BREAKING DOWN THE STEREOTYPES

Guest Article: The Dangers of Discrimination

Gender Dysphoria
Evangelical Christianity
Bisexuality
Online Dating

& many more articles and features
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It’s the end of the road, this is the last [no definition] that both of us will have the pleasure to circulate around Cambridge. We hope that frequent readers have found it inspiring, insightful or amusing, and we hope that those newcomers will want to carry on our job. This issue we are asking some important questions over the taken-for-granted norms regarding the stigma of labels and stereotypes: something we have all experienced, yet continue to place on other people.

Ed’s
Luke Andrews & Dunni Alao

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Back to Reality

Last night, I had a rather vivid and scary dream. For some reason, God only knows why, I was in Iran in an illegal underground gay club which had been busted by the authorities. We were all rounded up and we found ourselves at the top of a tower block being forced to confess our abhorrences and be tortured clean of them or jump to our deaths to a jeering crowd below. As it happens, my sidekick and I were smart and strong enough to overpower the men in aviator glasses armed with AK-47s and, in some superman-esque way, managed to flee and find sanctuary at the British embassy.

I’m a strong believer in interpreting dreams to reveal our inner feelings and insecurities, but in many ways I dread to think what this subliminal encounter says about me and my inner fears. What was striking, however, were the characters in my dream and how they were represented. The guys I was in the club with, and later at the top of the building, were all gay men. There was the odd Muscle Mary, the masculine middle-eastern guys in tank tops and dark hair, there were also the blonde western boys that one would usually see frequenting the podiums of G-A-Y on a Saturday night. At the bottom of the tower block were a blood-thirsty crowd waiting for me, whipped up into a pathological frenzy, and clearly informed by various images in the media recently of crowds in Sudan calling for harsher punishment for the teacher who named her teddy-bear Mohammed. The guys that were rounding me up were all dressed in white robes, wearing kaffiyehs around their heads, expressionless and simply looking evil.

What was particularly revealing was what wasn’t present in my dream. I certainly didn’t see any women. I didn’t see any couples. I didn’t see anyone who was prepared to stand up to the authorities within the group, and I certainly didn’t see anyone in the crowd that had been whipped up into a pathological frenzy breaking free and standing up for us either. Maybe the locational-context of my dream had something to do with all this, but I think that the invisibility of these factors was a significant metaphor for my experience as a gay man today.

What dawned on me regarding the dream was how cultural stereotypes and representations can even permeate at the level of the unconscious. My dream was, above all else, a patchwork of images that I had picked up in my life that had managed to play on my fears and effectively disrupt my sleep. It called into question how the “realities” of my waking life are also experienced through a series of (false) representations of the Other, of how I see myself, and of the places that I see and read about. In other words, how the visual becomes truth. If I am not beginning to challenge these engrained ideas and assumptions at the level of the subconscious, where the imagination is free to wonder as it pleases, then how different is my outlook going to be when I am awake? [nd]
The Dangers of Discrimination

David Self©

David Self is a freelance broadcaster and writer, having previously been a teacher, a lecturer in drama and a BBC producer. He writes for a number of national papers, including The Sunday Telegraph, and The Guardian as well as for Church Times, New Statesman and The Times Educational Supplement. His latest book, The Lion Encyclopedia of Christianity was published in January 2007. He and his partner, Majid, were also one of the first people in the country to register for a Civil Partnership in the UK.

Kari is not a tart. Well, he does have a website which boasts a photo of him wearing nothing but a very tight pair of wet white running shorts and which also announces his mobile phone number in case any mature gentlemen might wish to meet him for company (outcalls and hotel visits only). But he is not some stereotypical tart. If you suggest as much, he'll spit.

Anna and Lorna are in their mid-fifties. They've known each other for years. They don't live together but they do live in similar little houses in the same Lincolnshire village. Both have cats and both have felt an emptiness in their lives ever since Martina retired but nevertheless they still both save up to spend three days at Wimbledon each summer. They are definitely not stereotypes even though Anna smokes cheroots.

If you meet Stephen in his office mid-week, you might guess he was just a bit of queen. Sunday lunchtime, if you get invited round his place for a 'teensy-weeny G&T', you'll find he's a first division screamer. Mind you, everything's in the best possible taste - and a symphony in beige. Beige walls and carpet, beige three piece suite, beige ornaments each in their place on a smoked glass coffee table that's almost beige.

