

History is Gay Podcast  
Episode 5: Stars from a Bi-Gone Era

### **Pre-Show Announcements**

**Leigh:** Hello, queerlings! Before we get into this very special episode, we wanted to give you a little background. This episode is our live episode/panel at TGIFemslash, a gal pals convention that we just went down to in Santa Ana, California. You heard us talk a little bit about it in the last episode, which premiered the day that we were coming on back up. But, fun fact, this convention is where Gretchen and I actually met last year and decided to make this podcast happen. So, it was a fantastic time filled with lots of femslashy friends and if you're into fandom and queer ladies kissing, then you should probably check it out. We're quite fond of it and it made this happen so we're pretty grateful.

A few cool announcements, another super neat thing that happened at TGI Femslash was the annual live auction. And this time we offered up a last-minute the opportunity to have a guest spot on the show for an episode with a topic of the guest's choice, and we want to thank our amazing friends, Morgan and Jonathan, who bid a ridiculous amount of money to hang out and nerd with us. So stay tuned for those later in this year. You'll be hearing those fun episodes.

We also mention in the recording you're about to hear, the exciting prospect of merch. We do have some things leftover from con. I made a couple of things to bring down, things like stickers, and magnets, and even shirts! We'll soon have a way for all you lovely people to get some of those things if you so wish to tell the world just how gay history is with cool, fancy real-life things with this podcast's name on it. Which, frankly, is mind boggling and so cool. So, as soon as we figure out logistics, we will tell you all how to get things like that on your bod, or your car, or wherever you like to stick things that have rainbows on them. So, I'm excited.

That's it for any sort of announcements, so, without further ado, *Episode 5: Stars From a Bi-Gone Era*.

## Introduction

**Gretchen:** Hello, and welcome to *History is Gay*! A podcast that examines the underappreciated and overlooked queer ladies, gents, and gentle-enbies that have always been there in the unexplored corners of history. Because history has never been as straight as you think.

♪ Intro Music ♪

**Gretchen:** I'm Gretchen.

**Leigh:** And I'm Leigh!

**Gretchen:** And in this episode, we are live at TGI Femslash!

[Crowd cheers]

**Leigh:** Okay, that was really fucking cool!

**Gretchen:** I know! We have a laugh track. [Laughs]

**Leigh:** Oh my god. So, for those of you not in this room right now, there's are a lot of fucking people in this room right now.

**Gretchen:** We expected like 10, we have like four times that, or maybe three? I'm bad at- this isn't math con, I'm bad at math.

**Leigh:** So, yeah. So we're hear doing a panel which is going to be a live episode and the theme of that episode is talking about queers in the golden age of Hollywood, AKA what Gretchen's title was-

**Gretchen:** Stars of a Bi-Gone Era.

[Crowd chorus of "Ah"]

**Gretchen:** We like puns.

**Leigh:** We're all about the puns. [laughs] So yeah, do we have any sort of content warnings going into this?

**Gretchen:** I don't think we do.

**Leigh:** I mean mostly this is just mostly rumors and scandal. [Laughs] This is going to be one of our only episodes that doesn't have a lot of confirmed sources. It's a lot of like, [whispers] hey... did you know? So, take some of it with a grain of salt and then go home and do your own research.

**Gretchen:** Right. Well, some people— we're going to be talking about the golden age of Hollywood, silver screen, back in the day. Some people might think that gays in Hollywood are an invention of *Will & Grace* and Neil Patrick Harris. But, we're here to talk about how we've always been in Hollywood from the very beginning.

### **Game: Silver Screen Sexploits**

**Leigh:** Yep. So we're going to jump 'straight' in. [laughter] So this is going to be a shorter mini episode, about a half hour. And then, we're going to open up the room to this lovely panel to discuss some other people's favorite queerms from history. We asked people to come prepared with their stories and so, hopefully we will get a lot of fun. But, we started this out with people coming into the room with a lovely little game. Gretchen, do you wanna explain the game?

**Gretchen:** Yeah. This game is a game we like to call *Silver Screen Sexploits*. Our lovely, lovely audience were given ten factoids and there are ten pictures of people on the wall. We have Clark Gable, Marlon Brando, Joan Crawford, Katharine Hepburn, Raymond Burr, Vincent Price, Marilyn Monroe, Cary Grant, Marlene Dietrich, and Greta Garbo. And they were given ten facts and they have to see if they can guess which one was which. So-

**Leigh:** How did that work for everybody?

**Audience Member:** It was really hard.

[Everyone laughs]

**Leigh:** A lot of guesses, a lot of confused looks around the room. So, yeah, so y'all wanna hear the answers?

**Audience:** Yes!

**Leigh:** Alright.

**Gretchen:** You wanna read the first one? It's pretty good.

**Leigh:** I'll read the first one. Alright, so, who was this? Was allegedly 'gay for pay' and for career advancement, had a string of older clients who paid their bills and helped them get jobs but cheated on them constantly. Had close personal, possibly sexual, relationships with several openly queer actors.

**Gretchen:** That was Clark Gable.

[Chorus of "Oh..." from the audience]

**Leigh:** Boom!

[laughter from audience]

**Gretchen:** Alright. Married five times and had one daughter. Lived with a same-gendered actor for 12 years, and then with a different same-gendered actor later in life. Prior to becoming famous, day-to-day fashion designer of the same gender on-and-off for nine years.

