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The Gay Saint

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AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL COLLAB

LGBT+ Rights Are Human Rights

Olivia Sykes.

In the midst of essay deadlines, lab reports, society socials, and a few too many drunk nights out, it's easy to forget that, as I'm writing this, we're already halfway through LGBT+ History Month. Every year in February we come together to celebrate the lives of the queer community and reflect on the past, the present, and hope for a future where everyone feels welcome. But why do we take a whole month to reflect and why is it so important?

LGBT+ Rights Are Human Rights

'We should all speak out when someone is arrested or imprisoned because of who they love or how they look. This is one of the

great neglected human rights challenges of our time' (UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, April 2013). LGBT+ rights are human rights. It is one of Amnesty International's firm beliefs and targets that everyone, regardless of age, sexual orientation, race, etc. should be able to love whoever they want without fear or discrimination. While these sentiments are reflected in international law, the reality is that even in law the LGBT+ community faces discrimination. Despite governments signing international treaties meant to protect LGBT+ rights, many queer people are still harassed, imprisoned, and killed for expressing their fundamental right to who they love. According to an Amnesty article, same-sex relations are still illegal in 78 countries, and queer people still face the death penalty in countries like

Iran, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Mauritania, Sudan, and parts of Nigeria and Somalia. LGBT+ History Month is key to communicating the struggles of LGBT+ people across the world to the wider community who do not have to actively live these experiences every day. It is key to understanding that progress has been made since the first LGBT+ History Month in 1994, whilst still acknowledging that LGBT+ people continue to face discrimination. It is integral for the privileged to offer their voices in the fight for LGBT+ rights.

St-Andrews Amnesty International and LGBT+ Rights

Since becoming a full committee at the beginning of 2021, the St-Andrews Amnesty International Committee has tried to show support for the LGBT+ community however possible.

We have stood and continue to stand behind the trans community during the hateful, transphobic actions that took place in late 2021.

We organised and coordinated an email to the school administration on their response to the transphobia displayed, demanding they stand behind the trans community. We released resources and posts about how to help the trans community and we have been working with *Saints LGBT+* to hear their perspectives and will continue to act and stand by them.

We are actively working on organising a speaker series throughout the semester on the realities of global policing and how it intersects with human rights. One of these speaker events is being coordinated with *Saints LGBT+* to provide them with the opportunity to communicate, express, and

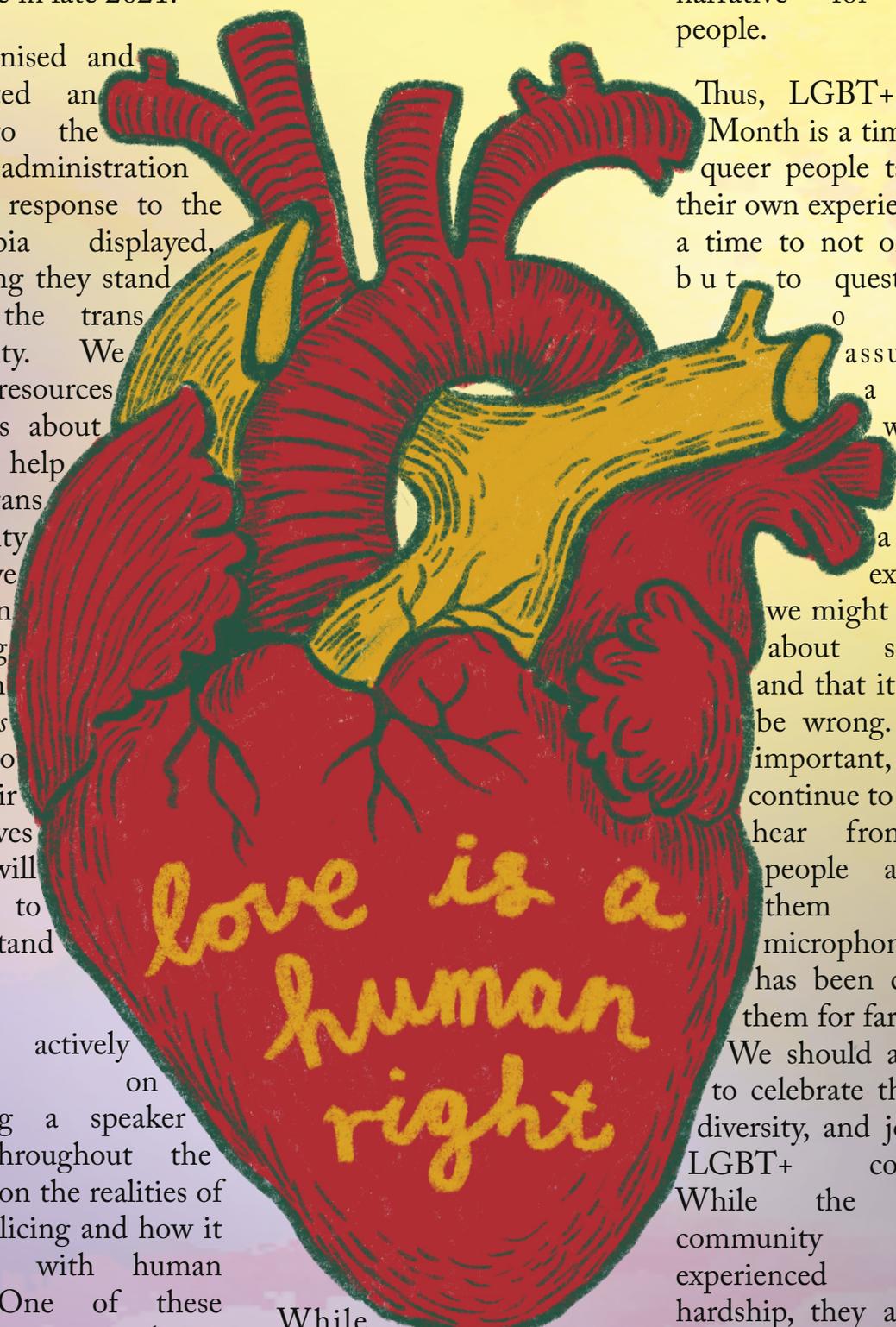
educate others about how policing has historically and continues to affect the queer community.

