Coalition

The magazine of the Greater Manchester Coalition of Disabled People

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[inside front cover]

Coalition, the official magazine of the Greater Manchester Coalition of Disabled People, aims to act as a forum for debate, analysis, and expression of opinion on all issues relating to disabled people.

Coalition does not knowingly publish any material which is offensive or demeaning to other oppressed groups of people.

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What Do You Think?

Which world famous golfer made the

following comment in a recent radio

interview?

"...once I got to the green

I was a spaz"

Read on for the answer!

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EDITORIAL COMMENT

This issue of “Coalition” has come about through the GMCDP Disabled People’s Movement conference on 24 September 2005. The members of the “Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Disabled People’s Workshop” not only brought examples of barriers to the plenary session for feedback, but also some solutions. One of these solutions was a Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Disabled People’s themed magazine – which we are very pleased to bring you now.

You will find some of the issues raised in that workshop described in more detail in this magazine. The barriers faced both in the LGBT communities and disabled people’s communities, but also the more positive welcoming of LGBT disabled people.

From the tentative initial contact of a gay man with a disabled people’s group, through to the experiences of a Deaf lesbian involved in the women’s and lesbian and gay movements over the last 20 years, a wide range of experiences are reflected in these pages.

It is clear that there is still a long way to go before disabled people, and especially Black, lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or Transgender disabled people will find that they have unrestricted access to the mainstream of the community and commercial scene, whether by the change in attitudes of non-disabled people, or through physical changes to buildings.

The articles in this issue of Coalition do, however, show a humorous as well as realistic approach to the oppression faced in everyday life, and will be a valuable addition to the wealth of knowledge that “Coalition” has built up over the years.

As this magazine does not reflect the whole spectrum of LGBT disabled people’s experiences and issues, we would welcome more contributions for future magazines, especially if there are issues you would like to highlight which have not been covered in this edition.

If you would like information about lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender organisations or groups in Greater Manchester, please contact the GMCDP Information Unit, who will be pleased to provide any assistance they can.

Linda Marsh

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I would like to thank Linda Marsh for the work she has put in, editing this edition of Coalition, and appreciation also to Brian Hilton in supporting Linda, whilst I was unwell.

(Ed)

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THE STING

Extracting The Urine

Is there anything more depressing, demeaning and irritating than seeing the men-in-suits trying to be trendy / street / chic / with-it / bad / hip / cool (or whatever)? Who will ever forget William Hague (who at 16 was already sounding like a dinosaur) trying to connect with the youf by prancing around at the Notting Hill carnival in a baseball cap? To be fair to Hague he does seem to have learnt from this embarrassment and is more popular than ever (though that isn’t too difficult) now that he has dropped the gimmicks and the non-sense.

Perhaps this is a lesson which can be learnt by the DRC’s Bert Massie and David, just call me Dave, Cameron, the new leader of Tory-Lite. Sorry, but I really did piss myself at the launch of the uber-cool “are we taking the dis” campaign featuring the Poodle and the Pedigree.

I really don’t know what I found the most ridiculous, the photo of Bert and Dave, soberly suited and seemingly grimacing, or the £1.2m campaign itself.

It’s ironic that the campaign should be launched so soon after French Connection announced it was dropping the FCUK brand, because the impact had been lost; FCUK is no longer seen as rebellious, trendy or clever. For many it is now dated, hackneyed and irritating.

The pretence at swearing is no longer big and clever. So why not go the whole hog and drop the pretence? “Are We Taking The Piss?”, would have been a whole lot better, guaranteed to get extra attention and is much easier to answer; Yes, you are and in running this campaign so are we!

Even better still, would have been the more direct “Just Stop Taking the Piss” campaign. The posters could feature disabled children in coffins as a symbol of the failure of the “care” system; disabled young people selling The Big Issue in honour of an education that fails to prepare us for work; disabled people in prison, jailed for having a mental illness; battered and bruised disabled people in recognition of the abuse we can expect if we live to be old!

You never know, if the Just Stop Taking the Piss campaign really catches on (and given the vogue for retro design) perhaps it will be time to dust off all those old “Piss on Pity” t-shirts. Maybe updated and in the style of those sectarian football shirts depicting a fan peeing on the shirt of a rival club; we could have a disabled person peeing on a whole host of people and organisations.

It’s Not Rocket Science

It has never been more popular to be a disabled person than now, or so it would appear judging by the number of reports and reviews flying around; Downing Street’s Life Chances of disabled people, the Tories’ making “disabled policies” central to their review process; the DRC’s Changing Britain for Good to name but three (and I’m sure that the Lib Dems will have 10million policies in the pipeline, one for each disabled person in the country).

So in the spirit of our time I offer you D=ABC4U: The Scientific Guide to Disabled People:

A is for Access: You’ve got it we want it!

B is for Business: You’ve got it we want it!

C is for Control: You’ve got it we want it!

4 is for Education, for Employment, for Independence, for Equality.

U is for Unity.

It really is that simple! Now if that isn’t worth the Nobel Prizes for Literature, Science and obviously Peace, then what is?

Out Of Focus

It’s not often that I find myself agreeing with Andy Rickell (former BCODP Director and now Executive Director for diversity, politics and planning at Scope – it worries me that some people have job titles that sound like Directorates in the former USSR), but I couldn’t have agreed more with his recent article in DN; headed “Disabled people and their organisations need to get together and refocus to get their voice heard”.

Or rather I couldn’t have agreed more with the first 7 words: “Does it matter who I am? No”.

I do, however, have a bit of a problem with the rest of his attempt to refocus, especially the bits concerning “disability organisations”.

Rickell suggests that “disability organisations and disabled people …

need to re-think how we work together”. He further suggests that the problem lies in groups being impairment specific. To quote Rickell, “historically, disability organisations have been set up for people with specific impairments”.

