BONA TO VADA YOUR DOLLY OLD EKE!
CONSTRUCTION OF GAY IDENTITY IN THE JULIAN
AND SANDY RADIO SKETCHES

by

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Abstract

The paper examines the construction of gay identity in a Sunday lunchtime British 1960s radio comedy programme. While the characters can be constructed on the surface as effeminate “negative” gay stereotypes, the analysis reveals that more subversive and daring interpretations can also be applied. The roles of Polari (a “gay” language variety), euphemism and the radio medium are explored as key contributory factors in the representation of gay identity in the sketches.

Introduction

In the 1960s, two of the most popular radio characters in the U.K. were Julian and Sandy, a pair of outrageous, camp “queens” who shrieked their way into radio mythology with an unending supply of queer banter which somehow managed to escape the censors. Julian and Sandy spoke Polari, a secret language variety known to the gay subculture of the time, which has origins dating back to the criminal’s Cant of the 18th Century, but also has roots in Italian, French, Yiddish, rhyming slang, and the lexicons of beggars, prostitutes, sailors, fairground people, the American airforce, actors and drug-users at various points in its development. This paper examines Polari’s contribution to the construction of the gay identities of Julian and Sandy.

Julian and Sandy were two fictional characters, created by Barry Took and Marty Feldman and voiced by Hugh Paddick and Kenneth Williams on the British BBC radio series Round the Horne. The show, which ran from 1964 until 1969, was immensely popular, attracting 9 million listeners each week and winning the Writers' Guild of Great Britain Award for the best comedy script in 1967. Round the Horne consisted of a series of comedy sketches, linked together by "straight man" Kenneth Horne (hence the show's title). Each episode tended to adhere to the same format, containing a film spoof, a musical number, a parody of a cooking or fashion programme, a folk song from the fictional character Rambling Sid Rumpo (also voiced by Kenneth Williams), and usually
ending with a Julian and Sandy sketch. The fact that this sketch was almost always last suggests that it was the most popular part of the show - the part "worth waiting for".\(^2\)

Julian and Sandy were the two "friends" in each sketch, and although their sexual orientation or relationship to one another was ever made explicit, it was implied in many other ways. They were both stereotypical effeminate homosexuals, although of the two, it was Sandy who was the more experienced, aggressive and sharp, while Julian tended to be softer, although supposedly more talented and physically attractive.

In 1992 a tape of Julian and Sandy sketches was published by the BBC, which was followed in 1996 by a second tape (total running time of both tapes together: three and a half hours approximately). Added to this data was *The Bona Album of Julian and Sandy*, an L.P. which was released at the height of their popularity, using Barry Took instead of Kenneth Horne. I was also able to procure copies of two more sketches which were not on the tapes (*Bona Antiques* and *The Daily Polari*). In total the Julian and Sandy data consists of 51 short radio comedy sketches (35 000 words) of transcribed data (approximately 3 and a half hours in total).

For many gay men who did not live in London or did not have a circle of gay friends, in the 1960s their only exposure to Polari was through listening to *Round the Horne* on the radio. Indeed, at that time *Round the Horne* was the only programme on the radio or television to base part of its show around homosexuality, albeit in an implicit context.

Even if you lived in a little village in the back of Hicksville - and you had to be listening to it on the crystal set with the bedroom door locked, and it on very softly, you still had Julian and Sandy giving you courage mon amie.


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1 For a fuller description of Polari see Baker (1997).
2 Barry Took agrees with this statement. "The were the most popular part of the show. Marty Feldman got tired of them and wanted to leave them out, but I didn't want to. So we did a sketch where we did leave them out one week, and then had them come in and complain that it was a disgrace and make all sorts of suggestions as to what we could have had them doing." (Personal correspondence with Barry Took, 1997).
So Julian and Sandy were possibly the only accessible gay identities who were able to provide some sort of clue that other people like themselves existed and were part of a subculture.

The camp, outrageous characters created by Barry Took and Marty Feldman were not initially what they envisaged for Round the Horne:

We had written two old gentleman, two old actors, they were terribly booming old boys, and in those days it was commonplace for actors to do housework between engagements, and we thought it would be funny for these old theatrical chaps going to Kenneth Horne to do his washing up and the rest of it...the producer didn't like them – “they're too sad, make them chorus boys.”

Took interviewed on BBC Radio (1998)

So the sketch was modernised, to make the actors younger and more contemporary. Julian was named after Julian Slade, who co-wrote Salad Days with Dorothy Reynolds, while Sandy was named after Sandy Wilson, who wrote The Boyfriend. Members of The Royal Ballet Company loved Julian and Sandy, possibly recognising themselves in many of the sketches - to them, it was a shared secret. (Correspondence with Barry Took, 1997).

