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(Un)acceptable in the 80s

David Lowbridge-Ellis

I think we can all agree that 80s nostalgia has reached its apotheosis. We've had 80s theme bars for some time (Reflex anyone?) but these are aimed predominantly at people who were of drinking age in the decade when a Tequila Sunrise was still 'a thing' - in both Mel Gibson/Michelle Pfeiffer movie and cocktail forms.

For anyone actually born in the 1980s the recent double-measure of nostalgia comes courtesy of those things we *could* legally imbibe: family-friendly (yet slightly swear-y) blockbuster films and TV shows. The modern manifestations include Stranger Things, Super 8, Transformers, Guardians Of The Galaxy, Ghostbusters and Spielberg riffing-off himself in the forthcoming Ready Player One.

In all honesty, despite belonging to the target demographic, I am not a fan of most of these titles. At first, I thought it was because I couldn't stop spotting the references to things I remembered from the first time around: the clothes, the font styles, the posters on the bedroom walls, yet another bike chase stolen from E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial (released the year I was born and still an absolute classic, as proven when I introduced it to my A level Film Studies class the other day).

Seeing these 1980s callbacks relentlessly regurgitated back on screen was the reason, I'd been telling myself for some time, I couldn't properly engage with this new wave of retro entertainment. And then it finally struck me: it wasn't the films and TV shows that were the problem. It was me.

I don't have a great deal of nostalgia for the 1980s.

There, I've said it. That feels better. I am a traitor to my birth decade. And you might be able to argue that the 1990s was really my decade as that was when I did most of my growing up, but I don't look back fondly on much of the 1990s either.

Which is not to say I had a horrible childhood. My parents were (are) amazing people, and they did a stellar job of both preparing me for the world and shielding me from many of its horrors. Unfortunately, they had no idea about the truly horrifying thing that was eating away at me from inside.

Like the audience nervously watching the famous chest-bursting scene from Ridley Scott's 1979 sci-fi horror classic *Alien*, I was aware that something was very wrong from very early on.

I place it around 6 when I first knew I was gay, though the word hadn't yet entered my vocabulary. It would soon though, along with the vocabularies of everyone I went to school with. I shan't bother listing all of the synonyms that came along with it. I'm sure we've heard them all before. 'Turd burgler' was most popular in the school I went to.

I only remember a dozen or so times when these words were directly aimed at me. Perhaps I have repressed other incidents but I think it more likely that I was better than some at putting potential bullies off the scent. I was obsessed with James Bond movies from an early age, so that helped.

Still, the kids will always be able to spot a queer, no matter how accurately he can quote word-for-word the torture-by-laser-to-the-groin scene from *Goldfinger* (and in hindsight, there's something alarmingly phallic going on there).

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By the time I was 7 I was what we nowadays call 'school phobic'. Back then, we called it 'throwing a sickie' and I took it somewhat literally, sticking my fingers down my throat to stimulate enough bile to make a small puddle. My mom saw through it quite quickly of course, calling a meeting with the Head Teacher at which nothing was revealed but, for a time, things were resolved. I remember him making a visit to my lessons every now and then, ostensibly to check on the whole class.

He was a nice man, but, like all teachers until 2003, he had his hands tied behind his back. I was completely unaware of Section 28 of course, which had been enacted the year before, in 1988. Even if I had seen something about it at home on the BBC News I would have pretended to be reading and not looked up, for fear that my secret might be discovered.

The worst single instance of bullying I can remember is being thrown down a flight of stairs. It was years later, when I was in Year 9. Most of our form used to huddle outside our form room every morning, waiting for our tutor. I kept myself at a distance, almost outside the next form. I had friends in that form, just as I had friends in my own form. But my form also contained someone I will call 'Sam'.

Perhaps it was because Sam sensed something different about me that he chose to bully me. I liked reading and I didn't like football. Maybe it was as simple as that. Of course, like all bullies, Sam mustn't have liked himself very much. But I didn't know this at the time. At the time, all I did know was that I was terrified of him.

I didn't tell any of my teachers about Sam throwing me down the stairs but someone must have said something to my tutor. He was another nice man with his hands tied behind his back, but he did what he could. For the next three years, he would have zero tolerance of Sam's antics, whether they were aimed at me or anyone else. I can still hear him yelling at Sam – very effectively as it turned out. He was not a teacher who shouted often, so when he let rip not just the whole class but the whole of the surrounding corridor fell silent. Sam didn't fall completely silent but he did quieten down and I was not bullied physically from then on.

When I think back, I see my school experience with the sound turned down. There was a whole part of me, my gayness, which was there all the time but not-quite-muted. I watch a lot of 80s and 90s films and TV shows now and I don't recognise myself in any of the characters. I watch back my own memories and I don't fully recognise myself in those either.

I was 26 when I finally came out for the first time – certainly not the last, as any LGBTQ+ person knows. With each new interaction, some days it can feel like Groundhog Day (another film which does hold up well).

At school, I came out first to the senior leadership team. It had just gone 5pm and the meeting had finished. We were discussing plans for the weekend. Another Assistant Head said he had to dash because he was taking his wife out for dinner. The head teacher just turned to me and asked “Do you have a partner David?” I said to everyone assembled there in the conference room that I did, “and his name is Antony”.

No one batted any eyelid and we all went home for the weekend.

I know that isn't the experience that many teachers have had. I know this because teachers who have joined our school have said as much. We have staff who have been told by their previous Head Teachers to not say anything about their 'private lives', despite the fact that their colleagues, in heterosexual couplings, do exactly that.

I don't remember the first time I shared with my classes an anecdote about my boyfriend (now husband). Like any truly effective teacher, when I'm trying to explain a new concept I mine my so-called 'private life' for examples. “So a metaphor is when you compare something to something else but you don't use like or as. It's a direct comparison, like 'my husband is a couch potato'. He's not really a potato but I want to make it clear that he sits at

home playing video games all day.” (For the record, although my husband does enjoy video games – as do I – he is not a couch potato. Except on Sundays)

I will never understand how any teacher builds trust with their classes if they don't show at least a little of their human side. I'm a much better teacher now that my pupils all know why I have a long and hyphenated surname (“it's because my husband's name was Ellis, not because I'm posh”).

