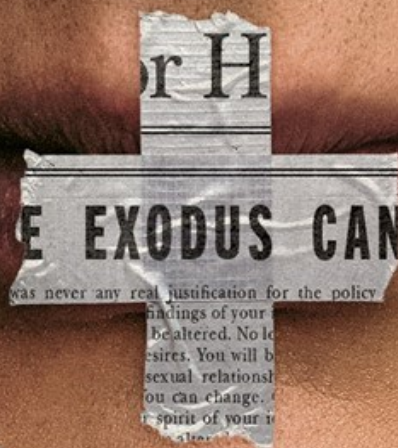


SEPTEMBER 2024 ISSUE 171

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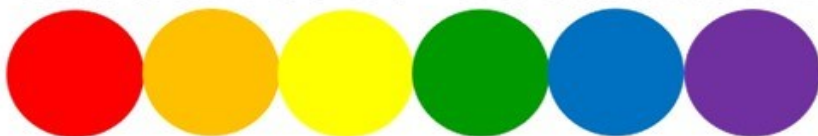
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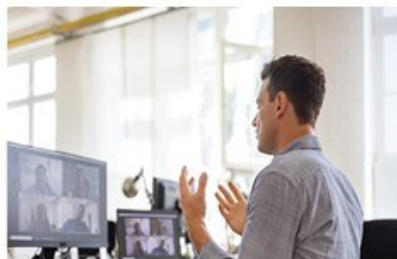
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Jax Gay Inc. is a Community Marketing and Events organization incorporating Jax Gay Magazine, Rainbow Events, and Drag Queen Aholic.

Our mission as a 502(c)3 non-profit is to promote North Florida and especially in Jacksonville, as a welcoming LGBTQ+ destination through marketing and events. Jax Gay produces many events a year, including Jax Equality Festival in Jacksonville. Other events include the Rainbow Awards Show, White Party, Big Gay Picnic, Taste of Pride and Red Party. Visit www.JaxGayMag.com for more information.

Jax Gay Inc. also plans to launch our Jax Event Center & LGBTQ+ Art Gallery in Fall of 2023.

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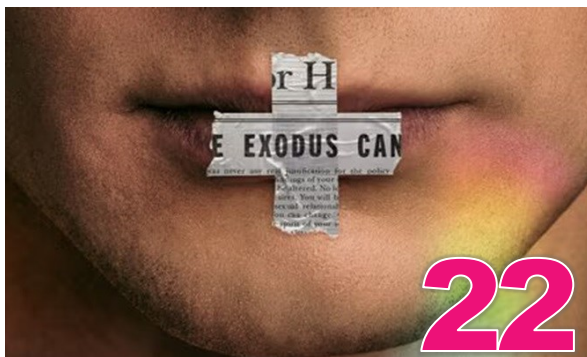
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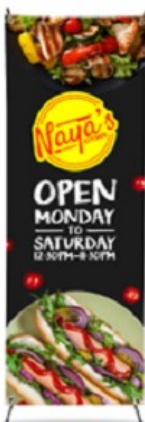
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News & Politics

Project 2025 Would Make Workplace Discrimination A Lot Easier

By Debi Massengill



Only some 40 percent of disabled people are employed. But even that low figure is buoyed by federal laws against employment discrimination—a target of Project 2025, the Heritage Foundation’s roadmap for a right-wing transformation of government by a second Trump White House.

A key institution for the just treatment of disabled workers is the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, which enforces federal bans on workplace discrimination. Viewed with distaste by many on the right since its founding through the 1964 Civil Rights Act, the EEOC obtained nearly \$4 million in 2023 for disabled workers subjected to employment discrimination under the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Discrimination plays a significant role, according to Stetson University College of Law professor Robyn Powell, in unemployment among disabled people, who experience it at a rate about double that of people without disabilities.

In response to substantiated complaints, the EEOC can sue companies for discrimination

on the basis of disability—among other categories, including race, gender, and age—and may reach a consent decree, where companies agree to changes in policy and practice, sometimes with financial settlements to the affected workers.

“Consent decrees occur when there is a big employer where we’re seeing systematic examples of discrimination,” Powell said. “If we can open up employment opportunities by tackling discrimination, it helps everyone.”

The decrees are quicker, cheaper, and sometimes more effective than lawsuits in combating workplace prejudice. But they have a notable enemy in the Heritage Foundation’s pet project.

Jonathan Berry, who was the chief counsel of Trump’s 2016 transition team and held multiple jobs in his administration, writes in Project 2025 that EEOC “should disclaim power to enter into consent decrees that require employer actions” not already explicitly required by law. Back in 2012, during the Obama administration, a Heritage Foundation employee testified

before Congress that federal agencies habitually abuse consent decrees—a viewpoint still clear in Project 2025.

“When we look at [Project 2025’s] specifics around the EEOC and consent decrees,” said Powell to, “we can see that they really are trying to attack and decimate disability rights.”

The EEOC and DOJ “have really been critical in protecting the rights of people with disabilities,” says Shira Wakschlag, general counsel and senior director of legal advocacy at The Arc, which serves people with developmental and intellectual disabilities. “Consent decrees are really critical in any kind of civil rights monitoring or systemic action.”

Anti-discrimination consent decrees tend to emphasize reform and accountability, with modest settlements compared to potential legal damages. In one representative case, a government contractor that did not provide accommodations to Deaf and hard-of-hearing employees, and that fired workers on medical leave, agreed to a \$1 million settlement with updates to

policies on medical leave, reasonable accommodation, and managerial training on the Americans with Disabilities Act, including five years' monitoring for compliance.

Other types of Justice Department consent decrees also come under attack in Project 2025. Wakschlag says that's very concerning for disability rights—federal consent decrees are used to fight the continuing institutionalization of disabled people, which violates both the ADA and the Supreme Court's Olmstead ruling.

