Welcome to the Michaelmas term 2011 issue of [no definition]. CUSU’s only LGBT magazine! As always we have a variety of content, ranging from academic articles to opinion pieces, poetry to photography, and I would like to thank all of our talented contributors. My particular thanks go to Emi Dunn, who provided the stunning cover illustration. I’m tempted to tell you to stop reading this and go look at it again. Thanks also to our sponsors and CUSU, who allow this magazine to be made in the first place, and to Dan Green, Anthony Woodman and Emi Dunn for all their help.

Last issue (Easter 2011) we focussed on how the LGBT community interacts with mainstream society - for this issue, we decided to turn the spotlight back onto our community itself and take a look at some of the subcultures and subgroups within it. Even as a community that prides itself on its diversity, sometimes we can ignore or fail to notice minority groups that fall under the LGBT banner. In hopes of rectifying this we include articles on LGBT life in rural areas, gay FTMs and the concept of the ‘scene’, among others.

This is the last issue I will produce as editor, and though I have now left Cambridge, I hope that [no definition] and CUSU LGBT as a whole continue to thrive in the coming years. We are lucky to attend a university with such a vibrant and active LGBT scene, and I encourage everyone to get involved. Anyone who is interested in running for the new vacant position of [no definition] editor should watch the mailing list for information about the upcoming by-election. Any comments on this issue or questions about what the role of editor entails should be sent to me at hattiejones89@gmail.com. I hope you enjoy this issue, and have a great term!

Hattie Jones

Michaelmas brings good things to CUSU LGBT. We are excited to be launching LGBT parenting. Getting involved with the LGBT scene can be quite daunting at the best of times, doubly so when it is intercollegiate and even more so as an incoming fresher, so we hope that this scheme will break down barriers and help make what we do even more accessible and inclusive.

We also welcome two new sponsors - Deloitte and Morgan Stanley - and welcome back BCG. The intention of this address is not to advertise for them, but simply to point out that our contacts at these firms are in themselves a fantastic resource. Our contacts are all ex-CUSU LGBT Exec and more than happy to talk and share information. Not all graduate jobs in London are identical and I highly recommend taking advantage of the events they will be co-hosting with us to get a first hand impression of the prospects and challenges faced by LGBT people in a particular career.

As well as my presidential role, I am currently filling in the vacant Finance & Sponsorship position. This is a really important role, and is a great position for someone who wants to make a significant and material contribution to the improvement of the services offered by CUSU. There are also other Exec vacancies [including editor of this magazine! - ed.] so if you are interested in running in the upcoming by-elections, look out for the information we will be sending through the mailing list shortly, or email me at the address given below for further information.

As for upcoming events, this term brings exciting things to CUSU LGBT too, like Imperial College London and - more controversially - Oxford. We are hoping to run joint events with one or both of these erstwhile institutions this term, and are planning much more besides. I wish everyone a wonderful term!

Anthony Woodman  lgbt-president@cusu.cam.ac.uk

editor's note HATTIEJONES president's address ANTHONYWOODMAN
MEET THE EXEC
SCENE / UNSEEN  john swarbrooke
THE PROBLEM WITH ‘GAY’ HISTORY  alastair cliff
TRANSGENDER IDENTITIES IN JAPAN  nicola mcdermott
CHRIST AND RADICAL LOVE  tom sharp
SEXYOUALITY  tom hughes
BLOOD DONATION POLICY CHANGE  alexander betts
[POETRY]  clare rivers mohan
[POETRY]  eley williams
FANFICTION AND SELF-DISCOVERY  rachel cunliffe
AN AUGUST IN IDA: QUEER TIMES IN THE AMERICAN SOUTH  janey thornton
[SHORT FICTION]  rei haberberg
GAY FTMS AND TRANSMEN: GETTING TO GRIPS WITH OUR MASCULINITIES  harry harris
[PHOTOGRAPHY]  karl dmitri bishop
WOULD IT REALLY SMELL AS SWEET?  alexander betts

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 or CUSU LGBT’s sponsors. No responsibility is taken for content of websites linked to in the magazine.
chair

DAN GREEN • ROBINSON • SECOND YEAR COMPUTER SCIENCE

The Chair is, with the President, one of the joint heads of the CUSU LGBT campaign, and is responsible for the logistics and administration of the campaign. I chair all the meetings as well as sorting out a lot of the behind the scenes stuff.

what I’m up to:

This term we have by-elections for three roles which will be the biggest thing to organise, as well as keeping the campaign running as usual and generally helping out with plans for Freshers’ week and beyond.

ANTHONY WOODMAN • TRINITY • THIRD YEAR HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE

The President has to make sure that everything’s going well, that other Exec members are happy, well fed, well looked after and being proactive. Ultimately I’m responsible for everything CUSU LGBT.

what I’m up to:

Launching LGBT Parenting has been my biggest project so far, I’ve also been running finance and sponsorship as the position is vacant, so someone should definitely take that job off my hands in the upcoming by-election.

grad rep

CAITLIN STEWART • QUEENS’ • PHD STEM CELL BIOLOGY

I organize events for the graduate or mature students within Cambridge - pub events, games nights, dinners, formals, whatever you want! During the vacations I run events open to everyone, including undergraduates. I’m also always here to lend a hand or for advice to anyone if they need support.

what I’m up to:

I’m currently improving ties with the Graduate Union and hoping to get their support in ensuring every college has an LGBT representative within the MCR. Comming soon will be termly meetings involving all college reps to ensure everyone knows about upcoming events and the support and training available.

president

ALEXANDER BETTS • TRINITY • SECOND YEAR MATHEMATICS

The Campaigns Officer organises the campaigns of CUSU LGBT at any given time - at the moment I orchestrate our “Bloody Unfair” campaign against the blood donation ban for queer men, and help out with the “Think Outside The Box” campaign for better accessibility for non-binary-gendered people.

what I’m up to:

As well as organising our current campaigns, I have been arranging talks to be held this term, and am also coordinating with other groups to sort out a fantastic programme for LGBT History Month.
ents

WILLIAM MORLAND • QUEENS’ • THIRD YEAR COMPUTER SCIENCE

The ents officer works with the socials officer to organise CUSU LGBT’s many events, ranging from our regular fixtures such as Rendezvous at The Cow on a Monday to special events such as formals or speed dating.

what I’m up to:

Holding regular events such as Rendezvous at The Cow on a Monday evening and Sunday Socials. We also have plans ranging from a Christmas formal to swaps with other universities.

socials

NATACHA CROOKS • ST JOHN’S • FOURTH YEAR COMPUTER SCIENCE

The socials officer works with the ents officer to make sure that CUSU LGBT becomes a thriving community with lots to do for everyone from drink events to film nights, coffee meets to club nights.

what I’m up to:

Organising more of the above. This term I’ll be showing a mixture of fun films and documentaries, and putting on a fancy dinner. And the rest will be a surprise...