It is very easy to see gays and lesbians as stereotypes - as exemplified by such descriptions and also thanks to those tired jokes on the lines that 'you are probably gay' if you check out each mirror you pass, spell 'boys' with a 'z' or know the jockstrap was invented by Parvo Nakacheke. The straight world in particular is quick to pigeon-hole all gay men as mincing poofs such as Mr Humphries in Are You Being Served, predatory old choirmasters or ranting moustachioed activists - and to imagine every lesbian is a diesel dike in Doc Martens.

Such stereotyping matters. Just so long as LGBT people tolerate stereotyping of themselves or their peers, prejudice and intolerance are free to do their dirty work and the straight world is free to dismiss gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transsexuals (LGBTs) as jokes.

Despite the extraordinary advances in the acceptance of homosexuality in the last twenty years, prejudice and discrimination are still alive and well outside the tolerant enclaves of the universities, a few equal opportunity businesses and the camaraderie of Guardian readers. Remember especially the school playground where cheap taunts of
'lezzie', 'poof' and 'shirtlifter' are commonplace. That was where 'gay' became a catch-all term of abuse.

Of course, sections of the straight world are coming to accept the LGBT community – and even to tolerate and enjoy sharing its pleasures. It's not just a matter of straight women feeling comfortable in gay bars. When Majid and I had our civil partnership ceremony back in December 2005, more than one married couple said in complete surprise, 'It feels very normal.' Even my sister (who gave the best man's speech) was surprised how 'respectable' it all was.

So much for progress. What is still a disgrace is the gay world's readiness to discriminate against diversity. In reality, you have only to browse the contact ads to see the wonderful diversity of the homosexual and bisexual worlds. Very few of us fit neatly into any immediately recognisable category. Majid and I lead settled, comfortable domestic lives. We don't often go out on the scene. That said, we're both proud and happy to be openly gay. We both campaigned actively for the legalisation of civil partnerships. But then, despite the piss-awful way the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church behave to gay men and women, I remain an active Anglican. Majid is a Shi'a Muslim. We don't fit any obvious pattern. Consequently, we confuse both straights and gays.

The gay world is far too ready to assume that the only gays who matter are under 30 (or possibly 35 if they go to the gym regularly). You have only to look around to realise that much of the gay scene is designed exclusively for the teens and twenties and that it can be unpleasantly ageist. I've stood in plenty of bars waving a tenner, waiting to be served while the bar boys have looked straight through me and served a pretty little bottle-blonde behind me. I've been refused admission to more than one bar on the grounds that I didn't fit the management's 'admission policy': that is, they don't want their youth-orientated scene tarnished by wrinkles cluttering up the dance floor. Or, even worse, wanting to sit down and chat while having a drink.

Then there's the gay press. Of all the monthlies, Gay Times (more than the others) had the broadest appeal. It wasn't totally preoccupied with young men's fashion and grooming. Recently it re-launched itself as GT and has since made a deliberate attempt to appeal especially to younger readers.

Of course, some elderly LGBT folk (men especially) don't help the situation. Many of those even older than myself got so used to being in the closet before homosexuality was decriminalised forty years ago that they still can't open the door - and many even enjoy a sense of being part of a secret society with its mafia-like brotherhood with its passwords such as 'Are you a friend of Dorothy?'

What the younger generation of LGBTs can do is to reach out to their older brothers and sisters. Not all oldies are dying to tear the knickers off anyone under 30 and cross-generation friendships need not imply the younger person is hunting a sugar daddy or is into geriatric sex. In fact, such friendships can be mutually beneficial.

In some cultures, age is venerated: 'The old, they know all the tricks.' Age does have certain inevitable disadvantages (your hair grows in the wrong places and even when well lubricated with baby oil, your body isn't as supple as it once was) but it
does bring experience, wisdom and practical knowledge. Old shoulders can be very strong and comfortable when you want to confide your miseries about a cheating partner or take the first steps into the housing market.

The young would also do well to remember that straights tend to have ‘vertical’ families: children, grandchildren, daughters-in-law and so on. Gays and lesbians, on the other hand, tend to construct artificial, ‘horizontal’ families. Their friends are of a similar age, with similar tastes and interests. But, as we get older, time and circumstances take their toll and such groups are depleted. Older gays and lesbians can welcome the support of their juniors – whether it is by saving them from being taken advantage of by cowboy tradesmen, help with mobility problems or simply by changing an awkward light bulb.

Age is by no means the only artificial barrier within LGBT communities. There are plenty of others erected by groups within those communities intent on stereotyping other groups and scorning ‘those who are different’.