Pass the Mic

is also a time to step back, take a seat, and listen to their voices. White cis het people have historically and continue to define the narrative for LGBT+ people.

Thus, LGBT+ History Month is a time to hear queer people talk about their own experiences. It is a time to not only listen but to question our own assumptions and worldviews. A time to actively express that we might be wrong about something and that it's okay to be wrong. What is important, is that we continue to learn and hear from queer people and pass them the microphone that has been denied to them for far too long. We should also strive to celebrate the beauty, diversity, and joy of the LGBT+ community. While the LGBT+ community has experienced immense hardship, they are also a community of joy and passion.

Listen, reflect, educate, celebrate.



While LGBT+ History Month is a time to reflect on the past and the hardships queer people continue to face, it

Urgent Actions!

Every week, one of my main roles for St-Andrews Amnesty International is to find the 'urgent actions' of the week. This week, we implore you to focus on LGBT+ issues and look for ways to listen, learn, and educate yourselves. Here are a couple of ways to get involved and take action.

Join the Amnesty UK Rainbow Network

Amnesty International works in a multitude of ways to support the LGBT+ community, one of which is to join the 'Amnesty UK Rainbow Network', a group of activists who attend events to demand rights for queer people and campaign for gender and sexual identity equality.

Read more and sign up here: <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/join-lgbti-activist-network>.

Iranian LGBT+ Rights Defender at Risk

Zahra Sedighi-Hamadani, an LGBT+ activist known as Sareh, has been detained in Iran since 27 October 2021 due to actions in defence of LGBT+ rights. Authorities have threatened to convict her of 'spreading corruption on earth', which carries the death penalty.

Take action to demand Sareh's release by composing a letter here: <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/urgent-actions/ill-treated-iranian-lgbti-defender-risk>.

LGBT+ History Month Webpage

Finally, check out the official LGBT+ History Month webpage for other

ways you can get involved, such as contributing to their blog, purchasing merchandise, downloading resources, and more: <https://lgbtplushistorymonth.co.uk/>.

Sources:

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LGBT+ HISTORY

A Timeline of the Fight for LGBT+ Liberation in the UK

Jack Travers.

We have undoubtedly come far in the fight for LGBT+ rights in the UK in the past decade, with rights being hard won by relentless campaigning, civil disobedience, and the dedication and bravery of members of our community. However, there is still a long way to go in this fight for equality, inclusion and progress. Here, we'll take a look at the history of LGBT+ liberation movements in the UK, their landmark victories, and highlight where the fight continues.

1950s

1951 – Roberta Cowell is the first trans woman to undergo sex reassignment surgery.

1957 – Wolfenden Committee considers

changes to laws against homosexuality after a string of high profile convictions, recommending that 'homosexual behaviour between consenting adults in private should no longer be a criminal offence'. This is rejected by the UK Government of the time, prompting the formation of the *Homosexual Law Reform Society* in 1958.

1960s

The formation of the first Lesbian, Gay and Transgender activist groups, educating the public on LGBT+ issues and pushing for reform.

The Sexual Offences Act of 1967 decriminalises sex between males over 21 and 'in private' in England and Wales only. It would remain illegal in Scotland and Northern Ireland until the 1980s.

The summer of '69 sees the Stonewall Riots in the US, bringing greater awareness to modern

LGBT+ liberation movements, and sparking widespread protest and civil disobedience over police brutality against the LGBT+ community.

1970s

The formation of the London Gay Liberation Front in a basement classroom in the London School of Economics is characterised by revolutionary politics, using civil disobedience, street theatre, 'gay-days', festivals, and sit-ins. This leads to London's first Gay Pride march in 1972. The same year, Britain's first gay newspaper is published: *Gay News*.

1977 – GaySoc holds its first meeting, the first organised LGBT+ student group at the University of St Andrews. This would later change to be renamed as LGB Society, then LBTSoc in 2006, being 'one of the first universities in Scotland to represent transgender people in the Society's name.

The present iteration of the society is Saints LGBT+, an official subcommittee of the St Andrews University Students Association, of which every matriculated student is a member.

1980s

The first Black Gay and Lesbian Group is formed in the UK, followed by the London Bisexual Group in 1981, making the LGBT+ rights movement in the UK more inclusive and representative of the community.

1981 – The first case of AIDS in the UK is recorded, signifying the start of the AIDS crisis.

Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners Campaign group was formed, raising money for miners in South Wales, who were facing pit closures.

1988 – The infamous piece of legislation, Section 28, is passed, making the ‘promotion of homosexuality’ and LGBT+ inclusive education illegal. Sir Ian McKellen publicly comes out as gay in response to this. The

following year, Stonewall UK is founded.

1990s

1992 – The World Health Organisation declassifies same-sex attraction as a mental illness.

1994 – The age of consent between MSM is lowered to 18. This is later lowered to 16 in 2000, with group sex between men also being decriminalised.

1999 – Trans Day of Remembrance is founded in memory of those who have been murdered as a result of transphobia, and to bring attention to the continued violence and discrimination faced by the transgender community.

2000s

The millennium is characterised by wide sweeping reforms in the area of LGBT+ rights, with major legislation passing in the UK, such as: the ban on LGB people serving in the armed forces is repealed, and Section 28 is

repealed in Scotland in 2000. Section 28 is repealed in England, Wales and Northern Ireland in 2003. Age of consent is lowered to 16, making it equal with straight people.

Equal adoption rights for same-sex couples are also enshrined. In 2003, the first LGB workplace equality legislation is passed.

2004 – The Civil Partnership Act and the Gender Recognition Act is passed, granting trans people full legal recognition and protection.