I don't want to overstate the importance of the Deputy Head Teacher being openly gay, but it must have an impact. And not just on pupils, but staff as well. Statistics about how many people are actually LGBTQ+ are famously unreliable, ranging from 2% to around 6%. I have a hard time believing it could be as low as 2%. If it is, our staff are disproportionately 'queer' by a significant margin. There's a recruitment crisis in teaching. We all know this. But are all school leaders recruiting from the widest pool of talent? I'm not saying Head Teachers openly discriminate against LGBTQ+ people (though I know this does happen), but are their schools places where LGBTQ+ people would feel welcome?

We have a mantra at Barr Beacon School: If it would be good enough for your child then it's good enough for pupils here.

I don't have children of my own. The husband is keener on the idea than I am. I usually win the debate by pointing out that I already experience the pleasure (and pain) of parenting: 1500 children, 7 hours a day, 5 days a week. I also have nieces, and our friends are increasingly fruitful as we all head into our mid-late 30s.

I would have no problem with any of the children I know attending our school (besides the obvious embarrassment of Uncle David being their Deputy Head Teacher).

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My pupils tell me they don't hear things being described as "gay" in my school. That they feel safer in school than they do "out there" in wider society. Sometimes, I try to imagine my school through the eyes of my 15-year-old self...

As I leave my office, and turn my mind back 20 years, I walk past a massive display on the 'Science of LGBTQ+'. The nature/nurture debate plays itself out in bright rainbow colours. The fact that it's even up for discussion would have come as a surprise to the 15-year-old me. But for our pupils, it's nothing unusual. Displays are always in danger of becoming mere wallpaper, but not this one, because it's also something that's also talked about in science and PSHE lessons.

Moving down the English corridor, I see a starter activity on the board that makes me smile.

YOUR SO GAY.

SPOT THE 2 COMMON MISTAKES.

I saw a version of this used in an assembly earlier in the year, led by a group of pupils, but how could anyone resist teaching homophones through homophobia?

I look at the pupils wrestling with grammar and homophobia in their typically mature manner. If I imagine 15-year-old me sitting there I initially picture him shrinking into his chair, embarrassed and afraid. But I reconsider: how could he still be afraid at this school where talking about gay stuff is not unusual?

Wilfred Owen, Carol Ann Duffy, Oscar Wilde, Shakespeare... I studied them all for GCSE. Why did no one even mention they were queer? It would have meant the world to 15-year-old me to know that he had this in common with my literary heroes. The pupils here, in 2018, are not just aware of writers' queerness but are actively engaged in analysing its

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impact on their writing. The first time I encountered queer studies was at university and I was so scared to take the year 2 module because someone might find out I was gay. These kids are doing it for GCSE!

And that's not all they're doing: posters of LGBTQ+ sport stars adorn the Sports Hall walls, making 15-year-old me realise that, actually, doing a bit of exercise probably isn't going to kill him. Gay kids can run. And jump. And anything else they turn their minds to.

It goes on and on. In every subject, in every classroom, 15-year-old me is made to feel welcome.

It does take a bit of effort to make a minority feel welcome, to batter down the walls of discrimination. But a few small things, with the right emphasis, can make a huge difference. 15-year-old me would know the teachers have been trained on how to tackle homophobic bullying and he would find it reassuring that there is zero tolerance here. He knows that, like anywhere, it can still happen. But he also knows it will be dealt with swiftly, and not at all obliquely. A spade will be called a spade. You don't get away with using the word 'gay' in a negative way here.

Usually, I end my sojourn around school by entering the busy main reception and just standing there for a few minutes, saying hello to everyone who walks past. Pupils holding doors for teachers, teachers holding doors for pupils. There is no poster loudly announcing the school's ethos, nothing to demonstrate how it promotes 'British Values'. All the demonstration that's required is in everything I see. Everyone is respected, regardless of what makes them who they are.

I might then look up to the giant screens which show me images of daily school life. During LGBTQ+ History Month the screens present role models to the pupils. People they already know (popstars, actors, sports stars) and people it's our job to introduce them to (scientists, philosophers, entrepreneurs, CEOs, war heroes... teachers).

They are all queer. They are all here (in visual form at least). 35-year-old me is also queer, and glad to be here. I know 15-year-old me would be too.

<http://www.barrbeaconschool.co.uk/lgbt-history-month-2018/>

LGBTQ+ Initiatives at Ricards Lodge

By Sarah Sawyerr: Assistant Headteacher Ricards Lodge High School

In line with the legislation set out in the 2010 Equality Act Ricards Lodge adheres to the requirements of the public sector equality duty through our Equality policy, which is regularly reviewed and updated.

However, a policy is not enough; it is after all just a piece of paper. A policy must be alive to the issues we face in the 21st century, be understood, and inhabited by those the policy covers, namely our school community of students, their families, our staff and those who work with us.

Ricards Lodge is a Stonewall Champion School and is acutely aware of their most recent School Report of 2017 which highlights that, although 'anti LGBT bullying and language has decreased across Britain's schools since 2012, almost half of all LGBT students still face bullying at school for being LGBT and more than two in five trans young people have tried to take their own life'. These statistics are deeply worrying.

The result of bullying of this kind not only affects the academic outcomes of our young people but their mental health and life chances also. So, how does our Equality policy support our LGBT students?

Ricards Lodge is a school which celebrates difference. We are a girls' community school with a co-educational sixth form, RR6, based in Wimbledon, southwest London. We have a rich and diverse community of students and staff. Our students come largely from Merton, Wandsworth and Sutton Local Authorities with a variety of social and economic

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backgrounds, with pupil premium numbers including Free School Meals reaching about 30%. At the last count, students at our school spoke 81 different languages with 43 % of students having English as an additional language.

