AN ANTHOLOGY OF THE FACETS OF FEMININE LIFE

Interviews by Madison Zhan
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Rachel Doyle, founder and CEO of GlamourGals
Tell us what you do!

I am the founder and CEO of GlamourGals, a non-profit that inspires and organizes teen volunteers to provide ongoing companionship and complimentary beauty makeovers to women living in senior homes.

What inspired you to create GlamourGals?

After my grandmother’s passing, I wanted to honor her memory with something special. A GlamourGals makeover provides an opportunity for a young person to connect with an older generation, exchanging compliments, stories and advice. The bonus is that seniors get to enjoy freshly painted nails or a touch of color on their lips and cheeks after a beauty makeover.

How do you define your leadership style, and how has it evolved?

My leadership style is focused, creative and inviting. My role as a leader has changed over the years: first, as a student asking others to join; then as chapter leader; later as a leader managing many chapters; and, now even staff. Through these transitions, I have always stayed true to my style.
Can you share a specific moment or experience that encapsulates the impact GlamourGals has had on the lives of those it serves, and how it reinforces your commitment to the cause?

For 24 years I’ve seen how the touch of a hand, a light embrace, or a conversation can brighten someone’s day and make them feel valued at a GlamourGals makeover.

My personal experience with a senior named Faye demonstrates our impact best.

Faye sat quietly as I greeted her. Her hands were clasped, and she didn’t move so much as a slight nod. I double-checked with the activities coordinator: “Does Faye want a makeover today?” She nodded yes.

For about an hour I smiled and chirped about school, embraced her, applied rouge on her cheeks, dabbed lipstick on her lips and complimented her smooth skin. Faye didn’t smile once.

I left the makeover feeling like a failure; it was the first time a woman had not even smiled back at me. That evening, I received a call from the activities coordinator. I got nervous. I thought I might be in trouble. As we were discussing the makeover, the conversation turned to Faye. The coordinator informed me that Faye was the reason for her call.

She shared, “Faye had been severely depressed, and had stopped eating. It was after your makeover that she finally picked up her fork.”

The will to live is powerful and the idea that as a teen I had a role in impacting that will is special, and I will never forget it.

In building and growing GlamourGals, what challenges did you face, and how did your leadership skills help you navigate through those obstacles?
Entrepreneurship brings daily and long-term challenges—sourcing resources, and finding the right people. Each solution reveals new obstacles. Success lies in navigating these challenges with the right attitude and approach. It may not be the planned outcome, but continuous forward movement signifies success for any business owner or manager.

Leadership involves making tough decisions. Can you share an example of a challenging decision you had to make as the founder of GlamourGals and how it influenced the organization?

I faced a challenging situation when I established my advisory council in college. A senior member displayed a disrespectful attitude before our first meeting, prompting me to swiftly “accept his resignation”. Despite the bold move, it proved to be the right decision, allowing the rest of the council to have a productive and important meeting the next day, undeterred by negativity.

As GlamourGals continues to evolve, how do you ensure that the organization stays true to its core values and mission while adapting to changing circumstances?

Our goal is to positively impact seniors’ lives and nurture leadership skills in volunteers. As we grow and evolve, it’s crucial to keep these principles in focus. Open communication within our organization encourages constructive feedback from volunteers and supporters. This input helps us adapt without compromising our mission, allowing us to address the changing needs of seniors and the communities we serve.

What advice do you have for someone who is passionate about a cause and wants to make a positive impact?

Don’t wait to start. As a 16-year-old, all I had was hard work and determination and the belief that I could build something out of an “idea” to create change.
Rachel Doyle at a 2023 GlamourGals Power Brunch with author Madison Zhan.

Madison Zhan, founder/chapter president of Stuyvesant GlamourGals at the 2023 Glammy Awards.
Making seniors feel loved and appreciated is at the heart of GlamourGals’ mission. Chapter President Madison Zhan and Vice President Hwarin Zoh with a senior at 305 West End Assisted Living.
Founder and Managing Partner Serina Wong of Dresden Green Consulting
Tell us about yourself!

I’m Serina Wong, the founder and managing partner of Dresden Green Consulting. My journey started in Hong Kong with an engineering degree, transitioning through roles in public relations and fund management before finding my niche in executive search. After a 17-year tenure as global sector head at a leading search firm, I established my own business three and a half years ago. Dresden Green Consulting, with a focus on C-suite mandates in Asia, blends human capital with financial opportunities, a synergy that has become our hallmark.

Our firm has expanded beyond traditional executive search, inspired by an opportunity where I facilitated a key capital introduction for a client. This experience, highlighting the versatility and depth of my network, steered the firm towards a specialized focus on the financial services sector. Now, with two offices in Asia, we’re a growing force in the industry.

Outside of work, I’m committed to lifelong learning, embracing activities like scuba diving, skiing, and sailing. I believe that continuous personal development is essential to maintaining youthfulness and enriching professional networks, a belief that is deeply intertwined with my professional ethos.
Why the name Dresden Green?

Dresden Green Consulting is named after the illustrious Dresden Green Diamond, a paragon of rarity and resilience. This 41-carat gem, renowned for its unique green hue and flawless clarity, symbolizes the exceptional talent we seek for our clients. Its history of enduring through wars and upheavals mirrors our commitment to resilience and excellence. Our candidates, like this diamond, are rare and extraordinary, each possessing a distinct brilliance. The absence of a phone number on our website underscores our bespoke approach: we don’t wait for talent to find us; we proactively seek out these unique gems, ensuring a match that’s as remarkable as the Dresden Green itself.

What are common challenges in executive recruitment?

Executive recruitment today faces a multifaceted set of challenges. Firstly, the complexity of the global talent market must be considered. It requires navigating diverse cultural norms and professional practices, demanding a deep, nuanced understanding of various industries. This is especially crucial when matching high-level executives not only with the skillset but also with the cultural fit for organizations.

Another significant challenge lies in adapting to the evolving landscape shaped by digital platforms like LinkedIn and in-house recruitment teams and their tools. While these platforms have democratized access to candidates, they often lack the strategic depth and personalized approach that specialized search firms offer. Our role is more than talent acquisition; we act as their external arm, engage with the decision-makers and provide comprehensive market analysis, trend prediction, and become strategic advisors to the hiring managers.

