Welcome to the Easter 2011 issue of [no definition], magazine of the CUSU LGBT campaign! This issue broadly takes as its theme the assimilation of LGBT people into ‘mainstream’ society - a subject which has become very relevant over the past decade. We look at the desirability of assimilation in general, and then at aspects of assimilation within the family, the education system, religion, gender paradigms and the media. We are also proud to announce a special feature on the status of LGBT people in the military, with an article by Ilana Seager and Eric Randall of Yale University’s Q magazine on the repeal of DADT, and interviews with members of the British military about life after repeal.

Special thanks to Karl Dmitri Bishop for the stunning photography featured on our cover (www.karlmitribishop.com), and thanks also to Chris Huang, Dan Green, Anthony Woodman and Halle Warner, as well as all of our wonderful contributors. I hope you enjoy this issue! Any comments or submissions for next term’s issue should be sent to lgbt-editor@cusu.cam.ac.uk.
Something of a breakthrough occurred last term - we now have a full exec for the first time in institutional memory! What this means for you is that we are now able to organise a positively hyperactive schedule of events. So although we're all - grads excluded - somewhat inconvenienced by such throwaway irritations as exams this term, the CUSU LGBT calendar will be pretty full, with punting, BBQs, a Garden Party and much more besides. We have also relaunched the website, giving it a revamped events calendar and an altogether shinier layout - many thanks to Advait Sarkar for creating a truly exemplary resource. I passionately believe that we have something to offer everyone, be it a campaign, a club night or anything in between. If you feel there's something we're omitting, then let us know. Ensuring that CUSU LGBT is as relevant as it can be is a personal priority. We've got some fantastic events lined up and I look forward to seeing you at one of them some time soon!

04 THE CASE AGAINST ASSIMILATION  luke betts • hannah ehrlich
05 PUT DOWN THE MEGAPHONES  yanqing cheng
06 HOMO HOMOS: THE SUBTLETIES OF CONFORMITY  raphael cadenhead
08 THE OLD GAY WHISTLE TEST  gary mcdowell
09 LGBT ACTIVISM AND THE ELDERLY  taz rasul
10 SAME-SEX MARRIAGE AND OTHER SEXUAL DEVIANCES  jack hare
11 [PHOTOGRAPHY]  karl dmitri bishop
12 A PERSPECTIVE ON TRANSSEXUAL PARENTING  harry harris • chris kassam
13 BEING GAY IN THE FAMILY WAY  emi dunn
14 TO BE OR NOT TO BE A GAY TEACHER  jonny walker
15 THIS PROJECT  taz rasul
16 MILITARY FEATURE  hattie jones
18 SCHOOL'S OUT  ilana seager • eric randall
20 GAY AS A MAYPOLE  jonathan wooley
21 LOVE DIVINE  charlie bell
24 [SHORT FICTION]  jonathan wooley
25 [POETRY]  clare rivers mohan
26 BEING OUR BEAUTIFUL SELVES  amo king
28 FROM BATMAN TO KEVIN KELLER  chrysogonus malilang
30 OUT OF THE CLOSET AND INTO THE LIVING ROOM  william morland
31 [ILLUSTRATION]  emi dunn
This repression of the self arises from the idea that since prejudice is a problem, the solution is to eliminate difference, but this is simply a non-sequitur. The real problems are the value judgments based upon perceptions of difference — remember Nick Griffin on Question Time: “a lot of people find the sight of two men kissing in public really creepy”. This implies that the solution is to limit expression of alternative sexualities, rather than tackle underlying prejudice. The pressure to suppress difference exists not only on an individual level but also when it comes to the queer community itself. Attempting to procure equality, people often completely reject any suggestion of a queer culture — given the number of loose trends I’ve observed that run across the LGBT+ community, I can state that this rejection is simply contrary to fact. Of course, people shouldn’t be forced to conform to queer culture, but neither should they be forced to reject it.

One of the most prolifically criticised aspects of queer culture is Gay Pride. Pride is so often slated for being ‘tacky’, ‘in-your-face’ and ‘disruptive’ that even a large number of LGBT+ people find it embarrassing. Of course, legitimate concerns can be raised about the commercialisation of Pride, and these should be addressed, but nonetheless the majority of disdain towards Pride events can be traced to a sense of embarrassment at some of the most oft-attacked subsections of queer culture — those which indicate the value of femininity and flamboyance in a world where femininity (especially male femininity) is so often vilified. Pride is also criticised for being ‘sexualised’. It is unequivocal that there is nothing wrong with asserting one’s identity in public, but it is hardly surprising that open expressions of queer sexuality seem distasteful to the straight public. In the aftermath of Section 28, our sex education system still focuses on the singular experience of sex as a procreative act, and consequently many people have a rather narrow, unimaginative view of what ‘sex’ is.

But this deafening silence on queer sexuality doesn’t exist only in schools but in the media also. Token LGBT+ characters on TV shows are almost inevitably celibate, whilst their straight/cis companions mill around them in a sex-fuelled haze. Think of Marc from Ugly Betty, and Alexis too, who cannot find a man who will even touch her without having some ulterior motive. So it’s no wonder Pride is so sexualised. Society sanitises and shuns our desires and glides over our differences so frequently that it seems pushy or aggressive to openly assert our identity. Stereotypes these may be, but at least they are ours — we choose to live in this manner because it is part of who we are, and that should be no more looked down upon than the behaviour of those straight-acting members of our community. Society always tells us we need to conform in order to be accepted, but don’t heed it: you don’t need to compromise your identity for anyone.

It is a mantra of our time: “LGBT+ people are just the same as the rest of us.” Yet as I sit here with ABBA blaring out of my speakers I cannot help but wonder if this can really be said of all of us. It often seems that in our haste to promote equality we pretend that everyone is exactly the same, and can be quite affronted when others don’t conform to our own, inherently heteronormative, expectations. These expectations focus mostly on behaviour — often there is as much prejudice against ‘behaving’ queer as there is against actually being LGBT+. This applies not only to LGBT+ people, but also straight people whose behaviours differ from society’s norms: as one of my co-volunteers on the THIS project (see article page 15) said: “I don’t want to live in a world where the most fun, flamboyant, extraverted boy in class is turned into a shell of his former self because homophobic bullies have decided — whether or not it’s true — that he is gay”. Figures from Stonewall’s Reports back this up — 48% of boys perceived as “acting like girls” experience homophobic bullying, as opposed to only 31% of ‘out’ LGBT pupils. More insidiously, a form of victim blaming often also emerges when even well-intentioned people deal with cases of bullying: “he brought it on himself by being so camp.” By telling victims to “just ignore it”, the blame is shifted away from the perpetrator. Moreover a perceived dismissal of the bullying by someone important to the victim can emotionally harm them just as much as the bullying itself.

In my experience, it was while I was coming out that I really became aware of society’s expectations. Whilst closeted I felt I had to suppress my expressive impulses, and after I came out I still couldn’t express myself for fear of conforming to stereotypes and thereby undermining my notions of equality.
What comes to mind when one hears “LGBT”? Traditionally, we think of rainbow flags, activism and Pride parades, and more recently, queerness has become synonymous with celebrities, TV and pop music. It seems that the LGBT community are defined by the loudest amongst us - the activists, the anarchists and Lady Gaga. But being loud is not always the best way to be heard. Sometimes we need to step back and ask ourselves, what’s all this noise drowning out?

Activism isn’t what it used to be. The old-school, 60s-style activists are being gradually replaced by a generation of youths armed with forums and Twitter, ready to pounce on any occurrence of the word gay as derogatory adjective, any “lezzie” joke, any accidental incorrect usage of pronouns... Which begs the question, is this really a worthwhile use of our voices? Every once in a while, “X people complained about this statement” appears in another news article. Half the time it’s the “conservative right” complaining about “attacks on family values” - most laugh this off as silly. The rest of the time it’s the “PC brigade”, complaining about some small thing that might cause offense to a small percentage of society. This is considered less silly, but still frequently annoying - and we, the LGBT Twitter-youths, frequently find ourselves in this camp. Standing up for our values is to be applauded, but a loud, grating assertion of self-importance only acts to alienate us in the same way as it does the conservatives.

We as individuals are comfortable, settled and valued members of society. It is thanks to the good work of those who have gone before us that we use our society as a whole rejects homophobia, and no longer shudders at the thought of queerness. Why is it then that some of us actively reject the idea of being “mainstream”? Had homophobia not existed in the first place, this would be a non-issue - we would not have been treated any differently to begin with. Now that homophobia is being tackled, and “mainstream” is no longer synonymous with “straight”, it is reasonable to believe that those of us who are not leftist anarchists might not want to feel like an outsider all the time, always shouting frantically to be heard.

Another problem with complaining too much is that we risk always sounding like victims. Though this may invite attention, eventually one of two things will happen - we may be pandered to and patronised, like spoilt children, or viewed as overindulged and narcissistic, like spoilt children. What we risk doing by bawling at every single statement that might cause offence, is desensitising people to real prejudice. The loudest amongst us don’t necessarily know what is best for all of us. Sometimes, it is worth stepping back and realising that we are not the only people facing problems in the world.

Quietening down and getting on with life is certainly not an option for all of us. The Trans community, in particular, has many battles left to fight. However, despite transphobia being more widespread in our society, it is jumped on far less frequently than homophobia. Part of the reason is that far more than their LGB counterparts, individual members of the Trans community want to pass and fit in - making activism of the “out and proud” variety less viable. It is important that some of us recognise how privileged we are to be in our position; only this way can the voices of those who have much left to achieve be heard above the clamour. Assimilating more into society doesn’t mean that we should become invisible, or that we should stop fighting against the many injustices which still exist in the world. Quite the opposite - if we, instead, allow ourselves to become homogenised into society, so that we stop being “them” and start being “part of us”, if we quieten down on the small things which matter less, then maybe we’ll be better heard when we ask for those things which matter the most.

