.

**Liam**

**00:02:39:20**

Now, obviously you're taking part in this episode of the ITV Pridecast with me and our focus this time is on bi-visibility. And I'm really happy to say that it's Bi-visibility day, and I wanted to find out what that means to you.

***Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Jen Yockney***

**Simon**

**00:02:55:19**

Um, bi visibility to me is an opportunity to break down the stereotypes and the misinterpretations of what it means to be bi, um, and also what impacts us as a community. And I think for a lot of bisexual people, you feel really outcast because you feel like you're straddling two communities, whether it's being perceived as straight or not being gay enough. I think it can be really hard. So a day like bi visibility, it's just it's just an education, isn't it? And it's to give bisexual people, and even within the bisexual spectrum, that breaks down to many different things. It's just giving them more of a voice and making sure that B is truly a capital B.

**Liam**

**00:03:35:04**

And you identify as bi, don't you? And how does it feel to have come to a company and seeing what ITV does for the LGBT+ community?

**Simon**

**00:03:44:06**

Um, I think I've been very fortunate, um, that I've been openly bisexual since I was 17. I'm 27 now. It's been a long while. Um, and I've obviously been very outwardly bisexual to all my friends and family, so I think that added confidence prepared me for whatever scenario I may have come to. But coming to an organisation like ITV where they had a very strong presence with the LGBT, um, Pride and Pride network generally, it's just nice, it's reassuring and it's good to know that there's a wider community who understand you and also shows how integral it is throughout the business, because even in my role where I'm meeting people from production people in HR, corporate, whatever it is, I'm meeting people of different sexualities across the spectrum. And that, in a sense is great because it just shows you how integrated and normal it is. Um, and obviously the importance of why things like that, not just for Pride, but also across ethnicity, disability, everything. Like it's important. Like it just needs to be a natural foundation for an organisation.

***Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Jen Yockney***

**Liam**

**00:04:43:17**

Yeah, absolutely.

**Liam**

**00:04:45:09**

Well, our guest this time on the ITV Pridecast is Jen Yockney. She's one of the most prominent bi activists in the UK and helps run by Biphoria, the country's longest running bi support organisation. She also edits Bi Community News, the bi monthly print magazine, and runs the website BiVisibilityDay.com.

**Simon**

**00:05:06:22**

She tells us why Bi Visibility Day is so important to her, and why having places whereby people can talk freely about who they are is essential, and allowing them to feel confident and proud of who they are.

**Liam**

**00:05:17:12**

And just for you to be aware, Jen identifies as a gender queer trans woman who lives her gender identity through a non-binary expression. She does use the pronouns She/Her, and he's happy for me and Simon to use these when referring to her in this episode. Right then, here's the latest ITV pride cast with Jen Yani. Jen. Hello there. Thank you so much for joining us on the podcast. And I wanted to start off by asking you about, you know, over the period of the last 25 years or so, you've been working to promote the rights of bi people, and you must have seen, you know, huge amounts of change. And of course, you know, things still need to be improved for bi people, but you must also have been able to reflect and and witness a lot of change and progress as well.

***Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Jen Yockney***

**Jen**

**00:06:14:20**

When I first went along to a bi support space in 1994, and there were these tiny little, you know, isolated pockets, we are I'm in a space where there are some other bisexual people. So exciting. But when you got together, you know, I mean, for example, if you want to talk about bisexual representation on TV, um, I mean, I remember was it about 96, the year that *This Life* had Ferdy as a bisexual male character? And we had to get about four months of conversation out of that because it was like this year's bisexual, you know, whereas this, you know, just a few weeks ago at the the local BiPhoria meetup, we were so what's on TV and people can't well, there's this thing and this in *Gossip Girl* and this is the return of *Sex Education*, which is so exciting. And while we are still, you know, not there in certain ways, and I feel that there are bits of bisexual life that are missing compared to where we started. My word is that much easier for people to be able to reach out, find one another, help to, you know, understand themselves and what's going on with, uh, in their own, in their own head, in their own life, in their own heart. If they're trying to work out, if they're buy, it is a world transformed.

**Simon**

**00:07:22:01**

As a bi person myself, I would say I have never been aware of there being a space for people like that and those communities and those groups, and obviously reading your website, looking at your social media and all of that stuff, it was really, really interesting to see; One, how long you've been active for, um, and also the spaces that you've occupied, do you feel as if, and this might be a generational question, but do you feel as if that is partly the issue in terms of people being aware of that, people not necessarily fully accepting being bi, and also the perception of being bisexual in society affects that, if you know what I mean.

***Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Jen Yockney***

**Jen**

**00:07:59:11**

It has always been that much harder to find things because there's been, to be fair, you know, when I was- I came out in 1989, um, as bi few years later as trans and finding even finding gay space in those days took quite a lot of effort, you know. And it was it's always been a bit of a, okay, this is me, but how do I find other people like me and a leap of imagination to even think that there will be those spaces. And I think part of it, as we've seen sort of the shift maybe the 80s, 90s, lesbian and gay culture became that much more visible. More and more people started coming out in the public eye and saying, 'I'm gay, and that's absolutely okay'. And so on. And over about the last 7 or 8 years, we've started to see that with bisexuals in the public eye more. You got people I think about three of the actresses from True Blood all came out as bisexual and were proud, consistent. Not just I'm bisexual in one interview and I never mention it again. But when people tried to put them back into the closet of, oh well, you were bisexual, but you're married now. And they were just, you know, take down interviewers and go, 'Yeah, and that still means I'm bisexual, because that didn't change just because there's a bit of metal around my finger.' And that thing, for me, one of the difficult things about being bisexual is, uh, that all of us kind of have a 'Am I bisexual enough to own the label?' because you live in a world that wants to put you back into a gay or straight box, that wants to say - and Simon, feel free to chip in at this point from your experience as well - but the kind of it it's that thing. If they want to say, oh, well, 'You prefer this, so you must be that, really? You know, you're more into gays. Therefore we can conclude a binary sexuality for you. You're more into girls.' I like pizza and I like ice cream. Um, if this podcast was on video and people could see my belly, they would know how committed to both of those things I am. Right. And the fact that I'm not even sitting there eating ice cream going, oh, I wish I could have a bit of pizza now. I'm loving the ice cream at that moment too.

***Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Jen Yockney***

**Simon**

**00:10:13:11**

It's a great analogy though, because it's so interesting. And I think growing up I think my hardest thing was always me doubting myself because you meet so many people in life and they want to view you as being very binary and you must fit into this box, because society is, unfortunately to all of us, that that's how we perceive things. It's easier to perceive things as you are, either this or you are that, because it's it makes my life easier. And so when you tell someone that you are bisexual or you are this thing that floats between these ideologies or these perceptions. Once they find everything they can. And I don't even think it's intentional. Sometimes a lot of sort of an unconscious thing where they're finding everything they can to be like, oh yeah, but you must be this. And like a scenario with me, I have a lot of I've been open since I was 17 and I'm 27 now. And like, it's never been I've never felt ashamed of it. But what has always been a struggle is when you tell people about your experiences and whether you've had access to a particular thing or a particular community more and say someone has been with men more often, it's very much like, oh, but how I'm surprised that you like this person or a woman because you've had sex with more men. And it's just almost like, well, you wouldn't say that in any other scenario. Why is it that because I'm these two things, you just- I don't know, it's just always been a very frustrating thing to explain to people because I feel like they don't want to get it because they just have the assumption, like, I know there are people in my life who I love dearly and care about who will tell people I'm just gay because of experiences that I've had, because that's just easy for them to perceive.

***Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Jen Yockney***

**Jen**

**00:11:53:06**

But, but, but it's kind of like it's a bisexual burden of always having to do that argument and present that thing for yourself or say, okay, I'm just going to absorb this. There's just this little microaggression, and I don't know if this is your experience, but I would say tending to be the othering. So within straight community, them going, oh, you're you're oh yeah, she's a lesbian within gay community. Oh but you're straight and you're a tourist. And just kind of like push. You're not good enough to be one of us. You don't really belong in the gang for that. In a world where almost everywhere is either a gay space or a straight space in that kind of way. And it's kind of it's part of where I think a lot of the the issues that bisexuals have with mental health and things like that comes from.

**Liam**

**00:12:37:02**

And on that. Jen, I don't know if you can talk to us now about why bi visibility day to day so important about making sure that the community is seen and is heard as well.



***Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Jen Yockney***

**Jen**

**00:12:50:04**

Going back to what what we were just talking about earlier, um, that thing of finding each other and bi visibility day, I mean the history of it. It started out in 1999 as International Celebrate Bisexuality Day, and that was quite a different concept because it was, uh, three American activists, Michael Page, the guy who invented the bisexual flag, the pink, purple and blue stripes that are now very well known, uh, Wendy Curry and Gigi Raven Wilbur. But they invented a day, um, that was International Celebrate Bisexuality Day and the idea was to celebrate all the stuff that was already going on in the world to support and provide voice for bisexual people, because you've got lots of groups across America, Britain, Germany, wherever that were giving bi people a space to come together and go 'I'm bisexual.' And all sorts of things that come up with that of am I bisexual enough? That is probably the single most uniting experience of bi people is is not actually, you know, that we all fancy Kylie Minogue or whatever, and we all seem to get through that. It's like doubting your bisexuality is the proof of your bisexuality. Um, so those spaces that gave people some way to come together and be with other people who also got it, so you didn't have to defend that you were bisexual. And I thought that bisexuality was real. So International Celebrate Bisexuality Day started as a day, really, to celebrate those things, to turn around and go, we've got in our town, there is a group that's been supporting bisexuals for five years, and that is an amazing contribution to their lives and our society. After about a decade, we had a shift in how we talked about it and starting in the UK, but very rapidly across Europe and now, um, much more so around the world talking about it as being Bi visibility day rather than International Celebrate Bisexuality Day. Now there's a couple of things for that. The first and simple one is, as I'm sitting here talking to you every time I say International Celebrate Bisexuality Day, there's a lot of syllables in that. You need a little run up and, you know, you're probably gonna fluff your lines a couple of times. Imagine, you know, an interview where you said it 20 times. You're gonna call it something terrible by the end, because you get all the syllables in the wrong order.

***Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Jen Yockney***

**Liam**

**00:15:06:07**

It doesn't quite roll off the tongue, does it really.

**Jen**

**00:15:09:23**

Exactly, but talking about it as being visibility because of that enormous thing of by people being visible to each other, which requires us to own our labels because so much of society will otherwise just erase us away into your straight, your gay, and even as by people you know, we do it to others. You see two people walking down the street holding hands in front of you. You mentally you've coded. Maybe you think, oh, that one. I think that one's a boy, that one's a girl. So part of your brain goes, they're a straight couple. And even as by people, it takes that little bit more mental energy to go. Oh, that could be a pair of bisexuals. Maybe there's three of us all standing next to each other. It's almost enough to start a support group, you know. Um, but that visibility thing that requires us to stand up and speak about it. When we become visible, we make ourselves real to each other, and we make ourselves legitimate to each other. That bisexuals don't have to be the tiny tip of the iceberg. Bisexuals who you see in the newspaper.

**Liam**

**00:16:08:10**

And what was life like when those closest to you found out about you and who you are?

***Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Jen Yockney***

**Jen**

**00:16:15:04**

Back when I was 19, I was at university and I'd been out to my friends as bisexual for years, but I hadn't yet come out to my family. Um, and my big sister came to visit me at university, and, uh, it was just before sort of Christmas break, and it's. All right. So you coming back at the end of term, shall I arrange to be at Mum and Dad's house, a similar sort of time where we can catch up again? Then I was like, well, I'm going to be a few days late because I'm. And then in that kind of talking into your hand way, because I'm going away with the Lesbian and Gay Society for the Christmas retreat, because I'm bisexual and, and in the course of the next ten minutes, though, her, you know, her responses to that were not 'Oh, my God, that's disgusting.' Or 'Are you sure?' they were 'Oh, you're bisexual, so am I. So's Mark, so's Mum.' I was like we were a majority bisexual family, but because we didn't actively talk about it or own those labels, we weren't that kind of huggy, touchy feely, communicative sort of, uh, family. It just wasn't in the nature of who we were. I'd been there for three years knowing this was the label for me owning it to my best friends in school, but never realising that I was sitting down with a bunch of bisexuals for Sunday dinner. And so, you know, I had all of that isolation and I can't talk about this, and I need to hide the stuff that my friends know about me that I can talk to them about in school, but that mustn't come back. And, you know, posed potential problems at home and so visibility for us, being able to find each other is the first step to then being able to talk about all of those experiences as being bisexual, as being bisexual enough, as your way of bi being just as valid as the way that 20 other entirely different ways of being bi are for people.

***Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Jen Yockney***

**Simon**

**00:18:09:03**

I do think it's really interesting how often bisexual men are perceived in a very different way to bisexual women, and almost, I mean, both entirely perceived in a negative way. Bisexual women are perceived as a commodity for straight men as a thing to conquer, as a thing that's enticing. Because it's like, oh, that just means I, as a straight man, can have sex with more women. That's how it's perceived. And it's very interesting how then the opposite, when bisexual men interact with straight women and with gay men, from experience, I'd met women or we'd go on dates and me being bi was like a was a factor. And and those issues around can you be faithful and I and I remember particularly um, I was dating someone and I told them prior because I'd had so many experiences by telling them on the day, it didn't go very well. And her first question was, oh, okay, well, are you into monogamy? And I said, well, yeah, I'm a monogamous person. And then I just said, why? Why did you feel the need to ask that? And she just said, oh, it's just what you guys are like. And I just thought, you don't realise what you're saying. But also it comes down to- it's all these stereotypes about queer people and how it's so entrenched in society. You just don't realise it from your perspective, as someone who's obviously lived longer than I have, have been in, have been in the community longer than I have, what do you think has been the real drive for the perception of women in particular, to be so negative and actually not have acceptance from women, but also have some lack of acceptance from men as well?

**Jen**

**00:19:45:19**

Part of that is that whole thing of women's sexuality being commodified so much more than men anyway. That applies across different sexual orientations. Um, part of it probably is tied up with what happened with HIV and Aids in the UK at that point where HIV struck, you know, public attitudes to homosexuality, bisexuality were so much worse than they are now. There was, if I can put it that way, there were no votes in saving gay men's lives, you know, there was no we must do something about this because, you know, you opened up the

***Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Jen Yockney***

pages of The Sun or The News of the World or whatever, and it was God's judgement on gays for their abhorrent lifestyle and charming phrases even more unpleasant than that. And part of getting the government to do something at all was activists from that generation using bisexual men as a bogeyman, as turning around to the government and saying, yeah, yeah, they're a gay man. And if it was a disease that was entirely confined to their circles, in that sense, it would not be a problem that you would politically worry about. You wouldn't see votes in it. But there are bisexual men. Everyone knows that bisexual men are inherently promiscuous and cheaters. They will be in straight marriages as the world would perceive them, but they will be having sex on the side with gay men, catching Aids, bringing it home to their straight wives. And therefore Aids is a problem that's going to explode in the straight community. It's going to be an issue for your nice respectable home counties voters and all that kind of thing. And therefore you need to do something about Aids in the gay community, because otherwise bisexuals, specifically bisexual men, because of how the gender imbalance and so on of HIV infection was how they will bring it into the straight community and it will be an epidemic in the straight community if you don't act now. Now, I don't like what that does. I don't like that. That gives us a situation where we have a hangover. Now. We're still that actually, you know, imagine if you wrote into a problem page, um, or even turned round to some friends and said either, hi, I'm a I'm a straight, straight man, and I've discovered that my girlfriend is bisexual. What does it mean? And you probably get a reaction along the lines of, well, it means that she's probably a bit, you know, open to experimentation and those sorts of things. So, hey, probably going to get a threesome. Why not ask her if there are any of her friends she quite likes? And on the other hand, hi, I'm a straight woman and I just I've discovered that my boyfriend is bisexual. What does it mean? Is more likely not to get, hey, maybe he's going to bring home another guy and you can have one. Wonderful, exciting times. No, it's going to be you should go to a clinic and get tested in case he's given you anything nasty. And that differentiation between bisexual women are not sexually dangerous and

***Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Jen Yockney***

threatening, because hypersexual anxiety in women is because it's so commodified. Hot. But hyper sexuality in men is dangerous, and that we've managed to get, you know, this is a really big in so many bisexual things. We have so much in common across the genders, but particularly for the, you know, within the the big black gender binary by men and by women have a very different experience on that, on that set of stereotypes and assumptions and how therefore it's so much. Safer in the dating world in certain ways to be a bi woman than to be a bi man. However, where it perhaps kicks in as a a different step in the dating process where it becomes a problem for by women than for you, is that then the assumption, the stereotype you're a bisexual woman, so you must be hypersexual. You must be open to doing all of these things. You have less, um, sort of autonomy over your body really, because you're so sexualised that you're bisexual. Therefore, you must be willing to do X, Y, or Z things that your boyfriend might want. And we see that in, uh, domestic violence, domestic abuse statistics in the UK, um, from memory. And this is from a report called, uh, Beyond Babies and Breast Cancer from the LGBT Foundation about 6 or 7 years ago. But lifetime experience of sexual assault, domestic violence, rape, things like that for straight women is 33% of the UK population. For lesbians, it's worse, it's 45%. But for bisexual women, it's 65%. It's two out of three instead of one out of three for straight women, because we have all of these charged up things, we have the idea that you're super promiscuous, so you must have cheated on me, or you must be willing to do x, y, z, or it's okay for me to do these things because you are a hypersexual bisexual woman. Your experience of dating, that is the experience of so many bisexual people dating Simon. But while it's different for me, it's almost like the problem comes at a different point in the relationship. But both by men and by women face big fucking problems because of the stereotypes and cliches that we have, uh, loaded into what being bisexual means for the rest of society.

***Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Jen Yockney***

**Simon**

**00:24:58:03**

It's just all so interesting because you just see how deep rooted biphobia is and obviously homophobia as well. And just how with I don't know, it's just really interesting how being bisexual generally it's for some people it's just so much harder to accept for some reason. And I think you have these majority groups and I say majority groups and I don't use I don't mean that in the time I it sounds like I mean, in the sense of you have either people perceive me, you as gay, you perceive you were straight. And I think it's just so funny that fundamentally, people find it so hard to even engage with it. And even topics that like when I think about conversations I have had as someone who's been openly bi since 17, this is probably the most conversation that length I have ever had, except with friends who have asked me or or the usual people who are like, do you have a preference? Do you? I mean, outside of that personal conversational element, this is the most it's I've ever seen it. Disgusting. I just think it's I just think it's interesting and also a shame that it often it's one of those things that are sidelined. And actually you have I don't want to use the word oppression because that's not the right word, but there's almost a lack of understanding from the cisgendered group who you expect the prejudice from, but then from other queer people. I think that's often where it's most disappointing. Um, like, I had an experience at uni where I lived with the gay guy, and he was perfectly lovely, but it was interesting how often he would dismiss me, and he would often be like, oh yeah, but you're not really that, are you? You are just getting. And I know he didn't mean it in a sort of derogatory way, but it was almost. That didn't help with the questioning either. It didn't help with the uncertainty that comes, like you said. But earlier, I feel like every bisexuals big trait is am I or am I not? That's half the joke. Do you know what I mean? And so when you're meeting someone who's you're a part of their community and you're hoping that because they're marginalised to a degree, they will understand and they're in fact the one more than anyone else telling you that you're not a thing. Yeah, it can just be very distressing and it just doesn't happen. I just think it's it's just a shame. Absolutely.

***Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Jen Yockney***

**Jen**

**00:27:23:11**

I mean, my experience as well, because I came out in sixth form and was, you know, it was the South Wales Valleys in the 1980s. It's not surprising. I was the only out queer person in my school because those were the numbers. Those were the times section 28 had just become law. It was. I look back at it as a very interesting time to decide. Yeah, this is I won't wait till university. I'll tell people now, um, a little bit foolhardy. Um, but because of that and because fortunately, the school I was at while no one was like, oh, you're bisexual, brilliant. But also no one punch me in the face for it. In the 1980s in a, you know, small town South Wales, that was a pretty good outcome to get was people like, oh, you're bisexual. And we kind of, you know, some of us might see. Think that that means that you're gay. Really? And this is a stopping off point, but we don't argue with you about it. We just, you know, accept it and roll with it kind of thing was a remarkably good situation to get. And then going I went to university in Manchester. Obviously the you know, Canal Street was half the size that it is now then, but it was still one of the biggest sort of queer districts anywhere in Britain. Um, and I expected I would go there, I would finally meet some other queer people and they would get it. And it's that weird thing where I don't know if actually I encountered more biphobia from the gay and lesbian community than I did from the straight community, or if it was just that my guard was down so much more because I expected people who had done that whole coming out process to get that someone else might have it, and it would be different for them, but they would still have some kind of a commonality of of experience and understanding of that and the desire to say, yeah, the outside world is hating on you for your sexual orientation, the same way it's hating on me. And we have that shared experience of oppression. And yet it feels like more people told me that it was just a phase and that I would come out properly and all those kinds of things from the gay community than, than from the straight community.



***Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Jen Yockney***

**Liam**

**00:29:27:12**

And with that, then I was going to say that this is why nowadays then bi visibility day to day is so, so important. And I wanted to kind of speak to you a little bit more on, um, your work with biphobia. Of course. Tell us a bit more about that, because you have been involved in that since the early 90s.

