QUEER DISCUSSION; ALIENATION AND DISTANCING; ILLUSTRATION; GAY MARRIAGE; POETRY; DEFINING QUEER; INTERVIEW WITH ANDREA GIBSON; FICTION; SHOULD WE BE LGBTQ; PHOTOGRAPHY; THE MEDIEVAL SEX PARADIGM; PHOTO MONTAGE; QUEER ATTRACTION.
Welcome to [no definition], the magazine of CUSU's LGBT campaign. I'm your new editor, Emi. This term's issue is in honour of February's LGBT history month. Springboarding from a discussion about whether CUSU LGBT's acronym should be changed to accommodate queer (LGBTQ), this issue seeks to explore what queer means to us through essays on sex, marriage, alienation, and attraction. We also hosted a discussion group for the LGBT community (next one this term—always in Lent to sign up), and interviewed Andrea Gibson, a renowned queer slam poet, on queer art. Finally, I'd like to thank Lis & S.T. for all their invaluable help. If you've any comments, or think you'd like to get involved, then get in touch at lgbt-editor@cusu.cam.ac.uk or facebook.com/cusuND.

From Rowan & Alex as Trans Reps: We both knew and loved Harry and miss him greatly. He was instrumental in building support systems and a sense of community for trans* people. His plans for the future included setting up a queer reading library as a free resource for all students, and arranging for the University Counselling Service to have at least one counsellor trained in trans* issues. He was at the heart of the trans* community and leaves us in mourning. We stood as trans* reps because we felt that a focus and “official” source of support was important to the community. We intend to see to it that his plans are brought to completion. If you would like to help, please get in touch. We encourage others to take on this role and continue this work at the General Meeting in Lent.

From Felix: I first met Harry as a blue-haired, adolescent-looking member of the LGBT exec, balancing determined butt-kicking of the President himself with a degree of patience, sensitivity and good manners which I suspect will always be beyond my own irascible nature. I graduated from Cambridge in 2000 and am now 33 years old; perhaps transitioning so late in life has made me cynical, because hearing Harry give a talk on his transition during the Men of Trinity week, speaking with confidence of a timescale of ten years for sweeping change, was the first thing I’ve encountered since discovering my own transness that gave me genuine hope for the future of trans people in Britain. When Harry died, the trans community lost a future leader, and without him the weight of responsibility lies that much more heavily on all our shoulders. Everyone in the local community has pulled together to take up the torch, and I’m both touched and impressed by the depth and intensity of the response; but it goes without saying that we have a long road ahead of us without him.

From Alex Brett: This is what I know about Harry: he did everything he could to help. When I asked him whether on the off-chance he’d be willing to help me complain about an interaction with the NHS, he agreed instantly. When I e-mailed him to whinge about the latest awful bit of correspondence, he sympathised and reassured me. He welcomed me and gave me a place to feel at home; he was brave and compassionate and open, and he always listened. My name is Alex, I’m trans, and I have mental illness. Harry, this one’s for you.

From Rowan Thomas: I’d only known Harry a short while but he was important to me and has left a huge hole in my life. He was someone who shined very brightly and who cared about others fiercely despite everything he was struggling with. He was one of the most unselfish people I knew. There is very little to be said at a time like this, we shared a lot, he was there for me, I hope he felt I was the same. I miss you Harry.

Editor’s Note

RememberING Harry Harris

Cover photography courtesy of Brian Shumway. The views or opinions expressed in this magazine are those of the respective authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the editor, CUSU LGBT, or CUSU LGBT’s sponsors. No responsibility is taken for the content of websites linked to in the magazine.
Josie
My queer identity is a joyful one. I revel in it, take pride in it, play with it and explore it. It provides support without constraint, belonging without conformity.

I admit: I used to dislike the word ‘queer’. But when I identified as lesbian, I didn’t feel comfortable with that either. I worried, or felt guilty, if I was attracted to someone who didn’t fit a narrow definition of ‘woman’. I didn’t feel that ‘lesbian’ told the whole story – I had to qualify it. This despite being a very ‘out-and-proud’ person. So when my partner began to question her gender identity and identify in a more masculine way, I panicked – what would happen to my lesbian identity if my partner transitioned, or identified as genderqueer? That was when I discovered ‘queer’. Queer, for me, is an antidote to playing-down of these varieties of people in our community, to make them more palatable to our heteronormative gender-binaried society – because it’s safe. Sure, we are not persecuted as much any more – but I worry that we are now becoming ashamed of our differences rather than enjoying them, and we have lost the defiant pride that made us powerful agents of social change. Basically, instead of beating ‘em, we have joined ‘em.

Queer, for me, is an antidote to it. That says ‘I don’t care whether you accept me, because I am going to be my fabulous self anyway’. Queer sticks two fingers up at the gender binary. Queer welcomes everyone under the umbrella, it doesn’t ask for criteria or a number on the Kinsey scale. It encourages individuality and discourages the too-common policing, in-fighting, exclusion and prejudice found within our own community.

Queer is liberating rather than restrictive. It allows for more genders than just ‘male’ and ‘female’. I am proud of its association with our history, and I want to celebrate those who fought so bravely in the LGBTQ rights movement. It’s an attitude, a state of mind, rather than just a narrow description of sexual preference: for me it is best summed up by writer and activist Tristan Taormino: “I see myself as queer, since queer to me is not just about who I love or lust, but it’s about my culture, my community, and my politics. The truth is, even if I were with a heterosexual guy, I’d be a queer dyke.”

Sarra
To me queer feels more reflective of my experience of my sexuality than ‘bi’(sexual)’ does, because it evokes ‘not fitting boxes’. Taking on the ‘queer’ label can be a mark of political engagement – rather than just submitting to a box (L, G or B). Queer is more open – queer says ‘I ain’t’. For me it includes the possibility of deconstructing gender binaries much better than simply LGB.

Sophie
I think it is important that queer identities be represented better under the LGBTQ banner, as LGBTQ. For queer-identifying people, it can be used subversively, playfully, politically, earnestly and in many other ways to self-identify and relate to the world and people around us.