Moreover, in an era rife with digital scams, establishing trust and credibility is more challenging than ever. Our firm distinguishes itself
through a reputation built on integrity and successful, long-standing industry relationships. We prioritize personalized communication and a deep understanding of both our clients’ needs and candidates’ aspirations.

At Dresden Green Consulting, we take a consultative approach rather than a transactional one. We don’t just fill executive roles; we provide strategic insights and advise on broader market strategies. Whether it’s market entry, expansion plans, or turnaround tactics, we deliver more than just recruitment solutions; we offer a partnership that contributes to the strategic success of our clients.

**Building relationships with C-suite executives requires unique strategies. Can you share some of the strategies you employ to establish and nurture these high-level connections?**

Building and nurturing relationships with C-suite executives is a cornerstone of our approach at Dresden Green Consulting. We act as career coaches, advising them based on our extensive experience with successful senior executives. This coaching is cyclical and strategic. For instance, when conducting a senior search, I often reach out to top executives who, while not interested in moving, might be seeking talent themselves. This reciprocity fosters strong, mutual connections.

We also stay ahead of the curve, especially in emerging sectors. By mapping out the market – typically involving 100-200 senior executives in a specific sector or region – we gain comprehensive insights. This expertise, combined with our consultants, who each one of them has over 20 years of industry experience, ensures delivery at the highest level.

Our selective approach to searches, taking on just 15 to 20 senior roles annually, also sets us apart. This exclusivity, much like the allure of an Hermès handbag, only increases demand for our services. The high-caliber executives we work with, often in salary ranges between
USD 1m to 4m, seek more than just job opportunities; they seek a partner who understands their worth and potential market impact.

Additionally, we act as the eyes and ears for senior leaders, helping them gauge opportunities outside their organization, ascertain if their compensation is competitive, and assist in due diligence for potential moves. This comprehensive support system ensures that we are not just recruiters but trusted advisors and career strategists for the elite executive circle.

**How does Dresden Green prioritize diversity in executive searches?**

At Dresden Green Consulting, we prioritize a comprehensive approach to diversity in executive searches, aligning with industry standards and expanding beyond traditional definitions. Diversity for us encompasses a spectrum of dimensions, including gender, nationality, and diverse life experiences and cultural backgrounds.

Our strategy is rooted in intersectionality, understanding diversity in its broadest sense. We integrate varied experiences into corporate leadership, exemplifying this with diverse leaders like a female Chinese chair at an American bank or an Indian leader of a Singaporean corporation. This reflects the shifting attitudes in traditionally conservative sectors, evident in Japanese firms embracing non-Japanese leaders and a Hong Kong-Chinese woman leading a major Singaporean bank.

Our search process ensures a diverse candidate pool, aligning with clients’ specific diversity goals. This includes:

- Expansive Talent Sourcing: Proactively sourcing candidates from diverse backgrounds, challenging traditional recruitment channels to uncover hidden gems.
• Inclusive Search Criteria: Our criteria focus on a candidate’s potential to bring diverse viewpoints and experiences, rather than fitting a conventional executive profile.

• Client Collaboration: We work closely with clients, educating and partnering with them to understand the strategic value of diverse leadership and to integrate these goals into their long-term vision.

• Mitigating Bias: Implementing structured processes to minimize unconscious bias, ensuring a fair and objective evaluation.

At Dresden Green, we view diversity in executive leadership as a strategic imperative, essential for fostering innovation, adaptability, and global competitiveness in today’s dynamic world.

You have a degree in information engineering and computer engineering. Has this been useful throughout your career?

I never wanted to be an actual engineer. However, the knowledge I gained with this degree has served me well professionally! I am very good at number crunching which is crucial in various fields such as business, finance, and data analysis. I also have a deep understanding of technology and easily understand emerging businesses like AI, Web 3 and blockchain.

What advice would you give to the younger generation on pursuing their ideal career?

To the younger generation embarking on their career journey, my advice is to actively explore and identify your passions. Understand what excites and motivates you, as passion is a vital driver of career success and fulfillment. This exploration should be coupled with a commitment to education and continuous learning.
Building a strong network and seeking mentorship is also crucial. Engage in industry events and professional groups where you can gain invaluable guidance and support. Simultaneously, gain practical experience through internships, volunteering, or part-time jobs, as this real-world exposure is invaluable for understanding your chosen field.

Align your career choices with your personal values. A career that resonates with your core beliefs is more likely to bring satisfaction and success. Be patient and persistent, as building a meaningful career is a journey that requires time and dedication. Success often comes from a mix of thinking and execution; remember, strategy might form 30% of the journey, but execution is 70%. Be prepared to embrace change and seize opportunities, often leading to the most fulfilling and diverse career experiences.

In essence, find your passion, discover how to commercialize it, and then execute with determination. Hard work and adaptability are your best allies on this journey.

Shine like a Dresden Green Diamond!
’Tis the season to celebrate! Serina Wong with clients and staff at Dresden Green Consulting.

Serina Wong at a female leadership luncheon co-hosted with global vice chair of Capital Group.
Frances Kweller, founder and CEO of Kweller Prep and recipient of Forest Hills Business Woman of the Year 2023.
Tell us about yourself!

My name is Frances Kweller and I am the founder and CEO of Kweller Prep, a tutoring company located in New York City that helps students prepare for standardized tests, college admissions, and academic success.

What inspired you to create the learning center Kweller Prep?

I’m a child of an immigrant family. Setting up this learning center was my calling - to help other immigrant children. Education is the key to success and I want to share my passion and knowledge with as many students as possible.

How would you describe your leadership style? How do you inspire and guide your team?

I encourage young talent. I love ambitious young go-getters. All the tutors I hire are highly motivated self-starters, many hold master’s degrees, and all are determined to succeed. These are empowering youth. This is exactly what I was like as a young 21-year-old!
What significant challenges have you faced in establishing Kweller Prep and how did you overcome them?

I experience a challenge every minute, every hour of the day! Every entrepreneur will tell you this. I am just very grateful for the education I had – a degree from New York University’s Steinhardt School of Education and a law degree from Hofstra University School of Law. My legal education has impacted every business decision I make.

How do you ensure Kweller Prep maintains a student-centric approach, and what initiatives have you implemented to make the learning environment effective for students?

I am constantly channeling positive energy into our learning space! I’m hosting a Lunar New Year party next month. I’m always celebrating someone’s latest achievement. We host parties for every occasion, even birthdays are a big celebration here!

