The History Of Pride
Coming Out and Staying Out: Do we have a duty to come out?
Out of the Closet: The Sexuality Survey
The Gay Culture Top 10
The Demise of The L Word

PRIDE
Letter from the editors

Welcome to the latest issue of [no definition], Cambridge University's only LBGT magazine. We're Ray and Josh, the new editors. Taking on [no def] during exam term was certainly a challenge. Perhaps in typical Cambridge student style, we are writing this at thirteen minutes past two in the morning, with a whole magazine left to do by ten tomorrow. Happy days.

The concept behind this issue is Pride. So much of what we hear in both mainstream and queer media paints a depressing picture of modern gay life. We wanted to bring out the positive aspects of queer culture and identity. We believe that everyone deserves to feel proud about their orientation, from asexual to genderqueer, gay to straight. We have chosen to focus on two subthemes: coming out, and the institution of Gay Pride. The articles that follow explore this uplifting premise in a variety of ways, from deeply individual standpoints, to broad historical overviews.

We hope you enjoy reading them as much as we enjoyed editing them, and look forward to increasing the profile of [nd] in the new academic year.

Lots of love,
Ray and Josh
Editors
A Message from the Exec:

Dear All,

It is my great pleasure to introduce this new edition of [No Definition], a magazine that has grown in reputation and quality throughout my experience. My thanks go to Josh and Ray for putting together this new issue for us all to enjoy.

The LBGT Committee has swelled to a magnificent size this year. The 21-strong team includes a pair of very active and keen Women’s Officers, Josie Fielding and Reema Patel, who have been working closely with CUSU and the Women’s Council, as well as running regular Women’s Coffees. We also have dedicated Grad and Bi reps who aim to make sure CUSU-LBGT caters for everyone. Perhaps in future, if past Open Meeting discussions are any indication, this will extend further to an Asexuality Rep, as well as the presently vacant Trans Rep. Run in conjunction with CUSU Ents, our club night “Rendezvous” at Vodka Revolutions Bar has gone from strength to strength due to the hard work and commitment of the Ents team, Jonny Birtwell and Will Yang. They deserve particular congratulation for the recent Rainbow Ball, a hugely successful and entertaining venture to celebrate the end of exams. It is my hope that such an event will become an elemental feature of our annual calendar.

The Socials and Welfare Officers have been ploughing on with their roles, providing a strong sense of community of which I am immensely proud. The Sponsorship Officers, Jack and Fiona, must be thanked for their crucial support in allowing us to achieve this in the current economic climate. I am sure their teamwork will allow us to continue to provide you with the quality of events and advice.

Our Campaigns Officer, Rachel Rowbottom, has also been working hard, having brought the American actor and poet, Peterson Toscano, to Cambridge this term. We were also able to celebrate the International Day Against Homophobia on March 17th by working in conjunction with St John’s Films to show Sean Penn’s award-winning performance as the first openly gay politician in the United States, Harvey Milk. If you haven’t seen it yet, you should. There are plans for many more high-profile guest speakers and campaigns. Keep your eyes peeled for more information on Listings.

As ever, the Communications Officer, Treasurer and Reps Co-ordinator have been fundamental to the smooth functioning of CUSU-LBGT as a campaign, and will already be familiar names to a good number of you. Finally, I would like to thank the individual college reps for their contribution to the success of our events — “Rendezvous” in particular. These are vital roles within CUSU-LBGT and I am grateful for the hard work and good grace with which they have been approached by College Reps.

We are also looking to run an LBGT parenting scheme whereby LBGT-identified Freshers can be paired up with an experienced mentor to introduce them to LBGT life in Cambridge and to provide a base level of support. If you are interested in helping out, please get in touch with me at president@cusu-lbgt.com.

On a final note, I wish the best of luck to this year’s graduands in the future. I would encourage you all to join the CUSU-LBGT Alumni Association. Please do get in touch, and stay in touch. It has been a pleasure to know you.

Shereen Akhtar
CUSU LBGT President
“I didn’t realise I was bi until I was fifteen, I came out as soon as I knew, but I’m getting ahead of myself. It all started one day when I was almost fourteen, and I saw a guy on Hollyoaks, and I realised he was fit, and it freaked me the hell out. I was a conservative Catholic and although I assumed I was straight, I had no inclination towards either gender.

How wrong I was! After I became aware of my feelings for men, I went through the usual crap of confusion. I asked God to change me, but as many of you will know, that didn’t happen. Gradually, I came to terms with my sexuality.

By the time I’d accepted my unknowingly temporary homosexuality I had feelings towards a girl, my best friend, and that was the start of a very odd time in my life – dabbling with heterosexuality! As my feelings for women grew I knew: I was bi. I was BI!

So why am I proud? Apart from the heritage (sorry but Oscar Wilde’s ours, and Casanova had it off with the odd guy, too – read his memoirs) and the smug feeling of superiority you gain when you realise that you have a larger palate than others, there also comes feelings of insecurity which some bis never get rid of: the flip-flop; a sudden change in your dominant attraction, and the dreaded “am I finally gay?” conundrum.

“sorry but Oscar Wilde’s ours, and Casanova had it off with the odd guy too.”