I hesitate to identify my sexuality with a discrete, all-encompassing term. As essential as it is for me to have some way of communicating my sexuality to the people that matter, it can at times feel suspiciously like species classification. I feel like carrying the card “pansexual” – probably the closest “technical” definition of my sexuality – doesn’t accurately reflect it or how I’d like to talk about it.

If I’m going to identify, it’s best to do it with a malleable term like “Queer”. It can be a way of affirming that there is another way to live one’s life with “non-heteronormative sexual desire”, without rifling through the cardbook of taxonomies to figure out “what I am” according to what I will do and with whom.

“Even if I were with a heterosexual guy, I’d still be a queer dyke.”

Anon
I really take issue with the word ‘queer’. For me, being gay is perfectly normal – there’s nothing wrong, strange, or odd about it. I don’t think I’m ‘different’ (if other people treat me differently, that’s up to them) and I don’t think I’m questionable, suspicious, unbalanced, or any of the other definitions that appear in the dictionary when one looks up the word ‘queer’. I’m not ‘queer’ – I’m gay. The most irritating thing about this word is when people try to “claim it back”. ‘Queer’ was never originally used to mean gay, transgender, bisexual or anything else. My dictionary traces the etymology of the word to either Scottish or German, and it’s always meant strange, or peculiar. You can’t “claim back” a word when it never referred to sexuality in the first place.

Conversely, my colleague at the next desk enjoys that ‘queer’ is often slang for ‘gay’. He likes the fact that being gay is sometimes considered taboo, and that – by being gay – he is not, ultimately, ‘mainstream’.

Eddie Demelza Tindall

Without rifting through the cardbook of taxonomies to figure out ‘what I am’ according to what I will do and with whom.”

ND asks the Cambridge LGBT community.

BY JOSIE FIELDING, SARRA FACEY, SOPHIE BARNES & ANON
You might see him at the theatre – although he looks so out of place there it’s ludicrous, in a velvet frock coat over torn and faded jeans. People ask about his outfits a lot, and he never has an answer, his fashion sense as contrary as a bus timetable; the only constants about his clothing are the cowboy boots, the brown leather scuffed and scarred with age, and the hat. In bars and cafes he might be seen with any number of people, but for concerts and conventions he seems to have a companion picked out for each, and for the theatre it’s a slender man with a fine-boned face and suits so sharp you’re almost afraid of the edges. They have a box of their own, it would seem, and during intervals they’ll stand next to each other and talk soft and easy, heads bowed, gazes drifting around the room. Together, they look just incongruous enough to blend in.

You’ll see her on horseback, although not so much in the city, and wonder why she never puts up her hair. There’ve been sightings of elastic, some say, tangled in the thick dark mass of it, but whether she’s tried to keep it away or not it’s down around her shoulders and over her face by the time you run across her, and it’s hard to see how she keeps on course. Sometimes she lets the beast amble her around town and doesn’t seem to care much where she goes and sometimes you’ll see her one minute and the next she’s off towards the desert and picking up speed, dark eyes flashing, now and again with some laughing girl giving chase. Best not to stare after ‘em too long, or the sand’ll get in your eyes.

Or you’ll see them in a bar, and they might be wearing any old thing; it’s oddest when they’re in a shirt and some kind of corsetry, for the fall and crease of the linen lies smooth in some places and in others makes curves of what might be flat planes and angles. They might be in the thick of things, playing pool or at the hub of some joke or a brewing fight, sitting at a lady’s feet or with a gentleman on their arm, or just by themselves, sprawled loose-limbed with a pipe or a fag or one of them other things, the long slender cigarettes they put in a holder to smoke. (If you look carefully you might see them try to blow a smoke ring, but that’s not often and it never happens by chance; they never really mastered the trick, you see, and the only way you’d be able to watch long enough to see ‘em muck it up would be to keep your eyes fixed at all times, and that’s the sort of thing that people notice.)

Sometimes he’s out-loud and showy, striding around town at midday in an evening dress with feathers in his hair, and sometimes he’s just some scruffy lanky boy at the bus stop, too young to be wise, too grown-up to be awkward. Sometimes she’s all white cotton skirts over those scuffed-up cowboy boots and sometimes she’s in overall, spotless ones, sharp and bright against her sun-browned sandy skin. They’ll have the hat on, like as not, looking like it’s fighting a losing battle with that thick dark hair but somehow staying on regardless; or if it’s not on their head it’s somewhere about them, tucked under one arm, slung carelessly over one shoulder.

Often you’ll be in conversation with her before you even realise it. He’s a decent enough talker, after all, and if you’re by yourself in a dark room and the air’s misted with smoke and your brain’s fuzzed over with beer, you’ll be drawn into the conversation before you remember what you’re supposed to be looking out for. She seems to like it that way; it draws the wariness out of her eyes, the ever-present don’t mess with me hint that lurks behind his smile whenever they’re somewhere they’re not sure is safe. There’re layers on layers in that smile, and the surface one’s the same as the very deepest, which you’d think would make him an easy type but actually makes him tricky to talk to, sometimes, especially when you’re asking all the wrong questions. Then they look at you like you’re missing the point, somehow, like you’re not getting the joke. (It’s okay; you’re not the first, and you won’t be the last. It’s obvious once you’ve figured it out, but sometimes that takes time, like the really good restaurant that everyone’s heard of but that’s only ever half-full ‘cause the route’s not the clearest and it draws the wariness out of her eyes, the ever-present don’t mess with me hint that lurks behind his smile whenever they’re somewhere they’re not sure is safe. There’re layers on layers in that smile, and the surface one’s the same as the very deepest, which you’d think would make him an easy type but actually makes him tricky to talk to, sometimes, especially when you’re asking all the wrong questions. Then they look at you like you’re missing the point, somehow, like you’re not getting the joke. (It’s okay; you’re not the first, and you won’t be the last. It’s obvious once you’ve figured it out, but sometimes that takes time, like the really good restaurant that everyone’s heard of but that’s only ever half-full ‘cause the route’s not the clearest and you’ll get lost on the way there unless you already know where it is.)

Some people wonder why it’s funny. She can get them quite worked up about it, if she’s in the right sort of mood.