reps coordinator

TOM JEWKES • FITZWILLIAM • THIRD YEAR ARCHAEOLOGY AND ANTHROPOLOGY

The reps coordinator maintains links between CUSU and the college LGBT societies, and also coordinates communication between the college LGBT reps.

what I’m up to:

I’m currently helping to organise the LGBT parenting scheme, and am hoping to organise a family superhall in the near future.

trans rep

HARRY HARRIS • TRINITY • PHD MEDICAL RESEARCH

My role as trans rep is to lend an ear to anyone who is trans, who is questioning their gender identity, who is a partner/friend of a trans person or indeed anyone else who would like to talk about trans issues. My job is to give trans people a voice on the Exec. to organize events and socials, provide welfare support, and to raise awareness of trans issues in the University as a whole.

what I’m up to:

Making a video diary of my own transition and planning exciting film nights!
bi rep

DAVID BORG • KING’S • SECOND YEAR MATHEMATICS

The bi rep represents the bisexual or pansexual members of the student body and organises events specifically targeted at them.

what I’m up to:

This Michaelmas I plan to continue the bi meet-ups established by previous bi reps.

women’s rep

FREYA FERGUSON • NEWNHAM • SECOND YEAR ENGLISH

My role as the Women’s Rep involves organising socials, including regular meetings such as the weekly women’s coffee group, as well as ‘one-off’ events such as film nights and the annual Women’s Formal Hall.

what I’m up to:

I’m here for anyone who would like to talk to me over a coffee for whatever reason - don’t hesitate to drop me an email if you feel like you need some advice, have an idea for a social you’d like to see happening, or just fancy a chat.

computing

ADVAIT SARKAR • EMMANUEL • THIRD YEAR COMPUTER SCIENCE

The Computing Officer maintains the website, mailing lists and other technologies used by the Campaign.

what I’m up to:

I’m keeping the site looking fresh and current, just like myself.

communications

ROBBIE NEUMAN • GIRTON • THIRD YEAR EXPERIMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY

As the Communications Officer it’s my job to put together the weekly [LISTINGS] email which has got all the upcoming LGBT events and a few other interesting things. I also take the minutes for the exec and open meetings.

what I’m up to:

Passing on emails between members of the exec and answering or forwarding on queries from members.
[no definition] editor

The [no definition] editor is the editor of this magazine! They get to organise the issue themes, arrange for people to write articles and submit contributions, select content to include and design the look of the magazine. The organising of each issue typically starts shortly after the release of the previous issue, but most of the actual editing and designing is done during the vacations once all the content has been submitted.

To run for this position - keep an eye on [LISTINGS] for info on the by-election!

welfare

The Welfare officer is there as a listening ear and helping hand for all members of CUSU LGBT. They are responsible for training the college LGBT reps as well as promoting better LGBT Welfare provisions throughout Cambridge.

To run for this position - keep an eye on [LISTINGS] for info on the by-election!

finance and sponsorship

The Finance and Sponsorship Officer is responsible for maintaining CUSU LGBT’s relationship with its sponsors as well as seeking new opportunities for sponsorship.

To run for this position - keep an eye on [LISTINGS] for info on the by-election!

grad rep

As one of our Grad Reps has stepped down after graduating, there is an opening for an additional Grad Rep to work alongside Caitlin (see page 4).

To run for this position - keep an eye on [LISTINGS] for info on the by-election!
I always turn to the back pages of guidebooks before I go on holiday. They're tourism's equivalent of the seedy classifieds in newspapers - the bits the tourism office don't want you to know, exhumed for your entertainment. The despots, the handbag thefts, the freak avalanches. It's all there.

As I was reading this section in my guidebook to Paris, however, I came across another section - or rather a modest two paragraphs entitled 'Gay and Lesbian Paris'. The gay scene in Paris is thriving... It began, before going on to add: 'Some of the raunchier events are men-only. Girls should go with pretty boys'. You can almost imagine Simone de Beauvoir turning in her grave in nearby Montparnasse.

Thriving. A powerful word. A word we often use to describe an economy in a period of great growth, or something which is very lively; all meanings which are firmly placed in the present. Things thrive now, not before or after. What this gay 'scene' endorses, in the reviewer's eyes, are the pleasures of living for the moment, like those bankers some years ago.

But we don't need to cross the Channel to find such things out. In fact, the reviewer reveals some home-truths about our own LGBT 'scene' and the attitudes which surround it. Granted, the 'scene' has historically been a very important aspect of LGBT life. On June 28 1969 police raided a club in Greenwich Village whose clientele were mostly gay women and men. Although resistance to the police was initially passive, there were soon violent clashes as people were arrested. The Stonewall Rebellion, as it came to be known, was a turning-point in the history of gay culture.

What began in a club sparked new, highly visible LGBT rights movements which swept across America and Europe in the following years.

For the organisation which takes it name from this historical event, Stonewall, the campaign goes on. Calling for acceptance in all walks of life, the charity seeks not only to protect the rights of lesbian, gay and bisexual people but also to promote the many aspects of LGBT culture which exist today.

But so long as the subculture of the 'scene' is taken to be the defining feature of LGBT culture, the campaign for social acceptance and integration which such organisations as Stonewall are leading so tirelessly will continue to be overlooked. The message which those protesters back in 1969 were sending out was that LGBT life would no longer be relegated to the subcultural margins of dark private clubs. They dared to be seen for the first time, rather than being hidden like the generations of gay men and women before them.

Today, alarmingly, the opposite is true. To be seen as members of the LGBT community, it is often thought, we must go to gay bars and nightclubs. The result of this can be as alienating as social exclusion. In a survey conducted in 2007 by Stonewall into the experiences of lesbians in the UK, the responses of the participants revealed an image of the 'scene' as being a male-oriented and unhealthy environment. One participant, a youth worker called Helen, described the problems facing the community:

"I don't think there are sufficient spaces for lesbians and bisexual women. Most of the scene is oriented towards men. Also, I'm kind of sick of the emphasis on bars and pubs. Something different would be nice. I'm not much of a clubber and would much prefer a new way of meeting other women. I work with lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans young people as a youth worker and find that many young lesbians feel they have to go out and get hammered every weekend."

Before we can promote equality and celebrate the many facets of LGBT life we must first tackle this stumbling block within our own community and accept the 'scene' for what it is: a subculture. Only when this is done will gay culture no longer be relegated to the back pages of guides and the margins of society.
The idea of ‘gay history’ is one that has become prominent in recent years. Promoting the idea that gay individuals, forming some sort of ‘gay community’, have a shared history stretching back thousands of years apparently separate from their own cultural surroundings. Scanning a list of individuals who have been compiled as a part of ‘gay history’ those who are often listed range from Renaissance artists like Caravaggio to the Emperor Hadrian and Alexander the Great. However, this notion that these historical figures are gay is flawed, as it assumes modern cultural distinctions of gay, bi and straight have existed throughout history. ‘Gay history’ is a misleading term: it often looks back to individuals who may have engaged in same-sex relationships or sexual activity and claims such activity as ‘gay’, and as such represents the mapping of an entirely modern and culturally specific construct onto a past whose actors would not recognise such definitions as valid.