We are, in fact, all different and the pathway to that utopia where there is no discrimination, no playground name-calling and no gay-bashing starts at the point where LGBT people accept those who are different. To paraphrase the Old Testament Book of Isaiah, ‘The bear shall dwell with the feme, and the clone shall lie down with the preppie, and the leather man and the drag queen and the chubby chaser together, and a little twink shall lead them; the sucking slave shall play over the hole of the bottom, and the butch woman shall put her hand on the trannie’s bum – and the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the world as the waters cover the sea.’

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I don’t think love exists you say
As you take my hand in that mischievous way
And smile that smile that moulders your eyes
And leaves me feeling butterflies

I don’t think love exists you declare
As you touch my trembles whilst easing my fear
And you look at me as if to state
You have to have me now you just can’t wait

I don’t think love exists you proclaim
As I writhe with longing whilst you whisper my name
And my insides go gooey and turn to jelly
And it’s all I can do to keep my hands steady

I don’t think love exists you state
As you kiss my neck leaving me feel faint
And you roll your tongue along my lips
And I feel the yearning in my hips

So if love truly doesn’t exist
Then please tell me what’s the point in all this.
Welfare Issues

Jon Laurence

Hello, my main role is to provide support and advice on a range of issues to other students in the LBG community. Although I'm most used to giving advice on sexual health or support to those coming out, I'd like to think people could come to me to talk about anything at all because I know from my own experience just how unpleasant it can be to have a problem that you don't feel able to share with anyone else. I want other people to know that they can always come and talk to me about whatever might be getting them down.

Now, I know that obviously during this busy time academic work will be the main priority of almost everyone here. However, to be able to work as effectively as possible, you need to be free from distractions, and the last thing that anyone wants is to have something playing on their mind during term. I want to make myself as available and approachable as possible as I can so that people can get the support they need when they perhaps need it most.

If you do have something that really has been causing you difficulties that you would like to talk over with me in person, don't hesitate to contact me at welfare@cusu-lbgt.com to arrange a meeting. I'm happy to meet with you to talk your situation over and take things from there. You can also reach me on the CUSU LBGT Welfare phone on 07758 727771. If you'd like to contact me in a more informal way, you can reach me on MSN at cusu_lbgwelfare@hotmail.co.uk every Thursday or Sunday between 7 and 8pm. You can also email me if you want to discuss things that way or get information. Everything that you say to me will be treated in confidence - unless you're at risk of serious harm, I won't (and can't) talk about your situation with anyone else unless you want me to. Remember, I'm here to help you, so don't ever feel you have to suffer in silence.

Best wishes!

Jon

“ I want to make myself available so that people can get the support they need when they perhaps need it most”

Ed: Jon will soon be standing down, but all of the detail will remain in use by the new welfare officer
Who am I?

Sexual Stereotyping as a Diagnostic Tool

By Portia

As a group, the LBGT community is aggressively averse to labelling. I’m not talking about some conspiracy to ban the use of washing instructions inside cheap shirts — although a friend of mine does claim that the only label he will accept is ‘hand wash warm.’ No, I am referring to using terminology that has specific connotations in the eyes of society. We don’t like it. Some people take it too far of course — your name, your job title, your sexual orientation: these are all labels, but they’re also facts. The statement “I am homosexual” might make some people froth about the term being a label, but if an individual really is homosexual, what term would you like them to use? Differently straight? Auto-chromosome biased? Political correctness can go a little too far, and mucking about with the ‘labels’ so as to give nobody any offence ends up in stupid terms that simply become equally as offensive in no time at all as the connotations are shifted from one label to another.

Besides, in certain situations labels and the stereotypes they embody can be very useful. Being transsexual, I naturally have an interest in the eventual breakthrough that will find the genetic blip that can cause this much misunderstood condition. It is likely that there are identifiable biological indicators of transgenderism, and autopsies on deceased transsexuals have suggested certain genetic factors that may lie behind gender dysphoria. This is a science in its infancy, however, and there is little hope for a discovery of the genetic key for gender dysphoria any time soon.

This is not true for all gender-divergent conditions of course. Klinefelter Syndrome, where a male has an XXY chromosome combination resulting in 47 chromosomes as opposed to the normal 46 — this has an identifiable genetic cause. Similarly, Turner’s Syndrome (which affects females, causing an X chromosome to be missing or abnormal) is also genetically identifiable. Likewise, a woman with Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome (AIS) can be identified, as internally her body will be male, including testes, even though her external appearance will be female. These are all physical conditions, and examination and genetic testing reveals the underlying source behind the apparent sexual or psychosexual problems experienced by the patient.