You know them, though, because everybody does, even if not all of them seem to get it either. Some people figure it out and some don’t; the ones who know or don’t care don’t need to ask, and some people never get much further than wanting to know, because it seems rude to bring it up. You might be one of those, and that’s natural enough; it’s the kind of thing you might expect people to be offended about if it’s talked about, after all, if it’s brought out into the open.

Not everybody’s as polite as you, though, and it’s only a matter of time before you see that too; that one person who, out of malice or curiosity or just plain confusion, leans in at the bar or barges through the crowd in the shopping mall or just plain sees her, stops, looks him up and down, and takes the long or the short way round to that big question: “What are you?” You might miss it; it’s normally over quicker than you’d expect, after all, the eyebrow raise where you’d think to find curiosity or just plain confusion, the ever-present don’t mess with me hint that lurks behind his smile whenever they’re somewhere they’re not sure is safe. There’re layers on layers in that smile, and the surface one’s the same as the very deepest, which you’d think would make him an easy type but actually makes him tricky to talk to, sometimes, especially when you’re asking all the wrong questions. Then they look at you like you’re missing the point, somehow, like you’re not getting the joke. (It’s okay; you’re not the first, and you won’t be the last. It’s obvious once you’ve figured it out, but sometimes that takes time, like the really good restaurant that everyone’s heard of but that’s only ever half-full ‘cause the route’s not the clearest and it draws the wariness out of her eyes, the ever-present don’t mess with me hint that lurks behind his smile whenever they’re somewhere they’re not sure is safe. There’re layers on layers in that smile, and the surface one’s the same as the very deepest, which you’d think would make him an easy type but actually makes him tricky to talk to, sometimes, especially when you’re asking all the wrong questions. Then they look at you like you’re missing the point, somehow, like you’re not getting the joke. (It’s okay; you’re not the first, and you won’t be the last. It’s obvious once you’ve figured it out, but sometimes that takes time, like the really good restaurant that everyone’s heard of but that’s only ever half-full ‘cause the route’s not the clearest and you’ll get lost on the way there unless you already know where it is.)

They’ll tip their head back, and smile, and wink. “I am exactly as I ought to be, darlin’,” they’ll say. It’s the only answer they can give, because it’s the only answer there is. They are exactly as they ought to be. That’s the only answer that matters.
This article is only available in the print edition of [no definition].
This article is only available in the print edition of [no definition].
The sexual relationship par excellence and why does such a concept even exist?

BY SWYN HAF

This is a Queer Catholic Apologia. I believe such an article is relevant, because we all are living under a Catholic paradigm. And not just any Catholic paradigm – a medieval Catholic paradigm; virtually all restrictions that apply to sex in Western societies stem from Catholic moral convictions of that era. Even technical legal discourse employs language – ‘crime against nature,’ ‘unnatural act,’ and ‘sodomy,’ for example – that assumes medieval beliefs about sex (Brundage, 1987, 587-9). I argue that another Catholic paradigm is as possible as it is desirable as it is necessary for the coherence of Church teaching. This is my saying to the Catholic Institution regarding its stance on sexual relationships: not only are you wrong, but you also contradict yourself.

Science & Religion

Let me start at the concept from which the medieval Catholic paradigm takes off: hierarchy. Basically, it goes God – Man – Woman. Man is closer to God in this paradigm because Man was made in God’s image and woman in man’s. This, unfortunately contradicts Genesis I though, which states that They (God) created them (humanity) male and female, in their own image created They them. So medieval Catholic writers had to seek support for the concept of gender hierarchy elsewhere.

They sought it in science. However, a medieval writer would (hopefully) treat science very differently to you or I: the world, the body, and hence science, were viewed as illustrative of a greater, cosmic truth (Laquer, 1990, 27). Medieval writers accordingly illustrated their truths via the work of many, mainly classical, anatomists such as Galen. Some of the widely accepted ‘empirical evidence’ he provided, to illustrate the ‘truth’ of woman’s inferiority, was the observation that her reproductive organs, like the mole’s eyes, are still inside her body and thus, obviously, not fully formed. They are actually just male reproductive organs which are not developed enough to procreate – her ovaries are testes, her vagina is an internal penis, etc. Woman is an imperfect man (Laquer, 1990, 25-26).

I hope I don’t need to convince you that this is bad science. However, the real problem for the medieval Catholic writers was actually that, although classical anatomists’ authority was useful in supporting gender hierarchy, there were glaring inconsistencies between Church teaching and the science by which it claimed to be informed. ‘Science’ and Galen held, for example, that orgasm, both male and female, was necessary for conception (Laquer, 1990, 2). But according to the Church, marital sex was ‘crime from sin so long as no one enjoyed it’ (Brundage, 1987, 429). So reproduction, commonly held to be the least sinful reason for having sex (Kung, 2005, 42), necessarily entailed the most sinful thing about it.

Medieval Inconsistencies

This teaching, apart from being incoherent because essentially nonsensical, also entails near heresy; Woman was created by God, and created with a clitoris. If pleasure is sinful, this seems to have been a grievous blunder on God’s part.

“Woman was created by God, and created with a clitoris. If pleasure is sinful, this seems to have been a grievous blunder on God’s part.”

In teaching sex hate, the Church teaches against the example of its own founder.”

The medieval paradigm itself, however, actually represents a shift from early Christianity. The consensus on Christian sexual morality with which we are familiar today dates from, but did not come into being until, the late thirteenth century – almost 1300 years after the time of Jesus (Brundage, 1987, 586).

Jesus, famously, had very little to say about sex. He encountered people who, of course, were variously sexual, but their sex lives never defined his interaction with them. Take the Roman Centurion (Luke 7:1-10) – whether or not his pais was a concubine or just his young male slave, those who heard him begging for his pais’ life, would probably have assumed that the pais was a concubine, given that keeping a male concubine was expected practice of a Roman Centurion. Jesus’ response was to grant his request and commend him as an example of faith surpassing any in Israel. No further comment.

Sex for Reproduction

Further, the reproductionist school of thought (which holds reproduction as the only acceptable goal of sex) contradicts Paul, who the Catholic Church is usually loath to contradict. He claims, that couples should have sex so they don’t have sex with other people. So the primary goal of sex is to stop people having more sex – that’s not unproblematic, but it’s not the same as the primary goal of sex being to reproduce.