Kweller Prep is in the heart of Forest Hills, where you grew up. How do you maintain a connection with the local community, and in what ways do you contribute to the community?

I raised over $150,000 for the children of Zhiwen Yan (an Asian food delivery man) who was shot dead in Forest Hills. I felt so bad for his widowed wife of three very young children. I made it a goal to raise money for the educational needs of this family.

What are some of the proudest moments or achievements in your journey so far?

Every day I experience joy! Every day there is a proud moment because one of my students was admitted to their top choice college, received a scholarship, improved their test score, got into a specialized high school, or won some award. This whole week we learned of multiple acceptances into catholic schools!
What advice would you give to someone who is passionate about a cause and wants to make a positive impact?

Get a law degree first! Then start a business. A law degree takes only three years to obtain, however, the skills and knowledge associated with that degree last a lifetime.
Please give us a brief introduction of yourself.

I am a pediatric ER doctor by day and engage in competitive pole dancing by night! I won three medals within nine months. I am 51 years old and can lift my entire body laterally with just my hands.

That’s impressive, but why pole dancing?

I pole dance because it allows me to be uninhibited and free from judgment. Even free from the self-judgment that has been thrust upon female minds by society. Being born in the United States in a Christian family and growing up under a social construct made by men, it was all about rules of decorum, and being told incessantly that I couldn’t do things because I am a woman. I was so glad to find this sport. It is like a sisterhood. To see all my sisters succeed at something hard makes me smile. To be given the trust they have when they tell me about their journeys … that’s special! I love seeing their successes. I see them burst with confidence. I see healing.

Also, I am ducking strong. Stop pretending women’s sexuality exists only for men. My sexuality exists for me. Sexuality is an inherent part of all of us. I connect with my body, which makes me proud to see myself function. It’s not about sex for me. And I post to show other people that they can also take this and make it uniquely theirs. My pole sisters all have a style.
How has pole dancing helped you and others?

Several people in pole have experienced trauma and lived in daunting and alarming circumstances. There are so many stories. I love that the people I am friends with have come to trust me enough to tell me these things. They also tell me that pole dancing helped them through their ordeals and the demons in their lives. When they open up and tell me about it, it feels like a safe space. It is a community. Taking up this sport is definitely a way to heal for a lot of people, and I work in mental health.

Pole dancing is the only feminine space where we do not get judged and can be completely ourselves without the confinement of a social construct designed by a patriarchal society.

What historical person do you admire?

I really admire Cleopatra because she lived in an Egyptian culture where women were equal to men and were much more liberated. They could be a pharaoh or a queen. Absolute ruler. There is a discussion about the roles of women in Egypt. It’s very feminist.

Do you have any advice for people contemplating a new sport such as pole dancing?

I will defer to my favorite quote: “Life is like a book … some chapters are sad, some are happy and some are exciting. But if you never turn the page, you will never know what the next chapter has in store for you.” —Izuudon
The blue and pink colors in this flag represent the traditional colors for boys and girls, while the white stripe represents transitioning.
Can you give a brief introduction of yourself?

My name is Olivia, and I live in Los Angeles. I am bi-racial and will be eighteen in five days. I go by the pronouns she/her.

When did you first realize you were transgender and what transpired after that?

I’ve never been a girly girl and I’m still not girly. I’m pretty tomboyish if anything. I’ve never worn a dress. But each time I looked in the mirror, I felt something was wrong. I thought maybe I was overweight. So I got skinny and I looked in the mirror again and still said, “No.”

One day I saw a picture of a pretty lady and thought, “Wow! I want to look like that!” A switch flipped for me. I just opened a can of worms! I immediately got on the internet and I started researching what this meant. And it said that I might be transgender.

A lot of people mentioned using support groups, but I decided to research this topic on my own.

I created an online account where I said I was a girl and messaged people to see what that was like. My experience was, “WOW, this feels
a lot more comfortable!” I spent my entire summer after eighth grade having people refer to me as she/her and Olivia, and I LOVED it!

**Did you tell your parents? How did they react?**

It took me some time to gather the courage to tell my parents. I did it by text. To my relief, my mom was quite accepting. The first thing she asked was, “Do you have a name you want to go by?”

I said, “Olivia.” There is no backstory to this name, I just think it sounds pretty.

Mom then took me to see a gender specialist at UCLA. I was placed on puberty blockers. This stops the growth of facial and body hair, the deepening of the voice, and the broadening of the shoulders. Puberty blockers just put things on pause and nothing more. You resume puberty if you stop taking them.

**Did you reveal your identity change at school?**

Once high school started in the fall, I thought revealing my gender change wouldn’t be a big deal. But everyone at school continued calling me “he” and “Robbie,” my dead name. It was such a bummer. It made me feel bad like I had a pit in my chest.

**Were your own friends supportive?**

They were either understanding or they had no idea what the duck I meant. One of them thought I set my name to she/her on Instagram for role-play, like putting on a persona on the internet or something. And they were like, “Yo, I got a custom character too!”

I responded, “No, dude. I wish I was a girl and I’m gonna try to become that. I’d appreciate it if you could refer to me as such.”
One kid thought I was female-to-male. I didn’t know if I should take that as a compliment.

Another said, “I’m gonna call you by your old name because it’s more comfortable for me.”

The majority pretended I never came out and continued calling me by my dead name.

What did you do then?

At my next visit to the gender specialist, I was asked how certain things made me feel, my emotions, how I saw myself, and how I perceived myself. I just let it all out. I was pretty firm on changing my gender. That’s when I was prescribed estrogen. I took my first dose in Ralphs Parking Garage in West Los Angeles. It felt like a first step. I was overjoyed! Now I can begin becoming who I wanna be—changing the entire trajectory of my life. It’s a big change to make.

Can you share a moment of personal triumph or growth in your journey?

My favorite moment was when I looked in the mirror and actually liked what I saw! I used to avoid mirrors like the plague. I was not comfortable with myself. I wanted to change everything about myself. I’d look at my face and think, “This is wrong.” But now I look in the mirror and I’m like, “Wow, I look pretty good!” I’m happy with myself. And that’s something that no one can take away from me.

This was also the same moment I didn’t feel the need to do voice training anymore. I don’t speak in the most feminine voice. I speak in the voice that’s comfortable for me and the gender I identify with. And that’s something special, feeling confident in my own skin. No matter what I sound like, no matter what I look like, I know I can be myself. That’s a moment of triumph for me.
What is voice training?

