

ISSUE 5

PLANORAMA

JANUARY 2024

Interview with Oliver Preece

An insight into working within a corporate environment as a young LGBTQ+ person and the support provided by ERGs.

Queer Stories of Interest

From the works of Emily Dickinson, to upcoming stories across the globe

Queer Experiences at Warwick

A note on the flagship queer events of campus life.

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Images: PLAN's Summit in 2023



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CONFERENCE PROGRAMME

Lgbtq+
Careers
Summit
2024



Summit - 20th January 2024

1pm

Panel 1: Trans Voices

Katie Neeves (she/her)
Marley Conte (they/them)
Bobbi Pickard (she/her)

2pm

Panel 2: Non-Corporate

3pm

Sponsorship Workshops

4pm

Headline Speaker Yasmin Benoit (she/her)

5pm

Networking Reception

Schedule

Career advice

Hear the top tips concerning careers from the PLAN Exec team

Ella - President

“When searching for internships, apply to as many places as you can bear! Any experience is valuable experience and casting the net as wide as possible gives you the best chance of securing one.”

Mathew - Head of Events

1st year- Make sure to apply for Springs! Be early. Attend open days and take notes that you can then use as talking points about firms
2/3 Years- Commercial awareness! Read the Financial Times and find commercial awareness podcasts and newsletters for you desired career area. Interview prep (outside of commercial awareness) do mock interviews and case prep for you chosen career.

“Take a risk!”

Abby - Non-corp officer / Careers and wellbeing temp

“Take a risk! Apply to as many positions as possible because you never know what opportunities /experiences you’ll end up enjoying!!”



Katie Todd - Frep

“Put yourself out there, people will be more willing to help your journey than you think.”

Alex Lukic - Marketing Officer

“always be nice in a corporate environment - you never know who will remember your kindness and put in a good word!”

James Keane - Careers & Wellbeing

“Just keep pushing through and doing as much as you can! University is such an amazing time to explore your options so really take advantage of it. It is important to remember that we **learn through experience** and rejection is redirection so everything you do pushes you further towards achieving your goals! ”

Lish - Corporate Officer

“Stay curious, keep your eyes and ears open, pay attention to the little things. When there is a door open for a great opportunity you don't know how to do, always take it and **figure it out as you do it.**”

PLAN's Term 2 Calendar

Week 1	Thursday - Queer Quiz
Week 2	Tuesday - Trans & NB coffee morning Saturday - LGBTQ+ Summit
Week 3	Tuesday - Loud & Proud circle Thursday - Self-defence class
Week 4	Wednesday - WWiE collab circle Thursday - Self-defence class
Week 5	Thursday - Self-defence class
Week 6	Thursday - Self-defence class

We have more events to be announced soon! Take a look at the @WARWICKPLAN Instagram to keep up to date and find more details.

microAGGRESSIONS

by Erin Lewis (they/them)



A close friend of mine is pansexual and regularly has to explain her sexuality to people who ask about it in often relatively demeaning tones. As an autistic person, I regularly find that when I mention it to people the first response I get is “Oh, I couldn’t tell” as though I was describing a debilitating physical condition of some kind. These are not the only examples of slights, backhanded compliments or glances that have a certain undertone to them, however if I was to list all of these encounters I or people I knew personally experienced then I would likely have enough anecdotes to fill a hefty novel.

In the UK, 40% have experienced microaggressions at work related to their identity.

-Wates

These interactions, as well as a litany of other that are experienced that marginalised people on a daily basis, are microaggressions- those subtle yet harmful slights, insults, and prejudices that queer people, people of colour, disabled people, and those from other marginalised community face in everyday life. Whilst it is a positive that people that are a part of these groups are being more integrated into environments such as the corporate workplace and different sectors of the economy there must also be greater consideration of the rise of microaggressions that these people may encounter in daily life.

This is, of course, not a strong indictment of the people who make these remarks. Oftentimes when people ask a queer couple “which one of you is the man?” or tell a black person that “you aren’t like other black people I know” they are not coming from a place of inherent malice. Maybe I’m being generous but I don’t believe that the people who say that they “couldn’t tell” that I have autism are not doing so because they hold actively negative views towards autistic people. They are operating from a place that underlines a large majority of microaggressions, that a white, cisgender, heterosexual, able-bodied world is the norm and an encounter with anyone who operates outside of these groups is in some way different. Not enough to spark out right hatred or acts of sustained bigotry, but enough that they are almost a foreign presence within this worldview and that there is a level of uncertainty when operating around these people, however low level this uncertainty may be.

