



EQUALITY FOR ALL CONFERENCE

A one-day conference for lesbian, gay, bisexual and
transgender people in Scotland

Edinburgh

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CONFERENCE REPORTS

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Lesbian Issues Workshop

The workshop started by dividing into four sub-groups to identify key issues:

Visibility

Social/club scene is viewed as "political" centre, but what does this achieve in terms of our profile?
There is a need for a Women's Forum.

Need a place for ourselves.

Pride Scotland could have a theme "Women!" - it is currently seen as a male thing.

Representation

Networking and information needed throughout Scotland, in schools and mainstream.
Hold a Lesbian Conference.

Sexual health

Need information provision - the issue gets lost within the "safer sex" issue.

Youth issues

Bullying is a major issue.

Need better education (schools and externally).

Information to schools and youth groups targetting teachers and workers.

Responsibility lies with: local authorities, teaching unions, school heads, parents, us.

Bisexual women

Prejudice within the gay and lesbian community.

Lack of equality in gay male and lesbian groups.

Lack of information.

Partnership rights

Legal rights: wills, housing, mortgages, children, adoption.

Being out as a parent.

Partner not wanting children.

"Rights" as a lesbian grandmother.

Visibility - being out, parents educate all.

What rights/responsibilities are there to a partner's children? On break-ups? During relationship?

Custody of children.

As the above list demonstrates, a lot of topics arise from a "Lesbian" workshop: namely everything that affects our lives. There was a strong feeling that lesbian visibility could be much greater within generic gay groups in Scotland. It was suggested on more than one occasion that Pride Scotland could facilitate the raising of a lesbian profile in Scotland by adopting a theme around this issue.

Another thread that ran strongly through the workshop was the need for greater networking opportunities, both between lesbians, and between lesbians and other individuals, groups and organisations. A goal for this would be a pan-Scotland network. It was recognised that this was ambitious with regard to infrastructure and funding. A starting point was seen to be a national conference. Is this something that the Equality Network could help facilitate?

The workshop was given a difficult challenge with the width of topics to cover, but was seen as a useful and valued space to start to discuss the above issues.

Gay Male Issues Workshop

Access to Services Recognition that gay men should have equal access to services - statutory or otherwise - and that services are sensitive to the issues of sexuality where and when appropriate. Services include health, social services, education, law employment.

Gay Scene Acknowledged the huge growth and visibility and diversity of the commercial gay scene. Concerns at the non inclusiveness of the gay scene to certain groups of gay men.

Self Oppression Expressed the view that more support and work need to be done on the issues of how homophobia affects gay men (internalised homophobia) and the problems that it can cause - alcoholism, mental health problems. This needs to be addressed, especially in schools, for younger gay people.

Diversity Recognition by service providers and institutions of the diversity of gay men. Gay men are not all the same and have different needs.

Cruising and sex in public spaces The law is different in certain aspects relating to sex between men in public spaces as opposed to sexual behaviour between men and women. Law should be equalised.

Bill of Rights There should be one.

Policing Acknowledgement that policing policy and practice is often discriminatory towards gay men and is often hostile and homophobic. This is especially true of issues relating to public sexual behaviour.

Young gay men The education system needs to be sensitive to the issues and needs of young gay people. Similarly social work, where children in care are an area which also needs to be sensitive to these issues.

Age of consent Needs to be equal.

Rights and responsibilities With equal rights will come responsibilities.

Pensions and financial issues Needs to be equality of access and treatment on financial issues such as mortgages, insurance, pensions etc. This will involve the recognition of gay male relationships and protection for surviving partners under law.

How we treat each other Recognition that self oppression and internalised homophobia are often acted out on each other causing such things as relationship difficulties. This suggests the continuing need for counselling and other support services and again emphasises the need for these issues to be addressed at a fundamental level in schools etc.

Bisexual Issues Workshop

The workshop opened with introductions. Of eight people there, most identified as bisexual, but some had started doing so only very recently. Four of the delegates were also members of the Edinburgh Bisexual Group, and three of those were active on the Bisexual Phonenumber.

