

IWD 2022: Iconic LGBTQ+ Women

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To celebrate International Women's Day, we wanted to highlight the trailblazing LGBTQ+ women, past and present, who have paved the way, and are continuing to do so, for women around the world.

Frida Kahlo (1907 - 1954)



The Mexican painter is best known for her vivid self-portraits, but did you know she was bold, beautiful, and bisexual? Kahlo was married to the notorious womaniser Diego Rivera, but she was rumoured to be in a relationship with Josephine Baker, a famous entertainer.

Reported to have met each other in Paris in 1939, Frida and Josephine fell in love during a time that was absolutely against them. Kahlo never hid her bisexuality during her stormy and turbulent marriage with Rivera, who was well-aware of his wife's lovers.

Frida and Josephine's romance featured in the 2002 biographical drama Frida.



Eleanor Roosevelt (1884 - 1962)

Rumours of the First Lady of the United States' bisexuality stem from a long, passionate relationship with the young reporter Lorena Hickok who Eleanor fondly nick-named 'Hick'.

They met during her husband's first presidential campaign in 1932. Hick convinced her editor that this particular candidate's wife warranted her own reporter, and she was given the job.

Romantic letters between the two were discovered after Eleanor's death. The Roosevelt family tried to suppress the letters and unfortunately destroyed some of them.

Their love affair lasted Eleanor's lifetime. Hick inspired and supported her outspoken activism for democracy and human rights.



Jane Addams (1860 - 1935)

Progressive social reformer and activist Jane Addams was the first American woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize.

A well-known advocate and leader in the women's suffrage movement, Addams was close to many women and had romantic relationships with a few of them, most notably with philanthropist, Mary Rozet Smith. They remained together until 1934, when Mary died of pneumonia, after 40 years together.

Having been in exclusively romantic relationships with women, Jane would most likely be described as a lesbian in contemporary terms, similar to many leading figures in the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom of the time.



Marlene Dietrich (1901 - 1992)

German-born actress and singer Marlene Dietrich was well-known for her androgynous fashion sense and acting roles. Openly bisexual, Dietrich was very active in the growing LGBTQ+ scene in Berlin, attending many drag balls.

She was also known to use the term "sewing circle" to refer to the underground lesbian and bisexual film actresses in Hollywood. Greta Garbo, Frank Sinatra, John F. Kennedy, and Edith Piaf are all said to be among her former lovers.

Her career spanned almost 80 years and her legacy in film, fashion and her queer identity in Hollywood remains iconic long after her death at the age of 90 in 1992.



Lady Phyll (1974 -)

Phyll Opoku-Gyimah, better known as Lady Phyll, is a British LGBTQ+ rights activist and anti-racism campaigner. She is the co-founder of UK Black Pride, which began in 2005 as a day trip to Southend-on-Sea in England and now attracts thousands of people every year.

She is also the Executive Director of the charity Kaleidoscope Trust, which campaigns for the human rights of LGBTQ+ people in countries around the world where they are persecuted.

Lady Phyll is a true queer powerhouse, positively shifting the political and societal landscape for LGBTQ+ individuals of colour in the UK.



Edith Windsor (1929 - 2017)

Edith Windsor was a leader in the fight for LGBTQ+ rights in America. Her case against the American justice system was the first time same-sex marriage was recognised as legal in the US.

Edie married her wife Thea Syper in Canada in 2007. When Thea died in 2009, the American government said that Edith had to pay \$363,053 in tax because only marriage between a man and woman was granted something called unlimited spousal exemption from federal estate taxes.

Windsor decided to sue arguing that the law discriminated against same-sex couples - and was successful. Her fight led to the Defence of Marriage Act being overturned.

Nicola Adams (1982 -)



Nicola Adams OBE is a British former professional boxer, retiring with an undefeated record. She became the first female boxer to become an Olympic champion after winning gold at London 2012, and the first female boxer to be a double Olympic champion following a second gold medal at Rio 2016.

Openly bisexual, Adams was the first LGBTQ+ person to win an Olympic boxing gold medal and was awarded the most influential LGBTQ+ person in Britain by The Independent in 2012.

She was appointed an MBE in the 2013 New Year Honours for her services to boxing and later appointed an OBE in 2017.



Laverne Cox (1972 -)

American actress and LGBTQ+ advocate, Laverne Cox was the first openly transgender person to receive a Primetime Emmy nomination for her role as Sophia Burset on the Netflix series “Orange is the New Black”.

Cox was also the first African-American transgender woman to produce and star in her own TV show (VH1’s “TRANSform Me”) and the first openly transgender person to appear on the cover of TIME Magazine.

Her impact and prominence in the media have led to a growing conversation about transgender culture, specifically transgender women, and how being transgender intersects with race. She is also known for her uplifting social media presence, which she uses to promote the hashtag #TransIsBeautiful.

This list is by no means exhaustive but serves to highlight the important role that LGBTQ+ women have played and continue to play. It's important to remember that International Women's Day is for all women.

Intersectionality, a term coined by American lawyer and civil rights advocate Kimberlé Crenshaw, describes “the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender as they apply to a given individual or group, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage”.

Not all inequality is equal. As such, we have to take an intersectional approach in our fight for equality or things will only improve for a small, privileged percentage of women. This means listening to and involving all women.

If our feminism isn't intersectional, it isn't feminism. This is why we seek to collaborate across our Staff Networks at MKUH.

