NO DEFINITION

THE BODIES ISSUE

TRANS-FORMATIVE DISABILITY & GENDER; QUEER SPORT; PHOTOGRAPHY; KARL DMITRI
BISHOP Q&A; BEAUTIFUL BODIES; MUSCLES & CURVES; ILLUSTRATION; THE ACTUALISING
TENDENCY; LGBT LIFE IN JORDAN; SATURDAYS AND COWBOY HATS; SCOFIG MANIFESTO.

MICHAELMAS 2012
Welcome to [no definition], the magazine of CUSU’s LGBT campaign. I'm Jack, your editor, and I'd just like to say a quick hello (or hello again) and hope your brand new academic year is starting off well. This term's issue focuses on 'bodies': what it means to have a queer body & how people experience themselves in the world. We've got articles dealing with the parallels of disability & queering gender; queerness in sport; reclaiming femme power in queer spaces; the power of creativity; and what it means to be gay in Jordan. We've also got interviews with photographer Karl Dmitri Bishop; writer & director of Cambridge Art Salon, Ruthie; and World Gay Rodeo champion, Sara Simunovich; as well as plenty of beautiful poetry, photography and illustration. Hope you enjoy! As ever, get in touch (lgbt-editor@cusu.cam.ac.uk) with any comments or if you'd like to chat about submitting something to next term's issue – everyone & everything is welcome – and follow us online (facebook.com/cusuND) to hear about this term's discussion panel & how you can be involved! Finally, a huge thank you to S.T., Izzy and KDB for all their help.

Editor's Note

Cover illustration courtesy of Wesley Freeman-Smith. 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.
MEET THE EXEC

Here’s a quick picture guide to who’s who on this year’s CUSU LGBT exec, what we do and how to get in touch with us.

**President – Freya**
lgbt-president@cusu.cam.ac.uk
Hi – I’m Freya and I’m a third year at Newnham. As President of CUSU LGBT, my job is to ensure that the campaign is all running smoothly; and if that sounds a bit vague and waffly, well that’s because I study English, right? As President this year, I will help to ensure that the socials, coffee groups, club-nights and other fantastic LGBT+ events really have something to offer for everyone. I would also like to raise the profile of campaigning and awareness-raising activities – speaker events, information stalls, posters, as well as our annual Awareness Week. CUSU LGBT has something to offer you, whatever your sexual orientation or gender identity. So if you have any suggestions at all for what you think we could be doing to improve our provision of social events, welfare or campaigning activities – don’t hesitate to drop me an email! I’m passionate about CUSU LGBT, because it really has helped to make my time at Cambridge hugely enjoyable.

**Chair – Charlie**
lgbt-chair@cusu.cam.ac.uk
Hi, I’m Charlie Bell, and I’m the Chair of CUSU LGBT this year. As well as doing a load of the admin for the campaign, my main focus this year is making us responsive to your needs, being both proactive and reactive. It’s incredibly important to have an exec that works, and this year that means coordination, cooperation and collaboration with all the LGBT+ reps across the university, whilst providing you with the best Ents in Cambridge, and making sure being LGBT+ at Cambridge is the positive experience it can be. I’m always keen to hear what you have to say about the campaign and how we’re doing, and more than happy for you to get involved, so feel free to give me a shout at any time. Freya and I are heads of campaign, so we are there to represent you; so please do tell us what you want!

**Computing – Tach**
lgbt-computing@cusu.cam.ac.uk
I’m Tach, and as computing officer, my main job is to take care of the website and tend to the mailing lists and other technologies used by the Campaign. Surprisingly, I’m also a Computer Scientist. Please do email if you have any suggestions on additional resources / tools you’d like to see appear on the website. I tend to rather enjoy playing around with new gadgets or website features…

**Communications – Harry**
lgbt-comms@cusu.cam.ac.uk
Hi everyone, I’m Harry, your communications officer. I am in charge of the weekly LGBT listings which detail all upcoming LGBT+ events. If you are organising an LGBT-related event please email me at lgbt-comms@cusu.cam.ac.uk. Also if you’re not currently on our email list and would like to be, here’s a handy link for you: http://www.lgbt.cusu.cam.ac.uk/mailing-lists/. On top of that I am in charge of trying to get as much visibility as possible for all our campaigns, so if you are particularly passionate about any of our campaigns and would like get involved, feel free, as for any other query, to send me an email.

**Campaigns – Andrew**
lgbt-campaigns@cusu.cam.ac.uk
At CUSU LGBT we also seek to run campaigns that are particularly relevant to the LGBT+ community in and out of Cambridge. Following the partial success of the ‘Bloody Unfair’ campaign and the spinning off of ‘Think Outside the Box’, we are looking to start new campaigns. Some of these are already in the pipeline, but if you have any suggestions or would like to find out how you can help, please email me.

**Ents & Socials – Tiffany & Max**
lgbt-social@cusu.cam.ac.uk
Hi there everyone! We are Tiffany and Max, your Socials and Ents Officers for this year! Tiffany’s a 2nd year lawyer from Catz and Max is a 3rd year linguist from Clare. We’re here to provide you with a fun, bustling and sociable LGBT+ scene at Cambridge all year round. The events on offer range from the weekly coffee meet ups to film nights, from the staple Wednesday club night at the Place, to black tie dinners; hopefully there’s something for everyone! If you have any ideas, feedback or questions, please give us a shout. We are super enthusiastic and approachable people, always seeking out ideas for fun events. LoveGBT to you all!

**Welfare – David**
lgbt-welfare@cusu.cam.ac.uk
I’m David, and as Welfare Officer my responsibility is to ensure that members of the LGBT community have access to support, whenever they should they need it, both at college and university level. This involves close work with other reps to address any welfare issues relating to the whole or part of the LGBT+ community. Equally as important is the welfare of individuals. College LGBT reps are a point of contact for anyone needing support with issues to do with sexuality or gender. There are a number of alternative options: the ‘support’ section on the website is a good place to find the right person to talk to. Please feel free to contact me, using the address above, if you need advice, support or have any questions about welfare.
Hi, I'm Jack – I'm a third year Social Anthropologist at Kings. I'm the editor of [no definition], CUSU's LGBT+ magazine. [nd] is published once a term, and we're always looking for contributions from students or town! I organise termly polls, discussions (to which everyone is invited) and interviews around a different topic each term. The magazine itself welcomes submissions in any format: articles, poetry, fiction, photography, illustration, collage, reviews, or anything else you can think of – from a paragraph of opinion, to a full blown essay. If you want to get involved, have any questions, or want to know where you can get hold of an issue, send me an email! You can also subscribe to get [nd] delivered to your pigeon-hole (in an innocuous brown paper envelope) on our website.