Conservative attacks on consent decrees are not exactly new. "We've certainly seen pushes to either limit, restrict or get rid of consent decrees in agencies in prior administrations," Wakschlag says. The Trump administration, notably, put a near ban in place on consent decrees between the Department of Justice and police departments that aimed to address police brutality.

If the EEOC's ability to give consent decrees was diminished or ended, federal anti-discrimination legislation would be dramatically weak-

ened. The agency could still provide technical assistance—such as instruction on how the ADA protects employees and applicants with visual disabilities, diabetes, or epilepsy—but losing the power to push companies to commit to treat disabled workers better, and monitor their progress, will harm disabled workers and strip them of remedies.

"We would see a huge shift in power dynamics," Powell said, "where we would see that it would really tilt the balance of power more towards employers in these disability discrimination cases."

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OUT & HEALTH

Joel Kim Booster Just Proposed To His “Vacation Boyfriend”

By David Vandygriff



Writer and comedian Joel Kim Booster, best known for his gay take on Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*, proposed to his “vacation boyfriend” over Labor Day weekend and he said yes.

The pair met shortly after the pandemic in Puerto Vallarta, where they enjoyed a no-strings hook-up that neither man was prepared to pursue into romance, Booster says — until they did.

The Industry co-star, 36, popped the question along with a boxed gold band off the coast of Jeju Island, South Korea, Booster’s ancestral home. His soon-to-be husband, video game producer John-Michael Sudsina, agreed to the proposal.

The LTR wasn’t inevitable, in Booster’s telling. Neither man professed interest in the other beyond the pleasures of a weekend hook-up. “We both had very much the vibe of like,

‘We know how these weekends work,’”

Booster told Jesse Tyler Ferguson on his podcast *Dinner’s on Me*. “You don’t have to continue to talk to me. You can find your next conquest. I’m not going to glom onto you. You’re not going to glom onto me.’ And he was very, again, like, you know, ‘This is not going to be a relationship.’ And I said, ‘That’s fine.’ Meanwhile, I’m talking about him on every podcast that I go on.”

Booster’s Q jumped in 2022 with the release of *Fire Island*, his retelling of Austen’s satiric and affecting critique of social status in 19th century England’s upper classes, now transported to the iconic gay summer enclave. He’s written and produced for *Big Mouth* and *The Other Two*, and appeared in *Shrill*, *Search Party* and *Sunnyside*.

Sudsina is a principal creative producer for *Valorant* and

League of Legends from video game developer and publisher *Riots Games*, based in Los Angeles.

While Booster is looking forward to the nuptials — a date has yet to be announced — he’s contending with at least one family member who requires special handling: his mom.

“She changes the subject a little bit,” Booster said in his Ferguson interview. “I think she loves him, and loves that I’m happy, and I think like, the Republican conservative in her is like, ‘Maybe that’s a step too far.’ It’s like, I don’t know if she would be at our wedding or not. And again, I don’t need her to, and it doesn’t hurt me.”

For now, Booster is basking in engagement bliss.

“Very much in love. Very happy,” he posted to Insta about his fiancé. “No matter where I am, he’s my home.”

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Science & Technology

Apple Reveals Launch Date To Unveil New iPhones With AI Features

By Greg Wilson

Apple will host its fall event on Sept. 9 at its headquarters in Cupertino, Calif., according to an invite on Monday, where it will likely unveil a series of new iPhones and updates to other devices and apps.

The upcoming launches are crucial for Apple as it looks to reverse a global sales slowdown, particularly in China, and lay out its artificial intelligence roadmap.

At its developers conference in June, Apple announced a slew of AI features under the umbrella “Apple Intelligence,” including a revamped Siri and an integration with ChatGPT.

However, these features will be available only on the latest Apple devices and will be rolled out gradually starting later this year.

Apple faces increasing pressure from competitors such as Samsung and Alphabet’s Google, who have recently announced AI functionality alongside their new Galaxy and Pixel smartphones, respectively.

While Apple’s event invite teases “It’s Glowtime,” no further details have been provided. The company typically announces new iPhones and watches at the fall

event, its biggest product showcase every year.

In recent years, iPhone sales have slowed due to a lack of significant upgrades in newer models and competition from Android-based smartphone brands offering high-end specifications at lower prices.

Apple has said its third-quarter sales were better than expected on the back of iPhone 15, its latest series, which is set to receive the new AI features. Overall sales in China dropped more than expected at 6.5%, pressured by Chinese smartphone brands, chiefly Huawei.



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Religion & Faith

Liberating Word

By Rev. Dr. Michael Piazza



Florida held its primary election on Tuesday. In our area, people mostly were voting for judges and school board members, though a few state legislators had challengers. Our church has long been a polling place, and, generally, I think it is a good thing to invite people from the area into the building for whatever reason. My hope, of course, is they will come back on a Sunday for worship, or at least volunteer with one of our many missions.

This week, however, I've been rethinking that strategy. After the church office closed around 3 p.m., it seems election officials received a complaint about us. The first concern was we have a sign next to the entrance saying, "All Are Welcome Here." I'm not sure if they resented the sentiment or if it was the rainbow flag on which it's printed they didn't appreciate. I suspect the latter because their other complaint was our two Little Free Libraries include banned books. We have signs on them declaring, "Ban Hate Not Books."

In response to one voter's complaint, the office of the supervisor of elections
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consulted with the city attorney who, reportedly, told them to remove the signs, which they did. When I learned about this the next day, I was outraged they would deface church property. They had our cell numbers and could have called to ask, though we wouldn't have given them permission to remove the signs. Their argument was banning books is a "political issue," and school board members were on the ballot.

In my rather terse email to the supervisor of elections, who I understand is a good guy, I asked if they also would remove pro-life information in a Catholic church; after all, some of the candidates might be pro-choice. Would they take down crosses and crucifixes because some of the candidates might be atheists, Muslims, or Jews? Were they going to make the Baptists remove signs saying, "Jesus is the only way to be saved"?