In my case, I’ve settled down, metaphorically speaking, my Kinsey number is pushing four, and decreasing, and I don’t worry if sometimes my eye is mainly caught by girls. I admire people from the back and am okay with whichever gender they turn out to be. The tennis match of 2 – 5 – 3 – 6 – 1 – 4 – whatever, is over, and frankly, I couldn’t be more glad.

Why am I proud to be bi? Well I’m not boringly straight, I don’t feel I have to act like a stereotypical straight or gay man, and all the while my chances of finding a person to spend my life with are somewhat increased!

Hi, I’m Sean and I’m proud to be bi.”
“Even when you are still in the womb, society starts to try and put you into one of two boxes: boy or girl? From the moment you are born and the doctor checks between your legs and cries out “It’s a beautiful baby girl/bouncing baby boy (delete as appropriate)”, your fate is supposed to be sealed. Society will tell you what colour your clothes will be, what games you will like, who you can be friends with, even what you are good at.

Genderqueer says fuck that! Life isn’t so simple. Contrary to popular opinion, there are more than two sexes and as many genders as you can imagine: earth mother, metrosexual, tomboy, drag queen, butch, femme…

In fact, there are so many different masculinities and femininities that one day I realised I couldn’t think of a single thing that ALL women have in common (other than the label ‘woman’ obviously). Possessing a vagina? That both wrongly excludes some transwomen and wrongly includes some transmen. Liking pink and wearing skirts? I hope everyone knows that is a ridiculous suggestion. But then, what do all men have in common? Fancying women? I know some gay guys who would object to that idea. (For me, being Genderqueer affects my sexuality too. What do ‘straight’ or ‘bi’ or ‘gay’ mean if you yourself aren’t male or female?)

Genderqueer is about being who you are and doing what you want and being aware that this can change.

People might be surprised to see me sewing patchwork in my army boots but I’m comfortable, and I’m just as happy cooking on a stove or a barbecue. When I fill in forms and the person behind the counter looks at me and says “You ticked Mr, surely that’s a mistake?”, I grin back and say “Nope, Mr Sophia, that’s me!”

Genderqueer is freeing, confusing, challenging, transgressive, comfortable, radical, normal and fun.”
Gay Culture: The Top Eight

Queer as Folk or the art world of Bette Porter?

Fiona Dickinson reports.

As I write this, my exams are forcing me to miss out on the ‘Queer up North Festival’ in Manchester. As compensation I’m looking forward to a return to Salt Spring Island Pride (Vancouver, Canada) to make my dad feel uncomfortable around Dykes on Bikes! Both these events seem very different on the surface, but a serious celebration of the LBGT community in the Arts and a multicoloured super-party may not be so very unlike. Both can be encompassed by the term ‘gay culture’. I’m going to try and highlight where I think gay culture is thriving.

1. Film
Gay film is now an ever-expanding genre, ranging from the small, arty film festival to more widely distributed films like Milk and Brokeback Mountain. If you want to see some cutting edge shorts, look up the Iris Prize or a local film festival. Personal recommendations? For a heart-warming film try Beautiful Thing, or for the classic student-teacher scenario it has to be Loving Annabelle. I’m looking forward to the release of The Art of Being Straight this summer.

2. Literature
Sarah Waters, Alan Hollinghurst, Patrick Gale, Jeanette Winterson, Carol Ann Duffy: gay writing in the UK is flourishing. E.M. Forster’s ‘Maurice’ had to be published posthumously to protect its author from scandal; today, LBGT writers win the Booker Prize, top the best-seller lists, and are appointed Poet Laureate.

3. TV
We’re a little lacking in gay TV shows now that The L Word and Queer as Folk have finished. But gay characters are slowly being featured more in UK mainstream TV, what with Hollyoaks, Skins and gay storylines in the soaps. Maybe we’ll even go the way of the USA and Canada in having a gay channel (Logo and OutTV respectively).

4. Comedy
Gay people can be a funny bunch and we know it! Comedy shows on TV and the UK comedy circuit feature loads of LBGT comedians, many of whom will be featured at the E4 Udderbelly-Stand Up with Pride and at Comedy Camp.

5. Internet Blogs and Podcasts
With the rise of the internet, micro-blogging on Twitter, and all human life revolving around facebook, many people are starting to use the internet to blog or vlog (video-blog) about things they care about, be that The L Word, travelling or sport. The creators are even becoming minor celebrities. A great collection of LBGT blogs and vlogs, from comedy to political, can be found on Afterellen.com and Afterelton.com. Podcasts can get pretty addictive and take over your life, but they’re a great source of comedy and information. The range of LBGT podcasts available on iTunes is huge. Some of my favourites are ‘2homos.com’, ‘Big Gay News’ and ‘Gay Men Talking’. They’re all free so download to your hearts content, sit in the sun with your ipod on and pick your favourites!

6. Radio
LBGT radio used to be something that was confined to online streaming, but slowly a number of local radio stations are starting to have an LBGT programme, for news, interviews and event publicity. Manchester’s ‘Citizen Manchester LGBT’ is on 8-9pm every Monday on BBC Radio Manchester and is also available on BBC iPlayer. Cornwall’s ‘Rainbow Source’ airs on The Source 96.1fm, Wednesday’s 6-7pm.