That was Cary Grant.

[Chorus of audience reacting in surprise]

There is actually, we will put this in our show notes, there is actually a documentary about Orry-Kelly, who was the fashion designer. And they met-so before Cary Grant immigrated to the U.S., and there is a documentary about Orry-Kelly and his relationship with Cary Grant.

**Leigh:** Alright. Came of age in post-war Berlin, where the LGBT culture thrived and came to the U.S. with a more open view of sexuality. At a premier in a film, this actor walked on stage with a bunch of violets pinned to their crotch, a symbol of homosexuality in Germany. Was married, but had several passionate gay affairs, one with another actor on this list.

**Gretchen:** I think this one was probably the easiest.

**Leigh:** Does anyone have a guess? Before we give it out?

[Chorus of audience stating, "Marlene Dietrich"]

**Gretchen:** Yes. Marlene Dietrich.

**Leigh:** My love. That's my wife for the week.

**Gretchen:** [Laughs] That's a running gag. That Leigh has a wife for the week.

**Leigh:** Just saying, if anyone wants to draw any fanart...

**Gretchen:** We're here for it.

For a time in the 1920's, they lived openly with a partner of a different gender. Later they conducted their relationship with a playwright and poet of the same gender with similar directness and lack of pretense. The poet was a 'best friend' and lived with this actor for 30 years. Called their love affairs with same-gendered partners 'exciting secrets'.

Greta Garbo.

[Chorus if audience reacting in a surprised way]

**Leigh:** Alright. 25 year relationship with differently gendered acting costars, was more about a friendship than romance or sex, and their public relationship was likely a publicity stunt by studios as both of them were gay. Was allegedly set up by known Hollywood "pimp," quote unquote, Scotty

Bowers, with allegedly over 150 sexual partners of the same gender. Had a particular attraction for one partner whom they saw off-and-on for 49 years.

**Leigh and Gretechen:** Katharine Hepburn!

**Gretchen:** Incidentally, Scotty Bowers is actually the source of a lot of this information. His exposé book is where a lot of these factoids come from, though many of them have been confirmed by other sources.

**Leigh:** Yeah.

**Gretchen:** But yeah. He's the main source.

A quintessential sex symbol, this actor had a strong preference for partners of the same gender and is rumored to have had affairs with two of actors on this list. Claimed one of their partners had a, "*gigantic orgasm and shrieked like a maniac,*" but then turned spiteful when the actor turned them down after being asked for another round. Guesses?

Marilyn Monroe. Marilyn Monroe.

**Leigh:** Yep.

**Gretchen:** We have not gotten to that partner yet. The one that shrieked like a maniac.

**Leigh:** No. No, we have not.

[Crowd laughs]

Had multiple affairs with famous actors in Hollywood and once told a French journalist,

*"Homosexuality is so much in fashion, it no longer makes news. Like a large number of [actors], I, too, have had homosexual experiences and I'm not ashamed. I've never paid much attention to what people think about me."*

Marlon Brando.

**Gretchen:** This one is my absolute favorite. One lover described– oh, same gendered lover, describes sex with him as,

*"Pleasant, unhurried, gentle. There was what I can only refer to as a kind of refinement about it. It was erotic, tantalizing, fulfilling, high-class stuff all the way."*

[Crowd laughs]

Vincent Price. Which makes so much sense when you– like if you've seen a Vincent Price movie, you're like, he would be!

**Leigh:** Okay, but is Vincent Price a pillow princess is the real question.

**Gretchen:** Oh... he might be.

**Leigh:** Was married to an opposite gender partner once, but it only lasted a couple of months. Met a same-gendered actor on the set of an iconic TV show in 1960 and they remained together until 1993, when one famous– when our famous queer actor died. The fellow actor is often named as a "business partner" and still owns and operates the joint vineyard they founded together in Sonoma.

**Gretchen:** Raymond Burr. I was not told that Raymond Burr was queer when I watched *Perry Mason* growing up, but that was my favorite show when I was sick and home from school. Makes sense.

Alright, so our final one. Known for having an insatiable appetite for sex with men and women, who may even have slept their way into becoming a screen legend. Also linked with another actor on this list. This is the partner that screamed like a maniac with Marilyn Monroe, and it is Joan Crawford.

**Leigh:** *Mommie Dearest*, indeed.

**Gretchen:** Is Alice in the room?

[Crowd and hosts laugh and clap]

**Leigh:** Ah man. Well, that was the beginning.

**Gretchen:** Well, something that came up multiple times is that these actors– is many of them had marriages or even were linked by studios together and that brings us to our word of the week!

[Hosts hum a tune]

One day we'll have theme music for that. Leigh, would you like to talk about our word of the week?

### **Word of the Week: Lavender Marriages**

**Leigh:** Yep. So, the word of the week that we're talking about, and if you all in this room have not listened to the podcast, on every episode we feature a different piece of language from our history. Today's is a phrase called 'lavender marriages.'

So 'lavender marriages' were, and there were several of them in here, they were marriages of convenience, usually studio arranged, that were– [sing-songs] you take a male celebrity, and you take a female celebrity, and they both might be pretty gay and you smush them together and you make a marriage that looks nice and proper and heterosexual for everybody to gobble up.

So it usually was, you know, everybody hopefully in this room is familiar with the concept of 'beards'. This was a very standard practice in Hollywood.

