



# Ticking the Other Box

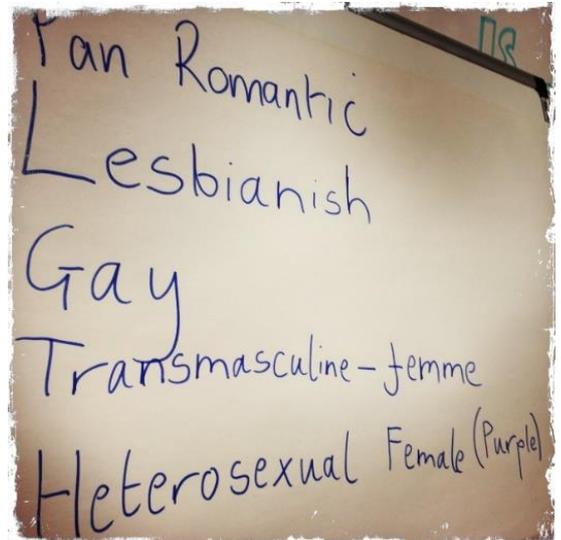


**Community Discussion Event**  
Thursday 11<sup>th</sup> September 2014

'Ticking the Other Box' was a community discussion facilitated by LGBT Health and Wellbeing (LGBT Health) that focussed on the issues around having identities that don't fit neatly into categories. 28 people attended, including a diverse range of people in regards to identities, ages, backgrounds. The event involved several facilitated discussions, with participants speaking in a large group forum and then breaking off into small groups. This report provides a summary of the discussions, along with the questions raised, opinions that were expressed and participants feedback of the event.

## Background

Through the outcomes of the Transition Support Service and current work of the Lothian Transgender Support Programme, LGBT Health has been made aware of the greater need to provide support and inclusive spaces for a wider range of trans identities, specifically Non-binary identities. As a result of these findings, LGBT Health has been engaging with local community groups to strengthen connections and increase the understanding of the issues faced by people with non-binary gender identities and sexualities.



As such, LGBT Health approached a number of community groups; [Beyond Gender](#), [Non-Binary Scotland](#) and [Bi and Beyond Edinburgh](#), to take part in the event which was hosted at [LGBT Youth Scotland](#) as part of Beyond Gender's fortnightly group space. Each representative spoke about their group, contributed to discussion and provided Q & A opportunities for participants. This served to raise awareness and provide crucial links between participants and potential supports.

In addition to involving community groups, the event also triggered a response from Police Scotland. Rona Duncan, Equality and Diversity Officer for Police Scotland, contacted LGBT Health's Community Development Worker, Jules Stapleton Barnes, to ask whether feedback could be gathered at the event. Of key interest to Rona Duncan was the current electronic notebook, used by officers.

Rona Duncan explained that the current situation is that officers have to select a box with the following options: female / male / gender unknown. Encouraged by the request, LGBT Health agreed to report back accordingly.

# The Discussions

## Discussion 1 – ‘Types of Forms’

Asking participants to think about the types of forms we encounter in our day to day lives, encouraged people to think about all the formal ways in which we are required to identify ourselves. Participants came up with an extensive list, demonstrating that from education to employment, from online social networking to purchasing goods, there are literally hundreds of ways in which we are expected to declare who we are. Within these forms we are invited (and sometimes expected) to declare how we identify, and often from a limited set of options. Here is a list that participants compiled from the discussion, and the feelings often associated with completing forms:

