

Staff Pride Network Event: Lavender Menace LGBT+ Book Archive

Forty years ago, when Lavender Menace Bookshop opened, positive depictions of LGBT+ people in books were rare. One lesbian pulp novel of the 1950s was called *Women in the Shadows*. There were similar shadows over all queer people in print and film. And legal censorship was alive and well in the 1980s. It simply had to be more focussed than before, as with Section 28.

Today our lives can be explored straightforwardly in fiction and non-fiction – but how did the change come? It was mainly LGBT+ writers and presses, along with radical bookshops and book distributors, who took the risk and opened the door. Their success surprised everyone and gave a lead which others followed.

But now many of the original LGBT+ and feminist presses have closed and well-known books have been forgotten. Lavender Menace Returns hopes to create an archive and database of the material we knew best. They want to also include LGBT+ writing of today to form one body of work telling the story of our community – and our demand for equality and honesty.

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A response to the School LGBTQ+ Diversity Since Section 28/Clause 2a event

February is LGBT history month and in Scotland, the focus is on that Clause 2a/Section 28 was repealed 20 years ago (<https://www.lgbtyouth.org.uk/news/2019/announcing-the-theme-for-lgbt-history-month-2020/>). There were three more years for it in England and Wales and the less said about Northern Ireland the better. I grew up under Section 28 and it was a confusing time. We had no internet, and no school or medical resources about homosexuality or bisexuality so all we had was the media and that was ... varied.

Most media articles were hysterical in tone. Gay men were either said to be or implied to be paedophiles, gay women were often ignored or considered frigid or man-hating and bisexuals needed to pick a side. Where there was variation in representation it was HUGE and isolated. The famous Brookside lesbian kiss (<https://www.stonewall.org.uk/our-work/campaigns/1994-same-sex-kiss-between-two-women-brookside-builds-first-kiss-between-two-men>) was often reported for being “saucy” and framed through the male gaze. The gay kiss between Simon and Tony in EastEnders (https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/loud-proud-eastenders-gay-kiss-mark-homer_uk_5725ad16e4b0a1e971cb84f0) meanwhile should never have been shown before the watershed. Because sexuality was inherently sexual and not to be discussed.

For me growing up as bisexual in that world, and wanting to get married and have kids one day, “pick a side” meant picking

men because there was no way I could have those things with a woman. I was still outspoken about gay rights but did not think that could apply for me. Things have changed but Section 28 cast a long shadow over the lives of so many people and has influenced the way children are taught, even today. There are more resources outside of school but they still take courage to find. It is still hard.

The Staff Pride Network held a schools event that highlighted the parallels between Section 28 and the treatment of trans rights and some attendees asked if there really was a parallel. For me, there are some obvious ones. Media representation of trans people has the same hysteria I remember from my childhood and teen years. Trans women are presented as sexually deviant, trans men are all but forgotten, non-binary identities? Pick a side. A recent Guardian Blind Dates column with a trans woman and a lesbian led to people claiming the trans woman was somehow tricking the lesbian. Thankfully she rebutted it in the strongest possible terms (<https://twitter.com/aigroe/status/1199431598929784838?s=20>).

I know the internet is a resource now, but not everyone has it in their homes. Imagine suspecting you are trans now in this media environment? How much courage would it take to look it up at school where people might see, particularly when everything you see is so hysterical and claims you are such a threat to the fabric of society (recalling Thatcher's words as she introduced Section 28)?

The fact that so many of the arguments and tropes that were used against lesbian, gay and bisexual people are being used against out trans siblings is something many of us can't ignore because we remember the impact those things had on our

own lives, and our own opportunities to be who we really are.

The shadow of Section 28 is still long, and the impact on trans lives is still harder. Research from LGBTYS (<https://www.lgbtyouth.org.uk/media/1354/life-in-scotland-for-lgbt-young-people.pdf>) shows that when asked if they had a mental health problem, 40% of LGBT young people and 66.7% of transgender young people said “yes”, while half (50%) of LGBT young people and 63% of transgender young people experienced suicidal thoughts or behaviours. 73% of LGBT young people, and 83% of transgender young people, who had experienced at least one mental health problem, had been bullied at school and this shows why the work of organisations like LGBTYS is so vital.

The parallels are real. We need to learn from the past, I know the 80s and 90s are back in fashion but prejudice, discrimination and bigotry never should be.

Siobhán

Staff Pride Network Event: School LGBTQ+ Diversity Since Section 28/Clause 2a

It has been 20 years since the repeal of Section 28/Clause 2a in Scotland. This event was held to provide an understanding of current equality law pertaining to schools, to discuss the

experiences and challenges that our students and staff had in school before and after Section 28's repeal, in particular young trans students' experiences.

This event was intended as a positive experience for staff and students to share their LGBTQ+ experiences, for the audience to learn about the similarities and differences of their times.

Event Co-Chairs are Elliot Byrom, EUSA Trans & Non-Binary Liberation Officer and Sharon Cowan, Professor of Feminist and Queer Legal Studies.

Panellists were: Sarah Quinn (PrideSoc Faith rep who has done work in the background to section 28), Hazel Sanderson (PrideSoc Trans and Non-Binary Rep), Levi Mitchell (PrideSoc President) and LGBT Youth Scotland Head of National Programmes (including schools guidance), Cara Spence.

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