My understanding is they use our buildings as they are. The signs they removed are expressions of this congregation's values and were up long before the election. I also asked if this was because our values differ from

the current political leadership in our former Confederate state.

Putting the signs back was no big deal, but it was the principle for me. Someone found our values offensive, so they violated our property. This will not go down without a fight because, to save our faith from Christian Nationalism and our nation from fascism, we must mobilize and resist. We can't afford to be demure.



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ART AND ENTERTAINMENT

'The Apprentice' Film About Trump Will Open Before Election

By Melinda Alsop



A film focused on former President Trump, titled "The Apprentice," is set to open in the U.S. prior to Election Day.

According to The Associated Press, the film is getting an Oct. 11 U.S. and Canadian release via Briarcliff Entertainment.

"Soooo excited to show the movie to its home audience!!! America here we come," the film's director, Ali Abbasi, said Friday in a post on social platform X.

Steven Cheung, communications director for the Trump campaign, called the movie "pure fiction which sensationalizes lies that have been long debunked" in a statement on Friday.

"This 'film' is pure malicious

defamation, should never see the light of day, and doesn't even deserve a place in the straight-to-DVD section of a bargain bin at a soon-to-be-closed discount movie store, it belongs in a dumpster fire," Cheung said.

Back in May, a lawyer for Trump sent a cease-and-desist letter to the filmmakers behind "The Apprentice," which stars "Captain America: The Winter Soldier" star Sebastian Stan as a younger Trump and "Succession" actor Jeremy Strong as infamous defense attorney Roy Cohn. Trump's team sought to block the film's release and threatened a lawsuit.

"The Movie presents itself as a factual biography of Mr. Trump, yet nothing could be further

from the truth," according to the letter Trump attorney David Warrington sent to Abbasi and screenwriter Gabriel Sherman.

"It is a concoction of lies that repeatedly defames President Trump and constitutes direct foreign interference in America's elections," the letter said. "If you do not immediately cease and desist all distribution and marketing of this libelous farce, we will be forced to pursue all appropriate legal remedies."

In a previous statement to Variety, the film's producers called it "a fair and balanced portrait of the former president."

"We want everyone to see it and then decide," they said.

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OUT & HEALTH

World-First Lung Cancer Vaccine As Human Trials Begin

By Kelly Harrington

The world's first lung cancer vaccination trials have begun in the United Kingdom.

Janusz Racz, a 67-year-old lung cancer patient, is the first to receive this groundbreaking vaccine. He is part of a clinical trial that is taking place across multiple countries.

BioNTech, a German biotechnology firm, has developed this mRNA-based vaccine dubbed BNT116. The vaccine works by activating the immune system, which then recognizes and combats cancer cells.

"We are now entering this very exciting new era of mRNA-based immunotherapy clinical trials to investigate the treatment of lung cancer," said Siow Ming Lee, consultant medical oncologist from University College London Hospitals (UCLH), who leads the national study.

Lee added: "Lung cancer remains the leading cause of cancer deaths worldwide, with an estimated 1.8 million deaths in 2020."

mRNA Based-Vaccine

This experimental cancer immunotherapy is designed for the treatment of non-small cell lung cancer (NSCLC). NSCLC is the most prevalent type of lung cancer.

It uses messenger RNA to expose the patient's immune system to NSCLC-associated tumor markers. This allows the immune system to identify and attack cancer cells that carry these markers.

Over several weeks, the patients will receive numerous jabs, each with a unique RNA sequence.

The experimental vaccine is specifically designed to boost immune responses against targets primarily found on cancer cells, thereby minimizing the risk of harm to healthy, non-cancerous cells. This differs from chemotherapy, which often damages both malignant and healthy cells.

"The strength of the approach we are taking is that the



treatment is aimed at being highly targeted towards cancer cells. In this way we hope that in time we are able to show that the treatment is effective against lung cancer whilst leaving other tissues untouched," said UCLH consultant medical oncologist Dr Sarah Benafif.

This initial trial will establish the safety and tolerability of BNT116. The trial will enroll patients with NSCLC at various stages, from early-stage before surgery or radiotherapy, to late-stage disease or recurrent cancer.

130 Patients To Take Part

The study will enroll approximately 130 participants across 34 research sites in seven countries, six of which are in the United Kingdom. The other countries include the US, Germany, Hungary, Poland, Spain, and Turkey.

Racz, the trial's first patient, received his diagnosis in May and began chemotherapy and radiation therapy immediately after.



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Life and Style



New Data Shows Gay & Lesbian Couples Don't Live In The Same Places

By James Rutherford

New data from the 2020 U.S. Census reveals where same-sex male and female couples are living in states across the country, and it's not always in the same places.

While both male and female coupled households were often found in and around the main population centers of each state, coupled women gravitate toward smaller towns on average compared to coupled men, who reside in larger numbers than women in the country's biggest cities, all with larger LGBTQ+ populations.

According to figures broken down by study authors Amara Jones-Myers and Lydia Anderson, female same-sex couples made up just under one percent of U.S. coupled households in 2020, with the number of male same-sex couples coming in at 0.8%.

County-level maps show higher percentages of both types of same-sex couples in Florida, the Northeast, and on the West

Coast. Counties in those areas also had the highest number of same-sex couples and counties with the highest percentage of same-sex coupled households, the data revealed.

The top ten counties with the most same-sex couples overall were Los Angeles County; New York County (New York City); Cook County (home to Chicago); San Francisco County; Maricopa County (Phoenix); Broward County (Ft. Lauderdale); Harris County (Houston); King County (Seattle); Riverside County, California (Palm Springs); and San Diego County.

The list of top counties for women couples includes Kings County, New York (Brooklyn); Alameda County, California (Oakland and Berkeley); Clark County, Nevada (Las Vegas); and Bexar County, Texas (San Antonio).

Male couples dominated the list in New York, San

Francisco, Broward County (Ft. Lauderdale), and Riverside County, California (Palm Springs).

