

From a Whisper to a Roar

Interview Summary	
Name: Lisa	Date: 06.01.2019 Age: 53
Key issues: Bisexual. Women's Bi network. BiCon. BiPride. Biphobia.	
Narrative summary <p>Lisa was born in Australia and came to London in her twenties. She was aware of being attracted to both men and women from mid-teen years, but did not know how to articulate this. As a young adult she became more aware of her attraction to women, but also of the negative reaction to bisexuality from lesbians.</p> <p>She came from a strongly religious background and was distressed about her sexuality. When she came to London she saw a stall at the 1992 Pride for bisexuals and realised that this described her and she was happy to have found her identity and a community. It was an exciting time with lots of groups like the women's Bi network, meeting every week, with a sense of political excitement around change. She speaks about BiCon – the bisexuality conference which has run annually since 1981, where she got her political education. She describes how it has always been a very supportive community, reaching out in many ways. She speaks warmly of the core of bi activists who have kept this going over several decades.</p> <p>Lisa quotes the survey, published in 2015 which found people experienced more biphobia from LGBT organisations, than other groups, although she references marked improvements in more recent years. However, there have been stark examples of bi erasure too.</p> <p>She also talks about the recent BiPride event in London, which was extremely successful, and found it gratifying to see a new group of young activists putting this on.</p> <p>She is in a long term same-sex relationship and allows assumptions to be made, but would never identify as a lesbian. She has many valued friendships with lesbians, but still feels anxious that it might undermine these friendships to identify as bisexual.</p> <p>She reflects on an earlier relationships in which she experienced distressing biphobia from a partner with a radical feminist perspective and contrasts this with the incredibly supportive relationship with her wife now. The fear of biphobia has had an impact for most of her life, but she has seen a change in the last five years and has felt a bit more confident.</p>	
Length of interview: 1 hr	

Evelyn: This is an interview for From a Whisper To a Roar, an oral history project conducted by Opening Doors London and supported by the National Heritage Lottery Fund. Today, is the 6th of January 2020, and I'm interviewing Lisa...

Lisa: Colledge.

Evelyn: Colledge. Lisa, could you tell me a little bit about your early days and how you came to an understanding of who you really are?

Lisa: I'm... How old am I? I will be 54 this March. I was born in Australia. I came to London when I was 26. I grew up in a country town in Queensland in Australia although I was in the UK as a child for about two years with my parents while my father trained as a doctor. I was aware that I was attracted to men and women from my kind of probably mid-teenage years onwards. I wasn't aware of any way of identifying as that or describing that. As I grew on and became a young adult, I was more aware of my attraction to women and through asking questions, I became aware that I would get a negative reaction from lesbian women if I was open about being attracted to men as well as being attracted to women.

Evelyn: So that's quite a difficult place to be in.

Lisa: Yeah.

Evelyn: You don't really have a word to describe it, and you're possibly in trouble from both sides of the community.

Lisa: Yes. I came from a very strong church background. I had strong religious beliefs, spiritual beliefs, which definitely included the pressure to not have sex before marriage and it was communicated that homosexuality was definitely out. I had strong experiences of falling in love with men and with women, one of which was a very difficult experience. The person involved became ... had a health disaster, and I was not their only girlfriend, so that was very difficult to deal with.

Lisa: I trained in a medical science degree. I worked in that for two years and left the country. I didn't like the job that I was in, and I was distressed with mental health concerns and also as regards my sexuality. So, I came to London and I've never left basically. I discovered that I was bisexual when I learned there was a word for it, when I attended my first Pride March. I saw a stall that said Bisexual Network or London Bisexual Group or something like that. I looked at the word and I thought, "But that's what I am." I knew there was a word that described...

Evelyn: How did that make you feel?

Lisa: Kind of happy and relieved and exultant and quite put out at the same time because I guess it didn't occur to me until a long time afterwards that people in Australia could

have been organising around bisexual issues. Then I might not have had to have had years in the wilderness and left my job that I'd studied so hard for and felt like a pariah, had there been a support network, but that's history. Hopefully, there's positive progress that makes things easier for people who come along later.

Evelyn: What year did you come to London?

Lisa: 1992.

Evelyn: '92, so this is the '92 Pride?

Lisa: Yes, which was a very big Pride. The Pride party afterwards was in the big park just outside Brixton.

Evelyn: Victoria.