Estrogen doesn’t change your voice. You will still sound like a guy on estrogen until you practice making your voice sound feminine.

If you’re female-to-male, testosterone will deepen your voice. You don’t need to do voice training. But if you’re male-to-female, voice training is how you make your voice sound like a girl’s.

My voice ranges in the middle between a feminine voice and what my voice previously sounded like. I used to have a deep, deep voice. It was also very monotone with no pitch variation. But now I talk like this and I’m happy about it. I’m expressive with how I feel.

Are there any misconceptions or stereotypes about transgender people that you’d like to address?

A ton of them! The biggest misconception is that we’re different from anyone else. The whole point of being trans is being comfortable with myself. It doesn’t influence my interests. It doesn’t influence anything about who I am as a person. It has nothing to do with my parents. It has nothing to do with the school I was in. It has nothing to do with my friends. It only has to do with me. And it was my own personal journey. To find out who I wanted to be.

What are some practical steps or strategies you recommend for someone on this journey of self-acceptance to express themselves authentically?

Self-acceptance is a process that takes time and patience. You may not feel fully confident in your identity right now, but you can achieve that in the future. Whether it takes a month, a year, or three years of being on estrogen, you will eventually reach a point where you are comfortable with yourself. Don’t let the pressure of passing affect your self-esteem. Many other trans people have gone through similar struggles and have learned to embrace their true selves. Passing is not
the ultimate goal, but rather expressing yourself authentically. You will find comfort within yourself when you focus on what makes you happy.

What does “passing” mean?

Passing is a term that refers to the ability of a transgender person to be recognized as their affirmed gender, rather than their sex assigned at birth. Some transgender people may feel pressured to pass as a way of avoiding discrimination, harassment, or violence. However, passing is not a requirement for being transgender, nor does it determine one’s validity or worth. Gender identity is a personal and complex phenomenon that goes beyond conforming to binary stereotypes. Transgender people have the right to express their gender in any way that makes them feel comfortable and authentic, regardless of whether they pass or not. Passing is not a measure of one’s success or happiness as a transgender person.

Are there any transgender rights that you’re passionate about?

For those in a similar space as I am, know your rights at school! These are:

1. Right to the same opportunities to participate and learn like everyone else regardless of gender, gender identity, race, nationality, or disability
2. Right to dress and present yourself according to your gender identity
3. Right to privacy. You get to choose who you tell and don’t tell and no one else gets to—that’s your story
4. Right to start a gay-affirming club or gay-straight alliance
5. Right to use the restroom and locker room that matches your gender identity
What if people in charge at school don’t follow these rights?

Of course, knowing these rights exist does not mean people in charge at school or school districts follow these rights, so know what recourse is available:

- Title 9
- The U.S. Constitution
- Filing a complaint against the Office of Civil Rights through DOE—this is a very powerful tool to get things moving for 504 coordinators

Where else can trans youth find help at school?

Find adult allies in the school building, starting with your guidance counselor. Guidance counselors at school can create safe spaces, be visible, and place signs or stickers on their doors to communicate to kids that they are available to talk at any time.

Guidance counselors can also help trans youth create a club like a GSA (Gay Straight Alliance). If GSA doesn’t work for whatever reason, get creative with the clubs such as making it a knitting club, crochet club, or some other noncompetitive nonacademic group. The whole point of the club is to offer a safe space for transgender youth to talk and share coping mechanisms, so they can learn how to fight for each other and how to find happiness when stuff sucks.

What else can schools do to help transgender youth?

Transgender youth typically grow up with a name they do not feel suits them. Their parents probably gave them a name associated with the opposite gender. So many transgender youth want to be called by a different name. Schools can help with this name change. It helps to know that you can change your name on non-legal documents like the graduation program, student ID, yearbook, graduation ceremony, award ceremonies, attendance roster for substitute teachers, etc. Only
legal documents need a legal name such as your transcript and diploma. So start with places that don't require your legal name.

You are in school to learn and feel safe. It is hard to focus when the teacher calls you the wrong pronoun or won't use your preferred name and instead uses your dead name.

What else can schools do to help trans youth?

I would say designating gender-neutral bathrooms is important! And knowing grounding techniques that can help manage emotions. These can include:

- Cold water: placing your hands in a bucket of cold water to take your mind off of things
- Exercise to get your heart rate up and pull you out of emotional distress
- Breathing techniques
- Taking a walk outside

Can you explain a few basic words in the trans world?

Sure! Here are some common vocabulary words used:

- Dead name = name given at birth
- Misgendering = using the wrong pronoun
- Cisgender = gender identity corresponds to birth gender
- Transgender = gender identity does not correspond to birth gender
- Gender identity = a person’s innate sense of their gender
- Sexual orientation = homosexual or straight, asexual, who you are attracted to
- Passing = when someone is perceived as a gender they identify as or are attempting to be seen as, rather than their biological sex
Do you have any advice for those who are in the process of trying to understand their gender identity?

Gender identity is a personal journey that does not have a fixed deadline. You can explore your feelings and thoughts at your own speed. It is not important how long it takes until you feel confident. The most important thing is to be honest with yourself about what makes you happy.

Ignoring your emotions will only make you unhappy. You should follow the pace that feels right to you. And remember, you have options and opportunities if you find out you are transgender.

You can still pursue your dreams and goals with the support of those who love you. If you are unsure or curious about your gender identity, you might want to consult a professional who specializes in this field. You can also confide in some trusted friends or family members who will respect and support you. This way, you can discover if being transgender is right for you.
Olivia and her cat Cheeto.
DemiGirl is a non-binary identity where a person partially identifies as a woman or with feminine characteristics, but does not fully identify as a woman.
Can you tell us a bit about yourself and your journey? When did you first realize you were transgender, and how did you come to understand your identity?

My name is Ester and I am a first-generation Filipino American. I am a mechanical engineer by trade. I go by the pronouns “he” or “any.” “Any” is unusual but it is difficult for me to identify as either gender. Transgender is not the right identity, as it means you identify differently from the gender you were born with. I see identity as more of a spectrum. I consider myself nonbinary and under this other umbrella called DemiGirl: someone who partially identifies with womanhood or being a girl but not fully or completely. I have some disconnect from stereotypical gender roles. I experience a mix of feminine and nonbinary gender traits. And I feel more comfortable using gender-neutral pronouns.