He’s almost there mind you, just delete the words “with specific impairments”. Andy you don’t seem to grasp the major difference between a disabled person’s organisation and a disability organisation. To make it easy for you, you used to work for the former and now you work for the latter.

The problem isn’t that we need to better learn how to play together, the problem is that there is no place for non-representative, non-accountable organisations for disabled people.

We don’t need “a new way of thinking” we need to win the fight to speak for ourselves, represent ourselves and finally kick into touch the parasites in the disability industry who feed off us.

We don’t need to “think differently about who we are”, we do, however, still need to find a better way of getting disabled people’s organisations to work together.

In the 80s BCODP was formed to bring together organisations of disabled people. The diverse nature of our organisations reflected the diverse nature of our lives and interests. The challenge for BCODP was to develop a common cause that reflected our collective experience.

The principles underpinning the formation of BCODP are as relevant today as they were 20 years ago. What we still need to do is to find a way of making them work.

Gary Neville – An Apology

On behalf of disabled people around the world, though obviously very few in Manchester, I would like to apologise to Gary Neville for the distress caused by the recent publicity surrounding his abuse of a disabled person’s parking bay at the Trafford Centre.

Obviously there has been a major misunderstanding here, which no doubt stems from people who are jealous of the world’s greatest football team and its legendary captain, which is the usual explanation for any criticism.

At the moment I can’t quite think what that might be, but I’m sure that Gary Neville will be able to explain himself. Unusually, however, the ten minutes spent in the disabled people’s bay seems to have rendered him speechless.

I would, therefore, also like to apologise to Gary Neville for thinking that he is just another in a long line of footballers who seem to think that they can do as they please, in fact just another selfish, arrogant bastard.

Carry On Minister

I am truly inspired by Anne McGuire, the minister for disabled people. She seems to have got right into the spirit of the Taking the Piss campaign. At the launch she is quoted as saying “we need to be careful we do not assume that politicians do not reflect society as a whole”.

Whatever she’s on I want some. Though it’s bloody scary that a minister seems to think the 600-odd clowns in Parliament are reflective of the rest of us. I really would suggest that Anne gets out more!

I’m also tickled by her statement that she “knows many politicians at Westminster and in local government who are blind and have MS and cancer”. Come on then, name them!

You’ll be telling us next that “some of my best friends are disabled”!

Sex Chat

A disabled woman has recently been convicted of benefit fraud after it was found that she was working on a sex chat line whilst also signing on.

Following sentencing judge Anthony Hammond stated, “this is the sort of job a disabled person can do, but there are other forms of telephone work which don’t involve deluding the sort of people who wish to patronise chat lines”!

Scorpio

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THE CYBER SAPPHIC CAFÉ AT THE EDGE OF THE UNIVERSE

Rhona and Jade sit in the “virtual café” of life and discuss their experiences as disabled lesbians coming from very different backgrounds, their frank exchanges raise some interesting issues.

Rhona: Hi Jade, great to see you again and carry on our conversation from last time. Even though we know quite a bit about each other now, we’ve never really talked about how we feel about being disabled lesbians. I wonder how similar or different they are? How do you think you would describe yourself, in terms of sexual identity?

Jade: I would describe myself as a lesbian, but I don’t think that sexuality is always “fixed for life”.  I used to think - although I’d say I didn’t actually “think” about it at all - that I was heterosexual.  So … who knows for the future? I can’t imagine changing again, but never say never!! How about you, Rhona?

Rhona: I think of myself very definitely as a lesbian, although in my younger life I did have sexual relationships with men. And I still have close friendships with some men. But, from about age 14 I have felt like a lesbian. I've been in a committed relationship with a woman for the last 15 years and we've brought up sons together. being a lesbian, to me, feels much more than a "sexual" identity ... it is like a whole part of what makes up the person I am. It’s also very tied up with my sense of myself as a woman.

Jade: Yes, I can identify with that in some way. I would say I am definitely a “woman focussed woman”, it is more than sexuality. Though I have some old male friends, and I wouldn’t want to lose them, I wouldn’t make an effort with men now, they don’t really feature much in my life, and I don’t particularly want them to. Take, for instance, being in a room full of women – its just so special!! But your view on sexuality seems to be different to mine.

Rhona: It's a complicated issue (hahaha). One thing I really do hate though is when straight people assume that because I am a lesbian, I am also very "anything goes" about sexual issues. Not that I'm a “Mary Whitehouse”, but I do have quite strong feelings that sex is very commodified in this society, although this seems to be quite an unpopular view to hold.

I was involved in the women's movement in the 70's and 80's when there was a lot of interesting discussion about sex /sexuality, and also issues like pornography and sexual practices which just seems to be missing these days. I think that sometimes having certain views or attitudes or even just questioning things gets you labelled as old fashioned or prudish or boring or uncool ... but I think that is also a way of stifling debate. What do you think, Jade?

Jade: I struggle with issues such as pornography, my instinct is that it is exploitative. As you, I feel there is so much emphasis on being sexual or “sexy” these days. I suppose I’m also more of the “old school” as I don’t like bodies (male or female) being turned into objects just to look at as a “thing”.

So many judgements are made based on physical appearance, and I think that’s an issue in terms of disabled people as well as around gender and sexuality. As disabled people we have often been brought up to be ashamed of our bodies and to hide them, or we may not have the confidence or resources to explore “how” we want to look, our image or whatever. Especially if using personal assistance either paid or unpaid. And what if we don’t want to fit into what is expected? Why should we go for any stereotyped look – butch-dyke, lipstick-lesbian, masculine, feminine, ? The list of issues could go on and on, its far too much to go into today … perhaps another time!

Rhona: You mentioned being a “woman focussed woman”, do you think of yourself as part of the lesbian and gay "Community"?