Ricards Lodge High School is firmly committed to promoting, celebrating and valuing the diversity of all our staff and students. We aim to create an open and welcoming environment. We take seriously our commitment to equality of opportunity, and seek to challenge and address discrimination, inequality and stereotyping in all areas, including those associated with gender and sexuality. We aim to develop a culture of inclusion and diversity in which all those connected to our school feel proud of their identity and are able to participate fully in school life. Our school values of trust, equality, resilience and aspiration have been agreed by all members of our school community and reflect this commitment.

Our spiritual, moral, social and cultural agenda has been developed over several years and has been highlighted as a real strength of the school since our 2013 Ofsted Report. SMSC is embedded within the Personal development, behaviour and welfare section of our school strategic plan which is monitored by the senior leadership team and reported to the Governing body. SMSC is embedded in the school curriculum such that students are able to access the principles and values of the SMSC agenda as part of their entitlement to a broad and balanced curriculum. SMSC is also part of our CPD programme and links closely to the personal and professional conduct of staff. At a recent CPD session for new staff and PGCE students, staff received training on non-binary terminology including the use of non-gendered pronouns.

Ricards Lodge has an SMSC working group of students and staff. Its meetings are calendared, well attended and drive the schools SMSC principles. The SMSC lead is also part of the Local Authority equality working group. Three years ago, the school set up its own LGBTQ+ group initially with a youth worker provided and paid for by the Local Authority. When the funding ceased we set about running the group ourselves. The group meets fortnightly and offers a safe space for students to come and be themselves and discuss issues and concerns in an open forum. Our school group, we believe, is the only one of its

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kind within the borough of Merton and its profile has grown considerably over the last 18 months.

Students have been asked to run a number of high profile training sessions for educational and health care professionals. In October 2016, students led a workshop on how to support LGBTQ+ students at the ASGS Annual Headteachers conference. In November of the same year the group ran a workshop for educational professionals held at South Thames College in Morden. In January 2017, the group presented their ideas on inclusion to the Merton Safeguarding Children's Board. In May 2017 the group led a Conference for educational and health care professionals about issues in schools which affect students from the LGBTQ+ community. As recently as November 2017, the group presented at a Trans Inclusion conference, the aim of which was to hear from students about advice and guidance on trans-inclusive policy and practice in schools. Only this week our students responded to the Department of Education's call for evidence as part of its review of changes to the teaching of Sex and Relationships education and PSHE.

In addition, the group have run a number of workshops in local primary schools for younger students to address issues associated with homophobic language. Students organised a series of role plays and scenarios to encourage the students to reflect on their behaviour and consider how best to support young people from the LGBTQ+ community.

There is still more work to do and we cannot afford to be complacent but we can celebrate our achievements and applaud our young people who live out our policy every day. We are delighted that in our recent Ofsted Inspection (November 2017), for which we received an Outstanding judgement, the report highlighted that 'The school's focus on developing pupils' awareness of SMSC issues is exceptional'. Furthermore, it highlights that 'The school's work on inclusion and challenging stereotypes has established a culture where differences are celebrated. The school's high-profile 'LGBTQ+' group (providing support for issues in relation to sexuality) is another example of the school's outstanding work to promote equality'.

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Student led initiatives, which challenge bullying, and homophobia must be supported and we would encourage all schools to adopt this approach. At Ricards Lodge we aim to ensure that our young people are comfortable when talking about sexuality and gender and staff give visible signs that students have a safe space to talk openly in order that all young people can achieve their full potential regardless of which part of the rainbow alliance they represent.

References:

Stonewall School Report 2017

Ricards Lodge Ofsted Report December 2017

Wrong to doubt: Role modelling and raising awareness of LGBTQ+ issues among students

Thomas Boswell, Art Therapist at Carmarthenshire Secondary Teaching and Learning Centre

After leaving University, I secured a job in a small rural primary school with just over 100 students. For the first time, I had to address an issue that I'd never confronted before: should I be open with my students about my sexuality? Would they understand? Would their parents be okay with it? I deliberated over this for some time; however, I ultimately decided not to disclose my sexuality to any of my students. I was the only male member of staff and this alone was enough to confuse the students, who regularly referred to me as "Miss" despite sporting a full beard.

After two years, during which I gained many invaluable experiences, I knew that it was time for me to move on, to progress onto a new challenge. I found myself lured to the pastoral and student well-being side of education. I had always been drawn to the student who were deemed difficult and challenging, and eventually I stumbled across a job vacancy, which seized my interest: a role in a local Pupil Referral Unit. (For those who have not come across a Pupil Referral Unit before, a simple explanation of a Pupil Referral Unit is that it is an alternative educational provision for students who have been excluded from education or who are ill or, for other reasons cannot be educated in a mainstream setting. The job I'd shown interest in revolved around pupils who had been excluded from mainstream education.

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The job description included supporting pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties and supporting these pupils to overcome barriers. I applied, not even expecting an interview. To my delight, I got the interview and secured the job. I knew that the job would be challenging, but I was ready. At least, I *thought* I was ready. With the news of my new job offer I was hounded with negative messages about Pupil Referral Units by colleagues and friends, but I was determined to accept the challenge.

Unlike my previous role, I was now going to be working with pupils from KS3 and KS4. I couldn't wait to start and hopefully begin to make a difference, supporting the most vulnerable of learners. However, there was one small obstacle in the way of my enthusiasm: my sexuality. I feared that my sexuality could be my weakness. I knew working with students who had been excluded from mainstream education would be challenging, and that there would be days where there would be confrontation. I was concerned that students could use my sexuality to their advantage if confrontation got personal – but I wasn't willing to hide. I knew that the effort that went into hiding facts about my life could be used far more effectively by providing support to my new students.

On my first day, as I sat in the head-teacher's office, we discussed safeguarding, absconding, rules and so forth. Concentrating proved difficult, however, especially with three teenage girls giggling, knocking and tapping the window outside. They were invited inside to meet me, and immediately they started circling me, bombarding me with questions and statements.