Almost every sketch had the same premise: Kenneth Horne (playing himself) would find out (usually from a magazine of dubious credentials) about a new business which had just started up, generally in Chelsea or Carnaby Street, and his curiosity would take him there. He would knock on the door, ask, "Hello, anybody there?" to which Julian (Hugh Paddick) would always respond, "I'm Julian, this is my friend Sandy", and Sandy (Kenneth Williams) would follow with a phrase heavily peppered with Polari (usually “Hello Mr Horne, how bona to vada your dolly old eke again”). With this introductory routine established, the sketch would begin properly with Julian and Sandy talking about their new business (often leaving Kenneth Horne out of the conversation completely) or trying to get him to try their new product or service. Even within this framework there

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3 Salad Days (commissioned in 1954) is a musical about a young couple who discover a piano that has the power to make all who hear it dance. The Boyfriend is a musical spoof set in the 1920s.
were a number of patterns which came to be expected, for example, Sandy would often reveal or hint at a dark (homosexual) secret of Julian’s, causing Julian to hiss "traitor!" but then eventually allow himself to be encouraged to "unburden himself" of the whole story. Each sketch ended rather abruptly, with a quick punch line.

So although the Julian and Sandy sketches are wholly artificial, they were used, both as a source of humour, and as a source of Polari instruction by gay men of that time. According to David (1997: 199) by the late 1960s Polari had become “almost extinct” within UK gay subcultures, and the Julian and Sandy sketches provoked a revival.

**Analysis of sketches**

The Polari lexicon

It is likely that the Polari words used in *Round the Horne* originally came from the Polari which was used by the homosexual community (and others) in London's West End. Took and Feldman were "15 year old grammar school drop-outs" who had gradually got into show business. Took worked at a musical publishers, then as a trumpet player, then with dance bands and became a musical comic in the West End. Took’s choreographer introduced him to Polari, which was used by a good deal of theatre people. (Correspondence with Barry Took, 1997.) Kenneth Williams did identify as homosexual⁴ and had a show-business background which stretched to the theatre and his days as an entertainer in the army. According to Barry Took and Marty Feldman⁵, Williams told them the Polari words and their meanings (although not always accurately) and the writers included them in the Julian and Sandy sketches. Table 1 below shows the Polari words used in the sketches:

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⁴ His diaries, published posthumously reveal that he was often unhappy about his sexuality (Davies, 1994).
⁵ There is no record of Took or Feldman publicly identifying as anything other than heterosexual.
Table 1. Frequencies of Polari words found in the Julian and Sandy data.

Words marked with an asterisk are the lemma of the word, and correspond to other forms such as plurals, tenses etc. Therefore, *vada* (70) consists of *vada* (65), *vadaing* (1), *vadas* (1) and *vadaed* (3). *Eke* is *eke* (48), *ekes* (3) and *eke’s* (1). *Troll* is *troll* (19), *trolling* (25), *trolled* (3) and *trolls* (1). *Ommee* is *ommee* (31), *ommees* (9) and *ommee’s* (2). *Lallie* is *lallies* (22), *lallie* (3). *Palone* is *palone* (19) and *palones* (8).

The sketches used a lexicon of 52 Polari word-types which counts for about an eighth of the Polari words know to the author. Considering that a total of 843 Polari word tokens...
are found across the sketches (which taken together count for about 35,000 words), only 2.5% of the words in the sketches were actually spoken in Polari – the rest were in English. None of the Polari terms for numbers (una, dooey, trey etc.) are used by Julian and Sandy, nor are the related terms for money (tosheroon, beyonek, gent)\(^6\). Also excluded are words which relate to sexual intercourse such as kertever cartzo (venereal disease), cartzo (penis), pont (pimp), charvering donna (whore) and charver (have sexual intercourse). This Polari lexicon is therefore a simplified, “sanitised” version – made necessary for the purposes of British media broadcasting in the 1960s. The lack of sexually taboo words can also be attributed to the fact that at least one of the writers didn’t want to use them:

There were no swear words either. We never used them. We didn’t want to, it wasn’t in our makeup. Later comedy programmes such as Steptoe and Son, and To Death Do Us Part used them, but they were a different generation to us.


The large number of Polari words in existence would have been too complex for the audience to follow, if hundreds of them had been used (making the unlikely assumption that the writers knew them all). So by concentrating on a core vocabulary, which could be used and reused in a number of different contexts, Polari was made quickly accessible to people who were not previously aware of its existence. This accessibility and simplicity made it the dominant version of Polari to exist post-Julian and Sandy\(^7\). A further aspect of this simplification of Polari, was that in the majority of cases, Julian and Sandy would use it in a way which aided translation - so instead of filling every sentence with incomprehensible Polari, the characters only used the occasional word here and there, sometimes giving translations as they proceeded.

Kenneth Horne: Yes, oh I see you’ve got lallie of lamb on.
Sandy: Oh yes
Julian: Yes, lambs very nice, or there’s your jugged riah. That’s erm Polari for hair.\(^8\)

\(^6\) It is debatable whether any of the words for numbers or money could ever have been classed as Polari. Only Hancock (1984) lists them as Polari whereas other authors, writing from a gay perspective (e.g. Burton 1979, Lucas 1994) do not.

\(^7\) In interviews I conducted with Polari speakers, almost all of the words in the Julian and Sandy lexicon were well-known to them.

