



## ***Practical Significance* | Episode 6: ASA Pride**

**Donna LaLonde:** Welcome everyone to the June episode of *Practical Significance*, the podcast where Ron and I get to have fun conversations with some of our most amazing colleagues today. We're delighted to welcome Jiashen You and Suzanne Thornton to the podcast. And we would like to start by asking Suzanne and Jiashen to introduce themselves to our audience. And so Jiashen, I'll turn it over to you.

**Jiashen You:** Good morning, Donna and Ron. Thanks for having me. So, my name's Jiashen You. I'm a full-time statistician working for the federal government. I've held various roles from research positions at the Census Bureau to more project management and data policy setting functions elsewhere over the years. Currently, I work in the chief data officer's shop at the Equal Employment Opportunity commission, also known as the EOC and I'm a part-time faculty member at George Washington University in Washington, DC. I'm attending this podcast today in my personal capacity.

**Donna LaLonde:** Thanks, Jiashen. And Suzanne, would you introduce yourself?

**Suzanne Thornton:** Hi Ron. Hi Jiashen. It's great to be here with all of you today. My name is Suzanne Thornton. I am a statistician in the mathematics and statistics department at Swarthmore College. I graduated in 2019 with a PhD in Statistics from Rutgers University. And before that I studied mathematics and statistics at the University of Florida.

**Donna LaLonde:** Well, Ron and I are delighted to have you both here to help us celebrate the beginning of Pride Month in June, Suzanne. I'd like to start with you and ask if you could talk a little bit about the work that you did leading the LGBTQ+ Working Group as a part of Wendy Martinez' presidential initiative. So, tell us about what the group accomplished and what work is still being undertaken.

**Suzanne Thornton:** Thank, Donna. So, I served as the chair for this working group. It was a result of the 2019 Town Hall at JSM that the ASA LGBTQ+ Advocacy Committee hosted and the result of this town hall, we met with a lot of statisticians and data scientists from all over the world and all over the country. And one of the common themes that we heard reiterated was the need for community and the need for a network to basically just help LGBTQ+ statisticians and data scientists and allies be able to connect with one another more easily and readily and be in touch with current research that's related to LGBTQ concerns, issues and, and data.

So, Wendy Martinez started this amazing working group and I got to work with some really great people and our goals were rather broad. We wanted to foster a supportive and inclusive environment for LGBTQ+ statisticians and data scientists. We wanted to create new opportunities for success in leadership with LGBTQ+ statisticians. And we also wanted to increase the representation in our field and a couple of the outcomes. One of which we'll talk about a little bit later is the Pride Scholarship, which is an exciting new funding opportunity to support LGBTQ+ statisticians, early on in their career.

And another really exciting outcome is a soon-to-be publication in *Significance* magazine. It's going to be coming out this August on best practices for gender and sex as variables of interest. And this is best practices from a statistically informed point of view. And we're really excited about this publication. It's definitely something that's in high demand from researchers from other disciplines, such as psychology

and sociology and biology in many other fields. And I think that the statistical point of view is going to be a very necessary and hopefully useful component. We also hosted a virtual Pride celebration last year in 2020. Oof course, 2020 was a really difficult year to be starting a working group for many reasons, but we're really very happy to have a successful network of people that could come together and at least virtually celebrate and connect with one another.

So, we presented at a virtual STEM Conference on our work for the best practices paper, and Brittany Green and Bento were working with us and created a website that is going to be passed on to Dyson and the LGBTQ+ Advocacy Committee. And this is a website that's currently hosted by Google sites. If you go to [sites.google.com/view/ASA-LGBTQ](https://sites.google.com/view/ASA-LGBTQ), this is a place where you can learn about the different people who were on the working group with me and the different research initiatives and outreach initiatives that we've been fostering and creating and connecting. And this is also hopefully going to be a place where we can share our work as it relates to both LGBTQ+ research, but also just to our own research, whether or not it's related to LGBTQ+ issues.

And some of the things that we're looking forward to that are still to come include some ally training programs that will hopefully be available through the ASA at large, for people in both industry and academia or in research who want to be more inclusive in both their professional environments and policies. This'll be an opportunity to help educate one another on how to do that with respect to the LGBTQ+ population.