People's experience of their emerging sexualities was discussed. Most of the delegates had arrived at a definition of bisexuality after having used another definition of themselves. It was agreed that this was partly due to societal pressures - so for example if a man is attracted to men, there is pressure for him to define himself as "gay", no matter who else he happens to be attracted to. It was commented that this was a possible source of society's impression of bisexual people as indecisive, as it may lead to a fluctuation between opposite sexual identities which does not really represent a fluctuation in the person's feelings.

It was noted by all delegates that some of the speakers at the conference had started out by being fully inclusive in language ("lesbian, gay and bisexual") but had then quickly ceased to say "bisexual". Some encouragement was taken from the fact that people are attempting to be fully inclusive, but it was suspected that this inclusivity is in many people the result of a conscious effort, and has not yet become unconscious. It was agreed that this would be part of the feedback to the plenary.

The workshop applauded the great efforts at inclusivity which have been made by the Equality Network, Pride Scotland and Outright Scotland. It was felt that these are setting the standard for many other organisations.

Transgender Issues Workshop

Issues raised:

Is The Equality Network willing to offer affiliation to the transgender community?

What potential benefits might affiliation have?

Discussion:

A distinction between sexual preference (lesbian, gay and bisexual) and gender preference (transgendered) of individuals was made. But as transgendered people may identify their sexuality as lesbian, gay or bisexual (as well as heterosexual and asexual), it seemed perfectly natural to consider working together. It was recognised, however, that gender issues ignite strong feelings, for the transgendered and what we call society.

Just how the Equality Network might help could be looked at again when the needs and ambitions of the transgender community were better understood.

Conclusions:

While the overall goal of equal treatment and recognition for transgendered people is felt to be a long way off; it is tempting to draw comparisons with the struggle for "gay" rights and how prejudices have been challenged and social attitudes changed in a relatively short period of time.

Drawing from the historical fact that these changes took place because individuals came together in numbers and in so doing found the strength to demand respect and equal treatment, it must surely be folly for the transgender community in Scotland to miss this opportunity to build closer ties with the Equality Network. Before anything can happen, however, the transgender community in Scotland has to come together to agree what we all want and then ask for that with one voice.

Action:

Myself to circulate copies of the Equality For All conference report as discussion document within the transgender community and follow this up with organised discussions at group meetings around Scotland, possibly with the involvement of a representative of The Equality Network for the purpose of determining the aspirations of the transgender community as a whole, and how these might be furthered by affiliation to The Equality Network

Transgendered - assuming the gender identity of the opposite sex. This may be done for different reasons and to varying degrees, through choice or compulsion.

Youth Issues Workshop

Attending: 20 delegates, roughly equal gender mix

Aim: To highlight areas of inequality affecting young LGBT people

1 Initial Brainstorm

Law

- Age of consent - inequality 16 for straight people, 18 gay men, none for lesbians
- Cottaging - law around gross indecency, initial sexual contacts
- Discrimination - lack of protection, no rights
- Voting age - young gay people often forced into early independence without a democratic say

Housing

- Homelessness - more likely to become homeless after coming out to parents
- Security - difficulties in obtaining and retaining accommodation for young gay singles and couples
- Safe Houses - absence of safe gay housing projects for the young

Education

- Section 28 - misinterpretation both deliberate and through fear
- Teacher Training - no raising of LGBT issues in training
- Non-inclusive sex education - no coverage of homosexuality, heterosexism
- Anti-harassment work - little done to combat bullying or setting up support systems

Money

- Gay scene - baptism of fire, expensive and predatory
- Exploitation - expensive gay world need to conform to images
- Marketing - expensive products aimed at young, setting up need for parental support, borrowing etc.
- Debt - likely to get into major debt (esp. students) pushed into premature independence
- Prostitution - need for money for living, confirmation of sexuality in absence of school or other support

Services

- Lack - a general lack of services for young LGBT people
- Consultation - a lack of consultation over services and needs
- Marginalisation - young people's needs marginalised, high priority on needs of older men especially i.e. fucking
- Access/Awareness - services aimed at out people, advertised through scene and press

Employment

Low pay - young people paid less

Work rights - early careers have little rights, part-time work, easy to lose job

Protection - no protection for dismissal if gay

Restriction of choice - stereotyping hairdressing etc., homophobia linked with working with children

Families/Social

Parenting rights - little access to fostering, adoption etc., or having own children and connections with partners

Safety - gay bashing

Support networks - support networks are mostly heterosexist for young people

Parent support - often absent for young LGBT people

Media - lack of positive images of young LGBT people

Diversity - lack of diversity' on the gay scene

Gay scene - off-putting, exploitative, predatory

Positive role models - traditional family role model inappropriate to gay people

2 Prioritisation

The workshop split into 4 groups and tackled the 2 headings each. The groups reported back their findings in terms of what they thought the Equality Network should campaign on:

Education

To provide greater access to further education for young LGBT people

To provide inclusive sex and health education for young LGBT people

To provide positive role models for young LGBT people.