Lisa: Victoria Park. No, not Victoria Park. I think that was two Prides later. Anyway, close to Brixton. It was really huge. There were something like 200,000 people there. That's when I realised I was bisexual, although meaning that there was an identity and some kind of community and structure that I could connect with. There were books I could read and there was a sense of positivity, a sense of cohesion and identity, I guess is what I'm talking about, that went with those feelings rather than just being a crap lesbian or being a dilettante, one of these awful people that lesbian women hate, an embarrassment and they try to get rid of them.

Evelyn: Did you suffer a lot of abuse from lesbian women?

Lisa: I've usually been too scared to stick my neck out basically. I've always anticipated receiving negative reactions from lesbian women. That's continued on. I have good lesbian friends, and I hardly ever bring up the topic of bisexuality because their friendship is important to me. Queer friendship is very important to me. I've been with a female partner for 18 years now. We've been married for two and a half years. Queer friendship gets much more important as you get older. Jeopardizing the affection in those friendships is a very high price. I've done activist stuff that I'll talk about later.

Lisa: I am not one of those bolshy people who have the guts to "represent" when the opportunity calls for it. I'm a bit ashamed about that and wish that I had had more confidence and had been able to make more of a difference and had been able to make more of a difference to my social circle I think because I'm not a natural extrovert. I'm not very articulate in situations of potential conflict. I come from a very conservative background and unfortunately, having... In my younger years, I was much more gung ho about things, but I've become more or even more unwilling to rock the boat when the stakes are substantial in middle age.

Lisa: On the few occasions where I have challenged people in a social situation or a work situation, there have been more negative responses. Positive responses are rare and have all occurred in the last five years. I guess I came out to myself as... Not to myself. I

came out and I wrote my parents a letter telling them that I was bisexual in 1992. That's been 28 years of fearing biphobic reactions and having the effect on my personality and confidence and memory and mental health from that.

Evelyn: This is an internalised biphobia really?

Lisa: Absolutely. In the last five years, there's been... It's been great. I hope myself that I've played a little part in that, pushing forward of an inclusive agenda that includes bisexual-identified people and also opening up the inclusivity in non-heterosexual identities and non-cisgendered identifies in general, opening up that inclusiveness more.

Evelyn: Because one of the issues is that just because you've been in an obviously a really successful and happy relationship with a woman for all this length of time, there's this automatic assumption that you must be a lesbian.

Lisa: that's one of the reasons I don't bring it up because that would be, firstly, very... When I say offensive to me, it's as if my feelings are some important thing. I don't want the conversation. I don't want to deal with the hassle most of the time. The automatic assumption is that I'm a risk to my partner and my wife has come out to her work colleagues and said, "My then partner, my wife now, is bisexual." The first comment she got was, "Oh, that's dreadful."

Evelyn: There's some sort of assumption that you're not going to be faithful to your current partner just because you're bisexual.

Lisa: She's in a very senior position and has a high public profile within her sector, so I would much rather contribute to the idea of a lovely, nice, happy, same-sex couple, stable home, nice wifies than embarrass her although she's been on an journey, but she is very bi positive. She comes out about me more than I do in good ways in her workplace. She is supportive to a fault. It's amazing.

Evelyn: Well, you're very lucky.

Lisa: I am enormously lucky.

Evelyn: No doubt you deserve it, but it is strange that there's the assumption that perhaps somehow the attraction to a man is going to overtake any attraction to a woman.

Lisa: Well, people have very deep seated... People coming from a Western culture background usually have very deep seated negative feelings around sexuality that they've been taught and which are supported in many areas of society and throughout our education. It would be almost impossible to avoid taking some of that in by osmosis. Bisexuals are the new go-to scapegoat. It used to be gay men and lesbian women or women or black and Asian people or youth. It's this scapegoating process which is at fault I think.

Evelyn: I suspect there's a level of... I don't like the word, but intersectionality there. "Oh, it's a woman, and she's bisexual."

Lisa: You'd really enjoy reading the literature around that because there's much more stigma enacted against bisexual women than bisexual men.

Evelyn: Doesn't surprise me. So we're at 1991. You've gone to your first Pride with great excitement.

Lisa: 1992.

Evelyn: 1992, sorry. Gone to your first Pride with great excitement, found out about the bisexual community. How did you manage to plug into it?