The biological mechanics of sexual attraction are separate from the way it is culturally expressed, and the notion of being ‘gay’ is entirely modern. ‘Gay culture’ is not something which is inherently separate from ‘heterosexual culture’, but is instead the way our collective sexual culture has grown to deal with varying sexual orientations. L G and B are not biological, but cultural definitions.

To expose the flimsy historical basis of the ‘gay community’ one just needs to examine the cultures of past societies. From the late 19th Century the ideal of the ancients, held up by men such as Oscar Wilde, was used to paint ancient Greek and Roman cultures as sexually liberated before the advent of the Christianity. Such a picture is unhelpful, as it paints an unrealistic depiction of homosexuality throughout history.

Let us consider the Theban and Dorian sexual cultures of northern Greece. One example which is often touted as an example of ‘gay history’ is the Sacred Band of Thebes, an elite military regiment made up of several hundred ‘homosexual’ couples. The Sacred Band was one of the most ferocious fighting groups in the ancient world, with its prowess attributed to the fact lovers were fighting side by side and were thus less likely to break rank and flee. The Band even annihilated the entire Spartan army in one battle, though it is perhaps notable that in our hetero-centric culture the Sacred Band is forgotten, while the Spartans are regarded as the epitome of warriorhood. However claiming the Sacred Band as part of ‘gay history’ is flawed: the warriors would not consider themselves ‘gay’ - they didn’t even have a word for it. All would have had wives and families back in Thebes; it was a world where women were seen as child-bearing chattel while close personal and/or sexual relationships were conducted with other men. Indeed the Roman General Pompey was mocked by his contemporaries because he showed affection towards his wife, demonstrating how women were not seen at that time as being valid emotional partners.

Alexander the Great is another oft-given example. Alexander had a close companion and lover in his childhood friend and second-in-command, Hephaestion. Aristotle - who tutored Alexander - described their relationship as ‘one soul abiding in two bodies’ and they reputedly shared a tent when away on campaign. However, this was not a relationship as we would recognise today: Alexander married three times, while Hephaestion married the sister of one of Alexander’s wives, making them brothers-in-law. Furthermore, Alexander has numerous sexual encounters with male and female slaves. In Alexander’s culture, sexuality was fluid and sex played many different roles: with Hephaestion it was about what we would understand as ‘love’ and male bonding, with his wife it was about producing children, and with the slaves it was about pleasure. While this is only one example, it does emphasise imposing modern terms such as gay or ‘LGBT’ on cultures with different sexual structures and expectations is unhelpful.

Trying to trace a ‘gay history’ is simply an attempt to map modern conceptions onto the past, and ultimately to write a history that does not exist. The desire to do so has been caused in part by the exclusion or lack of recognition of historical same-sex relations until the latter part of the 20th century. But while the Victorians may have maintained that Alexander and Hephaestion were just ‘good friends’, the answer is not to set out to paint them as a prototype gay couple romping around the Middle East. Like it or not, ‘gay’ is a modern idea and a modern word, and the concept of a ‘gay community’ continuing through time up to the present day does not fit historical actualities. Any history of sexuality and sexual relations needs to take a far more holistic view, and not restrict itself to just looking for the ‘gay’ in history.

ALASTAIRCLIFF theproblemwith‘gay’history
this young man is going to a gay night

rendezvous

monday at the cow
corn exchange street, cambridge, cb2 3qf
Around here only one part matters

True individuals should consider our range of graduate and undergraduate opportunities in Audit, Tax, Consulting and Corporate Finance. If you’re interested in joining a world-leading professional services firm that will challenge, develop and reward you in equal measure, visit www.deloitte.co.uk/graduates and get ready to make your mark. It’s your future. How far will you take it?
Transgender identities worldwide have come to be popularly understood as the diagnostic category of ‘transsexual’, an individual suffering from Gender Identity Disorder (GID) who was ‘born in the wrong body’ and desires sex reassignment surgery to acquire the body of the opposite sex. In the opinion of many Gender Studies scholars including Judith Butler, the creation of a ‘disorder’ which marks the transgender as abnormal and who can be medically corrected and then reassigned as the opposite sex, only serves to leave unchallenged the notion that gender identity is always binary. Whilst this mainstream model for transgender identities may have gained currency amongst the medical communities in the West (and around the world), it often cannot fully describe the range of identities experienced by transgender people.

In Japan, many indigenous transgender categories are endeavouring to show that living a life beyond the gender binary is possible, challenging normative considerations of how gender identity should be experienced.

Whilst Japan’s descent into militarism in the 1930s halted progressive and open expressions of sexuality, the post-war years saw an increase in female and male transgender practice, the period before the 1980s being described as a “transgender boom” by many scholars.

Significantly, apart from a brief spell prior to the 20th century when Japan was modernising and often imitating the West, Japan has had virtually no sodomy or obscenity laws regarding homosexuality or transgender practices. Those who wished to live such lifestyles found a hospitable environment in the mizu shōbai, a euphemism for the sexual entertainment industry literally meaning ‘water trade’. As such, cabaret clubs featuring transgender performers and bars where homosexuals were known to gather were never harassed or raided by police like in the USA during the 1960s, and such bars and clubs flourished. Many transgender performers went on to achieve mainstream stage careers outside of this industry, such as Miwa Akihiro and Carrousel Maki, adored by ‘gender normative’ men and women in mainstream society. To this day, the mizu shōbai provides a safe environment for transgender men and women. It exists in most major cities and small towns, and its size and variety of spaces challenges even some of the largest LGBT districts in the USA and West.

The clubs of the mizu shōbai often use their performers’ transgenderism as a selling point for the mostly straight and gender-normative clientele. For instance some male-to-female transgender acts are promoted as being more beautiful than ‘real’ women. Because of the range of services and clubs in this industry, several categories have developed to describe those who derive their main livelihood from the mizu shōbai.

One of the most recognisable categories is the okama, a slang term for buttocks that literally means ‘rice cooking pot’. It is often translated into English as the equivalent of drag queen, though it can also be used to refer to effeminate gay men. The okama is a hyper-feminine figure of fun who performs dance routines and provides humour for customers in the mizu shōbai. Much like drag queens in the West, they play up to stereotypical feminine traits using flowery language and movements as well as elaborate hair and make-up to the point where they are hammed-up and overly camp versions of females. Much of the humour is derived from the okama trying and failing to pass as female. As the okama, unlike most drag queens in the West, most often identifies as female, there are obviously those for whom a career in the mizu shōbai does not fit.

Another category is nyūhāfu (newhalf) referring to non-normatively gendered biological males who work in the mizu shōbai. The term was invented by a transgender ‘mama’ (manager or boss) of an Osaka club who said ‘I am half man and woman so I’m a newhalf’, but actually became popular when it was picked up by newspapers in the early 1980s to describe famous transgender people. Within the category are a wide range of bodies and identities which are in various stages of physical transition; some people prefer the use of hormone injections alone to create feminine features, some have breast implants and some no medical treatment at all. The majority do not define as the opposite sex, but as a mixture of both male and female.