My identity is something I only realized within the last year, but it is not something I am unfamiliar with. I hung out with guys from primary school through middle school. Starting in high school, I watched a lot of anime and found myself drawn to shows that girls like. I’m a guy who likes some girly things and visiting feminine spaces. And that’s how I carried myself for many years.

In the past year, I started questioning my gender identity. I started by getting closer to my best friend, who is a girl. We enjoyed talking about fashion, makeup, romance novels, and cute anime games. I didn’t want to be just a guest in this sphere. This is actually where I belong and where I was supposed to be living this whole time.
What are some of the unique challenges you’ve faced and how have you navigated them?

Once I started questioning my gender, I came to realize two things: (1) it changed how I felt about interacting with my guy friends whom I had known for so long. They would be talking about cars or tech and other stereotypical male things and I just wasn’t interested; (2) I wanted to be in the girlfriends’ corner and talk more about fashion trends and cute heels.

Because this is a new development for me, I haven’t truly come out yet. I also haven’t dressed or presented more femininely when I go out in public. It’s still on my mind. The only people who know are my fiancée and my best friend. Both are supportive, accepting, and encouraging.

I haven’t yet figured out how to present visually, as femme leaning on binary. I don’t have the wardrobe for it yet. I ordered some clothes, we shall see!

I haven’t told my parents yet. Not because they will disapprove, but because it’s easier to keep the course. I attended my grandmother’s birthday recently and there was one moment where relatives were saying transphobic things. It could be an ethnicity thing or an older generation thing. It’s hard to separate.

In the future, I will probably tell my in-person friends as most are either LGBTQ allies or identify as such themselves. I’m in a fortunate position. I have a stable life, and people I know will accept my identity.

Can you share a moment of personal triumph or growth in your journey that you’d like to highlight?

One moment of personal triumph was just going to pole class. I’ve always been interested but it took a long time for me to get the courage to walk into a studio and take a class. It’s such a feminine sphere. At first, I wondered if I belonged. Secondly, I didn’t want to make other women uncomfortable with someone who was assigned male at birth. For some women, it can be intimidating to just see a guy there.

Joining pole class was a big step for me and it really accelerated my ability to accept my identity. What drew me to pole was the need to get more physically active. The other attraction is that dance is so creative, and body expression arts have always appealed to me. There’s something about the flow and grace to it that is captivating. The body ownership and feminine
feeling of pole dancing are spellbinding. It’s a lot of fun! I feel good about how I move and how my body feels despite my misgivings about my biological male body. You also need to trust yourself when you go into moves and perform tricks. It’s quite liberating.

What is your sexual orientation?

My sexual orientation is asexual, which is both fortunate and unfortunate. Fortunate because it hasn’t changed my relationship with my fiancée. We still meet each other’s needs. What is unfortunate is the challenge of not being physically female when I’m feeling feminine and reading first-person novels and not being able to identify with the bodily experiences of a woman.

How can individuals, communities, and institutions better educate themselves about transgender experiences and issues?

One relief I have is going on Reddit and seeing other people comment on similar experiences. I don’t go out and do any pride events, I prefer to just read about other people’s experiences. This has been really helpful. There are online wikis that explain trans, non-binary, and other umbrella terms—they are wonderful resources and have been a big help in finding an identity that makes sense for me.

Is there a message or piece of advice you’d like to share with others who may be on a similar journey?

To those going through a similar experience—read lots of online sources about different identities instead of assuming extremes on one end or the other. There is a spectrum and you can fit in somewhere.

Take the time to explore, understand, and accept your identity so you can explain it to others. Coming out is a personal decision on one’s journey toward self-acceptance and authenticity. You don’t have to come out to everyone at once. Start with one or two people you trust and gradually expand from there.

Coming out is an act of courage and self-love. Be proud of yourself for taking this important step toward authenticity. Your identity is valid—it is a beautiful and integral part of who you are.
The lesbian symbol is two interlocking female symbols (♀).
SAME-SEX PARENTING

Can you introduce yourselves and tell us a bit about your family? How did you meet and decide to start a family together?

My name is Sovannary and my partner is named Shek. We are both from Hong Kong. People say we look alike! When we first met, I owned two dogs. The dogs were like our kids, and we were happy with this for a while. That is what most same-sex couples have, dogs instead of children. When my partner suggested having real human babies of our own, I was floored! I thought, how crazy is that? Myriad ideas raced through my mind, including who, what, where, when, and how would we do this procedure. Was it possible? Socially acceptable? Ethically correct? Any legal barriers? We couldn’t even get married in New York or Hong Kong at the time in 2002. Imagine having children?

But then I thought of Anita Mui, who was one of the most iconic Hong Kong Cantopop singers! She developed cervical cancer at the age of forty and died of her complications. Her elder sister, Ann Mui, had also died of cervical cancer a few years earlier. Anita Mui once pointed out that women should all learn to appreciate what we HAVE before time makes us appreciate what we LOST. Basically, if you have healthy working female organs, use them!

Anita Mui turned down surgery to remove her cancerous organ, her cervix. She felt that by removing this organ, she would no longer be a whole woman. She always dreamed of having babies, getting married,
and being a parent. Because of Anita Mui, I wanted to have a baby and experience motherhood using the organs designed to give life.

Since my partner’s family history included numerous miscarriages, I took it upon myself to undergo intrauterine insemination (IUI), where a donor’s sperm is placed directly into the uterus. We endured eight failed rounds of IUI. Then we switched to in vitro fertilization (IVF) where embryos are formed in a test tube instead of a woman’s fallopian tube. I successfully got pregnant with two heartbeats (twins)! Because the two babies were conceived separately, we had fraternal twins. A daughter soon followed. I gave birth to three children.

Surprisingly, we received plenty of support from our workplace, friends, and close family friends while living with children in Hong Kong. At the same time, we encountered a profusion of attention from the local media and were frequently asked for interviews. People everywhere in Asia blatantly questioned us about the father of our children. The idea of homosexual marriage is still not widely accepted in Asia-Pacific countries.

**Do you know many other same-sex parents?**

We don’t know many other same-sex parents. This could be a cultural issue. Asians don’t come out, let alone have children. The first same-sex parent we met turned out to be my maternity doctor. He is a Canadian. He kept asking all these personal questions unrelated to my pregnancy and giving unsolicited advice about adoption and what protections we needed in place. We found it really odd. He was so nosy!! Then he told us he was gay and also trying to have a child with his husband.
Could you tell us about the LGBTQ+ support group at your place of work? What kind of activities or initiatives do they engage in?

