# Russell Tovey reflects on queer freedom amid AIDS crisis scars and rising transphobia



Russell Tovey has recently expressed a profound envy for younger queer individuals, highlighting a significant cultural shift in the relationship between sexuality and mortality. Tovey, best known for his role in Alan Bennett’s critically acclaimed production *The History Boys*, emerged as a queer voice during the latter stages of the AIDS crisis, a time marked by societal stigma and legislation that deeply affected those navigating their identities.

In an interview with *The i Paper*, Tovey reflected on the restrictive atmosphere fostered by Section 28, a controversial piece of legislation enacted by Margaret Thatcher’s Conservative government in 1988. This law banned discussions of same-sex relationships in educational institutions and prevented local governments from disseminating LGBTQ+ literature. The impact of Section 28 was severe, instilling a sense of shame and internalised homophobia in many of those who grew up during that era. Tovey articulated his anguish, noting that coming of age during the AIDS crisis meant he constantly associated sex with death, an experience that starkly contrasted with the lives of contemporary queer youth. “To have a generation that doesn’t even consider death around sex blows my mind,” he remarked.

This historical context is essential in understanding Tovey's sentiments. The legacy of the AIDS epidemic continues to resonate within the LGBTQ+ community, shaping perceptions of love, intimacy, and vulnerability. Tovey's experiences mirror those of many in his generation who were confronted with a pandemic that left indelible scars—physically and psychologically. Speaking to the *Pink News*, Tovey has described how the pervasive fear of AIDS during his formative years led to a complicated relationship with mortality, asserting the necessity of confronting these past traumas to foster healthier discussions around sexuality.

Moreover, Tovey’s reflections occur against a backdrop of ongoing struggles facing the queer community today. While there has been notable progress since the repeal of Section 28 in 2003, stark prejudices remain, particularly against transgender individuals. Tovey noted that while homophobia seems less overt in some respects, the rise in transphobia represents a troubling evolution of societal attitudes. The recent Supreme Court ruling in the UK, which determined that trans women are not legally recognised as women under the Equality Act, has drawn widespread criticism from organisations such as Amnesty International, which described the decision as "disappointing" and "concerning."

Tovey's comments resonate with those of fellow queer luminary Russell T Davies, who, at the Gaydio Pride awards, expressed grave concerns about the increasing hostility towards the LGBTQ+ community, especially in the wake of political changes within the United States. Davies warned of a societal wave of anger and violence that threatens to engulf queer individuals, highlighting the precariousness of the gains made thus far.

Despite the stark realities of discrimination and violence that still pervade society, Tovey remains hopeful. Recalling Derek Jarman’s assertion that "the world moves in circles," he emphasised that change is possible and that one must hold onto the belief that acceptance and understanding will inevitably return. However, Tovey also candidly acknowledged the current climate, calling it “f**\***g horrible” but underscoring the need for persistence in the face of adversity.

In a world that continues to grapple with issues of identity and acceptance, Tovey’s reflections serve as both a lament for the scars of the past and a celebration of the freedoms that younger generations now enjoy. As the dialogue around sexuality evolves, the importance of historical context and the legacies of trauma remain crucial in shaping both understanding and acceptance within society.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraphs 1, 3, 4, 5
2. Paragraph 3
3. Paragraphs 2, 4
4. Paragraphs 2, 3
5. Paragraph 5
6. Paragraph 5
7. Paragraph 6

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/russell-tovey-queer-sex-death-section-28-b2748088.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/tv/features/russell-tovey-interview-the-sister-itv-history-boys-sexuality-b1158285.html> - In this interview, Russell Tovey discusses his experiences growing up as a gay man during the era of Section 28, the UK legislation that prohibited the promotion of homosexuality in schools. He reflects on the challenges faced by his generation and expresses admiration for the progress made by younger queer individuals who can now openly express their identities without fear of discrimination.
3. <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2021/aug/12/russell-tovey-constellations-section-28> - Russell Tovey shares his perspective on the lasting impact of Section 28 on his generation. He describes how the legislation instilled a sense of shame and internalized homophobia, affecting the mental health and self-perception of many queer individuals. Tovey also highlights the contrast with today's more accepting environment, where younger people can explore and express their sexual identities more freely.
4. <https://www.thepinknews.com/2023/05/04/russell-tovey-aids-crisis-death/> - Russell Tovey opens up about the profound impact of the AIDS crisis on his perception of death and sexuality. He recounts how the constant association of sex with death during his coming-of-age years led to a painful relationship with mortality. Tovey emphasizes the importance of addressing these historical traumas to foster a healthier understanding of sexuality and life.
5. <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2021/jan/03/russell-t-davies-i-looked-away-for-years-finally-i-have-put-aids-at-the-centre-of-a-drama> - Russell T Davies discusses his decision to center the AIDS crisis in his drama, reflecting on the historical reluctance to address the epidemic in media. He acknowledges the stigma and fear that surrounded AIDS in the 1980s and how it influenced the portrayal of queer narratives. Davies highlights the importance of confronting these issues to honor the experiences of those affected.
6. <https://www.wmagazine.com/culture/russell-tovey-life-is-excellent-documentary-david-robilliard-interview> - In this interview, Russell Tovey discusses his involvement in the documentary 'Life Is Excellent,' which explores the life and work of artist David Robilliard. Tovey reflects on the significance of queer art and its role in challenging societal norms. He also touches upon the impact of Section 28 on the queer community and the importance of reclaiming narratives.
7. <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/features/russell-tovey-interview-derek-jarman-blue-now-b2328943.html> - Russell Tovey reflects on his collaboration with director Neil Bartlett on the stage production 'Blue Now,' inspired by Derek Jarman's final film. He discusses the personal resonance of Jarman's work and the ongoing relevance of queer art in addressing themes of identity and mortality. Tovey also shares insights into his own journey of self-acceptance and the challenges of growing up queer during a less accepting era.