



## **Community Discussion: Sextival**

Hosted by LGBT Health and Wellbeing with partners  
Terrance Higgins Trust, Sandyford, Smut Slam and Luke and  
Jacks

Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> February 2018 at Luke & Jacks, Centre for Contemporary Arts  
(CCA) and Kinning Park Complex.

*This report is written by Ian Mearns, LGBT Health and Wellbeing (Development  
Worker, Glasgow Community Project) who chaired the event with the help of  
notes taken by Angela Arangelovici (Sessional Worker).*

### **Overview of the Sextival**

As part of our ongoing series of quarterly Community Discussions, part of the  
Glasgow Community Project, we held a multi-sessional event about Queer Sex  
and Relationships. We partnered with the Terrence Higgins Trust, Sandyford,  
Smut Slam Glasgow and Luke and Jacks shop. All sessions held throughout the  
day were based around the following question:

***What are healthy sex and relationships for those with queer or LGBTQI  
identities?***

The purpose of the event was to explore the unique sexual and relationship challenges faced those in LGBTQ+ communities.

The event was split into three separate events:

- Breakfast event at Luke and Jack's LGBT focused sex shop
- Workshop/discussion events at CCA
- Smut Slam Open Mic at Kinning Park

## Overview of each event

### Luke and Jack's (Beneficiaries: 10)

The first session was held at Luke and Jack's sex shop in Glasgow, and was a small breakfast event. The shop provided refreshments and voucher for each community member who attended.

The purpose of partnering with Luke and Jack's was to allow our Community Members to ask questions about sex and sex toys in a safe space with other LGBTQ+ people. Information about sex available to people, and in particular to LGBTQ+ people often relates to sexual health, and although this is very important and included within our programme for the rest of the day, this event allowed community members to be positive about others aspects of their sex life and relationships and open them up to talking about LGBTQ+ sex life and relationships.

Luke and Jack's engages regularly and positively with LGBTQ+ communities and groups in Glasgow and were ideally placed to hold such an event.



## CCA Events (Beneficiaries: 40)

We held a series of sessions at the CCA in Glasgow about healthy sex and relationships followed by a community discussion. The sessions were:

**Introduction:** a series of questions were posted on the walls of the space for community members to answer followed by a short discussion about the questions/answers provided as an icebreaker to get them comfortable about talking about sex/relationships. Questions included: asking for positive examples of LGBTQ+ sexual or relationship experiences; the impact digital technology on LGBTQ+ relationships (eg, dating apps on phones or online); the impact their families' attitudes to sex had on them; and the risk of different sexual activities. The answers were also used in the later community discussion. The session worked well and everyone who attended got involved in answers and discussing questions with each other. Notes for session are below.

### **Chemsex (with Terrence Higgins Trust):**

THT showed their short film about Chemsex called 'G'O'Clock' and took community members through topics such as how long Chemsex has been on the radar for sexual health organisations, the drugs that people use, sexual health and chemsex and points of referral.



### **HIV and the Trans Community (with Terrence Higgins Trust):**

THT had a session setup for information about HIV and the Trans Community. Only one community member came for this session so they spoke through the topic with them 121 instead of as a workshop.

### **Queer Film Session:**

We showed a selection of films related to LGBTQI sex and relationships. Programme for the session is below.

### **LGBT Age Session:**

Community members for our LGBT AGE project had a discussion specifically related to Sex and Relationships for LGBT people over the age of 50.



### **Community Discussion:**

Panel: Terrence Higgins Trust, Sandyford Clinic, Smut Slam Scotland, LGBT Age Community Member.

We held a community discussion titled 'What are healthy sex and relationships for those with queer or LGBTQI identities?'. Each panel member introduced themselves and a talked for around 10 minutes on a subject they felt was important to healthy queer sex and relationships. Community members who attended the discussion engaged with the panel and asked lots of questions. We also used some of the answers/questions from the introduction to question the

panel and put to those who attended. Notes from the Community Discussion are below.