Jade: What is “the lesbian and gay community” is what I’d question first. If you mean more political and support oriented events and groups then I’d incline more towards that than the pub and club “scene”, and I certainly feel very comfortable at events for lesbians and bisexual women, but I’m not sure, apart from localised ones, that there is a specific “community”. I have a good group of friends and acquaintances, and the other women they know and trust who I meet at parties and gatherings, who I’d think of as my community in a way. The way my life has been recently I’ve not been in the position to get involved in LGBT groups and events as much as I would have liked, so there is probably a “community” out there I’ve just not got into yet. How about you?

Rhona: For me, the lesbian and gay community is what I want it to be! Because I have been active in lesbian and gay politics, I do feel part of some community / family, though like every family ... there are some relatives I'd be happy never to meet again! I think, especially as I get older (I'm 50) the sense of (some) shared history is important. Recalling stories, places , and characters from 20 years ago with other lesbians/gay men who were around the same events. My strongest links with the lesbian & gay community are very much on a local level, because I have grown older with them! I also think there is a sense of feeling a "responsibility" towards younger lesbians, that they are part of my community. It can make you feel quite protective because of not wanting them to go through some of the rubbish I went through. Actually thinking about it … it is really much more like "family".

Jade: Funny … that’s how I feel about the Disabled People’s Movement – or the small part of it I’ve been involved in for more than 10 years now. When I got involved it was the first time I could remember in my adult life feeling like I “belonged” somewhere. And as I get to know more disabled LGBT people it just brings the two together so well. But how have you found the experience as a disabled woman in the lesbian and gay community Rhona? Have you experienced barriers or prejudice?

Rhona: Well, the usual complaints about access and also sexism from some gay men, but any community will be bound to reflect what happens in wider society, won’t it? Overall, there is really no more awareness of access issues within the L&G community than there is among the wider community. Every year, the city I live in has a lesbian and gay week of events, which are never interpreted and no access details are provided in publicity. It's been raised with them as an issue, yet nothing happens. In a general way, even when L&G events actually are accessible, there are problems because I am deaf. There is the issue of having to have BSL interpreters. I often don’t feel easy about this because (a) I may not want an interpreter to know I am a lesbian and (b) it can feel very uncomfortable having a heterosexual interpreter interpreting things that are about lesbians and gay men. It makes me feel very exposed. How about you?

Jade:  I’ve encountered the usual not knowing how to engage with a blind person, and access, in general, at one big event I went to left a lot to be desired. Apart from that, nothing major, but I haven’t been “out there” much yet … time will tell on that one!  Then again, I wouldn’t pick up on a lot of things – I miss out on body language, facial expressions, etc.  I don’t know if there is someone there I’ve met before unless they speak to me, so they could so easily avoid me without me knowing. As a Deaf lesbian, have you found there is a difference in the way the Deaf Community view sexuality and the disabled People you have met?

Rhona: It seems quite weird in the Deaf community because on the one hand, there are a high number of "out" lesbians and gay men, yet there is still a lot of prejudice and misinformation. But I think Deaf people tend to be very straightforward and direct and ask outright about things or make their opinions known , so that cultural thing is quite different.

Jade: What about disabled people’s reactions, have you experienced prejudice in relation to you being a lesbian?

Rhona: I don't think it is prejudice, as much as just not realising the full implications of lesbian and gay oppression. Or because of not wanting the oppression to exist, sort of pretending it doesn't exist. For example, many years ago, my partner and I made a conscious decision not to attend weddings. It was a difficult decision arrived at after a lot of thought. We decided that, as the state would not allow us (as lesbians) to marry, it was really contradictory to be going along to celebrate other people's state sanctioned unions. (and it's saved us a fortune by not buying wedding presents! hahaha) But, it was a very political choice ... yet over the years, not many people have been prepared to enter into that discussion about marriage as an institution.

Jade: so, how do you feel about the new Civil Partnership Registration?

Rhona: I feel very suspicious and quite reluctant to embrace it! After all, for years and years that state has told me that my relationship was at first abhorrent…then to be tolerated … and now its telling me that lesbians are almost as acceptable enough to have a near equivalent heterosexual marriage. And I am supposed to jump for joy with being told this. I don’t think so. Also, its brought the whole State Benefits issue even more into light for being an outdated farce. I’ve always been financially independent (if poor) and don’t want to be counted as my partner’s “other half” for benefits purposes and don’t want the State to judge that I should be financially supported by her. I’ve got to my age without being a wife and I certainly don’t want to start now.

Jade: Well, Rhona, I won’t rush out to buy a new suit for your CPR ceremony!!! No, seriously, I’ve really enjoyed this chat. There are so many things to talk about, and I feel we could carry on for a lot longer yet, but I suspect we are going to get chucked out of this café soon because we’ve been here so long!

Rhona: OK, let’s meet at same time next week ..and this time, I’ll buy the cakes!

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BROTHER - I’M NOT AS CAMP AS A ROW OF TENTS

This amusing and moving insight into the emerging life of a Black, young, disabled gay man leaves us hoping for more writing by Coolgay Cripman in future magazines.

It’s January 1989 and I am 5 years old. Me and mum have just moved house from Moss-Side in Manchester, to Withington, just 2 miles down the road.

Things were great at first. We both loved our new place. At least until I was playing with my friends outside and another kid spat on my coat calling me a “black bastard.”

I’ll never forget that gut wrenching feeling the first time I encountered such despicable racism knowing even then, it wouldn’t be the last. It continued for about a year before my older cousin threw a stone at one of them in my defence. I wasn’t comfortable with this at first; however I felt the best thing to do would be to disappear as quickly as possible.

Of course, it didn’t take the angry parents of this young man long to find me, since mine was the only house in the area with a ramp at the front door.

As time went on, I realised that there was nothing “wrong” with the colour of my skin. I became accustomed to dealing with the attempted taunts from kids my own age and adults alike, which was illustrated perfectly when I enrolled at one college in Manchester and was told by a senior member of staff: “You look like a right thug on your I.D. card.”

Mum was horrified and wanted to express this in no uncertain terms, however I decided it would be more appropriate for this to come from me. Let’s put it this way, once I’d finished giving him a verbal dressing down (in the politest possible way of course) he never said anything like that again.