\(^8\) Thanks to Richard Maggs who provided the interpretation for this line. “As a chef, I know that the most usual way to eat Hare in this country is in a dish known as Jugged Hare” (a traditional stew).
So the sketches cannot be held to represent a typical example of Polari speech, just as textbooks on the English language which rely on carefully constructed, simple, grammatical sentences such as "John gave Pat the ball" cannot be held as typical examples of spoken English. However, like language textbooks, the sketches provided a blueprint for learning a basic version of Polari.

As stated above, Polari was only a relatively small contributory factor in the construction of gay identity in the Julian and Sandy sketches. So before examining Polari’s contribution to gay identity, I wish to outline briefly the ways that Julian and Sandy were represented in the sketches, in order to demonstrate the relationship between identity stereotyping and Polari use.

**Stereotypical representations of gay identity**

Because of the radio format, language was the most important way that identity was constructed (rather than placing a reliance on visual codes such as dress, gait, posture, facial expressions, hand movements etc). Both Julian and Sandy have stereotypically “camp” voices, with East London working-class accents (an accent strongly linked to Polari speakers). The roles are played for humour, with a great deal of exaggerated exclaiming, and a good use of comic timing.

Gay identity is therefore constructed via the channel of conversation, and I would argue that there are two interacting strands or traits which are mainly accessed in order to produce stereotypes about Julian and Sandy. On the one hand, their homosexuality is associated with stereotypes to do with femininity, and on the other, they are represented as “deviant” transgressors, who are against traditional sexual norms concerned with the stability of long-term heterosexual relationships, sanctioned by religion and law.

Julian and Sandy appear to be fond of gossip (a form of discourse traditionally, although often incorrectly associated with women), while topic of conversation also contributes strongly to identity construction – themes include descriptions of other men, evaluations
of other people’s homes and clothing, fear of ageing and exposure of techniques designed
to hide the ageing process:

Sandy: Here, that’s never Kenneth Horne.
Julian: It is
Sandy: Oooh, he doesn’t half look old dunnee. I wonder if they’re his own teeth.

Sandy: Now look at the… vada Mr Horne at this garden of yours.
Kenneth Horne: Right it’s through here.
Sandy: Oh, innit nasty. Innit nasty, I couldn’t be doing with a garden like this could you Jules.
Julian: What!
Sandy: Oh those horrible little naff gnomes. Oh no!
Julian: What! It’s a bit like Noddy in Toyland innit.

Sandy: Yeah, we'll be out as soon as Jule's finished doing his riah. Takes him hours combing it so the join
don't show.
Julian: Traitor! Traitor! You swore you'd never mention it.
Sandy: You're so vain!
Julian: Oh! Hark who's talking.
Sandy: Mm.
Julian: Puts on hormone cream Mr Horne.
Sandy: Don't listen. Liar!
Julian: Oh yes you do.
Sandy: Liar!
Julian: You do too. And anti-wrinkle cream on your elbows.

Gossip, and particularly “bitchiness” abounds in their interactions. Julian and Sandy are
often critical of each other, Mr Horne and other men. They are also constructed as
physically weak, and trivialising; making much of small matters.

Sandy: He grabbed me by the wrist, he pinned me down, and then he broke it.
Kenneth Horne: Your wrist?
Sandy: No ducky, me fingernail!
Although Julian and Sandy are actors, they are regularly unable to find theatrical work, and therefore take on other jobs to make money: in every sketch they are seen in another line of business. While this allows considerable scope for the development of unique scenarios, this transience implies that they will never settle down to anything permanent – a lack of dedication and respectability which is set up in opposition to the (then) tradition in mainstream society of holding down the same job for life.

Impermanence is also implied by the implication that Julian and Sandy both have dark “pasts”, or many incidents in their romantic lives that they would rather forget about: liaisons which need to be shamefully coaxed from them:

Sandy: Don’t mention rugby to Jules! Ooh!
Julian: Ha! Ha!
Sandy: Ooh! Don’t mention that to him
Julian: Ha! Ha!
Sandy: Ooh! Here, no, here. He’s sworn, he’s sworn never to touch a pair of rugby shorts again. No listen, no listen ducky. After what happened.
Julian: Oh! He swore he’d never tell.
Sandy: Go on, tell Mr Horne about it, go on, tell him
Julian: No, no, no.
Sandy: Go on let yourself go.
Julian: No.
Sandy: Purge yourself! Purge, purge!

Many sketches feature such examples of near-hysteria: the characters seem to flit from one extreme or emotion to another, implying that nothing remains stable for long. Such stereotypical emotional exaggeration is characterised by Bruce Rodgers:

They [the flaming faggots] overdramatize words to make up for the plainness they find in their own lives; to them life is a stage with all the lights going and the audience constantly clapping for more. It’s Vegas every minute!