7. Music
What music do you associate with the LBGT community? Madonna? Britney? The standard playlist from a night at Revs? From time to time even I might admit to listening to some Diva classics, but what else is there? In fact, there’s a plethora of LBGT artists out there, from Pride event performers, like Four Poofs and a Piano and drag acts like Our Lady J, to popular artists like k.d. lang and Elton John, and loads of unsigned acts.

8. Art
Type in ‘gay painting’ into Google and all you get is erotica, but according to Diva there’s now a lesbian art elite. The National Gallery hosted an event earlier this year ‘Looking for the Queer in National Gallery Paintings’, exploring how we recognise LBGT art.
From Moscow to San Paulo, James Williams investigates the roots and ramifications of Pride.

Introduction: London 2008

On 5th July 2008, the streets of central London were slowed to (leisurely) marching pace for a spectacle which, for all its colour and warmth, was not so very radical. Indeed, rather like the Church of England, much of the event had the feel of assured Establishment about it. The London Mayor, unusually well-presented and donning a striking pink Stetson led a parade in which marched contingents of uniformed police officers, servicemen and members of other "authority" professions. In Trafalgar square, there was the usual medley of stalls handing out condoms, leaflets and lube. One had displays about gay persecution in various parts of the world, though admittedly most people moved past quickly to get to an extremely crowded drinks stall.

Apparently, on the outskirts of the event there were various religious and generically anti-gay groups. But were kept well-away and went largely unnoticed. For supporters of campaign group Christian Voice, all these scenes of official support seen at Pride London 2008 show that homosexual culture is now deeply, perhaps irrevocably, ingrained. And fortunately they are right. Mr. Johnson’s participation may or may not have been entirely sincere. However, the fact that he and other authority figures felt they ought to attend, at least for PR reasons, suggests that there has been a shift of opinion within the public and political authorities towards recognition of the validity of homosexuality.

Precedents and hidden identities

Before the inception of Gay Pride Parades, expressions of gay pride and identity arose within underground movements, or in the efforts of a few courageous individuals. These latter include scientists and mathematicians (Turing), playwrights, and other literary celebrities (Wilde, Woolf, Forster, Proust). Wilde et al have subsequently been taken up as figureheads for gay pride, as evidence of the positive influence homosexuals have had on our culture. Many of the most famous gay cultural figures also suffered famously for their homosexuality (such as Wilde or Turing). There is no doubt that other gay figures — Coward, Crisp et al — maintained their gay identities in defiance of outside pressure. But they were no martyrs. It seems to have been important for the nascent gay rights movement to have these figures of pathos. We might consider that these figures did not set out to be remembered as symbols of gay pride. But nevertheless their fight against institutionalized persecution has often become an integral part of their retrospective "stories". Wilde died in penury, Turing by a cyanide laced-apple. Today Wilde’s "love that dare not speak its name" is often held up against heteronormative ideas about
love, whilst Turing’s apple was adopted as an early gay symbol.

Interestingly, notable lesbian or bisexual women have featured less prominently as figureheads of gay resilience. Perhaps one of the more obvious reasons is that there were no notable trials of women for homosexuality. Anti-lesbian legislation having failed most recently in the 1920s, pressures on women were less clear-cut (though socially very present), and so there are no culturally iconic images of lesbian women being imprisoned, or statutorily forced to undergo treatment. Yet it remains the case that women have been neglected by the dominant male voice of gay liberation.

Stonewall Riots

New York is generally held to be the birthplace of the Gay Pride as mass demonstration. Originally beginning in commemoration of the Stonewall riots, it maintains much of this protest character today. The riots were sparked by the sustained official persecution of gay men, through police entrapment and the revoking of licenses for bars suspected of catering for homosexual customers. The Stonewall Inn in the Greenwich Village area of New York was not an attractive establishment, but open meeting places for gay men and women were limited. During a raid, the bar’s customers would be forced to line up. Men dressed effeminately and women without feminine clothing would be arrested. Anyone else — if they could provide adequate identification — was sent away. In order to avoid such police harassment, the (often heterosexual and criminal) owners of the bar provided cash incentives to the authorities.

On June 28 1969, one of these police raids didn’t go as expected. Rather than remaining in a docile line whilst delayed police re-enforcements arrived, the customers began to riot, spurred on by rumours of police “bullying” of those detained.

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In contrast to the previous secretive existence of the rest of the New York gay scene, gay people were now actively drawing attention to themselves.
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A number of officers were injured, and several were trapped inside the bar, eventually being freed by re-enforcements. Although hostilities around the now badly burnt and damaged Stonewall Inn eventually died down in the early morning, rioting in the surrounding streets started up the next night. This was perhaps the first public manifestation of a — quite motley — gay subculture. Those involved came from all walks of life, from homeless youths to professionals. But in contrast to the previous secretive existence of the Stonewall Inn and the rest of the New York gay scene, gay people were now actively drawing attention to themselves. One activist, Craig Rodwell, ensured that The New York Times, The New York Post and The New York Daily News were called to the scene of the riots, and the story made front page news.