**PUT DOWN THE MEGAPHONES**

yanqing cheng
I think this way of thinking has won us many battles, because it enables us to understand why a dominant group feels threatened by those who do not fit the paradigm. Carving people up into ‘normal’ and ‘deviant’ groups is an ingenious way of including some people whilst excluding others. I’m sure that understanding how oppression works means half the battle is already won. However, precisely because of its success, ‘heteronormativity’ has rapidly become an unchallenged dogma within the LGBT community. As a result, most people are not willing to admit its limitations. Let me outline a few here.

Firstly, our demands for justice are unstable, because we’ve chosen to define ourselves against what is normative. Keeping us shackled to a minority position means that difference is sought for its own sake — not because it abides by the demands of a common ethic, but because it isn’t normative. Secondly, I don’t think ‘heteronormativity’ is as coherent an idea as people often make it out to be. In fact, it’s never entirely clear what someone means by the term. It usually means whatever they want it to mean. For example: you’ll often hear marriage labelled as heteronormative, resulting in gay marriage being condemned by some as an insidious form of tyranny. Then there’s civil partnership — which is viewed either as a tragic mimicry of marriage (in short, an extension of heteronormativity) or as a way of casting aside the patriarchal baggage of marriage. Some go even further, claiming that all sexual relationships which are exclusive to one other person are a hangover of heteronormative monogamy. We end up with an impasse where everyone wants to defeat the big bad monster of ‘heteronormativity’, but no-one agrees what that monster looks like. The problem is that ‘heteronormativity’ is often conflated with ‘heterosexual desire’, so that anything associated with heterosexuality is almost immediately treated with suspicion. I think we need to go beyond that knee-jerk response — to offer an explanation why something is oppressive and destructive, not just rest satisfied with the judgment that it is ‘heteronormative’. This summons us to an ethical discourse that many are unwilling to consider, because ‘ethics’ sound uncannily similar to heteronormative conformity. Thirdly, by thinking in terms of an ‘us’ and a ‘they’, it is tempting to place the onus for transformation on ‘them’ without looking at ourselves and our own community. We are so familiar with criticism from the outside that we do not recognize the challenges from the inside. The heterosexual threat is so consuming that we don’t feel prepared to identify destructive desire and behaviour within ourselves and others round us.

In the face of recent social shifts which have raised the status of LGBT people to an equivalence with heterosexuals (in marriage adoption, and so forth), there have been growing counter-tendencies to re-capture the early aims of queer liberation. Nostalgia paints a rosy picture of sexual
emancipation and summons us to repentance: 'We have lost
direction. We once promoted fluidity and social disorder, but
now we laud the institution of marriage. We blindly seek
everything that heterosexuals seek and in the process we
are assimilated into the heterosexual world order.'

I have no doubt that 'social acceptance' can become an idol
to which everything is sacrificed. I also suspect that some
aspirations for marriage and for heterosexual 'equivalence'
(a term I prefer to 'equality') are inspired by no other factor
than a desire to 'fit in'.

At the same time, I'm not so sure promoting 'non-conformity' for its own sake is a better alternative. In fact I think it produces the very effects it seeks to
overcome, as non-conformity acquires a kind of normative
status. It occurs to me that certain expressions of 'queer
liberation' do not end up appreciating all sexual desire, but
uneapologetically show a preference for more so-called 'fluid'
social arrangements. With this, 'marriage equality' is cast as
a form of bourgeois acquiescence, while less structured or
binding relationships are portrayed as a more authentic form
of emancipation. And where does celibacy fit in? Of course,
it doesn't. This is because sexual liberation has been
presented in naïve terms as a matter of expanded sexual
activity.

There is something quite contradictory about the position
we find ourselves in. All ethical judgment is suspended
because normative ethics are allied with 'heteronormativity'. At the same time, we gladly cast
judgment upon 'heteronormativity' - but because 'normativity' is abandoned (when in reality it hasn't been),
many other norms are smuggled in. As I have already
suggested, one such norm assumes that all sexual restraint
is oppressive. I, for one, am not so sure that all regulation of
desire signals the triumph of tyranny. In fact, ascetic
practice may in certain situations exhibit a sophisticated
form of self-mastery that holds hope for the overcoming of
social expectation and hegemony. But a discussion of
asceticism must wait for a later date...

We are faced with a sexual aporia which calls for a renewal
of the way we, as the LGBT community, discuss and
articulate desire, and we must re-think our discourse beyond
the simplistic categories of 'normativity' and 'resistance'.
"This is Gary. He’s OLD." That’s how I was introduced to the new CUSU LGBT committee at the last handover meeting. When asked how old, I replied "26" and someone actually cried, “EW!” She sleeps with the fishes now.

This is a particular phenomenon of a university town such as Cambridge. I certainly don’t have this problem anywhere else in the world. But it does make me wonder, as I advance in years, about those born earlier than me, and how the gay community treats its elders.

Consider first how you actually respond if you are a younger member of the community, or how you did respond when you were younger, to the sight of someone a bit older in a gay bar. Did you avoid all eye contact? Assume they weren’t worth talking to? That they were only after one thing?

The problem is that older members of the LGBT community, particularly men, are viewed as 'creepy'. The assumption is that an older gay man in a bar is only after one thing. Which is ironic given the behaviour of some of the young people who frequent LGBT events. But really, older people often have more difficulty integrating into a gay community and particularly in a small town like Cambridge, where there is no community to speak of outside the university.

Why do we react this way? Is it perhaps that we worry about ageing ourselves? An older person reminds us of what is ahead for us, what is to come. And in a culture as dominated by looks as the gay scene can be, the mere hint of a line or suggestion of sagging can throw off a queen for a week.

Another assumption seems to be that we who are older should be jealous of how young the people we are talking to are. Sorry loves, the 80s is where the cool kids are at. The 90s were crap. And I wouldn’t like to be anything younger than 24, and that age increases as I get older. After all, when I was 21, I was stressing about exams, job applications, and my downwardly spiraling relationship. Now a cool hard shell of bitter cynicism protects the heart that all too often broke when I were a lad - ironically first broken when I was 18 by a 26 year old. I thought he was my boyfriend, he knew I was his fuck buddy. Sure, if I were just to be transported back to my 18 year old body I might consider it. But if I were to lose all my experience as well - no thanks.

Older gay people do not survive by feeding off the essence of the young. Older people are just people who were born earlier than you. It doesn’t mean they are necessarily any different in terms of opinions, outlooks, feelings or demeanour. In fact the best friendships are often struck up with a later realization of just how different in age you are. I was recently confused for a 21 year old by one friend who was shocked to find not only was I 26, but that I also teach. "You’re a supervisor? I can’t talk to supervisors! I won’t be able to chat to you now!" So in fact age is a perception. If most people I meet just assume I'm another undergrad, rather than a grad who has been teaching for 4 years and is about to become a Doctor, why am I suddenly any different when they realize my actual age?

On a more serious note, looking at someone and changing your behaviour towards them based on how old they look is no different from judging them based on skin colour. Discrimination is discrimination: some forms appear more socially acceptable than others. But they hurt just the same. The problem is particularly acute in a university town such as Cambridge, where there is pressure to compete and perhaps achieve at as young an age as possible. You may notice that as age increases, the number of gays of that age out and about decreases. Indeed I commend the older members of our community who do brave the scene, considering the banter I get at being only 26.

My spiritual gay home is Calgary, Canada, where many of my friends seem unable to comprehend that I am viewed as old back in Cambridge, and where I have friends in their 50s whom I don’t think twice about talking to. Perhaps now that I am departing The Bubble I am well trained for the inevitable ascent into The Thirties and being consigned to the homosexual elephant’s graveyard. Perhaps I will one day be that old man who dances in the corner by himself and requests songs from decades ago, like “Toxic” by Britney Spears or “Pass That Dutch” by Missy Elliot (both, by the way, played on a weekly basis on gay nights when I arrived in Cambridge back in the 14th Century). Perhaps some of you will join me, and by the time we are old (and my 26 to your 20 pales in comparison) there will be a community for the older gays. Perhaps our generation, the first to come out in large numbers in our teens, will become known as the gay “baby boomer” generation and this problem will disappear. I hope so. But, for now, respect your elders.
At 13, my Coming Out Plan was very simple:
(1) Wait until my grandparents are dead.
(2) Tell everybody who is not dead.

The elderly are insurmountable obstacles to my sexual freedom. Their attitudes won’t change. Let’s trust in the forces of cultural progress and focus our reformist energies on the Facebook generation (“100 Million Strong for Homosexuality”, etc).

At least, that’s the bias-verging-on-ageist attitude I took in my teenaged cost-benefit analysis. I don’t know about yours, but my grandparents are 70 year old, heterosexual, first generation Muslim immigrants. The mistake I made was turning my familial situation into a sweeping and universal caricature. I’m going to tell you why I was wrong, and why it’s worth including the elderly in work on changing attitudes.

To start, we shouldn’t only try to change people’s attitudes if those people’s attitudes are easy to change. Neither should we be making decisions on how worthwhile it is to combat prejudice depending on the type of person who possesses it. That’s a really dangerous attitude to have and, where limited resources aren’t an issue, the bounds of our messages should, too, be unlimited. We can get so outraged by the negative attitudes of our peers, whilst remaining so unfazed by the negative attitudes of our parents or grandparents. On principle the homophobia hurts no less, and we have a duty to act to quell ignorance and discrimination.

Additionally, we are fortunately able to separate our personal lives from our political actions. It may be hard to challenge the people to whom you are closest and that’s why political, more impersonal action is needed. Two months ago as I was heading out of the house to take part in my regular LGBT youth campaigning project, I heard my grandmother angrily shouting at the television, “But WHY do they have to get married?” I have so much pride and passion in the work that I do to help LGBT kids feel more comfortable and secure, but I didn’t have the guts to turn back and question what my grandma had just said. I was ashamed of myself for being so willing to tackle homophobia in public speeches and classroom workshops, but not when it arises in my own house. I’m sure that’s a common experience for many LGBT people, though, and it shows that wider support for LGBT activism targeted at the elderly is necessary.