As many nyūhāfu in the industry are sex workers, they often keep their sex organs in order to please more clients,
and their medical transition is tied up with the demands of the industry as much as with their personal desires. The same is true of the female-to-male category, the onabe. Although female-to-male transgender identities in the mizu shōbai are not as common as male-to-female, the onabe has emerged as a prominent category to describe biological females who are transgender and work in the mizu shōbai host bars. In this capacity, they are ‘special boyfriends’ for the female customers for the duration of their visit to the bar. In return, the customers pay a small fee for entrance and are encouraged to buy expensive drinks. Many women who attend these bars are looking for a romance in their female-to-male transgendered hosts that they cannot find in biological males.

There are two main rival onabe clubs in Tokyo: Apollo and the New Marilyn. At Apollo, taking male hormones is obligatory so that they develop facial hair and deeper voices, and over half of the hosts working there have had mastectomies. Most of the onabe working at the New Marilyn have not taken any steps towards medical treatment, and only a few take hormone injections. The owners of the Apollo even use the fact that their hosts have undergone more medical treatment and so have more conventionally male-looking onabe as a selling point to their gender-normative clientele.

The various physical features of onabe and nyūhāfu mean that they occupy an intermediary status between the genders, and their identities reflect this. Even the term nyūhāfu (newhalf) describes a state of being half man, half woman. Misaki, webmistress of a nyūhāfu website describes herself as ‘having a female heart but being 10 per cent male’ and says ‘some may think I want to live as a woman, but I don’t: I just want to live as myself’. Gaish, an onabe, says ‘I don’t particularly think of myself as a woman or a man. I’m just me’ and describes himself as ‘in-between’. Another onabe interviewed for a episode of Jonathan Ross’s Japanorama in 2007 described himself as ‘half man, half woman’. These identities therefore cannot be placed comfortably within categories of male or female and cannot be described within the mainstream category of transsexual that has developed to described men or women “born in the wrong body”.

Onabe from the New Marilyn

The mainstream media in Japan mostly takes interest in the male-to-female categories in the mizu shōbai, portraying them in a sensationalistic light. Images of cross-dressing and transgender individuals have been widespread in both the mainstream and underground press, often interpreted to show an acceptance of subversive gender behaviours that is perhaps not present in Western media. However, this media attention is most often portrays transgender people as objects of fascination, which can further encourage differences between gender-normative and transgender people.

Despite the flourishing transgender identities in Japan that challenge the binary nature of gender, it is notable that most of these identities exist only in the sexualised mizu shōbai. Whilst many transgender people prefer to seek work in this industry, it seems they may be doing so because it is an industry that can offer not only employment but a site to fully develop their transgender identities and to live as themselves.

The koseki seido is the family registry system in Japan and is required as identification when claiming health insurance, getting a mortgage and finding employment. The rules for changing your gender on the koseki are very strict: you must have a diagnosis of GID, have had sex reassignment surgery, you must not be married and you cannot have children aged below 20 years old. As such, many of the transgender categories that do not identify as male or female are ineligible to apply, leaving them with a koseki that states they are the opposite gender to the one they appear to be. The production of such a koseki may cause embarrassment or discrimination for these people and so many try to avoid hospital or cannot get mortgages, and as the koseki is necessary when applying for long term employment, many may find themselves marginalised from full time and better paid careers. As such, the mizu shōbai is the only place where these transgender categories that defy the gender binary can thrive.
LGBT Christians have had a hard time from their churches. They can be shunned, disrespected, ostracised and very occasionally persecuted by other Christians. In my local churches, I have been challenged on a number of occasions, and even in the Christian community in Cambridge, many LGBT people feel rejected by Christian groups. The interesting thing is that LGBT Christians seem to have responded to this in different ways.

One response is to take up one’s cross with fortitude. Just as Christ carried his cross to his crucifixion and his ultimate triumph in the resurrection, LGBT Christians must bear their hardships through love for him, and so join him in that final triumph. In churches which teach that homosexual sex is contrary to God’s will, such as the Roman Catholic Church and many Evangelical and Charismatic Churches, this may be the burden of chastity. Since transsexuals and transvestites are excluded from eligibility for the priesthood by most churches, they must bear the burden of perhaps not being able to serve their church as they might wish.

In many ways, this view that expects LGBT Christians to bear their lesser position within the church with fortitude is not to be snubbed. It is through dealing with difficult truths that we learn more deeply what it is to live our life in Christ. However, there is a growing body of Christians, notably in the Anglican Communion, who do not believe that these are burdens which the LGBT Christian should have to bear.

On the 2nd November 2003 Gene Robinson was consecrated Bishop of New Hampshire. After the ceremony he blessed the crowd and processed out to rapturous applause, pausing to hug his partner, Mark Andrew. The electors of Bishop Gene had shocked the world with their decision, but they had not elected him because of his sexuality. They had truly born the cross and taken the difficult decision to choose the best person to be their Bishop, regardless of his sexuality, and regardless of the outcry their decision would provoke.

This, then, is the cross that LGBT Christians, and indeed all Christians, must bear. He who wishes to see the church unified as the true and perfect body of Christ must take the difficult decision. He must take the radical step and see those who disagree with him as followers of Christ, earnestly trying to please God and to contribute to the church in their own way, whatever their faults.

As St Paul said, “Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us’ (Romans 12:4-5). Just as the liberal contributes to reinterpretating the message as our understanding moves on, the conservative tests whether such progressive movement is really right. Failure to recognise this keeps us on what Bishop Gene has called ‘a self-dividing and self-destructive path.’

Of course, this is not easy, especially when the attempts of LGBT Christians to see the good in what their opponents do seem not to be reciprocated. But good old JC has an answer. ‘But I tell you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who persecute you’ (Matt 5:44).

As LGBT Christians who do not accept inequality as the solution, we must not stop at turning the other cheek. We must actively engage with those who disagree with our view of our role in the Church of Christ. We must, in humility, engage with their views in true brotherly love and continue to live out our Christian calling whatever the opposition we face. Above all, we must have faith in Christ Jesus, who is our hope in this life, and our joy in the next.

Bishop Gene Robinson receives his Mitre from his partner, Mark Andrew, at his consecration as the first openly gay Bishop in the Anglican Communion.

‘Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.’

Matt 5:11-12
SexYOUality are an LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual and Transgender) support group based in Cambridge for young people between the ages of 14 and 24. Since 1993 we have strived to improve the lives of those who experience discrimination as a consequence of expressing their sexual orientation. This has been achieved through early intervention work with schools to reduce homophobic behaviour, giving our members a “safe-space” through fun group activity sessions and working individually with them to support their need to function as confident adults.

Despite many positive legislative landmarks, including the repeal of section 28 that had previously hindered the work of support groups, to the introduction of civil partnerships there are many attitudinal barriers that still prevent many LGBT people from feeling accepted in society. Our purpose is very much one of positive duty to give young LGBT people the opportunity to rise above the stereotypes and enable them to be who they truly are. Hence the name of our support group, which can be viewed in more detail at 2byou.org.uk.