Yet without any absolute biological diagnostic criteria, how is gender dysphoria diagnosed? The answer is subjective analysis, applying certain stereotypical traits to the patient to see whether or not they conform to ‘known’ transsexual behaviour patterns. Diagnosis is usually performed by oneself, as it is essential to first realise there is an issue and take the steps to address the problem before any sort of medical assistance can be sought. Stereotypically, transexuality manifests at a very early
age as feelings of discontent with the body and the role forced onto a child in society. The youngster would rather be like the opposite gender, playing their games, and wearing their clothes. Puberty is especially difficult, as the body becomes increasingly more distasteful. This does not immediately translate into self-awareness in the child that they are the wrong gender, though. Such things are seldom discussed, especially around children, and some people can go for almost their entire lives before they realise the situation and are able to deal with the emotional pressure. It is not a coincidence that so many transsexuals only come out until they are middle-aged – it can take decades to be able to admit to oneself and others that there is a gender issue.

Diagnosis is based on a number of varying psychological tests and scales, but the most commonly used diagnostic scale is the Dr Harry Benjamin’s Gender Disorientation Scale. Dr Benjamin was a German-born sexologist who worked very closely with Alfred Kinsey in establishing that alternative sexualities and genders were not disgusting aberrations but verifiable physical, emotional, and sexual states of being. Initially, the diagnostic scales were linked, so that degrees of homosexuality on the Kinsey scale were directly related to Benjamin’s own gender dysphoric scale, but they were later seen as totally unrelated, giving Benjamin freedom to break from Kinsey to make a clearer diagnostic scale. Benjamin’s scale is subjective – the individual analyses their own life and tries to fit into the stereotypical pattern of behaviour that the scale suggests for varying degrees of transsexuality. The closer one is to a particular stereotype, then the more likely they are to get a diagnosis.

There are six degrees of transgenderness on the Benjamin Scale. They range from sexually fetishistic transvestitis to outright transexuality which requires complete sexual reassignment surgery. The scale requires analysis of one’s feelings and behaviour. While this can lead to confusion and incorrect diagnosis, especially by those who are very confused or under pressure, generally speaking it is a very good way to help emerging transsexuals discover a starting point from which they can develop. Obviously, the scale is far from perfect, but Benjamin’s work with gender dysphoria has been so successful that transexuality as most know it is now more appropriately referred to as Harry Benjamin’s Syndrome.

Stereotyping is never a good thing insofar as it partitions individuals and subjects them to social stigma. But when the very name of the condition is so riddled with connotations, sometimes the stereotyping can help. If I say to people ‘I am transsexual’ then I get a host of responses, including the ‘Aren’t you a pervert?’ response. Whereas, if I follow the stereotypical diagnostic scale and say ‘I am a Type IV transsexual’ I can then associate myself with a different stereotype entirely, and one that is very far removed from the sexual connotations that are connected with the Type I transvestite. In this sense, stereotyping is helpful. It allows the individual to obtain some sense of perspective and provides a very useful label which can be developed as the transsexual learns more about their condition.

All this aside, if someone asked me exactly what my own personal stereotype was, then I would have to be brutally honest. Mine is a Philips five-cd changer with CD-RW compatibility. It’s a bit old now, but it’s not bad, as stereotypes go. [end]
Un-BI
-Leaveable

Dunni Alao

Bisexuality may seem like a middle
ground for indecisive or greedy people but
the world isn’t full of opposites of either/or.

People aren’t just good or bad, they’re not
just intelligent or ignorant, they’re not ei-
ther humourous or unhappy, interesting or
boring, heck for some people it’s debatable
as to whether their just male or female. So
why assume their either gay or straight?
I’m certainly not either, yet for many peo-
l it’s so easy to see me as one or the
other.

Bisexuality is often regarded as the transi-
tion period between the two extremes on
the spectrum of sexuality. Whether it’s gay
to straight or straight to gay for some bi-
sexuality is the little stop off point along
the way. Sexuality is often deemed by who
you sleep with, with this notion very much
relying on present analysis, therefore
never mind if you’ve been a lesbian for
years if you’re suddenly shagging a bloke
in the eyes of society you’re in a hetero-
sexual relationship and thus straight. And
heck maybe you are after all circumstances
do change, yet this doesn’t help the genu-
ine bisexual gain any recognition for the
authenticity of their sexuality.