Hi, I'm Vincent Scully, and I'm Finance & Sponsorship Officer for the campaign. Unsurprisingly, that means I'm in charge of making sure we have enough money to run all of our events and campaigns, and trying to allocate it to the things that are worth most to the LGBT+ community in Cambridge. If you have any suggestions for things you think we ought to be supporting – or even companies that might want to support us! – then feel free to get in touch.

Hi, I'm John and my job is to make sure that College reps, the first point of contact for the majority of LGBT+ people in Cambridge, are well-placed to support the community in their colleges: both socially and from a welfare perspective. It's important that LGBT+ people are well-represented at a college level, and have someone they can talk to in person about any welfare issues. By organising training sessions for reps, and working to increase participation, I aim to improve the welfare provision for LGBT+ people. I hope that running social events to help the reps get to know each other a bit better will help facilitate the organisation of inter-college socials, and increase further the diversity of the LGBT+ presence at Cambridge LGBT+ socials. My aim is to strengthen the network of reps, helping to create a supportive and enthusiastic group of people who can provide the best experience for LGBT+ people in Colleges.

I'm Jamie, a 3rd year geographer at St Catz and I'm representing anyone who feels less than comfortable, or is marginalised here, and aren't sure where to turn. I've always been interested in improving the LGBT community, especially in being inclusive and welcoming to pan/bi people who want to 'dip their toes in the water' – trying to smooth out the gay/straight binary. Second, representing members of all sexualities (which includes straight people) who are interested in queer issues or politics. Feel free to drop me an email: I've dated both girls and boys in Britain and Japan, and while I can give advice, I'll never try to force you to do something or change your opinion. I'm looking forward to hearing from you, particularly if you have suggestions or complaints about CUSU LGBT.

Heya! I'm a fourth-year geologist at Trinity Hall – but I can talk about things other than my Top Five Volcanoes Ever. As Trans* Rep, my work includes organising fortnightly coffee meets; supporting people during transition at any point in their university career, in academic, medical and social contexts; and encouraging better provision for trans* students at an institutional level, for example by raising awareness of trans* needs at the University Counselling Service, or by working for gender-neutral graduation dress requirements. If you've got questions, or if you'd just like a cup of tea with someone who isn't going to assume anything about you, please do get in touch!

Our new LGBT+ library opened at the end of last year, and aims to provide access to material you might otherwise find hard to get hold of: from academia to fiction, music to movies. It's located in the Central Sciences Library, on the New Museums Site, and shares their opening hours (0900-2000 Mon-Fri in full term). To find it, go up the stairs (or take the lift), turn right past reception (ignore the window. Anyone is welcome to borrow – undergrad, postgrad or nothing to do with this uni or any other – just fill out a borrowing slip (anonymous except for the librarian). You can find our current catalogue online (www.lgbt.cam.ac.uk/resources/library) which is added to regularly (please do suggest anything you'd like us to purchase to the above email), and follow us on facebook (www.facebook.com/harryharrislibrary).
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This is my skeleton, this is the skin it’s in, that is, according to light and gravity. I’ll take off my disguise, the mask you met me in, ‘cuz i got something for you to see. – Ani DiFranco, Shameless

Every day of my life is a transformative work. “She”, they call me, or “What’s wrong with your legs?”, they ask, or “We don’t really need to tell the extended family this, do we?”

I was assigned female at birth. I started binding in 2009. I was diagnosed with endometriosis in 2010. I’d been symptomatic for six years. In 2011, I changed my name and started using a walking stick (and that’s Ani’s fault – but a story for another time). In 2012, I started using a wheelchair.

One way or another, I seem to spend an awful lot of my time transitioning; between gender roles, between modes of apparent ability. As I become more visibly trans*, as I become more visibly disabled – as I remake myself into something to live with, rather than something to live through with grated teeth – parallels become more and more obvious to me.

I’m a long way from the first person to voice these similarities1, and I shouldn’t be the last, but the fact that I am using a walking stick today, and was using my wheelchair yesterday, doesn’t mean I’m ‘better’. It means that the awkwardness of the chair outweighed its benefits. That I use feminine pronouns in some situations instead of my generally preferred neuter ones does not, for me, mean that I’m not genderqueer; and it definitely doesn’t mean I’m not trans*.

It just means that sometimes I get tired: of needing to go an extra half mile to get to dropped kerbs; of the Victorian prescriptivist arguments over the epizonic pronoun; of needing to remember that car drivers behave strangely when you are in a chair; of the looks on people’s faces at my long hair, or when I stand up to fetch something from a shelf.

One way or another, I spend a lot of time transitioning; between gender roles, between modes of apparent ability.

Sometimes it is easier to wear a mask and play pretend than it is to patrol my identities. One way or another, I spend a lot of time performing my identities.

In public, in my chair, I have the choice of being authentically me – of time performing my identities. One way or another, I spend a lot of time transitioning; between gender roles, between modes of apparent ability.

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In my experience the “oh dear it’s a wheelchair how do we deal with that” face has an awful lot in common with the “oh god they’re going to demand gender-neutral markers in the records aren’t they” face. The overbearing concern and the overwriting of my autonomy are common to both: “Well, if you’re sure...”

And so I end up performing my identity. I suppose at least I’m not without choice in which role to play: like I say, I can exaggeratedly be a good crip, a good genderqueer person, and fit people’s expectations; or I can be aggressively and ostentatiously myself – a third option. And that is to close my eyes, take a deep breath, and make a public space for my private self – to do out loud the work I’ve been doing inside my head for years.

I was a field geologist. I was a hiker. Recognising that those aren’t things I can do any more – that I’ll likely never do fieldwork on Mount Erebus, Antarctica; that it’s going to be a long time before I get up to a 1000m peak under my own steam again; that it ever happens; that the Hangover, Austria is going to remain on my list of ‘unfinished business’ – is, yes, a loss. Saying goodbye to my childhood nicknames and to ticking “F” on forms

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I feel like I haven’t yet learned how my gender and it unsettles me because I understand myself and perform masculinity creeping in to the way joy. I can feel certain aspects of it was happening I felt a mixture of face for the first time ever and while painful at times. Today I shaved my and fun, but it is also frightening and derby. Most of the time it feels exciting to together wildly, like a demolition. The different parts of my gender crash together wildly, like a demolition.