**Gretchen:** Yep, basically Hollywood endorsed bearding for the getting of more monies because heaven forbid, heaven forbid that society find out that there are so many non-straight people in Hollywood, so oh no! Oh no, let's pretend that they love each other sexually, romantically...a lot of them would just be really good friends, they would just be really good friends with their partner in the lavender marriage and then go have sex with other people and go have romantic relationships with other people. Pretty normal.



**Leigh:** Yeah. Yeah. So we briefly mentioned just for like, a note on sources and also if y'all want to read a little bit more about this, most of the information that we get from here comes from a book by a guy named Scotty Bowers who was a former Marine and a Hollywood pimp from the 40s to the 80s, and the book he wrote is called, *Full Service: My Adventures in Hollywood and the Secret Sex Lives of the Stars*. There's a whole bunch more that he goes into that if y'all want to read more...

**Gretchen:** Check that out. Yeah, and we will have a full list of that and several other resources, again, on our show notes page on our website. So you can access that. So yeah, why do we think they're gay, Leigh? I mean- do we really need to explain that on this one?

### **More Stars of the Bi-Gone Era: Why Do We Think They're Gay?**

**Leigh:** I mean, we don't need to explain a lot of them. The game is like the majority of the content we got into, but we have a little bit more kind of context for some of these folks.

So, Marlon Brando and- did we have James Dean up there?

**Gretchen:** We don't have James Dean up there.

**Leigh:** We do not have James Dean up there. So, Marlon Brando and James Dean were actually rumored to be involved pretty heavily in kinky BDSM sex together...woo! [laughter] Apparently Brando was the dom and Dean was the sub. Also, y'all might have just recently seen an article that came out that Marlon Brando also had a thing going with Richard Pryor.

**Gretchen:** Which is- that was confirmed by both Brando and Pryor's- was it- Pryor's partner. So, that is actually confirmed by people that would have known.

So yeah. Marilyn Monroe and Joan Crawford and Barbara Stanwyck and Marlene Dietrich-

**Leigh:** These people were all sleeping together. [laughter]

**Gretchen:** Yep. And Marilyn Monroe actually began to see a psychiatrist named Dr. Ralph Greenson towards the end of her life, and it was in that transcript of that meeting with her psychiatrist that she told the story of:

*Oh yes, Crawford. We went to Joan's bedroom. Crawford had a gigantic orgasm and shrieked like a maniac... next time I saw Crawford, she wanted another round...after I turned her down she became spiteful.*

That is straight from the– well hah... “straight.” [laughter] Straight from the horse’s mouth in that case that Marilyn Monroe owns up to that.

**Leigh:** Oh, yeah. We also have– we didn't feature on here but we have Barbara Stanwyck. I don't know if any of y'all have heard of her referred to as 'Hollywood's greatest closeted lesbian'. She was in two different lavender marriages. She was rumored to hook up with Marlene Dietrich, our friend Joan Crawford again, and Tallulah Bankhead. And she ended up– I love this. She ended up living with her publicist, Helen Ferguson, for 30 years. She also–

**Gretchen:** A fellow actor called Clifton Webb said that she was his favorite Hollywood lesbian. Yes.

**Leigh:** She's the favorite. And that her second husband actually allegedly told a fellow actor that she was lesbian and that they didn't share a bed.

**Gretchen:** So, yeah. They didn't even sleep in the same room together because she was a big ol' lesbian.

**Leigh:** Big ol' homo.

**Gretchen:** Yep. Yep.

**Leigh:** You wanna talk a little bit about Joan Crawford?

**Gretchen:** Yeah! Joan Crawford. On– so E.J. Flemings, he is a famous Hollywood– no, E.J. Flemings wrote a book on Mannix who– Mannix was a famous Hollywood fixer. So, he's someone that studios would go to and be

like, "We have a problem! Please make it go away." So, E.J. Flemings book alleges that Mannix got MGM to pay \$100,000 to stop the release of a lesbian porn film starring Joan Crawford.

[Audience laughs and cheers]

So somewhere in the world this probably exists.

**Leigh:** And somebody in the world needs to pay \$200,000 to purchase it. Get it back.

**Gretchen:** Yes, cause we deserve that. [laughter]

**Leigh:** And so- and then we've got just a tiny little tidbit about Tallulah Bankhead who described herself as 'ambisextrous'. I just had to- [crowd laughs] that's all I've got, like, I just- I like that term. And then we have Katharine Hepburn

**Gretchen:** Yeah, Katharine Hepburn. In Bowers' book, *Full Service*, he recalls that Hepburn said,

*"I know about your reputation, Scotty. When you get a chance, do you think you can find a nice, young, dark-haired girl for me? Someone that's not too heavily made up."*

So, she had a type. Definitely had a type.

**Leigh:** Katharine Hepburn is into chapstick lesbians. [crowd laughs]

**Gretchen:** That's canon.

**Leigh:** You heard it- That's canon. [crowd laughs in agreement] Confirmed! Hashtag confirmed.

**Gretchen:** Hashtag confirmed. And that brings us to the part of our show we like to call- [in unison with Leigh] *How Gay Were They?* [laughter]

## How Gay Were They?

**Leigh:** This time we're gonna- what do you wanna start it off with?

**Gretchen:** Yeah, we usually give our personal ratings, but we want to hear from you guys. What are your guys' ratings on these?