Reproductionism cannot be held up to the inspection of either the Bible or human experience: how much sex is actually reproductive, even potentially? Oral and anal sex is obviously ruled out, and consequently all queer sex (you can’t get pregnant by scissoring or fingering either), but so is straight penetrative sex on 23 days of a 28 day cycle and with any woman who is past the menopause, or who, due to any number of common factors such as stress, won’t be ovulating that month. Any link between female sexuality and reproduction at all is tenuous – a woman can be aroused by a person incapable of fertilizing her, and fertilized by someone who doesn’t arouse her. We’re back to the Clitoris Problem it would seem, that female sexuality was designed for something greater than reproduction. It seems that might involve pleasure. This just isn’t accommodated by the reproductionist scheme.

Sex for pleasure

This flat rejection of pleasure betrays ‘sex-is-dirty’ thinking. This was another medieval school of thought, which held that all sex was bad, reproductive or otherwise.
This allows for sexual pleasure as forging a bond of affection between the couple, which outranks procreation as a reason to have sex. Here Paul is reintroduced – happily, marital sex is redefined as a means, not by which to ensure people have less sex, but that people fall more deeply in love, meaning, supposedly, they won't want to have sex with other people. Lovely! The obvious problem is, that if sexual pleasure is actually good, then, for example, oral sex should be good, too. Queer sex should be good. But the Church continues to deny this. Not only is the institutional Church wrong, it also contradicts itself.

The History of Sex

It is obvious that the Church stance on sex is not essentially true, as it is internally inconsistent. But the Church still tries to doom Catholics to sex exclusively within marriage, vaginally penetrative only, and with the goal of reproduction. Is that really what we should make of Aquinas’ pronouncement that God gave us our senses that we might delight in His [sic] creation? And why is the creation varied if we are meant to live so restrictedly in it? And why does it include the clitoris? Further, it is ridiculous to pretend the Church's (anti) sex stance cannot change, when it has already changed quite drastically. Look at the Bible: even the institution of marriage changes, from one way polygamy and concubinage (Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar), to exclusivity but ownership by the husband of his wife (the Ten Commandments) to headship by the husband of the wife, but at least mutual ownership (Paul). These changes surely constitute successive improvements.

Anti-woman

The Church, however, continues to hold that there is but one kind of acceptable sexual relationship: reproductive, contained by Pauline marriage. Sex is still seen as dirty in Catholicism, and woman, the presumed object of the (all-male) Catholic institution’s sexual desires, is viewed as concomitantly dirty. So being anti-sex makes the Church hate at least half of humanity, whilst professing that sex should be about love. The Church was recently exposed as a sexual scourge of the vulnerable. This is sadly unsurprising of an institution which makes sex about hate. But in teaching sex hate, the Church teaches against the example of its own founder.

I am a Christian, because I love that founder, and I am Catholic because I believe in right and wrong, not relativism. Dogma is a crude tool of Catholic morality; but it is also a fragile one. Sex dogma presents powerful temptations to force religion beyond its limits. The Church would do well to resist those temptations, for down that road lies hatred, and hatred leads to abuse. 

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ND asks the LGBT community if our acronym should be changed to ‘LG BTQ’?

No - stay LGBT (14%)  
Yes (48%)  
No - just Q (16%)  
No - LGBT+ (22%)
INTERVIEW: ANDREA GIBSON

ND interviews Andrea Gibson, winner of Women’s World Poetry Slam & whose work was read in lieu of morning prayer at Utah State Legislature, now on her fifth album, on what queer means to her.

BY EMI DUNN

Can you tell us what ‘queer’ means to you? No, I don’t think I can. It’s the one word in the universe I have no definition for and that’s why I like it so much.

In your poetry there are often strong political themes – would you say that ‘queer’ is a politic? If so, how so? I never like thinking in terms of politics. I don’t think of queer in terms of politics. I don’t think of war in terms of politics. I think when we do that we separate ourselves from our basic inclination for compassion.

Do you see your work as inspiring/mobilising a queer politics; as a response to one; or as an articulation of one? No, I don’t think I can. It’s the one word in the universe I have no definition for and that’s why I like it so much.

Who are your biggest inspirations? Pema Chodron, Mary Oliver, Bell Hooks, Leslie Feinberg. A thousand more.

What are your strongest drives for keeping doing what you do? I write because I have to write. My spirit wouldn’t be alive if I didn’t. I travel around performing my poems because I love that experience and because I believe the best way to counteract a destructive culture is to create.

Your work is very unconventional, in form, imagery and delivery – would you say this is part of doing queer art/performances? My work is not unconventional in terms of spoken word and the culture of spoken word. I would say most of the form, imagery and delivery was taught to me by the spoken word community/movement throughout the world. But I suppose spoken word is formless by nature. So.

What would you say the role of the artist/poet in LGBT and queer communities is? To tell the truth.

Your poems are very raw, and use very challenging imagery (eg. ‘Dive’) – would you say you write to shock and unbalance? I’m part of a performance group called Vox Feminista. The mission of Vox Feminista is to “comfort the disturbed and disturb the comfortable.” That’s the answer I’ll go with.

You once said your love poems are your political poems, and your political poems your love poems – can you explain this a bit? Love in this time is revolutionary. I believe to love someone well is a radical act. And I don’t like the idea of political poems being called “issue poems” or even “political poems”. Political poems at their root are poems of love.

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The best way to counteract a destructive culture is with creation.

If you had to recommend just one of your poems, which would it be? ‘Sleeping’ [tinyurl.com/AGsleep]

You mention you were once a school teacher – do you think it’s possible to have ‘queer’ as a child-friendly notion, and if so, how? Yes – tell the truth without shame.

What has been the biggest thing about your career so far? Being away from home so often. It’s not in my nature to be on the road so much. I like the quietness and slowness of home.

And the most unexpected thing? Most unexpected is that I never ever cease to being nervous to perform. In ten years the butterflies have not let up.

What would you class as your biggest success so far, and what would you love to achieve with your work? I’m not sure I think in terms of success, because I don’t really think in terms of failure. I feel happily surprised that I am able to write poetry full time; that the thing I love doing most in the world is also the thing that pays my rent. That is such a blessing.