The different parts of my gender crash together wildly, like a demolition. Most of the time it feels exciting and fun, but it is also frightening and painful at times. Today I shaved my face for the first time ever and while it was happening I felt a mixture of fear, uncertainty and mischievous joy. I can feel certain aspects of masculinity creeping in to the way that I understand myself and perform my gender and it unsettles me because I feel like I haven’t yet learned how to celebrate, re-purpose or trust it in the same way I have with femininity. Embodying masculinity with integrity is an intense responsibility that I don’t always feel ready for. Hot damn, that gender category comes with a lot of fucking baggage, entitlement and power, and I do not know if I am wise enough to navigate that in ways that don’t hurt other people. Gender seems so much bigger than me sometimes. It permeates everything around me in a way that I fear are unspeakable, although I guess I’m talking now. The lack of control and choice I have in this process shakes me in ways I would rather not admit. Still, here I am doing me as hard as ever, buying tagine, shaving my face, going out in public and staring back into the eyes of those who try to erase and belittle me with their gaze. I don’t have the answers right now, so I guess all I can do is let this thing kick the shit out of me while speaking from my heart and wearing lipstick to the party.

CRASH

BY MAJESTIC (HTTP://MMMAJESTIC.COM)

What is a queer body? I suspect that this is about as answerable as the age-old and eternally irritating ‘how long is a piece of string?’ Perhaps it’s more useful to ask – what is my queer body? Or, how is my queerness manifested in my body? In my experience the answer is firmly rooted in sport.

From the age of eight I was paddling kayaks. From the age of twelve I was racing them, and at sixteen I was racing them on various lakes and backwaters across Europe. With national or international competition in any sport comes a hefty training schedule and, as Sprint Kayak is a power-based sport, this involved a sizeable dose of weight training. In fact, it’s quite likely that heavy gym in my formative years stunted my growth. Whatever.

My parents are both short – I doubt that is variation. It permeates everything around me in a way that I fear are unspeakable, although I guess I’m talking now. The lack of control and choice I have in this process shakes me in ways I would rather not admit. Still, here I am doing me as hard as ever, buying tagine, shaving my face, going out in public and staring back into the eyes of those who try to erase and belittle me with their gaze. I don’t have the answers right now, so I guess all I can do is let this thing kick the shit out of me while speaking from my heart and wearing lipstick to the party.

Q"We are a work in progress, my body and myself, but I refuse to regard myself as defective.”

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BY AMO REX

A pec-uliar experience: on the importance of sport for queer bodies & gender.

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Physical development and the gradual unfolding of one’s queerness are one and the same. However, in my own peculiar personal experience this is the case. As long as I can remember I have moved a little strangely, partly as the result of an unusual masculinity which causes my movements to be a little more exaggerated than I perceive them to be. Yet, I notice this exaggeration in others who touch on the butch end of the spectrum and this has come to be a tell-tale sign, guiding me towards a firm conclusion whenever my gaydar begins to twitch. Of course, while sport has safely delivered me into happy feminine masculinity, it is highly unlikely that I would have embraced cleats, curls and crunches with quite the same vigour, had my queerness not lurked beneath the surface. Yet the connection remains, regardless of which factor might be the chicken and which the egg.

This is why I am so troubled by the barely concealed sharp edges of the sporting world when it comes to the ambiguity of bodies. One example of this is Caster Semenya, whose success at the 2009 Athletics World Championships, paired with her naturally androgynous appearance, opened her up to mass speculation and a rather insensitively executed gender testing process. In addition, I am unsettled by the segregation of athletes into two distinct gender camps even when this is unnecessary. This was starkly illustrated by the pink and blue jackets sported by the German national team at the opening and closing ceremonies of our recent Olympics. It is clear that sport can be both a support and a constraint when it comes to realising our queer identities or even just deviating from the expectations of the spectators around us. However, if Caster Semenya’s proud procession of this is Caster Semenya’s proud procession with the South African flag during the Olympic opening ceremony is anything to go by, the future of sport may see a little more space for those of us who transcend preconceived boundaries, queer or otherwise.
Looking at other people’s pictures can be a very dull affair, even though it shouldn’t be. Too many self-titled artists seem to be putting chains and a padlock on their craft; it’s safe and it’s standardised where it should be all about expression. Karl Dmitri Bishop’s pictures on the other hand clearly stand out in contemporary photography, a unique and complex portrait of a world that seems to exist parallel to our reality.

Tell us a little about your work & what you’ve been up to, lately.

My work explores the abstract dream space. The things people often don’t like to think about: fears, the occult and the things that go bump in the night! I’m always thinking what can I do next? How can I better myself? What would haunt people the most? People fear what they don’t understand.

How long have you been doing photography, and what first attracted you to the medium?

I’ve always been a hoarder of still images. From a young age I would collect magazine cut-outs, postcards, album covers, anything that was pleasing to my eye. It all started in a far away mystic land, with a reflection in water on top of a misty mountain, actually! It’s been about three years now.

What themes are you exploring in your work?

I like darker themes because it’s what has yet to be explored, the unknown. I love work that tells a story, gets the viewer’s imagination to tick.

Is there a spiritual angle to your work, or is it more surrealism dream-based?

Both I guess. I’ve always been interested in the spiritual side of things, myths and the occult. Take the Victorian spiritualism movement for example, I’m sure their obsession with myths and ghosts somehow affected their imagination and emotions.

Do you feel your identity/sexuality impacts on your art?

Most definitely. Your childhood/teenage years make you the person you are today. So many thanks to my childhood obsessions and close friends for influencing and making me the person I am today!

“Understanding what makes you human makes it easier to make something less human.”

Your imagery is beautifully surreal – do you think this has changed the way you experience subjects in everyday life?

I’ve always been a dreamer, even more so now. I walk down the road and see something and stop. It’s some time before I realize I’ve been standing there for a while, and then I notice people looking at me! They must think I’m mad!

Congratulations on your residency at Cambridge Art Salon! What do you expect this to involve?

Thank you. The Cambridge Art Salon have been so welcoming and friendly. It’s great to have a space away from home where I can work and enjoy the company of other creative artists! Who knows what will happen. My next project might involve being underwater and liquid latex; you’ll have to watch this space!

Other than photography, do you expect to branch out into other mediums?

I’m starting to branch out a bit more these days, thanks to my new studio. I’ve just completed a short film, it was a hard process but I’m pleased with the outcome. I love how you have more to play with when it comes to film but I still favour the still image. Film can take the mystery away a bit for me.

Outside of art, you work in nursing: does this impact the focus of your art?

It makes you appreciate your day-to-day life for sure! Being up close to the human body all day really helps your creativity. Understanding what makes you human makes it easier to make something less human.

Your work often involves quite abstracted bodies – how do you strive to portray the body in your art?