**Leigh:** It's on a scale from zero to ten. Often we ditch that scale because things are too gay.

**Gretchen:** Right. On the episode that hasn't yet been released, we were both just like, fuck it. Ten is not enough. This is- I mean

**Leigh:** We need a new scale.

**Gretchen:** Yeah, this is like twenty out of ten.

**Leigh:** Um... God. I mean- I heard about Joan Crawford the first time I started looking into these things and... she was all over the place I'm going to say. She's a full on ten out of ten. Gretchen has abandoned me!  
[laughter] Oh yeah, microphones! We're gonna pass these around, if we could get our lovely microphone passers.

**Gretchen:** Hold for tech!

**Leigh:** Hold for tech!

**Gretchen:** One of the microphone cords is tangled.

**Leigh:** Are you saying that some of our equipment is refusing to be straight?

[audience laughs]

**Gretchen:** I am saying that. Everything in this room is just so gay! Not even the tech is straight.

**Leigh:** Nope, nope. Do you have any other ratings or do we just wanna launch into everybody else?

**Gretchen:** I'm going to go- I'm going to go with Raymond Burr. I give him an eleven out of ten. Because, I mean- he fell in love with a guy and lived with him for like 60 years, and they started a winery together. I also petition that 'business partner' becomes the new 'gal pals' for men.

[audience laughs]

**Leigh:** I thought we had 'bros being 'mos'?

**Gretchen:** Yeah, just bros being 'mos.

**Leigh:** Bros being 'mos. And business partners.

**Gretchen:** And business partners. I like that one.

**Leigh:** Barbara Stanwyck? I'm gonna give her 12. You don't get called 'Hollywood's Favorite Lesbian' without...

**Gretchen:** Without- without something behind that.

**Leigh:** Without something behind that.

**Audience Member:** Plus, how she looked in leather.

**Leigh:** Plus how she looked in leather!

**Gretchen:** Snaps for that. Snaps [snaps fingers] Marlene Dietrich? Okay, like wearing violets on your crotch to tell the whole world like, "Look at- look at my big ol' gay...gayness"

**Leigh:** Everything.

**Gretchen:** Gay everything. She's just so extra, man.

**Leigh:** She- if none of you have ever seen anything with Marlene Dietrich in it, she is this wonderful epitome of androgyny and androgynous performance. And she's consistently outfitted in tailored menswear. Like we

mentioned in the game, she actually- she emigrated from Germany, and we'll end up doing a podcast, but in the like 19-teens there was a huge explosion of- of exploration of queerness in clubs, in academia. There was a lot of research into sexuality and gender identity that we unfortunately lost during World War II because of the Nazis.

**Gretchen:** Fuck the Nazis.

**Leigh:** Fuck the Nazis.

**Gretchen:** Punch every Nazi.

**Leigh:** I'm just going to say it right here on this podcast multiple times. Fuck the Nazis. So yeah, I love Marlene Dietrich and y'all should watch a bunch of stuff with her. We will give links out.

**Gretchen:** And one thing I will say if a lot of these people seem very white, I mean they all are. Pretty much. One of the main reasons is because of Hollywood racism. We do not have a lot of actors of this time. However, if you- this will be coming out after our previous one we recorded, and you guys may not know this. We recorded a podcast just this last weekend about the Harlem Renaissance and queer women of color blues singers [crowd cheers] and let us tell you... that's the one that broke the scale [laughter] cause my god!

**Leigh:** And even running in these circles a little bit, this is mostly focused you know 1940's-1950's, but if you want some fun look into Josephine Baker.

[audience snaps fingers]

**Gretchen:** Yep, and really the only reason we have- I think- one could make the argument and I think you'd have a very strong case to say, these actors we have here were only able to live the way that they did because of what happened in the Harlem Renaissance. Where you have this ability to like live- like live more, at least openly in a non-mainstream part of society as queer. And that really paved the way, I think, for Hollywood to be like, "Oh right yeah, we can be queer too, I guess. As long as we have studio execs who will hide it for us."

[audience snaps fingers]

**Leigh:** What do y'all think? We're gonna- we're gonna go down.

**Gretchen:** And you don't have to stay within this time period, you can talk about anybody you want. There's a lot of history, a lot of global history. If you have a favorite- if you have a favorite queer, I know I got a couple I can pull out of my pocket.

**Leigh:** We got a- we got a whole list.

**Gretchen:** Yeah, we do.

**Leigh:** It's right here.

**Gretchen:** Right. Exactly. It's on our computer. [laughs]

### **Group Discussion: Favorite Queermos from History**

**Leigh:** Yeah, so we're gonna open up the discussion. That kinda concludes the 'we talk at you for 30 minutes' part. [laughter] Anybody have anything? No one did their homework?

**Audience Member 1:** Okay, I'll give you the obvious one of Rock Hudson.

**Leigh:** Ooh yes, tell us! Tell us more. Do you know anything?

**Audience Member 1:** I know that Rock Hudson came out to his- I think it was his manager, who panicked, ran out, grabbed the secretary and said,

*"You're getting married to this woman right now!"*

[Audience "Oh"s in unison and snaps fingers]

**Leigh:** Here, you wanna bring it over? [sounds of microphone being passed to another audience member]

**Gretchen:** Sorry, there are not-

**Leigh:** Yeah, they're.. We're a little low tech.

**Audience member:** Hold for tech.

**Leigh:** Hold for tech!

**Audience Member 2:** There's one that makes me really sad, is- I've heard that Joan Plowright who married Laurence Olivier after his marriage to Vivien Leigh ended, is- just gets rabid about,

*"No, he wasn't gay, he wasn't gay, he wasn't gay!"*

And it's just really sad to hear that kind of thing. So...