Before I reached the stage of enrolling at college, I had High School to deal with and well this is where life really did become a jumbled web of confusion and anguish. At the age of fifteen, my main priority wasn’t my GCSE coursework as it should have been, more putting my creative skills to the test whilst inventing the most convincing reason for skipping my next P.E. lesson. I would go to any lengths to avoid the nightmare that emerged every time I went into the changing rooms!

Nothing seemed to make sense at the time. I suddenly found my best mate (who shall remain nameless) attractive and wondered what on earth was going on. He must know (I thought). I must be making it so very obvious without even realising.

It wasn’t until I was seventeen that I actually came out to my brother. To my complete surprise he put his arms around me and at first didn’t say anything at all. It didn’t take long for him to tell me he’d known for years! “I still love you” he said discreetly, not something he generally makes a habit of and I know he won’t thank me for publishing that! I think I was more shocked than him in the end.

Like most brothers, we have our disagreements, though one thing I thank him for is his support at a time when I needed it most. He even kept his mouth shut (surprisingly) for two years until I was ready to face the world with what I knew would be a complete bombshell to some of my loved ones.

Things started to change when I became involved in a young persons LGB theatre group. My first production with them was an event in Manchester’s gay village as part of the Mardi Gras festival. I opted for a role behind the scenes as a lighting operator because I simply could not imagine going on stage with a bunch of people who were subconsciously screaming “GAY AND PROUD” throughout every performance.

On the other hand, it was fantastic to be around so many people like me. As a boy, I was surrounded by homophobic lyrics in songs. Most of the adults in my life had taught me that queers, faggots, benders, batty men (and the list goes on) ought to be ashamed of their sexuality. My new friends helped me to un-learn a lot of that nonsense. I can’t say it was easy though.

I was soon to regret my decision to keep well away from the stage when I began to really like one of the cast members. For the purposes of this article, I’ll refer to him as Luke.

Luke was a few years older than me. He could have me falling about with laughter without even thinking about it. More than aware that the whole ‘GAY’ thing was very new to me, Luke always took the time to ask how I was feeling, reassuring me when I needed it. Oh and he was gorgeous too! Anyway, to cut a long story short, there was a snogging scene at the very end of the script as the lights faded and the curtains closed. This was between Luke and the character I was cast to play. GUTTED! Especially since I was the one fading the lights, so I had no choice but to watch!

I knew there was going to be another production the following year and that he was likely to be involved, so I told myself that I’d be on stage next year and I was. This paid off as although I didn’t work closely with him on stage, I did get up close and personal at the after show party! Rather typically, I look at him now and wonder what was so attractive about him! The ironic thing was, very few people were aware of my sexuality before the production in June 2003. Then suddenly, a number of people I knew had turned up to watch this play entitled ‘Unveiled’ at Manchester’s Contact Theatre to see me dressed in a shirt and tie full of pink glitter playing a homophobic bully. From that point on, there was no turning back. Everyone was talking about it.

Soon after this, I started spending a little more time on the ‘scene.’ I remember sitting in one bar with my friend and this guy had been looking over at me for ages, before finally asking me for my number. I didn’t stick around for long enough to write it down! (By that I mean I declined his advances.)

It is so very stereotypical though. I used to think “Queer As Folk” was a farce until I had been to Canal Street. If it wasn’t people staring at me and making very obvious remarks about the fact that I use a wheelchair, it was those who were only out for one thing and didn’t hesitate to come and invade my ‘very personal’ space, letting me know exactly what was on their minds. Daunting at first, though I learnt to handle those awkward situations very quickly. I’d shake my head and simply say; “I like a challenge” before politely moving on.

As a result, I quickly decided that the gay scene is an excuse for bitchiness and hypocrisy. I was forever hearing LGB men and women banging on about equality issues, yet there they were excluding me as a disabled person. Even with the DDA, I can’t think of one single place in ‘The Village’ that is fully accessible to disabled people. I also have no idea why the words ‘accessible' and 'toilet’ translate into ‘junk cupboard’ within the gay village. I have seen everything from mops and other cleaning utensils, to boxes and boxes full of condoms when trying to answer essential calls of nature. I’ve heard of practicing safe sex but that is ridiculous!

On the other hand, I had my first public show of affection to my partner in the village, feeling safe in the knowledge that I wouldn’t get beaten up.

It has been a rollercoaster ride so far as my sexuality is concerned. In many ways, I have faced the same barriers as a gay man as I have as a black disabled man. Stereotypes, attitudes, etc and my reason for writing this article was not to simply bore you all with my life story, more to inspire those of you who may be questioning your sexuality that there is light at the end of the tunnel. My relatives didn’t like it at first. Some have accepted it, others have found it more difficult but that is their issue and not mine.

Everybody deals with the issues differently, so I do not claim to be an expert. All I can say is that I now feel completely at ease with my identity. I can also say that being gay does not necessarily mean ‘raving queen’

(apologies for any offence caused.) I still flirt with women and am forever surprised at the number of times when people try to tell me that I’m not gay as a result.

My final thought: BE HAPPY!

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Muscle Fetish

A dyke said to me

“Don’t you love it when those

tasty women athletes

all pumping blood and oxygen

power through

some personal hurdle?”

I love it

when my friend asks me to comb her hair

so her strength is free to paint

intricate visions just for herself.

I love it when she sings

taking minute gasps of air between

each tiny sound, cascades of melody

so light they’re almost gone

before they reach my ears.

I love it when her worn-out, pressured

muscles, trembling with the onslaught

of a work-out she never chose, the burn

which seldom stops, feel a hiatus

which allows her to move and dance.

Dykes dribble over the muscles of dykes

who walk the hills

who mend cars

who dance till dawn

but ignore dykes

who have to lie all day in bed

who cannot direct their muscles

whose muscles tire easily.