2010s

The Equality Act of 2010 enshrines gender reassignment as a protected characteristic and ‘incitement of homophobic hatred’ is made a criminal offence in the UK.

2011 – Gay and bisexual men are allowed to donate blood for the first time.

2013 – Same-sex marriage legislation is passed in England and Wales, this is extended to Scotland in 2014.

Gay and bisexual men convicted for having consensual sex prior to its legalisation are pardoned. A legislation is introduced to make the teaching of sex and relationships education compulsory in schools, with the PSHE curriculum amended to include LGBT+ rights and history.

2020s

Same-sex marriage is finally legalised in Northern Ireland, and gay and bisexual men have all blanket barriers to blood donation dropped. The 2021 census is the first to include sexuality and gender orientation. Calls are made for conversion

therapy to be banned in the UK, with countries across the world already banning it. The UK Government has launched a consultation which closed at the start of this month, and has promised a legislative ban on the barbaric practice. The fight goes on. It's important to reflect on the immense sacrifices made by members of the LGBT+ community fighting for liberation and equality. However, there is still far to go, with equality legislation being stalled, and homophobic and transphobic incidents increasing across the UK and the wider world. And homos, we must remember that we are a community and until we

are all freed from the shackles of oppression, none of us are truly free. Whether it be across the globe, country or in our own town, the fight goes on.

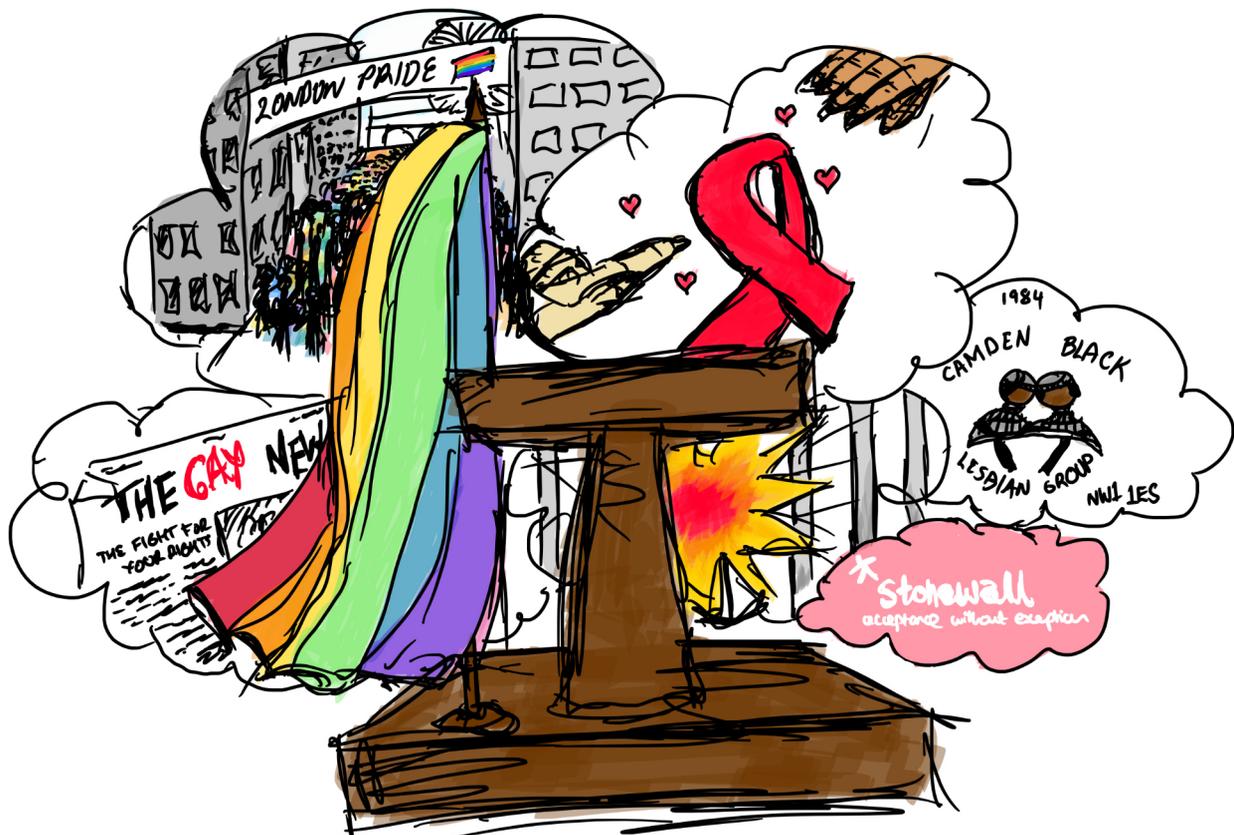
We need trans liberation now.

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Timeline, <https://timeline.com/this-is-what-britains-gay-liberation-front-movement-looked-like-in-the-1970s-c8583401a209>

Saints LGBT+, <https://www.saintslgbt.com/history>



The case of Dr James Barry or the Queer Importance of Being Appreciative

Toni Andres.

After last year's February marked the middle of the isolation Sad, I decided to kick off this year's LGBT+ History Month by joining a queer history walk in Edinburgh. As the train was struggling against the ungodly winds that swept across the north of the UK over that weekend, I found myself increasingly more cringed out at the idea of walking around Edinburgh with a tour guide pointing at sites of deceased queer people, following the absence of past queer presences.

A while ago, I had read about 'thanatourism': the voyeuristic exploitation of sites of horror, trauma, and mass destruction. Concentration camps are often brought up in discussions associated with thanatourism. On that train then, I was wondering: was I about to become part of the

touristic utilisation of queer identities of the past, a sort of rainbow capitalism?