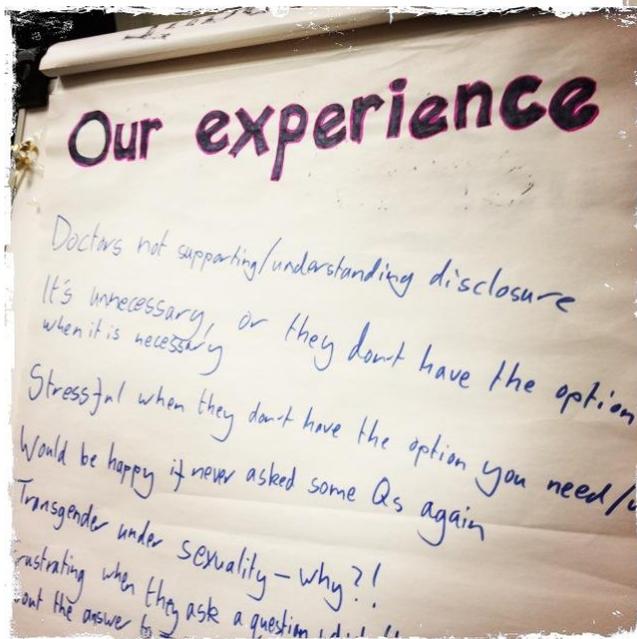
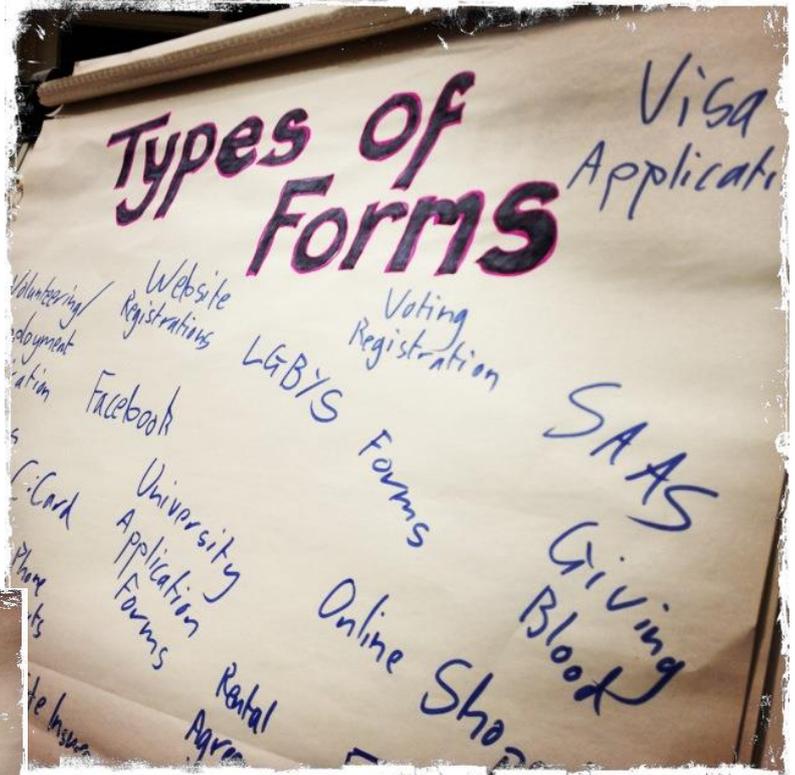
- Volunteering applications
- Employment applications
- Website registrations
- Voting registration
- LGBT Youth Scotland groups
- LGBT Health and Wellbeing groups
- SAAS
- Giving blood
- Online shopping
- University application forms
- C:Card
- Phone contracts
- Health forms
- Online dating
- Fostering/Adoption forms
- Grant applications
- Job Centre
- Life insurance/mortgage forms
- Disable parking badges
- Benefits
- Travelcards
- Equal opportunities forms
- Birth certificates Bank
- Library
- Gender recognition forms
- Utilities
- Visa applications

The discussion evoked strong reactions and the below list was created capturing the experience of individuals:

- ! Doctors don't always support or understand your disclosure
- ! It's unnecessary, or they don't have the right option for you when it IS necessary
- ! It's stressful when they don't have the option you need/want
- ! I'd be happy if I was never asked some of those questions again
- ! Transgender under sexuality – why?!
- ! It's frustrating when they ask a question which they don't actually care about the answer to – e.g. conflating genitals with interests for marketing
- ! Edinburgh College only has 2 gender options (but loads more titles!)
- ! Title is required in the UK – very annoying!
- ! Some banks will put MX on cards if you write and ask
- ! Feel forced in job applications to disclose personal info (in UK)

## 'Experiences of using forms'

Participants were asked about the impact of filling in the various types of form and there were a range of responses indicating positive and negative impacts. For example, banks or other national institutions respecting gender neutral titles like Mx was deemed as a positive step towards inclusion, where as having no options to declare yourself as transgender (or as having a non-binary identity) indicates a lack of understanding from the recipients.



