

Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Yasmin Benoit

Name: ITV Pridecast w/ Yasmin Benoit

Yasmin

00:00:01:08

Being a black asexual woman. I'm a pretty easy target for people that you know don't like it. It always does surprise me sometimes as to like what is seen as controversial because like before I started doing this, I sort of assumed that, you know, it wouldn't be that much of a scandalous thing to say. You know, I don't experience sexual attraction. I didn't think that that would be crazy, and I didn't think it would be that crazy.

Liam

00:00:24:03

Hello and welcome to Pridecast. This is a podcast about all things LGBTQ+ brought to you by ITV. During the show, we chat about being proud to be LGBTQ+ today. We speak to people from across the community to find out where they are on their journey and where they're headed. We'll also keep you updated on the latest LGBTQ+ news and the things that matter to you. This is the ITV Pridecast. Hi everyone, I hope you're all well and thanks for tuning in to this episode of the ITV Pridecast. Now as its LGBTQ+ History Month, we're continuing to bring you interviews with some great people who do so much to promote and support those from across the LGBTQ+ community. Now, if you missed our episode earlier this month with Russell T Davies and Nicola Shindler, you can listen back to it from wherever you get your podcasts. Well, for this episode, we're back and we're discussing what it means to be asexual. Now, asexuality isn't something new, of course, but it's a topic that hasn't been widely discussed and hasn't received much prominence when recording LGBTQ+ history. Therefore, the important reason to discuss it here.

Liam

00:01:48:07

Well, I'm really happy to say that joining me to co-host this ITV Pridecast is my friend and colleague Dougie Robertson. Hello there Dougie. How are you?

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Dougie **00:01:58:14**

Hello I'm very well, thank you. Very happy to be here.

Liam **00:02:00:15**

I've been wanting to you to to co-host today an ITV Pridecast with me for a long time now. And I'm so glad that we finally been able to get this sorted. So yeah, thank you very much for coming on.

Dougie **00:02:10:19**

No problem, no problem.

Liam **00:02:12:08**

Well to start with, for anyone of our listeners who doesn't know you, of course, um, do you want to tell us a little bit about what you do at ITV?

Dougie **00:02:20:09**

Yeah, sure. So I work within the streaming division of ITV. I'm an engineering manager, which basically means I look after some of the software engineers that work on the infrastructure and the code that brings you ITV X.

Liam **00:02:35:00**

So busy time at the moment then I gather.

Dougie **00:02:37:22**

Yes it has. I mean, the last year, the last 18 months have been pretty, pretty full on, um, because we've been working towards that November launch time. Um, but it all went really well. Uh, touch wood. And ITV is in millions of homes now, so it's been a really, really exciting time to be be doing what I do.

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Liam **00:02:57:03**

Yeah, I can imagine. And for anyone that's listening, and I made this faux pas earlier on denying that I asked you earlier on, didn't I? How is "The X" going interpreted in many, many ways, of course. But like like, you know, an older person saying, I'm going to use the Facebook, it's it's not the way to do it, is it.

Dougie **00:03:17:19**

No. Internally that's not we call it X. We don't call it "The X". So so it's crucial to get that right, especially as I've just come out at the end of a year long divorce process. It was it was you know, it really threw me for a moment.

Liam **00:03:29:10**

Yeah, I know I, I, I do apologise because the look on your face when I asked that question anyway, I thought, oh, it's such a simple question. And then I realised the interpretation. So yeah, we need to make sure we get that right don't we. So. Well, one of the things I wanted to talk to you about, of course, because, you know, we're hearing about your talents as an engineering manager, but, you know, they go far beyond that don't they.

Dougie **00:03:52:20**

Stop it Liam, stop it.

Liam **00:03:54:07**

You are not just an engineering manager. You're also a fellow podcaster as well, aren't you?

Dougie **00:04:01:00**

I am, yes, yes.

Liam **00:04:04:08**

Tell us, any of our listeners that have not listened to your podcast before, I say what it is and what it's about.

Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Yasmin Benoit

Dougie

00:04:10:04

So, uh, my podcast, which I co-host with my friend Mike Hoffman, who I've known for a long time now, um, is called 'Secular Buddhism for Sceptical Atheists'. And you can find it if you look for the one that's got a thumbnail of a sort of a Buddha lit from below by the light of a mobile phone is the cover art. We've done a few episodes. Um, and the premise, essentially, neither of us are experts on Buddhism, per se, but we've, like many people I think, encountered, you know, bits of mindfulness over the years and found bits of mindfulness practice like meditation and things like that helpful in our day to day lives. Um, and, you know, navigating our busy London, the, the franticness of living in London. Um, and we kind of wanted to poke a bit at the origins of that. Um, uh, you know, where does mindfulness come from? And some of it's more, some of its older roots and how things tie back to Buddhist principles. Um, and so, so yeah, we've done a few episodes. I think we've technically done two series, um, on it. Um, and yeah, we haven't recorded an episode for a while, I have to say, but there's quite a lot in there. So. Yeah, I mean, I don't want to just use this as an opportunity to plug another podcast.

Liam

00:05:20:13

Oh, no, please do, please do. Um, you know, because I'm not just saying this because you'll hear, of course. But it is an excellent podcast between you and Mike. And, you know, one of the episodes I particularly enjoyed was when you both spoke about the Buddhist concept of suffering and how it's something that's very natural. And, you know, I suppose we we often don't accept that suffering is a natural part of life, do we? And, you know, I suppose by accepting it, we can deal with it much better. Really?

Dougie

00:05:51:02

Yes and experience slightly less of it, I suppose, because you're not just you're just suffering rather than suffering because you don't expect to be suffering. Mhm. Mhm. But yeah. Listen to the episode. That wasn't a great explanation. But uh but if you listen to the episode it will all become clear.

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Liam

00:06:06:09

Well one of the, one of the great things about the podcast, I always think as well, is, um, you know, you always kind of at the end of the show, you and Mike ask for people to get in touch with you and send their thoughts, send their ideas, send their, you know, kind of, uh, views on the podcast. And, and, you know, there's a, there is a particular way of getting in touch with you, isn't there. And I it's always quite comical, I think, when, uh, when you explain it, I don't know if you can tell our listeners what that is.