Fast forward: the tour was fantastic, my previous concerns turned out entirely wrong. As we followed the absences of past queer presences, Hannah, the tour guide, talked about their lives and joys with admiration and appreciation, and yet she did not sugarcoat the struggles that these people had been through—after all, it is queer history we are talking about. I realised that the fundamental mistake I had made and built my concerns upon was the assumption that queer history is entirely about trauma and pain. Naturally, these are an intrinsic part of experiences of queerness and therefore a fundamental aspect of queer activism and history, but of course—and I cannot emphasise this enough—they are massively outweighed by the joys of being queer. As we unearth marginalised narratives from the past and re-pot them in the centre, queer history is fundamentally about subverting the existing power dynamics that pushed these identities to the

periphery in order to give them the space—appreciation—to tell their stories. And on that note: this is my story of Dr James Barry, or the queer importance of being appreciative. As we were walking around the Anatomical Museum, Hannah told the story of Dr James Barry, a doctor from the early 19th century. Born in Cork, Ireland, around 1789, James came to Edinburgh in order to obtain a degree in medicine. He later joined the army as a doctor and pursued a very successful career in the military, spending more than ten years in colonised areas such as South Africa. Barry has often been praised for his profound understanding of the human body, being far ahead of his own time. Discussions of his career are often deeply entrenched in a white-saviour-rhetoric that contextualises his work in a narrative of Western progress, 'benevolently' brought to colonised areas. His lifework is definitely worth being reconstructed through a postcolonial lens—applied both directly to his life and his legacy within the process of (retrospectively) constructing history.

The reason I chose him as an example, however, is the obsession of the 21st century's TERFs to re-narrativise James in a second-wave feminist move that perpetuates rigid, binary gender constructions and, by doing so, gatekeeps womanhood and invalidates the power of self-labelling.

In short: upon his death, James' wish not to undergo a post-mortem examination was disregarded. The doctor found out that James had been assigned female at birth and—knowing that these findings would probably have destroyed James' legacy at that time—he made sure to conceal this information from the public. Now, more than 200 years later, the public made sure that James' identity, which he assumed upon coming to Edinburgh, was glamorously invalidated, as a quick investigative google-consultation demonstrates: The upsetting amount of obnoxious sensationalist journalism was topped by the 2016 book *Dr James Barry: A Woman Ahead of Her*

Time, written by Jeremy Dronfield and Michael du Preez [1]. This was only beaten by Wendy Moore's review of the same book published in *The Guardian*, titled 'Dr James Barry: A Woman Ahead of Her Time review – an exquisite story of scandalous subterfuge' [2]. A year later, Mark Brown, wrote an article on the 'secret transgender Victorian surgeon [...] who concealed the fact that he was a woman'. Although I appreciate

the James Bond vibe of Mark's description, I personally prefer the alliterative sensationalism of Wendy's shot at James' life story over Mark's awkward skirting-around James' gender. Sorry, Mark.

What we are seeing here are two attempts at understanding gender from a point of view post the establishment of gender studies and post three waves of feminism (although many seem to be stuck in the second). Dronfield and du Preez' biography of James assumes that James was in fact a cis-woman who disguised her true

identity as a woman in order to cunningly trick the patriarchy. The historians of the second wave of feminism love this stuff: the girlboss who appropriates male privileges for her own benefit. On the other hand, Mark seems to be confused about what 'woman' and 'transgender' mean. Please do your homework, Mark.

It is not my aim to argue that James was definitely transmasculine and nothing else—or would have been, if the term, or

even the concept, of trans-masculinity had been around during his lifetime. I also do not want to dismiss the idea that James may have been intersex, another ongoing discussion among historians.

Or that James truly was a cis-woman who took on a disguise in order to pursue a career in medicine. The point is: we don't know. And unless any diary or letter written by James explicitly denies or confirms any of these hypotheses, we will never know. And that means that nobody gets to put James into a certain category.

James lived under the name James and used he/him pronouns in all documents, private and public. Who are we, who have the terminology to think of gender identity, expression, and performance in more nuanced categories and terms, to impose any of them onto James? And certainly not the TERFs. Also, please stop making gender reveals the butt of your jokes.

That being said, queer history—and especially the history of people who crossed the boundaries of how gender was constructed, constituted, and policed in their respective contemporary environments—demands the exact same care from us as we do from each other in the present.

As someone who has done some research on queerness in antiquity, I am also very aware of the turn this argument can take. I have proudly been twitter-yelled-at by scholars for applying modern terminology of sexuality and gender to a society that thrived more than 2,000 years ago. I understand that this anachronistic approach can quickly lead to revisionism and present-centric constructions of

history. This is a knockout argument for any profound research on the history of marginalised identities and—surprise—often comes from the more conservative camps (which the discipline of Classics, unfortunately, is full of). What I am saying, however, is that just as we practice self-labelling and self-identification in the present, I want to emphasise that we, in the present, do not get to label our queer family in the past either. By engaging with queer history, we focus on the long history of fluidity and dynamics in experiences beyond societally imposed categorisations along the lines of gender expression, expectation, and sexual acts. By allowing them the freedom to just be the identities they chose in their specific contemporary conditions, we prevent (or in many cases refute) TERF appropriations of these past lives that aim to legitimise constructions of a supposed essence of *genderhood*, constructions which are in turn used for debates in the present. Hannah's tour around Edinburgh

did not focus solely on the trauma of being queer; she followed the traces of past queer identities and lives that encompassed experiences of joy and personhood. When we think about the history of LGBT+ identities, let us grant them the freedom to be themselves, a freedom they may not have had during their lives, and focus on their joy of being themselves.

Sources:

[1] Jeremy Dronfield and Michael du Preez, 2016, *Dr James Barry: A Woman Ahead of Her Time*. Oneworld Publications.

[2] Wendy Moore, 'Dr James Barry: A Woman Ahead of Her Time review – an exquisite story of scandalous subterfuge,' *The Guardian*, 10 Nov 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/nov/10/dr-james-barry-a-woman-ahead-of-her-time-review>

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SEX EDUCATION

The AIDS Epidemic and HIV Stigma

Kylie Lam.