As can be seen from the feedback below community members who attended these workshops liked having the space to discuss LGBTQI sex and relationship issues with other LGBTQI people.



## Smutslam (Beneficiaries: 60)

In the evening we collaborated with Smut Slam Scotland who hold LGBTQ+ friendly open mic sessions for people to tell stories about their sexual experiences. The events are usually held in bars, but we booked out a community hall and the event was alcohol free. We provided soft drinks and food at the event too. The Open Mics also have a panel of judges and the winners got a prize from Luke and Jacks sex shop.

Smut Slam Rules are:

*'RULES: - no notes (this is storytelling) - no costumes or props (this is not theatre) - only five minutes (with a one-minute grace period) AND - the story must be real and have happened to you. Stories often are funny and/or epic win, but we want to encourage people to consider sharing their sad, disturbing, poignant, serious, simple and/or "fail" experiences, too.*

*IMPORTANT: Smut Slam is queer-friendly, kink- and vanilla-friendly, fat-friendly, sex worker-friendly, virgin-friendly, poly-friendly, ... we're really, really friendly. We welcome people with all types and amounts of sexual experiences.*

*We DO NOT welcome stories involving racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, or any other kind of discrimination, objectification, or fetishization. All stories must be CONSENSUAL!*

Considering these rules, working with Smut Slam gave our community members the opportunity to share experiences of sex and relationships within a safe space to the wider community. The topic for the stories for this event was 'Safety First'. It is one of the rules of Smut Slam that the specific stories must stay within the event, but most of the speakers told stories that were related to LGBTQ+ sex and relationships.

The event was well attended and many community members contributed stories to the event. This event was particularly successful in bringing in new community members that hadn't attended our event's previously.



## **Introduction Workshop Notes:**

Below are a sample of the questions posed to Community Members and a selection of responses.

### **DO YOU THINK MONOGAMY IS NATURAL?**

'No'

'Natural – no. Instinct- Yes'

'I do but she doesn't'

'It appears in nature so yes. But not the only way'

'No necessarily but society tries to push this ideology'

'Between gay men it is a bit unrealistic'

'It's what I want- natural for me but a personal choice'

### **TELL US ABOUT A TIME YOU HAVE HAD A POSTIVE EXPERIENCE OF SEX!**

'Everytime since I started to love my body'

'Out in the open. Just passion, no shame'

'My first sex was absolutely beautiful, I love every fuck'

'On a hotel balcony in Spain. Took the mattress out with us. Woke up with the sun.'

'Last week I moaned more than ever in my life'

## **IS THE DIGITAL AGE ENCHANCING SEXUAL PLEASURE?**

'NO. Porn possibly damaging or dangerous. Unrealistic expectations, feeds unhealthy fetishes. Apps are self-esteem damaging.'

'Probably not, it just makes it easier to access.'

'Not for me'

'Yes- eps for women/ trans ppl. Access to sex ed + info channels (eg. Sex toys) .

SO IMPORTANT'

## **DID YOUR FAMILY'S ATTITUDE TO SEX INFLUENCE YOU? HOW?**

'NAE CHANGE!! Family talk about sex, any sex was absolutely taboo'

'TOTALLY JUDGEMENTAL FAMILY'

'UNSPOKEN'

'Not talked about- didn't like my 'lifestyle'. '

'Gay sex? Yes. Shame.'

'Shame is a big factor in sex. Shame is learned from family.'

'Yes generations of shame and catholic guilt, profound impact on me'

## **DOES BEING A FEMINIST MAKE YOU HAVE BETTER SEX?**

'It helps me be aware of issues of trauma ect.'

'No. Why would it?'

'No, being a good person does.'

'No but it's great to be a feminist.'

'I'm unaware of a connection'

'No, but would make you more respectful'

'Being a feminist helps 'frame' what I want and ask/discuss/negotiate'

## **DO YOU THINK HAVING BETTER SEX WOULD MAKE YOU BETTER PERSON?**

'No, just more satisfied'

'Depends on the relationship'

'It makes you happier and happy people are always good'

'More important things in life'

'Enhances what is already good'

'YES!'

