



Sex, Relationships & Intimacy



Saturday 28th June, 2016

This impactful one-off event for trans, intersex and non-binary people, was delivered as part of LGBT Health and Wellbeing's quarterly series of confidence building workshops. These workshops form part of our Transgender Support programme (Lothian), a unique service providing events, workshops, 1:1 support and annual transition support courses for anyone self-identifying as transgender and/or non-binary.

Breaking the ice and introducing the topics

Upon arrival we introduced participants to the 'Sexual Lingo Bingo' wall. We had gathered and presented a range of terms relating to sexual relationships and intimacy in order to destigmatise the topics and create a relaxed, safe and fun environment to explore the themes. Participants were given post-its and invited to contribute to the wall with terms and words that meant something to their lives. We were overwhelmed with the additional suggestions!



Discussion 1: How have you learned to communicate about sex, relationships and intimacy?

In small groups, participants addressed a number of issues and themes that provoked discussion around how they had learned to talk about sex, romantic relationships and intimacy through their lives. Together we collated the small group responses into 'helpful' and 'unhelpful' experiences of communication around this topic:

Helpful

- ♥ **Good school teachers** - having a good role model who speaks openly and promotes diversity... makes it OK for you to talk about sex or ask questions
- ♥ **Being asked questions**, so you have the opportunity to talk or say what you like/need
- ♥ **The internet** - being able to find out information yourself, on any topic you're interested in and connect with others who feel similarly
- ♥ **Being around other LGBT and/or kinky people**
- ♥ **Being in LGBT Health / trans-specific safe spaces**
- ♥ **Porn** - can be safe, legal, ethical, informative, realistic and enjoyable
- ♥ **Written information** that is easily accessible from reliable sources
- ♥ **Friends** who create safe environments to share your experiences

Unhelpful

- 🗨️ **Family** - refusing to have conversations, or not making it comfortable environment to talk about the issues
- 🗨️ **Schools** and (lack of appropriate) sex education, lack of role models
- 🗨️ **Pop culture** - film in particular; not enough (or any) positive representation of trans people having sex; saturated by heteronormative romance/relationships/sex, only depicting monogamous relationships
- 🗨️ **Socialisation** - growing up being socialised around heterosexual, cisgender people and being made to feel that your sexuality and gender identity are abnormal
- 🗨️ **Being 'told'** what sex is and how we should have it
- 🗨️ **The internet** - masses of misinformation and potential to create unhealthy connections with people and easily (and sometimes accidentally) engage with sexual activity that isn't or doesn't feel safe. *"You can't unsee it!"*
- 🗨️ **Porn** - some types can be a destructive way to view sexual activity; illegal; unethical; setting up unrealistic expectations; distancing intimacy from sex, creating a need for porn to be used in order to climax / feel satisfied and not by your partner/s; damaging representation of trans identities etc.
- 🗨️ **Constant media messages** promoting the importance of finding love, having a relationship, being monogamous and valuing romance

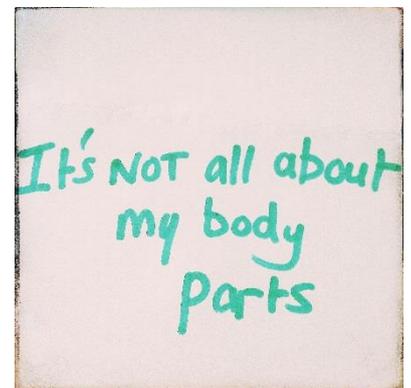
Discussion 2: Exploring Sex, Relationships and Intimacy from 3 different perspectives: Sexual, Emotional and Physical Intimacy

In small groups once again, we gave participants the opportunity to explore our workshop topic, from a perspective that felt most relevant to them. We approached this topic from different perspectives, to ensure the discussions were inclusive and to recognise that not all intimacy is sexual or physical and that not all sexual practices are necessarily emotional or about emotional relationships with others.