**Donna LaLonde:** Thanks so much, Suzanne. I know Wendy is very grateful for all the work that you and the group have accomplished and looks forward to the ongoing collaborations. And I think that's a perfect segue to the LGBTQ+ Advocacy Committee, which Jiashen is chairing and is also doing incredible work. So Jiashen, I'll turn it over to you to tell us a little bit about what the committee is up to.

**Jiashen You:** Certainly, Donna and thank you for that question. So, I've been very fortunate to be involved in this committee since late 2019 and to build upon the work Suzanne and other colleagues have done. So, this particular ASA committee has been in existence for quite some time. It was known as the ASA LGBTQ Concerns Committee until 2020. And before that the ASA Gay and Lesbian Concerns Committee for more than a decade. We have come a long way from fighting stigma and discrimination toward this community, our physical and mental-health related issues, and statistics in general, certainly has helped in the steady push. When an opportunity to rename the committee came up about a year and a half ago, the former committee chair, Jack Miller and I thought hard about this committee's mission and ways to build more inclusivity. We settled on the word "Advocacy" as we expanded the committee's representation.

I was listening to the last few podcasts and was just thinking there were probably enough names that we considered at a time that could run up the "Top 10 Names" that did not make it list. So, we were quite intentional with updating the committee's name and charge for several reasons. First, we answered a call from then-ASA, President Wendy Martinez for expanding diversity, equity, and inclusion. As you may recall, the JSM 2020 theme was "Everyone Counts: Data for the Public Good." A very fitting name for a year that the San Diego census took place. Second, we would like to revitalize our committee and potentially pivot front a group that you can rely on having an inclusive networking platform or AKA someone who knows how to throw a friendly JSM happy hour 😊 to play a more major role in coordinating with ASA on LGBTQ+ focused research work.

So, last year, Donna, you helped us establish an ASA partnership with the National Organization of Gay and Lesbian Scientists and Technical Professionals. So, building and sustaining these strategic partnerships so that we can reach a broader audience is part of our goal here and the word advocacy. To me, it speaks more actions, such as cultivating LGBTQ+ leaders and allies, providing them with training and mentoring that will help them succeed and keep lifting them up. So, I'm very grateful for the current ASA president, Rob Santos, supporting the initiative on diversity, equity, and inclusion and his commitment to build a more diverse statistical community. As he mentioned in the first podcast, we would like to create a microcosm of a "pay it forward" pipeline within our community. I could go on and on about the work and the vision of this committee, as they are very relatable to me.

But I will say this before we move on – the phrase, "Strength in Numbers" is not just a slogan that applies to the Golden State Warriors.. It means so much more beyond the brute force interpretation of sample size that we teach and preach almost every day. It matters, uh, in precision reliability, robustness power, and even repeatability and reproducibility of research for our allies who are interested in research on statistical issues associated with sexual orientation and gender identity. I hope that we can keep expanding our coverage to include topics such as employment rights, fair housing education, and just general wellbeing and quality of life. For instance, the Williams Institute at UCLA recently released several studies ranging from LGBTQ people who lack protection to the disparate impact of COVID-19 to the LGBTQ community, to restricted healthcare for transgender youth. And for those who are interested in getting more involved with our committee, please feel free to get in touch with me. Thank you.

**Suzanne Thornton:** I just wanted to comment on what you said. I think about the strength in numbers. I thought that was absolutely beautiful and extremely well-put. I also wanted to say that the working group that I led and the LGBTQ Advocacy Committee that you're leading, we worked very closely together. The outcomes of the working group would not have been possible without Jack Miller and their intentional work to grow the scope and the outreach of this ASA committee. Thank you for that.

**Ron Wasserstein:** Thank you, Jiashen and Suzanne, for those wonderful stories about work that's being done in the committee and in the working group. As I was hearing you talk about that, I was reminded yet again, just how much the ASA depends on volunteers. We can't live without volunteers like you and the members of the working group and the committee helping us do these things on the flip side of that. we always hope that volunteer service for the ASA is something that's beneficial to the volunteers as well. So, my question for both of you, and maybe I'll start to Jiashen, and then you can swing the microphone over to Suzanne after that is – how has your ASA service impacted, influenced your work? Just tell us a little bit about that. Thanks.