Bisexuals are seen as a bit of a joke.
They’re greedy, their promiscuous, they’re
horny as fuck. Abi Titmarsh didn’t do any-
one any favours in her coming out story.
The notion of someone being in a serious
committed relationship and labelling them-
selves a bisexual just doesn’t seem to fit. If
you’re in love with you’re partner who’s of a
different gender to you then surely you’re
heterosexual? But why should you be? Is
sexuality only validated by having sex? Are
virgins’ therefore asexual and closeted ho-
mos actually straight? Of course not! What
about desire I hear you cry and here is
where it gets messy. No one likes to think
about their partner desiring anyone other
than them so it gets a little confusing when
there’s a possibility of them desiring a dif-
ferent gender to them. Yet how different really
is this from fantasising about Carmen from
the L Word or Johnny Depp?

For many of my lesbian friend’s there is a
huge difference and my straight friends
would say the same. My ability to sit on the
fence playing for both teams can therefore
isolate me rather than afford me the best of
both worlds so many assume I encounter.
There is a lack of understanding between bi-
sexuials and homo and heterosexuals that
can lead to bi’s being excluded from both
worlds with our sexuality not being taken se-
riously. But the refusal to accept bisexuality
as fixed is often ignorant and insulting and
can lead to a person denying part of their
identity because of it.

So why are people so uncomfortable with
taking bi’s seriously? What is it that leads
gay and straight folk alike to assume bi’s are
just testing the waters before they settle
down? Well it is that very notion of settling
down that presents the bisexual with a con-
lict of interests according to many. If a bi
desires both sexes how can they be satisfied
with just one and still be bi? Shouldn’t you
only desire one person if you are monoga-
mous? The idea that to be a bisexual you
have to constantly want both men and
women and therefore can never be satisfied
with a relationship with just one is ridiculous.
If you can be dissatisfied in a relationship re-
gardless of sexuality then why can’t you be
satisfied under the same conditions? A bi-
sexual doesn’t need to be someone on the con-
stant look out for another notch, alternating
between both sexes. A bisexual can be just
as committed to a relationship and still label
themselves bi. After all it’s character rather
than labels that draw us to people in the first
Untitled

I don't think love exists you say
As you take my hand in that mischievous way
And smile that smile that moulders your eyes
And leaves me feeling butterflies

I don't think love exists you declare
As you touch my trembles whilst easing my fear
And you look at me as if to state
You have to have me know you just can't wait

I don't think love exists you proclaim
As I write with longing whilst you whisper my name
And my insides go gooey and turn to jelly
And it's all I can do to keep my hands steady

I don't think love exists you state
As you kiss my neck leaving me feel faint
And you roll your tongue along my lips
And I feel the yearning in my hips

Tori Amos Love Song Cover

It was a love song
Her song to me
She sang in a way that made my chin tremble
My spine tingle my heart sway
It was a love song
Her song to me
I felt it in each particle each atom of skin
Of flesh of bone of being
Of harmony slipping from her lips
It was a love song
Her song to me
From those sweet pink lips
Salted by her tears
She meant every word
It was a love song
Her song to me
She'd always love me
We'd always be

It was a love song
And it was ours
This term we decided to go on the prowl in Cambridge's hottest nightspot on a Tuesday: Club22. In keeping with our stereotypes issue we probed our respondents for answers concerning their lifestyle. And it's up to you to judge who self-defines as gay, bi or straight or none of the aforementioned?

Name: Adam
What Type Of Music Do You Feel Defines You?
Opera
Shopping Love Or Loathe?
Loathe
Wine Or Beer?
Wine
Friday Nights Mean....
Fun
Three words to describe yourself
Activist, green, socialist
Do you play a lot of sports?
Rowing and pool
Jeans - baggy or tight?
In the middle
Do you have a lot of friends of the opposite sex?
No

Name: Andrea
What Type Of Music Do You Feel Defines You?
Er, pop music and typical music to dance
Shopping Love Or Loathe?
I love shopping
Wine Or Beer?
Neither!
Friday Nights Mean?
I like going out to pub, sometimes I go to the cinema with friends
Three words to describe yourself?
Open, friendly and talkative
Jeans - baggy or tight?
Tight jeans
Do you have a lot of friends of the opposite sex?
Not a lot but some friends
Short hair or long hair?
Long hair
Underwear - lace or boy shorts?
Lace Boy shorts
Name: Sarah

What Type Of Music Do You Feel Defines You?
Oh dear – don’t know if it defines me but I listen to a lot, like McFly on one end, and then kinda going into the Indie I’m listening to a lot of Fritallees and The Fray at the moment