We've summarised the discussions below:

Emotional

- 💖 Acknowledging your trans identity with a partner, can feel necessary to progress your relationship but you don't always want it to be a "big thing". It's just part of who you are and you don't want that part of who you are to be sexualised
- 💖 Trust was acknowledged as being fundamental in relationships, and in particularly in relation to being open and disclosing about your gender identity and the body parts you have. One participant described that they wanted an intimate relationship with somebody who loved them for who they are and not for their body parts
- 💖 Another participant spoke of how important it was to relate to somebody who has an open mind
- 💖 We discussed as a group that focussing on the emotional bonds between friends and lovers can be just as meaningful and fulfilling as focussing on the physical



Sexual

- Discussed that there are often assumptions from other people (including partners) about the type of sex a trans person might want to have. This can be connected to assumptions of gendered sexual roles such as sexual acts that might make someone feel 'more like a man' or 'like a woman'
- Removing yourself from sexual relationships sometimes felt safer for people. But this also meant people could become 'stuck' in this position
- We acknowledged that trans people feel differently about sex at different times
- One participant described a feeling of envy in relation to cis men and the seeming acceptability of their sexual behaviour
- For trans people taking T (testosterone) this meant increased horniness
- Places and events like those organised by [Trans Bare All](#) were helpful in giving people places to discuss being sexual
- It is a challenge to sift through all the available online information about being a sexually active trans person. It varies in accuracy and relevance
- 'Squicks'. LGBT people can still be judgemental or dislike other people's sexual practices.
- Some trans masculine identified people felt hurt in rejection from lesbian communities. Yet at the same time had experienced assumptions from others that only a lesbian would want to sleep with them because of their trans bodies
- There was an acknowledgment that no matter how sex positive you are that sometimes sex can be awkward and horrible
- We discussed the importance of remembering to say no
- People found that cis straight people often hadn't ever questioned what was more important for them in a partner – genitals or gender
- We discussed how trans people often have little or no access to informed, inclusive sexual health advice

Physical Intimacy

-  We discussed the idea that the more authentic you feel about your gender and gender expression, the more your sexual arousal increases and the more intimate you feel confident being

Youtube clips & discussion

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bqldKtGQHoc> - Trans dating - Jai Letto

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pqotQzIY_U4 - Sex positive trans man discusses dysphoria

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ICqWr9V_4b0 - Trans woman talking about post-op orgasm and disclosure





<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oQbei5JGiT8> - the 'cup of tea' consent explanation

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JEAgXMtcJ0w> - consent explained by a porn star

Evaluation and feedback

Feedback forms were completed after the workshop and here is what participants experienced in their own words, along with some suggestions for future events:

“I was apprehensive and nervous as to what to expect but the way in which it was structured was fantastic and very settling and actually really enjoyable. Thank you so much!!”

“Having really friendly and approachable facilitators really helped me to be completely open and comfortable.”

“It would be great to have another workshop to talk more about emotions in detail”

“I’d like to see it longer and more interactive!”

Useful Resources for Trans Sexual Health

Terrance Higgins Trust

<http://www.tht.org.uk/sexual-health/Sex,-reproduction-and-gender/Trans-women>

<http://www.tht.org.uk/sexual-health/Sex,-reproduction-and-gender/Trans-men>

Trans Sexual Health Factsheet, The National LGB&T Partnership

<https://nationallgbtpartnershipdotorg.files.wordpress.com/2012/07/np-trans-health-factsheet-sexual-health-final.pdf>

Tips for Sexual Wellbeing, College of Sexual and Relationship Therapists

<http://www.cosrt.org.uk/information-for-members-of-the-public/tips-for-sexual-wellbeing/>

Useful Contacts and Information

Chalmers Sexual Health Centre - www.lothiansexualhealth.scot.nhs.uk

Free condoms | Emergency contraception | Contraception | Pregnancy testing | STI testing | HIV testing | Specialist services | Sexual assault | Alcohol, drugs & emotional health | Healthy Respect drop-in

Free confidential service for all, including sexual health advice and all forms of contraception and testing for all STIs.

Office: 0131 536 1070 (appointments)

Helpline: 0131 536 1070 (option 3 to speak to a nurse)

Address: 2a Chalmers Street, Edinburgh EH3 9ES

Opening Times: Walk-in clinic M-F 8.30-10am. For general booked appointments phone 0131 563 1070 on a Wednesday after 2pm

Lothian Gender Clinic at Chalmers Sexual Health Centre, Edinburgh

<http://www.lothiansexualhealth.scot.nhs.uk/Services/GIC/Pages/default.aspx>

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 T: **0131 523 1100**

Transgender Support Programme (Lothian and Glasgow)

A holistic programme of support for trans people delivered in both Edinburgh and Glasgow, including newsletter, information and 1:1 support, managing transition courses, confidence building workshops and regular social events.

Contacts:

Jules Stapleton Barnes, Development Worker (Lothian)

E: jules@lgbthealth.org.uk T: **0131 523 1104**

Katrina Mitchell, Development Worker (Glasgow)

E: katrina@lgbthealth.org.uk T: **0141 271 2330** (Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesday morning)

