

2.2 The Ups and Downs of a Late Bloomer

Daniela, Switzerland

I am a Swiss cis woman in my mid-fifties, married to a straight man, and a late bloomer in two ways—at 33, I came to faith, and only 18 years later did I realise I was bisexual in the sense of Robyn Ochs' definition, namely I have the potential to be attracted to people of more than one gender. With few exceptions, I am still not out. I am a member of my church leadership team and am employed part-time as a pastor in training in a not fully affirming free evangelical church. I am currently in the process of becoming an ordained pastor.

How did it take me so long to realise that I was bisexual? I've often asked myself this question. Looking back, a combination of social circumstances, personal history and character are responsible for this—factors some readers may recognise in themselves.

Teenage Years in the Heteronormative, Homophobic 1980s

As a member of Generation X, my formative teenage years were spent in the 1980s. The music charts were topped by bands like Queen and Culture Club, with openly queer frontmen such as Freddie Mercury and Boy George, while androgynous solo artists like David Bowie and flamboyant stars like Elton John enjoyed success. And yet, same-sex relationships—let alone bisexuality—were virtually absent from public discourse and the media.

It was the same at home. I vaguely remember my mother once speaking positively about gay acquaintances, but queerness was not a topic. It

was a similar story at school. There were no visible same-sex couples. Rumours circulated about possibly gay or lesbian teachers and that was that. The subject of same-sex love only became more prominent with the AIDS epidemic. The tenor of the media at that time was extremely negative (“the gay plague”), with male homosexuality seen as particularly threatening.

This lack of visibility was partly responsible for me not realising when I was attracted to girls. Drenched in hormones like most teens, I usually fancied some boy and was obsessed with having a boyfriend. Only in retrospect do I realise that I was also fascinated by girls. I still remember some of them to this day, in terms of their personality and appearance. But I had no language for these feelings, and it didn't occur to me that this fascination might be attraction. In my mind, I simply admired and envied these girls, wanting to be like them. It was only when I looked back, that I realised what was really going on.

One experience from my childhood demonstrates to what extent societal homophobia shaped my sexual identity. Around age four, I became friends with a girl my age who lived in our apartment block. We went to pre-school and primary school together and were inseparable until I went to secondary school. We also shared our childhood crushes on boys. One day, we were playing “boyfriend and girlfriend” in our apartment block's recreation. She played herself, and I played the boy she had a crush on. Somehow, we realised that what we were doing was strange, because we hid in a closet (!). Inside we held each other closely and I stroked her arm. At that moment, her older sister discovered us and, in a disgusted tone, asked if we were lesbians. We were nine or ten years old at that time and had no idea what a lesbian was, but her reaction was unmistakable—only lesbians did what we were doing, and they were disgusting. I don't remember if we ever talked about the incident afterwards, but we never played “boyfriend and girlfriend” again.

Other Inhibiting Factors: Demisexuality and Neurodivergence

Two other aspects probably contributed to my late coming out: I'm demisexual and neurodivergent. Reliable self-assessments indicate an elevated autism score, and I suspect, based on mixed symptoms, that I have both autism and ADHD.

As a demisexual person, the idea of wanting to be intimate with someone with whom I have not formed a mental and emotional bond is completely alien to me. If I meet someone on the street, no matter how attractive that person may be, I would never want to be intimate with them. My neurodivergent brain also means that I only 'click' with a few people. As a result, I very rarely meet someone with whom I can form a deep mental and emotional connection. And the fewer people I can make such a connection with, the less often I feel attraction and realise that I have feelings for someone—be it a man, a woman or a non-binary person.

One factor that also delayed my coming out by almost twenty years was—to use the fundamentalist expression—my late conversion. I grew up in a socially liberal, social democratic environment. My university years—prime time for exploring one's sexual identity—were mostly spent in a Catholic fraternity, where same-sex relationships were not present or discussed. However, it was here that I first came into close contact with a queer person—a new young man came out to me as gay and eventually chose me as his 'beer mum' (a godmother in the fraternity). In retrospect, his choice no longer seems so random to me.

At 33, I came to faith in a Pentecostal charismatic church. There, for the first time, I heard the teaching that God disapproves of homosexuality. I didn't understand why same-sex love was supposedly sinful, but I lacked both the biblical knowledge and spiritual maturity to challenge it. I simply filed it under "things about faith I don't yet understand."

Once again, I entered a world without openly same-sex couples. Everyone knew such relationships wouldn't be accepted. Occasionally, I heard testimonies in small groups from people who said they had "overcome" same-sex attraction, or rumours about members with "that

problem.” But since I didn’t think it applied to me, I didn’t think about it any further.