To highlight within the curriculum positive contribution made to society by LGBT people.

Employment

To provide anti-discriminatory legislation to protect young LGBT people in seeking and staying in work

Health

To provide advocacy around access and provisions for young LGBT people

To provide marketing strategies which do not marginalise young LGBT people

To ensure consultation with young LGBT people in service provision

To empower young LGBT people

To provide proper evaluation of services to ensure best practice

Law

To equalisation of age of consent for all people

To repeal existing anti-homosexual laws and in mean time to seek clear and concise information about actual meaning of Section 28

To seek an equalisation of sexual offences laws

Housing

To seek recognition of special needs of young LGBT people being made homeless or forced into premature independence

To provide legislation to protect LGBT people in terms of security and access to housing

Families/Social

To provide legislation to ensure parenting rights

3 Facilitators Notes

The workshop raised a number of issues in terms of interconnections between various areas not noted above:

Young LGBT people are not generally supported in school, there is little to suggest that homosexuality is an acceptable or normal lifestyle. Schools do not generally have an equal opportunities policy, guidance staff traditionally are in post due to long service rather than special training, schools are wary of dealing with homosexuality in line with parental wishes, school boards will not normally have homosexual members to advocate such policies.

Most young LGBT people are not out and so have no access to information, little positive imagery or support networks, this will normally lead to low self-worth, lack of confidence, under achievement, isolation, development of damaging emotional defences, participation in damaging relationships, self-harm, premature independence and associated effects.

Young LGBT people do not have family or home environments which provide acceptable role models for their own lifestyles. Often when coming out they may face rejection from family and friends, they may need to become independent at an early age and this may lead to financial problems, leading to prostitution and abuse.

The lack of appropriate role models may result in difficulties around setting up relationships and maintaining them.

Parenting Workshop

This workshop was facilitated by two members of the Edinburgh Lesbian Mothers Group and attended by approximately 12 others.

The workshop wanted to note, with regret, that there were no fathers or men present, and only two people who were not parents themselves. The latter, it was felt, reflected the feelings that many lesbian parents have that the gay community is not gay parent friendly, or particularly interested in the issues affecting gay parents. Gay parents therefore often end up feeling isolated and unsupported by the gay community.

Whilst, historically, most gay people did not see having children as an option available to them it was felt this had now changed. Young gay people now do not feel that being gay automatically takes away the choice of having children. The workshop felt that it was important to get across to the gay community the fact that lesbian parents (and probably gay fathers) would appreciate more interest and support and that our children are their future as well. It was felt that gay parenting issues should be given a higher profile by organisations campaigning for gay rights.

One member of the workshop was keen to learn about setting up a Lesbian Mothers Group. It was explained that both the Glasgow and Edinburgh Groups are supported by, respectively, One Plus and One Parent Families Scotland, single parent organisations. Publicity was mostly kept to gay outlets and gay support services, but distribution of leaflets had also been made to Health Visitors, Social Work, and to women's organisations through the Women's Committee, City of Edinburgh Council. The Edinburgh group had applied and received grants from Single Parent Action Network and the City of Edinburgh Council, and this enables them to have creche facilities at its monthly meetings, build up its library of books and pay for administration and telephone support work. Ongoing funding was noted as an area that still needs to be looked at.