New York

The Stonewall riots led to the first Gay Pride campaign march on 28 June 1970. Called the ‘Christopher Street Liberation Day’, campaigners marched from Christopher Street to Central Park. There were simultaneous marchers in Los Angeles and Chicago. According to The New York Times, “thousands of young men and women homosexuals” participated, proclaiming “the new strength and pride of the gay people.”

Now Pride events are organized by the ‘History of Pride’ (HOP), founded in 1984, taking over from ‘The Christopher Street Liberation Day’s’ committee. The march’s website, despite its name change, continues to emphasize the campaigning nature of the march, which still passes the Stonewall Inn and officially eschews the nomenclature “parade”. New York Pride, like London Pride, has recently gained levels of official participation that its early marchers might have only dimly envisaged. In 2008, NYC Mayor Mike Bloomberg, the Governor of New York and Charles Schumer, Senior New York Senator, attended. Democrat administrations especially have officially affirmed Gay Pride as a facet of US identity (in 2000 President Clinton proclaimed June to be Gay Pride month, a move repeated by Obama in June 2009).

San Paulo

Despite the history of New York Pride events, it is Brazil that has the accolade of holding the world’s largest celebration of Pride. Despite its strongly Catholic heritage, homosexuality has been legal since 1830. The first pride event in San Paulo attracted 2000 people. In 2007 it attracted 3.5 million.

This being said, the campaigning element in San Paolo is probably more urgent than in London or New York. Homophobic violence, including murder, is widespread in Brazil. In 2004 a rights group claimed that 159 Brazilians had been killed because of their sexuality in that year, whilst some activists
estimate that between 1980 and 2006 some 2,680 gay people were murdered in Brazil for being LBGT.

Moscow

In contrast to New York, London and San Paulo, attempts to demonstrate a gay presence in Moscow encounter continuing official disapproval. Despite the legalization of homosexuality in 1993, the unfortunate combination of a resurgent Orthodox Church and right-wing nationalism have united to hinder the progress of gay rights. According to a 2005 survey, 43.5% of Russians favour re-criminalization of homosexual acts. For Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov, a close friend of Vladimir Putin, a gay demonstration in his capital would be “satanic”, leading him to ban gay protests in 2007 and 2009 (on the day of the Eurovision contest). In both cases the protests went ahead against the twin threats of arrest and violent anti-gay protestors.

Hope and Incentive

For all the difficulties that still surround Gay Pride and the open expression of gay identity, the history of Pride is one of both hope and incentive.

Hope: because official acceptance of homosexuality has been achieved so rapidly where men and women have had the courage to be honest if given the opportunity. The UK was the nation that exported anti-homosexual legislation to its territories throughout the nineteenth century, and renewed persecution at home during the 1950s in “one of its periodical fits of morality” (to quote McCaulay). Since 1969 there have been sea-changes in the attitudes of the authorities, majority media, and mainstream culture. This could not have happened without the actions of early pioneers, who were prepared to make a hitherto hidden gay identity manifest in environments initially hostile to them. This “making-known”, thereby attempting to overcome either the alienation or anonymity of gay people, seems to characterize all Gay Pride activities and symbols, wherever they appear.

Pride shows that where people do have the courage to rise up, their persecutors will be shown up.

Incentive: because Pride shows that where people do have the courage, even if initially at some cost, to rise up, their persecutors will be shown up. NYPD's oppressive activities were shown to a wider public, and that attention changed how both the authorities and homosexuals were conceived. In 1999 the area around the Stonewall Inn was listed on the National Register of Historic Places. At the commemorative event, the Assistant Secretary of the Department of the Interior stated, "Let it forever be remembered that here, on this spot, men and women stood proud, they stood fast, so that we may be who we are, we may work where we will, live where we choose and love whom our hearts desire." (The New York Times, June 26 1999).
REVOLUTION

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TUESDAYS

10 TILL 2

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In the TV series The L Word, Dana, a professional tennis player, is feted when she comes out in a publicity campaign with the slogan ‘Get Out and Stay Out!’ However, many people resent the automatic assumption that everyone has to have a label, particularly when it comes to something as complex and personal as sexual attraction. Still others cannot come out for personal reasons, or because of circumstances such as cultural or religious background.

What does it mean to be ‘out and proud’? Wikipedia defines coming out as “the usually voluntary public revealing of a person’s sexual orientation and/or gender identity”. It sounds simple, but coming out is a continuous process. The first and greatest obstacle is acknowledging it to yourself, a vital part of coming out which can take many years. I started coming out to my closest friends when I was about sixteen, and I’m still working through my list of people to tell! Being ‘out’ can permeate every area of life: booking a hotel room with a double bed for two girls, handing a copy of Diva to the guy on the till at Borders without blushing, being seen by your DoS wandering around Cambridge hand in hand with your girlfriend...

Of course, you don’t have to dance around all day wrapped in a rainbow flag and singing Elton John song lyrics to qualify as ‘out’, nor do you have to write official letters to all your third cousins notifying them of your precise sexual orientation… It’s pretty hard to define what ‘out’ means. I think of it as living your everyday life with the gay part fully integrated into it as much as possible, and most importantly, accepting it yourself.