First Cracks in the Cocoon

Ten years after my conversion, I left that church on good terms and joined my current free evangelical church. Over the next decade, I took on increasing leadership responsibilities. In 2020, I began internal theological training that equipped me to critically examine Scripture. Around the same time, our movement began a serious conversation about same-sex relationships.

In 2022, I concluded for myself that God is not against same-sex relationships. I voiced this opinion and felt encouraged when trusted church members shared it. Without realizing it, my newly won “yes” to homosexuality created deep cracks in my heterosexual cocoon. It wouldn’t take much more for the truth to break through.

An “Internal Coming out” through Binge-Watching

The catalyst came in the form of two TV series. The first was Netflix’s *Heartstopper*¹, released in April 2022. I had just embraced same-sex relationships as valid, and I was curious about the LGBTQ+ world. I didn’t expect the show to strike me like lightning. I watched all eight short episodes repeatedly, not understanding what fascinated and touched me so much. What did the story of a sixteen-year-old boy discovering his bisexuality have to do with me?

My curiosity deepened into a neurodivergent hyperfocus. I watched YouTube videos about bisexuality from a real-life YouTuber featured in *Heartstopper*, then found reaction videos from queer creators watching the show. This was my first—albeit virtual—contact with the queer community, and their testimonies moved me deeply. They spoke of joy that

1 Netflix, 2022.

such a show now existed, but also of grief that they hadn't enjoyed such positive representation as teens.

The final crack came with *Sex Education*. I watched it for Nauti Gatwa, the future *Doctor Who*, but one therapy scene changed everything. Dr. Jean Milburn asks teenager Ola what kind of people catch her eye on the street. Ola answers, "Everyone." Jean explains that this isn't typical—that it suggests being bi or pansexual. My immediate thought was: *Well, of course*. And while Ola identified as pan, this label didn't really suit me. For me, gender does make a difference, but I am able to be attracted to people from every gender. In that quiet, undramatic moment, I realized: I must be bisexual.

The Importance of Art, Visibility and an Internal Coming Out

Let me take a brief detour, speaking as both a writer and someone profoundly influenced by books and films: The visibility of non-heteronormative relationships and life paths in art and entertainment is of vital importance and cannot be overstated. For me, these two series were the doorway to recognizing I'm queer.

We urgently need more books, artworks, games, comics, films and series that address these themes well—where queer protagonists are neither clichéd token characters nor tragic figures, but simply live their lives like everyone else, without being reduced to their queerness.

Looking back, I now understand why certain fictional characters and actors touched me so deeply. I was always most emotionally affected by films where I was drawn to both leads—like the 2005 version of *Pride and Prejudice*² or *Atonement*³ (two words: Keira Knightley!). Even though these weren't queer stories, they planted seeds that would later bloom into my "bisexual awakening."

Some realizations still make me smile—I only recently recognized how fascinated I'd been by Watts, the short-haired, leather-jacket-wear-

2 Working Title Films, 2005.

3 Working Title Films, 2007.

ing, drum-playing character in the 1987 teen romance *Some Kind of Wonderful*⁴. And even more moving to me was the relationship between Idgie Threadgoode—also played by Mary Stuart Masterson—and Ruth Jamsen in the film adaptation of *Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Café*.⁵ In Fannie Flagg's book, their relationship is clearly romantic; the film downplays it, but the sapphic tension is unmistakable.

Between Worlds: the Blessings and Burdens of my Situation

This delayed coming out has left me in a complicated place: I'm 55, out only to my husband and my queer Christian small group, yet also a church leader and part-time staff member in a denomination that allows some flexibility on inclusion, but officially teaches that same-sex sexual relationships go against God's will.

The hardest part is feeling “in-between”—the sense of belonging nowhere. It's a familiar bisexual experience: too queer for straight people, not queer enough for the LGBTQ+ community, doubted by both. For me, that's compounded by growing up outside the church, coming to faith late, masking my neurodivergence, and being demisexual: too religious for my non-church friends, too “worldly” for some church members; too odd for my neurotypical friends, yet too well-masked to be seen as part of the neurodiverse community; not asexual, but not fully allosexual either. I seem to belong to no-one, because my overlap with any one group is so small.

I sometimes grieve the fact that I didn't know or live out such a significant part of my identity for so long. I don't mourn missed physical experiences, but I long to explore and embrace this part of myself—at queer parties, in queer community, even outside Christian spaces. That's still possible. Yet I can't help wondering how my life might have been different had I known sooner.

4 Hughes Entertainment, 1987.

5 Universal Pictures, 1991.

Fear of Rejection and a Big “Yes, But”

Another heavy fear is whether the acceptance I’ve experienced in my church would vanish if I came out. I am, despite personal growth, still someone who craves harmony and hates conflict. I find it deeply stressful when someone is angry with me. In the congregation I’ve been part of for a decade—where I’ve taken on much responsibility and helped shape the community—I’m trusted, respected, and liked. Would that change? How would people treat me if they knew?