“How old are you?”

“Why do you want to work here?”

“You're ginger!”

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I was under fire, but I dealt with the questions and responded with humour. To this day humour is my last port of call when all else fails in the Unit. I settled into my new job; however the students had not caught on to my secret. By this point, I had started to build trust and positive relationships with most of my student. However, day by day I was drawn to supporting one particular student, who was highly disengaged, aggressive, verbally abusive and a risk to others. The behaviour displayed was crying out “I need help”. At this point I finally came out at work. At that moment in time, it felt like the best possible decision. I needed to connect emotionally with the student. I sat down and explained that it was okay to be different, that it was okay to have dark moments, to worry about the expectations of others and to suffer with mental health. Life can be tough and sometimes we have to persevere through the tough times to emerge into better times. At that moment in time I decide to tell her that I was gay, that I have struggled mentally in the past, however I made it through and I’m happier and healthier than ever. The response will always stay with me:

“That’s okay. You know if anyone says anything to you in this school, I’ll sort them out!”

I’d done it. I had ‘come out’ as an openly gay practitioner. I worried about the backlash. I’d unveiled my weakness. I’ve never been bullied - I’ve always been confident, but that day I felt vulnerable. It was the first time I was truly “out” to everyone I knew.

Since becoming an openly gay practitioner, I have been able to embrace my authentic self. Every child needs a teacher as a role model and I know as a child it would have reassured me that everything was going to be okay. Since being truthful I noticed the word “gay” was being used less and less in a derogatory manner. Students became aware of homophobic language and were very respectful not to use it around myself. Over time, students started to ask me honest and curious questions about my sexuality:

“How come you’re gay and played rugby?”

“Why don’t you wear makeup or dress as a woman on the weekend?”

“Did you have a partner?”

It was a liberating experience. My students were intrigued. They were thinking about things that they'd never had to think about before. That's when I realised that coming out to students wasn't just of benefit to myself, but could also enable me to make a difference and help the future LGBTQ+ community. The barrier had been overcome and students felt comfortable discussing stereotyping, the difference between being transgender and gay. We explored some of the stigmas that come with being gay. This was when I realised it was vital for me to become a role model and an advocate for the LGBTQ+ community. Providing students with a positive role model and demonstrating to them that being different is ok is absolutely imperative.

My role within the school evolved and I now support student well-being. I offer interventions and workshops which are designed to develop students' emotional literacy and well-being. With the freedom to explore and tailor programs to individual learning needs I set out to create a framework where pupils explored current affairs, learnt life skills, celebrated differences and would hopefully flourish into valued members of society. Naturally students in a specialist setting are there because mainstream education has not worked for them, therefore providing them with a balanced curriculum that will empower and provide them with the skills to integrate into society and to become a valued member of the community is critical.

We must educate our students about healthy relationships, the importance of a healthy mind and body, substance awareness, and managing money. I decided that I could also use this uniquely designed curriculum to educate students about the community that I belong to. In this day and age we should all be advocates of equality, not just for the LGBTQ+ community but for all minority communities. As a part of the well-being framework students explore topics covering culture, race, healthy relationships, gender, sexuality and sexism. The framework aims to raise awareness amongst students and hopefully instil values they will carry with them later on in life. Using a newly published guide called AGENDA Wales,

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students can support their rights and develop their awareness of equality, diversity, children's rights and social justice. Raising awareness and building knowledge and empathy is imperative to combatting LGBTQ+ bullying.

Pupils from Pupil Referral Units or specialist settings are commonly perceived as the most disengaged and troublesome pupils in the education system. They may have been the perpetrators of LGBTQ+ bullying before being excluded. Students may model behaviour from family or friends. They may have misconceptions. However, these pupils may not be armed with the knowledge and facts surrounding LGBTQ+ issues. With the pressure of maintaining grades in mainstream settings, was there time to raise awareness, time to educate these challenging pupils? Were staff trained and knowledgeable about LGBTQ+ issues and bullying? Was there enough time in the day to build strong relationships with these challenging students in order for any learning to be effective?

Fortunately, in a Pupil Referral Unit personalised learning can take place and this is where, as a gay practitioner, I can challenge misconceptions and raise awareness. Views and opinions are changing within the younger generation. Young people are willing to listen, to absorb knowledge and develop their awareness. By supporting students holistically and supporting the whole child, we can create a new generation who have empathy, resilience and a better understanding of real world issues. Now more than ever our society has become more open minded and accepting. Inequality will always be rife and raising awareness of LGBTQ+ issues and rights will be an ongoing mission. It is inevitable that bullying will continue to occur, however there is hope in a new generation of learners. As openly gay and proud practitioners I believe we can pave the way for future generations. Experiencing the emotions and realities of being gay we owe it to ourselves to tell our stories and support others. Students are growing up in an increasingly diverse and complicated world, and as educators, I believe it is our duty to support and educate students to embrace and respect all communities. I doubted students' capacity to accept and understand my sexuality, however everyday they continue to prove me wrong.

Transitions to University: LGBT students in higher education

Jonathan Glazzard, Leeds Beckett University

This work is part of a study that I am currently working on. I am exploring the transitions of students who identify as LGBT into and throughout higher education. This is a longitudinal study.

Choice of university

This section explores the factors that influence students' decisions about their choice of university. Choice of university has been described as 'a great and complex decision for a student' (Raposo and Alves, 2007, p. 2). Existing research suggests that gender, social class, ethnicity and sexuality are factors that influence university choice-making (Ball et al., 2002; Formby, 2015; Reay et al., 2001) and 'intersectional identities' (Formby, 2015, p. 21) mean that these differences interrelate (Taulke-Johnson, 2010). These differences have been described by Epstein et al (2003) as 'differences that make a difference' (p. 138). Accessibility of the university, distance from home, university and course reputation are also important factors influencing choice of institution (Briggs, 2006; Formby, 2015).