And action isn’t needed only to cede my own guilt. We are the last people who need reminding that, whether or not queer people are visible, they are there. This includes people in the elderly population. There are around 10 million pensioners in the United Kingdom and even on a conservative estimate of 3% non-heterosexual, that’s 300,000 elderly LGBT people. It has been repeatedly shown that elderly LGBT people face different, and in some ways exacerbated, challenges. Elderly people are more likely to feel socially isolated, being less likely to know other LGBT people and less likely to receive day-to-day support from their families and formal agencies. Elderly LGBT deserve to benefit from the revolution that they had the courage to begin.

Since I was 13, not one of my grandparents has died. Good - because I want them to see this.
Same-sex marriage (SSM) is a big deal. Vast fortunes have been spent on lobbying and campaigning for and against it in the UK, US and beyond. When Ben Summerskill, Stonewall UK’s Chief Executive, dared to question whether SSM was desirable, he was slammed by commentators for betraying the community he claimed to represent. It’s an emotive issue – marriage is both a public proclamation and legal recognition of love.

I’m in favour of complete legal equality, and the rights and privileges of marriage should be available to all couples, and even higher order tuples. The tax breaks alone make the situation look very cozy, and concepts like maternity and paternity leave can, and should, be adapted to suit same-sex couples.

However, the UK’s situation is a little peculiar. Civil partnerships have been around since 2004, and offer legal rights almost identical to marriages. It’s therefore obvious that when we demand SSM, it is not because we see it as accomplishing any improvement in legal position, but because of the deeper implications of the term ‘marriage’.

There is a dangerous delusion that bringing in SSM will solve all our problems. When leading figures like Sandi Toksvig define it as the most fundamental issue in activism it’s easy to nod and agree, but I find it really hard to see what it would achieve. The only people who benefit form the fortunate minority – those in a stable, long term relationship which they can be open about to their family, friends and co-workers: people who are generally middle class and in comfortable jobs. It’s considerably harder to get worked up about the issue if you’re a queer teen on the streets, kicked out of your parent’s home, or a closeted forty-something office worker grappling with depression.

If we’re going to strive for change, we’ve got to focus on the important stuff. The effort and money spent campaigning for SSM should go to lobbying the government to take action on homelessness, bullying in schools and the workplace, immigration and asylum rights, broader sexual health education and a whole host of other issues. If we want to be safe, we need to be respected, and we need to respect our community and ourselves. If we spend more time worrying about our white wedding than the girl starving on the street corner because of who she loves, then we are unworthy of that respect.

If nothing else, I worry about the impact on activism when we finally achieve SSM (and I doubt it will be too long coming) – the sobering reality that we’re still not popular with the cool kids on the playground and that they’re not going to be any nicer to us. Look at California and Prop 8 – the legalisation of SSM mobilised the religious right, the social conservatives and money poured in from across the US to wipe out hard won legal rights. There will be plenty of setbacks on the path to true equality – social as well as legal – and we must build a firm foundation, ensuring that no one suffers for their sexuality, rather than leaping upwards for a nearby shiny prize.

I’m going to clamber down from the moral high ground here and point out that, if anything, there is a stronger case for civil partnerships for straight couples. Marriage has a lot of baggage – historical, patriarchal, religious and more, and it would be nice not to have to participate in the tradition. I’m frankly surprised any same-sex couple would want such an institution over a civil partnership – the gender politics involved have always been used against our community. Peter Tatchell’s Equal Love campaign highlights this issue very admirably – allow the same opportunities for all, and let couples make their own choice about what they want. But don’t think choosing either way will have an impact on how the majority treats our community – changes will only be made when we can demonstrate solidarity with anyone who is even a little bit queer.

SAME-SEX MARRIAGE AND OTHER SEXUAL DEVIANCIES

jack hare
"My father's a woman who races cars in her free time, and she constantly embarrasses men by knowing more about high-performance engines than they do."

Trans people have always had children, but until recently there have been very few self-identifying trans parents. Formerly, many transsexuals felt themselves to be confronted by a stark choice between transitioning and having a family: childlessness was often considered the 'price to pay' for living in the right gender. Mental health professionals saw making a clean break with the past as essential to the transition process, and psychiatrists working at Gender Identity Clinics would refuse treatment to transsexuals with children. Thankfully, times have changed. Yet even now, trans parents are likely to come up against popular mythology about their 'fitness' as parents, which is nothing more than thinly veiled transphobia. One of the most common beliefs held by those opposing transsexual parenting is that parental transition will lead to a child becoming 'confused' about their own gender identity. Gay and lesbian parents have often been accused of failing to provide appropriate 'gender role models' for children, a belief that ultimately rests on heteronormative criteria for healthy psychological development. However, all research points to the contrary: there is no evidence to suggest that children of openly trans parents have gender identity issues themselves.

The prevalence of transphobia in our society does, of course, mean that every trans parent must contend with a number of other worries, such as the fear that their transition will expose their children to ridicule and bullying. Yet research has shown that this fear too may be unwarranted, though this will of course depend on factors such as location, social class and so forth. Perhaps the concern which has most oppressed trans parents is the possibility that a partner or spouse may react negatively or even violently to their transsexualism, with potentially damaging effects on children. In such situations, angry recriminations, divorce and alienation are sadly all too common. Even without such a reaction, the transition period can be emotionally turbulent, perhaps more so for older than for younger children. Family dynamics shift, and there are changes in a parent's gender expression, name and pronouns: there are also many decisions to be made about the timing and management of the transition. Openness, honesty and care are, as always, essential to preserve the parent-child bond.

Without seeking to minimise the difficulties of a parent's transition, experience has shown that children can and do adjust and even emerge as stronger people. Richard Green quotes the 7-year-old son of a male-to-female transsexual: 'Linda wants to be a woman. Linda wants to start a fresh life...I think that is happy for her. At first (when I was 4½) I didn't quite understand. As I got older, I realized she must be happy living as a woman, so I'll just accept that.' And conversely, how much emotional damage may be inflicted on a child who lives with a deeply unhappy parent trapped in an inappropriate gender role? One study quotes Dan, a female-to-male transsexual and single parent of a 9-year-old boy: 'I was becoming so screwed up in my head that I was starting to fail my son as a parent and if I didn't sort my head out and live as me, as how I felt, then I would totally fail him because I didn't have it in me to love him and provide for him and, you know, I'd end up on tranquillizers and god knows what'.

Things are looking brighter for trans parents, whether they transition before or after having children. A growing number of trans men and women are taking advantage of reproductive technologies to have their own biological children, despite being rendered infertile by hormonal therapy and surgery (although such technologies are not provided by the NHS and can be prohibitively expensive.) Nevertheless, the availability of these technologies, as well as the increasing popularity of surrogacy challenge normative assumptions about the link between biological sex and parenthood. There is no need for mothers to be female and fathers to be male any more. No one illustrated this more than Thomas Beatie, an American female-to-male transsexual who chose to retain his reproductive capacities, and became pregnant in 2008. In Mr Beatie's own words: "Wanting to have a biological child is neither a male nor female desire but a human desire." Similarly, the more relaxed attitude of a psychiatric profession that is coming to accept gay and lesbian trans people means that new parenting identities are being recognised. Researchers such as Richard Green have hitherto defended trans parenting by proving the normality of children and families of trans people within a traditional gendered framework. Yet as the field of trans identities proliferates, trans parenting will increasingly disrupt categories and expectations which are becoming ever more irrelevant to the complex weave of family life. It is time for us as a society to expand our understanding of parenthood, and to question the very necessity of distinguishing between mothers and fathers.
The Family: An institution fought for by all political parties, championed and reflected in almost every form of media we encounter. But this has only recently become an accessible option for same-sex couples, who in the past few years have finally become legally able to both be 'official' parents in the eyes of the law. Whilst there are many options available from surrogacy to insemination, I will here focus on the situation regarding adoption in the UK.

On the 30th of December 2005, the 'Adoption and Children Act' came into effect in the UK, making it legal for the first time for unmarried couples, including same-sex couples, who demonstrated an 'enduring family relationship' to adopt. In addition to this, in 2007 laws were enacted which make it illegal for providers of goods and services - adoption included - to discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation.

Both caregivers can now be on the adoption certificate, which means children of LGBT families now have the same legal rights as those from straight families - prior to this, the non-listed parents wouldn't have visitation rights to the child if the couple separated. Be able to bestow an inheritance, be able to register them at school, make medical decisions or claim social security benefits for the child.

LGBT families are also becoming more visible in the popular media - Elton John and his partner David Furnish recently adopted a child from a surrogate mother. 'The Kids Are Alright' generated a lot of publicity as the first mainstream film to include the issue, and there is a constant drip of articles and documentaries addressing the subject ('Mommy Mommy', about two women form Quebec trying to start a family, or 'Preacher's Sons' about two Unitarian Universal fathers adopting difficult-to-place boys are two interesting examples).

So does this mean that LGBT families have finally achieved equal status and recognition?

According to Stonewall, between 2007-2008 there were only 80 children adopted by LGBT families (out of roughly 3000-4000 children adopted per year). Stonewall's parenting guides for lesbian and gay parents advise, when looking for an adoption agency, to check Ofsted reports and 'Diversity Champion' and 'New Family Social' membership. Famously Britain's last catholic adoption agency, supported by the Muslim Council of Britain, announced they would close their agency should they be forced to place children with LGBT couples. We may have equality in theory, but there are still many obstacles in reality.

When a same-sex couple do establish a family, what familial structures are open to them? The only structure recognised and endorsed by the mainstream media is the heteronormative 'mom-and-dad' structure, complete with people-carriers, suburban housing, football on Saturdays and family roast on Sundays. The family in 'The Kids are Alright' was an example of this model, and whilst it served to show that 'alternative' families have the same problems as everyone else (surprise surprise!), it shied away from tackling any real issues of diversity and difference. In actuality, LGBT adopters are more open than heterosexual adopters to adopting older children, sibling groups and children of different ethnicities; these children being those who often have a longer wait in care. The documentary 'Preacher's Sons', mentioned above, shows two men adopting boys no one else will adopt. It would seem that LGBT families must either fit into a normative familial structure or pick up the slack left by heterosexual potential adoptive parents. Where is the option for creating new roles, new family dynamics, and new familial structures?