Other difficulties facing lesbian parents (and presumably gay fathers as well) were noted:

1. Co-parents not being recognised legally as the other parent.
2. Difficulties around maintenance when lesbian couples split after having a child together.
3. The fears of prejudice and discrimination faced by gay parents, leaving heterosexual marriages, that they will lose their children.
4. Difficulties and fears about coming out to your children.
5. Child Support Agency cutting benefit to lesbian mothers who refuse to name the father of the child.
6. Discrimination against children of gay parents by childminders, and/or their refusal to accept them.
7. Childcare workers not being trained to be sensitive to issues affecting children of gay parents.
8. The lack of confidence that schools are equipped, or trained, to deal with issues, or bullying affecting children of gay parents, and that gay parents may not even feel safe in coming out to the school.
9. The need for support for the children themselves.

It was felt that progress on all these issues would be helped by raising the profile of gay parenting, more networking between groups, and more visibility in mainstream organisations to campaign on many of these issues.

The following information was given on some of these issues:

Where Councils have an equality policy, which includes sexual orientation, any possible discrimination should be reported.

One member informed the workshop that when lesbian couples split it is possible to pursue, if necessary legally, a claim for maintenance from the absent parent, and apply for legal aid to do this.

The possibility of members of Lesbian Mothers Groups approaching schools was discussed. One member of the workshop gave details of the Rainbow Pack, produced by and available from Camden and Islington Community Health Services, which deals with discussing gay and lesbian issues in schools.

There is a international support group for children, based in the USA, which also offers children the opportunity to become penpals with other children of gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgendered parents. This is COLAGE, 2300 Market Street # 165, San Francisco, CA 94114, USA, (202) 583-8029, e-mail: KidsOfGays@aol.com.

The workshop ended with the emphasis on the importance of linking up with other lesbian and parenting groups to exchange information and ideas and to work together whenever possible.

Health Issues Workshop

Being lesbian, gay or bisexual can cause problems when accessing health services. Currently there is only one service specifically for lesbians, the Lesbian Health Service which is based in the Centre for Women's Health in Glasgow and offers well woman service fortnightly and counselling weekly. Also Glasgow has the Steve Retson Clinic which is based in the Royal Infirmary. Attending one of these clinics accepts a person's sexuality but the group discussed issues of coming out to one's GP or within a mainstream hospital setting. There were personal experiences of prejudicial treatment and of health "professionals" having stereotyped views of the gay community.

It was also noted that health professionals in the main do not have sexuality knowledge and define gay, lesbian and bisexual patients by their perceived sexual behaviour and do not take into account other issues. Comment was made that it would be necessary to sort out our own internal issues and prejudices within the community, before we could hope to alter health service attitudes. It was considered important that all health professionals should have training around issues of sexuality and to move into total equality of health provision, in fact, that specialist services should eventually no longer be necessary.

The discussion broadened out into the isolation experienced by many. Lesbians tend to remain hidden and those who do not like gay culture, which is often bar oriented, find it difficult to make contact with others. Also the 'scene' is very ageist thus adding to isolation. This in turn can lead to emotional and mental health problems which the group considered a major problem and again not always met with a sympathetic ear should the person decide to go into mainstream counselling. Those who were experiencing an internal struggle regarding their sexuality were considered very much at risk and that support systems are needed.

It was considered important to celebrate the diversity of our community and to have in place more support for those finding life difficult. Also the issue of being challenged on your sexuality, one suggestion was to neither deny or confirm, can cause a great deal of distress.

The conclusion the group came to was that there was a great deal of hard work to be done within the health profession to get rid of prejudice. The aim would be for equality in health where sexuality was accepted and the person was treated for their health condition not their sexuality.

Equality at Work Workshop

The main issue which emerged from the Equality at Work Workshop related to the fundamental importance of organising within the workplace, usually through Trade Unions. There was a clear contrast between those participants who were part of a Trade Union with an active lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender network, and those who were either in weaker Unions or in no Union at all.

There were a number of people from UNISON within the workshop and they spoke, generally, in positive terms as to how much the Union had done for them. Others, largely not in Unions, spoke to their isolation. Apart from the obvious way forward of joining Trade Unions or other professional associations, and raising the issue of equality up the Union agenda, it was felt that conferences, such as the Equality for All Conference, was an extremely useful way of exchanging information and establishing networks.

There was general consensus as to how useful the conference had been for that reason, and I was asked to convey my thanks to the organisers, with a request for more of the same!

Other issues which people raised as being of particular concern to them within the workplace, were (in no particular order) the continuing inequalities in pension provision for gay and lesbian partners, the isolation of bisexuals and transsexuals within existing equality networks, and, more predictably, the continuing discrimination against gays and lesbians in the workplace.

