

The gay stereotype

I don't know about you, but I find it incredibly frustrating that the old gay stereotypes still remain, and, from what I can work out, they probably always will. We're all incredibly camp, have lots of facial and stomach hair, and probably sleep with any other male that shows a vague interest. Oh, and we're all incapable of being in a relationship without sleeping with other men, we have an unhealthy interest in Shirley Bassey, we all boogie away in nightclubs with our shirts off and white powder up our noses, and we spend our evenings engaging in orgies or feasting our eyes on gay porn.

Even today, many people who haven't had the good fortune to get to know gay people, or gay couples, continue to believe that this is the way we lead our lives. I wrote a couple of issues ago about the way we are portrayed on television and the media, and, even though some of the stereotypes have disappeared, many, unfortunately, still remain.

The truth is that most of us live very ordinary lives and consider ourselves normal, law-abiding members of society. We do the same things other people do. We live in perfectly ordinary houses without a sex dungeon (actually, I did know someone who had one of those, but it ruins my thesis). We drive the same cars – because, believe it or not, we don't all like the open-top Jeeps the bloke in *Queer as Folk* drove. With the notable exception of *Attitude*, we buy normal people's magazines. For goodness sake, I even have subscriptions to *Stuff*, *FourFourTwo* and *GQ*. How manly can you get?!

Society likes to box us into little homogenous groups and, in a media-driven age, it suits a lot of agendas to pretend that somehow we are all the same. But we're not. We're individuals who each lead totally different lives with different tastes, habits and proclivities.

In many ways, the internet age ought to have liberated us all from the stranglehold of stereotype, but, in some ways, the opposite has happened. Mainstream media narratives still dominate. Tories are still rich toffs. UKIP supporters are racist Little Englanders. Liberal Democrats are basket-weaving sandal-wearers. Labour voters wear flat caps and own whippets. If a black man drives a BMW he has probably stolen it. Anyone wearing a hoodie is likely to mug you. Gay men will shag anything with a penis. You get the picture.

It is clear to me that one of the things driving the promulgation of stereotypes is often fear of the unknown. Often, it is a perfectly understandable fear. Animals fear what they don't know, so why shouldn't humans? Let me give you two examples. I took a call on my radio programme the other day during a discussion on street crime. An elderly white lady phoned in to tell me how she feared being mugged by the various groups of hooded kids on her estate. One day, she was walking home and saw a group of them looking menacing on a street corner. She panicked and dropped a bag of shopping. Immediately, one of the hoodies came over and, instead of nicking the shopping, helped her put it back in her bag and even carried it home for her. She said she felt thoroughly ashamed for thinking the worst was about to happen. Another barrier broken down.

We bought a house in Norfolk recently. I suspect we're the only gays in the village. I have to say that everyone has been incredibly friendly, but I had to laugh recently when one of the neighbours blurted out: 'You're both very normal, aren't you?'

I didn't know whether to laugh or cry. Normal for Norfolk, as the saying goes.

Virtually every gay couple I know I consider to be 'normal'. OK, one or two may be slightly more exotic than others, but that's the same in the world of straightery too. Perhaps we are too defensive about gay stereotypes and, instead of fighting them, we shouldn't give two hoots about them. Because, in the end, we know who we are. We don't need to be told by society.