Research has found that working-class students decisions about choice of higher education institution are influenced by a sense of 'fitting in' or belonging. For working-class students who identify as LGBTQ+ their sense of 'fitting in' is influenced by both their social background and their sexuality. Students' multiple and fluid identities adds complexity to the process of fitting in and experiencing a sense of belonging may be largely unconnected to their sexuality. However, sexuality tends to influence choice of location of university. The literature presents narratives of 'geographic displacement' (Taulke-Johnson, 2010, p. 252) from families and communities in relation to moving *away* from places which are repressive and intolerant *towards* places which are more supportive, accepting and diverse.

Research indicates that for students who identify as LGBTQ+, perceptions of *safety*, *acceptance* and *tolerance* (Formby, 2014) are important factors which influence university

choice-making. Thus, they may choose specific localities which they perceive to be 'gay-friendly' and accepting and they may avoid places which are perceived to be repressive or intolerant (Formby, 2015; Taulke-Johnson, 2008; 2010). Research has demonstrated that these 'push and pull' (Formby, 2015, p. 21) factors also reflect broader LGBTQ+ migration patterns (Cant, 1997; Formby, 2012; Howes, 2011; Valentine et al, 2003) which demonstrate the attraction of perceived gay-friendly cities for the LGBTQ+ community. Interestingly, in England specifically, research indicates a perceived North/South divide; the South is perceived as more accepting than the North (Formby, 2015) and this can influence migration patterns for the wider LGBTQ+ community and for students it can influence their university choices. Additionally, students may perceive rural areas to be less tolerant than larger towns and cities (Formby, 2015) and research in America has demonstrated that discrimination based on sexual orientation is more widespread on rural campuses (Stroup et al, 2014).

Choice of university for students who identify as LGBTQ+ may be influenced by previous negative experience at school (Formby 2014; 2015). They may choose a university which they perceive to offer a safe space so that previous experiences of bullying, prejudice and harassment are not repeated. Perceptions of safety can also be influenced by scene size and vibrancy. Universities with large and vibrant gay scenes nearby are perceived to be more tolerant, supportive and offer safe spaces for those who identify as LGBTQ+ (Epstein et al, 2003; Formby, 2015; Taulke-Johnson, 2010; Valentine et al, 2009). This mirrors broader research about LGBTQ+ migration which has demonstrated how urban locations with large scenes attract migrants from the gay community (Browne, 2008; Formby, 2012; Valentine and Skelton, 2003; Weeks et al, 2001).

In relation to the draw on the city, this 'taken for granted ... destination for queer subjects' (Formby, 2015, p. 22) fails to take into account the diversity of opinion within and beyond the city (Taylor and Falconer, 2015). Valentine et al (2009) found that at the rural campus it was easier to monitor the conduct of students thus resulting in students feeling safer than those in large universities in urban areas. Additionally, the intersection of identities can result in feelings of alienation even in places with large, vibrant gay scenes, especially if other aspects of an individual's identity are not reflected in the scene community.

Other important factors which influence university choice-making include marketing information and representation. Positive images which represent the LGBTQ+ community on university websites and prospectus influence student decisions about choice of university (Valentine et al, 2009; Formby, 2015). Research in America has also demonstrated that the existence of an LGBT society is an indicator of a safer campus (Kane, 2013) and this finding

was also replicated in research from England (Formby, 2015). However, increasing the visibility of sexual minorities is not always universally desired by those who identify as LGBTQ+ (Formby, 2015) and can lead to feelings of frustration.

For many students, the prospect of disconnecting from families, friends and home communities to attend university can be daunting (Chow and Healey, 2008). However, research has found that students who identify as LGBTQ+ may desire to escape from heterosexist and homophobic home communities which have 'strictly regulated boundaries of acceptable (i.e. heterosexual) behaviour' (Taulke-Johnson, 2010, p. 256). These environments were 'stifling' and 'claustrophobic' and 'restricted their expression and living out of their gayness due to them continuously being 'on stage'' (Taulke-Johnson, 2010, p. 260). These were environments in which students felt unable to disclose their sexuality or where their sexuality was treated as an open secret (Taulke-Johnson, 2010). Some of the accounts in the literature have emphasised the desire to escape from relentless surveillance in their home communities (Taulke-Johnson, 2010), the 'lure' of environments which were perceived to be more liberal, open-minded and which offered freedom of expression (Binnie, 2004; Brown, 2000, Weeks, 2007) and the opportunity to live in environments in which individuals to be safely 'out' (Epstein, O'Flynn and Telford, 2003). LGBTQ+ students may perceive university environments to be 'gay-friendly' due to perceptions of the level of education and perceived maturity of other students (Taulke-Johnson, 2010). In their desire to escape from 'the hetero-saturated nature of their home towns' and 'small town heterosexism' (Taulke-Johnson, 2010, p. 258) which forces them to maintain their invisibility, LGBTQ+ students may choose to embrace queer environments where they can construct 'families of choice' (Weeks et al, 2001) and queer social networks which offer an alternative to the heterosexist and often close-knit communities that they had been brought up in.

Student accommodation

Taulke-Johnson (2010) have found evidence that university accommodation can be intolerant, unwelcoming, hostile and homophobic. He found evidence of anti-gay sentiments being written on doors of rooms resulting in gay students modifying their behaviour so that their 'gayness' did not have a visible presence in the accommodation. Additionally, Valentine et al (2009) found evidence of inappropriate responses by institutions to homophobic behaviour in student accommodation such as institutions moving the victims out of the accommodation rather than the perpetrators. Whilst some students would have preferred

'gay-friendly' housing, others did not want to be segregated into 'gay only' accommodation and they wanted their institutions to create safe, inclusive accommodation for all students (Valentine et al, 2009). According to Foucault, separate spaces 'render visible those who are inside...provide a hold on their conduct...carry the effects of power right to them' (Foucault, 1977a: 172). Separate housing is not an adequate solution because it creates an 'othering' effect which leads to further marginalisation and discrimination. It makes the process of 'othering' visible and results in the creation of colonies of exclusion within mainstream environments.