This is not to say that LGBT adoption has not progressed in the last decade, but that it has the potential to go further. Less than ten years ago LGBT adoption was illegal, and even now general opinion only just sides in favour of LGBT adoption. As we push for the actualisation of our theoretical equality, we should perhaps consider what we want the dynamics of LGBT families to be, and whether we should be assimilating entirely to the traditional family structure, changing the structure to our liking, or building a new type of family afresh.

BEING GAY IN THE FAMILY WAY

emi dunn

EMIDUNNBINGAYINTHEFAMILYWAY
When I enter the primary school next year, I will be a teacher and I will be gay, but I am unsure whether or not to allow myself to be a gay teacher. It seems I have three choices; to be The Teacher, The Gay Teacher or The Teacher (Who Is Gay).

Being The Teacher will certainly make things easier on the day-to-day. By keeping my sexuality as my personal life - not something to be discussed in the classrooms or staffrooms - I can quite easily get along and will, as often happens, be assigned a presumptive heterosexuality by parents, teachers and pupils alike. No whispers, no furtive glances - I'll just be the whippersnapper from Cambridge who worked so hard he didn't have time to get himself a girlfriend.

Openness characterises the other two options, and whether I become The Gay Teacher or The Teacher (Who Is Gay), would ultimately be for my school to decide.

The identity I would be least comfortable with is 'The Gay Teacher', which is a pre-ordained character construct to be imposed onto you. Sexuality is important to me, of course, but I would position it very low in the hierarchy of my defining traits - I am an intelligent, sociologically-minded, creative, witty, white Yorkshireman before I am gay. So, to be 'The Gay Teacher' and for my sexuality to become some off-the-rail master status would be nothing short of traumatic for me. I don't want my eccentricities to become displays of fanciful campness. I don't want my creativity to become flounciness. I don't ever want to be anybody's G BF.

What of The Teacher (Who Is Gay)? This is probably the hardest to achieve but certainly the most fruitful. This identity could come about when I have the ability to be open about my sexuality without it swelling to enrage all other aspects of my identity. First and foremost, I'd be the teacher. This identity would only be able to come about in a school culture that is characterised by an open ethos. I am generally open about my sexuality, though the few spaces in which I feel the 'fallout' of my homosexuality would be negative are, sadly, among those aspects of my life which I value and enjoy the most - in my work with children.

I spend a lot of time with kids - working in schools and volunteering on charity projects in Cambridge - and it is in these interactions that I am nestled in the deepest, darkest corner of my closet. I work with two Year 7 boys and homosexuality often comes up as a talking point.

With one it is the normalised endemic use of homophobic language - he stuck a post-it note to my back saying 'I am gay' and all I could do in retort was a self-referentially sardonic 'Haaah!' When I walk too slowly. I am often told 'Hurry up, gayboy'. I don't like it, but I would be lying if I said I was genuinely offended by it. On occasion, he has asked 'Are you gay?' in such a way that seemed analogous with 'Are you stupid?'. Normalised homophobia is so central to his school culture that I feel if he knew I actually was gay it would be a big deal for him - as much as he likes me, the fact that a big gay looks after him once a week would be difficult for him to ignore. As things are now, I am happy, he is happy, his family are happy and he is benefiting hugely from my visits.

It is the interactions with the other boy I visit that affect me more. This boy is more sensitive and doesn't use 'gay' as a synonym for shit or anything like that. This weekend, with seemingly no prompt, he asked 'Are you gay?' His question seemed sincere, not a usual childish joke or insult. I felt really uneasy. "What a question," I half-replied in a resigned voice, genuinely hating myself as I said it. "What made you ask that?"

"It doesn't matter if you are, it's not a bad thing."

I felt ashamed. I didn't tell him and I should have done: that was the perfect chance. Like with the other boy, telling him wouldn't necessarily change anything, but this time it was within my head that things would alter. I've talked about Gay History month with this boy, having seen the rainbow flag on the Fire Station. I've talked about gay teachers and how there are probably gay teachers and pupils in his school. We've had an arduous conversation about transgender - 'Is it like Transformers?' But when the topic swung round and was about me personally, I felt unable to give him the open response he deserved, and I really regret it. I'm ashamed of myself.

What about next year then? Could it be that the problem I am facing with the two boys in Cambridge is only there because I didn't let them know earlier on? I don't mean to say I should have introduced myself as 'Jonny the Gay', but just that when, for example, they ask if I have a girlfriend, I could simply reply 'No, I prefer men'. What if the second boy I described asked me whether I was gay because he was questioning his own sexuality and was seeking guidance - what sort of role model am I?

I owe it to myself and to the kids to be open, and to be a teacher who is gay.
When we learn how to think and behave in a heterosexual, cissexual world where it is judged inappropriate to be given space to discursively address sexuality and gender, we are robbed of the ability to think critically about our own identities. When heterosexual and male/female are not categories but gives then the onus is on individuals to reject these ascribed roles, and those individuals who do are problematised. The roles themselves remain largely unscrutinised.

THIS Project was a six-week project which I devised and an army of Cambridge people delivered to 300 sixth formers at Haydon School in London. The students were given the responsibility of creating resources about gender and sexuality for the younger students (year 7 upwards). We were on hand to facilitate discussion and help them to complete their resources (which included videos, powerpoint presentations, websites, posters etc). At the end of those six weeks, we judged their resources, selected 10 which evidenced the most thought, creativity and effort, and showcased and awarded them in a special assembly on Valentine’s Day 2011. I’ll highlight some memorable parts below.

First: the reaction of the school staff to my idea. I had several meetings with the head of sixth form and the year 12 form tutors before the scheme began. This proved valuable because there is scope for lots of crossed wires in the teaching of sex and gender education. The head of sixth form allotted me one hour of contact time with the students per week for a half term, and gently reminded me that only a minority of students would jump at the opportunity to explore these issues. For most people there’d have to be other incentives. It was also essential to get the teachers on board, because the project deals with issues that are normally swept under the carpet. With the school staff’s cooperation, I felt confident we could deliver a positive scheme of work on sexuality and gender which didn’t focus on discrimination (they get enough of that), but on ownership and openness.

Second: the enthusiasm of the Cambridge volunteers. Many of the people who volunteered for THIS Project were my friends, but others were people who responded to my adverts on college and faculty mailing lists or had been recruited by word-of-mouth. A few of the volunteers had worked in secondary schools like this one before, but for most it was the first time they’d had to address school students since they arrived at university. Almost all of the volunteers were current students at Cambridge, but a few were London-residing Cambridge graduates who still cared enough to get involved. Queer people and allies alike, the volunteers were as vibrant, committed and invested in THIS Project as I was, and for that I thank them.

Third: a patchwork of interactions with students. A success could come in the form of a dialogical breakthrough, for example when a group of South Asian boys, at first very uncomfortable, began questioning whether their discomfort was the result of having always been silenced about sexuality because of their race. Some students came up to talk to volunteers after lessons, emailed them to ask questions, or thanked them for bringing sexuality and gender awareness to the fore. After our last visit to Haydon one girl took me aside to say thank you, and urged me to take THIS Project to a nearby faith school, where her friend had recently attempted suicide.

If you want to find out more, contact me, or see some of the resources that school students created, then visit www.THISProjectHaydon.org.

THIS PROJECT: SCHOOLS ADDRESSING SEXUALITY AND GENDER

Taz Rasul
For many British people born in the late '80s and '90s, the presence of openly LGBT people in the armed forces seems a given. When we learn of the situation in the US, where the ‘Don’t Ask Don’t Tell’ policy prohibiting openly homosexual people to serve has only just begun to be repealed, we are shocked: “In this day and age, how can a first world country justify such a discriminatory policy?” It can be all too easy to look at how things are now in the UK military and forget that it has only been just over a decade since our own ban on GLBT service members was repealed. In that very short space of time, the UK military has transformed from a reactionary, archaic behemoth into a diverse, progressive institution which actively recruits LGBT service members at Pride events and in gay magazines.

The transition wasn’t particularly easy. The Sexual Offences Act of 1967 decriminalised (male) homosexuality in British civil law, but it remained a criminal offence in military law until 1994. However, even after that, homosexual service members were still administratively discharged from the army, and investigations into soldiers’ private lives continued. In comparison to the US’s ‘Don’t Ask Don’t Tell’ policy, the UK policy at this time was much more intrusive: ‘Ask, Don’t Tell’. In 1996 the Ministry of Defence established the ‘Homosexuality Policy Assessment Team’, which stated that although LGBT people were no less skilled or able than heterosexuals, nevertheless the culture of the military was such that their presence would cause upset.

Reform only became inevitable in 1998, when four cases were brought first before the UK courts (where their claims were rejected) and then before the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. Smith, Grady, Lustig-Pien and Beckett were all members of the armed forces who had been discharged following humiliating investigations into their private lives and the forced exposure of their homosexuality. The European Court held that the UK’s blanket ban on homosexuals was a violation of Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights, which guarantees respect for one’s private life. In the Smith and Grady cases, there had also been a violation of Article 13, which guarantees an effective domestic remedy for violations of human rights. The Ministry of Defence had claimed that exclusion of homosexuals was necessary for morale and cohesion, given the propensity of negative attitudes towards homosexuals held by heterosexual service members, but the Court found that a strict code of conduct prohibiting discrimination and harassment would accomplish the same without infringement of human rights. Following the ruling, handed down in 1999, an urgent review of army policy was commissioned, and on the 12th of January 2000 the ban was finally lifted, being replaced with a new code of conduct for the armed forces.

Since then, change has flowed swiftly. Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people can serve openly in all of the armed forces, and any discrimination (direct or indirect) on the basis of sexual orientation is forbidden. Pressuring someone to come out is prohibited, and the British Army requires all soldiers to undergo annual Equality and Diversity training, with homosexual examples specifically cited in training videos. Civil partnerships were immediately recognised by the military upon legalisation in 2004, and civilly partnered gay couples have the same rights to allowances and housing as married straight couples, including being allowed to live in family quarters and hold wedding ceremonies in military property. In 2006 Royal Navy personnel led the London EuroPride parade in ceremonial uniform, and the British Army and Royal Air Force finally allowed personnel to march in uniform at Gay Pride in 2008. In 2009, to mark 10 years since repeal, the first openly gay serviceman featured on the front cover of Soldier magazine.