Lisa: I joined groups. It was wonderful. It was a heyday of bisexual organising in London and throughout the country. There were three groups in London. There was a general bisexual group, there was a women's bi network, and there was a BDSM bi network. I had much more connections with the women's bi group. I also had connections with the other groups. There was a real excitement there and a true sense of community, a sense of political excitement around change and some wonderful activists really inspiring people, doing really good stuff. It was a great thing to connect with.

Evelyn: Where did they meet?

Lisa: The women's bi group met in the London... I think it was called the London County Council offices, which were just off Kingsway. It was a big building, which was the... It was purchased originally by the London County Council in... I think in the '80s. There were all sorts of women's stuff there as well. They met there close to the site of the City Lit Adult Education College, Covent Garden basically, between Covent Garden and Holborn. The general bi group met in London Friend near Kings Cross, and the BDSM bi group met in... I think it was Central Station Pub. It was. This we're talking early to mid/late '90s.

Evelyn: Who were the leaders of the community or the most inspiring people?

Lisa: Obviously I'm not going to name names. People who had come to activism through some student activism, some things like people who'd been active around abortion rights, women's, feminist activism, gay rights in general and people who had just come out as bi and decided it was important and wanted to be active. So a broad variety.

Evelyn: What kind of activities did you undertake? Was it discussion groups or...

Lisa: Mainly discussion groups, yeah. There'd be topics. The women's bi group, we used to meet every week. There'd be a program of topics that members would agree every quarter and people would volunteer to run the discussion or they'd get in a speaker that they know. There was that, and of course there was BiCon every year, which continues on. BiCon continued on from that conference in 1981, which was the first political

organizing which bi people had done around bisexuality. Obviously, bi people have always been involved in a multitude of causes, but specifically political organizing around bisexuality, the first conference was in 1982. That has continued yearly fairly unbroken I think up to the present day.

Lisa: The Bi Pride event that you went to is a new startup. It was fantastically successful. There'd been many previous bi Prides done by much smaller groups of people in London and in Wales. There's been some in Bristol. I think there's been some in Scotland because people wanted to have more than just BiCon, the annual bi conference which is in the late summer every year. People wanted to have more to look forward to, to have a bigger group of bi people to meet up with and for it to be more local, more about their local town or city.

Lisa: So, the BiFests started up in those regional towns and cities this past autumn. The Bi Pride group was organised by a completely different group of people to the regular bi activists who'd been keeping things going for the last few decades basically. It was a staggering success. I met up with many long-time bi activists and people who've been on the scene for decades. We all had big smiles on our faces and one or two critical questions about putting things in context, which I think enriched the event.

Lisa: It was very gratifying to see whole new generation of young activists with bags of energy and people who are attuned to the cultural zeitgeist, which was all... Although bi organisers has always used new technology, definitely including social media and the best technology that's available at the time and that's free and accessible to everyone. That's a long rambling answer to your question.

Evelyn: No, no, not at all. Obviously, for the purposes of this tape and for people who might be... Funny we always say tape and it's not a tape at all! For the purposes of the recording... and future generations who will be listening to it, can you give us a flavour of some of the earlier BiCons that you attended?

Lisa: One thing you'd never do today was having a communal crash area for sleeping, for people who didn't have accommodation. People who couldn't afford accommodation or who had left it too late or whatever rocked up with their sleeping bags, and we all slept on the floor in this... like a large university room. You would never get that past health and safety and the legal team nowadays.

Evelyn: No, I don't think so.

Lisa: And also I... Well, I was going to say hopefully people's financial circumstances have changed, but that's actually not the case. The current generation of young people are substantially less well off than young people 10 and 20 years ago, but I think there was a kind of a great sense inherited from the '80s and the '70s of just doing what you like, but that's come up again with the Occupy Movement and Extinction Rebellion, the idea that you take over the space and you make it yours.

Evelyn: You disrupt.

Lisa: Yeah. BiCon was always a place like that. It's gotten much more organised and much more effective in some ways, but anyway, back to the anecdotes. The dances were always good. There would always be a disco on a Saturday night with amazing costumes. The quality of the costumes has continued to this day. I got pretty much all of my political education from BiCons.

Evelyn: What sort of topics and issues would [crosstalk 00:22:47]?