**'Fire fire burn-burn yes!
No latex rubber rubber
Fire latex rubber latex
bummer
Lover bummer!'**

These lyrics come from the piece 'Contact' in the multi-award-winning musical *Rent*. The high-concept number serves as a swan song for Angel, a drag queen or trans/non-binary character depending on the production, who dies suddenly of complications from HIV/AIDS at the end of it. For me, this evokes the terrorising memory of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, and how it affects the queer community specifically. The theme of queer history acts as a springboard for us to look back at the early days of the AIDS crisis in the 1980s-90s.

To start with the basics, HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) is a virus that attacks the body's immune system. If HIV is not treated, it can lead to AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome). While today, HIV infection is a chronic manageable condition thanks to great advancements in modern medicine, it was an almost invariably fatal illness in the recent past. The first cases of what would later become known as AIDS were reported in the US in June of 1981 with the CDC publishing a report which described five cases of a rare, deadly lung infection found in previously healthy gay men aged 29-36 years, all in Los Angeles. A steady trickle of reports with similar cases followed this one, marking the beginning of the AIDS epidemic. By the late 1980s, it would become the number one threat to public health, with an 89 percent increase in AIDS diagnoses recorded in 1985. In the darkest years of the

epidemic, AIDS was almost always fatal; the prognosis was a few years, maybe a few months. In 1988, a year in which at least 10,911 people died of AIDS in the US, the WHO established World AIDS day (1 December), and *The Red Ribbon Project* was launched in 1991 to raise awareness and fight against the stigma of AIDS.

The challenges and barriers imposed on the LGBT+ community in relation to HIV are often overlooked. Stereotypes, stigma, and homophobic discrimination can provoke fear among the community, hindering queer people from seeking help. AIDS was initially identified as a 'gay disease' because queer men were the primary group catching what was a mysterious illness surrounded by misconceptions. There are several underlying reasons – one being that anal intercourse is the riskiest type of sex for getting or transmitting HIV if it is not fully suppressed by effective treatment.

While HIV can be spread through vaginal sex, the fragility and porousness of rectal tissues allow the virus easier access into the bloodstream. Hence, anal sex possesses a higher risk of infection and thus greater stigmatisation can surround the act itself and queer sex in general.

It is worth noting that HIV diagnoses in straight people have now surpassed those in gay and bisexual men for the first time in ten years.

Given the lack of knowledge and misinterpretation of information regarding AIDS, queer people are more likely to experience disempowerment and low self-esteem. As we know, the LGBT+ community struggles not only with internalised homophobia and the psychological vulnerability that stems from it but also with the impact of human rights violations. Criminalisation of same-sex relationships, cross-dressing, sodomy, and 'gender impersonation' feeds into 'social homophobia' (UNAIDS, 2016).

Thus, the suppression of homosexuality affects both mental and physical well-being.

Research has shown that MSM (males who have sex with males) may exhibit less health-seeking behaviour and suffer from greater levels of depression, anxiety, and substance abuse. The fear of being associated with stereotypes about HIV-positive people—and other factors such as not fitting into the social norm, breaking family's expectations, and internalised homophobia—contribute to a self-stigma that can leave people (queer or otherwise) feeling disinclined to seek competent care or reluctant to get tested at all. The difficulty of accessing HIV healthcare could also pose a barrier.

The availability of staff and healthcare professionals specifically trained in HIV services is lacking and some countries do not execute the proper protocols, which act as an insurance

for patients' confidentiality and the dissemination of patient knowledge and awareness (*AIDS Care*, 2018). All of these constraints can impede queer individuals from accessing the HIV services and treatment that they need. Some might even opt-in to being 'unaware' as both the social and internal HIV stigma can lead to an avoidant mentality.

However, as the AIDS epidemic has left such a painfully unforgettable mark on human history, more and more people have made steps to encourage everyone to face these detrimental fears. For instance, The Mercury Phoenix Trust was founded by Brian May, Roger Taylor, and Jim Beach in memory of Queen's lead singer Freddie Mercury, who passed away in 1991 from AIDS-related causes. Furthermore, public figures who have made their HIV status public such as Billy Porter, Jonathan Van Ness, and Gareth Thomas continue to use their platforms to combat misconceptions and debunk harmful myths about the condition.

Additionally, modern HIV treatments and preventions are statistically promising, and effective in reducing the amount of HIV in one's

HIV medication daily as prescribed, viral load will drop to an undetectable level in six months or less. Further still, if taken within 72 hours after possible exposure, post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) is highly effective in preventing HIV infection.

HIV vaccine trials are shown to be safe and have prompted the desired antibody and immune responses against a HIV-like virus. It is predicted that people receiving the vaccine followed by multiple booster inoculations could reach a 79% lower per-exposure risk of HIV infection (mRNA HIV, 2021).

Although the openness of discussing this topic has improved leaps and bounds, it remains somewhat taboo. It's estimated that over 30 million people worldwide have died from AIDS-related illnesses over the

last 40 years. Insufficient funding for public health programs, opposition to prevention policies, lack of realistic sex education, and discrimination all pose as obstacles in the lingering epidemic. Seeing my friends from the LGBT+ community catching HIV, or being deceived, breaks my heart. I urge everyone to get tested, practise safe sex, and for all authorities to take swift action to shed light on such matters.

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<https://www.nhs.uk>

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bloodstream (AKA their 'viral load'). In fact, for almost everyone who starts taking their

CREATIVE WRITING

An Ode To Memory

Lucien Newton.

Content warning for themes of dubious/non-consent

I watch
The swallows
From my window,
And I wonder
If i'm
More like you
Than I
Ever wished to be.