We are very fortunate to work for a company, JP Morgan Chase, that offers phenomenal support to the LGBTQ+ community. JP Morgan Chase established the first LGBTQ+ Affairs Business Office three years ago. It sent over 250 employees, including 65 senior executives, to the Out & Equal Workplace Summit to drive equality globally and make an impact on business communities.

Shepherd, Christoffer and Trinity.

Sovannary Tan, mom, Shek Lam, Trinity, Shepherd and Christoffer Lamtan.
Dr. Helen Sham, Australia’s First Asian Congresswoman.
What gave you the inspiration to study law and launch your career in politics?

A Chinese philosopher, Lao Tse, once said, “The journey of a thousand miles must start with the first step.” As the first Chinese-born parliamentarian in Australia, I was filled with humility and pride. I was born in Hong Kong and Chinese was my first language. I traveled to Australia in 1961 as an overseas student attracted by the notion of “Fair Go,” that everyone has a fair opportunity to succeed.

I originally trained as a medical social worker back in the ’70s. I got married, had two children, then divorced. Being a single mother with a low-paying job was what really motivated me to take up a law degree at the University of Macquarie in Australia. Sometimes setbacks in life are just the motivation you need.

While studying law, I interned with the Attorney General, who asked if I would be interested in becoming a member of parliament after graduation. I said YES! I began my political career in 1985 as a commissioner of the New South Wales Ethnic Affairs Commission. In 1988 I was elected the first Chinese-born Australian MP. I served four terms in the Parliament of New South Wales and two terms as Vice President of the Legislative Council. I also co-founded the NSW Parliament Asia-Pacific Friendship Group in 1999 and was awarded
the Order of Australia (OAM) by the Australian Federal Government in 2011. I helped many Australians, including policymakers, understand Chinese culture and also explained Australian values to the Chinese community, particularly to new immigrants.

**What challenges did you overcome on your journey into politics? Did you face any discrimination along the way?**

Being a woman and being in politics is tough! The challenge for women in politics is that you must be as good as a man. You need to be assertive, almost aggressive, because you must fight to talk! I can talk for hours—this is a mandatory skill in politics. You need to make up speeches out of thin air. I once did a filibuster for a Greek Orthodox Church asking for help protecting their properties. I don't know anything about Greek Orthodox Churches but I do know a lot about Buddhism, temples, and being a Catholic! So I talked and talked and talked about all the things I know, and made them relevant to the Greek Orthodox Church and effectively won!

Being Chinese is also a huge barrier, but being a Chinese woman is even worse. I call that a double-whammy as you need to break the glass ceiling and the Asian ceiling.

**What is your advice to women seeking leadership roles today?**

My advice to the younger generation of women who want to take on leadership roles: (1) Believe in yourself. Have confidence in your abilities and believe you deserve to be where you want to be; (2) Invest in your education and continuously develop your skills; and (3) Don't be afraid to speak out! Advocate for yourself. This communicates that you understand your own worth and what you bring to the table. You are a valuable asset. Don't let anyone tell you otherwise.
FORUM OF AUSTRALIA - CHINA FUTURE

THE HONOURABLE DR HELEN SHAM-HO OAM JP
200 Years Chinese Settlement in Australia

28/10/2018
WESTIN SYDNEY
Anik Waterman, a Level 4 Ski Instructor, pictured with the author, Madison Zhan.
Please give us a brief introduction of yourself.

My name is Anik Waterman and I am a level 4 ski instructor. I teach at Mont Tremblant in Quebec, Canada.

What does it take to become a level 4 ski instructor, especially considering the challenging certification process?

To achieve level 4 ski instructor certification, you need more than just skills and passion. You need a strong commitment and a relentless drive to overcome the challenges and obstacles that await you. This is the highest level of ski instruction in Canada, and only a handful of people, mostly men, have attained it. It involves rigorous training for several years and a demanding exam that few can pass! Only 0.01% of level 4 ski instructors are females.

What is the secret to your success?

Never stop learning! I’m always trying to get better at everything I do. You never stop learning.
Do you teach other ski instructors how to instruct?

Yes, I train other ski instructors on how to teach and how to become better instructors.

What is the greatest barrier for women to achieve this level of ski instruction?

Having children. It is a lot to juggle!

What inspired you to become a ski instructor?

My dad was a ski coach for thirteen years and my mom was a ski patroller, so we are just a big ski family. I became a ski instructor as a way to get a free ski pass, continue skiing, and get better!

Do you have any advice for women who want to become top-level ski instructors or succeed in other male-dominated fields?

Twenty-five years ago when I first started ski instruction and moved up the certification levels, it was men all around me. It is definitely a male-dominated field. That didn’t bother me, no one told me “NO.” I love to ski, I know I am good at it, and that was all that mattered. Basically, if you want to do something, just do it! There is an old adage that goes along the lines of, “If I can see it, I can be it.” I was lucky enough to have female role models while growing up. Just seeing they were amazing skiers and knowing that I could be just as good as they were was very motivating. So never be discouraged!
Heather Sham,
Senior Director of Graphics Platform Engineering at AMD and 2023 Recipient of Women Worth Watching® Award.
EMPOWERING WOMEN IN ENGINEERING

Please give us a brief introduction of yourself.

My name is Heather Sham and I am a Senior Director of Graphics Platform Engineering at AMD (Advance Micro Devices). I’ve been with AMD for over 23 years. Despite other opportunities, I chose to stay because I’m constantly challenged, surrounded by people who believe in me and I have been given many opportunities to grow.

Congratulations on recently earning the leadership award Women Worth Watching®, can you tell us more about this achievement?

I am honored and humbled to receive the Women Worth Watching® award, which celebrates women leaders who make a positive impact in their fields and communities. As an engineer, I am passionate about solving problems and creating innovative solutions that benefit society. I am also committed to supporting and mentoring other women who aspire to pursue careers in engineering, a sector that is still largely underrepresented by female professionals. I believe that diversity and inclusion are essential for fostering creativity, collaboration and excellence in any organization. This award is not only a recognition of my achievements, but also an inspiration for me to continue learning, growing and leading.
When you began your career many years ago, did you ever imagine that you would have a leadership role in this profession/organization?