Lisa: There'd always be issues like feminism. There'd be racism awareness and ethnic minority focus groups and safe space for people who wanted to use that. There'd be stuff around BDSM and sexual styles and information for people who wanted to find out more about that. More recently, meaning the last 10 years, there's been stuff about older bi people and the desire to... people who want to have a chat with someone who shares more of their experience. I've enjoyed those. Lately, there's been an interest in people's health awareness in terms of doing stuff like going on bike rides or walks during BiCon, going for a swim in the local swimming baths, to try to build in the idea that bi people are also interested in being active.

Lisa: There's been a lot of joyful meeting up in real life for people who usually are in contact with people online. As I said, people have been on the forefront of organising online and through social media, so many people had a great support network and a lot of friends, but over the internet. So people really enjoyed coming to BiCon and actually seeing their friends and lovers in one place and in the flesh. There were... Let me see.

Lisa: More recently, there's been space for bi people who are parents, and there's been a lot of well thought through changes to BiCon so that there's space and places for bi parents who want to come to BiCon with their kids and have their kids in an appropriate non-BiCon atmosphere, in a creche basically. The BiCon organisers have paid for a creche to operate, so that parents don't have to organise a long weekend of childcare. Obviously, parents of young kids don't want to leave their kids behind or don't have anyone who can look after them. It also makes BiCon financially accessible for parents who have limited means.

Lisa: There's always been a Helping Hand Fund at BiCon, so people who couldn't otherwise come to BiCon are able to ask for a subsidy for their attendance fees and accommodation fees. That now has an extremely healthy amount of money, which is passed on from one set of BiCon organisers to the next, which underwrites the whole conference and also allows people to have subsidised access to BiCon.

Evelyn: Have you seen a change in the issues talked about over that time? Or is there a mixture of old chestnuts and some new things?

Lisa: Yes, it's old chestnuts and new things. I think regrettably BiCon has sort of been attended by the same sorts of people with the same kind of interest in the bisexual community over the last few decades. I think what happened with last autumn's Bi Pride was this coalescence and extremely effective event production by a whole new generation of people who weren't those old activists who have been busting a gut to

keep things going for decades and holding the communal memory of the bi movement in the UK and also the people who've made international networks with bi movements in other countries and kept bi political organising rolling as a... I say global. It's mainly a developed world thing, but there's been a lot of effort to link up internationally to help out other networks and groups.

Lisa: The group of BiCon organisers who've kept things running have a staunch, left-wing, grassroots activism perspective. The flavour's come and gone. The flavour has changed with the years, but those are the people who have... I think should all receive MBEs or something like that for services to the bisexual community. Those are the people who've given a large chunk of their life to grow and nurture and maintain bi community in the UK.

Lisa: I think it's great that that kind of hard-won experience has been brought to bear on BiCon and other central bi-community networking and organising down the years because it hasn't waxed and waned with fashion. It's maintained a collective memory and collective knowledge of useful stuff like the BiCon code of conduct and the BiCon organisers' handbook, which is updated every year and changes are voted for in the decision making plenary, which is effectively the bi community's AGM.

Lisa: The activists who've kept that strain of bi community going have had absolutely no illusions as to the difficulties that they would face. They are people of enormous heart and courage who were willing year after year to face those difficulties and keep the exercise running. There is one bi activist now who has an MBE for services to the bisexual community, and that's the editor of the Bi Community News, Jen Yockney. There should be a plethora of them because I'm sure you're very well aware that grassroots activists do it for love, and they do it because they hold it in conviction that what they're working on is important. That's been the case with that long term series of events and community organising.

Lisa: The social atmosphere is very different now, although sometimes you wonder how different it is because people are very quick to... When bisexuality is brought up, they're very quick to make noises, verbal or non verbal, to indicate that it's second rate or it's questionable or it's not as serious as the gay and lesbian priorities or we don't need to worry about any of that because it's all been sorted out. Or, frankly, biphobic comments that people like that are sex-mad swingers and a bit disgusting.

Evelyn: Do you feel those come more from within the community or...

Lisa: Within what community?

Evelyn: We call it an LGBT community. Does it come from lesbians and gay men or is it something aimed by heterosexuals as well?

Lisa: The complicated study, which was run I believe in 2013 and published in 2015, found that the most common sources of biphobia for the about 500 bisexual people who answered the survey were LGBT organisations and the NHS. LGBT organisations were

the most common cause. 25% of respondents who reported receiving biphobic treatment had received it from an LGBT organisation. In other words, that's an organisation that's received their tax pounds to support them and instead is attacking them.

