

## M4C Collaborative Doctoral Award

<b>Project Title</b>				
The Myth of Inclusivity: exploring barriers to representation in stand-up comedy through Leicester Comedy Festival's archive (1994-)				
<b>LEAD INSTITUTION</b>				
Name of HEI institution	De Montfort University			
Lead regional city	Birmingham <input type="checkbox"/>	Coventry <input type="checkbox"/>	Leicester <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Nottingham <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>PARTNER ORGANISATION</b>				
Name of organisation	Leicester Comedy Festival			
Website URL	<a href="https://comedy-festival.co.uk/">https://comedy-festival.co.uk/</a>			
<b>THE RESEARCH PROJECT</b>				
<p>Working in the Leicester Comedy Festival's archive, this PhD will identify barriers to and opportunities for fringe-style festivals to overcome the comedy sector's 'powerful myth of inclusivity' (Gill 2014). In collaboration with the festival the student will research structural changes as the basis for a new model to overcome inequalities. Exploring the festival's recently donated archive, this project asks how LCF's organisational context influences the variety or otherwise of its performance and performances. Evidence indicates gender and racial inequalities still exist. In 2020 only 34 per cent of LCF's solo comedians were women. There is no data available regarding comedians of colour or dis/ability, a gap this research proposes to fill.</p> <p>Situated within cultural studies, this proposal draws on comedy and festival studies to investigate how a comedy festival's backstage processes condition the cultures produced on-stage (Grabher 2021). While comedy's ability to critique social life is well studied (e.g Billig 2005), this proposal argues the interplay between production process and who gets onto stage controls which stories we hear. Who is present during curation shapes who is allowed to perform (Brook et al 2021). Informed by fundamental cultural production concepts that examine links between environments, identity and representation (Bourdieu 1993, Hall 1997), the proposal asks how 'foundationally unequal' (Banks 2017) contexts influence comedic performance identities (Gilbert 1997, Hengen 1998, Lockyer, 2015).</p> <p>This proposal draws on comedy and festival studies to ask, in preparation for the festival's 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the relationship between modes of curation and stand-up comedy performance's ability to articulate a rhetoric of social change?</li> <li>• How does festival's temporary disruption of social life facilitate social, cultural and structural changes within live comedy?</li> </ul>				

- What new models of curation and production can be introduced to remove barriers and to broaden opportunities for wider representation?

The proposal is prompted by three factors. The festival donating its archive to DMU in 2021; the Black Lives Matter and MeToo campaigns of 2020 illustrating an impetus to change the structural forces in society that cause inequalities; and the Covid-19 pandemic which has caused a reappraisal of the cultural funding system, meaning there is now an opportunity for live comedy to be incorporated as a respected art form. Research that critically evaluates comedy's cultural and social impacts and provides a framework for understanding where structural barriers to equalities lie and to suggest future strategies is urgently needed.

Collaborating with LCF and using its archives provides a unique opportunity to analyse the on-going 'unspeakable' influences with the comedy industry. Through collaboration with LCF staff, the PhD candidate will critically analyse curation practices in real-time to identify and theorise a best practices framework, as the basis for a toolkit that stands to impact upon the wider comedy festival and festival industries.

The student will undertake ethnographic annual placements at LCF in 2023, 2024 and 2025. They will interview stakeholders, including staff, comedians, producers and industry sources, rooting the research in theories of cultural production and performance identity. The project culminates with an exhibition at DMU's Heritage Centre and a best practice guide for the sector. The exhibition will present performances, photographs and publicity material contextualised through the academic framework of representation within cultural production. The exhibition will be documented and, with the framework, will enter the archive.

The PhD will be supervised by Dr Louise Peacock and Dr Jennie Jordan.

Louise Peacock has been working in comedy studies since 2009. In 2011 she co-edited a special issue of the *Journal of Comedy Studies* 'Analysing Stand-up Comedy'. In 2020 she edited 'A Cultural History of Comedy: Volume 6 The Modern Age' and has experience of archival research to analyse comedy performance. Louise has strong networks within comedy studies and contributed to several Playing for Laughs conferences at DMU and has since presented at panels within the Leicester Comedy Festival, most recently in 2020 and 2021. As an Associate Researcher of the Centre for Comedy Studies Research, Brunel University, Louise ensures a connection to the research network of comedy studies.

Jennie Jordan began researching festivals in 2004. She co-edited two foundational festival studies collections, *Focus on Festivals* (2015) and *Focus on World Festivals* (2016) and has published on festivals' roles in shaping cultures and influencing diversity and inclusion backstage and onstage. She is currently working with BA/Leverhulme fellow Dr Claire Sedgwick studying barriers to women's participation in comedy. She has worked with LCF since 1996, in various guises and her knowledge of and connections to the festival sector and LCF underpin this PhD collaboration.

#### HOW TO FIND OUT MORE

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