Early on, I never had specific intentions of taking on a leadership role. My strengths in communication, being able to connect the dots, and seeing the big picture were a good fit for the initial leadership roles I had. Growth continued from there.

Describe your leadership style and how you “lead” others. Is it different from your male counterparts?

Having a strong network and building trust with your team and peers is key—no one can be successful alone. These strong relationships enable me to get things done and challenge the team to keep raising the bar. I leverage my deep knowledge and experience to build trust with the team and provide guidance and judgment in tough situations. I also have a direct and honest communication style. I provide clarity and focus for the team. This is no different than my male counterparts.

How do you balance career, personal life and passions? Is there such a thing as balance?

I am a strong believer in work-life balance. I rarely work in the evenings or weekends. This is an exception in my company and in the industry. It has forced me to focus on what is important and therefore allows me to be more efficient and effective at work. On the rare occasions when I do work or have a meeting in the evening, I can’t shut my mind down after work and then I am not as well rested and energized the next day.
What advice would you give to the next generation of female leaders?

My guiding principles in my career and life:

**Have passion for what you do.** At work, this means solving challenges, providing direction, and driving change to improve and simplify while positively impacting people, products, and processes. At home, this is spending time with family and prioritizing experiences and vacations to make memories. You can have a successful career without sacrificing time with family and for yourself.

**Be authentic.** This means focusing on your strengths and not compromising who you are for what others want you to be. My style is direct and efficient communication, challenging the status quo, focusing on actions, and not stressing about things I can’t change. I am stubbornly independent.

**Help each other.** We are stronger together, whether collaborating on a project or learning from each other. Since I have benefited from many role models, I look for opportunities to share my experiences with others.

My gender has never held me back. I want my daughters and other young women to feel the same. Our guiding principles may differ, but I encourage everyone to find what drives you and makes you happy. You can do anything you want to do. Be you, stay true!
Artists have a unique power to convey thoughts, ideas, and narratives through visual form without relying on words, making their work accessible to people across different cultures and languages.
Please introduce yourself and explain how your Korean heritage influenced your artistic style and themes in your work?

My name is Eunkyong Park and I am an artist of Korean traditional folk art. Being in New York City, a major goal of mine is to introduce Korean traditional folk art to the public through modern themes and motifs. Much of my inspiration is drawn from the rich cultural heritage of Buddhism, meditation, family connections, and the natural world.

The tools I use are also taken from the earth such as hanji, traditional handmade paper from the inner bark of mulberry, which is a native Korean tree. The paints I use are water-based pigment powder. Detailing in my artwork relies on sharp brushes and muk, which is black ink made from the soot of burnt pine.

Are there specific aspects of New York’s vibrant art scene that have influenced your work or provided you with new opportunities?

My first collection of paintings was displayed in 2013 with art galleries located in Chelsea, a district famously known as the center of the city’s art world with over 200 galleries. I first started with two to three art exhibitions a year. From there, my career skyrocketed, with more than fifty solo and group art exhibitions a year.
I feel very lucky to be in New York, it is unquestionably the global center for arts and culture with its unparalleled concentration of art galleries, cultural institutions, and museums.

**How does your artwork resonate with your audience in New York?**

Most of my artwork is sold to Caucasians who find Asian artwork spiritual, mystical, and even Zen-like as I incorporate the principles of simplicity, tranquility, and mindfulness. My focus on Asian traditional style has opened avenues of success for me here in America.

*Eunkyoung Park, Painting Artist*
Please introduce yourself.

My name is Ava and I am 16 years of age. I am in 11th grade at Markham District High School in Ontario, Canada.

My name is Aria and I am 14 years of age. I am in 9th grade at the same school as my sister.

What do you feel is an important cause or issue among teens?

Ava: “Mental health is a big issue for teens! It’s easy for kids to develop things like depression, anxiety, eating disorders, and whatnot. Mental health has a direct impact on our academics and how we get along with others. Aria recently started high school and was initially pretty nervous about the transition. It’s hard for many teens to transition. To help others in the process we both joined a group at school to help ninth graders transition into high school.

Aria: “I’ve noticed people at my school sometimes say offensive things as if they were a joke. My advice to teens at the receiving end of negative comments is to just ignore them. Not caring what others think can be liberating and leads to greater self-confidence.”

Ava: “I would agree, but not caring what others think doesn’t mean disregarding all feedback or perspectives. It means prioritizing your
own values and opinions while maintaining a healthy openness to growth and learning. Find a balance so you can live authentically and with confidence. Everyone has flaws and imperfections, just accept and embrace them. Our parents taught us to care less about what others think and to focus on our accomplishments, strengths, and qualities.”

What advice do you have for teens?

Aria: “Surround yourself with positive people, those who uplift and support you. Positive influences reinforce your sense of self-worth.”
Juanita Lewis, Executive Director of Community Voices Heard NYC, a member of the Grassroots Global Justice Alliance.
POWER TO THE PEOPLE!

Please give us a brief introduction of yourself and your job.

My name is Juanita Lewis and I oversee the day-to-day operations of Community Voices Heard NYC. We are a grassroots organization created to raise funds to meet our strategic goals of housing justice, economic justice, and a democracy that is open to everyone, where renters have a voice and are protected and money is channeled into accessible New York housing. We also fight for real wages to pay for real living standards. I direct sixteen managers who oversee 200 staff members.

Who inspired you to be a leader and why?

Women in history such as Ella Baker and Fannie Hamer. These two women were leaders in the civil rights movement and started the fight for voting rights. They were women’s rights activists. I come from a long line of immigrants, and people on both sides of my family were involved in advocacy and politics. The first female mayor in Freetown was a black woman. This gave me lots of inspiration to learn about the different types of movements, from civil rights to women’s rights. I saw a lot of injustices as a kid and always asked, “Why?”

What do you think is the most significant barrier to female leadership?

Patriarchy and the idea of what a woman should be. Leadership
requires an assertive and confident personality, a trait that isn’t expected of women, especially black women, who have to continually prove themselves.

**What have been the most significant barriers in your career?**

Internally, I would say having the confidence to lead, imposter syndrome, continually affirming yourself. Need to stop self-doubting and believe in yourself, you can do this! Externally, race and gender.