Evelyn: Shocking, isn't it?

Lisa: It was a great study, and it's been very instrumental in changing LGBT organisation's attitudes because they are legally culpable in that situation and they're wide open to having their funding reduced because of it.

Evelyn: So that was 2013. Do you feel there've been changes?

Lisa: That was 2015. Sorry. That was released.

Evelyn: Are you feeling any changes in the scene?

Lisa: Yes, yes.

Evelyn: What's the impact been?

Lisa: For example, Stonewall used to pay lip service to supporting bisexuals, but did nothing, yet still collected government money saying that they supported bisexual people. They did active things to undermine bisexual people like saying that issues of marriage equality weren't a priority for them. Many ...Now, let me get this right: It wasn't marriage equality. It was the lack of awareness that many of their LGBT constituency are married already because they're bi people in mixed-sex marriages. It was a blindness, witting or unwitting, around... And many people would say a refusal to engage while still being very happy to take the money that goes with the numbers.

Lisa: Stonewall have made enormous strides to be truly and usefully bi supportive as an advocacy organisation and in terms of their own staffing. Diva Magazine has come an enormous distance. Diva Magazine is now... On pretty much every page, you'll find reinforcement that it's for bi and lesbian women and women who are non heterosexual and great engagement with trans women's issues as well and intersex and queer. That's been a staggering change. I don't have to read it with gritted teeth anymore.

Lisa: I think the Government Equality Office has taken biphobia onboard, and that's evidenced by the policies they publish and the speeches that come out of that office. I can't speak as much for queer men's organisations. Their approach to bisexual men and bisexual men's inclusion was influenced much more by HIV and the history of HIV activism. I don't have much information about that, but there's been improvement, I think from my limited exposure, to queer men's stuff in the UK.

Evelyn: My impression is that amongst younger people, there seems to be far more openness and less biphobia. I don't know if that's your experience.

Lisa: I've never come out to a young person as bi, so I don't know.

Evelyn: But you were saying that maybe the Bi Pride was run by a lot of younger people.

Lisa: Yeah. Younger bi people, so when you say young people, I think of straight young people. My wife and I have no children and we generally mix with people who don't have children, and my job doesn't involve working with children, so I'm not often talking to young adults or children. I don't really know. I know what I read in the mainstream media and in queer media. I hear that there has been. It seems bi stuff is now occasionally reported positively in the mainstream media. I was very happy to see a piece in the Guardian Magazine lately, which for the first time ever the journalist who was writing the piece contacted someone from a bi group and asked for information from them.

Lisa: Several years ago, when there was a YouGov survey, which found that... I think it was 23... No, almost half of under 25 year olds identified as neither straight nor gay. There was a multi-page article in the Guardian which referred only to that. It succeeded in... It ignored BiCon and there'd been the biggest BiCon ever that year. This was 2014 I think. There'd been two major books published by the bi community, one from the community itself and one on an academic overview of bisexuality and issues to do with it. No contact with Bi Community News, which is the bimonthly, bi magazine that's been running since early 2000s I think, and before then, they were bi newsletters as well.

Lisa: Just a spectacular piece of erasure of bisexual people's voices in favour of the journalist's own conjecture and riffing on this result from I think a couple of hundred people who responded to the YouGov survey. I hear that young people are more aware of bisexuality. However, there's been a very rapid movement towards being unlabelled or being fluid or being pansexual or omnisexual or unlabelled, which in my perception is also biphobic because it's a refusal to engage with and support the bi community and to validate that identity.

Lisa: I'm probably being a bit sensitive with that and I know that people... Of course every generation rebels against the previous generation and invents their own version of stuff. That's just the way things proceed. All of that kind of creation of new ways of being non homosexual and non heterosexual... Not being monosexual is the clearest way of doing it. All of that's been happening over the last more than 10 years. It's only been in the last kind of three years that I've seen support in mainstream, general media outlets for a bi identity, and that's been in the Guardian.

Evelyn: Do you feel that bi visibility has improved?

Lisa: Yes, I think so.

Evelyn: I think so because I think it's-

Lisa: It's a pretty low bar.

Evelyn: Yeah.