Rodgers (1972: 11)

Euphemism and innuendo
The use of the "double meaning" or saying one thing which can be interpreted in two ways, usually one innocent and one subversive is a way of saying something controversial, being funny at the same time, diluting the potential amount of offence caused and obscuring the meaning from those too young or innocent to understand. If Julian and Sandy had said, "We've been having anal intercourse" then nobody would have found it very amusing, and many would have found it distasteful. But by merely alluding to anal intercourse (e.g. comments such as “he took his part lovely” in Bona Homes) the writers of the Julian and Sandy sketches managed to create humour from the conflict and interaction between what was said and what was meant. Sexual humour had to be covert if it was not to offend - complaints could be dismissed with something akin to the "Emperor's New Clothes" syndrome - "what a dirty mind you must have to make these connections". Lucas (1994) wonders how the writers of Julian and Sandy got away with it all. Barry Took's explanation is that the BBC either didn't understand it, or they “didn't like to say”. The following, reflexive excerpt from Julian and Sandy, demonstrates the foundations upon which Round the Horne was based:

Sandy: …we could have been in a railway booking office and I could have said, Jule is checking his departures and looking up his Bradshaw. Haaaa!
Kenneth Horne: No, no, no, no, no, oh no. I don't think so. The audience may have seen a secondary meaning.
Sandy: Them? Secondary meaning?
Julian: What?
Sandy: They don't even see the first meaning. Just laugh at anything that might be dirty don't they. Disgusting!

No Julian and Sandy

In the 1960s innuendo was the dominant form of British sexual humour. For example, the Carry-on films contained numerous references to heterosexual intercourse and parts of the anatomy (usually female) - interestingly Kenneth Williams also played (asexual) roles

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9 The Julian and Sandy sketches were not the only ones in Round the Horne to make use of innuendo. Another popular sketch was Rambling Syd Rumpo (again played by Kenneth Williams), a folk singer who peppered his songs with a great deal of nonsense language, which had been invented by the writers. In some ways, Rambling Syd Rumpo is an even more extreme example of innuendo, as the words often had no real English translations, whereas, at least with Julian and Sandy, secondary meanings could be read into the dialogue, and Polari was also used to refer to male body parts. Barry Took (in a personal interview) said of Rambling Syd Rumpo "Of course, moulies didn't really mean testicles but all the same, the audience thought it did, and they found it funny."
in many of these films. But it was not only heterosexual humour which had to be shrouded in innuendo - references to homosexuality in more general terms were hidden in euphemisms:

Julian: There’s Cyril, ‘es half and half you know. Half King Charles Spaniel. Half Fox Terrier. We call him a Fox Cocker.

Bona Pets

Sandy: Inne bold? I’ve got his number ducky. Yes go on Jules though. Sorry for that interruption. Go on, it’s beginning to sing now, isn’t it, yes go on.

Bona Homes

Sandy: I mean you take the Hooded Terror.
Julian: Hooded
Sandy: He’s one of ours.

Bona Promotions

Sandy: We're gentleman's misfits.
Julian: Yes. No, no, no, what Sand means is we're interested in anything reasonable in gentleman's clothing

Bona Rags

Kenneth Horne: I know a bargain when I see one. And where will you dispose of the stuff? To distressed gentlefolk?
Julian: Oh no, no. There’s no point in adding to their distress. We've got a different outlet Mr Horne.

Bona Rags

Sandy: Now look, turn Jule. Watch him Mr Horne. He's on the turn. Now that’s, yes, that’s beautiful, isn’t that beautiful, that’s fantabulosa.

Bona Male Models

Julian: Oh yes, we feel there’s a crying need in this country today for men like us to get out into the open.

Lazy Bona Ranch

While innuendo takes any word or phrase and distorts the meaning by relying on features of the phrase that are ambiguous, euphemism refers to a neutral stock phrase or idiom which is knowingly used to refer to something taboo. Euphemisms can be used for sex, but are also generally found in language surrounding any tabooed or uncomfortable
subject (*pink slip*: dismissal notice, *collateral losses*: civilian casualties). Euphemisms for homosexuality can often be overlooked as they sometimes occur out of context, when Julian and Sandy are talking about something else, as in their description of a dog as being "half and half". Difference and/or belonging are often themes which are used in the creation of a homosexuality innuendo. Phrases such as "different outlet", "gentlemen’s misfits" and "not recognised by doctors" tap in to common feelings about homosexuality at the time the sketches were written, while "men like us" and "one of ours" suggest that not only are Julian and Sandy labelling someone else as homosexual, but are admitting to their own homosexuality at the same time. "On the turn" is an interesting euphemism, referring to someone whose sexuality is changing - from homosexual to heterosexual, or vice versa, while "I’ve got his number", appears several times in the sketches as a Polari phrase, meaning "I know he’s homosexual" but has also survived into present day English slang usage now meaning "I know what you’re up to."

Euphemisms relating more directly to homosexual sex are very common: the pronoun "it" is used to refer both to the act of sex, and to particular body parts:

Sandy: Yes, we are the Universal Party, so called because we’re at it right left and centre.

Keep Britain Bona

Julian: I used to stand there with it fizzing in me hand. And I used to say, I am Swifty the tonic fruit salts kid.