Literature from the UK and America has specifically noted concerns about accommodation for students who identify as trans or those who identify as gender non-conforming. Concerns have specifically related to lack of gender-neutral bathrooms and shared bedrooms for these students (Beemyn, 2005; Krum et al, 2013; Pomerantz, 2010; Singh et al, 2013). Research has identified that the attitudes and misunderstandings of housemates particularly towards trans students is a cause for concern (Formby, 2015). Additionally, the effects of homophobic bullying in student accommodation can result in feelings of isolation and psychological distress as well as feeling obliged to educate housemates about their negative attitudes (Formby, 2015; Keenan, 2015; Lough Dennell and Logan, 2012).

Financial issues

There is evidence which suggests that LGBTQ+ students are less likely to receive financial support from their families (Formby, 2015; NUS, 2011; 2014) and consequently are more likely to experience financial problems, including debt, compared to their heterosexual peers. Research also suggests that LGBTQ+ students may fear the loss of financial support from families if their parents discovered their sexuality or gender identities (Valentine et al, 2009). Worryingly, Formby's research identified that some parents use financial support as a mechanism for surveillance by threatening to withdraw support if their children engaged in social activities that were related to being LGBTQ+ (Formby, 2015).

Thus, fear of losing financial support can result in students modifying their behaviour by self-censoring and conforming to heterosexist norms.

LGBTQ+ and curriculum content

Keenan (2014) has emphasised the invisibility of LGBTQ issues in the higher education curriculum, supporting earlier research by Ellis (2009). This can result in marginalisation and curriculum invisibility is worse for transgender students who have reported a lack of trans experiences and trans history reflected in their curriculum (McKinney, 2005; Metro, 2014; NUS, 2014). Gunn (2010) highlighted that students in science disciplines experienced more negative attitudes and classroom climates towards LGBTQ issues compared to other subjects, thus supporting research by Valentine et al (2009) who found that students studying medicine, dentistry, veterinary science, agriculture, engineering, business, languages, literature and education tended to experience greater homophobic and biphobic comments compared to students studying other disciplines.

In view of this research it could be argued that attempts to queer the higher education curriculum have not been universal and literature suggests that courses continue to be strongly heterosexual (Formby, 2015). Most subjects could address LGBTQ issues in a serious way by embedding the issues into curriculum design. However, evidence suggests that even in subjects where students did not expect to learn about LGBTQ+ identities, the examples presented to students were either inaccurate or insensitive. For example, one participant in Formby's study recounted an experience of a mathematics lecturer who cited gender as an example of a binary. Students who study courses such as performing arts or drama are often labelled as gay (Formby, 2015), thus reflecting internalised gender stereotypes. Such stereotypes are dangerous because they perpetuate prejudice which can lead to bullying, harassment and discrimination.

Whilst some universities celebrate annual events such as *Pride*, and include a commitment to LGBTQ+ equality in their policies, there is evidence in the literature that the higher education curriculum does not seriously address issues around LGBTQ+ equality. Students continue to be presented with the achievements of the '*same old straight, white men*' and the curriculum is '*pale, male and stale*' (student participants in Formby, 2015, p. 32). There is also evidence that LGBTQ+ issues are invisible in psychology and health courses (Formby, 2015), thus presenting students with only a partial perspective on their disciplines. Whilst one-off celebration and recognition events go some way towards addressing LGBTQ+ diversity and visible signs of a commitment to LGBTQ+ equality create a positive campus climate, addressing the issues through the curriculum demonstrates to all students that the issues are relevant to everybody regardless of sexuality and regardless of the discipline one chooses to study.

Campus climate

In the US homophobia on campus is endemic and there is evidence of physical violence and verbal harassment (Ellis, 2009). This has resulted in a 'climate of fear' (Ellis, 2009, p. 727) in which students do not feel comfortable disclosing their sexual identity. Additionally, there is evidence of students negotiating their homosexuality by avoiding known lesbian and gay locations, disassociating from known LGBT people and 'passing' off as straight (Ellis, 2009). Research by Rankin et al (2010) found evidence of name calling, homophobic graffiti and physical abuse all of which contributed to the creation of a hostile climate for LGBTQ students. Students who identified as trans reported higher rates of harassment and LGBTQ students of colour tended to report race as a reason for experiencing harassment than their sexual and gender identity. Research in the UK presents evidence of homophobia on university campuses (Keenan, 2014; McDermott et al, 2008; Valentine et al, 2009) and a negative campus climate has been related to students considering leaving their course (Tetreault, 2014).

Campus climate does not just refer to direct forms of bullying. It also relates to students' willingness to be open about their own sexual orientation and gender identity. This is influenced by the extent to which students' experience heterosexuality as normative and natural and experience pressure to adopt conventional gendered and sexual identities (Taulke-Johnson, 2008). Epstein (1995) argued that heterosexuality is regulated by a 'hidden curriculum' which reinforces and rewards heterosexual behaviour. Evidence suggests that students are very aware of heterosexist and heteronormative discourses which operate on university campuses and this determines what is acceptable and unacceptable conduct within specific environments and situations (Taulke-Johnson, 2008). The boundaries of acceptable and unacceptable conduct are often unspoken but these discourses may force LGBTQ+ students to monitor and regulate their behaviour. Heterosexist and heteronormative discourses can foster an unwillingness in students to transgress the boundaries to which they are subjected and this can prevent students from 'coming out' at university.

Evidence from research (Taulke-Johnson, 2008) suggests that heterosexist and heteronormative discourses on university campuses are upheld by heterosexual male students who embody masculine 'macho' behaviour. The National Union of Students

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identified the prevalence of a 'lad culture' in sports teams which can prevent LGBTQ+ students from participating in teams (NUS, 2012).

