

Hello, I'm Jolly and I'm from the Welcoming Congregation Committee. Happy Black History and Black Future month.

We are also quickly approaching one of the most contentious American holidays, Valentine's day.

I hope that it comes as no surprise to you!

I am always looking for a reason to celebrate, and I think that VDay should be just another such excuse to express love to the people in our lives, and I am sure that many others agree in theory. Unfortunately, this holiday can come with a lot of expectations to live up to.

Growing up I've heard it called Single's Awareness Day, where it feels like everyone has plans with someone special to them except for you.

Often though, it's felt much worse by those who are a part of a couple. When I talked to some straight, cis men in my life, I heard it called "every man's least favorite day" or even "a woman's holiday." From buying the right gift (or any gift at all), to how you should sign the card (Love? Hugs? Yours?), it's the cause of some real anxiety among plenty of men. Or is she gonna be upset if I make a gesture that's too expensive? Like how my dad knows not to get flowers for my mom.

But these annual expectations placed on heterosexual men are weak compared to the minefield navigated by folks outside our social majority, and such they have found ways to approach this holiday very differently than many of us. We're bowling with the bumpers up. Everywhere you turn there is someplace pink and red trying to sell something for men to buy for women. And the cards are all for straight people, you have to really go looking if you are say, a queer woman. I realized when someone says, "look at that couple over there" I instantly picture a man and a woman. When someone says, I'm going to a wedding, I picture a man and a woman getting married.

Love is bigger than men buying flowers for women! Whether you call it my heterosexual privilege, or the way my world is always represented to me, I can't always notice the damage it does to how we interact with people. Almost all TV shows, movies, magazine stories and ads are all about heterosexuals. It's big news when one is about an lgbtq+ person. But without those traditional gender roles, My lgbt+ friends have removed themselves from the shame and confusion of whether it is a "women's holiday" This has created a world where LGBT+ people have to create their own expectations and rituals around something as ubiquitous as Valentines Day. They have reclaimed it to be a holiday of love for the people in their lives. This is permission for the rest of us to let ourselves be ok with letting go of systemic expectations.

I wish you a joyous and fruitful Lupercalia. And a Happy Valentines Day to all of us, in all different ways, and with whomever is your Valentine; whether it be with your partner, spouse, kid, friend, or your buddy, let's all choose to celebrate love wherever we find it! Amen.