Even if you don’t want a label you can still be out. People may be wary of being labelled as lesbian, gay, or bisexual if they mention a same-sex partner. But isn’t the automatic assumption of heterosexuality a more restrictive label itself? Some people I know get round this problem by just referring to whoever they are with at the time, which lets friends get used to the fact that they don’t want a label. In the end, it’s a personal choice – whatever label you use or don’t use, the crucial factor in being out is not to hide the parts of your life that don’t fit in with heteronormative society. Sarah Warn, the founder of AfterEllen, even discusses the rise of a ‘new way’ of being out, exemplified by Lindsay Lohan; refusing to define yourself but simply living your life openly.

Coming out is also important for those who are transgender, genderqueer or intersex, who face many of the same issues as the rest of the queer community. The difference is that, unfortunately, transphobia is often more widespread and virulent than homophobia, and there is less information and acceptance available to trans people. Also, it is necessary to come out as trans if you want to live as your true rather than biological gender, as it is a visible change, unlike being L, B, or G. Of course, there is also coming out as asexual, which has its own particular challenges.

In this article, I certainly don’t intend to shake an admonitory finger at those who for their own very good reasons can’t, or don’t want to, come out; there are a range of arguments for and against. First of all though, it’s important to look at the history of being out.

In Ancient Greece, the society most well-known for same-sex activity, there was probably no such thing as ‘being out’. Sexuality was fluid, and sleeping with men as well as women was almost as much a cultural practice as a personal preference; according to Mary Renault (author of the Alexander trilogy), gay prides “would have attracted as much amazement as demonstrations of persons willing to drink wine”.

Isn’t the automatic assumption of heterosexuality a restrictive label itself?

Subsequently, though, deviations from the norm of heterosexuality (or indeed, particularly in Christian Europe, any sexual activity outside marriage) became frowned upon and had to be kept secret unless you were extremely wealthy or powerful. Kings could dally with young men rather than mistresses, but even the powerful were still expected to marry and father children.
The very concept of 'coming out' was only invented in 1869 by Karl Heinrich Ulrich, an early gay rights campaigner; he urged people to come out to help change public opinion. In the first half of the twentieth century, a handful of mostly wealthy LBGT people began to live their lives more openly – a famous example would be Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas, who both wrote books about their lives together and were at the centre of fashionable Parisian life. A rather more sobering story is that of Federico Garcia Lorca (1898-1936) who wrote beautiful and thinly-disguised homoerotic poems and had a relationship with Salvador Dali; he was killed during the Spanish Civil War, probably for being gay as well as for political reasons.

The working classes still had to hide their identities until the gay rights movement really kicked off in the 1960s and 1970s with the famous Stonewall riots, when LBGT people marched holding banners proclaiming their pride in their identity, with slogans like "I am a lesbian and I am beautiful." Since 1988, National (though it is in fact international) Coming Out Day has been celebrated on 11th October. However, even in our supposedly more enlightened times, Ellen DeGeneres' famous coming-out resulted in her being sacked and 'in the wilderness' for three years. Now, of course, she is even more popular than before; her 2008 wedding to Portia de Rossi even featured on the cover of People magazine.

This brief overview suggests a glowing progress in our culture, in which homophobia is decreasing and it is easier and easier to come out. This is true in many respects; young people have access to the Internet and support groups; many workplaces have LBGT networks and actively seek gay employees; and new equality laws aim to tackle homophobic discrimination. However, there are still very significant barriers for many to coming out, including religion or ethnicity. For example, a survey by the Gallup Coexist Index 2009 found that 100% of British Muslims they interviewed thought that homosexual acts were morally unacceptable. LBGT people may be perfectly comfortable with their sexuality for themselves, but may hide their identity for fear of bringing hurt or shame on their families, or being ostracised socially. For those in countries where being gay carries the risk of imprisonment or the death penalty, being in the closet may be a matter of personal safety. Even in countries such as Britain and the USA, people can be murdered or beaten up in the street for being openly gay. Jill Bennett on AfterElle.com advises that young people shouldn't feel they have to come out if they are not financially independent, for example if they risk being thrown out of their home by a homophobic family.

Even if there are no external barriers to being out, LBGT people may be unable to accept their identity or worried that others will judge them. Telling the people you love something so important to you takes

Ryanto and Josh: www.adayinhand.com
a huge amount of self-confidence and determination. So after all this, why come out?

The closet is not a comfortable place. The pressure and the shame of hiding a crucial part of your identity can be hard to bear, not only for you but for your partners and those friends who do know. The relief many feel on coming out is extraordinary. Even if it takes your loved ones time to adapt to the news, they will probably appreciate the chance to know the real you, and you can feel more confident in being who you are. Plus it really is a pain having to change/avoid pronouns – being out means you don’t have to think before you speak!

Maybe a more powerful argument is that much homophobia stems from ignorance – it is harder to hate gay people if you realise one of them is your brother or your best friend. We only have the rights we have now because brave people came out and you can feel more confident in being who you are. Plus it means you don’t have to think before you speak!

Some people may have never seen that! During her time in career limbo, Ellen DeGeneres said that what kept her going was receiving letters from gay teenagers, saying that seeing her come out had saved them from suicide. In this vein, there is a new project called A Day In Hand (www.adayinhand.com) which aims to educate and combat homophobia simply by encouraging gay couples to hold hands in public.