Plummer has described the 'coming out' process as 'the most momentous act in the life of any lesbian or gay person' (Plummer, 1995, p. 82). The act of 'coming out' does not just occur once. It has to be repeated when LGBTQ+ people meet new people in different contexts and this can result in anxiety due to a lack of certainty about how individuals may respond. It is difficult for those who identify as LGBTQ+ to 'come out' to their peers at university, especially when they share social spaces with male peers who display anti-gay attitudes and if there is a strong heterosexist discourse in the social and academic spaces of the university. Intolerant, disapproving and hostile environments can force male students to negotiate their homosexual identities by adhering 'to conventions of traditional masculine gender performance' (Taulke-Johnson, 2008, p.128). They may frame events and comments, which might be interpreted as homophobic, as though they are not by explaining anti-gay behaviour as banter and supportive (Taulke-Johnson, 2008), thus allowing them to form good relationships with heterosexual peers. However, anti-gay 'banter' serves to reinforce anti-gay discourses and compulsory heterosexuality (Keenan, 2015) and places pressure on individuals to keep their sexual and gender identities in check.

The images that are displayed around the campus, celebration events, the attitudes of staff, curriculum content, the availability of support services and the resources in the library all influence campus climate. A visible commitment to LGBTQ+ issues helps to engender a positive campus climate for students with diverse sexual and gender identities. However, evidence suggests that bisexual students may face greater challenges in comparison with gay or lesbian students (Stroup et al, 2014) and research suggests that racism at university has been recorded more widely amongst LGBT students (Formby, 2012; Formby, 2015; Simpson, 2012), suggesting that campus climates are not as inclusive as they should be. Additionally, research has highlighted that trans students may not feel safe on campus and one in three had experienced discrimination and harassment (NUS, 2014). Additionally, trans and non-gender conforming students identified misnaming, mispronouncing and lack of gender-neutral bathrooms and changing rooms as particular issues which impacted detrimentally on their sense of belonging (Formby, 2014; 2015). Being misnamed and/ or misgendered represents a barrier to trans inclusion and lack of policies to support the updating of students' names or genders are particular difficulties that impact detrimentally on inclusion (NUS, 2014). Singh et al (2013) identified gender-specific sports teams as contributing negatively to campus climate. Lack of gender neutral facilities is a consistent

issue which has been identified in literature from the UK and US (Beemyn, 2005; Seelman, 2014; Singh et al, 2013). Literature has also identified that LGBTQ+ students are frequently dissatisfied with university counselling and medical services, (Beemyn, 2005; Formby, 2013; 2014; 2015; McKinney, 2005) and this impacts detrimentally on the campus climate.

Aldridge and Somerville (2014) found that nearly a quarter of LGBT students *thought* that they would face discrimination from other students and research has also found that fears relating to prejudice and discrimination impacted negatively on levels of 'outness' in universities (Formby, 2012; 2013; 2015). This suggests that even where bullying, prejudice and discrimination are not experienced directly, fears around these can impact negatively on LGBTQ+ students' experiences of higher education and thus, campus climate can be influenced by overt or covert factors.

It is also important to consider careers-related issues in relation to campus climate. According to Schmidt et al (2011) perceived discrimination in the workplace can result in LGBTQ+ students being indecisive about their career goals and university careers counsellors need to consider how sexual orientation and gender identity can influence employment prospects for LGBTQ+ students. Experiences of past discrimination in employment can also influence students' employment aspirations (Formby, 2015). However, it has been argued university careers advisors are ill-equipped to support transgender students in their transition into employment (Scott et al, 2011), particularly in relation to problems which may arise, including securing references and the impact of a name change on a student's employment record and qualification history (Formby, 2015). Additionally, participation in LGBTQ societies during their time at university can have a detrimental impact on students' employment prospects (Formby, 2015) and the probability of LGBTQ+ students receiving an invitation to a job interview is 5% lower than it is for heterosexual students (Formby, 2015). Students may hide their participation in LGBT societies and their involvement in gay activism whilst at university to gain employment (Formby, 2014), suggesting that LGBTQ+ students may need additional support in how to present their experiences on their CVs. Another concern which has been documented in the literature relates to how people present themselves in interviews. There are examples of gender-fluid individuals dressing in conventional male or female clothing for interviews to secure a job (Formby, 2015) which is at odds with their gender identity and candidates may be concerned that assumptions will be made about their sexual or gender identity based on how they speak, their mannerisms and their dress. Careers advisors can play a key role in supporting students who identify as LGBTQ+ students for employment through tailored coaching that

addresses some of these key issues. This could contribute to the development of a more positive campus climate for LGBTQ+ students.

The use of non-discriminatory language on campus helps to ensure a positive campus climate for students who identify as LGBTQ+. It is important that heterosexuality and gender identity are not assumed (NUS, 2014) and university leadership should ensure that all staff are trained in appropriate use of language (Formby, 2015). Aligned with this is the importance of updating university documentation to ensure that gender is not presented as a binary and gender-neutral facilities on campus should be clearly signposted. Library services should provide students with access to texts and digital resources which address LGBTQ+ issues and library staff should ensure that a diverse range of authors are represented.

Discrimination, prejudice and bullying

Research by Ellis (2009) reported the existence of homophobia on university campuses in the UK and this also replicates earlier findings in the US (Rankin, 2005). Ellis concluded that 'LGBT students do not particularly perceive a 'climate of fear', but [still] actively behave in ways that respond to such a climate' (Ellis, 2009, p. 733). Ellis found that students deliberately concealed their gender or sexual identity because they did not feel comfortable disclosing their sexual identity. Valentine et al (2009) found that trans students reported a higher proportion of negative treatment, including threat of physical violence, compared to those who identified as LGB and these findings have also been replicated in the US (Garvey and Rankin, 2015).

Keenan (2014) found that despite institutional commitments to equality and diversity, the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ students suggests that these policies are often not borne out in practice. It is evident that verbal and physical abuse are still apparent on university campuses are still apparent on university campuses, although verbal abuse is more common than physical abuse (Keenan, 2014). Additionally, other research has found that homophobic language is sometimes explained away merely as 'banter' but nevertheless this still pathologises students who identify as LGBTQ+.