The Ministry of Defence has backtracked from its pre-2000 stance, concluding that since repeal “there has been no perceived effect on morale, unit cohesion or operational effectiveness.” In 2007 a formal apology was issued on behalf of the Ministry to those affected by the ban, and in the last few years high-ranking naval and army officials have spoken at LGBT events, emphasising their commitment to diversity.

So yes, the military has certainly done much in the past decade to make us proud. But when we compare the UK to Canada and Australia (traditionally the more puritanical areas of the Commonwealth) which repealed similar bans in 1992, or New Zealand which did so in 1993, or Israel (1993), or Ireland (1994), or Norway which (being typically Scandinavian) repealed the ban in 1979, or the Netherlands, which became the first country to ban discrimination against gays in the military (it is now estimated that 10% of the Dutch armed forces are gay), we can hardly be called progressive. Why has it taken us, and America, so long to catch up? And what can the US learn from our example as their military enters a new phase of its evolution? To answer these questions, we talk to Royal Navy Lieutenant Commander Mandy McBain, an Assistant Diversity and Equality Officer and classroom teacher for LGBT rights within the British armed forces, and Tom (not his real name), a member of the US Air Force who is currently flying for the Royal Air Force as an exchange pilot. On pages 18 and 19 we present an article by James Seager and Eric Randall, of Yale University’s Q magazine, about LGBT cadets at American military academies following the repeal of ‘Don’t Ask Don’t Tell’.

INTERVIEW: BEING LGBT IN THE ROYAL NAVY

Mandy joined the Royal Navy in 1986. She is an Equality & Diversity Policy Officer in the Navy Command HQ and established the first support network for LGBT personnel in the Naval Service. Often interviewed by the media, she has also spoken at the Stonewall Annual Workplace Conference; Oxford University; Cambridge Union Society and has been part of panel discussions with the InterLaw Diversity Forum at the Law Society; she presented at a Stonewall Youth event and worked with the Albert Kennedy Trust, and is also a judge for the Women In The City Future Leaders Awards. In 2010 she attended and presented at the NATO LGBT Working Group meeting in The Hague as the representative of the UK Armed Services and the MOD. Mandy placed at No. 31 on the Independent on Sunday Pink List in 2010.

In a previous interview with q3 magazine, you said that even when the ban was lifted you did not immediately come out. Why?

I had to wrestle with my own conscience, knowing that I had lied to close friends; bosses I respected and worrying just how my deceit would be accepted, it sometimes felt like a risk that I was not willing to take.

Were you out to any of your colleagues prior to the ban?

I was out to very few. Some guessed but it was not discussed for fear of putting people in an awkward situation of knowing something that they were obliged to report.

After the ban was lifted, was there a noticeable gap between the new code of conduct and reality?

Not at all, the ban was lifted and I don’t think many really noticed a change. After all the LGB people in the Navy had always been there. They were now just able to dedicate all of their efforts to their job without worrying about being dismissed from the Service.
Do you think there is much of a gap between the attitudes of military personnel regarding LGBT issues and those of the general public?

I think that the military has come a very long way in a short space of time. We are certainly helped by legislation and by the great work of such organisations as Stonewall. I think also that attitudes have changed in society; the difference is that the Services are unique in that we often work and live together for many months in often very trying and dangerous circumstances.

In the US the ban on LGBT soldiers has just been repealed, and is (at the time of writing) awaiting implementation. Have you served with US soldiers before? If so, how did they react to the presence of openly LGBT people in other countries’ militaries?

I have served with the US military as I have with Turkish military. In both cases I have not had any issues at all. It is just about realising that they have their rules, be it wrong or right, and we have ours. I am not in a position to change their legislation so sometimes you have to understand and be thankful that we are where we are.

Do the various branches of the military actively recruit LGBT soldiers?

We do attend some LGBT events, such as the Diversity Careers Show, march in Uniform at London Pride but we do not directly target LGBT personnel to join the Service.

It seems the Royal Navy has been very much at the forefront of the push for LGBT rights within the military (being the first to allow its personnel to march in uniform at Pride, joining Stonewall’s Diversity Champions Programme, setting up the annual LGBT conference etc.) To what is this attributable?

I think the Naval Service was very fortunate to have some very driven and proactive people who were willing to take on the challenge in the early years. I am now very fortunate to be both the Chair of the Naval Service LGBT Forum and a Naval Service E&D Policy Officer and from this unique position can continue to ensure that LGBT equality remains on the agenda.

Do you think your membership of the armed forces caused you to struggle more in coming to terms with your sexuality than you would have otherwise?

In some ways, it certainly did make it more difficult to come out. I think everyone struggles about when and how to come out but working in an organization that forbids its members from being out creates added issues. It certainly made it difficult to be out to my colleagues. The fear of being prosecuted under DADT out weighed my wishes to be honest and open with my co-workers.

Were you out to any of your comrades in the US Air Force?

I was out to a few very close friends and colleagues. I had a few colleagues that were also gay and they formed a support network. It was certainly difficult leading a divided life - having work friends and private friends and not being able to introduce the two. It was difficult not being able to bring a boyfriend to work functions or homecomings after long deployments.

Were you out from the start to your British comrades?

I was out from the start with my RAF colleagues. As I work for the USAF, I still fall under DADT.

Do you think there is much of a gap between the attitudes of military personnel regarding LGBT issues and those of the general public?

The military has historically been a quite conservative organization and remains so. While it’s difficult to make a definitive statement, the U.S. military is perhaps a decade behind the U.S. general public on its attitudes towards gays. In the UK, I find the general public more accepting of gays and the UK military is no different. It’s important to recognize that views towards gays have changed quite dramatically in the UK.

DADT has just been repealed in the US, awaiting implementation. Was there much antagonism to the change, or support of it, expressed amongst your heterosexual co-workers?

I think most people were indifferent. At times, you do find a divide between older and younger colleagues. Younger co-workers tend to be more open-minded but I think overall people are accepting.

Have you ever experienced harassment because of your sexuality?

I have not been subject to direct harassment; however, people do make ignorant comments which can be quite insensitive.

Why do you think the US has taken so long to repeal DADT?

It’s quite surprising really. I think it’s probably a product of two things: political leadership and overall public attitudes towards gays. The difficult memories of 1993 and the rather unpleasant battle the Clinton administration faced left few politicians willing to push for a repeal. I think also that the U.S. public has only within the past decade become more tolerant and willing to accept gay equality.

What was it like serving as a gay soldier in the US?

I enjoy serving in the U.S. military. I love flying and enjoy the camaraderie that is part of belonging to a fighting organization. I do not think, however, in retrospect that I would have agreed to join having experienced life under DADT.

Our thanks to Mandy and Tom for their time and contributions!

INTerview: Being LGBT in the Royal Air Force

Hattie Jones interviews Tom (a pseudonym), a member of the United States Air Force since 2002. and on exchange with the Royal Air Force since 2007.

Did you know you were gay before joining up? If so, how did you intend to reconcile your sexuality with DADT?

I did know that I was gay before joining. I knew that it would be difficult to hide my sexuality but I had always wanted to fly. At the time, I was not out and I suppose that I somehow felt that life in the military would be no different than life in the closet out of the military. Obviously, my view changed over time after joining.

Were you out to family or friends when you joined up?

No. I’ve known that I was gay since I was quite young but I didn’t tell family and friends until I was in my mid-20s.

HATTIEJONES
This past year, Ben\textsuperscript{*}, a cadet at the Air Force Academy, began seeing more of his classmate Tania. About three months ago, the two were chatting in Tania's dorm room, and Ben made an admission. "Hey, I really like you," Ben said.

As a woman at a school with an overwhelmingly male student body, Tania had likely encountered this situation before. But she quickly replied to Ben with a confession of her own.

"I'll never work out between us," she told him. "I'm a lesbian."

At a U.S. service academy where "don't ask, don't tell" (DADT) is law, Tania made a shocking and risky move. Since 1994, when President Clinton lost his fight to repeal a WWII-era law banning gay, lesbian and bisexual citizens from serving in the military, his compromise -- "don't ask, don't tell" -- has required them to remain silent about their sexual orientation. (Because transgender people are excluded from the military on the basis of a separate medical law, the repeal of DADT still does not allow for their open service.) Since the policy's introduction, the military has discharged over 13,000 troops for violation, 261 in 2010 alone.

In coming out, Tania took a leap of faith Ben would keep her secret. In fact, Tania's trust gave Ben the confidence to reveal something he'd never told any of his fellow cadets: he has sex with men. Though Ben was comfortable with this side of his identity, he never brought it with him to school. Now Tania was able to introduce him to a small network of gay classmates who had confided in each other after arriving at the academy.

Ben and Tania form by no means the first or the only community of gay cadets at a United States Service academy, and their luck in finding one another should not discount the larger culture of repression bred under the policy dictating their conduct at school. But the many quiet friendships between gay peers and their allies that have formed in recent years indicate a growing tolerance among members of our generation enrolled in military schools. While gay, lesbian and bisexual cadets say they do not expect the upcoming repeal of the policy to create an immediate culture of openness and tolerance, they predict much of the military's next generation will be ready to accept queer service members.

Ben says he wanted to go to the Air Force Academy long before he started questioning his sexuality. He grew up in the Philippines for 11 years, but when his mother passed away, his father, a U.S. Air Force veteran, moved him to America. He toured the Air Force Academy campus in his sophomore year of high school and knew it felt right. In his senior year, he moved out of the Catholic school system into a public high school in Colorado, where he began questioning his sexuality. One day while he was working at his school library, a classmate invited him to join the men's swim team. After practice one afternoon, the friend offered him a ride home but instead drove to his own house. Parked in the driveway, he confessed he was attracted to him. That was the first time Ben had sex with a guy.

Ben continued experimenting with men throughout that year, but he was determined not to let this stop him from joining the military.