Dougie

00:06:33:15

Uh, yeah. So you have to message us on social media, and my social media handle is the same everywhere. And it's really difficult to say out loud because what is it is d0ug785 um, and then Mike has something like, uh, IamMikeHoffman or something like that. Actually, I think he's just changed it, which will have messed up all the links on, on the podcast. Um, but yeah, his makes a lot more sense than mine does. But we do. We do get great messages from people sort of out of the blue, because once you put a podcast out there, people listen to it. You can't predict when people are going to listen to it, and it kind of comes up and down. But we still get messages out of the blue saying, oh, I like that episode, or oh, have you thought about this? And so we have this little backlog of feedback from people, which is quite, quite nice.

Liam

00:07:16:08

From what you guys talk about, you really get a sense of your own identity, but also, um, you know, challenging what your thought process is with things, really.

Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Yasmin Benoit

Dougie

00:07:27:16

Yes. Yeah, I think that's fair. And we learn a lot making it as well. I mean, we have to do so much research before we do a recording. So we were recording two episodes in, in an evening or something. We have to do research to make sure that we say, you know, we're not experts, as I say, and we have to become at least, you know, we have to be confident in what we're saying before we send it out into the universe, because someone will tell us if it's wrong, um, which they do sometimes. And that's really- I'm grateful for that.

Liam

00:07:52:23

One of the things I wanted to ask you as well, you know, for, for the new series that, you know, will hopefully come quite soon, you know, um, will there are will there be a chance for listeners to get, you know, secular Buddhism t-shirts? I think it's about time that there's there's some merchandise really isn't that of merch?

Dougie

00:08:10:02

I mean, never say never. I mean, I yes, let's say yes. I'm going to say it here. Yes, we're going to do 'Secular Buddhism Sceptic Atheist' t shirts.

Liam

00:08:19:13

There we go.

Dougie

00:08:20:23

Soon. Yes. I love that idea.

Liam

00:08:22:15

You've heard it here. And now we will get the t shirts, you know, maybe even a pen. You know, from, from, you know-

Dougie

00:08:32:08

I mean, no one writes now.

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Liam

00:08:32:24

But no. Referring back to this podcast that we're doing now, of course. Um, so we're recording it during LGBTQ+ History Month, and, and we're speaking, uh, to a woman called Yasmin Benoit, who is an asexual activist. And, you know, I think this is this is an area of, of LGBTQ+ that we perhaps don't know a great deal about widely across the community. Do we really?

Dougie

00:08:59:04

No, I think that's fair. Well, it's certainly speaking for myself, I would say I'm pretty ignorant, actually, about asexuality. Obviously. I say, obviously. I have an awareness of what asexuality is, but sort of nothing else. Um, and so, yeah, I'm really looking forward to hearing more about, um, about her work. And she's so prominent in the space of asexual activism and the work in general in, in the UK. Um, so, yeah, super excited.

Liam

00:09:25:08

I know that we were discussing before actually that, um, you know, if you were to kind of search asexuality on Google, Yasmin is kind of the main person that's there that will come up from the searches, really. So it shows really the kind of, um, you know, the length and breadth that she's go into in order to kind of raise the profile of asexuality and I suppose, you know, challenge perceptions, really.

Dougie

00:09:47:16

Yes. Which I think is sort of brave in a way. Um, that's quite hard to pull back from. And you never know until like, as something builds prominence, how people are going to respond and the and and yeah, you're almost setting yourself up to be the go to person for anyone who has any opinion or feelings about asexuality in general, which I think is is admirable.

Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Yasmin Benoit

Liam

00:10:12:04

Yeah, no, indeed. And and something as well that, um, you know, we'll discuss this in the podcast, of course. But, um, you know, she has to deal with a sense of intersectionality as well, being a black woman who is asexual, you know, I gather she'll get, you know, a kind of different perception than, say, someone who is from a white background, really?

Dougie

00:10:32:01

Yes. Yeah. That's another excellent point. Um, I think yeah. Intersectionality is still something. I mean, do we get it right in the LGBT+ community? I would say o we often don't. Um, and I say that with the self-awareness of being a white gay man who works in media, um, you know, um, and it's sometimes it's invisible as well because of the way we record data and stuff, you know, even, you know, lesbians and gay men. You know, if you look at the LGBT stats within organisations together, they might look sort of okay. But if you separate out even just the G's and the L's, sometimes you'll see that the L's are massively underrepresented, just to take an example, so that when people occupy multiple spaces and are having to navigate that. Yeah, I'm really interested to hear more about what that's like and also how you can support people better in that space.

Liam

00:11:23:10

Mhm. Yeah. No. Absolutely. And talking about support actually, I suppose one way that you especially do that is through your work with the ITV Pride Network and um, of course you've been part of the team now for about three years. Um, I mean we first met really, didn't we, over a Google Hangout when we it was during the pandemic.

Dougie

00:11:47:10

Was it on a Thursday?

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Liam

00:11:48:14

It was on the first day. Yeah. At the ITV Pride social lunches, because that was the only way that the community as part of ITV could get together.

Dougie

00:11:56:00

Yes. And I just joined. I had just joined ITV after five years at my previous company, which I'd loved, and I moved to the other end of my kitchen table to try and create a sense of it being a new company. But it was still all very surreal and we were all, this is, you know, 2020. Peak lock down, tuning into Boris at 5 p.m. every day. It was that period of time, um, and I didn't really know what I was doing yet, and I didn't have my people to look after. And I was sitting in a very quiet slack, and I didn't know who to talk to. And so I saw this email about Pride, and it was like, oh, if you go to this hangout on Thursday, then, you know, people might be there. And I was like, yes, people. So yes, I remember that quite clearly.

Liam

00:12:34:01

There we go. I remember your orange Smeg fridge in the background and being like, wow, that's a very bright fridge.

Dougie

00:12:39:17

I've still got it. I've still got it terrible though. They don't defrost properly.

Liam

00:12:43:14

Oh, there we go. Are there other fridge brands are available, of course. Uh, yeah. But no. Wow,

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Liam **00:12:50:09**

Dougie, for now, thank you so much for joining me to, uh, to co-host this episode. We're going to be chatting with Yasmin coming up next. Of course. But, yeah, thank you for everything that you're doing. Uh, within the ITV Pride network, I know you play a big role within the work that we do with intermedia, uh, where we kind of discuss all the LGBTQ+ things that we're doing at ITV amongst other companies. So, yeah, thank you for all that you do there.