Among counties with the largest share of same-sex couples among all couples, men made up 5.9% in San Francisco. For women, the largest share of same-sex couples was found in Hampshire, Massachusetts, in the Berkshires, where 3.9 percent of all couples were female-female. For women couples, Multnomah County, Oregon, (Portland) was the runner-up with 2.8% of all couples. For men, Washington, D.C., ranked second with 5.7 percent of all couples.

Amy Stone, a sociology professor at Trinity University in San Antonio, said the data reveal where male and female couples feel most at ease, from smaller university towns like Hampshire or urban settings with more LGBTQ+ people like San Francisco and New York.



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"It's where people feel safe living or where they find support. Where gay couples feel safe and where female couples feel safe isn't always the same place," Stone told the Associated Press.

The U.S. Census currently does not track total LGBTQ+ populations in the U.S.; the survey only captures LGBTQ+ data if the respondents are living together as spouses or partners. It's estimated that same-sex couples represent about one-sixth of all LGBTQ+ people in the U.S. Those who are single or aren't cohabitating, as well as LGBTQ+ people in opposite-sex relationships, don't show up in the numbers.

The Census Bureau says it plans to add questions about sexual orientation and gender identity for people ages 15 and older to its annual American Community Survey, the agency's most comprehensive look at American life in addition to the traditional census.

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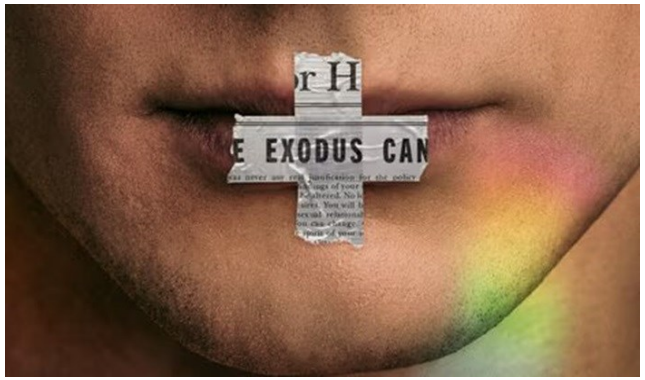
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Praying The Gay Away Didn't Work, But Loving Myself Did

By Jonathan Thomas Maiocco



Growing up in Marietta, Georgia, my family belonged to the Southern Baptist fundamentalist church. We went to church every Sunday morning and Wednesday night. The Bible and the surrounding religious community shaped my identity. Christianity, God, Jesus, and the church were always very important to me. I read my Bible every day and prayed constantly. I took religion very seriously, and anything else felt secondary.

In middle and high school, I attended a private Christian school. While I was there, there was a student who got kicked out for being gay. At the time, I suspected I was gay but wasn't sure. After the student was kicked out, I was certain that being gay was dangerous because it meant losing everything.

I didn't have anyone to talk to about what I was experiencing. I couldn't talk to my parents, my siblings, or anyone at church about being gay. I lived most of my childhood and teenage years stuck in my head. Being told

that gay was vile, disgusting, and perverted led to a toxic self-image that nearly killed me.

I wanted more than anything in the world not to be gay. I tried dating girls; I tried changing the clothes I wore; I changed my voice and tried to talk "straight"; I changed the way I walked. I even stopped creating music because I was afraid that being creative made me look gay. And I tried to pray the gay away constantly.

Religious leaders said that being gay is a choice and that if gay people wanted to, they could change. They pointed to conversion therapies, such as Exodus International, Love Won Out, and so many other organizations making outlandish promises with no evidence. But I still believed them.

I tried to change and reject this part of me, but I began to experience crippling anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation. I would wake up every morning and think, "Shit. Another day." I would look in the mirror and hate what I

saw. I would pray earnestly, begging God to listen to me, to take this thing away from me. I hated myself because I was taught to hate myself.

I knew I needed a change because I couldn't keep going. So, I made some radical life changes. I started going to therapy and doing research for answers to what the church said about being gay. I quickly learned that I wasn't the only queer person who experienced crippling anxiety, depression, and self-loathing when trying to change.

I started meeting other gay Christians and realized that there are many others; a conference I went to included thousands of other queer Christians going through similar experiences. I wasn't alone.

I started feeling more comfortable in my skin and started dating. I decided to come out to my family, my close friends, and people at the church I went to. And that's when my life fell apart. I lost housing. I lost my job at the church. I lost so many friends. I lost my sense of

belonging. It was the worst experience I have ever gone through, and I spent so many years afterward trying to numb myself.

I hear so many stories of gay kids coming out to family and friends and everyone accepting them. And honestly, I'm jealous. That wasn't my experience.

I didn't lose my faith in God; I lost my faith in people. I never returned to church and left Georgia for California to start a new life there.

I moved at the beginning of 2020, right before the pandemic. I was isolated and facing everything I had just experienced. But then I realized the only person I would spend my entire life with was myself, so it would be much easier if I liked myself.

After all the years of internalized homophobia and no self-esteem, that was a challenge.

Trusting oneself while on a healing journey is a moment-to-moment learning experience.

During this process, I heard lyrics and melodies in my head—whispers at first, but slowly growing into full songs, coming out of me without a choice. I began writing these ideas down, slowly forming them into a cohesive work.

My creativity returned. I wrote music of self-acceptance, rejection, isolation, confusion, and inner peace and resilience.

There are countless queer (and straight) people I have met who used to be religious and left because of hatred and homophobia. There are so many ex-religious queer artists

on the rise – Maddie Zahm, Semler, Katie Pruitt, and Adaline, to name a few. And more keep showing up.

If you are experiencing anything similar to my story, know you're not alone. Healing, freedom, and joy are possible.

It's been such an honor to create new family and friends, new memories, and discover new things about myself and the world around me. Yes, it's difficult, and some days are very challenging. But I promise that healing is possible for everyone. Living authentically, no matter the cost, is worth it.