I always use movement in my work, as it’s far more interesting to see the movement in-between poses. Then you capture an unnatural look that you wouldn’t always capture in a still image.

See Karl Dmitri Bishop’s work now at the Cambridge Art Salon (29 Cromwell road, just off Mill Road), or take a look online at http://karldmitribishop.blogspot.co.uk/
Misogyny, stereotypes, prejudice within the LGBT+ community, and the power of queer femininity: Jessica Murray reclains the colour pink.

BY JESSICA MURRAY

The first thing my big sister gave me when I came out to her as maybe a little bit queer or something was a pink lighter (right after the infuriating “How sweet, you thought nobody knew!” smirk). She was giving me this lighter for two reasons, she said. “Firstly, lots of lesbians smoke.”

I nodded, fighting the impulse to take notes. I knew nothing about lesbians. I didn’t even know that I was one.

“When you’re out on one of your gay nights out someone cute may ask you for a light. You now have the power to give with a wink or a smile full of darkness to match.”

“No one feared femmes. Who could take a person in pink seriously? Women pined after the image of the campy gay best friend and even lusted after long haired lesbians. Anyway, why would any self respecting person choose to mimic the demeaning gender roles set up for women in previous generations? Something in my memories of A-Level Politics finally clicked, and I was flooded with disappointment. These educational-esthetic amounts of kohl eyeliner and smile full of darkness to match.

I’ve never stopped being ashamed of the joke I mistold at a queer women’s gathering. “What do you call a lesbian with long nails?” The punch line was supposed to be “Single”; I blurted “Straight!” I earned a burst of raucous laughter and the injured stare of the one femme at the table. Her cheeks flushed red. I smiled nervously. My nails were short. I was doing it right. She tried to speak up, but the others shielded her— it was a joke, right? Wrong, and I knew it.

I knew that offensive jokes aren’t harmful because they’re told at the expense of someone else’s dignity. They’re harmful because they usually point to a larger structure of prejudice and ignorance, and they usually reinforce it.

The structure of the LGBT+ world had found itself in sometimes fetishized femininity to the point of dehumanising femmes, and in other places ridiculed the idea that femininity had anything other than a decorative value in our community.

After all, the masculine presenting ones (of any gender) were the ones who were taken seriously, whether there were seen as scary, femme or respectable men with access to the establishment. They were visible. They were the ones who had to work hard and toe the political bread to bring home for the rest of the community. (Where had I heard this before?)

I hesitated to say that femmes have it hard too because nobody wins the political game, and must either be belittled or invisible. I had been subjected so much prejudice on the basis of their gender and sexuality, being the same thing to others. No, no one feared femmes. You can only fear a person if you think they have power, and to be a queer femme was to be either belittled or invisible.

“Deciding to embrace my femininity was one of the most political, non-conformist and emotionally liberating things I’ve ever done, second only to coming out.”

“...with femininity by echoing the disparageme of feminine traits which is rampant in the wider world? Surely this is a world that is not able to be exactly who they want to be, without fear of prejudice!”

Despite the patriarchy and despite being a woman of colour, I knew that as a femme cisgendered woman I’m wrapped in layers of privilege. Being femme and cisgendered makes it easier for me to ‘pass’ and escape homophobic harassment, since I don’t look like the stereotype of a lesbian, but the end of the day I’m still a person in a homophobic world. I’m exposed to the same legal inequalities on the basis of my sexual orientation and gender as any other person. Just the idea of passing is horrifying – the idea that your sexual orientation must be misread in order for you to be safe from the potential hatred of strangers and colleagues, of your friends and family? Passing means only that you’ll spend the rest of your life being one wrong word away from all the violence and homophobic bigotry this world has to offer.

And being treated like a manifestation of the dream ‘femme lesbian’ that horny teenage boys wank over can be pretty fucking awful. Having people assume you are straight, or佔e of the most political, non-conformist and emotionally liberating things I’ve ever done, second only to coming out.”

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And being treated like a manifestation of the dream ‘femme lesbian’ that horny teenage boys wank over can be pretty fucking awful. Having people assume you are straight, or the stereotype of a lesbian, but the others assume you are a phase or purely a ‘match’ your outward appearance it is either a phase or be purely a performance for their gratification, is horrific. Being verbally and physically harassed by those who simply can’t comprehend that their fetishes for you, or you and your partner, doesn’t make you automatically sexually available for them, and “all you need is a good fucking to fix you...” again. Not nice.

Living in a patriarchy doesn’t make things any easier, with the social pressures that try to shoehorn people into stereotypes. The ideal would be for everyone to be able to be exactly who they want to be, without fear of prejudice!

I hesitate to say that femmes have it hard too because nobody wins the political game, and must either be belittled or invisible. I had been subjected so much prejudice on the basis of their gender and sexuality, being the same thing to others. No, no one feared femmes. You can only fear a person if you think they have power, and to be a queer femme was to be either belittled or invisible.

I’m wrapped in layers of privilege. Being femme and cisgendered makes it easier for me to ‘pass’ and escape homophobic harassment, since I don’t look like the stereotype of a lesbian, but the end of the day I’m still a person in a homophobic world. I’m exposed to the same legal inequalities on the basis of my sexual orientation and gender as any other person. Just the idea of passing is horrifying – the idea that your sexual orientation must be misread in order for you to be safe from the potential hatred of strangers and colleagues, of your friends and family? Passing means only that you’ll spend the rest of your life being one wrong word away from all the violence and homophobic bigotry this world has to offer.

And being treated like a manifestation of the dream ‘femme lesbian’ that horny teenage boys wank over can be pretty fucking awful. Having people assume you are straight, or the stereotype of a lesbian, but the others assume you are a phase or purely a ‘match’ your outward appearance it is either a phase or be purely a performance for their gratification, is horrific. Being verbally and physically harassed by those who simply can’t comprehend that their fetishes for you, or you and your partner, doesn’t make you automatically sexually available for them, and “all you need is a good fucking to fix you...” again. Not nice.

Deciding to embrace my feminism was one of the most political, non-conformist and emotionally liberating things I’ve ever done, second only to coming out. I’ve chosen freely to be myself, glitter and all – this is my gender expression. Are these painted nails art, or just an act of second gender citizen status? No! These are the nails of a woman who wants her nails to be red and her world to be equal, and intends to use them for the world one gender role at a time.

Does this mascara signal that I’ve accepted objectification and subscribed to a hegemonic ideal of beauty while sacrificing my sexual autonomy? No. These are the eyes of a sex positive woman who believes in radical self love and consensual sex on her own terms; a woman who will use any and all the tools around her to aid her sexiness, simply because it makes her feel good.