Shopping Love Or Loathe?
I love it when I have money I hate it when I don’t

Wine Or Beer?
Wine definitely although I do like beer

Friday Nights Mean?
Pav at Churchill or nothing really

Three words to describe yourself?
Bubbly, chatty and very inquisitive

Short nails or long nails?
I would like them to be longer but not fake long but their generally quite short I don’t bite them

Jeans – baggy or tight?
Both, I have boy fit and tighter ones but not too tight

Do you have a lot of friends of the opposite sex?
Yes I probably have more friends of the opposite sex than female

Short hair or long hair?
Probably in the middle... I don’t think my hair grows enough to actually be long

Underwear – lace or boy shorts?
I don’t own any boy shorts so I’ll probably say lace

Name: Katy

What Type Of Music Do You Feel Defines You?
All types of music, music friends listen to, a variety – metal, rock it depends on mood

Shopping Love Or Loathe?
Love clothes shopping for pretty dresses but don’t love normal shopping, love book shopping

Wine Or Beer
Wine

Friday Nights Mean
Lectures on Saturdays... time with friends

Three words to describe yourself
Loves cooking, loyal, twisted sense of humour

Do you play a lot of sports?
No

Short nails or long nails?
Short

Jeans – baggy or tight?
Tight

Flats or heals?
Flats

Do you have a lot of friends of the opposite sex?
Quite a few

Short hair or long hair?
Shoulder length
Name: Rob

What Type Of Music Do You Feel Defines You?
Indie, jazz, cheesy crap

Shopping Love Or Loathe
Loathe

Wine Or Beer
Both

Friday Nights Mean
College bar or like some party

Three words to describe yourself
F**k – that’s not one of them! Involved, increasingly cocky

Do you play a lot of sports
No

Short nails or long nails
Short

Jeans – baggy or tight
Half way

Face Piercings?
No

Name: Charlie

What Type Of Music Do You Feel Defines You?
I don’t feel that music can define a person I feel it’s an attribute, if you’re asking what I listen to I call the genre of music that I’m interested in shit wank rabbit funk which is sorta my own mixture and I do write my own pretty awful little raps and stuff, recently I came across a really funny parody about the London underground and a remix of 50 Cent vs Thomas the Tank – interesting, yeah, lots of indie, lots of indie as well on a more conventional basis

Shopping Love Or Loathe?
Loathe, absolutely loathe, argh!

Wine Or Beer?
Wine

Friday Nights Mean?
Um, I’m a student, every day’s a Friday or a Sunday or whatever day you wanna put it could mean it could mean anything, Tuesday nights recently have meant hanging out with people who are on the spectrum but believe they are the gay end of the spectrum

Do you play a lot of sports?
No but I used to be a ski instructor

Short nails or long nails?
Quite long nails actually not overly long you know that perfect length

Jeans – baggy or tight?
I have both, I have really tight jeans and really baggy jeans from the boys section in matalan

Flats or heels?
Flats I hate heels... I’m really tall though

Short hair or long hair?
Long hair, long hair... its something to hold on to

Underwear – lace or boy shorts?
Lacy boy shorts…. French knickers the comfort of boy shorts combined with the sexiness of lace, you can’t beat it

Name: Joanna

What Type Of Music Do You Feel Defines You?
Don’t really know, maybe 80’s pop probably

Shopping Love Or Loathe?
Love, love, love

Do you play a lot of sports?
Yeh I do actually

Short nails or long nails?
Long

Jeans – baggy or tight?
Tight

Flats or heals?
Heels

Do you have a lot of friends of the opposite sex?
Yes

Short hair or long hair?
Long
SOME PEOPLE ARE GAY.
GET OVER IT!

Stonewall
What LBGT & CICCU have in common

by Rachel Childs

Are we always too quick to judge religion and religious organisations without realising the similarities above the differences?

It's that time of year again - the days are getting longer, greenery is appearing, Cadbury's crème eggs are in the shops - Spring is tentatively emerging from hibernation. And Lent term in Cambridge can only mean one thing - CICCU are out converting.

This tends to cause consternation amongst a large part of the gay and bisexual community, and debates about the relationship between Christianity and homosexuality are once again reignited. Most arguments tend to frame the relationship between the two as antagonistic, before supporting the notion of one viewpoint's supremacy over the other or else a need for reconciliation., I however would argue that underneath the differences the two sides do have something in common - a strange and unconscious desire to feel persecuted.