Patriarchy told us we mustn’t have muscles

but when they bowl we don’t have to bat...

we can refuse to play cricket.

She lusts after muscles -

I lust for spirit.

Watch out for the spirit of disabled dykes

you may not be able to take

such strength.

Aspen~ ~ ~

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A FUNNY THING HAPPENED TO ME ON THE WAY TO THE DISABILITY MOVEMENT

In this witty recounting of his first involvement in the Disabled People’s Movement, David Colley tells us whether his expectations of homophobia and bobbly jogging bottoms were realised.

A funny thing happened to me on the way to the disability movement: I didn’t experience the homophobia I’d been expecting. Funny, but true.

You see, I’d been out as a gay man long before my impairment kicked in. Long before the tragic but brave stereotypes drove me to a disabled people’s workshop. Long before I’d heard of the social model of disability. And in that time I’d learned to expect pretty widespread negative comments about lesbians and gay men. (Bear in mind this was the 80s, and Kajagoogoo and the News of the World were giving everyone a bad name).

So by the time I shyly slided into that workshop, I was steeling myself for a room of people wearing bobbly jogging pants who would only mention lesbian or gay issues in order to put us down. How wrong could I be? Partially, that’s how much. The jogging pants still dog the movement, but I think it needs saying that, on the whole, we should be proud of how it has supported diversity in its own ranks.

The Independence Festivals (remember those?) made real effort to be inclusive - putting on workshops for disabled queers. UNISON’s national disabled members committee had specific elected spaces for disabled lesbians and gay men. The 90s were a heyday of supportive diversity in the movement. I’d been to different crip events with my boyfriend and received nothing but positive vibes, despite our bad kissing and dancing. I’d even dressed up in a rubber Thunderbird outfit for a crip arts event, and still received no negative reaction. What did a queer gay guy have to do in this community to get insulted? Quite a lot it seemed.

I’ve explored more alternative lifestyles through mates from the movement, than through my non-disabled friends. Performers and writers like Penny Boot, Liz Carr, Matt Fraser and many others all continue to challenge the sexual boundaries that everyone else either takes for granted or tries to impose on us.

The disability movement has been a welcoming place for me as a gay man; a heady mix of sexual diversity - an exciting and fun place, as well as a serious spot for heartfelt campaigning. I even met a boyfriend or two from the movement.

The gay scene, on the other hand, has been universally intimidating and unfriendly for me as a disabled person. I think every adapted toilet in every gay bar in this country is reserved as a changing room for drag queens, cos I’ve hardly ever been able to use one for the crap piled high in them. And that guy who once tripped over my foot in a bar in London and shouted “who left this pushchair here?!” will stick in my memory for a long time. As well as the man who shouted at my mate in a crowded pub for bringing in his ‘dirty wheelchair’. It’s not been a fun ride in queer town for this crip, and no doubt countless others.

So, although there’s real room for improvement, I think we deserve to take some pride in how we’ve organised ourselves, laughed with each other but not ‘at’ each other, and generally been a pretty inclusive movement. And if anyone wants a rubber Thunderbirds outfit, just call me.

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Day Room Attendant

The cleaner isn’t paid

To speak to us…

So we all

Come in early

To chat to her.

Bipolar Disorder

Bipolar Disorder -

If left untreated

Can leave the patient

Capable of success.

Carol Batton

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IS SHE OR ISN’T SHE?

This article by Eowyn Amath raises several interesting points around the issue of visual cues, “recognition” and flirtation.

The famous question from the 70s Harmony hair spray advert has been in my mind a little over the last few weeks, when thinking about vision, image and sexuality.

It’s struck me that though we are supposedly in the time of “queer”, “postmodern” and “anything goes” (whatever all those mean!), so much is still based on the old visual images and stereotypes.

What makes us think “ah yes, she’s a Dyke” or “oh no she’s hetty”? Is “Dyke Spotting” and “Gaydar” based on the visual or chemistry – or a mixture of both?

Though we are supposedly in the era of “lipstick lesbians”, it seems to me that it’s still the short hair, trousers, flat shoes, shirt / zip-up top / jumper look which still gets the “yes she is”, and the styled or longer haired, skirted more fitted clothes look which gets the “no she isn’t”.

As a woman who doesn’t want to look either feminine or masculine, but who can’t stand going to the hair dressers, I find that my long hair (though always tied back) does make people have assumptions about me. Also the fact that though I like plain clothes and now never wear skirts, I still don’t seem to have the “dykey” look.

Now, anyone who knows me well will already know that the last thing I will do is conform, even to a stereotype which is not mainstream, why should I? As far as I am concerned my priority is to feel comfortable, I haven’t, until these discussions with myself and others, really thought much about what I look like to other people – or at least not for years since I escaped the clutches of Mother and trying to fit in with societal expectations.

To throw an additional aspect into the melting pot … what about visually impaired lesbians? How do we “identify” other lesbians when it is all so visually based? Not only how do we spot the Dyke from the Hetty, but how do we identify someone’s gender?

I have been in the mortifying situation of addressing a woman as male because of her voice, as well as referring to a transgender woman (with a male body) as he rather than she, again, I heard the voice, didn’t see her clothes. And how do I work out who is what in order not to make a huge blunder? Does it matter as long as I don’t “assume”?

I may be wrong, but it seems to me that so many assumptions are still made based on visual cues or signs, irrespective of whether we can see these visual signs or not, how can we move away from this to a more rounded process of connecting with people while not assuming?

Then there’s attraction and flirtation … Ten years ago I wrote an article for “Coalition” called “The Mating Game”. I am still faced with some of the same conundrums.

What about the woman who’s fingers totally unnecessarily linger on mine when I’m handing her my money in a shop. Because of the shop it is, I’m 99% sure she’d be a lesbian or bisexual. But … there’s that “blindy” thing. People just don’t know what to do.

Is she “making a connection” by touch rather than sight because that’s what people think you should do with a blind person? Is she flirting? Is she being patronising? How do I know?