**Jiashen You:** Ron, is that question about causality?

**Ron Wasserstein:** Yes, it is!

**Jiashen You:** Okay. Well, I will say quite positively in both causality and association census, I'm a civil servant during the day. So public service and volunteering really speaks to me. And I've been involved in several other ASA groups for several years, ranging from helping with mentoring programs to coordinating local science fairs. It's been a very rewarding and enriching experience to meet other statisticians through ASA and exchange ideas. Since I deal with academic researchers and other statisticians in the federal government, quite often that external awareness from networking as well as building coalitions with ASA colleagues have certainly helped me perform better at my job. Well, you

know, so far, according to several of my supervisors. On the other hand, I can't quite say the same thing about my student's experience since I sometimes created class projects on the fly after learning new open data sets from my ASA friends.

**Ron Wasserstein:** Thanks, Jiashen. Suzanne?

**Suzanne Thornton:** The way that the ASA and ASA service work has influenced my career trajectory is really enormous. And I'm incredibly grateful for the opportunities afforded to me. I remember my first statistical conferences like WSDS and JSM, and it was at these conferences where I found statisticians with whom I shared motivation and values and interests. And at these conferences I was first able to connect with former president, Wendy Martinez, and Donna and, and others who became mentors and friends, colleagues, co-authors and have ultimately introduced me to new projects and directions for the scope of my career. So, the way that ASA service work has influenced me has been really great. Indeed, I think to summarize succinctly what this work has meant to me is very importantly, it's meant support and encouragement for me and my interests and my career and why I want to be a statistician and what I want to do with my career; it's provided me with community that gives me motivation when times are tough.

When I'm trying to graduate and start a new job and the pandemic is hitting and everything is remote; I still have a network of colleagues who care about me and my success. We work together and we care about our work on moving it forward together. It's also connected me to a wider network of professional statisticians and data scientists, and it's provided a strong sense of belonging. And as somebody who came out as a queer woman in my graduate career, it was a fairly challenging time for many reasons. And it can feel quite isolating to go through this experience on one's own. But I found people that really supported me in the ASA and made me feel like I have a valuable perspective to contribute to this vast and rapidly changing discipline. And I'm very grateful for all of that.

**Donna LaLonde:** Well, I can just say to both of you that it has been one of the highlights of my work at the ASA to be able to collaborate with you and your work is much appreciated. I definitely am looking forward to ongoing opportunities. I wanted to give you both an opportunity to talk about the Pride Scholarship. As Suzanne mentioned, we are really that 2021 sees the first award of that scholarship. And just to tease the listeners of the podcast, the recipient will be announced during our Pride Month celebration. So more to come on that, but I know we all have our reasons for why we think it is important. And so, Suzanne, I'll start with you and then ask Jiashen for you to just share a little bit about why establishing this scholarship in the award is important.

**Suzanne Thornton:** Thanks Donna. So, the Pride Scholarship is a really important outreach opportunity to help our field actively seek and support talent and contributions from marginalized groups within our discipline. And this includes, but it's most certainly not limited to LGBTQ+ people. I think that is incredibly important, especially for a discipline that has been so heavily shaped by eugenics to actively seek ways to introduce new perspectives, increase representation, and just increase the diversity of perspectives in our field that will influence the direction as our discipline unfolds in the future. And I think it's also important because we collect data on people and often gender and sexuality and sex are aspects of data that we collect and analyze. And I think it's important that we avoid collecting and analyzing data about certain groups without those groups represented at the table. So, I think there are many reasons why this kind of endeavor and the Pride Scholarship in particular is an important step forward for our field, but those are the ones that come to mind for me.

**Donna LaLonde:** Thanks. Jiashen, give you an opportunity to weigh in.

**Jiashen You:** Thank you. So, the scholarship was established to “Raise awareness for and support a success of LGBTQ+ statisticians and data scientists and allies. The scholarship will celebrate their diverse backgrounds and showcase the valuable skills and perspectives that these individuals bring to the ASA statistics and data science.” To me, this scholarship checks the visibility box and potentially the leadership box in terms of critical components of advocacy.