First, consider things from an evangelical Christian point of view. In a country where only 6.3% of the population attend church weekly, secular values are widespread and openly admitting to being a practicing Christian is unfortunately often met with scorn and derision, leaving many feel that they are a persecuted minority. The historical narrative of the religion supports and even promotes this feeling. I remember often being told dramatic stories at my Church of England primary school such as Christians being fed to the lions in Roman amphitheatres, or the gory demises of saints who became martyrs for their beliefs. Such stories served to heighten the feeling of constant attack. These feelings become crystallised when governmental legislation is imposed on Christian groups, such as the recent move to prevent Catholic adoption agencies from turning away gay couples. The desire to feel persecuted requires a persecutor, and the LBGT community and those who seek to defend it fulfil this role, becoming for evangelical Christians a symbol for wider perceived trends of undermining Christian morality.

From an LBGT perspective, feelings of being a socially persecuted minority are also prevalent. Most people who identify as gay, bi, lesbian or trans will more than likely
have experienced prejudice and discrimination at some point whether at school, work or from friends and family. Historically, it is well known that non-heterosexual behaviour has almost always been treated as a moral abomination in the West, with homosexuality (for men) deemed illegal in the UK until 1967. Today, stereotyped representations of LBGT people in the media and presumptions of heterosexuality in everything from advertising campaigns to sex education continue to contribute to feelings of exclusion. The negative experiences that some LBGT people will have had of some branches of Christianity, often at home or at school, mean that the religion comes to been seen as a threat and an oppressor, the source of much of this persecution and exclusion.

But to what extent do these feelings of persecution correspond to reality? Having to tiptoe around gay sensibilities when writing promotional literature hardly amounts to being fed to lions, and while having random members of CICCU knock on your door with pamphlets is annoying and intrusive it isn’t likely to destroy anyone’s life. This isn’t to deny that there are, unfortunately, many individual instances of members of one side victimising the other and of course these situations are real, often deeply distressing, and should be firmly dealt with. But the perception of being threatened is a damaging one, as it affects how each group perceives and treats the other and interprets their actions. Gay or bisexual people approached by CICCU, for example, may often perceive this as an attack on their sexuality when actually they solicit absolutely everybody, while evangelical Christians imagine that the LBGT posters they see about the place or the two men they saw snogging in the college bar were deliberately trying to insult them. As well as causing unnecessary hostility, the desire to be persecuted is ultimately narcissistic and stems from a need to feel righteous and indignant, the nobility of fighting a moral battle against the oppressive or indifferent majority. It is these unconscious motivations that need to be brought to light before either evangelical Christians or the LBGT community can form considered opinions of each other and engage productively. [nd]
You have one new message!

Should we always be so suspicious of online dating websites? Or should we learn to appreciate how they now accurately represent the social worlds we occupy and are simply the only way for some people to network?

Recently I have found nothing more exciting than being interrupted, mid-essay, with a window popping up on my screen displaying the beautiful, almost poetic words ‘You have an Online Message!’ The adrenaline! The anticipation! The unbearable, near orgasmic rush of energy that ruthlessly possesses me, tearing me relentlessly from my concentration on ‘volcanic activity in the Pacific Ocean’ like the torrid eruptions of those very volcanoes I’m writing about. Is it the one message I’ve been waiting for all of my life? My knight in shining armour that is about to whisk me off at the break of day to an exotic oasis of bounty and isolation? My Romeo that will declare his love for me by rearranging the stars to spell my name? Or Dave… a 40-year-old man who works in a chip shop and would like to get jiggy with me quickly before he goes off to his wife and kids in Kings Hedges! I click the automated response button and once again become divulged in the goings on of the Eastern Pacific Ridge. Oh… the anti-climax!!!

I stumbled across ‘well-known-website-sounding-like-“radar”’ at the age of 16 when I was beginning to dip my toes into the oh-so-scary world of what it meant to be gay and what is was like to be sociable with fellow homo. After all, a traditional boarding school in the middle of rural Suffolk was hardly the best foundations for nurturing a confident and socially thriving homosexual. Signing up was daunting to say the least and I felt highly naive, vulnerable and plain stupid for unleashing myself from previous securities and discourse into the world of internet chat-rooms and personals websites.

I felt, as my mother so dramatically put it, as though I was advertising myself to a bunch of perverts that would manipulate, influence and possibly endanger me. But she couldn’t understand that this was not as though I was walking down the high street with a sandwich board attached to me displaying; FREE SEX WITH A 16 YEAR OLD… COME AND GET IT! I suppose maybe she had the right to be sceptical in the way that mothers are allowed to be.