The greatest tension lies in how my queerness intersects with my sense of calling to pastoral ministry. Just before my 50th birthday, and before my internal coming out, I first had the impression that God might be calling me to be a pastor. I wrestled with this—especially because of my strong introversion—but received ongoing encouragement from internal theological training and other sources.

About a year ago, I began the denomination’s preparatory training for pastors to discern whether I am suited and called to the role. I received a big yes, both internal and external—except for the enormous *but* of my unspoken bisexuality. Would those who now see me as a pastor still think so if they knew? Would they take back their “yes”?

This raises a difficult question: is it necessary, important, or even essential to disclose my queer identity? I’m still torn. On one hand, I don’t owe anyone an outing. I’m married to a man, monogamous, and have no intention of changing that. By church guidelines, I am not “living in sin.” In theory, these guidelines allow someone who is homosexually or bisexually oriented to be ordained—as long as they don’t act on it.

But I dislike the situation because it feels inauthentic. I find it hard to bear not being open.

An Insider’s View on the Needs of Queer People

Alongside these challenges, I see positives—for both myself and the church. My internal coming out has sharpened my awareness of queer needs and the harm caused by non-affirming theology. I think often

about the effect on young queer people in our denomination, which spans a wide theological spectrum—some congregations are strongly rejecting, others are cautiously opening up within the limits allowed.

This means queer youth have vastly different experiences depending on their local church. Some hear that homosexuality is a sin; others hear more positive messages. But in both cases, they suffer from a lack of understanding—especially regarding bisexuality. Even in open churches, queer youth are often alone in their challenges, lacking older queer role models in the congregation. Most of those potential mentors have long left the church, after years of rejection or pressure to deny their identity.

I also think about the likely significant number of unconsciously bisexual people in churches like mine. Understanding of bisexuality is minimal—even well-meaning, educated Christians around me often believe bisexuals need multiple partners to be happy. Combined with the teaching that only heterosexual attraction is God's will, this has probably kept many from recognizing their bisexuality. As teens, they may have felt same-sex attraction but interpreted it as temptation, turning away from it in favour of the opposite sex—marrying, and living in heterosexual relationships. In their view, this was a healing brought about by faith and obedience.

Such hidden bisexuality may not be a problem for them personally, but it can hinder openness toward queerness in the church. To acknowledge bisexuality would mean facing the possibility that they themselves are bi—and that their “healing” never happened. This could shake their faith and self-image and may cause unconscious resistance to even talking about queerness.

The “Pro” Side: Joyful Coming out, Little Trauma

One great blessing is that I discovered my bisexuality only after I was on solid affirming theological ground. I believe that's no accident—without that inner “yes” to non-heterosexual relationships, my internal coming out would not have happened.

Because of that, my realization was not dramatic or painful—it was a joyful *aha* moment. I was glad to have learned something new about myself, something that explained so much of my past. I never wrestled with feeling “wrong,” but knew from the start that God made me this way and that it was good. I avoided the heavy baggage of trauma that many Christian queers my age carry. I know that’s a gift.

I see a strong parallel with my late conversion—coming to faith has been the greatest treasure of my life. Knowing that God says yes to me no matter my circumstances—that He made me as I am (quirky, introverted, queer)—has freed me in many ways.

Called to Build Bridges and Stir the Waters

All these unique traits strengthen my conviction to stay where I am: in my not-yet-fully-affirming church, in leadership, in pastoral ministry—and to tie my calling closely to LGBTQ+ advocacy. This is where I am meant to work for change. As someone between worlds, I am called to be a bridge-builder—fearlessly authentic.

For me, being myself has always been a non-negotiable need. That’s why I believe the time will come when I will be open about my bisexuality. Given my introversion and dislike of making a fuss, it won’t be a dramatic announcement—ideally, it will happen organically. I see it as a second calling to write books featuring queer characters, and for those to be taken seriously, they should be written by someone who can speak from personal experience.

Until then, I will live in this “twilight zone,” aware that part of my identity remains hidden and is rejected by my church. I must live with the uncertainty of when the moment will come to step into the light—and how people will react. But I trust, as I have since January 2004, in God’s guidance.

When the time comes, I will be ready—even if it means causing a stir, something I find uncomfortable. I dislike confrontation, taking up space, or disrupting the status quo. But even as I write this, I feel a growing conviction that this is part of my calling—to make people in my

church face the reality that those they admire for their character, gifts and maturity can be queer. To stand for queer people because I am one of them. To build bridges fearlessly and authentically, by stirring the waters.

This chapter reflects the personal experiences, memories and interpretations of the author. Names and identifying details have been changed or omitted for privacy.