**Leigh:** Yeah. Anybody else? Come talk.

**Audience Member 3:** Have you [muffled speech] of Leonardo da Vinci?

**Hosts and Audience:** Yeah! [cheer]

**Audience Member 3:** I feel like the wikipedia article, he gets a ton of flack for saying that his sexuality was speculated... Is it not on? [Microphone taps] Is it on now? It is! Okay, so, according to the straight guys, his sexuality is speculated upon, but according to Leo himself, in his own fucking notebooks, [laughter] he went to the bathhouses every Sunday just to look at the dudes. I mean that's a little pervy, not gonna deny that, but at the same time like, there was a joke on Tumblr about like, right now specifically and like explicitly, I am a lesbian who likes women and appreciates girls. [audience snaps fingers] And like, this is a 'symbol of feminine friendship'. And it's just like... yeah, so my boy, Leonardo da Vinci. [audience snaps fingers]

**Gretchen:** Also, Michelangelo, cause have you seen that guy try and sculpt ladies boobs?

[crowd laughs]



**Leigh:** Like he cut an apple in half and stuck it on top of a dude.

**Gretchen:** Like, seriously! He drew– he like modeled pecs, like a man’s pectoral and was like, I guess I need some titties. How does one draw the things? And then stuck a couple of like...literally like orbs.

**Leigh:** Glistening orbs?!

**Gretchen:** Glistening orbs!

**Audience Member 3:** Like on David’s? By contrast did you see how he sculpted the genitals of the Davids?

**Gretchen:** Oh yeah. [laughter] The Renaissance- the European Renaissance was also very gay.

**Leigh:** Turns out everyone, everything in history was pretty gay.

**Morgan:** I have a Marlene Dietrich story.

**Leigh:** Ooh! Tell us the Marlene Dietrich story!

**Morgan:** So when she filmed Morocco in 1930, there’s– like it’s pretty infamous, but the scene where she’s in a tailored mens suit and she walks up and kisses the woman and then throws the rose, apparently originally the rose throwing wasn’t a part of the whole gig. But, she knew that they would cut– cause in the 1930’s even– this is probably right when the Hays Code and stuff was becoming popular, she knew that there was the potential that it could be cut and so she was like, “If I do something specific that can’t be cut from the film because it would make no sense continuity wise, then I can kiss this lady.” And so she did, and so the rose throwing wasn’t originally part of it.

**Gretchen:** I approve of that.

**Leigh:** When Morgan mentions the Hays Code, is there anyone in this room that doesn’t know what that is? Cause- It was actually a part of– we were

originally going to include it in this discussion but we didn't want to monopolize too much time, but Morgan, if you want to talk about it?

**Morgan:** I'm happy to talk about the Hays Code. I mean not happy, because it was garbage, but... [audience laughs] the Hays Code is a set of perimeters put forth in kind of the early 1900's once film becomes really popular. Of course, people are like, we have to make sure this fits a very specific parameter of what we want people to see. And part of that was cutting out a lot of quote unquote 'immoral stuff', which of course included queerness. And so, Hays Code lasted for a pretty long time. I don't want to inaccurately give when it was, but it was post the 50's I think.

**Gretchen:** Is that the origin of the 'bury your gays' trope? Was to fit those guidelines, would you say?

**Morgan:** Yeah, because there was a completely separate set of guidelines. Hays Code would've been for film, but there was a set of guidelines created for television in the late 50s early 60s I believe when again T.V. was becoming popular. Because people didn't have televisions sets on a massive scale until the 50s.

But yeah, there was a separate set of codes created for television which were modeled after the Hays Code which yeah, there wasn't explicitly no homosexual activity or whatever, but it was no immoral activity. So yeah some of the first queer characters you see on television are purposely negatively portrayed because of the codes that- that existed.

**Leigh:** That's how we get a lot of queer-coding. We talk about queer-coding, villains, because that was really the only way you could get someone of a sexual minority on the screen. There were those codes that specifically dictated the ways that we needed to be represented and it even goes back further than T.V. and film in that a lot of those- you've all seen those covers of like those crazy lesbian pulp-fiction novels right? Like, 'She seduced me into her bed!', and then- all these kinds of things. It has these origins in literature, quote unquote 'literature,' as well.

**Gretchen:** So what I'm getting from this is we eventually need to have Morgan on our podcast

**Audience:** Yes!

**Gretchen:** to talk with us about all of this? That would be amazing.

[audience snaps fingers]

**Morgan:** Yes!

**Leigh:** Whoo! Yeah. Anybody else? Jamie.

**Jamie:** So I'm a huge science nerd, so I wanted to do a physician actually. This is Sara Josephine Baker. She was a physician in New York City in the 1910s, 1920s. And she was a very out lesbian in her time period, which is awesome. Apparently she wore tailored suits and like was very much dressing like a man in a man-dominated field. Which physicians still are mostly a male dominated field, so she was way ahead of her time.