Jonathan Thomas Maiocco is a music producer, film composer, recording artist, and stand-up comedian in Los Angeles, CA. You can find his music on Spotify and follow him @jonathanthomasmaiocco.

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Science & Technology

Google Trains AI On Sounds To Detect Diseases Via Smartphone

By Brenda Griffin



In artificial intelligence progress, Google is advancing by employing a novel method that utilizes audio signals to anticipate initial symptoms of sickness.

Google has utilized 300 million audio samples, including coughs, sniffles, and labored breathing, to train its AI foundation model to identify signs of diseases like tuberculosis.

Google has teamed up with Salcit Technologies, an AI startup focused on respiratory healthcare in India, to incorporate this technology into smartphones.

High-risk communities in areas with restricted healthcare access could experience a transformation due to this.

Bioacoustics

Google has previously made efforts to digitize human senses. The company's investment arm has previously backed startups using AI to identify diseases based on scent.

Exploring bioacoustics, which combines biology and

acoustics, demonstrates the growing use of AI to extract important information from the sounds made by humans and animals.

In healthcare, generative AI, the technology behind ChatGPT's widespread adoption by over 200 million users, is advancing bioacoustics with new capabilities.

Google has developed an AI model called HeAR (Health Acoustic Representations) that utilizes sound signals to anticipate early signs of illness, providing an innovative tool for medical diagnosis.

Easily deployable on smartphones, this technology can track and screen high-risk populations in regions with limited access to costly diagnostic devices such as X-ray machines.

This method's usefulness is its capability to offer healthcare options in distant areas by utilizing the microphone and AI software integrated into a phone.

Resolving Health Issues

Tuberculosis is responsible for

nearly 4,500 deaths and approximately 30,000 new infections every day, as reported by the World Health Organization.

While tuberculosis is treatable, millions of cases go undiagnosed. In India alone, tuberculosis leads to nearly a quarter-million deaths annually, highlighting the importance of early detection.

Google's AI was trained using a massive dataset of 300 million audio clips, which included coughs and breathing sounds from all over the world.

These sounds were obtained from publicly available, non-copyrighted materials, such as YouTube videos and recordings of TB screenings in hospitals in Zambia.

The AI tool, integrated into a smartphone, can be taken to the most remote locations to screen for the disease.

By analyzing subtle differences in cough patterns, the AI system can identify early signs of tuberculosis, facilitating early intervention and treatment.

Google's partnership with Salcit Technologies aims to enhance

the accuracy of tuberculosis diagnosis and lung health assessments.

Swaasa

Salcit is merging Google's AI model with its machine learning technology, Swaasa, an AI system named after the Sanskrit word for breath.

This collaboration is expected to greatly enhance the monitoring of respiratory health and the management of diseases, especially in areas with limited access to healthcare professionals and diagnostic tools.

The use of AI to detect diseases through sound represents a significant technological breakthrough with the potential to revolutionize healthcare delivery.

As AI models such as HeAR become more advanced, they could expand beyond detecting tuberculosis to identifying other respiratory illnesses and cardiovascular conditions through sound analysis.

Developing such tools is crucial in a world where healthcare accessibility remains challenging for millions.

Utilizing smartphones' current infrastructure, these AI-based solutions can be quickly expanded and used in urban and rural areas, improving the inclusivity and accessibility of healthcare.



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ABOUT US

RezaRide.org is a non-profit organization dedicated to supporting and advocating for the LGBTQ+ community in Jacksonville, Florida. Through initiatives like Reza Ride, we aim to raise awareness, funds, and support for LGBTQ+ organizations and initiatives, fostering a more inclusive and accepting community for all.



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BUSINESS & TRAVEL

Lowe's Home Improvement Abandons DEI After Threats From Fringe Extremists

By David Vandygriff

Home improvement retailer Lowe's is the latest company to abandon diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts, and online conservative extremists are taking the credit.

An internal memo from the company, obtained by multiple outlets, informed employees that Lowe's will no longer be participating in the Human Rights Campaign's (HRC) corporate equality index, and that its internal employee support resources for those belonging to minority groups will all be combined into one umbrella program. The company also said it would end its sponsorship and participation in community events such as parades, festivals, or fairs — referring to LGBTQ+ Pride parades.

Far-right conspiracy theorist and failed filmmaker Robby Starbuck took credit for the company's decision, writing on Twitter/X: "I messaged Lowe's executives last week to let them know that I planned to expose their woke policies. This morning I woke up to an email where they preemptively made big changes."

Starbuck and other

conservatives targeted Lowe's after a fake quote from the company's CEO, Marvin Ellison, circulated online. One account on X, @DocNetyoutube, a self-described MAGA supporter, claimed that the CEO said: "If conservatives do not like our values, they should take their money to Home Depot." Ellison did not say that, which the account later clarified.

Starbuck has used his over half a million followers the platform to target companies and bully them into dropping DEI, notoriously succeeding with John Deere and Tractor Supply earlier this year, and recently with Jack Daniel's and Harley Davidson. Starbuck also believes, among other things, that chemicals turn children LGBTQ+ and that the COVID-19 vaccine caused beloved Friends actor Matthew Perry's death (neither are true).

Orlando Gonzales, HRC's Senior Vice President of Programs, Research, and Training, told The Advocate in a statement that that seeing as "nearly 30 percent of Gen Z identifies as LGBTQ+ and the community wields \$1.4 trillion in spending power. Retreating from these principles

undermines both consumer trust and employee success."

"Robby Starbuck is so radical the Tennessee Republican party kicked him off the ballot. Companies should not cower to a random guy with zero business experience, who is so extreme he has been abandoned by the Republican party," Gonzales said. "Hasty, shortsighted decisions contrary to safe and inclusive workplaces will create a snowball effect of negative long-term consequences for companies, cutting them off from top talent, turning off LGBTQ+ and other consumers, and impacting companies' bottom line."