Ben wasn't the only high school student who weighed family tradition and a sense of patriotic duty more heavily than sexual orientation when choosing a school. Samantha, now a second-year cadet at the Coast Guard Academy, was president of her high school's gay-straight alliance and went into the college application process without any doubt she was interested in women. When her parents told her she would have to pay for her own college education if she wanted to "live that way," she started to consider the United States Coast Guard Academy in New London, Conn., which, like all service academies, fully funds its cadets.

Eleanor, 19, now a second-year cadet at the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colo., was set on the military even earlier. Her father, an Air Force veteran, raised her to put others before herself -- a quality that prepared her for military service.

"I wanted to make a difference," she said. "If I had to sacrifice some of my personal freedom, then I was okay with it."

She came out to a few friends in her junior year of high school. She said she took heart in the fall of her senior year when Barack Obama won the presidency that he would repeal "don't ask, don't tell."

But by the time Eleanor, Ben, Tania and Samantha reported for basic training, no repeal had come. In President Obama's first year in office, LGBT issues, including the repeal he had promised during his campaign, fell by the wayside as health care took center stage.

When she reported for duty at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, Katie Miller found hiding her earlier life as an openly gay high school student more difficult than she anticipated. She assumed the DADT policy would provide her with privacy and her classmates would not ask her about her romantic life.

"Naturally, people just inquired about whether I left someone at home. And that's when I started making up lies. At first I said 'No, I'm not seeing anyone,' but that was the absolutely wrong decision to try to avoid inquiries and romantic approaches from male cadets. And then later on I would say I was in a relationship with a boyfriend named Chris - I was dating a girl named Kristen. So I played the gender pronoun game. And then it started becoming an active portrayal of someone I wasn't. It wasn't just a 'live and let be' sort of don't ask, don't tell. I needed to actively lie to protect myself."

Chase, 19, now in his second year at Air Force Academy, noted he had an easier time keeping his sexuality private in his first few months. Basic training kept him so busy and physically exhausted, he said, he often didn't think about the situation he'd put himself in until he lay in bed. When his new classmates shared sentiments about their significant others, he felt powerless to participate, despite having left his boyfriend at home when he came to the academy.

During freshman year, the pressure grew greater. Chase listened to his peers discuss the national debate over DADT and heard some classmates express vehement opposition to the policy's repeal. While out on a run with a close female friend in his squadron, he broke down crying and came out to her.

"She was really supportive," he said. "We talked about how I could find people to talk to when I needed to that weren't in my chain of command."

At Coast Guard, Samantha also looked for safe people to talk to about the stress she was feeling during her first year at the academy. During boot camp, she was ready to quit the academy altogether. She came out to the chaplain who, she was surprised to find, rather than turn her in, helped her cope with her anxiety and convinced her to stay. The chaplain was the first of several allies and even gay peers Samantha would eventually find in the academy. Her meeting with the chaplain marked the beginning of her growing understanding that

\textsuperscript{*} names changed to protect identity
even in the repressive environment of military service, an underground movement of gay cadets and their supporters provided a safe space. "It's an underground culture. There's not a designated area to eat or team to join," she said of the Coast Guard Academy culture. "Certain people know about each other, but the pockets aren't fussed together."
"I got lucky, and met a good group of people," she added.

Many lesbian cadets reported that they came together with other like women on sports teams. Because sports teams often travel to meet other teams, gay team members have used them to reach out to surrounding colleges for social activities and support. Gay life at the academies, particularly for women, have come to be centered around (but not restricted to) sports teams. Some teams even have reputations among the student body for attracting gay students.

At Air Force, Eleanor went to a meeting for the rugby team. Within a couple of weeks, some teammates asked her directly if she was gay, and when she told them yes, they immediately took her under their wing.

Katie said the West Point rugby team has become a safe space for lesbian cadets as well. During basic training, Katie's "gaydar" alerted her to a fellow female cadet in her company she "immediately knew" was queer. Though the tightly scheduled life of the academy left little time to talk to friends, Katie found a quiet hour one Sunday to ask this cadet about her sexuality.
"It was really risky, but it worked out okay," she said.

The Internet is another mutual support network queer cadets use to connect with one another, though this avenue is sometimes barred. Eleanor said at the Air Force Academy she cannot access any LGBT-related websites. As a result, Facebook has become one of the strongest forms of communication LGBT cadets have.

OutServe, an underground network of actively serving LGBT service members created by an Airforce officer, went public in July 2010 and has since grown to include about 3,000 members, more than 60 of whom are cadets from the Coast Guard Academy, Air Force Academy, Naval Academy and West Point. Within the organization, there is a chapter dedicated to the service academies that allows cadets to discuss issues such as the repeal of DADT. But perhaps most importantly, the OutServe chapter gives cadets a way to meet other LGBT cadets and service members — and realize they are not alone.

Eleanor emphasized she had been lucky to stumble upon a group of friends that could support her at the Air Force Academy. Students who have yet to find other gay cadets would likely portray their experiences at the academy differently. Aside from these small pockets of support, the more predictable culture of a military academy still reigns supreme. While most of the cadets interviewed said that many peers are as liberal on gay issues as our generation at large is, there are still a lot of cadets with strong anti-gay feelings.

"Every single time I had to put up with a derogatory comment," Katie said. "I knew my teeth clenching. It became a struggle to be silent. I care very much about the military, but I realized that this was so wrong and that I wasn't okay with it. I didn't think I was going to be able to stomach this kind of cognitive dissonance that was emerging."

Katie famously decided to come out publicly via the Rachel Maddow Show in August 2010. Since then she has accepted a discharge from West Point, transferred to Yale and helped lead a national campaign for DADT's repeal.

Katie's arrival at Yale coincided with a larger push for repeal among Democrats and activists. Despite Republican Senator John McCain's protests against attempts to repeal the policy, the Pentagon published a report in late November 2010 that found overturning DADT had a very low risk of disrupting service. Enough bipartisan support was mustered to pass the repeal and President Obama signed the bill into law on December 22, 2010. Though the repeal will not take effect for several months, until the President, Secretary of Defense and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff attest in writing to its consistency with standards of military effectiveness, gay cadets greeted it with understandable joy.

"I always felt like I was hiding," said Eleanor. "Now it's not open, but it's less scary. The reality is definitely starting to strike us now."

Since then, academies have sent out a rush of information to help students understand the changes they will face. At the Air Force Academy, students received an email listing the top ten things Air Force cadets need to know about the repeal of DADT. The list establishes that commanders should not ask students about their sexual orientation, and that students face no repercussions should a commanding officer find out they are involved with someone of the same sex. The list also confirms that gay, lesbian and bisexual Airmen and women have equal opportunity for service and protects them from harassment.

While gay cadets welcome the repeal, many of them say they will still be cautious about coming out to others at the academy. Certainly, a cultural shift toward total acceptance will take longer than a few months.
"Most people are not going to jump out of the closet," Eleanor predicted. "People will feel the waters out a bit. There are some people at this school who don't know they know gay people."

Ben and Katie both mentioned that commanding officers might still exercise subtle discrimination when considering service members for promotions.
"I've talked about this with my gay friends," Ben said. "Not knowing how it'd affect our career, it'd be best not to make it obvious, but as far as with our personal lives it would get rid of that anxiety and fear of being found out."

Katie said ultimately it is the bravery of gay cadets that will change the attitudes of their colleagues and their commanding officers.

Despite the communities of peers and culture of tolerance Eleanor, Ben, Chase, Tania and Samantha have found, and even with the repeal of 'don't ask, don't tell' behind them, it seems unlikely they will be charging down the halls of the academies with rainbow flags.

"The military is a culture of conformity, at its essence," Katie said. "I don't know if the older generation will ever change their minds toward gays. But the younger generation I think will be much more conducive."

As students at military academies learn in the coming years that they have been serving alongside gay peers, hopefully they will help eliminate discrimination against gays, lesbians and bisexuals in the U.S. military for good.
Many LGBTQ people are pretty apathetic when it comes to religion. More interested in sex than spirit, rights than rites. Gaga than God. and as for seminars... well, you get the picture. Not that this is surprising. Some of the most sustained and violent oppression of LGBTQ people has come from religious quarters, so perhaps it's a natural reaction to turn away from the spiritual world and never look back.

But this isn’t the case for everyone. A considerable number of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered people are deeply spiritual, and have found welcoming churches, mosques and synagogues. I was a Christian for many years, and encountered many supportive congregations. However, I found it burdensome to be part of a religion for which (my) sexuality was an “issue”. Even though there are many liberal members of the mainstream faiths, I still felt that for many, my sexual orientation was something that would only ever be tolerated or accepted at best, never celebrated or enshrined in myth or ritual. To me, it seems that this is probably a bigger reason for the estrangement of many in the LGBTQ community from conventional religions. It isn’t that modern-day faith traditions are inevitably homophobic, it’s just that in most cases they’re not particularly homophilic either.

Paganism was therefore immediately more attractive to me as a spiritual path. Although it might seem strange in a religion that makes such a big deal about “natural” cycles and the delicate interplay of masculine and feminine, contemporary Paganism is actually very positive about LGBTQ lifestyles. Although this is undoubtedly because of the influence of contemporary liberal values and feminist discourse, the remaining accounts we have of Pre-Christian Europe suggest models of divinity that are anything but
Love divine, all loves excelling - the words my parents sang as they celebrated their wedding at Southwark Cathedral, many years ago. Love - what the church is meant to stand for. God is love - unless you turn out to be gay, of course. Then it's a whole different kettle of fish. And if you are in the wrong place, at the wrong time - then you can forget the love that God used to show you, because that love affair is over. Because, my goodness, God despises what you do.

Sex has always obsessed the church (and has often manifested itself in unsavoury and despicable ways when members of the clergy have been ordered to refrain from it). On the surface, it's pathetic that an organisation concerned with the mysteries of God and creation gets so hot and bothered over it. The core argument revolves around procreation - sex is how it occurs: between one man and one woman. Correct - I'm a biologist, and I can confirm that's the case. But where conception doesn't occur (when using condoms, for example), what is the problem - unless we are really stuck on the Monty Python 'every sperm is sacred' mantra? To take the argument further, what about gay sex that doesn't involve 'spilling of seed'? Surely, by the mantra, it's not a sin - especially given the fact (duly outlined by His Holiness) that being gay isn't sinful, it's acting on it that constitutes sin, because it wastes potential life.