Do you think you’ll ever come to the UK? I toured through the UK about 4 years ago and had an amazing time. I would love to come back and hope to very soon.
What is queer sexuality?  
– How is Q different to bisexual?  
– I identify as queer because I didn't feel 'gay enough' – I wasn't attracted enough to men to identify as bi, but I liked the fluidity of Q.  
– It's uncommon not to enact your desires – so is queerness defined by actions or by feelings, then?  
What about what Q is reacting to? Everyone speaks about heteronormativity – but celibacy is often overlooked in these discussions, or transformed into asexuality, which isn't the same thing.  
– There was a blog recently 'I don't want to have sex' about some Q communities that ends being almost 'sex coercive'. I read that article and totally agreed with it, almost 'sex coercive'. I read that.  
– As nice as a non-identifying response to heteronormativity.  
– Q is a fantasy of a real phenomenological project that has now become political; because it always has to be defined in response to heteronormativity.  
– As nice as a non-identifying apolitical space sounds, is that even possible?  

Is Q marginalised within the LGBT scene?  
– Obviously there's been a huge uptake of queer – but there still seems as aspect of marginalisation in LGBT spaces.  
– I don't feel marginalised in Cambridge – but it's a university space, whereas a lot of LGBT scenes are based in bars, which are less welcoming.  
– It's the same with forced gender roles.  
– But what would happen if those conformative masculinities, say, shifted? It sounds as if you're saying if a man buys into male behaviour, it's problematically the other way.  
– What's problematic is the ubiquitous coercion into gendered behaviours – although that said, many behaviours defined as male are problematic, such as misogyny.  
– It feels like you don't see masculinity done deliberately outside of the gay male community.  
– It doesn't feel conscious to me; it feels very much ingrained, like boys' violent games in school. I felt so glad, after I came out, to not have to conform to that any more!  
– You see people increasingly taking up queer femme stuff – but you don't see men doing that with masculinity.  
– What about bears? But I do agree male and masculine queer is less common than women being feminine and queer.  
– You see people increasingly taking up queer femme stuff – but you don't see men doing that with masculinity.  
– As nice as a non-identifying apolitical space sounds, is that even possible?  

So is Q just sexuality – or is it about gender & identity as well?  
– To me, Q feels like it's about gender & identity as well – not just swapping one stereotype box for another; it's not a set identity.  
– Definitely. Q is less prescriptive; Q can admit ideas like forced heterosexuality – the training of everyone to be heterosexual from birth and so having to 'come out' (except some trans people, who are trained to be gay from birth) – and define against that. It's the same with forced gender roles.  
– But what would happen if those conformative masculinities, say, shifted? It sounds as if you're saying if a man buys into male behaviour, it's problematically the other way.  
– What's problematic is the ubiquitous coercion into gendered behaviours – although that said, many behaviours defined as male are problematic, such as misogyny.  
– It feels like you don't see masculinity done deliberately outside of the gay male community.  
– It doesn't feel conscious to me; it feels very much ingrained, like boys' violent games in school. I felt so glad, after I came out, to not have to conform to that any more!  
– You see people increasingly taking up queer femme stuff – but you don't see men doing that with masculinity.  
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Do we think Q is political in a way LGBT isn't?  
– Yes, L & G especially can be a way of framing our identities as 'like mainstream people but with one thing different' whereas Q can admit ideas like forced heterosexuality – the training of everyone to be heterosexual from birth and so having to 'come out' (except some trans people, who are trained to be gay from birth) – and define against that. It's the same with forced gender roles.  
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& Shiela Jefferies speak about the queer feminist movement.  
– It's like 'homonormativity'!  
– We don't have the same 'consciousness raising' spaces for women that came with the early feminist movement.  
– There are also different feminisms; for example Janice Raymond & Shiela Jeffries speak about transsexual women as 'men in disguise', trying to encroach upon female space, and so they exclude all transsexual women.  
– There's a catch 22 for female trans people – where any assertive behaviour is defined as masculine, yet putting it aside is called a caricature of patriarchal femininity. And this gets used to push people from shelters, crisis counselling, basic resources – they end up in the wrong prisons, unable to find shelters they're safe in etc.  

What is queer sexuality?  
– How is Q different to bisexual?  
– I identify as queer because I didn't feel 'gay enough' – I wasn't attracted enough to men to identify as bi, but I liked the fluidity of Q.  
– It's uncommon not to enact your desires – so is queerness defined by actions or by feelings, then?  
What about what Q is reacting to? Everyone speaks about heteronormativity – but celibacy is often overlooked in these discussions, or transformed into asexuality, which isn't the same thing.  
– There was a blog recently 'I don't want to have sex' about some Q communities that ends being almost 'sex coercive'. I read that article and totally agreed with it, almost 'sex coercive'. I read that.  
– As nice as a non-identifying response to heteronormativity.  
– Q is a fantasy of a real phenomenological project that has now become political; because it always has to be defined in response to heteronormativity.  
– As nice as a non-identifying apolitical space sounds, is that even possible?  

Is Q marginalised within the LGBT scene?  
– Obviously there's been a huge uptake of queer – but there still seems as aspect of marginalisation in LGBT spaces.  
– I don't feel marginalised in Cambridge – but it's a university space, whereas a lot of LGBT scenes are based in bars, which are less welcoming.  
– It's the same with forced gender roles.  
– But what would happen if those conformative masculinities, say, shifted? It sounds as if you're saying if a man buys into male behaviour, it's problematically the other way.  
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So is Q just sexuality – or is it about gender & identity as well?  
– To me, Q feels like it's about not conforming to the gender roles in society. Q means 'other' – that's what I identify with. I feel often there are expectations that I've had to conform to, either by hands, eyes, nose, hair, clothes? In a sense, we are all constructing our identities through cultural products, radical self-expression etc.  
– Ideas like Judith Butler's, though, do seem to preclude politics around the label of Q.  