It was expressed that this causes stress and feelings of exclusion for these individuals. It was also highlighted, that the disclosure of private information to GPs or doctors could be distressing if a lack of support, understanding or acceptance had been established. Many people's experiences were of frustration and stress, but some spoke of the empowering nature of being able to identify themselves formally e.g. ticking the 'F' box for the first time since transitioning from male to female.

## Police Scotland Electronic Notebooks

At this point in the event, the facilitator introduced the topic of Police Scotland's electronic notebooks and a useful discussion ensued regarding individuals' feelings about the recording of gender identity.

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*"So glad you mentioned the police's recording of gender... they got it wrong for me and it was difficult and embarrassing for everyone"*

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The majority agreed that the issue was complex. In the absence of there being one 'correct' solution, it was established that the provision of an 'other' box, was preferable to the 'unknown gender' option, which implies the officer taking notes would be making their own judgement about a person's gender identity rather than involving the person in how it is recorded officially.

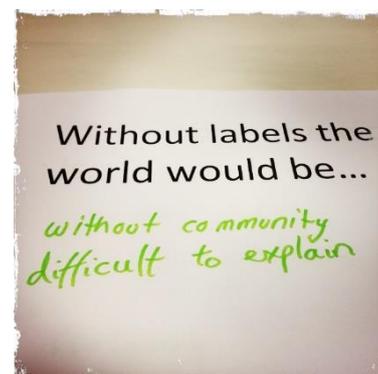
## Discussion 2 – ‘With or Without Labels?’



Participants were asked to give their opinions of what a world with or without labels would be like for them, revealing that how people identify with labels (or without) is very subjective. This was reflected in the wide range of responses people gave.

The idea behind the discussion was to find some common ground amongst the participants about what labels might mean to people, but also to demonstrate that we

all experience the world, and the labels we use, differently. The responses were varied and often contrary, igniting a lively debate.



## Discussion 3 – ‘Who or what inspires you?’

Participants were asked to share who or what inspires them, being prompted by the facilitator with questions about the films they watch, music they listen to, literature they read etc. Individuals expressed that it was isolating to feel constantly reminded that they don't fit within pre-defined boxes, such as female/male or lesbian/gay/hetero and that it was difficult to identify themselves within films, television and books, given the lack of representation of their gender identities and sexualities.

With further exploration however, there were many different people and objects from a wide range of mediums being highlighted, from celebrities to local activists, books to comic and graphic novel series. There was an overwhelming sense at the event that the Internet has become a vital resource for LGBTQI people to find information, share experiences and find role models. This discussion encouraged personal input from lots of participants, and clearly showed the importance of finding commonality with others and identifying with a community.

### Inspiring individuals or types of media to explore:

Ignition Zero (Web Comic – LGBT Fantasy)	Roboto Hugs (Web Comic)
As the Crow Flies (Web Comic)	But I'm A Cheerleader (Film)
Jennie Yockney (Publisher, <i>Bi Community News</i> )	Kate Bornstein (Trans Writer/Gender Outlaw)
Leslie Fineberg (Author of <i>Transgender Warriors</i> )	Elizabeth the "Trailblazer"! – (Group Leader of <i>Bi and Beyond Edinburgh</i> )
Ellen DeGeneres (Comedian, TV host, Actor)	Dana Fairbanks ( <i>L Word</i> Character)
Santana Lopez (Character in <i>Glee</i> )	Nathan – (Group Leader from <i>Non-Binary Scotland</i> )
Nelson Mandela (Revolutionary, Politician, Philanthropist)	Ellen Page (Actor/Activist)
Laverne Cox (Actor/Activist)	Janet Mock (Writer/Journalist)
Paris Lees (Writer/Journalist)	Kylie Minogue (Singer)
Annie Lennox (Singer/Activist)	James Morton, Scottish Transgender Alliance