**Jen**

**00:29:50:10**

Yeah. Um, so it formed in 1994, um, like a lot of sort of social groups for whatever stripe of queer people back in those days, really, it started as just, oh, look, wouldn't it be brilliant if we could get some bisexuals in a room together? Imagine being in a room with maybe 20 other people who are all also bi pan. Whatever label they prefer for it are also part of that multi gender experience attraction's experience. Being able to talk about what what's what it's like, what's going on in your life, what the challenges are, all those sorts of things. Um, in Manchester, prior to by Fourier, who was a bisexual men's group and a bisexual women's group. Difficult if you were non-binary or gender queer is okay. So there isn't one for me. But there was bi men's group. They were SPI women's group. They met at a conference and the organisers kind of said to each other, you know, as people for whom it's not about gender, maybe there's a trick we're missing here. And so came together and started a group that was for everyone, regardless of gender, under the big BI umbrella, rather than just for men or women. And over a few years, the men's and women's groups faded away, which I think perhaps reflected that what we wanted was a space where we could be all bi together was a perhaps a bigger drive as well as, you know, more than doubling the number of people who can come along. Um, so every month since, uh, September 1994, there's been at least one getting by people together in a community centre. Talk. Being able to talk about what your BI experience is every month there's, you know, 3 or 4 new people through the door going, oh my, I've never been in a space where I can just talk about this in this kind of the extended way that we're doing for this podcast. I think back back in 1994, I was along the first time I was there was the the fourth meeting in

***Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Jen Yockney***

December 1994. So I'm not a actual original vintage, but when you've been every month for more than 25 years, you're kind of, uh, been there forever. The personal thing that you need to talk about in your life, the 'I've worked out that I think I'm bisexual. How do I tell my partner? What does that mean for us? What does that mean for our future? What does it mean for me? How do I make myself feel like I'm validly bisexual? Like I'm authentically living who I am, even if I'm in a monogamous relationship with someone who isn't bi?' And all of the the pressures that that can kind of bring, those sorts of challenges are exactly the same in 2021 as they were in 1994. The I'm thinking of coming out to my boss at work and I'm a bit nervous. I've realised that I'm bi, my partner is totally happy with it, but how do we start talking about this to our kids? All of those things are exactly the same now as they were then. So that kind of support space for people to have that peer support of just sharing, not some sort of, you know, great, shiny, on the hill wisdom of the right way to be bisexual. But you're in a room with a load of other guys. Being in a space where you have that peer support to me is massively important. And the fact that after all of these years, it's still got a steady stream of people coming through pandemic times, obviously coming through a virtual door on Zoom rather than through a physical door. Um, but I hope soon we'll be back to meetings in person.

**Liam**

**00:33:16:05**

From your activism, from your, you know, being a very, very prominent speaker within the bisexual community. It's gained you some recognition, hasn't it? I wondered if you could tell us a bit more about that, because you're not just Jen Yockney. You are Jen Yockney with a few letters after your name, aren't you?

**Jen**

**00:33:37:03**

I am, yeah, it was, it was amazing. Um, 2016. Uh, I got a letter in the post in April, uh, from the Cabinet Office. 'The Prime Minister is minded to give your name to Her Majesty for this year's honours list.' At that point, you had A. Oh, my God. What? You know, when when I started volunteering with bisexual stuff in the

***Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Jen Yockney***

early 1990s, that was not a thing that was ever going to get you some letters after your name. But when you get that letter, uh, it asks for your details. Um, there was a little bit on it because it gave me the title Ms, and while that's the title that I'm happy with, I prefer the title Mx. M-x. The non-binary title that has, you know, acquired a lot of circulation over the last sort of ten years or so. And I looked it and I thought, this is I'm being put forward for the honours list. And I wound up receiving the MBA, um, for services to the bisexual community. No one's ever been recognised for specifically working with bisexuals before, so that would be amazing. And such a symbolic thing for bisexuals and for the community of this is real and valid and going back to the motivation for International Celebrate Bisexuality Day back in 1999, making bisexual space, being a really and important thing in the world that has affected people's lives. Just getting that would be amazing. And my pen sat there and hovered so much. Because do I cross out the title that they've got and put in the non-binary title instead, or do I go with what they've got given? This isn't a guarantee. You know, people get that letter and then don't appear in the honours list if the Palace turns it down for whatever reason. So it is a gamble. Um, and I decided, nope, I'm going to go for it. Double or quits, you know? Um, and then normally, you don't know if your name actually appears in the honours list until it's published. So you've got that. Uh, I might be and you'll, you know, told it under a strict sort of virtual oath of secrecy. And a week before the list was published, I was at a work meeting and I got a phone call, stepped out of the meeting, and it was someone from the Cabinet Office saying, hi. Um, obviously we can't tell you whether your name is in the honours list because that would be a breach of protocol, however, we are preparing press publicity materials about people, and we need to make sure that we get pronouns right. So can we check your pronouns for any material we might need to release in a week's time, which is about as much you've got it as you can possibly get without using those words. And I had to walk back into a work meeting with a totally deadpan poker face, not going oh my God, but just be. Oh no, it was. It was just a call about, um, the thing that I'm going to do this evening. Nothing to worry about. Where

***Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Jen Yockney***

were we up to on the agenda? And then a week later. Oh my word, I've got the MBE. It's, you know, and it's it's a double first. It was the first time that specifically work for the bisexual community was recognised. It was also the first time that Mx appeared, and I think still the only time in the honours list as a title, which for me meant I got to do things for kind of like two strands of queer community at once, because big validation for bisexuality and bisexual space. But also there are all those internet trolls who will respond to people who are non-binary or experienced their gender in those kinds of complex and nuanced ways and say it's not real. Mx isn't a real title. That's just a bit of made up language that you've got. It's a pretend. So for me, that then allows all of those people who are told isn't a real title to turn around and say, if anyone gets to define what's in the English language. When the Queen of England publishes Mx in a document that is definitely now part of the Queen's English. So I think in defining English, she gets to trump you little internet trolling, deciding what's real and good enough.

**Liam**

**00:37:34:23**

Very true. And so I gather you went along to the palace.

**Jen**

**00:37:38:17**

Yeah. You've got you've got two big celebration days there, because you've got the day where your name is in the list. Um, and then you've got the day where you go to the palace, which for me was about four months later. Um, it was Princess Anne who I had actually, um, doing the honours. Um, her remarks were to me were very sort of, um, it was along the lines of. Sometimes it must be difficult to work out how far to push things that I think was reflecting. This is the first time we've given an honour and published the non-binary title alongside it. And we know that you push this, that little bit, that little bit further. When you receive your honour, you you're presented in a sequence of people and sort of the, the format is that you go to a point in front of the Princess or the Queen or Prince Charles or whoever it is that you've got presenting you, and then you bow or curtsy according to gender, step forward, receive things, step backward, bow or

***Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Jen Yockney***

curtsy again according to gender and walk away. And so I went up, curtsy on the way in and bowed on the way out to try and get as gender queering a thing of it as I possibly could into the, into the ceremony. So, um, when you get MBE, OBE, CBE type things, it's a medal, but it comes attached to some ribbon and the ribbon shape is gendered. So men get quite a dull little sort of straight inch and a half strip of fabric. And women get a lovely ornate bow. Um, and I was taken to one side and asked, I don't know if you're aware of this. The medals come in two different versions, male and female, because you're genderqueer, and we didn't know which one you would prefer. We've prepared both. Can you tell us which one you would rather receive? Which for me was just such an epic? You know, we've really thought through this as far as we we can within the rules of a very historic sort of structure that we're working in. Um, I said I'd like the female one because it is so much more blingy. It just looks so much more glamorous. Um, which was entertaining. Said on the way out, one of the, you know, one of the cis men who had received his medal saw mine and was kind of like, how come you get so much more glam than I do? Why, why, why doesn't mine look as fancy? Are you? You haven't experienced the right oppressions, do you? But yeah. So absolutely an amazing thing. And you know, I. I'm not a monarchist by instinct. I'm a republican. And so there was part of it. I went through was should I accept it, shouldn't I? There are all these, you know, issues about that. But for me, once you've broken through that, once you've said bisexual stuff is good enough to be recognised in the honours list, non-binary people are good enough to be respected in the honours list. Then you can get into the. But should we, should we always accept that kind of thing. But as long as you've never been at the table, the fact that you refuse to go to the table is invisible to the world. Going back to that visibility, we have to be seen in order to then be able to be seen to be debating the pros and cons of an institution. So a fascinating moment in history and really weird to end up being in it.

***Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Jen Yockney***

**Simon**

**00:41:04:10**

As someone who is, I'm sure met many, many bi people over their life who's had all this experience and been an activist in the field. Now MBE. What is the one thing you would say to them? People who are unsure, people who feel as if they're bouncing back and forth and don't feel as if they are bisexual enough, or actually their bisexuality is something that's going to be used against them. Like, what's the sort of modicum of advice you'd give to them about that?

***Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Jen Yockney***

**Jen**

**00:41:32:04**

It's the Douglas Adams advice of don't panic, because so often when we're getting to that, I think there's this thing, and I need to tell people, it doesn't have to be today. You can. If today isn't the right moment to come out to that person, it can wait. You will probably still be bisexual tomorrow. And the second piece of advice is to not let the idea of a phase put you off something being real. Because so often as bi people, we get belittled as bisexuality is just a phase. It's a stopping off point on the way from straight to gay. I mean, as someone who's run a support group for many, many years, we get loads of people through the door who have identified as gay or lesbian and now found themselves attracted to someone of a gender they didn't expect. There's traffic in every which direction between these sexuality labels that so often erasing that, you know, half way to gate and sort of, um, phrase. But when people do try to tell you it's just a phase, embrace phases to look at the the biphobia inherent in the it's just a phase. We only ever talk for those people who are because, you know, for some people, being bi is just a part of their life, and then maybe they find a different label that seems to fit them better where they are later on. But if that's you, the bit before you were bi was just a phase. The bit after you were bi was just a phase, because they were all just phases of your experience. And the thing about them is not am I going to be exactly this bisexual for the whole of my life? It's this is who I really am now, and the best, most mentally healthy way that we can aim to live is as your authentic self as who you really are right now in your life, not who you imagine you'll be in ten years or who you were five years ago.

**Liam**

**00:43:28:20**

Wow, what an incredible interview with Jen there. What an amazing person she is.

**Simon**

**00:43:34:11**

She truly, truly is. It was it was it was really enlightening for me.

***Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Jen Yockney***

**Liam**

**00:43:37:16**

I thought what was really interesting was that despite not being a monarchist, Jen put her views to one side for that moment and by receiving the MBE, she's kind of helped elevate my visibility to the peak of British society. Really. I mean, whether you agree with the monarchy and the honour system or not, that recognition for the bisexual community, it's really quite something, isn't it?

**Simon**

**00:44:06:08**

The fact that she's got that as a tribute to the work that she's done. And so I can understand why she was in two minds, but I understand why she would take it. It's a celebration of her work. It's a celebration of what she's achieved. And actually it's a status thing. And not to get very political, it's very it's almost about having a presence and knowing I know what I talk about and now this body who I don't agree with, but if I have to use what they have in order to aid my personal agenda, and this applies to any minority group, I can understand why she's why she did it at the time that she did, considering all the work that she put in.

**Liam**

**00:44:43:12**

And I love the fact that that when she went to receive the MBE, she was like, right, I'm going to curtsy on the way up to Princess Anne and bow on the way back. And what a what a lovely symbol, especially for the non-binary community as well.

**Simon**

**00:44:59:22**

Absolutely. And I think it's important that actually all of these events and celebrations, whatever they are, tributes to people, should be based on their how they perceive the world. So if she, as an individual, wants to curtsy and bow, and it may be strays away from the tradition that should be allowed, I think it's good that she just took the initiative, because I think a lot of the time that's what people just have to do. You've got to set your own boundaries in your own rules, and people have to be able to adjust to them because the world isn't, as we know, a binary thing. It's non-binary. Well, following.



***Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Jen Yockney***

**Liam**

**00:45:31:01**

That then, Simon, thank you so much for joining me on the ITV Pridecast. It's been absolutely brilliant. Tell us, how did it go for you?

**Simon**

**00:45:40:22**

It was good. It was really, really exciting. I think for me as a bi person, meeting someone else who's had such an impact on the community and just having a discussion about it is really interesting. I've only had the opportunity to just speak to friends and family who asked me about my Bi experience, and I know my Bi experience is very me, it's very Simon and that's all I really know. So to meet someone else who understood where I was coming from and actually added a lot of history to it was really enlightening. And it also just makes me feel a lot better understanding the importance of Bi activism, understanding that there is even Bi activism. Because I'll be honest, I didn't know, um, yeah, it was really nice and it was great. And yeah, as you know, I love to talk.

**Liam**

**00:46:24:13**

Well that is super. And what a lovely way to have experience the ITV Pridecast. And I just wanted to say a massive happy Bi-visibility day to you, as well as all of our listeners as well.

**Simon**

**00:46:36:11**

Yes, thank you very much. And to everyone around the world who I'm sure is listening.

**Liam**

**00:46:41:00**

And a reminder if you're looking to meet fellow members of the LGBT+ community, there's plenty of ways you can do that. If you work for ITV, why not join the ITV Pride network?

***Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Jen Yockney***

**Simon**

**00:46:51:15**

This includes monthly newsletters about what the group gets up to, or pop into one of the virtual social lunches that's held every Thursday at 1 p.m. to have a bit of a chat and a catch up with some other members of the LGBT+ community.

**Liam**

**00:47:04:16**

And a big thank you to Jen Yockney, for joining us here on this episode of the ITV Pridecast.

**Liam**

**00:47:11:00**

I'm Liam.

**Simon**

**00:47:11:18**

And I'm Simon.

**Liam**

**00:47:12:17**

And thanks for listening to the ITV Pridecast.