My automatic assumption is that she is doing the “blindy” thing as I call it, but what if she isn’t? … what if, by not just returning the “right” smile to her I might be missing the chance of “something beautiful”?

There are many questions encompassing “is she or isn’t she?” … and I don’t have answers! Do you?

~ ~ ~

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psychiatrists

I thought they were valid

And I wasn’t.

National Institute For Clinical Excellence…

No more than two ‘Nice’ biscuits, a week?

‘Sign’ of Zero Tolerance…

“You are Forbidden to yell or swear at the Kafkaesque.”

‘WELCOME.’

Carol Batton

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What Do You Think?

Continued from earlier …

Which world famous golfer made the following comment in a recent radio interview?

"...once I got to the green I was a spaz"

The answer ... Tiger Woods

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THE INVISIBLE COMMUNITY—LESBIANS AND GAY MEN ARE PEOPLE TOO

This thought-provoking article by Ruth Bashall highlights the discrimination faced by many LGBT disabled people in accessing services. It is re-produced by kind permission of NCIL (National Centre for Independent Living) and first appeared in their newsletter ‘independently’ in June 2005.

Society increasingly recognises the human rights of lesbians, gay men, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people. But the lives of many disabled LGBT people are still restricted by institutional and individual discrimination.

Lesbians and gay men living in institutional care usually face at best, social isolation and the ignorance of “care” staff, at worst deliberate attacks on their human rights.

We often face homophobic harassment in care homes and psychiatric institutions and sometimes are moved to another care home or ward when staff discover a lesbian or gay relationship.

Very few social services departments make it easy to discuss sexuality when carrying out Assessments. Fair Access to Care Services (FACS) guidance says that, when assessing someone for a care package, social workers should take account of a person’s age, gender, ethnic group – but does not mention sexuality. (though it does refer to personal relationships’).

There is not a clear message that your difference in sexuality is seen as being a fundamental part of who you are. Not all disabled people’s organisations have an awareness of the needs of LGBT disabled people or link our struggle for human rights with theirs.

For those of us who live in their own homes, there is the decision about whether to “come out” to social services and to care staff. “Coming Out” is not a one off act it is something we have to make a decision about with every new person we meet.

Just being you who are can have a big impact on your day to day life.

In our own homes an insensitive care worker can out us to homophobic neighbours, refuse to work with us appropriately or work with us at all because of their views.

One lesbian for example asked the agency provided by social services to inform workers that she is a lesbian and to check they had no objections yet workers repeatedly asked her if she had a boyfriend

An agency worker asked a gay man if he abused boys

A transgender woman was told that she would have to have male workers

The support worker (provided by a social services day centre) for a young gay man with learning difficulties refused to go with him to a gay men’s social, because the young man “would be at risk”.

Yet this discrimination is usually not recognised.

We are still the invisible community, whatever our impairment. Social care organisations rarely take account of our cultural or support needs as lesbians, gay men or transgender people.

The principle of the independent living movement is that as disabled people, we should be able to make the same choices and exercise the same rights as non disabled people.

This includes not only basic human survival needs, but the right to be part of our communities, to have social and sexual relationships with people of the same or opposite gender, and the right to live free from violence and discrimination.

Direct Payments are one way we can start to gain our rights – whatever our sexuality. For the LGBT community direct payments allow us to have control over who comes into our homes. It allows us to recruit people who respect and understand our life choices, and to be who we are in our own homes and in the community. It allows us to preserve our dignity. It also allows us to be part of our community.

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Diagnosis: QUEER

Through poignant prose, Julie McNamara invites us into her fantasy world, constructed in the oppressive confines of the psychiatrist’s consulting rooms. She turns their intrusive investigations into her sexuality into unexpected pleasures! Photographs by Caglar Kimyoncu.

They think I’m mad, my mates, because I’m seeing a shrink. They may be right, because I keep seeing her...I seek her out in careful corners of my heart. I’ve always been OUT with my mates. But they get uncomfortable with my style. You see it’s all right being disabled, but Mad still makes us nervous, and Queer, well that’s better behind closed doors!

I was a feisty, fucked up female heterosexual when I was first sent to see a Psychiatrist at the age of 19. I had no understanding of identity politics, Lesbian culture or deviant sexuality in any shape or form. Ah, but that was way back then...before I fell in love (or lust?) with my shrink and the world turned inside out!

Now I’m a happily maladjusted Lesbian with gender dysphoria and an identity crisis. That’s good. That means I can still keep seeing a shrink. So what happened in those early years? And where are we going with the treatment plan today?

Well let’s see...

Aged 10 - I was just some ordinary Tomboy from a typically dysfunctional family, pursuing ordinary dreams, occasionally in Father’s clothes.

Aged 13 – I was fondling other female forms, with pre-pubescent fumbles as I hadn’t yet developed my own. (I’m a slow burner.)

Aged 18 – I took to heterosexual behaviour like a duck to water and almost learned to swim.

Aged 19 – Sinking into a depressive state at college far from home, I awoke one morning and wanted to be male. I disclosed my innermost thoughts to the boyfriend in Pizza Hut, Nottingham, who recoiled in disbelief. I was diagnosed with depression, Bulimia and OCD.

Aged 20 – My creative work was spent obsessing on naked flesh, other females’ not my own. There were comments from the nude models at the art studios in college and my Lecturer suggested I might need help. I knew that. But I didn’t know where the Gay club was and didn’t dare ask.

Aged 21 – I had fallen hopelessly and helplessly in love with the shrink at the 4th psych unit I’d been transferred to and life would never be the same again...

Let’s go back to those first few significant therapeutic interventions. Stamped with the certainty of a stiletto heel into my heart, I knew that I would never breathe again without the dispassionate interest of a high femme with designs upon my soul...

I was in the consulting room, aged 21, staring at the wall. The utterly beautiful shrink was gazing at me trying to draw me in. I didn’t dare look.