Lisa: It depends on compared with what. Yes, it's improved in the time that I've been out as bi. That's a long time, 28 years. It's definitely improved. If I said I was bisexual to my manager now, I wouldn't be at risk of losing my job or being reduced... I don't think I would be reduced to being the office joke. However, I would expect negative comments. I would expect unfavourable reactions, and that's the reason why I don't do it. I'm certainly out about my relationship with my wife and, after a certain period of time in a new job, like a couple of years, I would say to friends I've made in work... If they said, "Oh, what did you do on the weekend?", I would say, "Oh, I went to BiCon." I would briefly explain what that was, but I wouldn't do that unless I had tested out what kind of a person they were and what their politics were and what their support for diversity in general was and whether they had LGBT friends or whatever.

Evelyn: Really in short, when you're dealing with people around you, you feel far more confident being considered by them to be a lesbian than... And confident [crosstalk 00:44:56].

Lisa: I would never use the word lesbian because I find that distasteful. The effects I've had from lesbian women's biphobia have negatively coloured by life and the same with gay men. I don't want to be identified...

Evelyn: Identified as a lesbian?

Lisa: Yeah, but I...

Evelyn: You're more comfortable in...

Lisa: I would assume that other people will make that assumption.

Evelyn: Will use that word in their heads.

Lisa: If they said, "Oh, well let's get the opinion from a lesbian. Lisa, what do you think?" I would probably say, "Well, actually I don't identify as a lesbian, although I am in a same-sex relationship." They can ask more questions if they want to.

Evelyn: But in essence, you feel that there's a less... in other people's minds, there's less of a negative approach to the fact that you're in a same-sex relationship with another woman than there would be if they thought you were...

Lisa: Oh yes, definitely.

Evelyn: Bisexual. That's...

Lisa: That's my working assumption based on the evidence I've received. I'm also needing to keep my job. I've worked hard to develop several careers-

Evelyn: Keep good relationships within it, yeah.

Lisa: And to eventually make my way into a job which is in an LGBT-supported workplace, where I feel a general sense of support for gay men and lesbian women and maybe the odd trans person. I joined the LGBT staff network. There is one. I'm older, and I have a mortgage, and I really want to keep my job until I retire. I want a positive workplace network.

Evelyn: Network, yeah. Happy relationships within

Lisa: And relationships with people, which is important if you're wanting to work in more senior positions. Informal networks are very important. Because I did a master's in public health and my dissertation was on bisexual women's mental health, so I read a lot about the research that was available on that topic. I'm well aware of the evidence from research on bisexual people in the workplace that they are quickly perceived in a more negative light once they come out and that that affects their mental health and it affects their promotion chances.

Evelyn: Yeah, of course.

Lisa: I would gauge every potential coming out situation on its strengths and weaknesses. If people were being obviously biphobic, I hope I would have the courage to come out and correct their assumptions. If there was nothing to be gained from coming out as bi, I certainly wouldn't, so somewhere between those two extremes.

Evelyn: Entirely understandable. I can see we're moving towards the end of our time. I just wanted to be sure when you were coming to speak to me today, were there any burning issues that you had on your mind that we haven't touched on at all?

Lisa: In terms of history, I guess one thing I'd like to recount from my own experience is making relationships with lesbian women and my experience of that as an out bisexual woman. Of course, I was out to them as soon as I knew that I was sexually interested in them because it would have been completely unfair and a terrible basis for a relationship had I been otherwise. That's been the case in two relationships, the first of which had a terribly rocky road because my girlfriend was very biphobic, despite the fact that at that stage I'd never slept with a man and she'd slept with several. But she was a right on separatist lesbian who really did not do my confidence or self esteem any favours. I was glad to end that relationship and it was the right thing to do.

Lisa: She was the first sexual relationship I'd had. My relationship with my now wife was enormously different I think because of aspects of her personal history, which made her more sympathetic to people who are outside the kind of lesbian and gay mainstream in the UK, if I can call it that, her previous experience of relationships with bisexual women and her affection for me and the connection we had. She was interested in me as a person, and she was also interested in pursuing a strong sexual attraction on its merits. She had the courage to do that in the here and now, despite misgivings and some fears.

Lisa: We've come a distance in her understanding of bisexuality. She now no longer says to me things like, "Oh well, the only way you can be out is by going round wearing a T-shirt that says bisexual on the front." She's extremely supportive. She's had the courage to base her decisions on me around love and around her perception of my worth as a person and my integrity and based on trusting what I say rather than negative stereotypes around bisexuality.

