

Clubs are generally safe places unless you're in the Mafia, then you always have to watch your back and check under your duvet. I have performed in many different kinds of clubs, and each place has presented a different reaction depending on the group of people.

I often perform at a private lesbian women's club in London called the Glassbar. It is a small austere building that looks like my dad's garden shed from the outside, but a mass of hysteria explodes from its tiny inside. There are only two rooms and one is a toilet.

No men are allowed in here at all. It really is a women's club. They have tough female bouncers on the door and the crowd is hardcore. They don't laugh at anything. You have to be really fucking funny here — these women have seen it all. If you're funny here you're funny everywhere. The audience sit there, arms crossed, but in a supportive way. If you're not funny, they'll roll their eyes so as to say, "Come on woman — you can do better!" This is the Army School of Comedy. Everyone here knows each other, and if a new woman arrives at the bar the others will always

talk to her and make her feel welcome. My first time performing here, I was really scared; now I see it as a privilege and a place for new material.

Certain people belong to certain clubs, because they have either got the money or the contacts or tick a certain box. What you then get is lots of people who have some things in common, such as the gentlemen's clubs of Mayfair, where everybody's got a double-barreled surname, a yacht and, maybe at the moment, suicidal tendencies.

I once performed at the Frontline Club in London. This is a club where a lot of the members are journalists who work on the frontline. I thought, "I bet they don't laugh at any of my jokes. I bet they just analyse them." I had ideas about them. My only experience of these kinds of journalists so far had been when I was touring in Sweden and was asked to go on a current-affairs programme. I was trying to talk about my stand-up show and crowbar jokes into the conversation when the woman just ignored me and said, "But who do you think did 9/11?" The people at the Frontline Club turned out to be great and were so desperate for a laugh that at the end a man said, "Do you mind if we have a Q&A? Don't worry you can answer the questions in a funny way."

I had to perform at The Cumberland Tennis Club in Hampstead recently. It's not just a tennis club; it's like Wimbledon, with the kind of facilities worthy of luminaries with letters after their names. It was the first time their club had had a comedy night, and it was packed. I was told most members were Jewish. They varied in age from 17 to 105 years old. The club had that wonderful club smell of pine bleach and friendship. It had a warm and old-fashioned club feel, where old Jewish men and young Jewish women tried to get each other into bed. They laughed at all my anal-sex jokes and supported me as a young Muslim woman trying to reign in the comedy world, which they quite clearly have owned since time began.

In America, belonging somewhere is all the rage and has been long before it was fashionable. I went to Las Vegas recently to do a TV show. NBC sent a driver to pick me up from the airport. The Americans are always very kind and hospitable and really make you feel at home.

I got in the van and the female driver said, "Hi! My name is Laura. How are you today?" I said, "Oh, fine thanks. How are you?" She said, "Oh not too good. I've got cystitis." I thought maybe this is the done thing. So I said "Oh, I understand. I've got thrush." Then she looked at me like I was really weird. I thought, "You started it! I haven't even got thrush; I only said it because you said you had cystitis!" Suddenly Laura and I were in it together — our little infections club. I realised that some clubs are better to be in than others. ●

W—Shazia Mirza |—Matthew Green