Media and Representation Workshop

It's very difficult to attempt to cover very large topics with only short periods of time available, a problem that it would seem a number of the day's workshops ran up against. And 'media and representation' is almost too large a remit for 75 minutes of discussion: as was suggested at the workshop, even lesbian cinema could provide a focus for several hours.

As it was, two central issues were concentrated on: the concept of "positive imagery", and whether such an idea is now outdated in practice and theory; and the development of queer politics and media which do not primarily attempt to counteract heterosexist representations, but set a separatist agenda in which representations produced by a minority are allowed to stand for themselves without censure.

With a large, healthy attendance figure (over 40), which included representatives from all media, the workshop was broken down into five discussion groups. With brief prompting to provoke discussion, debate began, and a wide variety of issues were tackled. This facilitated a degree of networking between the individuals taking part, and headed towards a final goal of delineating some sort of agenda for the future.

Issues tackled included: the importance of icons, and their appropriation for personal use; the distance between reality and any form of representation; a search for honest, positive representation (for example, the television shows *Eastenders* and *This Life* were isolated and interrogated); individual ways to tackle the press; specific personal stories of representations that had individual power and impact; and so on.

In the concluding plenary session, the five groups all presented ideas by which to alter the representation of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) individuals in all media. For matters of clarity, I will isolate the five groups here and their individual contentions; where there was repetition and recapitulation, I will edit for brevity.

Group One: A numbered plan was constructed, with suggestions for intervention at both micro and macro levels.

These included:

1. Censorship is not the answer; denying heterosexism does not remove prejudice.
2. Internalised homophobia needs to be confronted; we need to get our act together before we can attempt to produce better representations.
3. In contrast to the local television programme *Local Heroes*, it was proposed that a series entitled *Local Queeroes* be made; this would document the lives and experiences of local LGBT individuals. It is important to produce real images' not *Stepford Wives*.
4. Local councils should be coerced into flying rainbow flags all year round, in a variety of locations.
5. The possibility of a queer column in *The Big Issue* should be considered.
6. There is a need to have a queer events diary in all press, local and national; local is possibly more important, as rurality can impede acceptance.
7. Increase public visibility.
8. Queer individuals need to attend the STV shareholders meetings, to voice their concerns, opinions and proposals.

Group Two: Containing a number of youth workers, this group focused largely on a youth agenda.

1. There is a need to represent all sections of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community, young and old.
2. Access to resources is crucial: being able to construct our own representations is empowering. Emphasis was made on the 'Speak Out' and 'Talking Bollocks' youth projects; these enabled youth groups to make films. These could then be used as educational tools and be shown at festivals and the like.
3. The Internet came under scrutiny as a potentially very valuable media form: used in isolation, it can enable contact for those in outlying areas. It also provides the possibility for putting out imagery and views of individuals without censorship. Again, this may be of particular value to younger individuals; the Net is seen as a younger medium.

Group Three: concentrated mainly on lesbian issues.

1. More lesbian writing is required, particularly in the theatre; this will only be possible if, as one woman put it, we "get off our arses".
2. Basic physicality is underrepresented in present depictions of LGBT individuals; it would be advantageous to increase such.