Our core group session takes place every Wednesday between 18.30 and 20.30 where members can meet to take part in a range of fun activity sessions. It is a great opportunity to meet new friends, play games and receive informative advice from our workshops. The past few weeks have enabled members to experience workshops in photography, sports, sexual health and quizzes.

We are always looking for new people to get involved as members, volunteers or mentors. Many LGBT young people lack positive role models for a variety of reasons from a breakdown in family relationships or alienation towards a heterosexual majority that can too often stoke a claim to be “hetero-normative”. If you are interested in being involved with the group or would like to find out more regarding our work then feel free to drop us an e-mail at hello@2byou.org.uk.

Following a recent review of evidence NHS Blood and Transplant have announced a change to their policy regarding blood donations. The most important changes for CUSU LGBT members will be:

- Currently, men who have ever had oral or anal sex with another man, even with a condom, are permanently excluded from giving blood.

- From the 7th November 2011, men who have oral or anal sex with men will be excluded from giving blood for twelve months after the last sexual contact with a man.

- Women who have sex with a man who has ever had sex with a man will be excluded from giving blood for twelve months after the last such sexual contact. This is unchanged from the current policy.

- People who take non-prescription intravenous drugs are permanently excluded from giving blood. This does not include prescribed sex-change hormones.

- The Blood Service doesn’t discriminate on binary-gendered people’s trans status, but non-binary-gendered people are not permitted to donate.

Please remember there are other exclusion criteria which may apply to you. For further information, see the Blood Service’s website (blood.co.uk) or email the Campaigns Officer (lgbt-campaigns@cusu.cam.ac.uk).
Explore me, she invites.
Her body made of glass,
she walks the streets,
high-wiring on the edge of her heels
and the Bois de Boulogne.

This season’s look’s Androgyné,
the Eurostar magazine tells me,
resplendent pages of women-dressed-like-men -

Her hair’s chaotic,
a writhing mass of platinum that,
Rapunzel-like, grows with every touch.

We crossed the périphérique and her path
on the way to the restaurant.

Her sky-high legs, her golden hair, her make-up,
(a face etched on a face, self-portrait of the self on her own skin)
she tells her story, or is silent if you ask.

Between her legs, her cock throbs.
Her heels glitter; she’s up for hire.

ANDROGYNÉ
clare rivers mohan
BASIL HAYWARD (FOOTNOTE)

eley williams

Canes against railings and shaken hands
And an opening of the door for Dorian.
Cigarette cases admired,
His cravat admired,
Everything admired, all adjectives applied, and I am mired, and it’s
abject:
I become hypaethral, and flotto, and blotchy.
The others are sly as I introduce him,
with their faces obtuse and abstracted into angles by half-hidden
looks.
Their fingers all over his tailcoat.
Delightful laquered cabinets, and wonderful, champagne parties.
The veneer and bubbles seem crucial.

I added my signature to the thing midway through the sitting
But scrubbed it out later: it offset the glamour too starkly.
It was only a squiggle anyway, belaboured but garbled.

I met him again, at another soiree,
Choking on the red carpet of my tongue.
He looked confused but unfazed,
And I reminded him of the pin-cold lights of the studio,
And how I caught the shadows against his mouth.
We discussed, mouths thick with oils, the flashy nouns of the
metropol:
Of button-holes, and of tie-pins:
The asterisks of morning light that I had picked out on his
teeth with my brush.
In the last couple of years, LGBT characters have finally started to hit mainstream media. Whereas ten years ago it was enough that Ross’s ex-wife was a lesbian, now every TV drama wants an on-screen gay couple (Desperate Housewives, Grey’s Anatomy, 90210), not to mention shows like Torchwood and love-to-hate-it Glee, where ‘diversity’ is one of the key selling points. In literature we have Lisbeth Salander in the famous Millennium trilogy, plus the more ambiguous Loras and Renly in the Song Of Ice And Fire series. Slowly but surely we are starting to see more than ‘token gays’ in our mainstream culture, even if nuanced and accurate representations of trans people are still few and far between. The industry, it seems, is finally starting to change.

But many of us just couldn’t wait for portrayals of people like us outside of The L Word and Queer As Folk, that is, if we could even get hold of them. My memories as a confused queer fifteen-year-old are of an extreme dearth of gay characters in the media. My internet was too slow to stream or download videos, and besides, I much preferred reading. Yet outside of the ‘Gay and Lesbian Erotica’ section of the bookshop, which I was too afraid to explore in case my parents found out, there was nothing for me. I was a teenager, interested in Harry Potter, Lord Of The Rings, and Discworld, and nowhere in any of them could I find a single character going through the same confusing mental gymnastics I was.

I knew about fanfiction, of course. It was cheap and tacky, something Other People on the internet did to spoil and ruin beloved characters. I refused to go anywhere near it. And then a good friend, who could see how hard I was struggling to find anything remotely relevant to me, sent me the three best Harry Potter ‘femmeslash’ stories she had ever read. I was stunned. Here were characters I already knew and was deeply familiar with: Gin, Weasley, Angelina Johnson, Cho Chang, Bellatrix Lestrange. They were doing things that would be unheard of in any of Rowling’s books. Yet they were written with such care and elegance, such respect for the original style, that it was impossible not to see these stories as an extension of the books themselves. These were stories that slotted in with what I already knew, that gave much-needed backstory to a world I already loved. Far from being jarring and ruining my interpretation of the books, good fanfiction, when I found it, actually increased my enjoyment.

Alas, these days it seems I have outgrown the magical wonders of Harry Potter. But I have certainly not outgrown the equally magical wonders of fanfiction. Once you begin down this twisted and highly disrespected road, there is no going back. About 80% of what is posted up to sites like fanfiction.net and fictionalley.blogspot.com is either badly-written drivel or hardcore porn, but it doesn’t take long to learn what to look for and how to weed out the writing which reads like a bad home-made adult movie. And once you work out that ‘slash fiction’ means stories with gay characters (Remus slash Sirius), here is the archive of gay romance that so many queer teenagers have been lacking. If Harry Potter, though still the largest fanbase out there, isn’t to your taste, these days there is fanfiction about pretty much anything, from Gossip Girl to Star Trek, Sherlock Holmes to Doctor Who.

Obviously, fanfiction is neither a new nor a specifically LGBT phenomenon. Jean Rhys’s Wide Sargasso Sea is a beautifully poignant fanfiction of Jan Eyre, and people have been writing novels based on classical mythology for centuries. One of the most popular femmeslash fandoms is Wicked. Gregory Maguire’s dark prequel to The Wizard Of Oz, which itself can only be described as best-selling fanfiction. For some reason, it’s social acceptable to write about other people’s stories, as long as those people are dead. While they are still alive and writing, it is seen as worthless plagiarism.