Lisa: I'm enormously fortunate to have found a partner like her. I think that the social advances around acceptance of bisexuality reflected in the LGBT social acceptance, or better acceptance of bisexuality, all of that has had a positive effect on our relationship. Certainly things like being able to get married has had a hugely positive effect. We're lucky to live in the times that we're in.

Evelyn: I think what you're saying there about your lovely partner now kind of illustrates that there's such a wall of negative stereotypes for people to get up and over around bisexuality in order for them to really in general be very accepting. It was a wall or a hill that she had to climb in order to get to the deeper part of your relationship. And, hopefully, I think from what you've been saying that that hill is getting a bit smaller as time goes.

Lisa: I would say we've climbed it.

Evelyn: You've climbed it personally, but I think it does reflect in the wider society that that the negative stereotype, whilst still often there ... do you think it's diminishing somewhat?

Lisa: I mean, as I was saying earlier, I don't test it regularly to see if it's still there or not because I'm afraid to do so.

Evelyn: That's entirely understandable.

Lisa: I take the information around changes in bi acceptance from the media I read basically and from comments I hear from people. I don't regularly go up to people and say, "So what do you think about my sexuality?"

Evelyn: [Laughing] Of course.

Lisa: And form my opinions based on what they say. I wish that I had the confidence to do that more because internalised negativity about yourself, then is a destructive psychological force, and it does erode your confidence. People who are more confident are given more license, are believed more and listened to more. Because they have that energy, they're more like the top dogs in any group. If you develop less confidence, you will be listened to less and believed less and held in lower esteem. That's just the way people operate as pack animals. What point was I trying to make? I've lost it sorry.

Evelyn: It's partly about the confidence of being able to...

Lisa: Yeah, I think it's important to...

Evelyn: Push the barriers of the negative stereotypes. I think maybe things like the Bi Pride event in London and all that energy of the younger people, they've got that push to start to erode those negative stereotypes.

Lisa: On that, there was heavy... Heavy? There were three or four security guards who checked you carefully before you got in.

Evelyn: Yes, definitely.

Lisa: And we're all aware of why that is necessary.

Evelyn: Finally, I will just ask thinking back to the young Lisa, maybe in Australia or maybe just first setting foot over here in '91...

Lisa: 1992.

Evelyn: '92. What would you say to her?

Lisa: I would say, "Keep on going. Don't go under because there will be people who believe that you're very worthwhile and that your bisexuality is part of what makes you you. They will support that and value it. You'll need to be careful in how you search for those people and protect yourself, but those people will be there. You will have a happier time of it than you're having at the moment."

Evelyn: I'm very glad that you are having a happier time of it. I think perhaps we are moving into a time of better acceptability, better... well, it shouldn't be accepted. We should be celebrating that sort of diversity. We should be celebrating bi women and bi men.

Lisa: That would be lovely. There was that sense within the community itself in the '70s and '80s. Bi people didn't get kicked out of the modern lesbian and gay movement for a few years until that started tightening up in the early '70s. About '74, '75 I think they got kicked out in New York and told to go off and organise by themselves, so they did. It started out being an accepting, sort of polymorphous community. Maybe some of that has re-emerged again, the idea that what you do in bed doesn't make you a pariah. In fact, sex is important and to be celebrated.

Lisa: There's a whole other force now coming against that with austerity and growing authoritarianism in society and the retreat to conservative values. I think that's an enormous threat for anyone who's seen to embody sexuality or non-conforming freedom of any kind. I think that there's new cause for hope and new cause for concern in the current day, so it's really important that people are doing work like your own to allow people's voices to be heard. Learn the lessons of history.

Evelyn: From their own lips.

Lisa: Yes.

Evelyn: Also, I think it's a time when there are pressures from outside that the LGBTQ, the non-straight community does tend to pull together more cohesively and learn to celebrate each other and be together.

Lisa: Yeah, it needs to be a collective that includes all of us. That's always a tension and a challenge, but it's really worth trying to meet that challenge.

Evelyn: I will just say thank you so much for-

Lisa: You're welcome.

Evelyn: Talking to me today about all of this and to reminding me and hopefully everyone listening in the future of how important it is to pull together and to celebrate each other.

Lisa: Absolutely.

Evelyn: Okay. Thank you.

Lisa: Thank you very much for giving me the opportunity.