I got tattoos
I know you'll hate,
And stifled gasps
Into Linoleum tiles
As they pressed
The ink
Under my skin.
I imagined you
Pressing your hands
Against my wrists,
Pushing them down
Into submission
For you.
Your hands
Enveloped my pulse,

And I still remember
It racing
Under your fingertips,
You quieting
My tears,
A stern voice
In the middle of the night
While I was terrified
Of you,
Of the darkness,
Of waking her
Where she slept
In the bed across from me.

I let my nails
Bite my palms,
The smoke
Burn my throat,
The cigarette
Singe my flesh.
I watch my hands
Shaking,
Tinting white and blue
With the cold,
And I remember
The bruises
Over pale skin,
Your fingerprints
Branded into my veins
Until they shattered
With the pressure.

I press my hands
Against their chest,
Let them anchor me
While I cling to fabric
Chasing residual heat
And remembering
The tape
Across fragile bones,
The racing blood
Catching up
With cut off circulation
Where you bound my
fingers,
My wrists
Spitting curses
Like they sung praises.

They tell me nice things
And I just want them to
hurt me,
To cast aside the
pleasantries,
Wrap a hand around a
protesting throat,
Pin their palms over the
ink stains,
And press my hands
Into the pillows.

They offer gentle kindness
And I long for
A body over mine

In the dead of night,
Relentless pressure,
Heavy silence,
As they quieten cries
And let my flatmate sleep
In the bed
On the other side
Of my bedroom wall.
I hear a whispered
sweetness
But it just projects
Your voice over theirs
Telling me
All the faults
You wished you could fix
But never could
Manipulate
Out of me.

I put up a fight
For the thrill of the anger,
The chase,
The urge to shake
The rotting feeling
Seeping into
Every empty space,
And I laugh
As cracking palms
Grasp my thighs,
My throat,
The strands of silken hair,
Aching
Poorly healed
Broken bones.
And I remember
The compliance,
Falling still,
Giving in and
Giving up

On shaking off
The press of you
Above me,
Brightened by
The night light
Not meant to chase off
Nightmares
But to invite them.

I wonder why
I fear
Every man
I talk to,
Every hand
Against my skin,
Why I can hardly breathe
When i'm around him,
Why I
Chase
The ones
Throwing me back
Against rough alley walls
And I remember
A twisted smile,
A hand against my spine,
A hissed order,
A stifled whine,
And a
Ten years too late
Realisation
That the others
Were nothing
Like you.

I inherited
Your eyes,
I hope you bleed
When you
Think of me.

Sonnet to a Scaleless Snake (Rejecting Romance)

Mia Kellner.

Why would a girl want
to write about love?
Caged and ephemeral the
scaleless snake
Fluttering presence in a
swarm of doves
Withered cherry blossom
branch soon to break
Weakness incarnate – the
squirming pink dawn
No armour to shield
tissue-paper skin
Softness seethes through
such delicate chiffon
Strange beauty shines in
fragile creatures thin
Soft flesh painted
beneath a rose-hued coat
No armour, it has
achieved final form
For Heaven is more
hellish to devote
Than Nature's ghost – the
fragile, giant worm
Rose-tinted spectacles
crack with my gaze
On the clear film of my
eye - the snake – stays

PERFORMER CALL

We at *Theatre of Diversion* are in the process of finding a team to bring to life a work written by emerging student playwright Ebele Enwegbara focusing on the experiences of black women, black trans women and cultural identity across generations. This short work will feature at Theatre, Lime & Salt, a showcase in late March for emerging artists to connect with like-minded peers and compete to win mentorship and shadowing opportunities with professional theatre makers.

Ebele is interested in casting three black female-identifying actors, one of whom self-identifies as trans, who see themselves on stage professionally or semi-professionally in the future. Additionally, we would love for people identifying as gender queer and/or black to participate in a Research and Development workshop process in the lead up to the performance.

Anyone who has an interest in creating provocative and dynamic spoken work and wants to learn more, please contact us at theatreofdiversion@gmail.com.

ARTS AND CULTURE

3 Historical Figures Who Were Potentially (Probably) Asexual

Mia Kellner.

Finding people from history who were queer is a feat that requires a great deal of speculation, especially when it comes to asexuality. While other queer sexualities were criminalised or stigmatised, asexuality as an identity was usually ignored, instead masquerading under genteel ideals of chaste female sexuality, spinsterhood, or bachelor life. As the so-called ‘invisible orientation,’ asexuality is erased as a potential sexuality for historical figures, with those who weren’t in overt heterosexual relationships initially assumed to be gay. However, as someone

who’s asexual and aromantic, I have always been drawn to notable people from history who were unmarried and not interested in sex, so here is a list of four potentially asexual historical figures who set my ‘ace-dar’ alarm bells ringing.

Nikola Tesla

Starting with my personal icon, the Serbian-American inventor of the AC and noted foe of Thomas Edison, Tesla showed no interest in romance or sex and remained a bachelor for his entire life – quite unheard of for a man who had his fair share of suitors in the late 1890s. He said that thinking about sex and romance would distract him from his work (the same excuse that I used to use when asked about relationships), stating ‘I do not think there is any thrill that can go through the human heart like that felt by the inventor as he sees some creation of the brain

unfolding to success.’ Need I say more? Despite having a terrible phobia of women’s pearl necklaces, Tesla had many friendships with men and women in his lifetime and died a virgin (which isn’t necessarily a prerequisite or result of asexuality). The only creature he professed his love for was a female pigeon whom he saved from an injured wing, feeding her daily from his hotel room window.

Joan of Arc

I may be slightly biased here, seeing as Joan of Arc is another one of my personal asexual icons, but the little we know of her personal life points towards her asexuality. Famous for being burned at the stake for wearing men’s clothing in 1431, Joan’s story also resonates with people today for her queerness—whether she is identified as trans, non-binary, lesbian, or more recently aro ace.