Of course, this is all rather convoluted and silly - and there are strong arguments on both sides of the divide. But let me add something altogether not silly. How about people who are genetically XO or XY but externally female, and so on? What about transgender people? Where do these people fit in to the church's scheme? Who should they have relationships with? All questions that are not only unanswered by the church, but totally ignored. Christ reached out to the outcast - especially those who were there through no fault of their own. The Pharisees looked on in judgemental horror, disgusted at Jesus's inability to understand that some people were beyond help. They relied upon tradition, and their own reading of scripture, to justify their Venn diagrams of who was in, and who was out. Remind you of any current organisations?

As a Christian, I am totally disgusted by the way LGBT people are treated by the church - which should be a source of strength, not one of deeper hurt. Look at Anglican priestly behaviour at David Kato's funeral; look at the kids committing suicide after their 'religious' (but my God, not Christian) parents disown them for liking the same gender. The arrogance and stupidity shown by those opposing gay marriage in churches is extraordinary - no one is forcing anyone to do anything, but rather allowing those who would want to do so to preside over such a service in a religious building. For the record, marriage is no longer a solely religious ceremony - so opposing the term 'marriage' for civil partnerships on those grounds is moronic. The Anglican Communion goes on about 'keeping the African church on board' when the Church of England refuses to allow civil partnerships in churches - that is, putting a façade of unity ahead of support and love for individual LGBT members of the church around the world.

Over the years, I have desperately wanted to turn to a priest or congregation for support, help, and love - God's love - but so often felt unable to, my sexuality being the final taboo for a modernising church. There are good people around, don't get me wrong - within Cambridge Fraser Watts and Duncan Dormer, to name just two. But it's about time that straight people stood up in their parishes, and made noise about this. It's about time priests got over tradition and embraced reality. And it's about time all Christian LGBT people felt comfortable to fall in worship at the foot of the cross of Christ, not feeling judged by those around them, but feeling loved.
STRENGTH IN DIVERSITY

BCG is proud to sponsor the CUSU LGBT campaign. Our position as a leading strategy consultancy depends on the strength of our people, no matter who they are. This why we place great value in supporting diversity, through a range of Networks that includes LGBT, Women’s, and several more. We look forward to continuing to work together to support diversity in Cambridge.

To find out more about BCG, please visit
No bull.

Straight talking from KPMG.

Graduate Programmes
All degree disciplines
We close for applications once we are full. To secure a place at KPMG, be sure to apply early. To find out more head straight to:
www.kpmg.co.uk/careers
Late afternoon, and everyone in the village gathered on the central green. Owl had told me over breakfast a couple of days previously that her younger cousin, nicknamed Fo, was undergoing "the quickening" as part of his ascent to maturity, and the climax of this liminal ritual would be his being welcomed back into the village community after a night of reflection and trials out in the woods.

The football nets, garden chairs and other bits and pieces that normally littered the centre of the village were cleared away. Little groups of people gathered; sitting together, talking, knitting, drinking, repairing tools or laughing with one another. When Fo appeared at the edge of the village, he was flanked by three masked figures embodying the three gender archetypes; muscular Dermagand, buxom Amree and slim Molmaron. A great cheer went up, as Fo shyly took his place at the edge of the green. The archetypes similarly stood at the edges, at the South West, South East and Northern points respectively. It was only when this had been done, that I realised that there was some clear sense in where everyone was - each person sat where they felt they were situated in relation to each of the gender archetypes. The crowd was a continuum of performances; scattered between the poles, expressing elements of each.

Just-in-Time, who I was sitting with, pointed at Fo. As the teenager walked through the throng, he imitated those around him. His wandering journey through this gendered space was characterised by parody - each step an imitation of those nearby; their manner, their temper, the activities they were busying themselves with. As he passed, those nearby coaxed and encouraged him to join them. In response he'd lampoon them further, teasing them, only provoking greater encouragement. He kept moving, testing, trying out - until he returned to a spot he'd lingered at three times previously, half-way between Molmaron and Dermagand, next to a group of deer-hunters with cropped short hair, carefully trimmed and painted nails and artfully decorated torsos. He began to imitate them, getting closer and closer until, reaching resolution, he hugged one of them, and sat down.

Everyone cheered again. They crowded around Fo, congratulating him - the kids cheering him on and the others welcoming him into adulthood, trying out the new name he had chosen; Boulder. When I got to talk to him a little later on, I asked him - which gender was he now?

He shot me a confused look, before smiling. "I play all of them. Partly."

- Jonathan Wooley
WE BUILT A PAPER WORLD ON THE BACK OF A MENU,
ETCHED COPIES OF OURSELVES IN WORN-OUT PEN.
YOU SKETCHED A MASS OF STICKY TWIGS FOR HAIR:
MY ZIG-ZAG FRINGE. I COPIED DOWN YOUR NEST OF TAWNY
CURLS.

WE EACH DREW ONE-HALF OF A HEART, AN INKY CLICHÉ
(A COCOON).
WE SHELTERED ONE ANOTHER, BLENDING OUR DREAMS.

THE SKIRTS OF OUR STICK-Figure SELVES
PROCLAIMED THE ONLY THING WE SHARED THAT
WASN’T IMPORTANT.
WE HAD SO MUCH ELSE BESIDES -
MUSIC, HUMOUR, A STARTLED KISS ON THE SLY,
MY HAND AND YOURS HELD FAST; A LOVE NOTE.

BUT SITTING OPPOSITE US IN THE RESTAURANT,
SHE NOTICED US, OUR FLIRTING,
AND ENVIED US OUR FRAGILE PAPER WORLD.

SHE SCRIBBLED OUT OUR LOVE WITH HER GRAFFITI -
A SCRAWL OF INKY MEN, BLACK BLOBS AND LEGS.
THEY MARCHED ACROSS OUR PAPER HEAVEN:
“YOU JUST HAVEN’T MET THE RIGHT BOYS.”
THE INVASION TORE OUR BIRO HEART IN TWO.

CLARE RIVERS MOHAN
SHARING A TABLE

CLARERIVERSMOHAN poetry 25
I'm sure I would be more productive if I spent less time floating about in the Word press and Tumblr equivalent of a vegan-friendly, tofu-touting café, full of lovelies with piercings and soya habits. Cutting my Sapphic procrastination would be good for my degree, but if I skipped my daily tour of the twenty-odd sites I frequent, where would I find totally awesome queer musicians and artists and writers who will almost certainly never make it to the mainstream? It was in these idle backwaters that I stumbled across two of my biggest, queerest, heroes - the mighty Andrea Gibson and equally magnificent Ivan Coyote.

Both Gibson and Coyote are 'spoken-word' artists, but more sets them apart than they have in common. Andrea Gibson is the kind of high-impact poet whose lines bounce off the stage and into your chest. Coyote, on the other hand, is more of an old-school storyteller; a self-professed pedlar of 'kitchen-table' fables and 'fish stories'. What they do share is a distinctly queer agenda and more than a little discontent with the gender binary. This reeled me in because, let's face it, writers kicking against this particular tide are hard to come by. But in spite of their mutual status as members of a rare species, Gibson and Coyote come at the gender issue from very different angles.

I tripped across Gibson a couple of years ago. I say 'tripped' because I challenge anyone to listen (really listen) to any of her poems and not end up sat on their arse, more than a bit baffled and looking for whatever just hit them. She takes an unashamedly hard-line approach to what she describes as 'your pinks and blues, your boy-girl rules'. With no hesitation or apology, Gibson highlights the largely unnecessary preoccupation with gender that prevails in our society and how this supposedly clear-cut division just doesn't sit comfortably with all of us. As a confirmed genderqueer, my experience is not so much that I found myself in the wrong category, but I found that there isn't really a category for me. And this sense of fitting neither here nor there is exactly what Gibson is getting at:

"IT'S NOT THAT I THOUGHT I'D GROW UP TO BE A MAN
I JUST NEVER THOUGHT I'D GROW UP TO BE A WOMAN EITHER
FROM WHAT I COULD TELL NEITHER OF THOSE CATEGORIES SEEMED TO FIT ME
BUT BELIEVE ME, I KNEW FROM A VERY YOUNG AGE NEVER TO SAY
HEY DAD, THIS ADAM AND EVE THING ISN'T REALLY WORKING FOR ME
I MEAN, WHAT ABOUT ALL THE PEOPLE IN BETWEEN?"

- "Andrew" by Andrea Gibson

In fact, the tendency of children to be blind to the gender boxes constructed around them is a theme which Gibson returns to in her poem 'Swing-set', based on her experiences as pre-school teacher.
"Are you a boy or a girl?" he asks, staring up at me in all three feet of his pudding face grandeur.
And I say "Dylan, you've been in this class for three years and you still don't know if I'm a boy or a girl?"
And he says "U-U-U?
And I say "Well, at this point, I don't really think it matters, do you?"
And he says "Uh-huh, no. Can I have a push on the swing?"
And this happens every day.
It's a tidal wave of kindergarten curiosity rushing straight for the rocks of me, whatever I am...

- "Swing-set" by Andrea Gibson

This lack of concern on the part of society's innocents is reassuring, reaffirming my belief that the boy/girl dichotomy is largely societal and not an innate given. Gibson, however, does not allow this sense of acceptance to settle. Indeed, she is typically feisty in her presentation of that awkward toilet-based scenario familiar to those of us who are lucky enough to pass, intentionally or otherwise, on a regular basis:

'I'm of course there's always the somehow not-quite-bright enough fluorescent light of the public rest-room,
"Sir! Sir, do you realize this is the ladies' room?"
"Yes, ma'am, I do, it's just that I didn't feel comfortable sticking this tampon up my penis in the men's room."