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ART AND ENTERTAINMENT

Nicole Kidman's Erotic Drama 'Babygirl': "What Have I Just Done?"

By Jimmy Bennett



Reijn wrote *Babygirl* with Kidman in mind. As an actor herself, when she was waiting in the wings and about to go onstage, she'd think of Kidman's screen work to steel herself to get on with the show. "I was so scared that I wanted to vomit and I wanted to die, so I would channel Nicole—I never knew her personally, of course, but her fearlessness in her movies was a torch that I was humbly trying to carry," Reijn says. She knew Romy would need an actor of that fearlessness—and she got one. "I just kind of went, 'Right, that's it. I will open myself up to you every which way, and let's see where we go together,'" Kidman says. "I would hope that you feel us in the movie, because it's very much an us."

In their extensive preparation, Kidman and Reijn met often in New York. They'd talk about their rawest life experiences, and examine the script's most provocative scenes and revise them together. "A lot of the themes in my movies have been explored through the lens of sexuality," Kidman says. "I've not eliminated that or tried to pretend it isn't there." Still, telling a movie so explicitly

from a female point of view, with a woman behind the camera, felt unique. The collaboration offered Kidman a level of intimacy into that kind of filmmaking she'd never experienced before.

"It was being able to talk unbelievably honestly and graphically—and that's woman-to-woman, as though you are sitting on your bed and talking to your sister or your best friend," Kidman says. "That's incredibly safe. Halina has a very strong maternal instinct, so she was very protective of all of us. But particularly me."

When it came to choreographing the sex scenes, which Reijn captures in radically long takes, safety was emphasized. Kidman and Dickinson worked with intimacy coordinators who could precisely structure a given sequence's many twists and turns, signaling moments of pleasure, discomfort, and everything in between for the actors to play authentically. These were blocked out in rehearsals and then adjusted during actual production as necessary. When it came down to it, the actors were dialed in, with Reijn's camera just rolling and rolling. "I never came out

of it, really," Kidman says.

When Kidman digs in, there's nothing quite like it. "It left me ragged. At some point I was like, I don't want to be touched. I don't want to do this anymore, but at the same time I was compelled to do it. Halina would hold me and I would hold her, because it was just very confronting to me," Kidman says. She admits this remains the case, months after filming: "It's like, Golly, I'm doing this, and it's actually now going to be seen by the world. That's a very weird feeling. This is something you do and hide in your home videos. It is not a thing that normally is going to be seen by the world."

"I felt very exposed as an actor, as a woman, as a human being," she continues. "I had to go in and go out like, I need to put my protection back on. What have I just done? Where did I go? What did I do?"

The seductive dynamic between Romy and Samuel plays out as distinctly modern. Credit surely goes to Reijn, who's coming off of the bloody Gen-Z satire *Bodies Bodies Bodies* with another savvy understanding of contemporary mores. And Dickinson is a

wholly unexpected foil in this two-hander: He can issue an imposing command and a puppy-dog apology in the same breath, and somehow keep it sexy.

"How Harris plays the dom is so different from how someone of Gen X would have played the dom in my time," Reijn says. "I wanted to create a male character that was experimenting and also confused by, Who am I supposed to be as a man right now? What is masculinity and how do I ask for consent, if at the same time, I'm being asked to be a dominator?"

Babygirl will land in the thick of ongoing debates among younger viewers as to the necessity—and quantity—of explicit sex in movies. Reijn was keenly aware of that conversation, and feels the

effects of digital saturation herself. "It's very important in a society that is polarizing all over the place, in every way, that we keep shining light on the things that we're afraid of," she says, before joking that friends sometimes refer to her as a "prude." It's hard to believe after watching Babygirl, but perhaps that's exactly the point. The film is undeniably titillating (Reijn prefers "juicy")—and rather than operating in the dark, fatalistic mode of many an erotic drama, it's a rollicking, risqué entertainment that winds its way toward hope. It's strangely, even sweetly moving.

When I mention to Kidman the current controversy around sex in movies, she's stumped. "What did you say?" she asks. I explain the topic more thoroughly. "I'm not familiar with many things," she says. "I

just work with abandonment." This much is evident in Babygirl. She tells me that she hadn't gotten to work in this "A24, indie filmmaking" style in a long time and found it inspiring. "You're grabbing things when you can, you're doing what you can—you're in a very limited timeframe, but everyone's there sharing heart and soul," she says.

What did Kidman share—and gain—in the making of Babygirl? "It's personal," she says quickly. She feels like she still doesn't have her "armor" on right now, as the premiere waits around the corner. A wide array of reactions, she knows, lie ahead. "That's vulnerable, but I'm never going to shy away from that to my dying day," Kidman says. "I'll place myself in a vulnerable position, and see where that takes me."


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SCAN ME

Life and Style

Coming Out At Work Can Lead To Discrimination: Williams Institute

By Dan Jenkins



Although the Supreme Court has outlawed anti-LGBTQ+ job discrimination, it still happens — as many people are finding after they come out at work, says a new study by the Williams Institute at the University of California, Los Angeles, School of Law.

“Employment discrimination and harassment based on sexual orientation and gender identity have been widely documented,” says the report’s executive summary. “Recent research has found that LGBTQ people continue to face mistreatment in the workplace, even after the U.S. Supreme Court held in 2020 that discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity is prohibited by Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.” That ruling came in the case of *Bostock v. Clayton County*.

Such discrimination is bad for everyone, the study notes: “Experiences of workplace discrimination and harassment negatively impact employees’ health and well-being, as well as their job commitment, satisfaction, and productivity. These primary effects can, in turn, result in higher costs and other negative outcomes for employers.”

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The study is based on a survey of 1,902 employed LGBTQ+ adults conducted in the summer of 2023.