Bona Ads

The verb "to do" is also a euphemism for sex:

Sandy: We’re concerned with efficiency, cutting out waste. Take when we did the gas board. We did them didn’t we?

Julian: Oh indeed yes.

Sandy: We did the gas board.

Time and Motion

However, other types of innuendo have more complex structures. For example:

Sandy: Yes, or there’s the party’s over, it’s all over my friend. I mean, yes yes, it’s lovely, no, it’s lovely, that is poignant.
Here Sandy is quoting from a song title, and the ambiguity lies in the phrase "it’s all over my friend", which can be interpreted as him talking to his friend and telling the friend that "It is all over", or the more subversive meaning translates as Sandy announcing that something, the "it" of the phrase is all over his friend, possibly a bodily fluid? The audience understood this, and laughed, prompting Sandy to lapse out of character and "deny" the double meaning: "yes, yes it’s lovely, no".

Julian: So pleased with us, you know what they done?
Kenneth Horne: No
Julian: The zoological society made us fellows.

Three interpretations can be cast over the above remark. The innocent meaning translates to the zoological society awarded us by making us fellow members, while a secondary meaning would be "the zoological society turned us into fellows." Finally, a third meaning could be "The zoological society made us fellows to take home and keep etc."
The final two interpretations both refer to homosexuality in that the former assumes that Julian and Sandy are somehow "less than men", while in the latter Julian and Sandy want to possess men: a humorous reworking of the object cathexis vs. identification dilemma found in psychoanalytical theory (Freud 1977/1921: 135).

Other innuendo devices lie in the employment of words which were commonly known as having secondary meanings in the homosexual subculture, or were words meaning "homosexual" in the heterosexual subculture. Examples of the former type would be when Kenneth Horne is advised to "go camping", or "try cruising" in Bona Tours Ltd, or when Julian says he is sick to the stomach on reading the headline "Queens to be scrapped" which refers to the Queen’s ships. Names of places also take on gay identification, with "Queen's Way", and "Mincing Lane" both being quoted. Examples of the latter type would be when relating a cigarette advertisement which the characters had starred in Julian says, "I'd take a puff and ride off", or in another cigarette-related pun, Julian is upset when "the government ban fags from TV".
Constructing criminalised identities

Homosexual acts were criminalised (as well as tabooed) up until 1967. Hence, the need for secrecy which Polari afforded. Julian and Sandy’s homosexuality puts them on the edge of society, and therefore referring to the law, the police or crime becomes a useful shorthand in indexing homosexuality itself:

Julian: We’ve got a criminal practice that takes up most of our time.  

Bona Law

Julian: Yes, now, erm, could I interest you in a flame red shoulder length wig?  
Kenneth Horne: Well, not me, but you might interest the chief of police  

Bona Bouffant

In Bona Law, the criminal practice that Julian refers to is of course both his homosexuality (he is a practicing homosexual) and the law practice where he is currently employed. Thus Julian manages to straddle both sides of the law at the same time. In Bona Bouffant, the red wig is enough to suggest criminal deviance to Kenneth Horne.

The sketches also used euphemism to refer to the medical attitude towards homosexuality in the UK:

Sandy: Oh hello Mr Horne, yes, nice to see you, nice to vada your eke. Yes, we’re your actual homeopathic practioners. Yes, yes, we’re not recognised by doctors.  

Bona Nature Clinic

While the phrase “homeopathic practioners” is a wordplay on the phrase “practising homosexuals”, the next sentence is interesting in that it highlights the ambivalence towards homosexuality by certain doctors in the 1960s and earlier who believed that gay identities could be cured/erased via drugs or electric shock treatments.

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Throughout much of the 1950s and 1960s, the prevailing opinion of the medical establishment, and certainly the field of psychoanalysis, was that homosexuality was a developmental maladjustment or illness.

Scroggie (1999: 238)

Therefore, the Julian and Sandy sketches help to represent an oppressed gay identity, but in a cheerful, mocking and implied way, rather than by indexing an angry politicised identity which was adopted by members of the Gay Liberation Front movement post-Julian and Sandy.

Polari’s contribution to the construction of gay identities

The simplest way that Polari facilitated the construction of a gay identity was in the fact that it was used at all. Considering work on representation by Saussure (1960: 16) and Barthes (1967: 91-2), a sign is made up of two elements, the signifier and the signified. So a Polari word such as \textit{lally} would be a signifier, and the signified would be the mental concept of a leg, or a particular leg depending on the context that the word is used. This descriptive level, according to Barthes is the level of denotation, but there is a deeper level of cultural connotation encoded within the word \textit{lally}, which requires the reader (or hearer) of \textit{lally} to understand that the word is being used in reference to a gay context. Consider the excerpt below:

Kenneth Horne: Could you give me some idea of his act?
Sandy: Well he comes on wearing this leopard skin you see. He’s a great butch ome, he’s got these thews like an oak, and bulging lallies. Ohh!