However, when discussing the impact of microaggressions it is important the majority of the focus is placed on the people who are a victim of them, rather than attempting to guess the worldview or the intentions of the perpetrator of these acts. In 2020, A National Public Opinion Study from The Center for American Progress found that more than a third of LGBTQ+ Americans faced discrimination of some kind in the past year, a number which rose to

two thirds for trans and non-binary people. Whilst there may be a perception that younger queer people have a more accepting world to engage with, this is not entirely the case. In the UK, a study conducted by Stonewall found that one in eight queer people had attempted to take their own life, a number which rises to almost half for trans people. Queer people, and people of all marginalised backgrounds, can be vulnerable and it is certain that many of the microaggressions levelled against them hurt and can add up. As Dr Aaron Malark, a licensed clinical psychologist who specialises in depression, anxiety and LGBTQ issues, states: “so many microaggressions can be unconscious and come from a well-meaning place but are still harmful.”

Of course, when addressing microaggressions, in the workplace or in wider society, it is important to acknowledge that these problems will not be alleviated overnight immediately. However, the greater awareness there is of these microaggressions and the impact that they have on people, the more likely it is that we will begin to combat them in everyday life and help make society more accommodating for marginalised people. It is not the only route necessary for us to achieve a more equitable society but the recognition of the impact of microaggressions and working to erase them is an important step to take in order to aid marginalised people.



The Queer Experience at Warwick University

by Alex Lukic (he/him)

After firming Warwick as my first-choice university, I was eager to see how the queer scene at uni would be. You can imagine my disappointment when I found out that in a somewhat dated survey (2014) it had been ranked the straightest in the UK.

On arrival, it was clear to me that even with a low percentage of queer students (allegedly) there were societies like PLAN where I was able to find my crowd.

Coming from a relatively small town, I was particularly nervous, as I had no basis for queer nightlife or even an active and visible queer community as neither of these really existed in my hometown. I was going into uni with very limited experience of the concept of a queer 'found family'.

Many aspects of the university experience were great, such as the bi-termly queer club nights, the multitude of queer-based events and the involvement of queer student officers in the student union.

However, the queer experience at Warwick is very much a polarizing one. It is very easy to feel othered. I sat through seminar after seminar discussing trans rights and terf ideology as if it were some far off concept and not a critical part of the lives of numerous students here.

It wasn't until a few weeks into term 1, after a night out, sitting huddled in the kitchen, taking turns to use the tap and waiting for our pizza in the oven that this reality started to dawn on me. After yet another night of odd stares and the

occasional giggles when I walked past, I brought it up with the group, and to my chagrin, it was the other visibly queer people who shared similar stories, and the straight and cis members of the group who hadn't had anything like it. From here on in, I became much more aware of how different of an experience I was having compared to others on nights out. I felt as though I was a spectacle on some occasions, and on others I felt as if all eyes that landed on me immediately tried to look away as if they never saw me. It felt as though it was impossible for me, as a visibly queer person, to just exist in these spaces as everyone else did, whatever happened I was othered in one way or another.

It is easy to feel this way in a social sense. From my experience, it's not direct acts of homophobia which are the problem, but instead many small comments, small enough to escape culpability but building over time to send me a clear message; I am othered. It grates on you slowly; small innocuous comments build and build until suddenly you're snapping at a straight person for saying slay to you. They don't understand why you're angry and it's hard to explain in a way that makes sense to them.

I feel like that's a big reason why PLAN and pride and other predominantly queer societies can maintain such large numbers, as queer people feel isolated and thus band together. These spaces for me feel like some of the few in uni where I can truly express myself and not fear what may come of that. On occasion, the support from the Uni at queer events comes across as very

surface level when you're getting dirty looks off the balcony of T-bar on the way into loud and proud. Events which are supposedly for queer people are often co-opted; I can't count the amount of straight people I've run into at GLOW the (alleged) queer night at T-bar, who are only there for a free game of pool. Of course, it's a welcoming place for allies and anyone questioning, but when you strike up a conversation with someone at the bar and the first thing they tell you is that they're actually straight, it's grating. It gets worse when this happens almost every time you meet somebody at one of these events.