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– I don't feel marginalised in Cambridge – but it's a university space, whereas a lot of LGBT scenes are based in bars, which are less welcoming.  
– My gay friends at home just don't get quee; there's more buying into to getting married, say, and one of the women can be the 'man' and wear the suit and get called 'daddy' by the kids. Maybe before LGB was as accepted, then Q was less marginalised – but now Q has become a more radical identity.  
– To me that speaks to the dominant, Hollywood image of gayness; two muscular blonde men playing tennis, and there's a push towards conforming to that image. That's really problematic, at least in New York, because there's huge populations of homeless queer people of colour who aren't even involved in this conversation. You must be careful not to subsume all barriers/expressions of non-normative sexuality into this 'LGBT'.  
– There's also a lot of cis male domination in the LGBT scene.  
– The issues of patriarchy transcend all spaces!  

“LGBT seems to have its own hegemony behind it now - 'homonormativity' - whereas queer isn't a set identity.”  

– We don't have the same 'consciousness raising' spaces for women that came with the early feminist movement.  
– There are also different feminisms; for example Janice Raymond & Shiela Jeffries speak about transsexual women as 'men in disguise', trying to encroach upon female space, and so they exclude all transsexual women.  
– There's a catch 22 for female trans people – where any assertive behaviour is defined as masculine, yet putting it aside is called a caricature of patriarchal femininity. And this gets used to push people from shelters, crisis counselling, basic resources – they end up in the wrong prisons, unable to find shelters they're safe in etc.  

Is it possible to have Q spaces?  
– Yes, and it does happen. I think it becomes a problem in political agendas where things like gay marriage take precedence instead.  
– I agree; I find Q attractive because LGBT seems to have it's own identity and hegemony behind it now: styles you fit into, what gay people do, what they're like, the 'pink dollar'. With Q, you're not just swapping one stereotype box for another; it's not a set identity.  
– Definitely. Q is less prescriptive; there are so many careful delineations and rules and borders now. Q allows you more space.  
– It's like 'homonormativity'!
Straight and gay communities now have their own idea of ‘masculinity’. – Yes; it’s ironic that gay communities buy into that. You mentioned ethnicity; so many people feel they have to conform to these Western ideas to get accepted. Why must one reject being a Muslim, say? – There’s also very little representation of lesbians in the LGBT image. – It seems historical; the very first gay rights movement tried to tell people ‘we’re not all that different’. 

- Stonewall came to be seen as LG pushed out the movement. and gender variant people were the period in the 70s where trans 

- communities, there’s a strong urge (or even to ‘flip’ the hierarchy, 

- to the other, there are the same cultural 

- structure). Especially in threatened 

- but still recreate the same power 

- (and gender variant people). – There’s a risk descending into radical cultural relativism that says everything must be okay, we have no right to say otherwise. No; we do just because we’re standing outside the norm, that doesn’t mean we can’t have opinions and morals. I’m still allowed to disagree with people! I know it’s a paradox; allowing people to be different, with a label! In a way we’re all alike because we’re different! – Yes, and we’re all accepting of difference, too.

Is Q separatist? - We need our own Q spaces; we don’t always have to take them, not everyone needs them, or needs them all the time, but they are important. – Look at the radical queer movement; it’s very tied into the anarchist movement too. – There’s a risk with separatism of being exclusive, though! – Not when we’re speaking ‘free from’ – free from social coercion towards norms we don’t accept, like forced heterosexuality. – Yes; we’re hardly at the stage of me and you! – It’s very individual; I know a woman who doesn’t like trans spaces, because she identifies as a woman, with a trans history, like one might have a career history. – There’s stereotypes even within non-stereotypical groups, like FTMs being hyper-male. – But these are rooted in experience where the dividing lines of gender are patrolled with violence. – Yes, I understand people mis-reading people, but I’m working on changing it! This is why Q spaces can be safer and more accepting.

How important is ‘tone’ in Q spaces? - It’s important not to alienate people, not to be too militant about Q. It’s not that people don’t care; they just don’t want to vocalise that they can’t. That’s why we need Q spaces. – Sometimes just ‘being yourself’ is powerful; like the 70s campaigns for people to come out so LGBT became a concept. My Jewish atheist Mormons, yes they took to me simply through being around me. – I take a certain subversive pleasure in that; that people don’t know what it means. – It means I get to define – because they think it’s a minority. – I like that about Q; especially since Q’s becoming increasingly fixed positions in culture, targeted for marketing etc. Q says no, you come to me on my terms for a change, I won’t fit. The moment you define Q, you exclude people. Q being an anti-thing is positive! – If someone doesn’t know what Q is, it’s killing its purpose! 

Q is acknowledging you don’t conform, and celebrating that. – I like that Q is about celebrating non-conformity, accepting difference in others and continuous self-work and self-awareness. – I hope you’re always given that luxury! It’s not that I walk into a room and say “Hey, I’m here to demonstrate being queer”. Being queer has to be your own choice; personal safety has to be prime.

- Can you ‘out’ someone as Q in the same way you can as gay, based on appearance? – Most people don’t know what Q is! Everyone at least thinks they know what gay is. – Q is about occupying the margins, it doesn’t make sense to be assimilationist and Q.

Is Q necessarily self-defining? - Lots of things people flag as ‘gay’ anyway are just gender presentation – I see you transgressin’, I hatin’! – Q is for people who don’t fit? – I take a certain subversive pleasure in that; that people don’t know what it means. – It means I get to define – because they think it’s a minority. – I like that about Q; especially since Q’s becoming increasingly fixed positions in culture, targeted for marketing etc. Q says no, you come to me on my terms for a change, I won’t fit. The moment you define Q, you exclude people. Q being an anti-thing is positive! – If someone doesn’t know what Q is, it’s killing its purpose! 

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Inwards receding
Falling down
Inside the ‘O’
Perching in the edge
Towards the centre
Dark and obscure
The ‘O’ that yawns
Hungry, hungry
Pulling always inwards
To the flesh beneath the bone
An eye devoid of sight
It sees me
Hungry
The pressure chamber
Not here. Within
She lies
Zero. A hole on all sides
Into itself
Intangible
Everything is strange
The mouth
Pushing, pursing
Pulsating
Swelling red red red red
Round as taboo.

BY HEATHER HIND
Marriage is no longer solely the province of religion.

**BY CHARLIE BELL**

I now pronounce you man and wife.