I like to think of Joan as asexual, as that's closest to what she called herself, 'Jehanne la Pucelle' (*Joan the Maid*), the name that she led troops into battle in the Hundred Years' War under. Although her desire to remain chaste and unmarried could be attributed to her Christianity, Joan's celibacy was not a choice – rather it was a result of her lack of sexual and romantic desire. Joan could have married at any point in her life, but she had a larger mission for which she was willing to give her life. In my opinion, if she were alive in 2022, she probably would identify as aro ace.

Emily Brontë

You've probably heard of Emily Brontë from her famous Gothic romance and only novel, *Wuthering Heights*, but not for her asexuality. Born in 1818, the third-eldest of the four surviving Brontë siblings, Emily never married, instead occupying herself in the far more interesting pursuits of reading, writing, and teaching. Emily had no known romantic or sexual

attachments and lived a reclusive life alone, preferring to take long walks across the Yorkshire Moors in the company of animals, not people. Although biographers and scholars have argued that such a life was the result of extreme shyness, social anxiety, and mental illness, these can co-exist with asexuality—as I can report from personal experience, mental illness doesn't negate queerness. Whilst Emily was most likely asexual, she probably wasn't aromantic, as some scholars suggest that, before her untimely death at thirty, just one year after *Wuthering Heights'*

publication, she wanted a romance like that of Heathcliff and Catherine. Hopefully not though, as their relationship is insanely problematic.

Final Thoughts

While I could go on and on about people that I think are asexual, I've had to stick to historical figures with this piece, for this issue's focus on queer history. If I were writing about fictional characters, then I would have a much longer list, but unfortunately, Elsa, Spongebob, and Charlie Weasley aren't considered to be historical figures.



5 Historical Queer Novels To Add To Your Bookshelf

Charlotte Grønbech.

The Timeless Classic

Alice Walker's epistolary novel *The Color Purple* might be the most obvious one on this list, however it feels wrong to write about queer history in literature without giving this classic a mention. The novel is set in the early 20th century and touches on the post-slavery culture of rural Georgia. It follows Celie from her teenage years into adulthood, as she tackles motherhood and falling in love with another woman. *The Color Purple* deserves all the praise it receives (although it does need a pretty hefty trigger warning for physical and sexual assault). And if you, like me, feel lost after completing the novel, because you want more, you can turn to Steven Spielberg's movie adaptation or (my personal preference) the musical soundtrack on Spotify.

The Insultingly Underrated

While Audre Lorde is

more so known for her poetry, her novel *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* is definitely worth checking out. The style of this work was so revolutionary when it was published in 1982, that the term biomythography (biography, history and myth) was coined just to describe her creative non-fiction novel. *Zami* covers Lorde's own young adulthood in Harlem during the mid 20th century, exploring everything from race and queerness to immigration and homesickness. There is a sensuality and nostalgia to her writing which causes you to long back to a time that was never yours. The novel provides an incredibly intimate and authentic peak into her life as well as New York City during that time period.

The One I Will Reading

Lilian Lee's *Farewell My Concubine* is one of my all time favorite novels, and one that I will bring into any and every conversation possible. For some absurd reason no one has heard of it. I wouldn't even call it underrated, it is so unknown it isn't really even rated, but don't let that fool you. The book is set during

a 40-year time period in China, from the Peking Opera until Mao Zedong's consolidation of power. Since he was a five-year-old boy, the protagonist Dieyi has been trained to exclusively play female love interests opposite male leads. This training is a lifestyle which requires Dieyi to embrace his femininity permanently. The novel explores how lifelong performances within theater shape the gender identities and sexual desires of the actors. The only place I've been able to get my hands on a copy is via Amazon, but it is worth it!

The Recent Publication

Last Night at the Telegraph Club by Malinda Lo was published just last year but has already received great reviews. The novel follows 17-year-old Chinese American Lily Ho as she explores her sexuality in 1950s San Francisco amidst the 'Red Scare'. While Lily's sexuality is the central plot of the novel, it also covers the challenges of being an immigrant in the US, specifically being a second-generation Chinese immigrant during the rise of communism.

The book is really engaging and informative, and is rich in history and culture. Unlike the other four novels this is YA, so it's less dense than the rest of the selection.

The One To Look Out For In The Future

Cecilie Enger's *The White Map* is based on the true story of two Norwegians who became Europe's—and possibly the world's—first female shipowners, founding their own shipping company: *Brummenæs & Torgersen*.

After having worked and met through the mining community, their shipping journey began in 1909 when they

bought their first shipping vessel. In spite of their success, they received a lot of criticism at the time for working in a male-dominated industry and for dressing in masculine clothes. They were often referred to as 'the menwomen'. The novel covers their lives from when they first met until they passed away (and were buried together).

A Brief History of the 'Detransition, Baby' Controversy and Why You Should Read It

Martin Jernigan.

On 6 April 2021, Wild Woman Writing Club published an open letter to the Women's Prize Trust about the choice to longlist *Detransition, Baby* by Torrey Peters. In a long-winded write up filled with blatant transphobia and transphobic dog whistles, the group urged the Women's Prize to reconsider their choice to include *Detransition, Baby* because Torrey Peters is a trans woman.

They also went beyond personal attacks to justify their call for reconsideration through an utter misrepresentation of facts and plot points within the book, all presented through the lens of hateful misgendering. It was an attempt from the group to make a literary critique of the novel as well and not just a critique on who the author was. It wasn't that Torrey Peters was trans but that the book itself was full of transness, of trans culture, and most importantly trans women and that was why it shouldn't be on the list.

Neither point of argument within the letter was all that convincing. The Women's Prize instead of catering to this call decided to recommit to their choice to include *Detransition, Baby*, releasing a press statement explaining why. While I disagree with the Women's Prize Trust's justification that *Detransition, Baby* can be included because Torrey Peters is 'legally defined as a woman,' it still marked a very important moment in LGBT+ history.

Detransition, Baby is a book by a trans woman, about trans women, for trans people.

It is incredible to see a book so unapologetically trans included in such a prestigious award. Even better is that Torrey Peters herself is the first trans woman to ever be nominated for the prize.