“Almost half (47%) of LGBTQ employees reported experiencing discrimination or harassment at work (including being fired, not hired, not promoted, or being verbally, physically, or sexually harassed) because of their sexual orientation or gender identity during their lifetime,” the summary states. The rates of reported discrimination and harassment were higher among transgender and nonbinary workers than cisgender ones, and higher among people of color than white employees — about twice as likely within the past year.

Many LGBTQ+ workers said they stay closeted at work to avoid negative experiences. Nearly half said they were not out to their current supervisor, and one-fifth were not out to any of their coworkers.

“LGBTQ employees who were out to at least a few coworkers and/or their supervisor were three times more likely to report experiencing discrimination (39% vs. 12%) and more than twice as likely to report harassment (42% vs. 17%)

than those who were not out to anyone at work,” the summary says. “LGBTQ employees who were out to at least someone in the workplace were four times more likely to have experienced discrimination in the past year (12% vs 3%).” One-third said they’d left a job at some point due to anti-LGBTQ+ actions by employers.

These findings underscore the need for better protections against discrimination, according to the Williams Institute.

“Discrimination and harassment negatively impact both employees and employers,” lead author Brad Sears, founding executive director at the Williams Institute, said in a press release. “More robust protections, including monitoring and enforcement, are needed to ensure that LGBTQ people, particularly trans and nonbinary people and LGBTQ people of color, are fully protected from discrimination and harassment in the workplace.”

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Trixie Mattel Dazzles In FX's New Comedy 'English Teacher'

By Josephine Daniels

Drag superstar Trixie Mattel is bringing her fabulous flair to the small screen in FX's upcoming comedy series *English Teacher*. Get ready for a hilarious ride as she joins the talented Brian Jordan Alvarez in this must-watch show.

The drag superstar will steal the spotlight in *English Teacher*, playing a drag queen who teaches football players how to elevate their cheerleading game. This unforgettable guest appearance adds a unique twist to the already intriguing storyline.

In *English Teacher*, Evan Marquez isn't just any teacher. He's got a rich and complex personal life that he's desperately trying to keep

separate from his professional duties. But as we all know, life has a funny way of blending the two, especially in a comedy series!

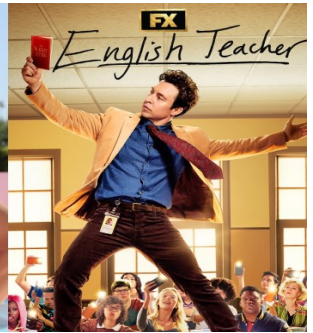
Alvarez recently spoke to *Vanity Fair* about the show's heartwarming theme: "People from every different part of life are basically forced to come together for a common goal, which is just to educate these kids. What we enjoy is this idea that obviously the teachers are teaching the kids, but sometimes the kids are teaching the teachers how to live in this modern world that's moving so fast, [where] it feels like the rules change every day."

The comedy doesn't stop with Alvarez and Trixie. The

talented cast includes Stephanie Koenig as Gwen, Enrico Colantoni as Principal Grant Moretti, Sean Patton as Markie, and Carmen Christopher as Rick.

The show also features a host of fresh faces like Savanna Gann, Sarah Kopkin, Emily Topper, Ralphael Lester, Mason Douglas, Matthew Smitley, Treyland Newton, Zikora Mbadugha, Michael Andrew Ajazi, Via Roz, Ben Bondurant, Brooke Butterworth, Sebastian Wiley, Carson Blyskal, and Cassie Lowe.

We can't wait to see Trixie Mattel bring her unique flair to *English Teacher*, and we're even more excited to watch Brian Jordan Alvarez keep us in stitches all season long.



A large, vibrant promotional banner for freeSTDcheck.org. The background shows a crowd of people at a party or concert, with many hands raised in the air. The text "READY TO PLAY?" is written in large, bold, white capital letters across the top. Below it, the website "freeSTDcheck.org" is displayed in a similar font. In the bottom right corner, there is a small red square logo with the letters "AHF" in white.

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News & Politics

Trump Claims That Schools Are Performing Gender-Affirming Surgery On Students

By Mark Meadows



In a bizarre rant during a discussion with an extreme anti-LGBTQ+ organization, Donald Trump claimed that schools are performing surgery on students in order to make them transition. This is false.

"The transgender thing is an incredible thing," Trump said at a "fireside chat" with Tiffany Justice, one of the co-founders of the anti-LGBTQ+ Moms for Liberty (not the one caught having sex with other women). "Your kid goes to school and comes home a few days later with an operation. The school decides what's gonna happen with your child."

"And you know many of these childs [sic] 15 years later say, 'What the hell happened, who did this to me?' It's incredible," he said.

Gender-affirming surgery is almost never performed on minors. Genital surgery as part of a transition is never performed on minors. Schools are not forcing kids to transition. Trump was simply

lying.

Also, the rate of regret for gender-affirming care is lower than the rate of regret for getting a tattoo or weight loss surgery or having children.

Moms for Liberty has spent the last several years attacking LGBTQ+ rights, especially in schools. This includes efforts across the country to ban books by LGBTQ+ authors, attempts to ban students from kissing people of the same sex, supporting laws that ban discussions of LGBTQ+ people in schools, and suing the Biden administration for the right to misgender trans kids. The organization has been designated an "extremist" group by the Southern Poverty Law Center.

Trump attacked trans people at other points during his appearance at the Moms for Liberty event. He lied and said that Algerian boxer Imane Khelif was a "person that transgendered." In reality, she is a cisgender woman; she was

assigned female at birth and identifies as a woman today.

Describing a fight at the Olympics this year involving Khelif, Trump referred to her with "he" pronouns.

"He ended up winning the gold medal," Trump said. "And there was another one who also transgendered, and he or she – she – ended up also winning the gold."

"He," Justice said, correcting Trump into using the wrong pronoun for Taiwanese boxer Lin Yu-ting, who is also a cisgender woman who was accused of being trans at this year's Olympic games.

Trump pointed at Justice and laughed. "Tiffany said it, I didn't. See, I'm a politician, I have to be politically correct."