I object to this double-standard not because I want to see authors and script-writers cheated out of their paychecks. I also accept that it’s wrong to try to make money out of someone else’s ideas and characters while they are still alive and trying to make a living. But to condemn fanfiction as nothing more than shameless copyright infringement is to completely miss the point of it all. People write and read fanfiction because they love for the original story, but still want slightly more than the author has given them, and that is particularly true when it comes to LGBT fanfic. All I wanted in Harry Potter was one openly gay or lesbian
relationship, and for whatever reason, Rowling would not give that to me. So I found my own online, and when I got bored of that, I wrote my own too. That’s not a mark of disrespect, but it is a sign that readers have preferences and strong feelings about characters too. And while I’m sure that increased political awareness and openly gay celebrities have had a lot to do with it, I wonder whether this is part of the reason why we’re finally seeing those gay relationships in literature and on TV. Those countless fanfic stories proved to professional writers that enough people want this, and if we don’t see it in mainstream media, we will write it ourselves.

If popular culture continues to surprise us with interesting and un stereotype quee characters, then with any luck the next generation of LGBT teenagers won’t need to rely on fanfiction in the same way that I did. But I know that I owe a lot of my confidence in my identity to the stories I read online at fifteen. And I hope that this outlet will continue to be there for anyone questioning cultural norms. With fanfiction, stories that are too outrageous or alternative for any commercial company to risk can still find readers, and more importantly, outrageous and alternative readers can find them.

other popular slash and femslash pairings:

Brittana” - Britney and Santana, Glee

Sailor Uranus and Sailor Neptune, Sailor Moon

‘Wincest’ - Dean and Sam, Supernatural

Utena and Anthy, Revolutionary Girl Utena
AN AUGUST IN IDA:
QUEER TIMES
IN THE AMERICAN DEEP SOUTH

janey thornton

As I sit writing this in the cob-webbed attic of an old and dilapidated Southern corn barn in Middle Tennessee, my life in Cambridge is but a murky, distant haze of a memory. For it happens to be the case that my Cambridge world and the world I inhabit at this given moment (29th August 2011, to be precise), seem irreconcilably... irreconcilable. The place that I have been calling home for the past five weeks and two days is the queer intentional community 'Idyllic Dandy Acres' (IDA). a breathtakingly beautiful, 200 acre hand-farmed holler just one hour’s drive east of Nashville: farmed by queers for queers. and smack in the middle of the American Bible Belt.

Not so much a subculture, perhaps, as one part of an expansive and well-connected local ‘gayborhood’ of similar communities scattered amongst the undulating green hills of the Great Smoky Mountain range. IDA serves as a place of refuge and sanctuary for the gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and queer people of all colours and creeds (not to mention genders) that come here and soon begin to think of this place as home.

What struck me when I first arrived here was the sheer acceptance of the place - there is a refreshing understanding between us all, despite our admittedly multitudinous differences. about who we are and what we know / don’t know about sexuality, about gender, and ultimately about our individual identities. The yearly performing arts festival held here to raise funds for new building and gardening projects, Idapaloza, is an expression and celebration of this hard-working and inclusive community - a testament and declaration of understanding towards our collective difference. For many, Idapaloza, which runs throughout the first week of June, is the event of the year, with IDA’s land becoming a chaotic mess of 700+ queers, all of whom need to be fed and watered by an excellent and dedicated (not to mention stressed) team of kitchen volunteers. There are countless performances by queer-friendly bands, like the brilliant Hurray for the Riff Raff and Dirty Fist, careful with the use of pronouns in their songs. that provide a refreshingly step away from other more mainstream music festivals. Workshops also happen on a daily basis in as wide a range of areas as knife-throwing and beekeeping. Word of mouth over the past couple of years has seen a huge influx of LGBTQ people, young and old, come together from all over America and indeed the rest of the world to Idapaloza.

Since arriving at IDA. I have met people from California, Florida, Texas, Canada, Australia, Germany, Sweden, France, Austria, Italy... the list could go on.

But besides the chaotic madness of Idapaloza, the everyday lives of the people at IDA constitute in many ways a unique and unrivalled form of queer activism in the sheer sense that they are being themselves in the midst of such a grossly conservative sexual and political atmosphere, and in a part of the world infamous for its persecution of minority populations which deviate from the white, heterosexual norm. The very fact of IDA’s existence here has changed the ways in which many locals perceive LGBTQ people: interactions with local farmers over agreements to share certain pieces of land, conversations in local grocery stores with shopowners, and other daily social meetings with the people in this neck of the woods serves to foster a level of communication between both groups that has not previously existed. On a potato-harvesting trip a few miles up the road from the IDA grounds. I met self-confessed redneck John. a corn farmer with IDA potatoes and beets planted on his land. John has been a good friend of two of the founders of IDA. Tom and MaxZine, for years. In the full knowledge that both Tom and MaxZine are both gay-identified men. John had. some months previously, allowed his fifteen year-old son to travel with them to North Carolina for a weekend to see a band he loved in concert - not your average redneck reaction to two queers offering your son a ride. But when I actually thought about what connected John. Tom and MaxZine to one another. I realized that these three people...
had bonded over their mutual love and appreciation for the land that gives them their livelihoods. John had witnessed Tom and MaxZine digging, planting and ploughing the land just as he had watched his own father and grandfather do the same. Indeed, the power of that collective experience and understanding is one very much underestimated in the modern world.

And so by far the most unique thing about this wonderful place, full of so many creative and embracing people, is its gayest thing I've ever seen. The garden beds are chaotically bursting with such traditionally Southern vegetables as okra, squash, green tomatoes, eggplant, zucchini, asparagus, kale, potatoes, cucumbers, corn, blueberries, strawberries and countless more, serving as a constant reminder that we are doing things right, that we are progressing and learning all the time - in an admittedly haphazard and humorous way.

rural location. It has become commonplace now, and perhaps detrimentally so, to think about queer spaces as being almost exclusively situated within largely urban areas. When people in the UK think about spaces in which they consider the LGBTQ population to be able to thrive, they think of London: in the States, people inevitably conjure up images of Christopher Street in New York. of course San Francisco's Bay area, and certainly not the South - city or countryside. The countryside has become disassociated with queer life and culture to an almost dangerous degree, as if the two are somehow incompatible. And this is what I believe IDA should be most celebrated for: its ability to integrate queer living with traditional and practical ways of country living. We at IDA plant, weed, mulch, harvest, cook and build together. It is an environment that is open, safe, equal, and full of people who understand what it means to be queer. There's even a rainbow garden here with different colored plants making up all of the colours of the rainbow - I'm pretty sure it's the

Another of IDA's attributes, when compared with particular aspects of the mainstream gay urban community, includes the way in which all segments of the LGBTQ community are properly represented and invited into this space in equal proportion. Surprisingly, this sort of equality within the community itself is one not matched by many modern cities. San Francisco, for example, which enjoys its status as being a kind of mecca for many queer people in the United States and beyond, can boast only one lesbian bar in the entire city. The same kind of distorted representation could be said to be true also of Chicago. the gay district of which is somewhat tellingly called Boystown. As I weaved my way up and down the countless stalls that were part of the 'Big Gay Fair' on Melrose Street, Boystown, earlier this month, it was impossible not to notice that the audience being catered for was by no means as diverse and varied as the LGBTQ community itself in its reality; this was a fair for mainstream gay men and mainstream gay men only. At one point, myself and a group of friends were actually

JANEYTHORNTON anaugustinida 21
approached by a number of gay men who asked us if we were lesbians, staring at us with such intense curiosity that it was as though we were animals in a zoo. These sorts of situations and encounters act as constant reminders that queer life in the city, as liberated and extensive as it is often portrayed, can often still be rife with numerous inequalities which will require an unprecedented amount of work if they are ever to be improved upon.