'No. but I'd be more content and relaxed. I might have higher self-esteem.'

'Might make me a happier person'

## **TELL US ABOUT A POSITIVE QUEER/LGBTQI RELATIONSHIP EXPERIENCE YOU'VE HAD!**

'Families welcoming engagement'

'THIS ONE. GETTING MARRIED.'

'On my first proper relationship now. So far so good.'

**IF THERE WAS ONE TIP YOU COULD GO BACK AND GIVE YOURSELF BEFORE  
YOUR FIRST TIME, WHAT WOULD IT BE?**

'Don't be drunk'

'Don't go back, go forward'

'If I could go back in time I would be 'open' or 'come out' earlier than I did. I think of all the relationships I knocked back because I was too shy or embarrassed.'

'Divorce'

'Experiment'

'There's no correct starting point. You're worth less because you've done less'

'Pick someone decent'

'Not confuse love with sex'

'Relax'

'Go to therapy'

'Non lace up boots'

Don't feel pressured. Stay true to yourself'

'Safe Sex'

**LOW RISK?**

'Sober sex'

'Low risk, no enjoyment. Take risk plenty of enjoyment'

'Kissing, foreplay, frothing , non-penetration, petting'

'Footsie'

'Safer sex. Long term partner'

'Foreplay'

'PDA in Scotland'

'Oral sex. Depends on the situation.'

'Piss sex.'

'S&M with limitations'

'Dirty sex with protection'

### **HIGH RISK?**

'Unsafe spaces, unfamiliar ground- could impact self-esteem.'

'Oral, anal'

'No Protection'

'Yummy'

'Chemsex without protection'

'Excessive alcohol'

'Straight men'

## **Queer Relationships on Film Programme:**

### **DES!RE(9m)**

DIR: Campbell X, Country: UK, Year: 2017

An experimental film exploring desire for transmasculine, butch, stud, and masculine of centre (MOC) people assigned female at birth.

### **Dusty Does Dallas (6m)**

Dir: Lock Up Your Daughters, County: UK, Year: 2014

An ex-porn star is jealous after hearing banging noises coming from her neighbour's flat. When a postwoman, pizza delivery boy, and workman come to her door, she gets a little bit carried away...

### **195 LEWIS (19m)**

Dir: C. Aponte Pearson, Country: USA, Year: 2016

195 LEWIS is a dramedy series about a group of women navigating the realities of being Black, queer, and polyamorous in New York City. Based in Brooklyn, the series follows Yuri and Camille as they test the boundaries of their open relationship. Yuri's growing infatuation with new lover leaves Camille distressed, which is only amplified by the unexpected arrival of Yuri's old college friend Kris, who shows up with nowhere else to stay. Another exciting example of a contemporary web series paving the way for a more progressive queer representation.

## **Sextival Community Discussion Notes:**

- Introduction by Ian
  - Panel introduction:

Derek (LGBT Age volunteer):

The LGBT Age Project engages with over 50s through its social programme.

Their contact point is in Glasgow and in Edinburgh. LGBT Age organises Coffee Possee which

is a once monthly dropin meetup in Spoon Café; this has been running for the last 2-3 years and is now well established. The LGBT Age has just had its funding renewed for the next 3 years, so currently staff are planning and brainstorming ideas for these next few years. The LGBT Age organises one off projects such as a cabaret performance and a film made in partnership with the Storytelling Centre and Lock Up Your Daughters, which won the Best Scottish Short Film Award last year at the Scottish Queer International Film Festival. The LGBT Age project is currently looking for volunteers.