"I'm a mom, I have to protect my kids," Justice replied. She did not explain how misgendering Lin Yu-ting protects her kids.



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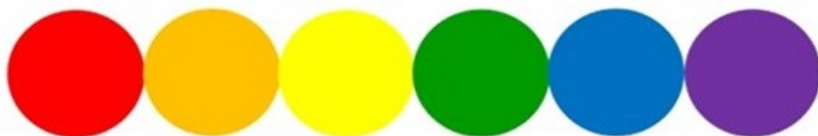


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BUSINESS & TRAVEL

Why Meeting Strangers During Travel Can Change Your Life

By Brandon Jenkins

Fresh off the tarmac and straight into the culinary whirlwind of Southern France's Sète's Les Halles food market, I sported the unmistakable look of a modern-day Marco Polo—if only Marco had swapped the Silk Road for air travel. Armed with a backpack, carry-on, and a distinctly jet-lagged aura, I skipped the standard hotel check-in on the advice of my cab driver. A self-proclaimed sage of Sète's gastronomy, he had spent our ride extolling the virtues of tielle Sétoise, a local delicacy promising an octopus and tomato medley encased in buttery pastry. To this American, it sounded like a Chicago deep-dish pizza that had taken a gastronomic tour of the Mediterranean and returned with a few tentacles.

The jet lag couldn't numb my senses to why France's largest fishing port on the Med was also dubbed the Little Venice of Languedoc. With its labyrinth of canals and vibrant Haussmann buildings, the setting was as if plucked from a painter's vibrant dreamscape. Yet, while my mission was initially aesthetic, it now became culinary. This trip marked my baptism into

travel journalism, a stark departure from nearly a decade tethered to the corporate grind. Was I trading the security of routine and regular paychecks for a passport filled with stories, or simply trading one type of confinement for another?

As I navigated the riot of colors at the market—stacked zucchinis, polychrome peppers, and bashfully blushing tomatoes—I found the barstool my driver had promised. There, the true taste of Sète awaited. I barely had time to take in the sights before a gentleman with a flair reminiscent of a seasoned traveler slid onto the adjoining stool. "Salut, Gabriel!" he hailed the co-owner before settling into what seemed a well-rehearsed routine. "You must try the oysters; they're really exceptional here," he insisted, already having ordered for us both. What unfolded was not just a supremely satisfying post-flight meal, but an ode to the spontaneity of travel and the human connections it fosters—all underscored by a shared plate of seafood.

Gabriel's own narrative was stitched with frequent shuttles between Paris and Sète, navigating the demands of be-



ing a tech entrepreneur and a caretaker to his ailing mother. Our exchange deepened, and I shared the contours of my own transition: from corporate drone to fledgling travel journalist. "It's really intimidating, this pivot to a life less scripted," I admitted. Amid the clatter of dishes and oyster shells, Gabriel offered a pearl:

"Chase the joy. That's where you'll find your story." His words became the thread weaving through my subsequent adventures, challenging the notion that one should never talk to strangers.

Now firmly rooted in the career that seems my destiny, each trip reaffirms that serendipity and human connections are the true treasures of what I now know is meaningful travel. You just need to be open to experiencing them. Consider a recent KLM Royal Dutch Airlines flight where a flight attendant, picking up on my enthusiasm for culinary adventures, struck up a conversation with me. With the generosity of spirit that so often characterizes those who have made travel their life's work, she regaled me with tales of her favorite restaurants and must-try dishes at my

destination, even going so far as to pen a list of hidden gems and local delicacies. This thoughtful gesture not only armed me with an insider's guide to the culinary delights that awaited me but also underscored the power of unexpected human connections that can spark even in the most fleeting of moments, like a perfect seasoning that elevates a dish from ordinary to extraordinary.

Similarly transformative was a music festival in the Faroe Islands, uniquely set in the cozy living rooms of locals rather than on grand stages. This intimate venue fostered a personal and communal vibe as musicians—both international and local—performed mere feet from the audience, crafting a shared atmosphere that was both exclusive and inclusive. Conversations flowed as easily as the music, creating bonds between strangers who, for the night, felt like lifelong friends.

Another memorable solo expedition took me from Geneva through the Alps in a cavalcade of supercars alongside fifteen enthusiasts from around the world. We carved through winding mountain passes, our engines' roars serenading the Alpine vistas, dining across France, Italy, and Switzerland, and exchanging stories that bridged cultures and ages, from twenty-something crypto couples to a septuagenarian oil baron. Each shared meal and roadside pause deepened our camaraderie, turning fellow travelers into friends as we bonded over our shared passion for adventure and the open road.

In contrast, a journey to Oman delved into tranquility. A routine tour of the Wadi Shab morphed into an unexpected adventure as my guide, adeptly attired for both the desert and a swim, led me through hidden gorges to a secluded waterfall—an untouched paradise known only to those bold enough to

veer off the beaten path. This journey was a vivid reminder of travel's power to reveal the undiscovered, inviting not just a break from the norm but a deep dive into the unknown.

But reflecting back on the one that started it all, my lunch with Gabriel from Sète—whose surname still eludes me—illustrates how ephemeral meetings can dramatically alter our trajectories and the profound impact that strangers we meet while traveling can have on our lives. His advice lingers, a constant reminder of the transformative power of pursuing what brings joy. That seafood meal, a simple yet pivotal feast, not only satisfied my hunger but also redefined my professional journey. "How about some chocolate gâteau to finish?" he proposed, as we reminisced over our shared repast. "Pourquoi pas?" I agreed, celebrating the unexpected routes that sweeten our travels. "This treat's on me."



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What to wear: Red shirt/blouse, sneakers or other comfortable shoes, sunscreen, bug repellent.

What to expect: This is a community photographic opportunity. Aerial photography. Family and friends taking and sharing photographs of this historic event.

Why September 18: This day is recognized as National HIV/AIDS and Aging Awareness Day.

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