The culture here is essentially one of collectivity: there are never less than 15 people around the dinner table, sharing insanely good vegetarian food, drink, and many an amusing/outrageous conversation. Invites to parties in the neighboring communities of Short Mountain and Daffodil Meadows, or get togethers further-afield in both Nashville and Knoxville, are common, and throughout the years a strong network of the truest of friends has developed into what you could easily call an extended queer family. It’s nowhere near perfect here, but people are doing a good job. It’s places like IDA that are truly taking the bull by the horns in the fight for social justice.

first and foremost, as I have said before, in the sheer fact that they exist. It is a myth, and a powerful one at that, that there are no LGBTQ people in the countryside, and that the countryside is not the place for us, nor will it ever be. And it is important to recognize that these sorts of myths can often result in their very realization and further perpetuation. In this case, such a myth has led to the widespread migration of many LGBTQ people into the city in search of a freer lifestyle - which of course undeniably, and thankfully, many of them do experience. Yet IDA is one queer network (subculture does not seem like quite the right word) which I am grateful for every single day, and which should serve as an example to those who need it that an LGBTQ countryside does exist, and that it will continue to exist for some time.
STRENGTH IN DIVERSITY

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The problem with being angry, by and large, is that you have to stop sometime. The kind of anger that burns inside a person, long and slow, for years without respite - changing their habits, their moods, tinting their subconscious red - that’s not your everyday storm of rage, not even the big kind, full of sleet and fire and vitriol, and it’s not what we’re dealing with here.

Anger of the kind that picks you up by the nape of the neck and shakes you until you scream, that reaches into your chest with cool fingers and heats your blood until it’s like walking on hot sand at high noon, the blistering heat so high it feels like ice - it even feels good, sometimes, if a perverse, ugly kind of good, but it has to fade sometime. It calms and softens and peels back to reveal whatever it was masking, and all too often what’s behind there is a sadness or desperation that you didn’t want to look in the face and now you have to, and the anger has drained all the fight out of you and there is nowhere left to run.

Fourteen-year-old Morgaine is learning this the hard way.

She’s already learned better than to give in to this kind of feeling around other people. Calling a storm down over the heads of people you care about just to try and make them see you is a tactic that works well in soap operas, but here it does her no good; she can’t explain what she’s done or why she did it, and ultimately most people laugh at her anyway, and that makes it worse. Growing her dark hair long and insisting on Morgaine - to the point of writing it on her exercise books, which has had her told off by her teachers (“your name is Morgan, stop being so silly”) - has helped a little, made her feel she’s taking control of something. But, instead of the dark curtain she had hoped
sense in protesting: not now. not like this. "I dunno. I suppose I'm not. really. Not anymore." Then that spike of hurt flares again, and she lays her head on her knees. "I don't know," she says quietly. "I just is it stupid to feel like nobody understands? I've tried explaining it, and I - nobody understands. I'm, I'm overreacting, and I need to tell them what's really wrong, and then I do and it's all nothing, like I'm just going through a phase when really it's the only thing I'm sure about, and... I dunno. I'm being stupid."

"Maybe a little," says her companion, not unkindly. "But that doesn't mean you're not right."

"But then how do I tell which is which?"

"That's what growing up is for. isn't it? Learning to be right at least as often as you're stupid. There's a knock to it. You'll figure it out."

"Aren't you supposed to be helping me?"

"What do you mean. supposed to? This is a wardrobe, for Heaven's sake. You didn't bring me here, and I don't remember doing anything to have you show up. I don't think I'm supposed to do anything."

Morgaine scowls and kicks at the wardrobe floor. "You really are annoying."

The voice smiles again. "I'm sorry. I am. sometimes. You might as well make peace with that. Being annoying sometimes - it's not terminal, and most people do it at some point. There's a light touch on her knee, a gentle pressure as a hand squeezes her leg. "There. I'm helping."

She nods a little, mollified. They sit in silence for a moment.

"I told Mum, you know," she says at last, in a small voice. "About - the girls."

"Oh. I see. That.

"A sigh comes through the darkness. "It could have been worse, you know. People your age get thrown out of their homes for less, even now. Don't forget that."

"It's not that. I'm not complaining. I don't want to complain. But she laughed at me. She told me I didn't know what I was talking about! Just because I'm fourteen. I can't know what I'm talking about when I talk about me? I know I don't have much experience of other people, but I've got fourteen whole years of experience being me, and that's more than anybody else, isn't it?" The hurt clogs up her throat, suddenly, and she sniffles. "I just - there's nobody I can talk to. I can tell people, but what good does that do? They'll just ask me questions that I don't even know the answer to yet. I just want to - talk about it. Without anybody laughing at me."

"You will. in time."

"The hand squeezes her leg again. "I know it's hard. And you're having it easy compared to other people like you, and you know that, and that's good. but that doesn't mean it's not hard."

"But then... it comes out a soft, thin whine, and she coughs and takes a deep breath before trying again. "But then what do I do?"

"Be patient. Keep going. It's not perfect, but you'll find what you need." The hand strokes her knee a couple of times before withdrawing. "And when you're ready... talk. Talk to everybody. Talk to anybody you can. Be stupid and annoying and come on too strong and say the wrong thing at the wrong time. It's easier to get away with than you'd ever imagine." There's a rustling sound and a brief, faint glow: the voice mutters, disgruntled. "I'd better go. Can't hide in a wardrobe forever."

Morgaine nods, sniffs one last time, lays her head back on her knees. "I won't ever see you again, will I?"

The voice laughs: suddenly the darkness moves closer. "Of course you will. silly. A touch on Morgaine's shoulder, brisk and brief and comforting. "Someday, you'll look in the mirror, and you'll see me."

"Shadow lips press a warm kiss to her forehead. "Good luck, Morg."

Morgaine opens her eyes, and her legs cramp. She curses under her breath and struggles to her feet as best she can, fighting her way through her forest of clothes and broken coathangers until she half-collapses onto her bedroom floor, still trying to straighten out the kinks in muscles that suddenly seem to be made of decades-old knitting yarn.