Dougie **00:13:13:13**

That's it's a pleasure. It's it's a small things that I do really. But but I do see because I'm a manager, I think I do see part of my job as just being visible like a visible LGBTQ+ person in the workplace. So I guess the main thing that I see my I think the main reason that I get involved in Pride is so that people can see that, you know, I'm bringing my whole self to work and that's okay. So please bring your whole self to work.

Liam **00:13:39:02**

I couldn't think of a better way to to end our introduction and to start this podcast with Yasmin Benoit.

Liam **00:13:46:21**

Thank you Dougie, thanks so much.

Dougie **00:13:49:02**

Thank you.

Liam **00:13:58:05**

Yasmin Benoit, thank you so much for joining us here on the ITV Pridecast. Firstly, happy LGBTQ+ History Month to you.

Yasmin **00:14:07:14**

Thank you. Same to you.

Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Yasmin Benoit

Liam **00:14:09:17**

Thank you so much. Um, I wanted to find out, firstly, how are you doing? How are things with you?

Yasmin **00:14:15:02**

It's been good. I kicked off the month. I've, uh, spoken at the NHS. I spoke at Cambridge, and I was at a reception launch for the month, just yesterday night. So it's been a busy, uh, few days.

Liam **00:14:28:06**

Oh, yeah, I can imagine. And, you know, one of the things that you're really involved with, of course, is to do with asexual activism. And I wondered if, to start with, you could just tell us what it is to be asexual.

Yasmin **00:14:42:19**

Yeah. So being asexual means experiencing little to no sexual attraction towards anyone, regardless of their gender.

Liam **00:14:48:18**

And you also as well as well as that you identify as aromantic as well, don't you?

Yasmin **00:14:54:03**

Yeah. And that just means experiencing little to no romantic attraction towards anyone, regardless of their gender. So separate orientations, but kind of similar, uh, phrasing.

Liam **00:15:05:01**

With how you identify. Of course, it's quite something that we don't usually hear about or see very much in society, isn't it? And, you know, how is that? Because, you know, when we, you know, we were doing a bit of research, of course, before about asexuality and you're the main kind of champion of this, aren't you? Really. You're the kind of at the moment, the main spokesperson in some ways for it.

Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Yasmin Benoit

Yasmin

00:15:26:02

Yeah. I mean it's it's something that's always existed. But of course, you know, it hasn't really been included in the conversation as much as other orientations that it's kind of general awareness is only really started increasing it. Even the existence of a kind of accumulated, um, actively involved asexual community. It's only really started over the last like 20 years or so. So we're quite early on in terms of our movement, uh, so to speak.

Liam

00:15:52:11

Yeah, absolutely. And I mean, is it anything that's kind of, you know, that goes against the norm in society or that people don't know much about is often a challenge. It's often challenging perceptions, isn't it, really? And is that something that you are used to now as an activist, or is it something that still comes a little bit like, you know, unnaturally because, you know, sometimes it's it's the hardest to be the one that puts your head above the parapet and, you know, is the the person that's flying the flag for your cause or your the issue that you represent. Of course.

Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Yasmin Benoit

Yasmin

00:16:26:19

Yeah, I mean, it's it's kind of like being, you know, like the first one out of the trenches, like you're kind of gonna get shot at first. So I've kind of made my peace with that. I kind of know that that's how it kind of naturally goes. And being a black, asexual woman, I'm a pretty easy target for people that, you know, don't like it. Um, but yeah, at the same time, I think that it's it's an important thing to do. So I don't really mind too much. And it's, uh. It always does surprise me sometimes as to like what is seen as controversial because like before I started doing this, I sort of assumed that, you know, it wouldn't be that much of a scandalous thing to say. You know, I don't experience sexual attraction. I didn't think that that would be crazy, and I didn't think it would be that crazy to, you know, have my appearance and say that I kind of thought we would be on the whole, oh, but you have to look a certain way to be a certain orientation. So there are some things where I'm like, okay, is this still scandalous in like 2023? That's weird. But okay.

Dougie

00:17:26:01

Does that happen a lot? I mean, the sense of, you know, people having preconceptions about what an asexual person might look like and that kind of thing, and the way that the counterpoint between their expectations and the fact, for instance, that you're a model, um, do you do you come up against that quite a lot?

Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Yasmin Benoit

Yasmin

00:17:40:21

Yeah. Like constantly. And to be fair, I kind of used to get that like when I was younger as well. Not on the basis of being a model, but just because people associate asexuality with whiteness. So that was always something I was kind of like kind of familiar with. But when I kind of got older and I was doing modelling and then I started talking about this like it for some reason it's very different, difficult for people to compute. I think they have an idea that if you're not sexually attracted to anyone, then you need to make yourself sexually unattractive and like, be like a kind of inconspicuous wallflower whom no one would ever notice. It's just really homely and, like, uninteresting to look at. Um, and you shouldn't put any effort into your appearance at all. So they find it quite paradoxical that I still care about what I look like.

Liam

00:18:25:24

Do you think with that actually, has it got. It's hard to say. Is it really? Because, you know, we live in a society now where it's in some ways very hypersexual really, in that, you know, dating apps and there's lots of ways to meet people. Do you think sometimes do you get this, like where you might be amongst a group of peers and that they might say, you know who you're dating or they don't realise that you're asexual or, you know, is that is that something that you find a challenge?

Yasmin

00:18:55:08

Um, I mean, it kind of used to be more of a thing. Now I think everybody kind of knows, and I tend to only really be in spaces where people kind of already know me. So it's like less of a surprise. But previously I would just I kind of kept it a secret so people didn't really know. And I actually became a total expert at, like avoiding the conversation. I was like, I lived by like a don't ask, don't tell policy. And I was a pro at just dodging all of those questions so people did not know what my sexual orientation was, even if they'd known me for like five years.

Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Yasmin Benoit

Dougie

00:19:28:13

I was wondering earlier, lots of the people listening to this podcast. For lots of them. You may be the first asexual person that they have heard speaking about being asexual, and one of the things that I, I was finding myself wondering was, is there a way other things that we can do to be a better ally to asexual people just in our day to day lives?

Yasmin

00:19:49:22

Yeah, definitely. I mean, all conversations about sexuality, I think are very incomplete unless they're inclusive of asexuality. So I think, you know, making sure that you are educated about, you know, the diverse range of human experience and not just those that fall within, like the first three letters of the acronym. It's pretty important, especially if you're in queer spaces, because even though I think in queer spaces were so good at like analysing sexuality and death and taking it outside of a heteronormative box, it still seems to fall into like who you're having sex with and how. And that seems to be like the primary understanding of what sexuality is. And it kind of ignores like the wider breadth of the community and different experiences. Um, and also trying not to do this thing, which I think the queer community does a lot, but so do others, where in kind of like a bid to, like, counteract this idea that, you know, queerness and, you know, not being straight is kind of unnatural. There's like an overemphasis on this idea that, you know, sex is something that's really essential. And like every human needs to do it. Therefore it should all be accepted. Because unless you're a total weirdo, like that is what you're doing. And that's actually not a very helpful approach to take, because then it's also suggesting that people that aren't experiencing sexuality in that particular way are doing something that is unnatural and is weird. It is a very unhuman thing. So I think being careful about that when kind of trying to like, normalise the narrative, because then that can actually be kind of kind of productive.

Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Yasmin Benoit

Liam

00:21:20:06

Yasmin, just to go back a little bit, when did you first realise that you were asexual?

Yasmin

00:21:25:24

Um, I always say I realised I was asexual when everyone else realised that they weren't so kind of like early puberty, like 11 ish.

Liam

00:21:33:16

Wow. And and what was that like when you were younger? Because I suppose it, um, you've got everyone around you that at school who, you know, they're going they're going through puberty and they're perhaps starting to feel, um, things for other people. And, you know, what was that like amongst your peers?

Yasmin

00:21:52:05

Um. Not great. I think that at first, you know, I just kind of assumed that it was something that was going to kick in for me at some point, but I wasn't going to actively encourage it because it kind of seemed like a lot of effort, like I was seeing kids like, you know, arguing with each other over who fancied who and like, getting into fights in the playground and crying over boys. And I was thinking, yeah, okay. Like, if it happens to me, it happens, but I'm not gonna actively pursue this, because why would I? Um, but then, you know, by the time you get to like, you know, 14, 15, 16, 17, after a while, you're going to be like, okay, feel like this isn't, uh, kicking in anytime soon. And that was quite obvious to people, and it was more concerning for other people than it was for me. And it was kind of other people's projections of like, okay, let's come up with theory. Something must be wrong with you. Let's try and explain this, because asexuality can't possibly be the answer because of how you look. Um, so yeah, just kind of having to deal with everyone else's, um, very inaccurate, uh, theories. And like, armchair psychoanalysis was kind of one of the more complicated parts of it.

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Liam

00:22:59:04

I guess, as well. Like, you know, there's whenever someone feels an outsider, they feel a sense of comfort by being able to meet fellow people who may be in the same position. And I imagine maybe at a younger age, that was perhaps a little bit more difficult to do so than perhaps now.

Yasmin

00:23:17:18

Um, well, I mean, the asexual population is very small, so it's actually very, uh, common for asexual people to have never met another asexual person. I was quite lucky in the sense that I lived near London. So when, you know, there were like prides or when the asexuality conference was happening, like I was able to go to that. But that wasn't until like 2018. So it was still quite a few years. I did encounter a couple of asexual people at my local pride, um, when I was younger, but that was kind of it. So most of the asexual community was very much an online phenomenon for a while.

Liam

00:23:53:08

It really does show the power, doesn't it, of have those spaces. Um, and I imagine you took a great sort of comfort from being able to connect with fellow asexual people online.

Yasmin

00:24:03:03

Um, probably not as much as people would think. I, I got the information I needed, but I didn't feel like I fit into that space because it was just a bunch of white kids. So I didn't really it wasn't really that like inclusive in terms of like, you know, intersectionality at the time. So I kind of took what I needed and then just kind of went back to my, you know, normal offline life, which was kind of what inspired me to start doing what I'm doing now, because it is a very white space. And it was a very white space back then, too. So, uh, it was yeah, it was vaguely comforting, but I didn't feel necessarily like I wasn't sticking out there either.

Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Yasmin Benoit

Liam

00:24:42:05

You're obviously having to deal with many issues there. And, um, I suppose what you're doing now is really kind of giving a voice to people who are in a similar position to yourself. So someone who perhaps isn't white, who identifies as asexual, you're there to kind of be able to give them a sense of identity, really?.

Yasmin

00:25:04:10

Yeah, I just kind of felt like the I mean, and I've kind of done the same thing in like other spaces, like when I kind of started modelling and I was kind of specifically like in the alternative genre, I was always like, it feels ironic that you have spaces that are all about, you know, being different and being open. You know, you're just like a group of outcasts when you're all just a bunch of like, you know, you're all fitting the exact same bubble and you're looking the exact same way and you're all from the exact same demographic in the same countries and the same social class like it all felt. I always find that to be quite ironic. So that was kind of one of the reasons why I just wanted to steer the conversations in a slightly different direction, because, you know, again, we are at the start of our kind of movement, so to speak. But I also think that kind of gives you a slight advantage in the sense that you kind of get to, you know, like set the groundwork to hopefully make it inclusive from its early stages so that it stays that way instead of kind of falling into that trap that, you know, so many movements and communities do when they don't start getting inclusive until like 70 years down the line.

Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Yasmin Benoit

Dougie

00:26:05:08

And in terms of that work and the the activism that you you do, obviously, I say obviously in, for example, gay male activism, there are many fronts on which we have to work. You know, there's legal fronts and there are social fronts, and there are various fronts. Um, with asexuality, would you say that from what you're saying, it feels like a big part of it at the moment is visibility more than anything else. And I was wondering, would you agree with that? And also, one of the other fronts that you think you know, where the movement will, will go in terms of, in terms of your work?