- "Swing-set" by Andrea Gibson

Well, a one-liner like that would certainly serve to clear up any confusion, in addition to administering a healthy kick in the teeth to the toilet-user assured enough in their assessment of those around them to openly question the presence of an ambiguous individual. After all, it must take a big slice of self-righteousness to challenge a perfect stranger, right? But what if they genuinely thought that you'd made a mistake? And what if what you construed as a verbal attack was intended as a 'hey, buddy, heads up - you're in the wrong place'? Now, I'm not saying that I don't feel a niggling irritation every time I'm made to feel out of place or questioned. I'm only by a look: but perhaps we should take a more compassionate view of the whole situation. This brings me to Ivan Coyote, the storyteller.

The most striking aspect of Coyote's style is a personality that steps out through the microphone, or off the page, and speaks directly to you. And it's a warm personality, full of compassion: a full-bodied sense of kindness that is both disarming and appealing. It is a kindness which extends as far as the bathroom-interrogators, the point-and-squealers. In a piece on this very subject, Ivan professes:

'I try to remember that they are, in part at least, scared of me. And I try to be compassionate.
I drop my shoulders, make my body language as non-threatening as possible, try to hold kindness in my heart, look them in the eyes, smile and say in my most reassurant: "It's okay. It's just me."

- LOOSE END / It's okay. It's just me by Ivan Coyote

I guess one of the things that makes Coyote so easy for me to relate to is the candid way in which she writes about being read as male by strangers. Coyote is happy to be referred to as he or she or just Ivan, suggesting a gender more nuanced than the average. To use her own words, this writer is simply a 'predominantly Oestrogen based organism'. This lack of concern, however, is not necessarily shared by those with whom she might be speaking:

Now there's always a chance at any point in this interaction that something, it could be anything, is gonna tip those scales and whoever I'm telling to might all of a sudden realise that maybe-- maybe I'm not exactly what they might have thought I was in the first place. Whatever the fuck that was. And they might not care at all. Most people don't care at all. But some people, they care a whole lot. They might change their body-language. They might change their tone of voice. They might change their mind about how much they like me. And oddly, I have no control over any of this.

- MISSED HER / Hair Today by Ivan Coyote

Alongside the humour, this piece reveals the vulnerability and uncertainty on both sides, but there is no hostility here. As an androgynous butch, frequently encountering situations like this, I think this is the most helpful insight into how one should behave that I have ever received. Sure, I could go in guns blazing and make some sort of snide remark about making assumptions or the gender debacle in general, but what would be the good of alienating someone with whom I could just as easily get along? In matters such as these it's often important to challenge the assumptions that constrain us, but sometimes there's a softer way. It's important to keep pushing the boundaries that can make it so difficult to be our queer and beautiful selves, but sometimes the best way to do it is with a smile and old-fashioned good manners. It's important to remember your Ivan Coyote when nursing your inner Andrea Gibson and, on reflection, perhaps it's best to keep wasting my time online, to keep finding those heroes.
"cured" of his homosexuality by an enemy's attack on him - a couple of panels later he breaks his comrades' stunned silence, saying: "Relax, folks. Only kidding. Still gay. Seriously. I wish you could all see your faces right now!" (JSA vol. 3 #40). This clearly references opinions of homosexuality as a 'disease'.

DC Comics' WildStorm branch, which writes comics aimed at a more mature audience, featured in The Authority the couple Midnighter and Apollo. They are the first gay couple to have a wedding, and later they adopt a baby girl named Jenny Quantum. Interestingly, they were created based on the image of Batman and Superman.

The token gay character of the other main publisher, Marvel Comics, is Northstar from Alpha Flight. Northstar is a member of Alpha Flight team, and was intended to be gay since conception. However, the company's policy was "no openly gay characters" and the Comic Code Authority prevented publications of sexuality. Therefore the creator was only able to imply his sexuality. In the late 1980s Northstar contracted a 'mysterious illness', signifying AIDS. Later on, his illness is stated to be due to his being half-fairy, another allusion to gay culture. This provoked a sarcastic comment from the comic writer Peter David: "He isn't gay. He is just a fairy!"

Alpha Flight #106, published in 1992, was historic in that, for the first time, a character in a mainstream comic came out of the closet. Northstar finally said "I am gay!" during his fistfight with Captain Maple Leaf. That edition of Alpha Flight was sold out in a week; despite the low sales the series had previously received. Subsequently there have been several storylines about his sexuality - the first dealt with his twin sister, whose shock over his sexuality caused her to develop split personalities - one which accepted him and the one which did not. In the early 2000s, Northstar joined the X-Men and had to deal with homophobic treatment by Omerta, who refused to work with him until Northstar proved his superiority and became his instructor. Northstar also became a role-model for the young gay mutant, Anole. When he rejoined the X-Men in 2010, he stated that he was not joining them as a 'token gay', but as a "normal" mutant.

Marvel Comics also features several homosexual couples such as the long-term lesbian couple Mystique and Destiny. Like Northstar it was always hinted that they were an item, but the Comic Code and the company's policy did not allow their relationship to be explicitly recognised. Although both of them are villains, their relationship was portrayed as a heartfelt one. Both of them were born in the early 20th century, but while Mystique remained young, Destiny grew old. Despite their differing ages, Mystique takes great care of her lover. Originally, the story writer intended Mystique and Destiny to be the biological parents of Nightcrawler, an X-Men member. Due to Mystique's shape-shifting ability, this
could be possible if she morphed into a man for conception. However this idea was rejected by the company, and they were only finally confirmed as a couple in the mid-1990s. Destiny finally meets her demise while lying to Mystique in order to save her life. Her death was depicted like that of other heroes: she died in the arms of her lover.

Another Marvel couple was Wiccan and Hulking from Young Avengers, who differ from the other couples in that they are both in their mid-teens. When they were revealed to be a gay couple readers’ opinions were divided, with the fan mail page for six editions full of both support for the characters and condemnation of ‘attempts to corrupt the younger generations’. The creator, an out gay man, argued that he created these characters as role models for LGBT teenagers. Wiccan and Hulking are written as having a ‘normal’ relationship with supporting parents and friends.

A third Marvel couple is Rictor and Shatterstar from X-Factors. Their first kiss (also the first gay kiss in the Marvel-verse) featured in X-Factors v3 #45, and won the writer Peter David a GLAAD Media Award in 2011. Shatterstar was initially introduced as an asexual killing machine, while Rictor was dated several women before admitting that he was always gay and was simply closeted before meeting Shatterstar. Rictor and Shatterstar were chosen as one of Marvel’s 10 Super Couples in 2010.

Top Cow, another publisher, recently made Danielle Baptiste bisexual: her relationship with a girl a focal point in her miniseries. Archie Comics has introduced their first gay character, Kevin Keller, in Veronica #202. Both major and minor publishers are recognizing the desires of LGBT people to be represented in comic books, and the inclusion of LGBT people is surely only going to continue in the coming years.
When I think of the words gay and television, the first thing that rushes to my head is a show like Queer As Folk: a programme written by gay people, about gay people and for gay people. Queer As Folk was important in pushing the boundaries of what could be broadcast, and as a snapshot of gay culture.

In the past few decades, gay visibility on television has increased massively and this has played an important role in raising awareness and acceptance. Look at almost any soap and you will find gay characters popping up all with their own relationship and family problems. However there are some shows which are conspicuous for their reluctance to include LGBT characters. For example, Disney has been repeatedly asked why they have never featured a gay teen on any of their popular children’s TV shows. Their stock response has been that they do not think their audience is old enough, a reply which reeks of the misconception that gayness is all about sex.

There is now a whole rift of specifically LGBT-targeted media being produced around the world, both by mainstream channels such as the BBC and Channel 4 but also by specific companies and channels such as Logo and here!. A common criticism of much LGBT-specific media is that the quality is not that good and certainly some of here!’s programming features dreadful acting and outlandish plots, barely redeemed by good-looking topless people getting it on so often that their bedposts must be more notch than wood (see Dante’s Cove). In contrast there have been some outstanding shows (such as Clapham Junction by Channel 4, written by Kevin Elyot who also adapted Christopher and His Kind for the BBC), Lip Service on BBC Three and The L Word on Showtime.

The most common storyline for a show’s gay character is their ‘coming out’: a particular staple of mainstream shows where heterosexuality is assumed of most characters. Often gay characters get little storyline beyond their dramatic coming out, and the ‘token gay’ phenomenon has unfortunately become all too commonplace (Eric from Gossip Girl is a recent example). In contrast, characters such as Maxxie from Skins, Captain Jack Harkness from Doctor Who and Torchwood and Ian Gallagher from Shameless are three-dimensional characters whose storylines extend above and beyond their homosexuality. Recently, however, a new staple has begun to emerge: the good friend of the protagonist who just happens to be gay. Often the only feature which distinguishes them from the straight characters is that they might occasionally encounter discrimination. Blaine from Glee, Ian from Shameless or Calvin from GRIM all fit this model.

A common question is “What do we, as a community, want to achieve through the portrayal of LGBT characters on television?” Gay characters can increase awareness, acceptance and help provide role models for young gay people, but not all heterosexual characters on TV are expected to accomplish all these things. In the end, the real reason why there should be gay characters on TV is the same reason as why there should be a whole raft of characters who aren’t white, young, good-looking and straight; because we exist and our characters have our own stories to tell.

OUT OF THE CLOSET
AND INTO THE LIVING ROOM

William Morland

Your Quick-Fix Guide to Definitive LGBT Programming:

1. BEAUTIFUL PEOPLE: all about growing up fabulous in Reading (yes, it is possible).
2. CLAPHAM JUNCTION: one evening in the lives of various gay people in and around Clapham Junction.
3. GRIM: great positive portrayals of gay characters.
4. LIP SERVICE: beautifully shot lesbian drama, set in Glasgow.
5. MODERN FAMILY: comedy hit following a father, daughter and (gay) son’s respective families.
6. NOAH’S ARC: four black gay friends in LA.
8. SHAMELESS: unusual setting of a council estate in Manchester.
9. RUPAUL’S DRAG RACE: competitive drag queens.
10. WILL & GRACE: love it or hate it, it’s a classic.