

Discussion: Being queer in a cis-straight world



On September 25th 2018, LGBT Health and Wellbeing's Mental Wellbeing Project held a discussion entitled 'being queer in a cis-straight world.' The discussion was comprised of a three part workshop designed to be a safe and brave space. We aimed to give every person in the room a chance to take part in a meaningful way.

Part one

We warmed up by watching and discussing some video clips about queer people who are navigating the cis-straight world of Glasgow in or around 2018.

1. Homophobia in 2018: Time for love by BBC The Social



Two men hold hands in a public place, but even in 2018, something's not quite right.

Time For Love is a poem that explores homophobia in modern society, and also the concept of normality. Do the pressures of convention turn us against one another? Is love the price?

Written, Directed and Performed by Sean Lionadh

2. Trans 101 Deadnaming and Misgendering by Kate Adair



This week Kate takes a look at dead naming and misgendering trans people and explains why this can actually be dangerous when it comes to jobs, relationships and general well being.

She dishes out some advice to her cisgender friend but will they listen?

Written and Directed by Kate Adair

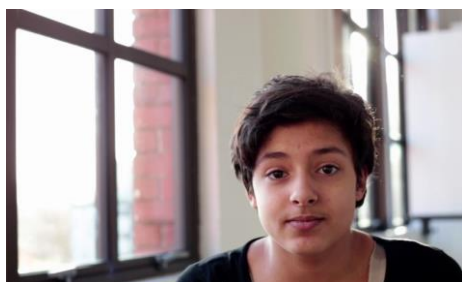
3. Just Me by Matthew Kennedy



A short film/biography on the director in which he explores gender identity, disability and other themes through his own narrative.

Directed and Written by Matthew Kennedy
Camera - Andrew Kennedy

4. Let Me Be Brave by Leap Sports Scotland



A 10 minute film, Let Me Be Brave, by LEAP Sports Scotland, showing transgender people's experiences of taking part in sport and the importance of sport in their lives.

With thanks to Asten Holmes-Elliott for making the film, to Scottish Transgender Alliance for support and advice, and to **sport** scotland and Awards for All Scotland for funding the film

Part two

We each took one or more post it notes and anonymously wrote about our own examples of situations or incidents in which the way the cis-straight world is structured had made being a queer person more difficult, upsetting or tiring.

On this occasion instead of focussing on specific incidents where we had been discriminated against as a result of active prejudice, we thought about times when the way the world around us is structured had made our lives more difficult.

We then discussed the topic on each post-it as a group, with contributors having the option to own their contribution or to leave it as anonymous.

Our concerns, based on the examples people had given, fell into the following categories:

Concerns

Lack of inclusive safe spaces

“I went to The Castro in San Francisco with my partner. Everyone there was gay, it just felt so safe to hold hands and be ourselves.”

- **Weight of living in a cis-straight world where you feel constantly judged:**
 - How much better it feels different when you can be wholly yourself and safe.
 - There's less worry on holiday, when you don't know anyone and won't see them again.
- **LGBT spaces:**
 - LGBT bars or clubs can feel even more unsafe – e.g. being singled out by using the gender neutral toilet. Even LGBT spaces are not always safe spaces for all identities.
- **Personal safety:**
 - In safe spaces such as this discussion group there needs to be accountability and someone you can go to. This is not always the case.

Exclusion from healthcare services and communities

👏👏 *GPs should get to have a rainbow flag in the window, but only if they can show that they have a good knowledge of queer issues* 👏👏

- **Neighbours or flatmates:** we still have to worry about prejudice, even at home.
- **Residential care:**
 - Erasure of identities for people in residential care is a concern.
- **Doctors and health care:**
 - GPs often lack LGBT knowledge.
 - There is often more need for healthcare/mental health services/sexual health as an LGBT person but less knowledge of our identities.
 - Traumatic experiences at doctors can make it hard to go back.
- **Places of worship and faith:**
 - Feeling safe enough to attend is a barrier.
 - These spaces may be labelled as 'inclusive', but how inclusive are they really?
- **Family**
 - Falling out with family a member happens disproportionately to LGBT people which leads to isolation.
 - Assumptions are made about the types of family we will or can have.