Bona Performers

In the excerpt, Sandy enthuses about another man’s body, saying (translated) that the man has arms like an oak and bulging legs and that he’s very masculine. It is probably the case that UK family radio audiences in the 1960s would have had trouble hearing a \textit{woman} praise (and sexualise) a man’s body, so the idea of a male worshipping another male in this context is unthinkable. Therefore, Polari allows Sandy to say the unsayable. Only part of his description is in English, and the most important parts of the phrase are in Polari (\textit{lallies, ome, thews, butch}). Not only then, does Polari work at the level of
denotation (as a code for English words), it works at a connotative level by referring to a
gay context, both by the fact that the words can be used to refer to topics of “gay interest”
(men’s body parts, sex etc), and by the fact that it can be recognised as a language variety
used by gay men.

Polari, used in recurrent phrases such as “how bona to vada your dolly old eke!” becomes
referenced with the notion of the comedian’s catchphrase; a shorthand representation of
the comedy identity which is instantly recognisable to audiences, even when
decontextualised, and thus able to be appropriated by fans. To audiences then, the use of
Polari in itself is funny – not only because it can obscure taboo meanings, but because of
its otherness.

Occasionally the actors exploit the fact that the audience is not a homogeneous entity
when it comes to knowledge about Polari on an individual basis. For example, consider
the following excerpt:

Kenneth Horne: Well do the best you can - here’s the dishcloth.
Julian: We couldn’t wash up in here. All the dishes are dirty.
Sandy: Speak for yourself
Kenneth Horne: Well, well I’m sorry, I’d’ve washed up if I’d known.

The use of the word dish to refer to an attractive man (or woman) is a commonly known
slang word, which the Round the Horne audience would have understood. Their
laughter after Sandy’s retort confirms that they were able to infer the secondary meaning -
Sandy stating that he is both a "dish", and he is clean. Two “folk” homosexual
stereotypes are accessed here: first, the gay man as vain and appearance-oriented, and
second, the gay man who is obsessed with cleanliness.

The notion of “audience” is multiple here. The typical “family” audience would have been comprised of
both children and adults, who would have had different levels of comprehension of the jokes. Then there
would have been gay men and lesbians who would have perhaps understood the content of the sketches
more clearly. Finally Polari speakers would have derived more enjoyment from the sketches, being able to
decode more of the hidden meanings. Of course, these are not discrete categories – it is the case that the
father (or mother) of a family could be leading a secret gay life and thus would have to pretend to
understand the jokes less than they actually did.
In two separate interviews in Brighton, and in Mary McIntosh’s Parlare lexicon (1972) *dish* is described as referring to the anus or bottom. In this light, Sandy's assertion is taken to a deeper, more sexually oriented level. It is extremely unlikely that the audience, other than committed Polari speakers would have been aware of this third meaning\(^{12}\).

To give another example, Julian accesses multiple meanings of the word *plates*.

Julian: Scotches may be a bit naff, but his plates are bona.

*Bona Dance*

*Plates* is a Rhyming Slang word (plates of meat = feet), but from an interview with a group of Polari speakers in Brighton, it transpired that *plate* also refers to oral sex. Gardiner (1996: 123) agrees with this translation. Although one could derive *plate* from the rhyming word "fellate" The Cockney Rhyming Slang Dictionary (Franklyn, 1960: 108) lists *plates* as being the stem of both "plates of meat" and "plate of ham", which is rhyming slang for "gam" - a term deriving from "gamahouche" which also refers to oral sex. Thus for Julian to say that someone’s “plates are bona", he could be referring to "feet", or making a reference to oral sex.

According to Barry Took (personal correspondence with Barry Took, 1997) the writers were unaware of the secondary meanings of *plate* and *dish*. Took cites *plate* as coming from army or navy slang, whereas *dishes* was used in the above sketch initially because of its alliterative function "all the dishes are dirty". Although Took was unaware of the Polari meanings of *plate* and *dish*, that is not to say that Hugh Paddick and Kenneth Williams (the actors who played Julian and Sandy) would not have known them, as both would have had more involvement with the Polari-speaking gay subculture of the time, whereas Took, although telling me an anecdote where he was labelled "as camp as Chloe" by Frankie Howard, did not claim to be homosexual.

Interestingly, in the book “Round the Horne”, which features scripts from the series, Sandy’s comment “speak for yourself” is not included, suggesting that it was an ad lib by Kenneth Williams, or was purposefully removed from the script for publication:

\(^{12}\text{There is a fourth meaning of } dish, \text{ used by gay speakers, which has its origins in America and means to viciously chastise someone: "to dish someone".}\)
Kenneth Horne: Well do the best you can - here’s the dishcloths.
Sandy: Ugh! Green and yellow - we can’t be doing with that.
Kenneth Horne: What’s the matter with green and yellow dishcloths?
Julian: Well see for yourself treash. We’re wearing blue - doesn’t match at all. No anyway, we couldn’t wash up in here - all the dishes are dirty.
Kenneth Horne: Well I’m sorry; I’d have washed them if I’d known.