Does my butt look straight in this cocktail dress? Sorry – this is the bit where I’m supposed to give a damn? I’m re-appropriating these symbols of femininity, refusing to let them be taken as badges of subservience or heteronormativity, and taking them as my own. That’s pretty brave – and pretty queer.

Queers claimed the rainbow. I’m taking it for myself.
Beautiful Bodies

On the impact of heteronormative standards of beauty on the LGBT+ community, which ‘type’ of gay is seen to be acceptable, and why we need to be fiercely body-positive. *TW: mention of eating disorders.*

By Olivia Smith

Body positivity movements are the antithesis of body shaming, that catch-all phrase for the policing of bodies. Shame, born from failing to meet impossible standards of beauty, is tied up in the disjunction every person feels with their own body and the ideal they are told they need to attain, which renders large classes of people invisible. When you are invisible – when you are not represented and you are not shown to be valued – there is a sense of disconnect, inferiority and not-belonging. These are the feelings sought to be undone and erased through body positivity movements.

Erasure is nothing new to LGBT identified people, and body shaming extends far beyond this group, so why the connection? Fat-positive feminism, while only one tenet of the body positivity movement, became most prominent in the 1980s, arguing that body-based discrimination was a gendered issue, afflicting women who were disadvantaged based on their size. Women then, regardless of orientation, became the victims of body-based discrimination.

"We are told that we are unnatural," said Michael, "so proving our sexuality and attractiveness becomes an obsession – a way of proving our worth." 1

Personal advertisements give us some measure of insight into the priority placed on bodies, whereby women looking for men are looking for financial security, sincerity, humour, and it is they who offer physical attractiveness in return. Women looking for men place far less emphasis on physical traits and more on to hobbies and interests. Men looking for men, in contrast, look for physical attractiveness in both their partner and themselves. This is not solely a gendered issue, in the sense that body dissatisfaction can and does affect everyone regardless of orientation or numerous other descriptors that intersect with your gender; rather what is notable is that the unifying factor in disproportionate concern with the body is the body being subject to scrutiny by men.

"Much of gay life was centred in bars, a competitive environment where looks and money were the only things you could judge about people . . . how else was he supposed to meet someone to love and to love him except with his looks?" 1

Men are not inculcated from birth to alter their bodies to make themselves desirable in the same way women are, and are not subject to the same intense physical scrutiny, and yet incidences of bulimia and anorexia are much higher in homosexual men than heterosexual men, indicating sexual orientation as an additional factor. They use more diuretics, they have more problems with binge eating and they are more insecure about their body than heterosexual men. There is a disparity between LGBT movements to undermine body shaming and the bars and clubs that elevate this superficiality, and are even predicated on it.

"When you are invisible – when you are not represented and you are not shown to be valued – there is a sense of disconnect, inferiority and not-belonging." 1

This fracturing of the LGBT community compounds the shame element, whereby even without the same heteronormist pressure there is still a sense of an ideal to be achieved. Living and working within the heterosexual by default, patriarchal society limits the self-acceptance of LGBT-identified people and reifies the idea that if you do not fit within the boundaries of ‘conventional beauty,’ then you are not beautiful or desirable. This is drilled and instilled into us from a young age.

This is a women’s issue and an LGBT issue and a human issue. This is a sad, all too real message we receive from society. Body positivity is the only way to go.

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The Cambridge Art Salon has just celebrated its first birthday. Tell us a bit about the journey so far, and how it all got started.

I set up the Salon after a studio for 21 artists on Newmarket Rd was threatened with closure in 2010 when its premises was earmarked for development by Travelodge. Through literally just talking to as many people as possible about our plight – at parties, in the bank – I somehow managed to secure new premises, with more studio space and a gallery. The Salon was formed in April 2011, and officially opened in September 2011.

What kind of work can we expect to find, at the Salon?

We showcase a vibrant range of work in the gallery – from installation, sound art or illustration, to photography, in the studio – any member of the public can apply to show with us or take up a means that we invite artists of all levels. We have an ‘open door’ policy which out to marginalised groups – how so?

The magazine is a voice for women all over the world who are working together, setting up businesses, going for their dreams. It launched on International Women’s Day 2010 and has gone from strength to strength. Check the FB group – it’s massive.

How, if at all, you feel your identity/ sexuality impacts upon your art/ writing choices?

As a business coach for creatives and in my work at the Art Salon I work with both genders and have no preference. I really love working with men who have imaginative ideas and need the help, too.

I’ve done a lot of writing on feminism over the years and have gone through phases of exploring gender a lot in my personal, more experimental work. At 16 I started writing about feminism for a girls’ magazine and interviewed countless women on what feminism meant to them – because of this, I was the youngest ever intern-writer on Britain’s only feminist monthly monthly “globe” in the 1990s. Throughout university while reading English, I was a big fan of French feminist thinkers like Helene Cixous and especially the 1970s and reared me on Germaine Greer. But in the context of motherhood, the reality is that it’s exhausting to deny the reality of the body. We all need to sleep! And while they may be well up on the latest hip ‘status of women in the capitalist machine’ zeitgeist theory, not everyone in the arts, or any sector, really respects that your child’s been up all night! I’ve been really touched by the understanding shown to me though by those that do. It took me a good few months before I felt able to say to people: ‘no I can’t meet with you today / take a call / talk about business because I am with my son’. When I was able to start leaving him with other people things got easier – but even then I was shocked at the bond between us and hard it was for me to leave him. The body is a powerful, beautiful thing – so is love.

More art! And skydives to help the Art Salon raise money. We are always open to volunteers and artists getting involved, particularly keen for students to join us and even set up their own student Cambridge Art Salon society to help them engage with art and the community. Everyone would like to know more please do email info@cambridgeartshalon.org.uk

You also write for ‘Inspirational woman magazine’ – tell us about this.

I think my generation were brought up to expect to be able to transcend perceived or imposed limitations of the body – to challenge biological constraints that & the very notion that the biological determines gender roles. To a certain extent this is true – I have grommashed other mums on Mat Leave from high powered jobs with my tales of writing funding applications while breast feeding (how? I just watch daytime telly while feeding!). But in the context of motherhood, the reality is that it’s exhausting to deny the reality of the body. We all need to sleep! And while they may be well up on the latest hip ‘status of women in the capitalist machine’ zeitgeist theory, not everyone in the arts, or any sector, really respects that your child’s been up all night! I’ve been really touched by the understanding shown to me though by those that do. It took me a good few months before I felt able to say to people: ‘no I can’t meet with you today / take a call / talk about business because I am with my son’. When I was able to start leaving him with other people things got easier – but even then I was shocked at the bond between us and hard it was for me to leave him. The body is a powerful, beautiful thing – so is love.