Yasmin

00:26:38:21

Yeah, I mean, I think visibility is is a step one, but I also think we've been having that conversation for 20 years now. Like the whole what is asexuality. Here's the introduction. And like it's it's being very much at the same space for a while, and there actually are a lot of other things that I kind of think are more important that we should get to like, you know, in the same way as, you know, queerness is being pathologised for lots of different communities. It is for a sexuality as well. We are still medicalised In the International Classification of Diseases. The National LGBT survey found that we are 10% more likely to be offered or to undergo conversion therapy compared to all the other orientations, and yet we're still left out of the band, so. We're not included in the Equality Act, we're not protected by it, and we're not recognised as an orientation. So there are like a whole lot of other things that I think are fronts that we should be tackling. But the conversation hasn't got there yet because it's still like, 'but what is asexuality?' So we still haven't kind of got to that point yet. But that's kind of why I started doing the Asexual Rights Initiative with Stonewall. So we can kind of speed that along while everyone else catches up with the definitions and stuff.

Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Yasmin Benoit

Dougie

00:27:46:02

Yeah, that's really interesting. So yeah, I always think that you're a little bit buried in the + at the end. Like sometimes you'll get LGBT+, sometimes you get LGBTQ+ the LGBTQIA+ is probably the acronym. You come across the least and you're still at the end.

Yasmin

00:28:00:18

Yeah.

Yasmin

00:28:01:15

Which wouldn't be so bad if it was like, you know, if the order wasn't actually, like representative of anything. Like, I don't mind if people just say LGBT, but it's actually very inclusive. But the issue tends to be that people don't really pay that much attention outside of the first four letters. Like, one of the first things I ever did was actually a panel about those in the + and, you know, talking about how intersex people also are never really included in the conversations. And like pretty much everybody that falls beyond the + isn't really included, even though it's pretty important for like, the rest of the community and it's all kind of interwoven.

Liam

00:28:38:05

And with that as well. I mean, you know, looking at this month in particular, Yasmin, of course, LGBTQ+ History Month, and, you know, that's all about us looking at, you know, those that have gone before us and, you know, the kind of strides that they made in terms of, you know, getting to where we are now, it seems like, you know, as we've kind of discussed that, you know, asexuality is very much early on in that journey. And, you know, that's why I suppose it's so important this month really reflects the things that you're doing and the kind of the cause of asexuality, because, you know, it's about seeing the kind of history that you're making.

Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Yasmin Benoit

Yasmin

00:29:17:22

Yeah. And I mean, it's, you know, asexuality is not as new as people think it is. It's just that, you know, with the rise of the internet, that's what allowed a very small population of people to actually interact with each other and build a sense of community instead of just being like random individuals spread out all over the world. So in that sense, it's kind of new, but like there's records of asexuality in exactly the same places as there was early records of like, you know, homosexuality, like it's there in the 1800s and like early like German research and sexology. And it's on the Kinsey scale, like in the beginning, like it's always been part of it. It's not as new as people are thinking is. But yeah, in terms of like activism and stuff like that is very new. And strangely, a lot of what I'm doing is kind of the first time anybody's really done it. So it'll be interesting to see what people think, looking back at it in like 50 years time or so.

Liam

00:30:11:05

Yeah, I mean, you are definitely setting that record, of course. And as you say that, you know, this is nothing new. I suppose it's just the way that it's being communicated now and more people, you know, becoming aware of it. Um, in terms of the next 50 years. And I know that's, that's hard to kind of look ahead, but where well, 50 years is too far in. In the next ten years, where would you like to kind of see things go for? Um, you know, people who are asexual and, and kind of the understanding of wider society of it.

Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Yasmin Benoit

Yasmin

00:30:44:07

I mean, it's always it's hard to predict because I feel like nowadays there's so much information. I feel like things don't stick the same as they used to in like, the 2000s, like asexuality, you kind of had like a little mainstream burst in like 2004. And I think that kind of felt like, oh, now everyone's going to know about it. Like, now we're gonna get past the 101 stage, and then it just kind of reverted back. And now we're still doing it like, you know, like almost 20 years later. Um, so, I mean, I hope that in like the next ten years, we've kind of finally got past that. And people don't just forget the information and kind of go back to the beginning. I hope that, you know, you can get that legislative protection that like I'm working on and Stonewall's working on, and it'll be an actual recognised orientation and the Equality Act would be nice.

Liam

00:31:33:22

Yeah, no. And when I suppose, you know, having those, um, you know, legal recognitions, that kind of does allow for progress to really, you know, start to happen.

Yasmin

00:31:45:09

Yeah and hopefully that won't even be the next ten years. Like, well, our report's going to come out like this year. So hopefully that won't happen. That won't take ten years. But then these. Things can take a long time. So who knows.

Liam

00:31:56:11

Is there a pressure with that, have you found from the queer community to kind of have them on board as well, like the wider, you know, all the rest of the letters? Of course. Do you find that sometimes it's not just the, um, you know, the straight parts of this world that we need to you need to kind of, um, kind of convince it's also the queer communities.

Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Yasmin Benoit

Yasmin

00:32:19:14

Oh, yeah. Definitely. I mean, the queer community doesn't know that much more than, like, the street community when it comes to asexuality or especially the legislative side, which is funny because, you know, the A's in there. So you think more people would be curious as to like what it means, but not really, apparently so. And there's also, you know, a lot of acephobia within the queer community, like a good probably like 50% of the hate I get online comes from queer people. So it's yeah, there's an equal level of ignorance there.

Liam

00:32:47:02

Yeah. I mean, not that kind of, you know, oppression. Um, and especially online, uh, I can imagine it. It isn't great. Of course. Um, how do you how do you react to it?

Yasmin

00:33:01:14

I mean, I always I just try and allow people to use me as, like, a case study. I feel like that's the only constructive way I can do anything about it, because people really don't, like, realise that like, acephobia is a thing. They don't realise that, you know, the asexual community actually has problems and that people have negative views about it. And often people don't believe you when you mention it. So I've kind of become pretty easy, like go to person as an example of like you can just take one look at my social media or anything that I've done, scroll down to the comments and see that it's very much a thing. So I try to just kind of use it in like an educational way, which is also a bit cathartic, just so that it's not a complete waste that, you know, there are thousands of evidence of hate comments on my things. Um, but yeah, I try not to personally like go back and forth with them because they probably don't really care that much. They're just trying to be annoying.

Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Yasmin Benoit

Dougie

00:33:58:18

Do you do you ever get a bit tired of it because you're speaking so eloquently about your work and with such passion, and about your goals and everything, but because especially because, as you've said, asexuality is such a small percentage of the population. Like if you google 'Asexual Activist UK', you get a little snippet all about you at the top of the searches. But you know, you are sort of the person, the people. Do you do you ever think, oh, I you know, I would just quite like to take a step back from the limelight for a bit and just, you know, just not be that person.

Yasmin

00:34:28:22

Um, I mean, I feel like the complicated thing is that I know that, like, if I don't do it, it literally won't get done. So I kind of have, like, no choice in a sense. Like, you know, not like it's like terrible. But if I ever was, like, not in the mood to do it, it doesn't matter because someone has to do it. And I know based on, you know, what the media is like and you know, just how like the, the kind of seen in the industry works, like if you're going to make it difficult for them, they're just not going to do it. Like they didn't care about asexuality that much, that they're going to go through some big research and trying to find alternatives. And like if I say, oh, I don't want to do that interview or I don't, then I'm just going to not cover asexuality. And then that will be counterproductive for the whole community. And then people will be like, Yasmin, like, why don't you do the thing? So I kind of have no choice but to do it. So that is, uh, one of the downsides. And also there's like no kind of blueprint for it. So I am effectively just winging it because I can't exactly go, oh, this is how someone else did it in the past. So I'll just do it kind of like that, or there's all these people, so I'll just copy them. Like, I just kind of have to guess how it's supposed to go.

Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Yasmin Benoit

Liam

00:35:35:13

But I suppose in some ways that's very, um, enlightening for you because you are kind of the history maker. You're the one that's kind of setting the precedent there, really. And that must be a very uplifting thing, I imagine.

Yasmin

00:35:46:16

I mean, it's nice to be able to kind of control the narrative when you're traditionally the kind of person that wouldn't be included in it. Like, I think it's in the future. I think it will be probably a good thing where people will be able to look back and be like, okay, well, what did the what was kind of like the start of asexual activism or the movement or the community and be able to, like, visibly and undeniably say that there was a black woman that was like, you know, actively part of it, although, you know, history does tend to conveniently forget those details. So hopefully people won't. But, you know, I think that it is helpful for, you know, a community at this stage to kind of have a more diverse approach from the beginning. And as someone who, as I mentioned, dipped my toes in the community as a teenager, quickly saw that I did not really fit and dipped back out and then kind of just live sort of in the closet for ages and didn't mention it. It's quite ironic, but also quite full circle that now people know me for talking about it and associate me with the one thing that no one associated me with for most of my life, despite my best efforts. So. In that sense, it's quite satisfying that it actually worked out in the end, and people did believe me eventually.

Liam

00:37:00:07

You mentioned, um, coming out there, and it made me think, actually, I don't know if this was your experience, of course. But for instance, anyone that comes out as bi, they probably when they first come out, people probably assume, oh, they're going through a phase. It's just a phase. And I kind of wondered, was that a similar thing for you in that, you know, when when you kind of came out and told people that you're asexual, did people just think, oh, okay, that that's fine for now, but maybe in years to come, you know, that it will have just been a phase.

Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Yasmin Benoit

Yasmin

00:37:33:10

Yeah. People. Well, people assumed literally everything aside from what I was talking about, like, asexuality was, like, not the thing that anyone was believing. They would believe that I must be traumatised or confused or ill, or hiding some kind of secret perversion. Before they believed that I was asexual, like every other explanation made more sense than asexuality, but definitely the idea that it was just, you know, it just hadn't kicked in for me yet. Or, you know, I haven't found the right person that's going to unlock my real sexuality because asexuality can't be your real sexuality, apparently. Like that was definitely an assumption. Or that I'm just like, putting myself down and limiting myself out of fear of, like, rejection or something.

Liam

00:38:18:24

I guess from that. You must come against a kind of hyper masculinity at times for you. Like you say, for instance, you know, the that you've you've kind of told people that that you're asexual. And do you find that men in particular that they can kind of react by you've not met the right man, you've not met that right person to to kind of, like you say, awaken your sexual sexual encounters.

Yasmin

00:38:42:01

Yeah. I always find it funny, like when straight guys say that to me because then I just, like, turn it around on them. And I was like, well, in that sense, I guess you just haven't found the right man to unlock your true sexual desires. If based on this theory, the right penis can literally change your sexual orientation. Presumably you could be gay next week if the right guy comes along. Or are we only applying this to me? So I did like to turn that around on them whenever they said that.

Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Yasmin Benoit

Liam

00:39:06:17

Wow, I totally agree. That was brilliant. Yeah, it's absolutely brilliant. So, um, you know, as we were saying that like, you know, looking ahead and, and where things are going, um, I guess you must feel a sense of pride as well in the, you know, the fact that where things have come a lot, there's, you know, a long way to go, of course, but, you know, to kind of get people much more aware of this thing. If you ask most people in society, they would probably know what asexuality is. You know, they would maybe be able to define it, at least in a, in a small way.

Yasmin

00:39:44:15

Yeah, I mean, it's it's hard because it's like, again, you kind of end up comparing it to, you know, homosexuality or these things that have been like researched and known about and kind of obvious in society because asexuality, you can really go under the radar with this one. Whereas, you know, if you're gay, there's going to be something that's going to make someone probably notice if you're, like, acting upon that. Um, so you kind of end up comparing yourself to that and being like, oh yeah, we're like way behind. But then at the same time it's like, you know, I guess we have managed to do a lot in a shorter time span as something that really wasn't part of the conversation not very long ago. I mean, 20 years feels like a long time for me because I'm 26, but I guess, like comparatively, like it's not that long. And to be, you know, having kind of conversations about like legislative protection at least, you know, for lots of places like that did take a lot longer. So while it feels super slow for me, um, when you're kind of doing it every day, I think that, you know, we are getting somewhere. I think there is more awareness and there's kind of conversations in the media and there's a small selection of characters. So, you know, there's books and there's things that are kind of coming out and helping to speed things up a little bit.

Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Yasmin Benoit

Liam

00:41:00:18

For anyone that is, you know, going through school or even not even not even school, maybe that, you know, they've been in a relationship for a long time and it hasn't felt right or whatever. And then they come to realise they're asexual. What would you do? What would you what advice would you give to anyone that's questioning their own sexuality and that they actually might be asexual?

Yasmin

00:41:23:04

Yeah. I mean, I think my main piece of advice would just be like, you know, you're fine. It's okay. Like, you can live like a perfectly fulfilling life while being asexual. Like we're kind of taught that, like, if you're, you know, not experiencing sexuality in a particular way, then you know, nobody's gonna love you, and everyone's gonna think you're weird, and, you know, you're not going to be able to experience, like, the full human experience. But, you know, you can. And also, like it's not essential to experience anything in a particular way. It's also not essential to label it necessarily, unless you find that useful, and it's not something that you need to worry about too much like there are. I think sometimes people, especially like young people, I get like, kids will message me sometimes and be like, oh, like they're really hung up on, like their label and their micro label and like how to talk about it. And I'm always like, you know, like there are so many other aspects of your personality that are so important to, like, give all this attention to, like, don't put all your eggs in like that one basket, because I tend to find that when you also just develop all these other aspects of your character, it makes you a lot more confident and see that like, you know, being asexual is not a big deal. Um, when you've kind of gained that confidence in other aspects of your life. So I always encourage other people to do that.

Liam

00:42:45:15

Let's just chat about modelling. I mean, tell us about how you got into that?

Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Yasmin Benoit

Yasmin

00:42:51:02

Yeah. So I, um, I think I kind of did like my first shoot when I was like 16. I sort of ended up on, like, a kind of kiddie modelling agency, but was kind of very quickly ageing out of that because, like, I was already not really looking like a kid that much. Um, but my interest in modelling mainly came from. I guess, one; I'm an only child who had like, exhausted every other feasible hobby imaginable by the time I was a teenager. Like you name it swimming, football, gymnastics, karate, archery, dancing, like everything. I'd already done it and like nothing had really stuck. Um, and also, I kind of was spending kind of more time online, and I kind of liked the, the kind of vibe of, like, weird looking models, like I was looking at, like the tattooed models and like the kind of alternative ones. And I very much thought that I was quite an unusual looking person. So I thought that I would be a good, like, weird model. So that was kind of like my interest. And also because, like, I was very much part of like alternative subculture and I'm a huge heavy metal fan, and I kind of wanted to bring a bit more diversity to that space in particular. Um, but then it just kind of ended up branching out into, I guess, more of the lingerie area because I'm five six with D cups, so I'm not going to be on a couture runway anytime soon, and then kind of into just kind of, you know, more editorial and wider things. And yeah, it's been like a good way to kind of, you know, build my confidence and get creative and kind of you get to like kind of live a different fantasy for a short period of time. You get to kind of transform into something else and fit what's either your vision or whatever, like the photographer's vision is. And it's like acting, but without the talent. So it's it's fun.

Dougie

00:44:38:21

Would you say there was a point at which you sort of transitioned from being a model to being an asexual model? Like, I feel like it's kind of a big part of what you do now. But was it was that the case of 16? I guess I guess not.

Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Yasmin Benoit

Yasmin

00:44:51:18

No, I think it wasn't until like, I mean, I guess it depends. It's like, I feel like maybe I'd have to ask someone else and be like, when did when did other people start thinking of me as that? Because I even now I don't think of myself as the asexual model. I'm just a model who's also asexual and also does activism. But there are so many aspects of my modelling which are like completely separate, like when you're picked to do a job, they don't care what your sexual orientation is, they don't even care what you have to say. Like it's just about what you look like and whether you fit the brief. They could care less about what you do in your personal life. Um, so in some ways, it still continues to be very separate. But I know that, you know, the second the image goes out there into the world and people know what my sexual orientation is and what my activism is, then it becomes part of one thing. And people take the modelling as being a statement about my sexuality, and then it'll kind of becomes one thing. But I think, yeah, it probably wasn't until like 2018, 2019 when I feel like people were very much like, oh, that's the, you know, the asexual lingerie model, because that's kind of how people discussed it and not, strangely enough, what people found. So like provocative, um, about it. But I've been modelling, you know, for quite a while before that without people ever really noticing the asexual part.

Dougie

00:46:07:16

As I would say, over the last, maybe 20, 30 years, the trans movement, that trans activism has become-a lot more people are aware of it. And with that has come a lot of media pressure and a lot of, you know, if you're a trans person living in the UK, you experience the UK media. And the way the UK media talks about trans people is often quite challenging for trans people. Um, I was wondering, do you anticipate in terms of as more people become aware of asexuality and asexual activism, um, would you anticipate, um, similar problems with the media, or would you say that some of the problems go away because of the nature of asexuality?

Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Yasmin Benoit

Yasmin

00:46:52:09

Honestly, I've always kind of used the trans community as like a cautionary tale because I feel I mean, like, again, comparatively to, you know, like homosexuality. I mean, you know, being trans, like, it's always existed. But I feel like in terms of, like mainstream conversation, it has been somewhat recent, like over the past, I would say ten years or so, that it's become like a debate topic. And I do feel like you can sort of compare that to, like, you know, some of those like early legislation about, you know, trans inclusion back in like the early 2000. And also the only existing asexual legislation was also in the early 2000. So people didn't really notice. And then, you know, so I feel like the kind of timeline trajectories are sort of similar. And that's why I was kind of very much focusing on the legislative protection part in this country, because I'm like, what comes after awareness probably isn't going to be good. Like I think that especially in the community, like everyone's so intent on making sure everybody knows about it. But I'm like, you do know that once that happens, it's not necessarily going to make your life that much easier, right? And the thing is, we also don't have any of that other recognition, which means that it's going to be very open season. And as someone who's, you know, a pretty easy target, I already see it. I've had people come up with conspiracy theories about my work with Stonewall, and there's a big overlap between like anti trans people and anti asexual people. Like I do think that even though it's something that shouldn't be very you think it's not like, hey, I'm not really having sex should not be the most provocative thing in the world, but people will find a way to make anything different and like, demonise it or make it some kind of dark conspiracy. So I do think that I do use the trans community as an example in that sense of like, that's one of the few where you can see it, like in my kind of like lifetime and be like, this is where the attitudes have kind of gone from. This has existed that people didn't really know to now people know, and now people are like visibly against it and see how the media can play a role in like creating a full moral panic about a community of people that's always been around and act like they're suddenly a danger now. So they weren't always around doing nothing. So yeah. So I

Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Yasmin Benoit

do think that in a different, probably in a slightly different way, but I do think the asexual community will have that at some point. And so that's why I'm like at this early stage in shaping that narrative, I'm trying to make sure that it's shaped in a way that will protect us moving forward.

