

# IN DA CLUB

Comedian Shazia Mirza has performed in private clubs all over the world. Here she recounts her experiences of performing to a select few

Featuring: Barack Obama. Las Vegas. Rice Krispies. Soho House. The Beatles.

I performed at a private members' club in Zurich once. It was full of very old people. It had the aroma of charity shops. You know how charity shops smell of dead women's clothes? That's how it was. I liked this club and I kept going back — not to perform there, but for the smell. It made me feel good to be alive.

Every club, gang or mob has its own smell. Soho House smells of "youth". I walked in and could see, feel and hear the youthful energy. It has nothing to do with age, it has to do with excitement, that feeling of going somewhere, accomplishing something. It's a great smell that you'll recognise if you sniff hard enough.

There's a club for everything. And there's that feeling that comes with belonging and association. You don't know that feeling of inclusion till you're included. It's how millions of black people must feel now that Obama is president. It's how millions of white people must have felt when UB40 were discovered. Obama winning the presidency makes you want to be black. My mum belongs to a club for Asian women aged over 60, called the 'Bored of your husband, but what's the point of leaving him now?' club. It's packed. They meet, swap jam and discuss how much they hate cricket. Apparently, there's a huge waiting list.

Clubs are a reflection of society. We gravitate towards the groups we want to be in, or the people we'd like to emulate. Some people feel safer in a group, and feel comfortable with like-minded people. When I was nine years old, I used to go to my local park where there was a bowls club. I was fascinated by these old people throwing big black balls around and sitting on the sidelines eating sandwiches. I couldn't be in that club — much as

I wanted to — probably because I didn't have blue veins popping out of my thighs, sported braces that kept up everything from my teeth to my trousers and actually thought bowls were what my Rice Krispies came in.

I remember hearing 'Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band' and thinking, "Wow, they even have a club for lonely people." But if they joined they wouldn't be lonely, so they wouldn't be allowed in the club, so would be kicked out but then they'd be lonely again and eligible to rejoin. Many of my childhood hours were spent puzzling over this club-related paradox.

I once overheard a neighbour talking about another neighbour who was "in the club". I asked if I could join, they just smiled at me and told me I'd have to wait a bit.

I really wanted to be in the Brownies. My mum wouldn't let me. She said all the girls in the Brownies were slags, and if I joined them then I'd probably turn out the worst. I didn't need to be a Brownie to behave like a tart.

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