I was saddened to see feminism today splintered so very much – but less and less academic notions of sexuality itself are as important to me as authenticity.

I am co-authoring a book that is being published by Inspirational Woman Magazine in 2013 which explores notions of a modern day sisterhood – which is about the power of women working together all over the world. It’s in aid of Women For Women International, who empower female survivors of war. Reading some of their stories while breast feeding my son was the most humbling feeling in my life. For me, feminism is about women working together to help stop this kind of travesty ever happening again – not nipicking at people’s marital or sexual choices. Love knows no gender – that is just my personal belief. There are feminists out there who are more separatist. It’s about freedom of choice.

I think my generation were brought up to expect to be able to transcend perceived or imposed limitations of the body – to challenge biological constraints that & the very notion that the biological determines gender roles. To a certain extent this is true – I have grommashed other mums on Mat Leave from high powered jobs with my tales of writing funding applications while breast feeding (how? I just watch daytime telly while feeding!). But in the context of motherhood, the reality is that it’s exhausting to deny the reality of the body. We all need to sleep! And while they may be well up on the latest hip ‘status of women in the capitalist machine’ zeitgeist theory, not everyone in the arts, or any sector, really respects that your child’s been up all night! I’ve been really touched by the understanding shown to me though by those that do. It took me a good few months before I felt able to say to people: ‘no I can’t meet with you today / take a call / talk about business because I am with my son’. When I was able to start leaving him with other people things got easier – but even then I was shocked at the bond between us and hard it was for me to leave him. The body is a powerful, beautiful thing – so is love.

[Find the Cambridge Art Salon at 29 Cromwell road, just off Mill road.]
MUSCLES & CURVES

BY JADE POLLARD-CROWE
"I predominantly feel the desire to dress smartly; to present my body in a boyish, dapper manner. However, when I get the urge to dress in a way that society would class as feminine, I do, and whilst doing so I have not let go of my boyish identity. My body is both natural and what I have made it, I enjoy both the muscles and curves and have come to a place where the two can co-exist."

Hello! This is me waving a friendly hello from FLACK Magazine, a local Cambridge project dedicated to giving voice and a platform to those outside of the usual channels – specifically, people who have been homeless, sofa-surfing, and generally in transition from chaos to order. We’re a charity, a social enterprise, and for those of us involved, sometimes an unhealthy addiction. So when I was approached to contribute something to [no definition], I thought: why not indulge and write a sneaky, sincere plug?

For those of you with boring jobs, you’re all going to hate me. After years of retail, menial, and other travesties that needs must, I’ve finally landed a job that I’m proud of. In charge of marketing and sales, my job’s to represent all that happens at FLACK to the world out there: all the craziness and creativity and small victories. The experience of being homeless, of being below what society considers worth its time, is an extraordinarily destructive position. Self-esteem is eroded, and it’s hard to climb your way out of the cycle. Many end up way beyond the pale, off the radar.

Two words in a nutshell sum up why what we’re doing is unique: one is TRUST, and the other is CREATIVITY. Simply put, when you pick up one of our magazines, everything you see is contributed by someone who’s been homeless – all the artwork, articles, poetry, everything. When we work with people, it’s not from a position of “Prove yourself. Prove you’re looking for work, willing to sort yourself out, not going to steal.” It’s more, “What can you do? What makes YOU feel good?” All the progress that in other agencies is tentatively exacted through draconian rule is here at FLACK built through trusting relationships. We rely on the individual’s innate creativity and passion to be their motivating force. In humanistic psychology, this force is called the Actualising Tendency – the belief that people are inherently motivated towards bettering themselves, given the right conditions to flourish.

One of our resident artists, Julian Raphael, describes being homeless as losing all currency. Not just monetary, but social too. You fall into a black hole where there’s no return: you’re a bum, worth zero. FLACK is not about problems – it’s about potential. Leave the story you’re lost in at the door and think about creating something positive for yourself. Write an article, make a decent cup of tea, do something cathartic with our film unit. Just have a chat, even. So long as it’s helping you escape whatever cycle you’re trapped in.

Basically, what I’m saying is, I love my job. And you should too. All the inspiring things that happen here aren’t always visible, and if this ramble helps you see what I mean, then it’s done its job. If you’re not convinced, why not come join us for our 1pm Wednesday lunch? It’s open to everyone. We’re located on the corner of Sturton & New Street, City Life House. Come say hello!

[ed: flip us over & take a look at this issue’s front cover to see some of Wes’ artwork.]
Gay rodeo events have purposefully been tailored to provide both animal and human participants with the safest environment possible. The IGRA imposes specific rules related to animal welfare, such as: prohibiting electric prods in bucking chutes; policing the types of spurs used; using a non-painful fleece flank strap for bucking events; having a vet on site for the duration of every rodeo. The IGRA website provides more information on animal welfare.

There were 20 rodeos a year on the IGRA (International Gay Rodeo Association) circuit, at locations across the US and Canada – and at season’s end, the contestants with the highest points in each event receive invitations to the World Gay Rodeo finals.

There’s a misconception that bull-riding is a cruel sport – what do you do to ensure the bull’s welfare is taken care of? Gay rodeo events have purposefully been tailored to provide both animal and human participants with the safest environment possible. The IGRA imposes specific rules related to animal welfare, such as: prohibiting electric prods in bucking chutes; policing the types of spurs used; using a non-painful fleece flank strap for bucking events; having a vet on site for the duration of every rodeo. The IGRA website provides more information on animal welfare.

You weren’t brought up around rodeo – so what is it that brought you to bull riding? A friend of mine went to one of the rodeo schools and told me how much fun it was. Of course he only did it the one time and decided you should really have insurance for that shit [laughs]. I went to check it out, thinking I’d just try it the once as well, but I ended up loving it. It’s probably the most challenging thing I’ve ever done – it combines mental challenge, physical challenge and, you know, not-dying into one very short time period of six seconds!

What’s it like to ride bulls? It’s definitely not a good sport if you’re a perfectionist! I’ve been riding for maybe seven years now, and I read somewhere that the professionals – the guys who get paid millions to do this – only ‘cover’ [last the six seconds required to qualify] their bulls 50% of the time. So if the pros fail half the time, I probably show up and, being an amateur, fail 95% of the time! So mostly I go to rodeos, try my ass off, and don’t make my time! Which sucks, especially when you’re missing it by things like 0.25 of a second!