Liam **00:49:19:13**

Amazing. Thank you so much for joining us on the ITV Pridecast. And yeah, all the very best for all that you're doing. And thank you for for raising the profile of, you know, asexual people, you know, and aromantic people because yeah, you're the one that's doing a lot of the hard work here. So yeah. Thank you so much.

Yasmin **00:49:36:00**

Thank you.

Liam **00:49:46:10**

Wow, Dougie. So our interview there with Yasmin. I mean, I feel very much like I've. I've learned something there, as I do in all of our podcasts especially. But, you know, that in particular was, um. Yeah, for a topic I don't really know much information on. I do feel much more knowledgeable about it now.

Dougie **00:50:04:14**

Yes. Yeah, I would say I feel the same. I just feel like I know so much more and it's only half an hour has passed. Um, so yes, incredibly worthwhile conversation. Really happy we were able to to invite Yasmin today.

Liam **00:50:16:17**

And incredible really to think like she's kind of the person that is the trailblazer for this really. She's, you know, leading the way and really, you know, really putting her head above the parapet in many ways. And, you know, you you see, from how she was discussing there of the kind of the abuse that she's received online, you know, that is not an easy thing to take when you're the person that's leading the way on things.

Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Yasmin Benoit

Dougie

00:50:39:15

Really. No, no, I can't begin to imagine what that's like. And it's funny because we're in LGBT- I say funny. It's interesting because we're in LGBT History Month, and a lot of LGBT History Month is about looking back to people who have done things in the past, the recent past, maybe the more distant past, but it feels like talking to Yasmin. She's going to be one of those people who, in 50 years in LGBT History Month, they look back on and say, oh, you know, she started something big in terms of asexuality awareness and and just for the asexuality movement in general. So it was kind of it was really interesting actually looking at it almost through the kind of backward lens of that, if that makes sense.

Liam

00:51:19:11

Yeah. No, I, I can totally appreciate what you're saying there because it is, um, you feel like you're witnessing history before you really before it's even properly happened. And she's the one that's leading the way on that. Exactly, exactly. I think one of the things that really kind of made me stop and think as well was the intersectionality that she is facing. Um, you know, I think as she was discussing there, a lot of the asexual narrative which has been written, not much of it, of course, meant a lot of it has been done by those who are white people. And, you know, there is a whole community that out there that identify as asexual that haven't really got a voice yet. And, and that's so important for her to be that, you know, that visible individual there for people to have a sense of, you know, connection, really.

Dougie

00:52:10:01

Yes. No, I agree, it's like that saying I never know who said it first, but you can't be who you don't see. And I feel like if I were an asexual person in the UK, I would see Yasmin and that would be very impactful.

Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Yasmin Benoit

Liam

00:52:24:11

Mhm. Yeah, indeed. Um, so following on from this podcast, of course, you as we discussed at the start, you're busy with ITV and everything. What's on the horizon now then what's the year looking like ahead for ITV?

Dougie

00:52:41:00

I mean it's funny isn't it, because we're transitioning from this world where we had this big deadline, big thing to deliver and get into people's homes. Um, and now it's more, what do we do next? You know, we're not going to release ITV again. So it's about, you know, we've got great new content landing every week. Um, we're taking lots of feedback from users. Lots of it's very positive. But there are also things, you know, that people want, which we understand. So it's about getting that feedback in and beginning just continuing to make it a better experience for people, um, and keep people coming back and, you know, and getting great content.

Liam

00:53:14:11

Yeah. Exciting time. Really. And, uh, yeah, it must be, uh, you know, the sense of, uh, real fresh thinking and lots going on. So, uh, yeah, I imagine it must be great to to work with, uh, all your colleagues on this, uh, exciting time.

Dougie

00:53:29:01

Oh, yes. Yeah, yeah. And and that hyper yellow colour is so, so vivid. It just really stands out, you know, and.

Liam

00:53:35:04

As we've discussed the, you know, we're very lucky at ITV in that we've all been given an ITV X hoodie and they are so comfortable that I've seen many colleagues wearing them even in, in our newsroom where I work. So yeah, it's good to see that the branding is doing well.

Dougie

00:53:49:19

Yeah, super. Well, I think they've run out of hoodies actually.

Clip: ITV Pridecast w/ Yasmin Benoit

Liam **00:53:52:00**

Wow. Oh, there we go. Well, Dougie, thank you so, so much for joining me on the podcast. Um, you committed earlier on to saying that, uh, Secular Buddhism and Sceptical Atheists would be coming back for a third series and there would be merchandise. So we will hold you to that.

Dougie **00:54:10:04**

Yes, yes. Thank you. Yeah. I mean, I think we'd have plenty to talk about. Um, so watch this space.

Liam **00:54:15:23**

Watch this space. And as you mentioned, uh, yeah, the merchandise is going to be available to order, uh, from all reputable sources.

Dougie **00:54:23:11**

Yes, it will, it will.

Liam **00:54:26:11**

Uh, well, thank you so much again, Dougie. And, yeah, I'm so glad we finally got to get this recording underway.

Dougie **00:54:32:16**

Yes, it's been really fun. Thank you very much for having me.

Liam **00:54:39:11**

Well, thank you so much there to Yasmin Benoit for chatting to me and Dougie and telling us so much about asexuality and aromanticism and information and support on asexuality and a romanticism will be available in this episode show notes and a reminder if you're part of the LGBTQ+ community and work for ITV, why not join the ITV Pride network if you haven't done so already? Thanks again for listening to this edition of the ITV Pridecast. I hope you can tune in for the next episode.