But she -the really cool thing about her is that she was famous for tracking down the index case for 'Typhoid Mary'. So she actually found that patient twice because they lost her or something- I don't know. She was really awesome. She was also huge in like helping immigrants in New York prevent getting illnesses, like preventative medicine and public health. So she was really active in the kind of communities that were being underserved by public health at the time. She's fucking awesome basically.

[audience snaps fingers]

**Leigh:** Jonathan, back!

**Jonathan:** Not to monopolize, Isaac Newton. Another guy who was straight washed by history, supposedly died a virgin. Nah, son. He had a live-in boyfriend he took care of, you know straight sugar daddy nonsense, for like thirty-odd years. While he was figuring out gravity and orbits and shit. So I'm just saying, gay is good for science. [audience laughs and snaps fingers]

**Leigh:** Speaking of Isaac Newton, if y'all haven't listened to our episodes before, you should listen to our second episode, *Cloistered Queers*, where he

is a little bit featured in that we have a really really wonderful lady from the 17th century who was a Mexican nun named Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, who apparently just like chatted up Isaac Newton on Sundays. Just decided to like sit in her nun's salon and have physics conversations with Newton?

**Gretchen:** As you do. Hashtag goals.

**Audience Member 4:** A personal favorite of mine is the poet Edna St. Vincent Millay. She actually spent her childhood identifying as a boy, going by Vincent. She was openly bisexual throughout her you know adolescence and adulthood. By the time she got married to a man, they had an open marriage and she said that they lived like 'two bachelors'.

[audience laughter and snapping]

**Audience Member 5:** I had to look it up to make sure I got the names right, but one of my favorite stories is the origin of the phrase:

*"The passion of the cut sleeve."*

I don't know if anyone is familiar with that but it's about Emperor Ai who was emperor of China during the Han Dynasty. He reigned from 7 to 1 BC. He was— had a well known partner, his name I'm probably gonna butcher this, Dong...

**Leigh:** Dong Xian.

**Audience Member 5:** Dong Xian? [Reattempting pronunciation]

**Gretchen:** Dong Xian.

**Audience Member 5:** So the origin of the phrase is one afternoon they were taking a nap together and the emperor had to get up suddenly due he was called to a meeting or something. And his lover was asleep on his robe, and so rather than disturb him and wake him up, he cut off the sleeve of his robe before he got up.

[Audience 'Awws' in unison]

I just thought that was really adorable.

**Gretchen:** We did our third– our third podcast is all about the homosexual tradition in ancient China. All about that. That’s a wonderful story, we love it. There are also like so many more–

**Leigh:** Yeah, that’s like a tiny piece. If that story interests you, I recommend that you listen to that episode and then also read a book by Bret Hinsch called, *Passions of the Cut Sleeve*. But that is a tiny, tiny sliver of the tradition in Imperial China that started even before then and went up until the 1900s when you had the influence of Western Imperialism–

**Gretchen:** Basically three thousand years of gay. [Audience laughs]

**Leigh:** Which is the title of my forthcoming biography.

**Gretchen:** Yep.

**Gretchen and Leigh:** Three thousand years of gay.

[Morgan speaking but unintelligible; Gretchen loudly laughs]

**Leigh:** This is why–

**Gretchen:** This is why you need to be on our podcast, Morgan.

**Leigh:** This is why we drink together, Morgan.

**Morgan:** I was just going to point out that I was– I heard the story of the cut sleeve in...oh, I don’t know, history class or something? He didn’t want to disturb his little dog.

**Leigh:** What?!

**Morgan:** This is why he did it. That’s... that’s how it was told to me.

**Leigh:** Alright, let's talk about how we've been erased from history, folks!  
[Audience laughter]

**Morgan:** I was originally told his little dog was asleep. He didn't want to disturb it and it was so cute.

**Gretchen:** Lies.

**Morgan:** And then I heard the other version. [Audience laughter]

**Leigh:** Yeah, Yeah. I mean part of- we can kind of launch into a little aside here. Part of the reason why we started this podcast is the fact- there's a lot of media out there right now that is doing really great work to highlight the work and foundations that have been laid by queer pioneers fighting for our civil rights.

A lot of the discussion about queer history, if we get it at all, anywhere in school, focuses on a very specific time period and it's a very recent time period. And it's upsetting and unfortunate that we have been erased from history and not at all by being forgotten or accidentally, but often very deliberately and systemically. In that our records have physically been destroyed.

**Gretchen:** Right, or even- or even as you were just saying, the telling of stories in a way that totally erases the queer context from them. So that was part of what we wanted to do. And especially in the podcast we did on the male homosexual tradition in China when we realized that they have three thousands years of history. And like- how amazing would it be if we as a queer community could situate ourselves in history and say, 'Yeah, yeah we've got like ten thousand years of history because we've literally always been around'.

We're not new, we're not like some invention of like industrialization or whatever bullshit people say. Like, you know- 'It's cool to be gay now, that's why all the people are gay'. No! We've always been here. It's just that now we have more space to talk about our experience.

**Leigh:** Yeah, or even talking about our language that we use. There's so much discourse right now around what language and what words we use. I think that a lot of problems that come from that and why people get so heated is that we don't know our own history. There are so many people talking about how 'queer' is a slur, but also there are a lot of people who don't necessarily know the history of that word. And that yes, it was a slur, and we fought tooth and nail to reclaim it. Same with any other word that has ever been used to describe our community. [Audience snapping]

That can be solved by having comprehensive access to our own history. And not just from folks in our community. It needs to be on a systemic curriculum level.