‘Are you uncomfortable here with me?’

‘Yes...d’you like me?’ I ventured, uncertain, insecure...

Then pressed to respond she finally gave away:

‘Yes...You’re a bit butch... but no more Lesbian than I am. Try wearing a dress...’

I’d never thought of myself as Lesbian until this whole journey into treatment had raised the possibility. And here she was ensuring I was the one … or so I thought, in my deluded state.

So I returned next week with a photograph of myself wearing a dress.

‘Not bad’ she said, ‘You see, you can look feminine after all...’

For endless months I hovered on the brink of insanity, trailing up to the hospital unit twice a week, just hoping for some sign. I took the bloody pills. I bowed and scraped for tit bits in return. I did the medication, meditation, anything required, all destined for disaster as you readers will be well aware. When sadly, I was not.

She got promotion to a better job. I was bereft. To celebrate the end of treatment, she took me for a meal and fed me baby sweet corn from her spoon and I felt I couldn’t breathe. I was obsessed. It took 2 years and a final meeting at a clinic before I could let go. And I made that last journey knowing I would never roll in her arms, or she in mine.

Neither my paramour nor Prima Donna, but at least she was my shrink. It was the strangest thing that helped me over her. I was ushered into her consulting room for that final session and she sat looking a little jaded. I might go so far as to say, she wasn’t at her best. I can’t remember what she was wearing, that’s not like me at all. But I noticed that she had a hole in her tights. I couldn’t take my eyes of it...a tawdry little ladder. I spent the whole session feeling the exuberance of my youthful fantasies just eking away. She was flawed. At last I could move on.

In my twenties I explored my sexuality, fought and fucked with the demons in my soul. Tried therapy, bi-sexuality, tri-sexuality and suicide. None of it worked. By 25 I’d settled into an uneasy partnership with a woman 13 years older. She was high femme, a neat powerhouse in a tiny package and something to behold. We had a one-night stand that lasted ten years into my mid thirties. Now that was living, for a while...

In my late thirties into the big ‘4, 0,’ I met a siren offering succour in the dark. We met at my mate’s funeral, eyes met across a crowded coffin, and she ate my very soul. And through all this time I have been in treatment, dancing with dangerous liaisons in secluded rooms in pastel shades, courting strangers for approval. I have been bequeathed at least four diagnoses, just to keep them in careers.

There have been six great Divas in those darkened rooms, cluttering my heart, six high femmes in high heeled shoes all mauling at my soul. And as long as I allow them in, there never will be room for reality, for relationships, come Desdemona or plain old dyke into my bed. You see they’re still trying to cure me. And that just sucks me in. So I keep taking the tablets, medication, meditation, anything required...

And now? I’m a soft butch; I can look a little feminine if I try. I still have an inner male, but I can buy the rest off the rack nowadays. And the treatment plan? Who gives a shit? As long as I get to see her, whatever shrink she is, and she will sit there, cool, aloof, picking dispassionately at the contents of my soul. I’ll watch her writing her careful comments about her fantasies of me. Good girl. Good girl. You keep on writing … I’ll keep on coming … and coming.

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Review: DISABLED LESBIAN POSTCARDS

Elizabeth Tonkin casts a critical, yet insightful eye over this unique set of postcards produced by the Manchester Disabled Lesbians Group.

Back in history, just over 3 years ago, Manchester’s Disabled Lesbian group created some postcards. The stated aim was to: “ … increase and encourage visibility in all areas of the community. Currently many disabled lesbians are isolated from the wider lesbian community because of the barriers that they experience.”

Let’s find out how they did this.

Postcard 1:

The postcard image shows a disabled person approaching one of two adjacent doors, one marked ‘Day Centre’ the other ‘Lesbian Club’. She is greeted at the door of the Lesbian Club by a man who says “no love… you want next door…!!..”

The image of the disabled person being told to go to the day centre I find hilarious on many levels. Firstly it appears that the disabled person is signing ‘what?’, yet the person they are speaking to has their eyes shut.

Secondly, how many Lesbian clubs do you know of that are so un-trendy as to be stuck next to a dumping ground for disabled people? However as a whole this postcard works, it makes the viewer think about what is stopping disabled lesbians from getting involved in the lesbian community.

Postcard 2:

The postcard shows an image of a woman with four arms proclaiming to her Mother “mum I’m a lesbian..!!”, to which her Mother replies “oohh.. you have to be different don’t you??”

The young lesbian woman coming out to her mum is blessed with an extra pair of arms.

Cue fantasy about having enough hands to put together flat pack furniture! This card doesn’t really say much to me, I just can’t relate to the young woman as a disabled person. Also the comment by her mum, ‘oohh …you have to be different don’t you??’ sets my teeth on edge.

Postcard 3:

This postcard shows two women and one has her arm around the other whilst squeezing her right breast.

The card with the Braille reader is the one I find offensive. It plays up to all those stereotypes of it being ok for some disabled men to be really rude because, ‘they can’t help it’, ‘they don’t know what they’re doing’, but even worse when twisted round, so that women are sexually oppressing women!

Postcard 4:

This postcard shows a woman addressing a female couple, one of whom is in a wheelchair. The first woman exclaims “aaww. Isn’t she cute?” and in reply the woman walking behind her seated friend is thinking “you should see her with her kit off!”

The last postcard is my favourite, it shows a woman patronising a wheelchair user who is with her partner.

I like the concept of this card although I wish it had been more firmly portrayed.

It would have been much stronger if the wheelchair user looked less passive and pushed herself, taking her partner out of the “carer” image. Also, if the thought by her partner was said, not just thought, it would more strongly challenge the publics attitude.

In all, this was a great idea for a project,, but I’m not convinced that it is a positive way for us disabled lesbians and bisexuals to be portrayed.