## Evaluation

Evaluation was conducted via a feedback form distributed at the end of the event. Participants told us that they felt the event generated *“a lot of positive and insightful discussion”*. They commented that the *“organisation of the event and facilitation was great”*, and that there were *“plenty of opportunities to learn new things and to listen to people’s opinions”*. Points for improving mostly revolved around better signposting of community groups, through written information. When asked about topics for future discussions event, *“learning more about non-binary identities”* and *“intersex issues”* were mentioned by a number of participants. Additional requests included *“creating resources to support people with their sexualities and identities.”*

*“positive and insightful discussion”*

*“plenty of opportunities to learn”*

*“I was grateful to have a safe space to ask questions”*

### When asked what they had gained?

*“an awareness of using more inclusive language such as the use of ‘gender’ instead of ‘sex’ when asking for information about the person gender identity.”*

*“an understanding of the importance of not asking inappropriate questions around gender and sexuality when it doesn’t matter.”*

*“an appreciation of how the inclusion of an ‘other’ category on forms could be a good step forward. The fact that many organisations and companies still refuse to do this could be distressing.”*

## Further information

### LGBT Health and Wellbeing

LGBT Health delivers a varied programme of services, groups, courses and events in Edinburgh and Glasgow. We welcome people with a diverse range of identities.

W: [www.lgbthealth.org.uk](http://www.lgbthealth.org.uk) T: **0131 523 1100**

### Lothian Transgender Support Programme

A holistic programme of support for trans people, including newsletter, information and 1:1 support, managing transition courses, confidence building workshops and regular social events. Jules Stapleton Barnes, George Burrows, Development Workers

E: [jules@lgbthealth.org.uk](mailto:jules@lgbthealth.org.uk) T: **0131 523 1104**

E: [george@lgbthealth.org.uk](mailto:george@lgbthealth.org.uk) T: **0131 652 3281**

### LGBT Youth Scotland

LGBT Youth Scotland offer a wide range of groups, activities, volunteer opportunities, and events for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender young people and their friends. They run groups and drop ins in: Dumfries, Dundee, Edinburgh, Galashiels, Glasgow, Perth, Stirling and Stranraer. LGBTYS also have information about what other LGBT youth and community groups that are running across Scotland.

E: [info@lgbtyouth.org.uk](mailto:info@lgbtyouth.org.uk) W: <https://www.lgbtyouth.org.uk/> T: **0131 555 3940**

### Non-Binary Scotland Meeting every second Friday from 6pm-9pm

Support and social opportunities for people who either self-identify as out with the gender binary of men and women or are questioning whether they might.

Email: [nonbinaryscotland@gmail.com](mailto:nonbinaryscotland@gmail.com) F: <http://www.facebook.com/groups/nonbinaryscotland/>

### Beyond Gender Tuesday evenings from 7–9pm, LGBT Youth Scotland, 40 Commercial Street, EH6 6JD

Group for transgender [and intersex] people and their friends aged 13–25.

E: [beyondgender@lgbtyouth.org.uk](mailto:beyondgender@lgbtyouth.org.uk) W: [www.beyondgenderyouth.org](http://www.beyondgenderyouth.org)

### Bi and Beyond Edinburgh 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesdays, 7-9pm, LGBT Health and Wellbeing, 9 Howe Street, EH3 6TE

A fortnightly social gathering for people who identify as bisexual and non-monosexual, with organised social activities and refreshments provided. Whatever your label or lack of label we welcome you! E: [biandbeyondedinburgh@gmail.com](mailto:biandbeyondedinburgh@gmail.com)