Jean (LGBT Age Coordinator):

LGBT Health & Wellbeing runs other projects as well in addition to LGBT Age, such as: the Mental Wellbeing Project (organises monthly dropin café, walks and gardening sessions), the Transgender Support Programme (organises monthly dropin T Time), the Counselling Service (which is in high demand and currently has a waiting list of 8-9 months), the Community Project (organises community discussions, Rainbow Spoon, Gay Men's Film Nights, Language Exchange), the LGBT Disabled People's Group, the LGBT Autism Group, BiScotland, LGBT Unity.

Julian (from Sandyford):

Sandyford provides specialist sexual health services. Their vision is that everyone can have pleasurable sex as safely as possible. They accept members older than 13 years old and they see patients on a basis

of urgency of care required rather than identity. Some of the services they provide are: treating urgent symptoms, HIV and STI testing, specialist contraception, emergency contraception, free condoms, termination of pregnancy, rape support service (called Archway), gay and bisexual men's service (called the Steve Retson project), gender identity clinic for transitioning support, young people's service for 13-17 years olds, gynaecology and menopause services, counselling and support, services for those with additional support needs (such as homelessness and learning disabilities), services for those who have sex in exchange for payment.

Julian then talked a bit more in depth about the Steve Retson project. The Steve Retson project organises sessions when you can attend by appointment, but they also have no appointment needed drop in services for HIV and STI testing. The project also organises workshops which act as an intervention to encourage gay and bisexual men to get tested regularly. They made a film last year which addresses issues around anal sex. Gay and bisexual men are generally very bad at talking about anal sex. This is a very important topic which is never talked about.

In the film, 4 different men talk about their experiences: the 1<sup>st</sup> chapter addresses safer sex in the context of a relationship, the 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter looks at anal sex stereotypes and how these can be very intimidating for gay men, for example if they've just come out; the 3<sup>rd</sup> chapter is about social pressures associated with anal sex and consent. The 4<sup>th</sup> chapter talks about pleasure and sex (not all sex needs to be romantic; sex should always be pleasurable). The 5<sup>th</sup> chapter analyses issues around communication (such as it has to be more than a one off conversation; consent changes and the dialogue has to be kept open).

David (from the Terrence Higgins Trust):

The Terrence Higgins Trust does HIV Testing. It has been running for over 35 years and it was set up in response to the AIDS crisis in the 1980s. One of its projects deals with long term conditions and it provides support to those infected and affected with and by HIV. They also work with Peer Support Scotland on the Health Promotion Project to help those with HIV to get back into the workplace. The Terrence Higgins Trust prefer to use

the term “men who have sex with men”, as a lot of the men who use their services do not identify as gay or bisexual. At the moment they only test for HIV, not STIs as well. Their drop in clinic is every Tuesday. They also provide a counselling service and they have both CBT counsellors and person centred counsellors.

Roisin (organises Smut Slam):

After this community discussion, a Smut Slam event is taking place in Kinning Park Complex. The Smut Slam is like a poetry slam but with stories instead of poetry. The stories have to be about sexual experiences which are true and have happened to the speakers. The Smut Slam started in the US in Boston and came to the UK last year. It is a sex positive event. Since sex can be a touchy subject, they make sure that they are very open, and fat friendly, different abilities friendly, age friendly, queer friendly, kink friendly (and more). The event has a safe space policy, this is in the form of lots of rules read out at the start of the event, which have been updated over the years and are always subject to update. They make clear that they do not welcome homophobia, transphobia, sex worker phobia etc. The language used by speakers can be very tricky to assess sometimes, especially when it's around things like BDSM (example of very binary roles within BDSM which were associated with specific gendered stereotypes which can be offensive). Other things like fetishisation needs to be watched out for (there's a difference between having a foot fetish and a race fetish -> the later dehumanises people which is not acceptable). Another thing they feel strongly about is that the Smut Slam is not a kinkier than thou competition. The stories have to be about sexual experiences, not necessarily sex, so a variety of people are very welcome, including asexual people and virgins. It is a no shame competition: the audience is only allowed to react in two ways – to do a burlesque shout out or to shout “your life is awesome”. The point of the event is that people sharing their stories are just regular people, not professional performers. The Smut Slam is always open to feedback and suggestions for improvement.