Now I’m fairly sure that a thousand different people could take issue with the somewhat archaic and sexist way of announcing a union between two people – man, take home your wife, your property. Woman, you are now someone’s wife. Even ‘you may kiss the bride’.

Not terribly 21st century is it. But then, as you will be told time and time again, God’s will doesn’t change, so neither should the view or teaching of religion. ‘Women, be subject to your husbands’, and that’s only Christianity. So why would the state want to broaden the church’s view of marriage to include gays?

**Marriage as a state function**

Well, first and foremost, the church has missed the boat on this one. They lost their stranglehold on marriage once the concept was accepted as a civil function of the state. So, although ‘marriage’ was originally the church’s alone (together with teaching children), since becoming a civil institution, marriage is pluralistic in its definitions, and indeed, should be.

Those from a church background appear the most vociferously opposed to the recently announced legislation to call a union between two people of the same gender a function of the state. Now what is marriage for? This isn’t something we can come to a clear answer on – and with good reason.

In fact, the inability to come to a single answer suggests just how pluralistic the definitions are, and indeed, should be.

“Forget about marriage as a religious institution. The whole point is that marriage is a legal union between two people – man, take home your wife, your property. Woman, you are now someone’s wife. Even ‘you may kiss the bride’.”

Now I anticipate the standard complaints here, and I’ll tackle a couple of them.

**Reproductive marriage**

Firstly, marriage was and is for the creation of children. The standard argument against is ‘but what about old people getting married, shouldn’t they do it, as they can’t procreate etc’. Well I imagine a Roman response would be that, if by a miracle, God wanted them to have children, it would be possible. This is pretty shoddy reasoning, I mean, it’s about as likely for a gay man to have a child with another man as any post-menopausal woman or one who’s had a hysterectomy – however, it’s not the only shoddy bit of reasoning amongst some church teaching, so it can’t come as a total surprise. But this is missing the point. Over time institutions & rituals change according to the current state of affairs. So, although ‘marriage’ was originally the church’s alone (together with teaching children), since becoming a civil institution, marriage is pluralistic in its definitions, hence saying ‘this is what it used to stand for and you can’t change it’ doesn’t hold much ground; welcome to democracy, your Holiness. What we call civil marriage often takes place for different reasons, and hence may be considered different to religious marriage (particularly traditional Roman marriage). But you lost the name when the state got hold of it – and you don’t have the monopoly on it. Which takes me onto my second point.

**Religious Freedom**

The inclusion of homosexuals within the legal civil marriage framework does not mean that this is a threat to religious marriage, neither is the state forcing religions to perform such marriages. Technically every marriage in the UK not celebrated by a Roman Catholic priest is ‘invalid’ anyway – just add this to the list! What is interesting is that groups like the Quakers are upset that, at present, they cannot perform gay marriages or even civil partnerships in their buildings – the state is in fact preventing them from performing rites that they want to perform – not allowing much religious freedom there then! What the current proposed law will do is allow these ceremonies to be performed by the state, just like ordinary civil marriage, and also give more religious freedom.

Adoption is also something that is constantly dropped into arguments denigrating the importance of a union. Why shouldn’t there be two married husbands or wives? Anyone suggesting civil partnerships are ‘enough’ needs to look at their semantic complaints – marriage is marriage, it’s recognised as an official union. There is no need for two storms – it’s equality or nothing.

This all sounds a little hard-line, I suppose, but it’s somewhat tiring to hear pseudo-philosophical meandering from within the church criticising state civil gay marriage as though it causes them major problems. ‘It offends the sacraments’. Deal with it. Gays have dealt with a fair bit of offense from the church over the years – and it’s here that the church has got left behind. They could have been the institution of love – but instead, too often it looks like they’re the institution of ‘rules for rules’ sake’, and ‘casting the first stone’.

I haven’t even had a chance to rejoice in the rally against the injustice shown to intersex, XX males, XY females, trans-gender people, and a whole number of others. Who should a man who is genetically female marry, for example? The church is ‘enough’ needs to look at their major problems.

So let’s rejoice in the slow but sure advance towards equality for homosexuals in expressing their love. And I suppose let’s feel a little bit sorry for the church, which rather missed the boat.
Significant Othering

Attraction down the privilege gradient: all people who identify as unattracted to a marginalised group (such as trans* people, people of colour, or fat people) have a continuing duty to challenge this part of their sexual identity.

By Lis

Received Sexuality

I’d like to use the term ‘received sexuality’ to refer to our sexualities as received from the culture in which we’re raised. This is the ‘assumed’ sexuality we’re assigned at birth, based exclusively on the gender we’re assigned at birth. It’s heterosexual, same-race, monogamous, only marginally includes BDSM sexualities (if at all) and, of course, it is not asexual.

It’s not a coincidence that received sexualities are considered normative. Clearly, these sexualities are assigned at birth because they appear to be the most common and hence the most likely.

Liberated Sexuality

Our sexuality can be trained; has been trained, from birth, towards normative attractions. A white man in England is taught from birth that his object of his sexuality is a thin, white, non-disabled cissexual woman. Putting aside evolutionary psychological nonsense about hip and breast sizes, it’s clear that the image of the ‘ideal’ woman is culturally created and sustained, and has differed throughout history and across different cultures.

Heterosexual identification can also be challenged. A cissexual (non-transsexual) woman is taught from birth that the object of her sexuality is a man (actually, it can be argued that women are made to be the objects of their own sexualities, and to experience sex via being acted on by a man, but that’s tangential to the point of this article). All children are assumed to be heterosexual until proven otherwise (or until they display non-normative gender behaviour, in which case they’re assumed to be gay/!). “Coming out” is an almost universal experience of people with non-normative sexualities, because it represents a rejection of social conditioning. Many bisexual people spend some or all of their lives believing themselves to be monosexual because of this conditioning, and many homosexual people spend a great part of their lives in unhappy relationships with people of a different gender before they, with great effort, recognise and act on their sexuality.

I would like to use the term ‘liberated sexuality’ to refer to a sexuality which has been challenged in this way and which has overcome all cultural enforcement to find its true nature. I would like to suggest that there is no such thing as a fully liberated sexuality under heteropatriarchy, and that these challenges apply over a lifetime, but that we can certainly get closer to liberated sexuality via constant consideration of these demands. Of course, it may be that a person with received heterosexuality challenges their sexuality and finds that their liberated sexuality is also heterosexual.