Research on LGBTQ bullying, harassment and discrimination is complex because students interpret these terms differently and there is a broad continuum of experiences (Formby, 2015) ranging from positive to negative and which shift over time. Regardless of intent, it is

important that universities treat incidents as bullying, harassment and discrimination if they are perceived in that way by the victim. Research suggests that male students have more negative attitudes towards LGBT students than females do (Worthen, 2012). However, females tend to have more negative attitudes towards lesbians (Worthen, 2012), possibly due to fear of unwanted sexual advances (Eliason, 1997) but do have more positive attitudes towards transgender students than men do (Worthen, 2012). The research on gender differences may go some way to explaining the strong heterosexist 'lad' culture which may exist on some campuses (NUS, 2012).

Alternative narratives of LGBTQ+ students in higher education

In this section, I present a counter-narrative to the documented narratives which portray gay students as victims who are at risk. Whilst existing research portrays students who are LGBTQ+ through a victimised framework, only one study has been located which presents an account which moves the debate beyond this tragic portrayal (Taulke-Johnson, 2008). This is a small-scale study of six male undergraduate students who self-identified as gay in a UK university. As such, the small sample size and the homogeneous nature of the participants (i.e. all male) compromises the reliability of the research. Whilst it is not possible to draw generalisations from this research, the study nevertheless adds a new dimension to the existing field of knowledge by presenting an account which challenges the dominant portrayal of the queer victim.

Gay students have been portrayed in the academic literature as victims (Taulke-Johnson, 2008) and accounts have documented the impact of homophobia, intolerance and harassment on their psychological wellbeing, their academic achievement and their physical health (Brown et al, 2004; Tucker and Potocky-Tripodi, 2006). These accounts situate gay students within a 'Martyr-Target-Victim' model (Rofes, 2004, p. 41) and positive accounts are largely unreported and ignored (Taulke-Johnson, 2008). Accounts which portray the 'tragic queer' (Rasmussen and Crowley, 2004, p. 428) with a 'wounded identity' (Haver, 1997, p. 278) are only partial and they locate gay students within a pathologised framework. These accounts are largely unquestioned and remain unproblematized and label gay students as victims. It has been argued that:

The constant re(telling) and reiterating of those stories which catalogue pain and misery, and solely portray gay students as victims and survivors of anti gay sentiment, provides only a particular pathologised and partial understanding of and insight into their lived experiences at university.

(Taulke-Johnson, 2008, p. 123)

However, whilst experiences of homophobia, harassment and discrimination are unfortunately a reality for some students, it is important to offer a more balanced perspective which reflects the lived experiences of the gay student population. An alternative narrative which presents non-victimised accounts of their experience offers a more nuanced, inclusive and comprehensive insight into gay students' experiences (Taulke-Johnson, 2008) of higher education.

During their time at university gay students can experience fulfilling, enjoyable and empowering experiences. These include: falling in love, developing sexual relationships, establishing new social networks and friendships and having fun. For some LGBTQ+ students, university is a time when they can explore and develop their self-identities in safe, accepting environments (Taulke-Johnson, 2008). Taulke-Johnson's participants emphasised how they had been able to construct positive LGBTQ+ identities in accepting and liberal environments whilst studying at university. These counter-narratives challenge the dominant discourses of homophobia, victimisation and harassment which are well-documented in the literature (Greene and Banerjee, 2006; Kulkin, 2006; Peterson and Gerrity, 2006).

Within Taulke-Johnson's study participants did not recount intolerance or harassment in university because of their sexual orientations. Additionally, experiences of homophobia and victimisation did not dominate their accounts. They experienced the university space as liberal and accepting and they were able to explore their sexual identity. Whilst they experienced the pervasive expectations, norms and regulations of compulsory heterosexuality, and the pressure to tone down their gayness, they were able to successfully negotiate their homosexual identities and this allowed them to experience university as a pleasurable, life-affirming experience (Taulke-Johnson, 2008).

However, despite these positive narratives university spaces, once described as 'threateningly straight' (Epstein et al, 2003, p. 138), are places where varying levels of 'outness' or self-censorship (Formby, 2012; 2013) may exist. Even where LGBTQ+ students experience university spaces as liberal and accepting, the heterosexist and heteronormative discourse can result in them modifying their behaviour so as not to transgress heterosexual norms (Taulke-Johnson, 2008). This can result in gay students carefully negotiating their homosexual identity due to lack of certainty about other people's reactions to their 'gayness' or as a response to homophobic language which is explained away as 'banter' but which nevertheless objectifies and 'others' LGBTQ+ students (Keenan, 2015). Pressure to behave

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as a 'good homosexual' (Epstein et al, 2000, p.19) i.e. one who is 'straight looking' and 'straight acting' (Taulke-Johnson, 2008, p. 128) can result in gay students carefully negotiating their homosexuality to fit in, despite experiencing university as a positive experience where they feel accepted and supported (Taulke-Johnson, 2008). Banter from heterosexual students towards LGBTQ+ students may not be framed as homophobic but nevertheless reinforces compulsory heterosexuality and gay students' passive responses to these perpetuate anti-gay discourses (Taulke-Johnson, 2008).

Homophobia may not be a dominant discourse in the lives of all students who identify as LGBTQ+. They may experience university as a liberal and accepting space where they can explore their identities and build new relationships. However, the existing research (Taulke-Johnson, 2008) demonstrates that despite these positive experiences of LGBTQ+ students, nevertheless they skilfully negotiated their homosexuality in ways which allowed the norms of compulsory heterosexuality to influence their behaviour. They achieved this by largely adopting the position of the 'good homosexual' by keeping their sexuality invisible. This led to them experiencing university as a pleasurable, fun and enjoyable experience (Epstein et al, 2000, p.19).

This is work in progress. I am currently conducting in-depth interviews with LGBT students to gather data for my study.