In Williams’ diary, he recounts an incident during the recording of Round the Horne in 1968, with Barry Took complaining that the sketches were becoming too “rude”:

Monday 8 April
‘R.T.H.’ Barry Took was in a v. funny mood and suddenly got quite snappy about the show becoming filthy. ‘We might as well write a series called Get Your Cock Out,’ he kept crying. I think he’s a bit demented.

Davies (ed.) 1994

It is possible then that Williams deliberately used his knowledge about Polari in order to make controversial jokes that would not have been interpreted by Barry Took and the censors, but would only have been understood properly by well-versed Polari speakers.

Constructions of Gay Masculinity in the Sketches

While Julian and Sandy were the two “obvious” gay constructs in the sketches, their sexual identity was not the only one which was referenced. For example their relationship with avuncular Kenneth Horne was open to subversion. As the "straight man" in both the sexual and comedic senses of the word, Kenneth Horne's fascination with the two gay characters was often archly commented upon by Julian and Sandy with suspicion.

Kenneth Horne: I take it you’re engaged in something pretty exciting at the moment.
Julian: No, no not really, we’re just standing here with our hands on our heads talking to you.
Kenneth Horne: Oh bold, very bold!
Sandy: I wonder where he spends his evenings. Oh yes you mean the subject, oh well frankly Mr Horne

Bona Prods
Although Horne did not claim to inhabit the same subculture as Julian and Sandy, instead being representative of British mainstream hegemonic “normality”, he occasionally used a phrase or word which indicated that he knew what the other two were saying, causing them to gasp and exclaim that he was very "bold”, a Polari euphemism meaning that he was not afraid to use the knowledge about the homosexual community that he had picked up, thereby implying that he was also homosexual.

Julian: We are the Cecil Bs of the 16 De Mille.
Sandy: Yes.
Julian: Small budget pictures really.
Kenneth Horne: Would I have vadaed any of them do you think?
Sandy: Oooh! He’s got all the Polari in’he.
Julian: I wonder where he picks it up?

Horne’s suspect sexuality and use of Polari is reminiscent of the closeted cautious gay identities described in the section on interview data above, where gay men would use occasion Polari words to drop hints about their sexual availability/orientation.

Although the sketches are essentially a three-hander between Julian, Sandy and Kenneth Horne, a number of their friends are frequently invoked, which afford further constructions of gay identity. Most notable are Gordon (who becomes their manservant in one of the sketches), Reynard LaSpoon (a choreographer), Panzo Wildebeaste (a film director) and Jock (a sailor). Julian and Sandy’s friends are therefore quite good reflections of the sorts of people who were connected with Polari: musical performers, actors and sailors.

Sandy: No ducky, no. Reynard LaSpoon the choreographer, he’s a close personal innee Jules
Julian: Oh, close. Very intimee.
Sandy: Very intimee. Intime you mean
Julian: Intime. I mean intimate really.
Sandy: Yes
Julian: Yes
Sandy: Lovely person
Julian: Get on very well with him. He’s your type. He’s all butch
Sandy: Yes. Mm, but questing.
Julian: Mm
Sandy: Now you must have seen his work Mr Horne, he does fantastic things on the television
Kenneth Horne: Oh
Julian: Yes, you know, they all come trolling on in form-hugging black and do evocative things with chairs and ladders and planks of wood.
Sandy: Mm
Julian: He once did something with a bentwood chair that made Robert Elton’s eyes stand out like orchids.
Sandy: True, true, true.
Julian: Both of them
Sandy: It’s his own fault for standing so close. Course, course Reynard is classical trained.
Julian: Oh yes.
Sandy: Classic trained.

Reynard is one of Julian and Sandy’s more bohemian and creative friends (“classic trained”), working variously as a female impersonator, choreographer, ballet dancer, advert maker and bar owner (all of their friends seem to own bars). His name is exotic, conjuring up an image of someone French (renard is French for the predatory “fox”). When in drag, he is referred to as Renee LaSpoon. Julian and Sandy claim that he is an “intimate” friend, and describe him euphemistically as “butch but questing”. Reynard’s performances are very modern: “they all come trolling on in form-hugging black and do evocative things with chairs and ladders and planks of wood.” Reynard is associated with a creative (although possibly pretentious or “piss-elegant”) identity, inhabiting the world of television and theatre.

Sandy: That’s Gordon you see, he helps us out. He’s sort of a masseur. He’ll give you a good pummelling I’ll tell you
Julian: Soon as look at you.
Sandy: He’s a rough diamond Mr Horne. But underneath, he’s a rough diamond, I mean deep down, inside
Julian: He’s absolute rubbish
Sandy: Absolute! Well he’s not my friend!
Julian: Well
Sandy: You brought him here.
Julian: Down on his luck, that’s what he said
Sandy: Down on his luck was he?
Julian: I’m like that. I can’t turn a stranger away
Sandy: You can say that again. You can’t. Yes, and you won’t find anyone stranger than Gordon. No, but seriously he is a certified, he is a certified psychopath.
Kenneth Horne: Don’t you mean osteopath?
Sandy: We know Gordon better than you do.