The 6 April 2021 was also the first time I had heard of *Detransition, Baby*. Thanks to the horrid letter, the book was brought to the forefront of online literary spaces which is how I even know it exists. It is also why I chose to read it.

As the back of the book describes the plot, *Detransition, Baby* follows Reese, a trans woman, and her ex-partner Amy (who detransitioned to become Ames), as the

two navigate a surprise pregnancy when Ames' boss becomes pregnant with his child.

This is all revealed quite early on in the book and it becomes quite clear that the book will be about a lot more than just the pregnancy. With multiple timelines, one a few years before

conception and the other a few weeks afterwards, the book details both characters' lives.

The reader is privy to their personal journeys and their multitude of relationships, especially theirs together.

It is a story about self-discovery and found family while also constantly challenging the reader's own perception of family and gender. It is a heart-wrenching book as well, and I can't stress enough that you should look up trigger warnings before reading. *Detransition, Baby* is a book about trans people, and all of the unfortunate reality that coincides with living as a trans person in a cis-world.

At the time of writing, I still haven't finished *Detransition, Baby*. It is not really a book that can be read in

one sitting, even though I think this will be my favorite book of the year, and probably of all time. It demands a lot from the reader: patience to get to understand the characters, empathy for their situations, and constant self-critique. It truly holds no punches and can be quite a difficult read from page to page.

I have had to simply put it down multiple times in order to process and to grieve with the characters. It is filled with darkness and pain, but it is also so much more than that, just like the reality of being trans. It is funny and dynamic and much more than the simple characterisation of women that the Wild Woman Writing Club accused it of being. I truly cannot recommend it enough and think it is a perfect thing to read to not only add to your own understanding of the trans experience and culture, but also to support a book at the forefront of LGBT+ history.

LGBT+ NEWS

Not Broken: Chronicling the International Movement to End Conversion Therapy

Brigid Rawdon.

Despite the fact that homosexuality was removed from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders in 1973, thus declassifying homosexuality as a mental disorder in need of treatment, conversion therapy is still widely used in modern day. Conversion therapy is a practice that aims to change one's sexuality or gender identity through methods ranging from religious counselling to the prescription of psychiatric medications. This practice has been discredited by numerous health organisations around the world, including the American Psychiatric Association,

because of its ability to have a strong and long-lasting negative effect on the mental health of those who experience it. While conversion therapy is still legally being practised in many nations around the world, recent years have seen an international movement to bring it to an end. Brazil was the first nation to ban the harmful practice in 1999, and the most recent nation to join the movement was New Zealand, which banned conversion therapy in a near-unanimous vote on 15 February 2022. Following a movement spearheaded by indigenous activist Shaneel Lal, a series of campaign promises made by New Zealand's Labour Party, and finally a parliamentary vote of 112 to 8, the nation joined the growing list of countries that have banned conversion therapy. New Zealand is an excellent example of the international movement to end conversion therapy because of the amount of similarities to other

nations who have both successfully and unsuccessfully attempted to ban the practice. The movement began as a grassroots campaign that grew into a national effort that saw 170,000 public submissions regarding the bill—the largest amount of any piece of legislation in New Zealand's history. Activists argued that not only is conversion therapy ineffective in changing patients' sexualities, the practice causes adverse mental health impacts in people who were already perfect as they were. Rather than changing an LGBT+ person's sexuality or gender, activists asserted that New Zealand should change its attitudes and embrace the nation's LGBT+ community. The final bill did just that, banning the practice of conversion therapy for anyone under the age of 18 or for anyone who has impaired decision making abilities in the eyes of the government. The United Kingdom has its own storied history with conversion therapy.

One of the most famous examples is that of Alan Turing, a World War II code-breaker who, despite being widely considered a war hero, was convicted for homosexuality and forced by the government to either be imprisoned or undergo chemical conversion therapy. In 2009, the UK government apologised for the treatment of Turing and now, in 2022, there are plans to ban the modern practice of both gay conversion therapy and transgender conversion therapy, which has become more prominent in recent years. The policy aims to strike a balance between potentially competing rights under the *Human Rights Act 1998* and *European Convention on Human Right* by promoting the protection of privacy and freedom of speech and belief while still preventing inhuman or degrading treatment. This ban will specifically target physical and talk conversion therapy, and that which involves people who are under the age of 18. In addition, this policy will prevent the promotion of conversion therapy through broadcast media, advertisements, and online promotion that may be influential to young people. The most recent

update was a consultation form available to the British public to express opinions and concerns about conversion therapy, closed in early February. The UK Government states that they intend to legislate when parliamentary time allows and that they will prepare a draft bill for spring 2022. So what can students do to educate themselves and join the international movement to end conversion therapy? As with any activism movement, it is crucial that students ensure that they are not speaking over the survivors of conversion therapy. As such, students must continue to educate themselves on the stories of survivors and current activism happening within their country. I would recommend the recent Netflix documentary *Pray Away* which details the experiences of both people who currently practice conversion therapy and the people who have escaped the practice and have relearned how to love their true selves. In addition, the book *Boy Erased* by Garrard Conley is an excellent memoir recounting Conley's experience with religious-inspired conversion therapy. While both of these pieces of media are

centred around conversion therapy in America, I highly recommend students seek out media about conversion therapy in their home nation or specifically in the UK if their home nations have already banned it. After learning about various local and national movements to end conversion therapy, students should begin researching how to get in touch with both their local representative and national representatives. If their state, region, or province does not have laws preventing the practice of conversion therapy, start there and then contact your national representative about banning the practice in the entire country. Personalised messages that voice support for proposed legislation will likely be the most effective but there are also templates available online that can provide inspiration for what to convey to politicians.

Sources:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/banning-conversion-therapy/banning-conversion-therapy>

<https://www.npr.org/2022/02/16/1081139566/new-zealand-ban-conversion-therapy?t=1645097832820>

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