So what keeps you going back? Because when it all comes together and you just let your body do what it knows how to do, the bull leads you forward and you just get this brief moment of… really, amazing experience! I don’t even know how to describe it. There’s nothing better than having a good ride – even just walking around the rodeo afterwards, having people come up to you and pat you on the back and say “good ride, cowboy”.

I remember a one-day rodeo in Vegas a few years back. Usually rodeo events are two days, so we joke that we fuck up on Saturday and remember how to do it on Sunday. But this one you just had one shot. I hadn’t been to a rodeo in a while, bull-riding was the last event of the day, and it’d been 100 degrees all day. I’d been standing around in my gear, dunking my head in a bucket of iced water to keep cool, and I was so excited to be ridin’ again I just made this stupid rookie move. I practically came out of the chute before the bull – he just dumped me in a second! And I had no Sunday time, no nothing. I couldn’t believe it! So I was sitting nursing my ego over a beer afterwards, and these girls came over to tell me how amazing my ride was. I said “y’know, I usually hope for a better ride than that” and this girl just reverts “Whatever. You just climbed on a bull!!” And for all I give myself a hard time about it, when I step back and think about it I’m like ‘hell yeah! Because even though you didn’t make your time, you climbed on a fucking 2000lb bull and tried!”

“What when it all comes together and you just let your body do what it knows how to do, the bull leads you forward.”

What’s the significance of the International Gay Rodeo Association, as opposed to regular rodeo? Aside from the drag race & goats, all rodeos have the same events. But gay rodeo lets men and women compete equally. In straight rodeos, you just don’t see women riding bulls, and you don’t see men riding barrel, which is considered a ‘women’s event’ for some reason. It’s kind of redneck; women aren’t ‘supposed’ to ride bulls! In the same way, you won’t see many women doing the administrative roles in the way you do in gay rodeo.

There’s definitely not as many women as men in gay rodeo, but that’s just economics: men have more disposable income, you can get really technical and political about it!

Also, I would just never feel very comfortable at a straight rodeo, competing behind the chutes – being female for one, being gay for another, especially if I did better than the boys. I hate to make big generalisations, but rodeo is still pretty ‘small town’ and people can get stupid. A large group of stupid people can be dangerous and it’s already a dangerous sport – I don’t want some straight boys playing some joke they think would be ‘funny’ on ‘the one girl bull-riider’ and getting my ass killed because of it.

You’re one of few women bull-riders in the circuit – why do you think that is, and how is that for you? Typically women can compete in the professional bull-riders’ association [the straight bull-riding group], there’s no rule that says they can’t, but there is a rule that says women can’t compete in high school rodeo. Now to stay in PBR, you have to keep up a certain standing in the rankings. If the boys are riding all through high school, joining PBR at 18, of course he’s going to be better. There’s no way she’s going to be the standing to keep her membership, much less compete and win. So until that rule gets reversed, you just won’t see many women bull-riders!!
Sometimes I wish there were more around, but do love my gay boys so I can’t really complain! It doesn’t really bother me: it’s not like there’s a lack of competition. I consider myself my own competition. No one else is going to ride the bull for me; I go out there and either fuck it up, or get it right, and I get scored based on my skill, how well I stayed in control etc. – it has nothing to do with anyone else. It’d be handy if more women competed, because then the prize money would be higher! But it’s certainly never paid the bills before, so I don’t count on that!

Do you think being gay has made it easier or harder to get into bull-riding? I wouldn’t see it as an added benefit at any point! I think, in a certain way women could get away with bull-riding in straight rodeo and the guys would be okay about it, so long as she wasn’t gay. Being gay as well, I’m just a certain kind of competition that they just really have to beat – otherwise they would look ‘less of men’! So I’m basically just a threat, which doesn’t help anything. It’s just that I have to prove myself on so many levels, it’d get kind of complicated.

What have been the best and worst things about your career so far?

Best – getting to travel around. I love things about your career so far?

What’s been one of the most unexpected things since you started bull-riding?

It surprised me just how much of a mental sport it can be: it’s not something you can just muscle through. I suppose that’s true of a lot of sports; you can psych yourself in or out of it so quickly, that’s really a huge challenge just to keep up that side of it, for sure.

Has bull-riding changed how you experience your body?

Yeah, definitely feeling old! I can feel the rain coming in my bones, now! [laughs] My chiropractor said my body is like a 60 year old’s! Does that count as experiencing my body? I hope about and it takes me fifteen minutes just to get to the fridge for a beer after a rodeo; which is obviously why I have to keep a cooler next to the bed.

What advice would you give to someone wanting to start out in gay rodeo?

Just fucking do it, man! Life is short! If you wanna do it, get it done: you’re going to have a blast. There’s no way it can go wrong, really. [Other than being trampled by a 2000lb bull!] Oh well, you know, life has its risks! [laughs]

Honesty, even if you just try it once, it’s one hell of an experience for sure. Everyone’s always so welcoming in gay rodeo – from leaning out their gear to giving you pointers – it’s just good energy, good people to be around, a lot of fun. Just wear lots of pads!

“Everyone’s always surprised that I live in the city & don’t know how to ride horses!”

Do you think it changes how other people perceive you?

In lots of different ways, yeah. Everyone’s always surprised that I live in the city, and that I don’t know how to ride horses! You wear a huge buckle like that around and everyone notices; it always starts conversations, peoples’ reactions are interesting. On the one hand there’s the guy who assumes you’re a tourist, so tends to pander you more, and then there’s all the drunken bar conversations! I think you’d have to ask those other people how they perceive me, though!

You won the World Gay Rodeo Champion in 2009, which is pretty impressive, how was that for you?

It was pretty damn awesome, actually! That was a rough season; I spent most of it injured. The finals was a two-day event, I hadn’t made my Saturday ride, so everything was down on the Sunday ride. That’s a hell of a lot of pressure! I kept trying to tell myself it was no big deal! I just remember sitting behind the chutes thinking ‘This is it. This is not going down any other way. I am fucking riding this steer, and this is just how it’s gonna go!’ – and sometimes you can get away with that! I went out there and did just that.

The funny thing was, when I went up at the awards ceremony to get my certificate, they’d run out of the papers they printed it on. The guy just hands me this blank piece of paper, everyone’s clapping and I’m just stood there like “what the fuck?” and he hisses “just pretend!” so I have to be all “Oh! Great! Yay!” They mailed me the real one a few days later! [laughs]

None of this, however, helps to prepare you for the experience of being LGBT in what are still very religiously conservative societies.