Living in Leamington also poses its own challenges as a queer student, which I felt blindsided by. When researching Warwick I hadn't thought to check the town where most off campus students live. The problems became apparent to me very quickly when within two weeks of living there somebody had felt the need to roll down their window and shout a homophobic slur at me. It is ultimately a big part of my queer experience as a Warwick student, even though it isn't on campus.

Obviously, in a world where homophobia is still widespread, Warwick is far from awful for queer people, however there are definitely places in which it could be improved. All in all, it wouldn't be fair of me to say the queer experience at Warwick university is a wholly negative one, but I can't say it is truly a positive one either.

Employee Networks: Slay or Nay?

by Bradley Barnes
(he/him)



Image: Financial Times

During the Financial Times virtual insight week I was lucky enough to participate in last fall (Thanks PLAN!), we were given the chance to interview various FT employees about their roles and responsibilities at the organisation. One of the interviews that stood out to me was with Jamie Brown, a Senior Software Engineer who also co-chaired an employee network of LGBT+ people within the FT, called 'Proud FT'.

Up until this point, I had never really considered employee networks as a concept. It made complete sense to me that they should exist, they just weren't something I had actively thought about before. So, I was quite curious to learn more when Jamie mentioned his involvement.

And I have to say, I was impressed with what I saw. Aside from providing a space for and nurturing a community of LGBT people, his group had also made major breakthroughs in ensuring more inclusive company policies. These included a guarantee of gender-neutral bathrooms in new buildings and gender affirming support in company healthcare packages. I was quite taken aback when I heard about all this. Being a bit of a cynic, I expected that action prompted by inclusion groups would be quite surface level; but instead, these were concrete policy changes that would greatly and positively impact people's lives.

Learning about Jamie and Proud FT made me curious about Employee Resource Groups (ERG) more broadly. Was what was happening there an exception or the rule? Did groups like these generally have such a positive impact, or was it dependent on the organisation they were in and how they were being run?

First for some background on employee networks. ERGs are usually completely volunteer-led and receive some (albeit often limited) funding from their organisations. In some cases, they receive no funding at all. In order to get more money ERGs can seek executive sponsorship or crowdfund. Often, volunteers will end up funding these ERGs themselves. For all of these reasons, ERGs can be somewhat limited in the scope of what they can achieve.

65% of employees who participate in ERGs say that these groups positively impact their career.

- Software Advice survey

Despite this, there have been some notable successes of ERGs. Obviously, we have already discussed Jamie and Proud FT, but there are many, many more out there; with one being the Military Support and Assistance Group (MSAG) within the Bank of America. The aim of the group is to help veterans as they readapt to day-to-day life, employing several initiatives such as job recruiting, career development, financial education, and so on. Since the start of this program, they've donated more than 2000 homes to military families and are committed to hiring 10,000 veterans and service members over the next few years.

There are also examples of large firms achieving a great deal of breadth when

it comes to the ERGs they offer their employees; good examples including EY, PwC and KPMG.

However, ERGs and their impacts are not unanimously positive. Oftentimes, they can essentially become a placeholder for meaningful change and more substantial Diversity and Inclusion infrastructure. If scrutinised for a lacking diversity hiring policies or workplace inclusion, companies can simply point to their ERG for a respective minority, and claim to be doing their bit. Instead of driving the change that's necessary, the normalisation of ERGs could actually hinder progress by acting as an excuse for it.

Moreover, even if we assume ERGs can be a driver for increased diversity, it may not be the case that companies see their facilitation as an end within itself. Research from Accenture suggests that small increases in diversity could lead to higher profits. Since ERGs do not need large amounts of internal funding, they seem to be something of a no-brainer for an organisation looking to use Equality, Diversity and Inclusion solely as a driver of growth.

All considered, however, I would not personally advocate for getting rid of these organisations. If nothing else, they provide a sense of belonging and community for minority groups and in many notable cases they have done so much more than this. That being said, ERGs cannot come in place of a broader D&I strategy and must exist alongside other efforts by firms to further their DE&I goals.