**Gretchen:** Yep

**Audience Member 6:** I actually kinda just had a revelation sitting there thinking. Richard the Lionheart, the King of England, was... not until 1948, it was assumed that he was straight. And then some historian in 1948 was like, 'Well, you know, we don't have any connection of him with women, so he must have been gay.' And I'm sitting there going, and there are no other options? Maybe he just didn't like to have sex?

**Gretchen:** Right.

**Audience Member 6:** Maybe... and I'm just sitting here going, that- that it becomes, once again, the binary. You have to be gay or straight. And, I just was sitting there going, that the asexuals have been erased from history as well.

[audience snaps fingers]

**Leigh:** Yeah, there's a lot of nuance to think about, too. Because, in- in this very specific and very recent invention of Western society of queerness as a personal identity is very new. It's very, very new. So, I urge you all to go out and read a bunch of different sources, a bunch of global sources. Because, what we may necessarily think of as romantic relationships, as sexual relationships, that you know that we resonate with, are things that were not even necessarily considered part of an identity.

We talked in our China episode how, you know, quote unquote, “bisexuality” would be more useful a term to- to talk about, but there were different things with ritualization, with certain rights of passage, and obligations to kinship-

**Gretchen:** Life stages.

**Leigh:** Life stages... Yeah, and even as you move through history, the definitions of like, ‘friendship’ versus ‘romance’ versus ‘romantic friendships’, how do we define these things? And how do we define these things in a society that really only kind of recently started shifting the goal posts in what we decide to claim as an identity rather than a like set of behaviors or something that is just integral to the way that a society works?

**Gretchen:** Right, cause there’s a difference between talking about ‘practice’ versus you know, ‘patterns of behaviors’ versus- like we talk about in Western societies is the matter of identity. There’s an inherent level of attraction, I’m inherently this way. It’s very essentialist, it’s talking about me as a person in its essence. That’s not a bad way to talk about things, it’s just that we want people to be aware that that’s a very modern concept, and that these ancient cultures or diverse cultures around the world that we’re talking about, have very different ways of framing that conversation.

And they’re not bad, they’re just different. That’s part of understanding our history, is that we- we as a community- people like us have always existed. They just haven’t always defined themselves the way we would define ourselves. But they still belong as a part of our community and it’s important to understand like how different people understand themselves. Just the way we want to make space for people to be able to label themselves the way they want, we want cultures in history to be able to label themselves with their own language- I mean, we have to use shorthand, because we can’t... we’d have like 4 hour long podcasts. [laughs] Which I mean, maybe people would be into it, I don’t know.

[Leigh and Gretchen laugh]



**Leigh:** Yeah, just expanding vocabulary, expanding our- expanding our framework.

**Gretchen:** I mean, we do this for you all. We're just a couple of you know, gay nerds.

**Leigh:** We want to see ourselves. Just like we all want to see ourselves represented in media, we want to see ourselves represented where we have always been.

**Gretchen:** Right. Because what is history other than another story? And the stories we tell about ourselves, not just in media, but the stories we tell ourselves about where we come from. Our places in history, our situatedness in time, that is just as important as the stories we tell about fictional characters. Because these are characters- these are not characters, there are people who are real, and they can help us understand ourselves and our place in history, and each other as different members of the community the more we know them.

And it's- we can be safe to love ourselves and embrace ourselves and say, 'You know what? There may be people in our society who hate me the way I am, but you know what, ancient China was pretty fucking gay and like, that was cool!' So the problem is not that there's, you know, human beings are inherently bigoted. The problem is our society is bigoted. Because there have been societies in history in which there was more of a space for this. So we can start tackling the problem as like, 'We just need to fix our society.'

Like, there's nothing that requires that people hate homosexuality. That's not inherent in society. There are places for us where we have been accepted and embraced and allowed to flourish. That's something we can be happy about and then motivate us to change what we see in our own society.

**Leigh:** Yeah. Woo! [Audience snaps]

**Gretchen:** Unless anyone's got anything else, we're gonna- Oh!

**Audience Member 7:** Was Cleopatra queer? Did she have any female lovers? Please say yes.

[Audience laughs]

**Leigh:** Oh, God. You know what, I recently was trying to find some stuff on this because I felt like I had read something at some point about it. I don't have details on it right now, but I can guarantee you that we will have an answer soon. One of the next episodes we will be going into soon will be talking about Egypt, [audience snaps fingers] specifically talking about third gender and expansive gender experiences in Egypt and also talking about-

**Gretchen:** -My favorite- my favorite gay Egyptian tomb.

**Leigh:** The two brothers, quote unquote.

**Gretchen:** The brothers who were depicted in wall art in like, very specifically in hieroglyphic art in the husband and wife position-

**Leigh:** Pose.

**Gretchen:** Pose in the afterlife. So they were literally being given a gay afterlife and of course a bunch of white, British, straight archeologists were like, 'Oh look! No homo! Look at these devoted brothers! Look at these friends!'

**Leigh:** Oh god! 'Kissing on the mouth!'

[Audience laughter]

**Gretchen:** But they were gay.

**Leigh:** Yeah. I will say about Cleopatra though, one of the things that makes me really sad about her legacy was that so many people focus on, 'She was so beautiful!' and that's like it. She was also an incredibly accomplished-

**Gretchen:** She was a fucking badass is what she was.

**Leigh:** She was an incredibly accomplished academic, as well. She was very, very influential with math, too. I know this isn't Math Con, but...