Questions from the audience: (submitted anonymously beforehand)

Q: Where/how do I get dental dams?

A:

Julian: Sandyford doesn't provide them anymore. They had an audit where they discovered that they were not being used so they were going out of date as there wasn't much demand. They now advise people to cut through a condom while it's still in the foil as it achieves the same thing.

Ian: Has some with him, so the person who submitted question can come speak to him afterwards.

Q: Are lesbians at risk of STIs?

A:

David: Lots of services around testing for STIs and HIV are targeted towards men who have sex with men. However, lesbians are at risk of STIs. Less risk of HIV than men (1 in 25 men who have sex with men have HIV -> 1 in 4 don't know they have it). Lesbians are more at risk of other STIs such as chlamydia and gonorrhoea which is often transmitted through sex toys.

Questions from audience: (asked in person non-anonymously during the event)

Q: What kind of rules do people break at the smut slam? (directed towards Roisin)

A:

Roisin: At the Glasgow slam, usually people don't break rules that often. It also changes from slam to slam in regards to the kinds of rules that are broken. Sometimes people share sexual experiences where consent is not overly clear. Sometimes there are jokes surrounding age. If you are performing and are unsure of whether something is allowed or not, chat to the organisers about it. It is not about shaming, it is about having conversations. Sometimes people don't know things or aren't aware of them, in which case conversation is welcome.

Comment from audience member: Changing your mind in the context of sex and consent is a very important point and the other person should respect that. Especially if you are new in the gay scene and you are not confident about stopping them, the other person should make sure that you are happy with what is going on.

David: When talking especially to young people at the Terrence Higgins Trust, we have started emphasising that there needs to be more than mutual consent between partners -> there needs to be enthusiastic consent; this sends out a stronger message.

Comment from audience member: There should be more open discussions about consent. I find that (and maybe this has to do with being a women) women or people who are not cis men talk more and more openly about consent than cis men. Also an important point is that yes doesn't always mean yes necessarily. Partners are allowed to change their mind and there needs to be ongoing dialogue happening.

Julian: I agree. This is a difficult topic as many people wonder how to prove enthusiastic consent to their partner. The truth is that this looks and feels differently in each relationship.

David: The person who feels more confident and empowered in the relationship or sexual encounter has the responsibility to check in with their partner. It is not about equality, it is about balance of power. There is never equal power in any sort of relationship.

In the case of queer people specifically, it's very likely that you've been surrounded by negativity regarding your sexuality, which makes it easy to feel like you want to please someone all the time, which is why is very important to balance the power in the relationship.

Q: Wondering if there are any aspects about healthy relationships and sex that are specific to older LGBT people?

A:

Derek: From his experience, there was little to no communication about sex happening in bed. There could be philosophical conversations about sex

otherwise in everyday life with his partner, but not when it actually came to having sex. This only came to light when they had a threesome and the person noticed and pointed out that Derek and his partner don't communicate. This is a complicated topic as many people feel rejected if asked to stop or change something during sex. Gay men don't openly talk about sex unfortunately.

David: This is not the case just for older men. He used to never talk about sex during sex but as he quit drinking, he started feeling more comfortable to discuss sex with his partner and realised that it is not wrong to talk about sex during sex, although unfortunately lots of folks don't do this.

Comment from audience member: From a younger age to an older age, gay men do not have an understanding of consent. This is closely related to internalised homophobia that they experience.

Comment from audience member: There is a lot of fetishisation of straight men by gay men.

Ian: Also, on things like apps for gay men, there is a lot of purposeful exclusion - > for example racist views trying to pass as "personal preferences", as well as transphobic and homophobic ones (no butch, no femme etc).

Derek: Does better sex make me a better person? Better sex means things to different people.