Beyond Rainbow Lanyards:

An LGBTQ+ Perspective on Growth and Transformation at BCG

by Mathew Stephenson (he/him)

For many young LGBTQ+ professionals, navigating the corporate world can feel like a daunting prospect. Oliver Preece, however, found more than just a prestigious job at Boston Consulting Group (BCG) – he discovered a space for personal and professional transformation. As he takes us through his journey in the professional world, we will see first-hand the power of inclusive workplace culture and how it allows diverse individuals to thrive post-education.

Oliver's early career at university wasn't without its challenges. As an openly LGBTQ+ student at the University of Warwick, he encountered subtle biases and moments of ostracisation. He admits, the fear of judgement was always present when he first entered corporate environments. **Oliver's path toward a brighter outlook was not a sudden revelation, but a gradual blossoming fuelled by two pivotal forces: the embrace of supportive LGBTQ+ networks and the transformative power of inclusive internship experiences.** These communities taught him the power of belonging and instilled in him the confidence to bring his authentic self to the workplace.

Landing at BCG, Oliver discovered a vibrant tapestry of diversity, woven into the company's very fabric. The LGBTQ+ network, Pride@BCG, welcomed him with open arms. Speaking to the impact of the group, he explains how it wasn't just a support group, it was a family united by a shared identity and a commitment to fostering an inclusive environment for everyone. Within this network, Oliver found mentors who became trusted advisors, confidantes, and advocates. This sense of belonging and acceptance proved crucial in his early days, allowing him to confidently navigate the intricacies of corporate life.

But BCG was more than just a safe haven; it was a catalyst for growth. Despite initial anxieties about public speaking and client interactions, Oliver found himself thrust into a dynamic environment that consistently pushed him beyond his comfort zone. Presenting in boardrooms, brainstorming with industry leaders, and navigating late-night client meetings – BCG nurtured his professional development with unwavering support. "It was both exhilarating and terrifying," he admits, "but ultimately, it forced me to grow in



Image: Oliver Preece

ways I never thought possible." Gradually, his anxieties were replaced by a newfound confidence as he mastered the complexities of consulting work.

One of Oliver's proudest achievements at BCG was spearheading a groundbreaking recruitment initiative. Recognising the need for greater LGBTQ+ representation within the company, he led a team that expanded their reach to historically overlooked universities, attracting a record number of talented individuals from diverse backgrounds. He found that BCG empowered him to turn his ideas and goals into reality. He said: "If you're passionate and committed, they'll support you every step of the way." This unwavering support for diversity and inclusion wasn't just lip service; it was a core principle ingrained in the company culture.

Oliver's arrival at BCG marked a pivotal

turning point. Stepping through the doors as a hesitant newcomer, he found himself in an environment that ignited a hidden spark within. BCG's culture of intellectual rigour and collaborative spirit challenged him to push beyond perceived limitations, fostering a confidence he didn't know he possessed. The initial apprehension melted away as he navigated complex projects, honing his analytical skills and strategic thinking with every step. Client interactions, once daunting, became platforms for him to showcase his newfound expertise, the fear of

senior figures replaced by a genuine desire to contribute and learn. Slowly, almost imperceptibly, Oliver transformed. Presentations that once sparked anxiety now became opportunities to lead with conviction, his voice resonating with authority and clarity. Watching Oliver navigate the company with newfound poise and confidence served as a tangible testament to BCG's power to unlock potential.

However, Oliver's story is not just about one individual's experience at BCG: it's a testament to the transformative power of an inclusive workplace. BCG, beyond superficial gestures, has created a culture where diverse identities are celebrated, not ostracised. It's a space where individuals like Oliver, and countless others, can shed the anxieties of belonging and reach their full potential. His voice, amplified by his experiences, serves as a beacon of hope for young LGBTQ+ professionals seeking not just a job, but a workplace where they can thrive authentically and contribute meaningfully.

Oliver's experience at BCG shows the importance of an inclusive workplace culture, allowing young queer professionals to thrive in their roles. This should be used as a template for other businesses to create an inclusive culture, ensuring they are both attracting and retaining diverse talent.