**Gretchen:** For our listeners who don't understand, that's an inside joke.

**Leigh:** Sorry, come to TGIFemslash next year and you will be in on the joke.

**Gretchen:** Yes! You will understand the Math Con reference.

**Leigh:** You will enjoy yourself with lots of to-gays. We have one more panelist.

**Audience Member 7:** Another thing that I was remembering was, William Shakespeare got gayed out of history. [audience snaps fingers] Explicitly, when they edited his works I believe in the Victorian era 'cause hello the Victorian era, they changed the pronouns in the sonnets. So that all the ones about how beautiful and how, 'Gee, you should have some kids because you need to have your line go on forever'. All that changed to 'she'. Hmm?

Yeah...I think there's a specific line about somebody saying he couldn't bear to think of William Shakespeare doing such a- being such a horrible pervert.

**Gretchen:** Gross... gross.

**Leigh:** Also like, that dude wrote so many dick and fart jokes, where were they?! [Audience laughs] Like, what Shakespeare were they reading where that didn't track?

**Gretchen:** Or like all of the like, gender bending, gender non- the play with gender in so many of his plays. Like are you reading the same Shakespeare I am?

**Leigh:** Or like, people nowadays that just cast Shakespeare as like the most boring straight, white, performances. It's like, you have such a sandbox to play with, why do you feel like you need to do this?

**Gretchen:** I feel like- I feel like Shakespeare would be super fun drunk, man. He would be a trip.

## Closing and Where to Find us Online

**Gretchen:** So, thank you all for coming!

**Leigh:** Yeah!

**Gretchen:** Yay!

[Audience claps]

**Leigh:** So, unfortunately we are out of time, and we need to let these folks-lovely folks go to dinner. So that's it for today's episode. Hey Gretchen, where can all the people here and all the people listening find you on the interwebs?

**Gretchen:** Well, when I'm not talking about gay history, I am writing nerdy media analysis and fangirling over *Star Wars*, *Steven Universe*, *Wynonna Earp*, for [TheFandomentals.com](http://TheFandomentals.com) and my personal website, [GNellis.com](http://GNellis.com). Or you can find me on Tumblr and Twitter as @gnelliswriter, all one word. Leigh, what about you?

**Leigh:** So I am online on Twitter, usually talking about comics, queer T.V., yelling about representation, fighting off Nazis, at [@aparadoxinflux](https://twitter.com/aparadoxinflux). Oftentimes I'm usually bugging all of y'all to please write me fic and do fanart and want to talk to everybody about more gay shit-

**Gretchen:** Make us fan art! We had lovely fanart for one of our episodes and it was amazing, and we want more. We still need someone to draw us Anne Bonny and Lizzie Borden.

**Leigh:** Yeah, so we ship Anne Bonny and Lizzie Borden. That was something that came out of our first episodes.

**Gretchen:** Yep, they would fuck up the world.

**Leigh:** Then, with our latest episode, which if you're listening you will have heard. For now y'all, this is new information, look up Bessie Smith. Or, you know, wait until Monday when you're all driving or flying back to wherever

y'all traveled from and listen to our episode and hear about how much Bessie Smith fucks shit up.

**Gretchen:** Yep. *History is Gay* podcast can be found on Tumblr at [@historyisgaypodcast](#), Twitter at [HistoryisGayPod](#), and you can always drop us a line with questions, suggestions, or just to say hi at [HistoryisGaypodcast@gmail.com](mailto:HistoryisGaypodcast@gmail.com).

And if you are enjoying the show, please remember to rate, review, and subscribe wherever you get your podcasts. It helps us get more people to find the show, and we can expand our awesome community. I don't- we haven't even checked recently, we don't know how many countries we're in yet, but our last count was what?

**Leigh:** 44.

**Gretchen:** 44? [Audience cheers and applause] 44 different countries.

**Leigh:** Which- okay, six months ago we were pretty set. We were like, 'Aw man, this is gonna be like us and like 5 people from con listening to this.'

**Gretchen:** Just gonna be our friends!

**Leigh:** So we're all very pleasantly surprised and we feel really touched that there are so many people in this room. First of all, like, y'all came out to just hear us talk about a bunch of homos. I mean, I know that you're all here to talk about a bunch of homos, but it feels really special.

**Audience Member 8:** What if I want to buy some merch?

**Gretchen:** Yep. Oh, right! Yes. Here at con, we have- we have merch available, so that is something that will hopefully be going online soon.

**Leigh:** Yeah, we may end up having- I mean- don't know, it's y'all's job to decide whether or not this is gonna happen. If we have any merch left, we'll put- put it online, we'll find ways to get it out to folks. But, if you're here at the con, we have a lovely booth.

**Gretchen:** Where you can order t-shirts, we have t-shirts, we have pins, we have magnets that Leigh amazingly got all of this set up, and Beth, who is not in this room at the moment–

**Leigh:** She runs a fantastic shop called *Glorious Weirdo*, which if y'all like queer fandom fun stuff, we're just gonna plug her shop because it's really awesome.

**Gretchen:** She made our shirts and they're amazing! You can go ahead

**Leigh:** So... That's it for *History is Gay*, until next time..

**Gretchen:** Stay queer–

**Leigh:** Stay curious.

[Audience applause]

♪ Outro Music ♪