Of course I’m not concluding that every gay person has a duty to be out. No-one should be made to come out before they are ready. But however terrifying it may seem, coming out is generally an incredibly liberating experience: and you can feel proud that you’re helping gay rights just by living your life. Personally, my confidence and happiness has increased many-fold since I came out. I would encourage you to do the same if you possibly can. You might be surprised! Now, if I could only find a way to tell my granny…

(For anyone wanting support in coming out, feel free to contact Erni Visser, the CUSU LBGT Welfare Officer at welfare@cusu-lbgt.com).

In conjunction with Josie’s article about ‘Getting Out and Staying Out’, we decided to run a special version of our [no def] survey, asking you, the beautiful LBGT students of Cambridge, about coming out and what it means to you to be ‘out and proud’.

Both the raw data and the individual responses we received made for an enlightening and often unexpected read. Firstly, you guys started young: 57% of you were thirteen or younger when you first realised you weren’t straight (perhaps this only surprised me because I was one of the 11% who fitted in the 17-19 category). For most of you, there was a fairly large gap between the realisation and actually coming out. Only 8% first told people about their sexuality when aged thirteen or younger (compared to the 57% who knew about it at this age). Most people (52%) waited until 17-19 before telling anyone; some (11%) were even older. As ever, the raw data conceals a whole host of underlying issues and questions. Why, for the majority of LBGT people, was there such a long hiatus between the discovery that they weren’t heterosexual and the actual moment when they first told anyone about it?

One answer lies in the phenomenon of sexual confusion. 36% of you were frequently confused about your sexuality before you came out; a good 20%, however, responded that you had never been confused about your sexual orientation. 44% confessed to having been occasionally confused. More unexpectedly, 53% of the people who had come out are still either occasionally or frequently confused about their sexuality. Some indication, perhaps, of how fluid and multiplicitous sexuality really is, how relatively meaningless the labels we don as we emerge from the closet.

The question still remains, however, and various social factors that we investigated provide a more troubling picture. School education is a current hot topic in gay circles, so we were shocked to learn that the overwhelming majority (a massive 74%) received no information about same-sexuality at school. Deprived of learning about LBGT orientations at school, many of you were similarly failed by the media: 32% felt that their attitudes to their own sexuality had been negatively influenced by media representation. When we consider this, along with the fact that 43% of you didn’t know any other LBGT people before you came out, we begin to suspect that those teenage years between discovering non-heterosexuality and coming out might have been a confusing and lonely time for many.

Running counter to all this negativity, the survey results consistently told one genuinely uplifting story. Most people had no doubts that coming out had been a Good Thing To Do: 67% told us they perceptions of themselves changed for the better after doing so, compared to just 5% whose self-perception changed negatively. The comments people made only reiterated this. Several mentioned a corresponsive decrease in stress and increase in self-confidence, and many talked about their relief about the positive responses of others. One person said simply that ‘I perceive of myself as a whole person now’. You couldn’t get a more ringing endorsement of the fact that being out and proud is as important as it ever was.
Would you invite your parents, your friends, and their parents to a formal meal and then film them talking about your sexualities? Emma Murphy tells us about a very unique documentary.

Gays at Cambridge really have it made: club nights, socials, our very own exec, and most importantly, lots of other gays all over the place! But we all know that it isn’t that easy for everyone. Once you get outside of somewhere like Cambridge or London things start to be very different. Anyone who came out at school will know quite how scary and difficult it can be.

Coming from Cambridge, I didn’t want to make the mistake of thinking that being gay is as easy for everyone else in the UK as it is for me now. I remember just three years ago when I first came here how amazing it felt to find a group of gay friends: people who were like me, who knew what it felt like, because as a teenager that was all I had wanted. So I decided to make a film about it.

The idea for Out at Lunch came out of nowhere. I wanted to do something special to mark graduation and hit on the idea of having a formal meal in Trinity, getting my gay friends to come along and inviting our parents. Making a documentary about it was our next step. I called my sister, an actress who had produced a couple of shorts, and she was on board straight away.

Convincing my friends that it was such a great idea was not so easy. But they slowly came round to it. The meal was an important step for us, tangible evidence of our parent’s acceptance. The documentary was something else, something I really believed in and my friends supported mainly because they saw how important it was to me. I’m so grateful to all of them for going along with it.

I’d always known filmmaking was something I wanted to do. Our best decision was hiring a professional Director of Photography, something that wouldn’t have been possible without the generous support of the Trinity Dunlevie fund (making a documentary about lesbians definitely counts as a ‘life enhancing activity’!). And so, with funding confirmed, we embarked on one huge learning curve.

While everyone else was crashing out after finals, I was researching cameras, where to buy tapes and what a pistol grip was. Most difficult of all was trying to convince my friends not only to invite their parents to what could have been a very awkward meal, but to come on camera and discuss how they felt about it! In the end, it all went incredibly well: our Director of Photography was amazing, my sister and I were so excited about finally shooting that we kept the energy up through two gruelling weekends and, best of all, my friends were so open and eloquent about their feelings and experiences that I had to spend most of the interviews fighting back tears.