Meet PLAN UK!

What is PLAN UK?

Founded in 2022, PLAN UK was formed following the successful launch of PLAN societies in Warwick, Sheffield and Cambridge with the aim of spreading PLAN's vision across the UK. To us, PLAN embodies the idea that the possibilities that lie ahead should be limitless regardless of who you are and who you love - instilling confidence, sharing skills, and celebrating queer joy. The mission of PLAN UK is to educate, encourage and support LGBTQIA+ students & allies in the UK as they explore and navigate their career journey. At PLAN UK we look to harness the power of togetherness, supporting our PLAN society network, and guiding students through both their professional and personal growth.

PLAN UK is currently formed of 6 recent graduates, comprised of students who have been a part of PLAN's journey from the very start. As an organisation we look to be a facilitator for our societies across the country to achieve the very best that they can be, whilst also bringing students together from across universities into one larger community. Whilst we are still in our early days and finding our feet, the future looks very bright for the PLAN project, with two new societies already underway for 2024! In the past few years PLAN has amassed nearly 500 students, 100+ events, 3 conferences and won 12 national awards across the network and we cannot wait to see this grow even further.

As part of PLAN UK's growth, we have also developed a close relationship with National Student Pride, the UK's largest LGBTQ+ student event. National Student Pride takes place every year for a weekend of queer joy, including panel events, therapy dogs, the UK's largest LGBTQ+ careers fair, and so much more! This year's festival is taking place on February 23rd, and we would love to see you there too as we have some extra special PLAN UK stuff in store...



Warwick PLAN

Warwick was the first University to found a PLAN society, and has excelled at producing a welcoming and inclusive environment ever since. The team has hosted many successful events so far this year, including the Queer Career Series, and hopes that the final term of our current Exec will be just as fun-filled and supportive as ever. The photos here are of recent PLAN circles, of which we have a few more lined up before the year is out! Alongside the socials, we'll also be continuing our career help for LGBTQ+ students and running charity events.



Sheffield PLAN

“Sheffield PLAN has been incredibly important to the LGBTQ+ community within our university as it has given students a safe and informative space to explore and develop their skills and connections for their professional lives. This is especially important in a place where finding a queer community is challenging. We have held networking events, office visits and a career summit, to name a few, all receiving incredible positive feedback from students explaining how beneficial the advice they'd learned was.”

from Alice (she/her), President of Sheffield PLAN



Cambridge PLAN

“PLAN provides a different offering from other LGBTQ+ organisations, allowing like-minded, driven, students to meet and support each other. We've had the privilege of hosting huge career events with top graduate recruiters which serve to both assist LGBTQ+ students in networking with top employers and in upskilling to present their best possible self in applications.”

Embracing Nobody: Unveiling Emily Dickinson's Quiet, Queer Rebellion

One of my favourite poems by Emily Dickinson is 'I'm Nobody! Who are you?' A seemingly simple proclamation that unveils numerous subtleties within the enigmatic life of Emily Dickinson.

Born in 1830 in Amherst, Massachusetts, Emily Dickinson remains a spectral figure in literary history. Celebrated for her poetic prowess and mysterious reclusiveness, she spent much of her life in self-imposed seclusion, crafting poetic lines that resonated with the hushed murmurs of her intricate self. Beyond the verses that resonate in quiet corners, Dickinson's life hints at a narrative intertwined with the complexities of LGBTQ+ identity.



Dickinson's poems often spoke of individualism and a rejection of societal norms, a sentiment reflected in her own life choices. Uninterested in the traditional roles expected of a woman in her era, she chose to dedicate herself to her art. Her pen became a conduit

for rebellion, each stroke challenging the norms that sought to confine her.

Dickinson's poetry, much like her life, explored the strength found in anonymity. In "I'm Nobody, Who Are You?" she beckons readers to consider the potency of existing beyond the societal gaze. This theme extends beyond the verse, encapsulating Dickinson's existence as she quietly defied the norms of her time. Her refusal to conform and suppressed yearnings contribute to a broader narrative of LGBTQ+ history, where individuals carved out spaces for their authentic selves even in the face of societal repression.