Times however are a-changing. No longer is Gaydar (damn I said it) and other such sites the stronghold hunting grounds for perverts, the socially inept, and people who fell out of the ugly tree and hit all the branches on the way down. Instead they have evolved into fairgrounds of socialising, cavorting, excitement, sexual exploration, and good, clean, innocent fun! They are places where friends are made and retained, gossip is circulated, fashion tips are concentrated and they can be the soil in which an embryonic relationship has the potential to sprout. Membership is nothing to be ashamed of and in
many ways typifies the technological, networked, rapid-paced and impersonal society that we are increasingly becoming part of. So I, for one, am certainly not going to have any hang-ups with being ‘shy_one’ whilst exploring the great wonders of cyberspace.

One of the wonderful things about Gaydar though is that it can enable us to act out our wildest fantasies. As the site proclaims- “what we want, when we want it”. Shy_one (a slight contradiction in character anyhow) needn’t be me, and I needn’t be shy_one. He could be a twenty-something Harvard graduate and millionaire with houses in New York, Tokyo and London (to name a few) with Daddy’s trust fund to live off. He could have been born Lucinda but could never get to grips with a pair of double D’s weighing him down when balancing on a pair of stilettos. In many ways Gaydar acts as a means of projecting an image of how we would like to be seen by other people and also by ourselves. Our profiles can be perfected over time, adjusted when we feel like it and we can be selective with which information we give out. It allows us to engineer ourselves aesthetically, by what pictures we select to use; culturally, by making explicit what interests us; and socially, by whose messages we reply to. And what’s more, we have the moral security that we don’t necessarily have to lie in order to do so.

However this can conversely be one of its largest flaws. The potential for out-of-shape, past-their-prime, hopeless fools to become youthful, cherubic stallions with a myriad of cultural interests and talents. And, my word, have I had an experience with this! It brings me back to one of the first people I ever met from the site who seemed as though they ticked all the right boxes for me and continued to do so when chatting over MSN. He was a 19-year old (tick), UEA English student (tick), who lived locally (tick), was very sporty (tick), sociable (tick), popular (tick), good looking (tick) … i.e. potential! However, what greeted me for lunch was far from it. I had to endure a meal (in one of my most frequented bistros I must point out!) with a bastion of unkempt looks, the epitome of mind-numbing dullness and one of the most socially retarded teenagers I think I may have ever come across in my life (and that’s bad- I live near Norfolk!). Call me a bastard! Call me unfair, superficial, soulless and despicable! Fine, in which case I’d be happy to pass on your email address to the dude. It was truly one of those awful moments where I was praying that the ground would just open up and swallow me whole. Oh… the embarrassment!

Yet experience has taught me to be more wary. To chat at length and be as probing as possible. To go to places where I’m going to be seen (just not by people that I’m likely to know). To be choosy and picky. To feel free to click the automated rejection button and not obliged to reply to the likes of Dave. I feel in control and am able to make right choices, and it’s paid off. It’s allowed me to network myself with people on my travels, especially in countries where homosexuality is still statutorily illegal, it has opened up a lively gay social circle at home and one day my prince charming could message me. Primarily though, I use it as a social tool, a way to meet people, who I then meet more people through, and to stay in touch with friends similar to a ‘gay facebook’. Nothing will replace face-to-face interaction and traditional dating but Gaydar can at least provide a means to this and also allow people who aren’t so comfortable in conventional places of interaction with a forum for which they can explore their sexuality in an anonymous and self-controllable way. Surely, we need to be proclaiming a work of wonder here and heralding Gaydar as, amongst other things, the liberator of would-be trapped and oppressed hearts!

So I’ve learnt to accept that Mr. Perfect may not necessarily bump into me in the street or that once in a while I may want to experiment with people that aren’t in the university. Does it make me a bad and sleazy person? Should I be signing up for help while I still have the chance to save my wretched soul? I can just imagine the scene at the introductory group meeting at the local rehab clinic. It’s my turn to speak. I stand slowly. I move my chair away from me and face the circle of seated waifs and strays. I clear my throat and solemnly and apprehensively announce with my head hung low… “Hi, my name is James and… (I take a deep breath) …and I use Gaydar”. The room falls silent. Tumbleweed bounces past me as I’m confronted by a sea of astonishment with the coke addicts and alcoholics gazing at me with piercing distain. Oh… the shame of it all! [end]