Highlights of the shoot would have to include persuading our vertiginous DoP to scale a fire escape to interview my best friend from her favourite rooftop haunt. Or getting up at four in the morning to film the sunrise over Great Court. There was never a dull moment, from filming prom dress rugby (only at Cambridge!) to debating taking the camera on a punt, encouraging the porters to make a cameo appearance or explaining to the intrigued catering staff that we were making a film about a “special group of friends”.

After the initial high of getting it filmed, we spent days watching all the footage, amazed that this was something we had made happen. Post-production was even more of a confusing unknown then the actual filming. But after months of what felt like scrambling around in the dark we’ve finally got ourselves together and on track.

We’ve cut a trailer, which is getting great feedback. All the focus now is on raising awareness and getting sponsorship for completion. We’re contacting business and have agreed our first sponsorship deal; the Cambridge Equality and Diversity division have asked to screen the film as part of LBGT history month in Cambridge next February; and we’ve even had celebrity endorsements from Jen Brister and Linda Belos! Support has been great and not just from LBGT people. We’ve got nearly 200 fans on Facebook and have had some really encouraging comments.

Last month I managed to get along to the BFI to catch as many films as I could at the London Lesbian and Gay Film Festival, and as I sat there in NFT1 (awed by quite how many lesbians there were all in one place) I thought to myself “you know what, next year, this will be our film”. That was a pretty amazing feeling.

If you’re interested to find out more about Out at Lunch then please visit "www.lifeslicefilms.com". Join our facebook page where you can keep up to date with all the news and be the first to hear about dates for our exciting summer fundraising event with special guest appearances.
the [no definition] interview

In which we grill the people that used to have our job.

Chloe Wong has been a fag hag since the tender age of 12 and picked up bisexuality along the way. You will usually see her dancing away Tuesday nights at revs regardless of impending deadlines.

Zing Tsjeng is a dirty left-wing, queer liberal Asian immigrant feminist. She does SPS and goes to Emmanuel.

1. Scarlett Johansson or Penelope Cruz (a la Vicky Cristina Barcelona)?
   C: Tough… But I think Penelope won with that amazing entrance- mussed hair, backless dress, sexy Spanish.
   Z: Penelope Cruz, every time. I prefer brunettes.

4. Best non-gay gay icon?
   Z: Eartha Kitt. She was the first black Catwoman and also the baddie Yzma in the Disney Film, The Emperor’s New Groove - homoerotic comic books and Disney, two gay boxes ticked at once!
   C: Jennifer Beals

5. Cynic or romantic?
   C: Cynic…mostly.
   Z: A romantic with a heart of stone and the baggage capacity of Heathrow Terminal 3.

6. What’s your biggest vice?
   C: Indecisiveness
   Z: Buying too many clothes while having too little money.

7. What’s your biggest virtue?
   Z: An underdeveloped sense of shame.
   C: Good listener

9. What makes you hopeful about humanity?
   Z: Puppies.
   C: People who help you with your luggage up stupidly long flights of stairs.

10. From a psychological perspective, would you describe yourself as ‘normal’?
   C: Haha, given I’ve just had my week of exams I would say any remnants of ‘normalness’ have completely vanished.

11. If you ran an LGBT venue, what would it be and what would it be called?
   Z: Frisk - a club with bouncy castles, a light-up disco floor, and drag queens handing out lollipops. Costume is mandatory, and there would be a dressing-up box to aid the unwilling.
   C: A bar/club, I’ve had enough naming clubs being on the committee during the move to Vodka Revs though, can I just take over any swanky gay club in London?

12. Do you ever wish you were straight?
   C: I’ve never wished I was straight but I have had my occasional ‘Am I actually straight/lesbian instead?’ crisis. But yeah, labels, becoming bi rep sorted that one out.
   Z: Never

14. What song do you want played at your funeral?
   C: Older Chests by Damien Rice
   Z: I’m not going to have a funeral when I die, I’m going to have a massive death-day party. Everybody will read their eulogies to pulsating electro music and at its climax, my tombstone will turn into a giant whiskey fountain.

16. Tell us a secret.
   Z: I’ve skinnydipped in the Emma swimming pool with a lesbian, a gay man, and two bisexual girls. And a duck.
   C: I’ve pulled more straight girls than any other gender and sexuality combo.
Celebrated as one of this year’s greatest comedies at the International Film Festival in Cannes, Woody Allen’s ‘Vicky Cristina Barcelona’ is the witty portrayal of an explosive menage-à-trois in the heart of Barcelona’s artistic circle.

The story-line evolves around best friends Vicky (Rebecca Hall) and Cristina (Scarlett Johansson) who decide to leave the US for a summer vacation in the Catalan Capital. Shortly after their arrival they meet the charming artist Carlos (Javier Bardem) who spontaneously invites them for a weekend trip to his country house in Oviedo. Cristina, who considers herself a free spirit and true child of the Bohème, is immediately drawn to the enigmatic painter whose sexual liberty incites her curiosity. Despite Vicky’s vehement objections they follow Carlos’ invitation and soon fall prey to the artist’s southern charms. The situation becomes complicated when both Carlos’ neurotic ex-wife María Elena (Penelope Cruz) and Vicky’s long-term fiancé Doug enter the scene. While Vicky finds herself in an emotional crisis, Cristina plunges right into a dangerous love triangle with Carlos and María Elena, a constellation which precariously vacillates between sexual liberation, adventure and downright self-destruction.