So, the eligibility requirement is quite easy to meet. You just need to be enrolled in a statistics or data science graduate programs or have completed such a degree within five years of the award date and identify as LGBTQ+ or an ally. It is my sincere hope beyond what Suzanne has mentioned, perhaps a portion of the scholarship winners in the future could become functional ambassadors for the LGBTQ+ statistician community. And we're very excited about the opportunity to celebrate their scholarly achievements and career milestones.

So, it's a June when we're celebrating and to everyone who's listening, our committee is all hands-on deck for the fundraising effort to and sustain this very meaningful scholarship. We have donors who have pledged matching gifts to the scholarship during Pride Month. And you can click on the link below, provided with this podcast to make your donation today and make it count twice. So, you do not have to be an ASA member to donate. We also have limited-edition ASA Pride t-shirts and all proceeds will go toward the ASA Pride Scholarship. Donna, back to you.

**Donna LaLonde:** I'll just say those t-shirts are definitely going to be a collector's item. So, folks should click on the link below and get theirs while supply last.

**Ron Wasserstein:** And I can guarantee my colleague, Donna will be among the collectors. Those are such a wonderful gift to the profession, and I really appreciate your work on these things. So, Pride Month. There are some activities planned. Tell us what's planned. And most importantly, tell us how people can participate. Let's start well, Suzanne

**Suzanne Thornton:** Thanks, Ron. It's a really exciting event coming up on June 10th at 6:00 PM. And this is a book reading by author Nicole Dennis-Benn. Her most recent work includes the novel of *Patsy*. And she is the wife of a 2021 COPPS Leadership Academy winner – Dr. Emma Benn. So, this is going to be a really exciting opportunity and I hope that we have a lot of turn out for this event. Jiashen, I'll let you talk about some of the other events.

**Jiashen You:** So, thank you for that intro for Nicole Dennis-Benn. We're really excited that she graciously agreed to do a book reading with us, June 10th. Again, the sign-up link can be found in the [ASA Pride Month website](#). There will also be a webinar on current LGBTQ+ issues, and a research panel in June as well, led by Donna. I also just want to give a special thanks to ASA staffer Amanda Malloy for doing all the grant work for the website and scholarship fundraising. Donna, back to you.

**Donna LaLonde:** I can just say that my colleague Ron knows me well. And in fact, I have already ordered my t-shirt and I'm eagerly awaiting its arrival. So yes, another t-shirt to my collection. Well, we really appreciate Suzanne and Jiashen taking time to talk with during this podcast. It has just been such a delight because we have this opportunity to spend time with wonderful colleagues. So as is tradition, I will turn it over to my colleague, Ron, to provide his Top 10. But before I do that, I'll just encourage folks to follow us on Twitter at [@TheASAPodcast](#). And remember that we are very interested in hearing from

you about who we should add to our conversation. So, reach out and let us know. And with that, it's all yours, Ron, for the Top 10.

**Ron Wasserstein:** Thanks! It comes as no surprise to anyone that we're living through difficult times, and we need all the help we can get to navigate these times. And there's a lot of offers for help there, but not every one of them is really that great. So today the *Practical Significance* podcast brings you the Top 10 "Rejected Self-Help Book" titles. These are self-help books that didn't make it and it's probably best.

So, #10: *Zoom Your Way to Success*

#9: *Mediocrity is About Right for You*

#8: *How to Network by Hosting a Super Spreader Event*

#7: *I Like Cooking My family and My Pets and Other Reasons You Don't Need Punctuation*

#6: *How to Slouch: All the Best Ways to Show You Just Don't Care*

#5: *Making Better Choices by Ignoring Facts*. You know, it occurs to me, Donna, that the reason that one might've been rejected is that there was no need for a book about that. It's already common practice.

#4: *Spend Even More Time on Social Media*

#3: *The All-Mushroom Diet*

#2: *Monetize That Excess Body Fat*

And the #1 rejected self-help book title is: *Learn to Dance the Ron Wasserstein Way*

With that, we say goodbye for the June podcast of *Practical Significance*. We're grateful to all of you for joining and we look forward to continued conversations next month.