While Emily never publicly acknowledged her LGBTQ+ identity, the intimate letters exchanged with Susan Gilbert Dickinson hint at a relationship that transcended the bounds of mere friendship. Susan, her sister-in-law, became not only a muse but also the recipient of passionate letters that eluded the constraints of societal norms.

In an era of clandestine expressions of love, Dickinson navigated the complicated aspirations she had, leaving behind a trove of letters as a testament to her undisclosed authenticity.

In the sacred space of her letters to Susan Gilbert Dickinson, Emily penned, "Yours, always, in the silent language of the heart." In these brief yet profound words, she encapsulated the depth of their connection—an intimacy that dared to exist beyond the boundaries of conventional expressions. The quiet declaration of being "Yours, always" whispered of a love that found solace in secrecy, leaving a lasting mark on the uncharted landscapes of their shared

by Lish Lawrence
(she/they)

emotions.

As Emily delved into the delicate prose of her letters to Susan, she began to intertwine their relationship with her famous poem, "I'm Nobody! Who are you?" Emily expressed, "In the garden of our shared confidences, the blossoms of emotions unfurl. Do you feel it too, the resonance of something unspoken, a language only the heart comprehends?" These words, written with ink that held the weight of hidden realities, unfolded a narrative of intimacy. In the metaphorical garden of shared secrets, a parallel to the poem's theme of anonymity and the freedom it offered was shown. Just as the poem questioned societal expectations and the masks people wear, their love existed beyond the boundaries of established norms, hidden from prying eyes. Their connection, like the poem, celebrated the beauty of being "nobodies" together, finding solace in their shared understanding, tenderness, and love that dared to bloom in the shadows.

This silent dialogue of the heart, echoed in her poem 'I'm Nobody! Who are you?' becomes a poignant thread connecting Dickinson to the broader tapestry of queer history. The poem, a declaration of nobodiness, mirrors her quiet rebellion against societal expectations. In a society clamoring for recognition, Dickinson found strength in anonymity, a sentiment encapsulated in the lines, 'How dreary to be somebody! / How public, like a Frog— / To tell one's name the livelong June— / To an admiring Bog!'

Emily Dickinson's life, veiled in mystery, serves as a testament to the resilience of the LGBTQ+ community throughout history. In a society that sought to silence and suppress, Dickinson's poems and unorthodox lifestyle choices speak to the subdued rebellion of people who dared to live true to themselves. Through the lens of her "nobody" status, Dickinson emerges as a somebody—a silent trailblazer who, in her own way, contributed to the literary and LGBTQ+ landscapes, enriching the narrative with her unique voice and unconventional influence.

The same notion she presented in her poem rings true in her own life: an act of defiance against accepted standards of living, is to exist beyond the watchful eyes of society, a quiet yet potent rebellion against the expectations of becoming a "somebody" in the public eye. The comical cycle, likened to a chorus of frogs bellowing their names, becomes a subtle commentary on identity. It suggests that even in the pursuit of individuality, there's a risk of unintentionally contributing to a collective identity — a cycle both amusing and thought-provoking.

In the embrace of solitude, she discovered the freedom to delve into her innermost thoughts and emotions, nurturing an environment where her poetry could flourish. Like the frogs in the metaphor, Emily sought to express her identity and establish her uniqueness in the world of poetry. She desired to stand out as a distinct voice among the collective. However, she also recognised the risk of blindly following what was expected of society and losing her true self in the process. Emily's poems often reflect this tension between seeking status and embracing solitude, as she navigates the complexities of identity and the delicate balance between individuality and conformity.

I'm Nobody! Who are you? (1891) - Emily Dickinson

I'm Nobody! Who are you?

Are you – Nobody – too?

Then there's a pair of us!

Don't tell! they'd advertise – you know!

How dreary – to be – Somebody!

How public – like a Frog –

To tell one's name – the livelong June –
To an admiring Bog!

Emily Dickinson's remarkable journey from a self-proclaimed "nobody" to an acclaimed poet is a testament to her perseverance and introspection. Despite her introverted nature, Dickinson's poetic genius allowed her to transcend societal expectations and leave an indelible mark on literature. Her unconventional lifestyle choices and poetic rebellion were a quiet but powerful expression of her true self.