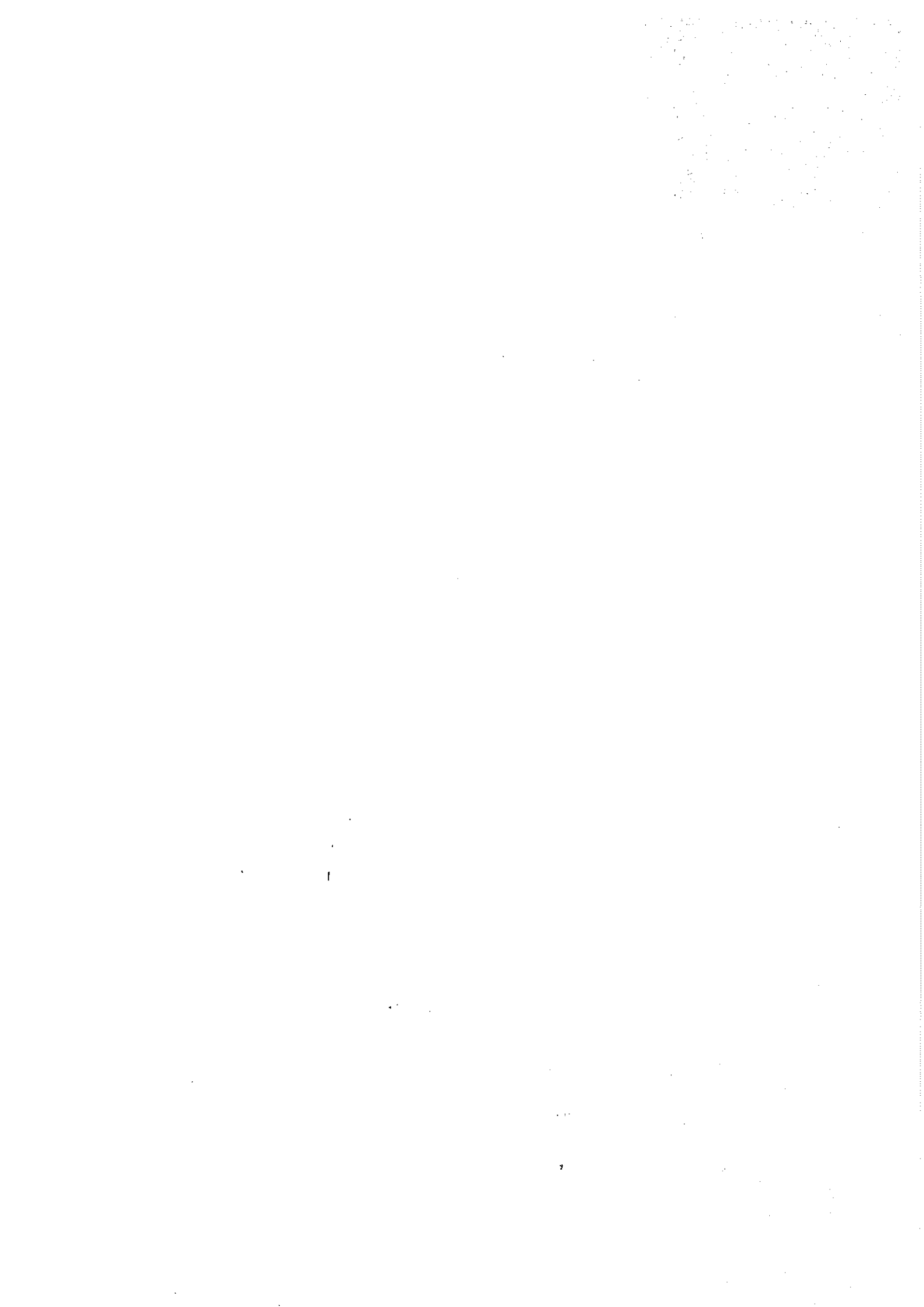
Group Four: largely discussed the press and soap operas.

1. There has been an increase recently in mainstream material and celebrities. This is to be applauded, although individual cases need to be considered for their value.
2. Narrative works through shock value, and this is the way LGBT issues are usually addressed. There is, therefore, a need to disseminate fair and honest material as a counterpoint.
3. The media remain male-dominated; there must be an increase in female input.

Group Five: concentrated on drawing up a productive agenda. With the impending increase in the Scottish profile, as discussion of the Scottish parliament increases, there is an improved potentiality to alter LGBT representation. We need, therefore, to:

1. Set our own agenda, and push for it.
2. Build relationships with the media industries, both heterosexual and queer, both in Scotland and the rest of Britain.
3. Media training for LGBT individuals should be promoted: all skills need enhancing and developing, from basic production of speech and voice, through networking, to the ability to sell material.
4. Funding may be a challenge; perhaps trade unions could provide one inroad.

My thanks to all those who took part, for what was an extremely insightful and productive afternoon.



**EQUALITY
FOR ALL
CONFERENCE**
20th June 1997

**Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual
Equality Network**

10a Broughton Street, Edinburgh EH1 3SA



Pride
Scotland

Stonewall
Working for lesbian and gay equality

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The Equality Network would like to thank the following for their support of the Equality for All Conference:

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