My Demands

As a lesbian, I demand that women who identify as straight consider whether they’re attracted to me.

As a transsexual woman, I demand that people who ‘aren’t attracted to trans people’ challenge that self-identification. I don’t just apply this demand to cissexual people. This also applies to me; because transphobia can also be internalised; I demand that I challenge my conception of cissexual woman as the ‘gold standard’ of womanhood, and allow my attractions to extend to my transsexual sisters.

As a white woman, I demand that I challenge internalised racism that might lead me to only pursue attraction towards other white women.

As a currently non-disabled person, it’s my duty to challenge ableism which means I subconsciously consider disabled people to be invalid subjects of attraction (and often asexual).

Exceptions To My Demands

It’s worth noting that these demands are in challenge to received sexualities assigned at birth, i.e. culturally normative sexualities, and don’t apply ‘symmetrically’ to non-normative sexualities. I demand that you and I challenge ourselves to extend our sexuality to dating down privilege gradients, not up.

For example, I reject the demand often placed on lesbians to consider whether or not we’re really attracted to men. Many of my lesbian sisters were assigned female at birth and have already been impressed throughout their childhoods with the necessity to fuck men; their lesbian identity has been found despite that coercion. It’s liberated and not received. And as a radical feminist and a transsexual woman, I reject the demand that I must negotiate the unequal privilege dynamics of a relationship with a man. I won’t be told that I must sleep with my oppressor.

Cindy Segura
Objections And Responses

“I mean like what am I supposed to do, force myself to be attracted to fat people?”

Well, yes.

“But aren’t you saying that I have to have sex with someone I’m not attracted to? I don’t want to have sex with someone out of charity.”

No. Nobody (for the sake of argument) wants a pity fuck. I’m saying that it’s your responsibility to challenge that lack of attraction. Perhaps you’ll challenge it, and find out that you really are attracted to the awesome, fat woman who goes along to your social club. Now all you have to hope is that she’s also attracted to you.

“But I don’t fancy this group because they’re objectively not hot/sexual. Anyone can see that.”

This one’s often applied to disabled people, fat women and some trans women, as well as other groups. I’m not sure how to answer it except to say you’re wrong. People in all these groups can be, and are, sexual, and maybe if you were friends with a few more of us you’d see that.

“But I don’t fancy them because they’re oversexed/hypersexual and they scare me.”

This one can be applied to people of colour, fat women and some trans women. It’s based on stereotypical attitudes, often reflected in and reproduced by pornography and to some degree other media. It’s often based on fear. It’s interesting (and by ‘interesting’, I mean I hate the world) that fat women and trans women are included in both ‘asexual’ and ‘hypersexual’ stereotypes. I think this speaks to the ways in which female sexuality is only socially condoned when it can be narrowly defined and controlled. The sexuality of trans women and fat women is socially unaccepted because our bodies don’t conform to patriarchal norms, and so it must be ‘other’.

“Our bodies don’t conform to social norms, so must be ‘other’.”

“I’m not racist! All my partners have been white, but that’s only because almost everyone in my social circle is white. It’s just statistics.”

Perhaps it is. Perhaps it’s not. Unless you challenge yourself, you’ll never know. That said, “all my friends are white” isn’t necessarily a good sign.

“I’m a transsexual woman and I already have to deal with men who fetishise my transsexuality. The last thing I need is you persuading more men to start coming into trans communities and chasing us.”

Oh, chasers. What are you like? (Some trans folk call these men tranny-chasers, and they’re a scrouge of online trans forums.) Well, for a start, plenty of chasers are probably either gay or bisexual, but because of internalised homophobia are treating transsexual women as a way to get cock (because in their minds, all trans women have cocks) without having to break their self-image as heterosexual. If they took up my challenge, maybe they’d stop being chasers altogether and would go off to have happy gay relationships with men. Or maybe they’d discover that they’re bisexual or pansexual, and that their sexuality includes transsexual women, not as a fetishistic object, but as whole human beings. This applies to other groups too. Don’t replace your non-attraction with a fetishisation of the exotic, because you’re making the same mistake - you’re not actualising an attraction to a real human being.

“What about attraction to children?”

You know who I hate more than a devil’s advocate? A paedophilic devil’s advocate.

“What about gay men?”

Glad you brought it up. It might seem like I’m suggesting that gay men have a duty to consider whether they are also attracted to women, since women are less privileged than men under patriarchy. Male-on-male attraction is less privileged than male-on-female attraction in a heteronormative society, but more privileged than bisexual identity. So I only partially include gay men in my challenge. I challenge them to expand their attraction to include women, not to abandon their attraction to men.

In Conclusion

We all stand to benefit from repairing the damage that capitalism, patriarchy and body hatred have inflicted on our sexuality. Those of us in privileged positions can discover new attraction to many amazing, magnificent human beings. Those of us who are marginalised according to body type are tired of being shunned, and may even be able to discover more sexual solidarity between ourselves. And lastly, every expansion in freedom also allows the freedom not to be attracted, or not to exercise choice-rich environments.

Can the world tell me please:

why this woman?

The World, This Woman

It’s inexplicable.

I want a woman, that’s odd enough,

but this one of all.

Everything one doesn’t want

– everything small.

Brian Shumway
To
The Red Haired Girl in Barcelona:
If your red hair
will never appear again –

Its threads coiled my heartsprings fast,
  fast, quick now, I’m dying,
it cut the flesh, festered there.
It burns, your curls have burned
the shadow of their passing
into the skin tissue and muscle and blood
  and thick body pulp
too big for my skinny ribs.
It hurts, it’s bursting through,
  like a mad love for you
and your big red hair
  and breasts, sinking their weight.

Did I drag you down when I drowned in you?
  If I hit you, you killed me.
You’re killing me,
  breathing your soft folds
into my every pore, no more! No more!

Pull it out, someone unspin me.

Unravel the red reams of love pressed in my heart
  and I’ll bite you, one last time,
oozing your wasted plenty
  onto my pristine floor.