If you would like more information about the Manchester Disabled Lesbians Group please contact:

Lesbian Community Project

The Lesbian and Gay Centre

49-51 Sidney Street,

Manchester

Tel: 0161 273 7128

e-mail: mail@manchesterlcp.org.uk

website: www.manchesterlcp.org.uk

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To The Therapist

Who made me speak

about that atrocity,

that I have not

ever spoken about,

For twenty years.

You've made me speak

about it,

in detail.

Then left me in it...

I hate you more

than my perpetrators.

Carol Batton

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Review:

THE RINGER

Directed by: Barry W. Blaustein

Starring: Johnny Knoxville

AMC Deansgate Manchester 02/04/06

Review by: Phil Samphire.

Yesterday, for the first time, I felt sullied going both to and from the cinema. When I arrived at a city-centre cinema I was slightly embarrassed to ask for the ticket, and my embarrassment was compounded as the smile vanished from the cashier's face as I uttered "one for the Ringer please!!". As I made my way to the screen I felt a small feeling of dread in the pit of my stomach. While waiting for the film to start I noticed my fellow audience members, the average age being no more than 15, and thankfully the audience numbered less than 20 including myself. I won't concern you with the details of the story - let's just say that the main character had to compete in the Special Olympics to be able to have his friend's fingers sewn back on. This is a dire film even before we deal with the main subject matter: It does not work as a comedy on any level.

The humour is centred on one premise, that disabled people are funny, from the way we eat, sleep, look, speak, in fact everything about us is fair game from the perspective of this director. There are no redeeming features in this film whatsoever, well maybe one, that there are more disabled people on the screen than in any other mainstream film apart from ‘Freaks’ - I leave you to draw your own comparisons. There are no Paralympians here, it is all special. In fact I have not heard the term special used in so many different and condescending ways since my days at school.

This film is trash, I can't emphasise this fact strongly enough. I have never walked out of any film, and I certainly have seen some quite terrible films in my time, but ‘The Ringer’ tested me to my limit. This film brings offensive stereotypes to a new low, every disabled character in this film is there purely as an object to fun. Do not go to see this film even if you wish to know how bad it is, you would not be able to justify the ticket price to yourself.

By the way I lied - The Ringer for me proved to have a second redeeming quality. In one scene they used Elmer Bernstein's theme to ‘The Magnificent Seven’, which prompted me to go out to buy it on DVD straight afterwards, to eradicate the memory of the last 94 minutes.

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THE NEXT MAGAZINE

"Surely we can agree that the disability movement has had its day, in the same way that the women's movement is historically behind us?”

The above quote is the  belief of an arts consultant as expressed to Paddy Masefield whilst discussing the closure of the Arts Council of England's disability unit (see Society Guardian, 14.12.05.)

We would like your views on the above quote.

Do you think the disabled people's movement is historically behind us?

Is such a view linked to the perception of disability politics becoming 'respectable' through achieving rights legislation?

Is the view that we have 'had our day' also connected to the widespread withdrawal of funding from arts and independent living organisation and  projects?

We would also welcome additional articles on the 'Rainbow' theme, as well as your responses to articles in this edition.

If you have any views on these or other issues, please let us have your articles, poetry, cartoons and photographs for consideration.

You can use a pen name or be anonymous in the magazine but please ensure that the editor has your name and contact address.

Please contact:  Ken Lumb (Editor), GMCDP, BEVC, Aked Close, Ardwick, Manchester.  M12 4AN.

Or by email to: coalition@gmcdp.com

Closing date for August 2006 edition of 'Coalition' is:

Friday 16th June 2006

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GMCDP PUBLICATIONS & MERCHANDISE

All GMCDP publications are available in standard and large print, in Braille and on cassette tape.

1. A Dangerous Woman by Sue Napolitano

A collection of witty, pithy, poignant and most of Direct Action and Disabled People - all POLITICAL poems.

Price £2.50 + 75 p&p

2. Coalition Magazine

Price: £3 (Back Issues £1 + £1 p&p)

3. Disability Is ...

A 4 minute animation video made by young disabled people, exploring the issues around positive imagery and role models as experienced by young disabled people.

Price £20 to £50 + £4 p&p

4. On Our Own Behalf by Martin Pagel

A starting point for anyone interested in the growth of the Disabled People's movement.

Price: £2.50 + 60p p&p

5. "... distress or disability?" by Anne Plumb

A discussion paper laying out some issues, arguments and history from a Mental Health System Survivor's point of view.

Price £2 to £5 + 60p p&p

6. Over To Us … by Maureen Greene

A report of an advocacy project working with young disabled people living in residential institutions.

Price: £5.99 + £1.50 p&p

7. Positive Image Posters

Produced by the Young Disabled Peoples Forum,

Price £5 per set of £4 + £1.50p&p

8. Disabled People Bite … The Hand That Patronises (poster)

A 594mm x 840mm poster taken from the ‘Disability Is …’ animation video.

Price £3.50 + £1.50 p&p

9. Disabled People Bite … The Hand That Patronises (postcard)

A full colour postcard taken from the ‘Disability Is …’ animation video.

Price £1 for a pack of 5 + 30p p&p

10. Take Action Now

Set of 4 Positive Image posters designed by Jacqui Tracey.

Price: £5 per set of 4 + £1.50 p&p

11. Peer Mentoring - A Good Practice Guide

CD-Rom produced by the Young Disabled Peoples Forum, discussing the merits and practicalities of peer mentoring for young disabled people.

Price: £10 to £20 + £2.00 P & P.

Accompanying report available from Pavilion Publishing on 01273-623222 or by email info@pavpub.com

12. Independent Living Skills

Training manual with video promoting independent living for young disabled people.

Price £20 to £40 + £3.50 p&p

Where prices vary, this is dependent on type of organisation wishing to purchase items.

Please allow up to 14 days for delivery.

Please make cheques payable to: GMCDP

GMCDP, (BEVC), Aked Close, Ardwick,

Manchester M12 4AN.

Tel: 0161 273 7870

E-mail: info@gmcdp.com

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