As reflected in the multifaceted interpretations of the poem, Dickinson's work continues to invite diverse perspectives, affirming its brilliance and enduring relevance. Recognizing the diverse interpretations adds depth to her legacy, emphasizing the poem's ability to resonate with readers across different times and contexts. The richness of her work lies in its adaptability, allowing for a continued exploration of its meanings and contributing to its lasting impact on literature.

Through poetry that defied conventions and letters that whispered of unspoken love, Emily Dickinson invites us to contemplate the power found in anonymity, the strength derived from resisting societal expectations, and the enduring legacy of those who chose to exist authentically, even in the shadows.

The poem's final sentence vividly contrasts those deemed as "somebody", possessing a public presence and a frog persistently making noise or asserting its presence. This analogy accentuates the stark contrast between expectations of visibility and recognition and the subtle rebellion found in embracing anonymity—a theme intricately interwoven with Dickinson's self-proclaimed "nobody" status.

For the struggle of individuality and the risks of conforming to societal expectations, just like the frogs, who assert their identities in a chorus, Dickinson sought to distinguish herself, to declare her worth as a poet of great influence and significance. However, Emily also sought solitude as a means to nurture her creativity and find solace in her own thoughts. She retreated from the pressures of her time, choosing instead to live a reclusive life.

The rise and role of Queer Comedy

by Amy Adshead (they/she)

The rising presence of queer comedians over the past few years begs a question of representation. With the constant release of new LGBTQ+ comedy specials as well as large-scale collaborations, such as Netflix's own 'Stand Out: An LGBTQ+ Celebration' released in 2022, queer comedy has been solidified as a significant part of stand-up. However, following this success many queer comedians have been questioned on the role they serve to the LGBTQ+ community as voices in the public space.



Image: Matt Crockett

Whether it is anecdotes of family members' reactions to coming out, or describing the awkward trials of code-switching around straight people, comedy provides a space for queer people to subvert expectations and affirm themselves as individuals. This is true for Mae Martin's comedy, which includes stories of the ridiculous relationship they share with their parents or their more niche, addictive obsession with Bette Midler. In comedy, there's no need to resolve such issues of identity, be it futile or life-changing. Perhaps, this is one reason for the



Image: Emma McIntyre / WireImage

popularity of comedic queer experiences - the multiple stereotypes and societal pressures placed on queer identities can be interrogated, related to, and satirised.

Sharing experiences on stage inadvertently creates a safe space for queer people to feel represented, although it's not the only reason for queer comedy. Often postmodern queer comedy centres on demystifying being part of the LGBTQ+ community. As Caleb Hearon ironically put it during one of his sets: "being gay is over, dog. [...] Being non-binary is cool." This awareness of queer culture typically being canonised as trendy or 'woke' with comedy audiences redeems a sense of the real people behind the labels. In a sad, rainbow-washing world of Sainsbury's Pride clothing lines and performative allyship, this ironic, self-aware queer humour is necessary and effective.

However, it is important to acknowledge that queer comedians don't need you to dwell on their

identity unless they want you to. Stand-up and social commentary have always gone hand in hand. Yet, first and foremost, comedians are there to deliver jokes and are not obligated to act as a role model for an entire community. In fact, one of my personal favourite qualities of queer comedy in general, is the way it can ground queer experience in humour that all types of people can laugh at. Its tendency to encompass specific pop-culture references makes it accessible to a huge range of audiences.

Ru Paul's Drag Race winner, Bob The Drag Queen, is an excellent example of a comedian that in no way hides their queer identity, but delivers standup centred on a much wider scope.

With queer comedy becoming more prominent, I would encourage audiences of all genders and sexualities to look for the deeper nuances of stand-up routines. As opposed to blanketing comedians with a representational purpose to act as a spokesperson, we should be equally interested in their individual lives and their engagement with the world as we are other comedians. As Joel Kim Booster describes in his Netflix comedy special 'Psychosexual': "I mostly just wanted to come up here and be stupid and make people laugh [...] all that stuff is a byproduct."



Image: BobtheDragQueen / YouTube

Queer stories to watch around the world in 2024

Africa

The **Namibian** High Court heard a challenge to its common sodomy law ban last year and will release its findings on May 17th (International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia). This date and other recent legal rulings suggest that this decision will decriminalise gay sex in Namibia.