Work can be stressful and hard to access

👏👏 *When I told my boss at the supermarket [about my transition] he said 'I've been up all night reading about this and I can't believe that I'm not allowed to tell you which toilet you can use.'*
He was so surprised. 👏👏

- **Being trans at work:**
 - Being made to use the wrong toilets or facilities at work as a trans/gender expansive person is upsetting.
 - Changing your name and, or pronouns is stressful – it can take a while for all team members to catch up.
- **Coming out at work:**
 - What do you disclose? When? How? Try to slip it into conversations?
 - People asking questions or making assumptions becomes part of your work life.
 - How many times do you come out to different people? Having to repeat this continually grinds you down.
 - Will being out make your job easier or harder? It's not clear cut.
 - Always censoring yourself and lying by omission to colleagues and people you work with, even if you're openly queer.

Admin tasks and day to day activities are more complex

“I was late because I had to change my clothes before I came here. I would never be able to wear a nail polish or make up at work.”

- **Forms:**
 - Male/female are the only options. You're forced to choose wrong options as a non-binary person.
 - Being asked for pronouns can feel awkward and exhausting, even if well-meant.
- **Presenting as you want:**
 - Having to get changed at LGBT spaces to avoid harassment.
 - Clothes shopping— gendered changing rooms, having to buy without trying on and return to avoid going into gendered shops.
 - Business or formal dress is inaccessible for lots of trans/gender expansive folks— unstable employment is often easier to access.
 - ‘Appropriateness’ of clothing and make up is an oppressive cis-straight norm.

Assumptions isolate us socially

“People at university that I don't even know just come up to me and ask me if I am gay. I wouldn't ask someone if they were straight.”

- **Not enough learning or knowledge about our identities:**
 - People think you should already know everything about your identity.
 - Lack of understanding that sexuality/gender is on a scale and can change or be fluid.
 - Not feeling normal makes you do abnormal or panicked things.
 - People think that they know everything about LGBT identities so they don't feel the need to listen, but actually they only understand the L and G.
 - Our community is often seen as ‘difficult’ or ‘snowflakes’ – the pressure to appear happy and stable can make it harder to access support.
- **‘Are you gay?’**
 - People feel they have a right to ask about and question your identity all the time.

Part 3

We had a group chat about the positive aspects of being queer, and how being 'abnormal' can be empowering and liberating. We also talked about things we could do to make our immediate world a better place for us to exist in in light of the concerns we had detailed.

Our group suggestions were as follows:

- Find and create actual safe spaces.
- Build a stronger sense of community amongst LGBT+ folks and find family in other places.
- Think of changes you can ask organisations for: acts of admin activism.
- Empower yourself. Be visibly and openly queer at work and in life if it feels safe to do so.
- Make it normal/OK not to be normal - we have to create this world together.

Conclusions from the event

“I am relieved, and started to accept myself.”

“The varied opinions made me think about my life – in a good way.”

- **LGBT Mental Wellbeing** this event was part of the LGBT Mental Wellbeing Project in Glasgow. One of the main barriers to LGBT people's wellbeing, and a reason that queer people often suffer disproportionately from mental ill health, is that they live in a world that is structured to actively impede them living as their true selves. In discussing some of these themes in more depth we hoped to help attendees to feel less alone in the problems that they faced. This was designed to be a step on the way to helping people to improve their own wellbeing.

- **Glasgow in 2018** We made a point of showing recent films by Glasgow based filmmakers. There is not one cis-straight world. Every community has its own particular problems to overcome and battles to fight. Although Glasgow in 2018 is perhaps a better place to be queer than many others, as we demonstrated in our discussion, it still has a long way to go before LGBT+ people feel safe to be themselves here. The discussion demonstrated that active prejudice, whilst a problem in itself, is only a part of a bigger structural barrier when it comes to living as a queer person in Glasgow in 2018.
- **Different identities, one community** Although the discussion was about queer people and their experiences with the cis-straight world, one of the main bits of feedback that we got was that people enjoyed hearing different viewpoints from their own, from people with different identities to theirs. In learning about each other's struggles from within the LGBT+ community and continuing to discuss them, we hope to be more able help queer people to support one another.