She hasn't done any of her homework and her legs hurt and she's definitely not looking forward to dinner tonight, but at least the impromptu nap seems to have lifted her mood a little. Her skin feels warm all over, like it always does when she wakes up, and a small part of her is aware of the memory of sensation on her face - something soft and barely substantial, like the ghost of a caress, or the imprint of a kiss.
psychiatry clearly believed that B's identity as a gay man was 'delusional'. Given the heteronormative thrust of research into transsexualism at the time, it is perhaps unsurprising that this climate pushed straight FtMs to jump over each other to emphasize how 'normal' they were, reinforcing the side-lining of gay FtM identities. Interestingly, the existence of gay FtMs is now frequently used as a counter-argument against those who claim that FtMs are simply lesbians in denial.

One of the hugely influential figures in the formation of an international FtM community was gay trans man Louis Sullivan. Sullivan's openness about his sexual orientation resulted in him being repeatedly denied gender confirmation surgery in the late 1970s: he was instrumental in the (ultimately successful) campaign to allow gay people to transition. Sullivan finally received his surgery in 1986, the year I was born, having made pioneering steps to change the world for queer trans men like me.

While the psychiatric profession is now beginning to accept that there are gay trans men, many psychiatrists still seem to favour a model in which FtMs choose trucks over dolls; in other words, they are still basing their assessment of whether or not a person assigned female at birth is transsexual on whether they displayed playtime behaviour considered appropriate for heterosexual, cisgendered males. Even on many Internet forums for FtMs run by FtMs, there is often the assumption that trans guys want to look and act like their heterosexual cis counterparts. (The blog 'Not Another Aiden' is unusual in its discussion of gay and effeminate FtM identities). While I personally like checked shirts, beards, and would love to have a body like Loren Cameron's, there are plenty of gay trans men who'd prefer to pass as scene queens than straight bloke stereotypes. Bring on the skin-tight tees and the glitter!

Gender is a spectrum and predictably gay trans men have just as varied a range of masculinities as their cisgendered counterparts: from hyper-masculine leather daddies to the androgynous or the fabulous, gay trans men can be found in many different gay communities, sometimes out and proud, more often existing by stealth. Effeminate gay FtMs are just as likely to be the victims of effemiphobia as their cis brothers, perhaps even more so. It is saddening, yet unsurprising, to note that gay trans men who are effeminate have a harder time justifying their transitions than straight or straight-acting FtMs: they frequently have to defend themselves against the people who believe that they 'should have stayed as girls'.

A body of literature exists describing the border wars between butch lesbian and FtM identities. However, little
has been written on how gay trans men interact with the wider community of gay males, either at the social level or in terms of how trans bodies are understood in the sexual sphere.

Just as there are many different sexual practices that can occur between cisgendered men, no one practice describes how gay trans men have sex. While some gay cis men consider gay trans men as men in every sense, others relegate trans men to second-class status, based on a number of beliefs or misconceptions. On internet forums I’ve come across numerous objections by cis gay guys to dating trans guys. Firstly, the often heard ‘I can’t date a trans guy because I’m gay’ is a sad reflection on the fact that many people still do not accept trans men as legitimate men. Secondly, there’s the ‘but I can’t do vagina’ comment. While there are certainly some trans guys who like vaginal sex this is certainly not true for all gay trans men and indeed some would react with horror at the idea. Personally, while I was amused by American relationship columnist Dan Savage’s ‘it’s just a cock and balls flat-packed’ analogy, it’s understandable that many gay-identified men are unable to accept it; but that is still no reason to reject all gay trans guys, many of whom are perfectly happy with anal or topping their partners. Thank you very much. Finally, there’s the ‘but what about the penis?’ question. In case I haven’t already laboured the point enough, gay trans men are all different, and not just in their surgical or pre-surgical status, but also in the extent to which they believe a penis is necessary for their self-actualization or to fulfill their sexual desires. Just as trans men differ, so do the cisgendered men who love them, and ultimately what matters is the compatibility of the two individuals and their preferred practices. Vague terms like ‘gay’ may be useful for playing identity politics, but they are too amorphous to precisely describe the nature of sexual relationships between two individuals. After all, while we have sex with organs, we make love to people.

I cannot count the occasions on which straight cisgendered people have suggested that I have traits that are not particularly manly or that I should ‘man up’, as though there was only one (sub-) macho version of masculinity. Personally, I have no intention of mimicking Marlon Brando just to please other people who have ‘cookie cutter’ views on what masculinity is or should be. My masculinity has certainly been inflected by my female socialisation, and influenced by my friends in the gay community, but ultimately, it comes from within. It is mine, and it is no less real than cis masculinities; it should no more be possible to lecture me on what kind of man I ought to be than it would be to tell one of my cis gay friends the same. My effeminacy is not a function of my vagina, any more than my masculinity is a function of my testicles.
Of course, if you change your name, that still leaves the question of which to choose. What is interesting is that beyond stage names and fun names like ‘Ten Sixty-Nine’ or ‘Huggy Bear’, most people choose a name with some connection to their birthname. Is it a masculine/feminine/androgyne version of their birthname, a middle name, or a name of a family member. It seems that while a name change can often signify a new start, most people don’t want to break entirely from their previous life.

In an entirely different vein, people often use other names as pseudonyms or stage names - think Stefani Germanotta / Lady Gaga / Jo Calderone or Barry Humphries / Dame Edna / Les Patterson. While we could cynically label these as ‘just another act’, these different names seem to bring out different personalities in the performers. Seeing the interview with Jo Calderone (Lady Gaga’s male alter ego) interview at the VMA awards – his nervous body language, his clearly torn feelings about Lady Gaga – I do wonder whether we can really say that he and Lady Gaga are 100% the same person. Much like with changes of names, performers use their pseudonyms as handles onto their personality, allowing them to change their persona as quickly as their clothes.

Whilst we all know how your name determines how others see you, it is often unappreciated that it also affects how you see yourself. A change of name to something aspirational – a family member, a personal idol, or even just a name which has positive connotations – can be often a way of becoming the person you want to be. This is something which Harry found: “as soon as I started being called Harry, positive experiences started to gather around the name.”

Once someone begins using a new name, of course, this can meet with varying degrees of resistance. Most often, close family members resist the change most strongly, especially as it can often seem like a rejection of them. But on the other hand people tend not to view the change as a moral issue. If, however, the change coincides with other big changes (such as coming out as trans) then people can be a lot more reluctant to adopt - by holding someone to their birthname it is almost as though you gain the power to keep them as the person you thought they were.

For trans people in particular the choice of name can be very difficult. Many, such as FTM activist Jamison Green, avoid strongly gendered names at first, opting for something gender-neutral like ‘Jamie’ first then in some cases adapting these to fit their binary gender as people become accustomed to the change. This was underlined
by Harry, who used ‘Harry’ as a gender-neutral nickname, but “once my parents realised that it had anything to do with gender, they flatly refused to use it.”

One thing is for sure: whether you live by your birthname, another name or have a set of pseudonyms, your name is more than just a convenient label to describe you; it sits at the very heart of your identity with your interests, aspirations, fears and of course gender and sexuality all bound tightly to it. That’s why the freedom to change names is so vital - it is the freedom to determine for yourself who you are and not have it forced on you by other people. It is a right we all deserve.