**How can one be powerful without alienating people or upsetting them? What if people are unhappy?**

The thing is, the more power you build, the more upset people will become just because of their perception of you. You will not always make everyone happy. Just be respectful, be clear, and be direct about the objectives you are aiming for. State your intentions. People have the right to disagree. Be empathetic and collaborative.

**How do you push for systemic change around ideas that are new or not that popular?**

Lots of organizing, training, and developing members to engage. I will hold discussions to talk about it externally and why we are fighting for change.

**How can women develop their leadership skills?**

Find a mentor, read books on different types of women leaders, think about the qualities you like in them, and ask, “What do I want to learn?” Think about a plan to reach that leadership role and ask for feedback from others on how they see you as a leader. Take some risks in your work, don’t be afraid to tell people how you feel, and most importantly be confident in your own skin!
Juanita Lewis pictured with the author, Madison Zhan.
50th Street Commons - a public plaza space in New York City designed by Vella Chan.
Can you give us a brief introduction of yourself and your journey into architecture? What inspired you to pursue this field?

My name is Vella Chan and I am a landscape architect. This is a rare field for a woman to be in, especially an Asian woman! My first job was at a nonprofit raising funds for Riverside Park in New York City, where I got to know the park administrator and the landscape architect. Riverside Park and Central Park were designed by Frederick Law Olmsted, who is considered the father of landscape architecture. This was super intriguing and prompted me to pursue a master’s degree in landscape architecture at the University of Pennsylvania.

I am part of a professional organization called the American Society of Landscape Architects, where I have spent many hours volunteering as an officer and on various committees to improve member benefits. I find volunteerism within my professional organization attracts women who are willing to give their time and skills. This results in more collaboration and less male ego involved in achieving goals.
Have you encountered any specific challenges or obstacles as a woman in this male-dominated field? How did you overcome them?

The only time I encountered challenges in a male-dominated office was when I worked for a multinational corporation. Male coworkers at my level were billed out at a higher rate, leading me to realize that they had higher salaries with fewer years of experience. I brought this up with the managing principal and HR department and was able to achieve parity in salary. Just know your worth, and don't be afraid to speak up!

What strategies or approaches have you found effective in asserting yourself and gaining recognition in a male-dominated work environment?

Being able to communicate well and making sure you are heard are the best ways to gain recognition. Assert yourself and initiate conversations. Ask questions, demonstrate your interest, and propose ideas for solutions to problems.

In your opinion, what benefits and perspectives do women bring to the field of architecture that might be different from their male counterparts?

Women bring a unique set of benefits and perspectives to the table. We are aware of male dominance and egos, so when working with clients we allow for others’ input and collaboration for an iterative design process.

I am proud I pursued a profession based on my own interests, with the support of my parents who, at the time, like most people, only knew about architects designing buildings and had not heard of landscape architecture. I have had varied career experiences, working on a wide range of design projects which include high-end residential complexes, academic and office campuses, museums, and public parks.
What advice would you give to young women considering a career in architecture or related fields?

My advice to anyone considering a career in building architecture and landscape architecture is to focus on a STEAM background because these are multidisciplinary fields. It’s important to include the A for arts!

Vella Chan, Landscape Architect.

Vella Chan with Parks Commissioner Mitchell Silver and Queens Borough President Melinda Katz at a groundbreaking for an NYC Parks playground she designed.
He Xiu Kun, author Madison Zhan’s paternal grandmother.
Please introduce yourself.

My name is He Xiu Kun. I am 80 years old and I live in New York City. I was born in China where I got married and had two boys.

When did you immigrate to the United States of America?

I was forty-two years old when I first set foot on American soil in 1985. My husband and I were eager to start a new life abroad with our two boys, who were fourteen- and sixteen-years-old at the time. None of us spoke a word of English. As a result, finding employment in New York City was tough. I took on three odd jobs and worked fifteen to sixteen hours daily to make ends meet. I was a seamstress in the garment district earning piecemeal pay; I pushed dim sum carts in a restaurant in Chinatown; and I was also a home attendant.

Our family lived in a small one-bedroom apartment on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. This was not a good neighborhood and we were mugged regularly.

How did your children adjust to their new school life in America?

Both of my boys were enrolled in ESL classes at school. These segregated ESL classes are probably the biggest travesty of the New York State Department of Education. ESL students should be fully and completely immersed in regular English classrooms. That way non-English speakers adopt English fluency much more rapidly and
do not miss any class time. Separating non-English speakers only leads to prolonged segregation.

One of your sons transformed from struggling in school to becoming a successful entrepreneur—what was the pivotal moment that led to this?

My younger son had a tough time acclimating at school. He never finished high school and was always out and about getting involved with the wrong crowd. I managed to convince my employer in the garment district to offer him a job separating and bagging sewn items. After two days of joining me at work, he was done. That was his turning point. He was determined to find a better life. He managed to get into Baruch College and discovered a natural skill in computer programming. He became more proficient in English, especially since ESL no longer existed! He later received his bachelor’s degree in Computer Science from NYU. He started and sold his first company at the height of the Silicon Valley boom in 1998-1999. He started a second company centered on the trading of options and currencies.

Due to his successes in business, he retired me from all my employment. I am relieved from the stresses that poverty carries. I have back pain from repetitive strain injuries sustained while working long hours in the past. But I would have done it all over again given the opportunities it gave my children.

What specific experiences or moments in your journey in America have reinforced your belief in the American dream, despite the hardships you’ve faced?

Despite all the hardships I endured over the years in America, I without a doubt believe in the American dream. Regardless of where you are born or what socio-economic class you are born into, you can attain your own version of success.
The American dream is the ideal that every citizen of the United States should have an equal opportunity to achieve success and prosperity through hard work, determination, and initiative.
An Anthology of the Facets of Feminine Life
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Madison Zhan has championed gender equality and female empowerment ever since she was a little girl. Growing up, she enjoyed regular verbal sparring with her father over women’s involvement in various traditionally male-dominated careers. She seeks to break down gender barriers and challenge stereotypes by telling women’s stories. Her ultimate goal is to find gender justice. A native New Yorker, Madison lives with her parents and younger brother in Battery Park City and attends a specialized high school in lower Manhattan. She is actively engaged in volunteer work with senior citizens in her community and hosts weekly meetings promoting human rights and universal education. She is passionate about the psychological and anthropological lenses on feminine life and gender equity. In her spare time, Madison enjoys listening to lo-fi music, skateboarding, and trying different flavors of bubble tea.