At the end of second year, before everyone left Cambridge for their year abroad, we were given a ‘Dos and (mainly) Don’ts in the Middle East’ talk to help prepare us for our time abroad. Don’t compliment people’s possessions, as they will feel obligated to give them to you (particularly awkward with an engagement ring). As a man, don’t ever inquire after another man’s wife, fiancé or girlfriend. Don’t accept invitations to someone’s house the first time they ask, it’s just politeness; if they mean it, they’ll insist. And so on. Vital advice, undoubtedly: forgetting it can lead to all sorts of misunderstandings and miscommunications (like the time a friend bought me a brand new pair of shoes, simply because I had said I liked his).

None of this, however, helps to prepare you for the experience of being LGBT and the organisation I was interning with, I found accommodation in a flat that served as the favourite hang-out for a group of young, rebellious Jordanians who worked in film, art, TV; evenings were spent rapidly draining bottles of cheap local whisky while discussing the latest news from Syria, updates of the situation in Palestine or preparing banners for the following Friday’s protest.

An interesting, open-minded group of people, but I was still not comfortable discussing my sexuality with them: I worried what effect that revelation would have on my new friendships. It came as a shock, therefore, when, at the end of one of many whisky drinking evenings, my friend Mansur (another intern) had changed for reasons of privacy! and I was chatting and he, out of the blue, described his own homosexual experiences while at university in Beirut (a city renowned in the GQ Middle East for its vibrant gay community).

None of this, however, helps to prepare you for the experience of being LGBT in any country, as it is simply not acceptable to have same-sex relationships in Jordan.

I spent my year abroad in Jordan, a Sunni Muslim majority country; with a small Christian minority; followers of both religions are generally (not always) stricter in their interpretation of their faiths than their counterparts in the UK. The power in the country is centred on the king, Abdullah II, who hires and fires prime ministers as he sees fit (the current incumbent is the fourth in two years).

Jordan has not been completely untouched by the Arab Spring (protests take place in the centre of Amman, the capital, every Friday) but stability is what the country, a key Western ally, prides itself on; there will be no Tahrir there.

So, when I arrived in Amman in October 2011, I was fully expecting to spend the entire year firmly back in the closet. Through someone at
only person to say something similar; Jamal, a Spanish-Jordanian friend who was born in Spain but has lived in Jordan since he was around 10 years old once said that if he was still living in Europe, he ‘would be at least bi’.

These people were aware that their own sexualities did not fit neatly into the expectations of their society and therefore chose, or were forced, to hide that part of themselves; who knows how many other Jordanians have chosen the same path?

But not all people do follow the same tactics. Some LGBT people in Jordanian society are open about their sexuality, at least amongst their friends, and comfortable in their identities. The small LGBT community in the capital is focused around one particular café/bar near the main tourist drag (ironically named Rainbow Street) where people can relax with friends and meet new people, comfortable in the knowledge that nobody will judge them or make unpleasant comments.

However, although it is easy to forget, this place is still in the Middle East; there are certain limits. There is no dancing or displays of affection and little physical contact between people of any gender; it’s more a place to sit and chat than to party. In case the patrons of the café needed a reminder that this is still a conservative society that views all things LGBT as alien and sacrilegious, last year the café was closed down after people complained about two men kissing one evening. After the owner smoothed things over with the authorities, it reopened and was soon full again, but that incident forcefully burst the bubble of those who imagine that all of Jordan feels the way they do.

One evening, I too was reminded that these concepts are often incomprehensible to most Jordanians. Sitting with Mansur and Omar, another friend, we somehow began talking about LGBT rights in the UK: the campaign for equal marriage and issues to do with transgender rights.

“These people were aware that their own sexualities did not fit neatly into the expectations of their society and therefore chose, or were forced, to hide that part of themselves.”

I mentioned that the government plans to allow people to register their sex on their passports as ‘X’ rather than ‘M’ or ‘F’ if they felt they did not want to be described as either of the traditional genders. Omar couldn’t understand the concept of not wanting to be described as either male or female and asked me whether gay men would have to register as ‘X’ from now on. I explained that they wouldn’t, that this was an option for people to choose if they wanted.

Concepts that are becoming accepted and mainstream in the UK and other countries are just completely incomprehensible to many people here.

And this, I think, is the heart of the issue. Western ideas on sexuality and gender are often completely baffling to people in the Middle East. If the situation is to change, and people whose sexuality does not fit the traditional mould are to be able to live their lives fully and freely, that change has to come from within; at the moment, these issues are seen by many as just another problem forced onto the Arabs by the colonising West.

Those Jordanians that are comfortable with talking about these topics often work with Westerners, or have travelled or lived abroad. They are very much part of a minority that do not share the views of the great majority, and even they are under pressure to conform to prevailing norms.

The question now facing Jordanians is whether they can capitalise on the winds of change blowing through the Middle East to bring about a more open, accepting Arab society, or whether that society will turn inwards and become yet more conservative.

**Cindy Segura**
The SCOF Manifesto

SCOF: Society for the Celebration of Failure

SCOF is all for

FREEDOM: to be a subject, to take up space, to re/create yourself

RESISTANCE: of heterosexist, misogynist societal norms

QUEER PLEASURE: in (being) revolting

FAILURE: defined as

1. an act or instance of failing or proving unsuccessful; lack of success
2. nonperformance of something due, required, or expected
3. a subnormal quantity or quality; an insufficiency
4. deterioration or decay
5. a condition of being bankrupt by reason of insolvency

1. In a society in which success has become synonymous with spending, suits, straightness and the succession of offspring (esp. sons), the Society for the Celebration of Failure invites you to reject success. Failure offers an alternative.

2. Heterosexist mainstream society demands, requires and expects:
   a. you to only fuck people within and according to its designated gender and genital guidelines. SCOF says consentfully fuck anyone you want. SCOF is pro-lovers.
   b. you to please remain within the designated gender boundaries and remain legible at all times. SCOF encourages you to fail to fulfil this request by dramatically destroying, flaunting, dancing across and by any other means disrespecting these boundaries, (thereby exposing the impossibility of neutrality). Welcomes strap-ons.
   c. you to get a job that reproduces and reinforces subordination of “minorities”. SCOF suggests you don’t; offers as alternative radical queer feminist activism and doing whatever you want all the time.

3. SCOF asks with suspicion: sufficient for what purpose? Fuck that shit. Invites you to embrace, celebrate and promote failing to be a pawn of the patriarchy.

4. SCOF sees beauty and takes strength in failure, including deterioration and decay, as a form of resistance aesthetics. SCOF celebrates the scuzzy and unkempt. SCOF is body-positive and pro-sweat.

5. As a failure, your “liabilities” (freedoms) exceed your “assets” (appropriate productive and reproductive capacities/intentions). Fail to be solvent.

BE A SPECTACULAR FAILURE

by Sophie Barnes