David: People have weird definitions of sex. At the Terrence Higgins Trust, they get people in all the time who say they've had "normal sex" and when they're asked what they mean by that they say, well normal sex. By which of course they mean heteronormative, penis inside vagina or inside anus sex, a view influenced by the belief of many and of society at large that sex is for procreation. The term foreplay itself can be dangerous as it implies that acts such as oral sex, or anything other than penis in vagina is not sex, when in fact it is part of sex.

Derek: In regards to older LGBT adults, social care for older gay people is extremely under discussed. The care system is targeted towards heterosexual people. Gay people's choices are removed when they go into care, or they have to come out all over again many times to many new people.

David: There is a lack of intersectionality in the provision of services -> services are not set up to respond or think about people who are part of more than one minority or who needs specific care from several points of view of their identity, for example gay black older men in the care system are not going to have it easy.

Roisin: Has worked in social care before. There is a lack of adequate training. Even “smaller” things like making sexual or romantic jokes about male and female people being friends contribute to a culture of heteronormativity.

Comment from audience member: Some charities are starting to do better, for example recently Alzheimer’s Scotland released a LGBT focused pamphlet. However many places are still very heteronormative.

The same way that you might not feel comfortable seeing a general counsellor if you are LGBT, it is the same with social care: it is very understandable that you may not feel comfortable with a care worker who is unaware or ignorant regarding LGBT identities. Older LGBT people are also very likely to not have support from their families.

David: It is often the case with non LGBT people in general as well as those who provide different services that they are afraid and unconfident to ask questions if they don’t know something for fear that they might offend or look stupid.

## Impact

### Selection of event feedback

What did you enjoy the most?

*'Made me more aware of issues/reality of the LGBT Community'*

*'The event made me more connected to the LGBT Community and am really happy to meet more LGBT people'*

*'The opportunity for open discussion'*

*'The fact sextival exists is fab. Great venue. Very interesting first session upstairs with questions and post-its'*

*'Informative, atmosphere, interaction with other people'*

*'Well organised/ good range of events for different identities'*

*'Community Discussion and opportunity to talk about sex '*

As stated previously the purpose of the event was to explore the unique sexual and relationship challenges faced those in LGBTQ+ communities. The core of the event was based around community discussion events but throughout the day we have different activities which allowed community members to interact in different ways with the topic. The different events allowed community

members to explore the unique sexual and relationships challenges of LGBTQ+ relationships from topics such as sexual health, representation of LGBTQ+ in film, different types of relationships, specific challenges faced by different sections of the community and engage with services that they could access. We provided community opportunities to do this in different ways through the introduction questions, to workshops, a panel discussion and the open mic. Most importantly it allowed our community members to meet and discuss these issues with other LGBTQ+ people and feel less isolated.

## Useful Links:

**LGBT Health and Wellbeing** delivers a varied programme of service, projects, groups, courses and events in Edinburgh and Glasgow for people aged 16+. We Welcome people with a diverse range of identities.

Website: [www.lgbthealth.org.uk](http://www.lgbthealth.org.uk)

Edinburgh: 0131 523 1100

Glasgow: 0141 271 2330

**Luke and Jack's** is a sex shop based in Glasgow with a focus on the LGBTQI community

Website: [www.lukeandjack.co.uk](http://www.lukeandjack.co.uk)

**Terrence Higgins Trust Scotland** is part of the UK's largest and leading HIV and sexual health charity.

Website: [www.tht.org.uk](http://www.tht.org.uk)

Telephone Number: 0141 332 3838

**Sandyford** provides sexual, reproductive and emotional health care across the Glasgow and Clyde area that is supportive, non-judgemental and sensitive to your needs.

Website: [www.sandyford.org](http://www.sandyford.org)

**Smutslam Scotland** Created and hosted by professional perv Cameryn Moore, the Smut Slam features real-life, first-person sex stories, guest stories from our panel of celebrity judges, and also THE SMUTBUCKET, a convenient receptacle for all your anonymous questions and confessions!

Website: [www.facebook.com/smutslamscotland](http://www.facebook.com/smutslamscotland)