The brutal Anti-Homosexuality Act is currently being challenged in the Constitutional Court of **Uganda**. The bill drew international attention for its inclusion of death sentences and extended 20 year imprisonments. The court may object, returning the country to the already repressive sodomy laws.

Americas

Upcoming legal rulings in **Dominica, Grenada, St Lucia and St Vincent and the Grenadines** in response to sodomy law challenges. Positive outcomes in neighbouring countries with similar legal systems are keeping observers hopeful.

Mexico is close to passing a federal conversion ban. The bill passed in the senate in October and is awaiting approval in the House of Representatives. This follows a Mexico state becoming the 29th (of 33) to recognize gay marriage.

2024 will see a plethora of elections across the **USA** which will have real consequences for queer

Americans. Former president Donald Trump (who has entertained the idea of a federal transition ban) looks set to win the Republican nomination. At both the national and local levels prospective politicians are endorsing greater access to gender-affirming healthcare as well as queer education and bathroom bans.

This November, **Californians** will be asked to remove the defunct 2008 Proposition 8 from the state constitution which bans same-sex marriage and remains an affront to queer peoples' dignity.

Momentum in **Hawaii, Michigan and Oregon** to repeal gay marriage bans in referenda at this years elections is building. With the Democrats controlling state institutions in all three, activists are hopeful for progress.

Asia-Pacific

Australian state governments in New South Wales, Tasmania and Western Australia have all pledged to introduce conversion therapy bans. This would leave just a quarter of States and Internal Territories without bans.

In November, the Tamil Nadu state government in **India** received a court recommendation advising the authority to "consider procedure to register civil union between LGBTQIA+ partners", raising the prospect of greater rights for same-sex couples.

The new **Thai** coalition government seems likely to achieve gay marriage this year. The bill, introduced late last year, also has the support of the main opposition party and although it could encounter opposition from the largely military-appointed Senate, it has voiced little opposition so far. The government has also announced plans to expand gender recognition for trans people.

Europe

Greek Prime Minister, Kyriakos Mitsotakis, has promised to introduce a same-sex marriage bill early this year. However, it is unclear whether this effort has

enough support from parliament to pass.

Despite a veto threat from the Prince (which seems to have receded), **Liechtenstein's** parliament is set to introduce same-sex marriage with near unanimous support.

Following the toppling of the virulently anti-LGBTQ+ far right PiS government in **Poland** in October, the new government has promised to quickly repeal oppressive legislation, introduce civil union legislation, legalise abortions and criminalise hate speech in a wider effort to reverse a long period of democratic backsliding.

Treatment of LGBTQ+ **Russians** is expected to further deteriorate after its supreme court outlawed the "international LGBT public movement" as an "extremist organisation". Already infamous for discriminatory attitudes and legislation, the Russian government has become increasingly dependent on far-right influences.

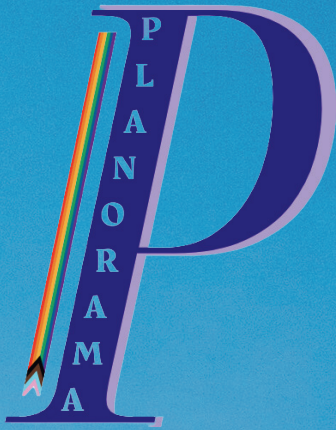
Transphobia has gripped the **UK** Conservative Party in 2023, with senior figures wielding it to gain favour with a widely anti-trans membership. Yet the party will need a little short of a miracle to win this year's general election. The Labour Party, currently almost 20 points ahead in the polls, has pledged to enact a comprehensive ban on conversion therapies and to introduce a fairer gender recognition system.

A draft bill to allow same-sex civil unions in **Ukraine** is expected before parliament this year. The bill has the support of President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and public support for greater LGBTQ+ rights has significantly risen since Russia's invasion.

December saw the **Vatican** allow priests to bless same-sex couples in a major change to doctrine. The Catholic Church, which still considers acts of homosexuality sinful, justified the change since the ban hindered its ability to connect to those seeking God. The ramifications of this decision will be felt throughout 2024, especially in the responses from clergy.

by Reuben Bye (he/him)





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