Gordon appears personally once in the sketches, as a rather menacing man with a working class accent and gruff voice. Most of the time he is presented as being hyper-masculine – wearing leather jeans, jackets, goggles and a helmet while riding a motorbike (Bona Bijou Tourettes). He has lots of studs in his jacket\(^{13}\) (Guided Trippettes). Sandy describes him as being like “a kinky AA man” (Bona Bijou Tourettes). Gordon’s sexuality is thus linked to an aggressive, leather-wearing S/M-practising gay identity. Politely, Sandy says that he is a “rough diamond”, whereas Julian is crueller: “he’s absolute rubbish.” (Bona Bodybuilders). Gordon’s violent tendencies are elaborated on by descriptions of his one-time position as a steam room attendant at South Mims Slipper Baths agogo (Bona Tax Consultants): he’s a “sort of masseur” (Bona bodybuilders)-“he’ll give you a good pummelling” notes Sandy. However, he’s also a “certified psychopath”.

Gordon is often insolvent, and is vaguely associated with prostitution via his job as the “masseur”. Later when he is “down on his luck”, Julian and Sandy hire him as a “gentleman’s gentleman” (Guided Tripettes), although what his work entails is left largely to the imagination. In the Bona Album Julian and Sandy remember how Gordon played the title role in the film “Motorcycle Au pair boy”, however Sandy recalls how he had his hand in the till.

Jock, is described as Julian’s special friend: a WASP (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant) in the merchant navy and is a physically attractive young man: “great butch ome, bulging lallies, eke like a Greek God” (Bona Rags). Like his name (jock-strap, football jock etc.) Jock is ostensibly masculine, good with his hands (he can make ships in bottles), and plays rugby. He also has a disarming generosity which endears him to both Julian and Sandy - every time he comes into port he brings Julian a gift, while on Julian’s birthday he presents him with a carafe of the appropriately named “Merchant Adventurer”.

\(^{13}\) Is this a clever double entendre?
Jock and Gordon are both representations of homosexual "trade" - ostensibly heterosexual (and often working class) men who have sex with other men, but do not identify as homosexual. Gordon and Jock when contrasted with Julian and Sandy are good examples of what writers like Tom Waugh (1996) refer to as the stud/queen binary, a defining paradigm of 1960s constructions of queer masculinity. What makes the presentation of this binary in the sketches important is that the presentation of such binaries were not associated with Sunday afternoon family radio shows, but were more found in marginalised, “progressive” art-forms such as Warhol’s work, or underground gay pornography: for example, the output from the Athletic Model Guild in the United States and Tom of Finland. Therefore while it was groundbreaking to represent gay men in the mainstream media, even as effeminate stereotypes, to refer to masculine, leather-wearing sexually ambiguous men was exceptionally daring and progressive.

In part it was the popularity of the Julian and Sandy sketch that allowed them to begin to go beyond simple camp constructions of identity. Had they not been funny, they would have been dropped, but instead they became the most popular part of the programme, and because of this they were empowered and so they could start to be more daring and experimental. Also, perhaps the fact that the sketches were in radio format rather than on television or film may have played some part in allowing such daring constructions of gay identity.

So because they were audio-only the characters became distanced from the actors who played them. The characters were merely voices and the lack of a visual aspect to the
programme had the effect of making the characters appear less real. It was up to the audience to create a mental or cartoon image of what Julian and Sandy would look like, rather than have a visual representation imposed upon them with real actors, which they may found overwhelming or shocking.

An example of this distancing process can be seen in drawings made of Julian and Sandy which were used in various Round the Horne books. Figure 1 is reproduced from The Bona Book of Julian and Sandy (Took and Feldman, 1976: 85). The characters are distinct enough to be different from Kenneth Williams and Hugh Paddick, sporting flamboyant clothing and accessories.

It’s not just the Polari that mystifies Julian and Sandy, but the fact that they can’t be seen. And their invisibility afforded by the radio makes them less threatening.

**Conclusion**

It is unsurprising that Polari, as a language variety declined in the 1970s after Julian and Sandy. Gay Liberation politics shied away from Polari’s often ambivalent, bitchy attitude, its camp posturing and its maintenance of a ghetto subculture (Raban 1973: 16-17). The Sexual Offences Act in 1967 partially decriminalised homosexuality, leading to less of a need for the secrecy afforded by Polari, while Julian and Sandy could be said to have exposed the code to a mass audience anyway, thus weakening its usefulness. While Polari currently enjoys a small revival, it is at the level of academic and historical interest, rather than being a concerted attempt by contemporary gay subcultures to begin to use it all over again.

While it is easy to dismiss Julian and Sandy as unfortunate, unsympathetic stereotypes who contributed to homophobic prejudice, I do not believe that it is useful to pass such a political judgement, especially from a so-called “enlightened” position of thirty years later. Rather, this paper has attempted to show how tabooed gay identities were negotiated in a context of homophobia and censorship at an important cusp in the history of gay liberation. While on the surface, these constructions appeared to kow-tow to the *status quo*, Julian and Sandy were nobody’s fools; and like at the end of so many of their sketches, theirs was certainly the last laugh.
References