In true Woody Allen fashion, ‘Vicky Cristina Barcelona’ is, more than anything else, a wonderfully ironic character study, set in a sunlit Spanish metropolis, where all American stereotypes about the European ‘Other’ come true. With masterful ease, American bourgeois morality is played out against the Bohemian life-style of Southern Europe, stereotypical and deliberately exaggerated notions of human self-experience which are reflected in the wonderfully incompatible characters of the film’s female protagonists.

For all those who are genuinely resistant to Bardem’s Latin-lover attraction, the female ‘dark-room encounter’ between Cruz and Johansson will make up for the male-centred plot.
In the beginning there was Jenny Schecter. And she was good.

Unfortunately for her, she discovered she was a lesbian. Subsequent events meant that she suffered a breakdown, became a psychotic megalomaniac and was eventually killed. The message is disturbingly clear: lesbian lifestyles are fatal. Dabble therein and the consequences will be unfulfilling and painful. But who conceived this persuasive piece of anti-homosexual propaganda? The Catholic Church? The Bush administration? Neo-Nazis?

No. It was Ilene Chaiken, lesbian television producer with a self-professed dedication to increased visibility for gay women worldwide. And this dedication has hardly proved fruitless. The initial response to The L Word was overwhelmingly positive, from viewers and critics alike. A TV series about the lives, loves and losses of a group of lesbians was unprecedented, and for many women and girls thinking about coming out, The L Word was pivotal. It not only offered characters that lesbians could in some way identify with, but also vindicated stereotypically lesbian attributes that hitherto had been ridiculed by television. Will and Grace, for example, was practically infatuated with the wit, success and beauty that appeared to go hand in hand with the male gay lifestyle, yet one of the only lesbian references I recall from the series was a punch-line insinuating that while one ‘lesbian mom’ couldn’t get down on the dance-floor like Jack, she had the machismo to build an entire house. I know the comic aspect of Will and Grace relied on stereotype more than a junkie relies on crack, but as a thirteen-year-old, that joke remained lodged in the back of my mind, and not without discomfort. The L Word turned that punch-line into a point of pride – not to say that my dreams of a future in construction work had suddenly been exonerated, but for the first time I was witnessing a TV show that accepted stereotypical lesbian characteristics as capable of detachment from ridicule. For the neurotic teenage me, The L Word was tantamount to weekly therapy; it seemed to be the only voice I had in my parochial existence that told me all was fine, that I could be who I wanted to be with pride, and without abandoning all social credibility.

Sadly The L Word’s therapeutic qualities wore thin for me by the time I was about seventeen, but like all good soaps, the series’ promise of escapism to a land of beauty, sunshine and unabashed promiscuity kept me watching. I, like many, learned to ignore the clumsy dialogue and contrived political siding, and to carve out vague consistencies in the overloaded concoction that The L Word quickly became.

The show descended into parody, and while parody is undoubtedly watchable – and watch it we did – self-ridicule does not mean immunity to the ridicule of others. Whether or not Chaiken et. al. were attempting surrealistic irony or whether they were simply trying to salvage something unsalvageable with the most crude and flashy means, the critics turned their backs, and rather a few viewers did too. Season Six, of course, confirmed our conviction that The L Word had not become so much an obscurely clever angle on the personalities and nuances of gay culture, and indeed the film industry, but a nauseating pastiche of insufferable, inconclusive storylines. No respect was paid to loyalists who had somehow managed to stick it out, and no respect was paid to Chaiken’s poor line-up of tragic characters. Take Max for example.

Faith Taylor looks back on the legacy of The L Word.
First introduced to us as butch lesbian Moira, he decides he wishes to undertake a gender transition, is consequently bullied by Jenny, shunned by Alice, and rejected as a freak by his first heterosexual dating endeavour. Next it is decided that he shall be a gay man. So he is subjected to a rude homosexual awakening by the mysteriously Scottish Billy, grows a godawful beard and next begins a relationship with a man. Happiness ensues for at least three episodes, before Max is knocked up (despite the mass amounts of testosterone, it would seem), and deserted by his boyfriend. The final, lasting memento we have of Max is the image of him heavily pregnant and heavily bearded, cleaning out a barbecue with a spatula. The only thing stopping this from being comic genius is the lack of some sort of coherent admission from Chaiken that yes, The L Word was actually supposed to be a great big send-up of gays, bisexuals and trans people alike.

It was this increasing tendency to self-ridicule – intended or unintended – that left The L Word a crumpled and useless opportunity. Yes, it was great for lesbian visibility, and it made the gay community seemingly and actually accessible for many women struggling with their sexuality. But the making of such a huge statement in the television and film industry shouldn’t be capped with a disclaimer that smacks of ‘should be taken with a pinch of salt’. I want to delve into a world where, fine, not everything’s absolutely dandy, but I can at least follow the trials and tribulations of characters I grow to know intimately with suspended belief, with a state of mind that does not constantly flick between scepticism and embarrassment. I do not want to enter into a Sapphic circus in which the only meaningful sex is conducted in a public toilet, and the last shred of utility attributed to pregnant FTM transsexuals is scraping charcoal off a grill.