

LOUISE CAROLIN

Extract 1: 30.32 – 33.55

STUDENT LESBIAN AND GAY POLITICS IN THE LATE '80s

L: I remember discussions about bisexuality going on at the time and when I was, in fact it was quite big when I ... in my other life as a student, I was involved in student lesbian and gay politics as we called it then, and I erm, made myself quite unpopular by supporting bi inclusion, and to me it was just ... it was a kind of, you know, pragmatic political thing that we were under enormous pressure as a community, and that it made sense to be inclusive rather than exclusive. But the ... the National Union of Students' line on, you know, on bisexuality was that it was completely separate. Bisexuals should organise separately. It was, you know, lesbian and gay conference. Everything was lesbian and gay. Lesbian and gay officer, lesbian and gay erm, you know kind of, you had your own college officer or you might have if, you know, if you were lucky, if your board of governors had approved it, erm, and then you had like an area, one NUS area executive would have had a lesbian and gay officer on it as well so, you know, everything was lesbian and gay and we had a couple of ... I remember one particular run in where there was a ... we had ... we had women's discos which were basically kind of lesbian discos, but everyone could come, so straight women would go to them.

My straight friends frequently came to the women's bops, to erm, to, you know, to hang out and bi women would come, erm, but then you'd have the lesbian and gay bop and that was strictly, you know, you had to be *out* as lesbian or gay, and I remember an awful occasion once where a girl I knew who was a friend ... she was a flatmate of a really good friend of mine who was a lesbian, identified as a lesbian then and this girl showed up at the lesbian and gay disco with a gay male friend of hers' who had never been to the disco before and kind of wanted her as his, you know, kind of support and friend, you know? And the ... our women's officer who was ... our college women's officer, who was a lesbian turned her away on the door in a really aggressive way like, you know, questioned her, was like "I didn't know you were a lesbian" and she was like "I ... I'm not a lesbian." And I happened to be there and I was absolutely cringing and I remember kind of following her down the road and going "I'm so so sorry." And her gay friend went with her as well and they were both very upset and I was like "This is really awful, I'll go back and talk to Maggie." And went back and Maggie was just like, you know, "We can't just have anybody coming in here, it's a lesbian and gay disco." You know? It was crazy. It was really crazy and at the time the girl, you know, the young woman involved in the scenario, hadn't told me that she identified as bi, but she subsequently did and I was just like "This is insane! We're in this tiny college, you know? We've got a Gay Soc that consists of, you know, half a dozen people on a good day. Why would we turn people away?"

Extract 2: 1:07:15 – 1:11:16

COMING OUT AGAIN AS BI

L: But once I'd began sort of experimenting with dating men I found it really ... it was really exciting. Not actually the, you know, the kind of having sex with men, going out with men, trying ... trying out relationships with men but ... but going through that coming out experience again. 'Cos I was older and I was much more in control of it and it was ... just, you know, it was like walking around just having these revelations like all the time, which, you know, as a nineteen year old was just overwhelming and a bit terrifying and it was a bad time, you know, it was not a great time to be coming out in lots of ways even though, as I've said, I had a ... you know, a good coming out experience as a lesbian.

I think coming out as an older woman, especially when you've already done it once is, you know, it was just extraordinary. It felt very - I don't like that word empowering, but it did feel empowering, erm, you know, I felt kind of jet-propelled just in my sense of like coming into myself. Not because my true self was bisexual but because ... maybe because my true self is somebody who's very erm ... interested in how ... how one's sexual identity affects how one is in the world. How you're perceived. How you ... how you make your way through it, and I've never seen erm ... you know like some people seem to relate to their gayness as a burden or a ... you know, something they wish they weren't, you know? Like "Nobody chooses to be a lesbian. Nobody chooses to be gay" That kind of thing, and I always think, I kind of feel like I did choose and not just because I'm really quote/unquote 'bisexual', but because it was, to me, it's a valid choice. If you choose, why the hell not?

Why would you not choose? Everyone should be allowed to choose every time they, you know, they get into a sexual relationship or have an attraction, or whatever. It should be, you know, I'd like people ... I wish people generally embraced that idea of kind of choice and valid expression of their sexuality more than I think we do culturally now, particularly in the LGBT world where there's a lot of that kind of "Oh, we wouldn't ... we didn't choose. Give us rights because we didn't choose to be this way, we can't help it." I don't find that a very helpful way of looking at orientation or a very empowering way of looking at it or experiencing it, and I think that goes back to my having come out through feminism where it was really in the, in the mid '80s, it was really positioned as "This is a valid choice for women, this is a good thing. This is a way to be, you know, to be a woman without, you know, kind of, it being about your relationship to men."

So even people who didn't identify then as political lesbians erm, actually that way of thinking about sexuality very much informed how a lot of us engaged with our sexual identities. So, you know, by the time I came out as bi, I had all this stuff you know? All these different ideas and ways of relating, and I was fortunate again because most people really didn't have a problem. A lot of my friends had bi histories themselves.

Extract 3: 1:17:40 – 1:21:16

DEPUTY EDITOR AT DIVA. BI VISIBILITY IN THE MAGAZINE.

L: People maybe who have always identified as bi, or people whose experience of coming out as bi has been much more problematic for them. I mean, you know, take away people's personal experiences, I think visibility is like a massive thing and what ... what had happened really is that it had finally kind of hit me that very late in the day, that the b was so massively under-represented in this kind of brave new acronym world that, you know, that we had ... we had to do something.

We had to, we had, you know, I'm deputy editor on a magazine that says it speaks to bi women, but very, very, seldom put, you know, a bisexual story on the cover, that probably only ran, you know, a couple of bi features every year, you know, in twelve issues and that that really wasn't OK because we could do a lot better than that. And I'm very glad to see you know, I've always felt one of the most rewarding things about working at Diva has always been that we get the feedback that means that we know that the magazine is really important to people ... that it really makes a difference to people that they can walk into W.H.Smith theoretically and take a lesbian magazine off the ... off the shelf, erm, and that even though we have a huge ... that people complain massively about feeling under-represented in the magazine, not seeing themselves represented in the magazine, erm, you know, that the flip side of that coin is that the magazine exists and people really want it to be there. They just want it to be more you know, targeted to them as a reader.

But yeah, I just yeah finally woke up and realised that bi women really needed to be erm, made more visible in any way possible because the levels of erm ... the effect of biphobia and the levels of mental illness and, you know, and domestic abuse and harassment and all kinds of things ... everything that affects lesbians really badly, it is becoming increasingly clear affect woman who identify as bi as badly, if not worse, and that there needs to be ... it needs to be recognised that bi women might have specific ... it's not enough to just include bi women with lesbians, we need to, you know, address bi women's needs specifically, and Diva's not a ... it's not a service, you know, we're not like a, you know, a mental health service or a sexual health service, we're not an organisation that does stuff like that, but it we make the B more visible as a real thing, these are real people, erm, with real experiences then that all feeds into this understanding within the kind of LGBT world of bisexual people as being, you know, a part – not just a part, but actually, you know, a discrete minority possibly a majority, but a discrete category of people who have their own issues.